



In May 2021, the Andrei Sakharov Research Centre for Democratic Development at Vytautas Magnus University initiated a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the human rights activist, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov. The special issue of “Days and Deeds” is the final chord in a year-long celebration.

Not only symbolic motives, but also the centenary and the desire to commemorate Sakharov’s importance led to the idea of the special issue, but also academic objectives: to revise the contemporary human rights discourse, looking for the link between learned phrases and the misunderstandings that continue to exist. Today’s life is permeated by media-created reality and comic characters, while the real heroes are quietly fading into oblivion. The recall of some of Sakharov’s activities and works, as well as the broader considerations of human rights in the region, becomes not only symbolic, but also very practical.

This is what it looked like a year ago. Despite the erosion of freedoms in Belarus and the growing human rights violations in Russia, there were no signs of war. The intention to raise hopes of understanding seemed still possible and justified, and Sakharov’s authority and the lessons he dictated were not a bad way of learning from the past and avoiding the mistakes of disrespect for human rights. Unfortunately, everything fell apart overnight. Today, it is clear that such a strategy is no longer possible without resolving the containment of Russia.

On the other hand, after all, were it not the dissidents who repeatedly warned of Russia’s dangerous development and sinister ambitions? Despite the worrying gap between the declarative concern for human rights and their actual relegation to the margins of the political agenda in the dialogue between the West and Russia, their voices have remained unheard. Today, it no longer matters who was right and who was wrong – the inhumane behavior of Russians in Ukraine

has discredited an entire nation. When civilians are being killed en masse, to say something positive about Russia, such as more sustainable integration towards the West or human rights, seems a bit sacrilegious. And yet, despite all the horrors that Russia has caused, one has to wonder: what next? Whether or not the current administration changes, it is still important to talk about the future of the country. Bridges will have to be built, and we will have to think about scenarios for Europe and Russia, if not for reconciliation, then at least for communication. It will be necessary to have not only binding norms and certain conditions, but also empowering symbols that are close to both. Even Ukrainians themselves, in the face of war crimes, are noticing that we cannot in any way descend to their level. The important thing is to preserve humanity.

Andrei Sakharov was a leader who undoubtedly inspired generations of people to fight for freedom and human rights following his example. Sakharov's legacy, is still relevant in today's climate, it is a reminder that human rights and the principles of democracy are always worth fighting for. There are always threats and challenges to overcome. For Sakharov, human rights were not a simple slogan or pure politics, but first and foremost – an integral part of moral choices. In the whirlwind of today's events, it is unfortunate to say that this round has been lost... quite painfully. The question for all of us is: what will we learn? To paraphrase Sakharov, we have to fight the illusion that progress is possible through technology without empathy. Progress is impossible without freedom and genuine respect for each other.

In the monographic part of the 77th issue of *Days and Deeds*, Dainius Genys, in his article "The Human Rights Conception of A. Sakharov: Between Faith in Progress and the Commitment to Humanity," recalls the origins of Sakharov's concept of human rights and explains how it was understood by this great thinker. Ilona Strumickienė, in her article "To My Country and the World: Andrei Sakharov and the Lithuanian Emigrants with a Science Background on Responsibility, Development and Environmental Issues" makes an interesting link between the discourse of progress in the scientific community and its relevance to the Soviet Union and occupied Lithuania. Tomas Kavaliauskas's article "The Types of Russian Dissidents Before and After the Collapse of the Soviet Union" broadens the topic by returning the reader to the events in Russia and at the same time recapitulating the fate (and changes) of the dissident movement after the fall of the Union. Finally, Dovilė Budrytė's article "Activist Memory and Human Rights: The Commemoration of the Roma Genocide in Lithuania" highlights the importance of memory for the conceptual understanding of human rights. The monographic part of the book is rounded off by a personal reflection by Robert van Vorren, who looks back on more

than three decades of his work in the field of human rights. The article “Society and the Individual: From Soviet Psychiatry Terror to COVID-19” is based on his public lecture for the inauguration of his professorship.” The Chronicle publishes a review by Neringa Gališanskytė on the exhibition by the Andrei Sakharov Research Center for Democratic Development “Andrei Sakharov – a Person of the Era”.

In the section of the reviews, Andrius Švarplys polemicizes with Tomas Kavaliauskas, the author of monograph “Permaininga Europa. Politinės moralės, geopolitikos ir tapatybės permainos nuo Sovietų Sąjungos žlugimo iki 2020-ųjų COVID-19 pandemijos“. [Changeable Europe. Political Morality, Geopolitics and Identity from the Collapse of the Soviet Union to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020], and gives a brief overview of the themes discussed in the book.

The part of the journal that includes multi-thematic articles focuses on language, text and its genre, the manifestations of ideology and its relationship with thinking. Each of these articles presents, in its own way, the meanings of content and expression, the reflections of reality and the signs of language, as well as the distinctive features of texts from the past and the present. The articles by Roma Bončkutė, Aušra Urbanavičiūtė and Domas Junelis, although belonging to different fields of humanities – literary studies, linguistics and philosophy, – are linked by a common denominator and the object of their research: language. This theme is continued in the “Discoveries” column by Sigita Barniškienė’s translation of Manfred Klein’s article on Lithuanian-German contacts in 19th century Lithuania Minor, and in another text in this column Martynas Butkus examines in detail the statistics of organizations in inter-war Lithuania.

We hope that readers with different intellectual interests will find new insights and food for thought in this issue.

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Editors of Issue 77
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