

The End of USAID. The Demise of the Left in Poland?

For several days now, left-wing organisations in Poland have been on the verge of a nervous breakdown. This is hardly surprising: US President Donald Trump has made a decision that will have devastating consequences for many of these organisations. He has suspended the financial assistance they receive under the USAID programme. Left-wing media, pro-migration and gay rights groups are suffering. Some of them are in a no-win situation – without US government aid, they are simply at risk of being shut down.

Thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars...

The list of organisations that depend on the American aid programme is impressive. The LGBT Tolerado association (49,700 dollars), the Empowering Children foundation (48,500 dollars, for the LGBT Plus Me programme); the Signs of Equality federation (30,000 dollars), the Herstory foundation (39,700 dollars); the Rural Development Foundation (approx. \$100,000, including for the development of the LGBT community in rural areas)... This is just a small part of a large left-wing environment that received American money. I chose openly pro-gay groups. Some might say that the amounts are not that significant. 'Bart' Staszewski, a well-known LGBT activist, wrote on the X website that making a fuss about it was unnecessary because it was only about 'small' amounts of money.

IMPORTANT! A LONG LIST OF ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM THE USA IS PROVIDED AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS TEXT

Or is it? When you add up all the subsidies that have flowed in recent years from USAID for pro-gay organisations alone, the amount becomes quite significant: after all, we are talking about dollars, and it all has to be multiplied by four to get the result in zlotys... Meanwhile, every few thousand or so amounts to financing the monthly work of a left-wing activist. A person involved in promoting subversive rainbow ideas can do a lot in a month. Now, please convert this to all the activists paid for months and years...

It is impossible to say for sure what results this money achieved; but it certainly did not go to waste. However, a thought experiment suffices: how many people in Polish villages have been confused by the support for the development of rural LGBT communities? Let's get down to brass tacks: someone might not have been concerned about the sexual revolution at all, but in his own village, he was handed some materials. He became interested, read up on the subject, and started to change his way of thinking... A drop of water wears away a stone, not by force, but by frequent dripping. Often, it wasn't just about 'drops'. For example, the organisation 'Campaign Against Homophobia' was promised 350,000 zlotys for a social campaign about civil partnerships. However, it will not receive this quite specific amount of money. As a result, a series of publications supporting the idea of same-sex unions will not be produced, and there may not be any billboards and so on. If Trump had not stopped USAID, all this would have happened. There is a difference, right?

Problem with elections

Aid from the USA could also have indirectly influenced the election result. An example of this is 'Latarnik Wyborczy' (eng. Electoral Beacon) – a well-known initiative that is supposed to tell voters which party they should vote for based on their views. The election guide was financed partly by the EU and partly by USAID (via The German Marshall Fund of the

United States). The election guide is heavily promoted in left-wing and centrist media. Interestingly, even some journalists from these media outlets considered the initiative to be 'left-leaning' - such opinions appeared on 'TOK FM' and on Oko.press. The 'left-leaning' nature is said to consist in the way the questions are worded, such that clicking the 'yes' answer - which is supposedly typical on the internet - promotes left-wing parties. Indeed, if you approach the 'Electoral Beacon' in this way, even the version from before the 2024 EP elections would suggest voting for KO or the Left rather than for PiS or Konfederacja. On the other hand, when I did this 'test' for the EP elections myself, the result was clearly 'right-wing'. Critics on the left of the political spectrum pointed out that the project was mainly intended for undecided voters and could therefore favour the centre and the left, thus constituting a form of foreign influence on Polish elections. This is also an absolutely tangible fact – and yet the possible 'left-wing bias' of Latarnik is only a trifle. The real problem for Polish politics is the views spread by activists and journalists who openly agitate for left-wing parties, precisely on the basis of foreign support...

Problem with the media

Media such as 'Krytyka Polityczna', 'Tygodnik Powszechny' and 'Kultura Liberalna' have also lost money. Every 'few hundred' means an article. Left-wing propaganda can either poison the infosphere or not – it just depends on the money that is now drying up... There is also a lot of online chatter about Gazeta Wyborcza supposedly receiving 20 million PLN from USAID; however, the website Niezależna.pl, which broke the news, later deleted the article. It seems to be a case of imprecise information regarding the actual recipient of the aid; investigative journalists will probably find out soon. However, it is known, for example, that Gazeta Wyborcza collaborated with entities associating reporters who presented themselves as 'independent' and received support from USAID. This work will simply stop now because there is no alternative to money from the USA.

Journalists who have been deprived of support write about it openly. On 7 February, an article entitled 'Trump Cuts, Big Tech Changes Front. Can the EU Rise to the Challenge?' by Wojciech Cieśla and Anna Gielewska from Fundacja Reporterów (eng. 'Reporter Foundation') was published in the 'Wyborcza' newspaper. They admitted that a few years ago they consciously decided to apply for foreign grants. Now, without US support, they are stuck: there are no similar support programmes in the European Union. Cieśla and Gielewska cite examples of their activities and it is hard to deny that some of them may have been valuable (for example, describing potential financial scandals involving PiS politicians). On the other hand, they also wrote, for example, about the 'growing influence of Ordo Iuris', of course in an alarmist way. Now it's all over.

By freezing USAID, Donald Trump's administration has dealt a really painful blow to left-wing organisations in Poland. In the debate that has erupted following this decision, the total shock is often pointed out: in the past, funds from America flowed to these groups regularly, not only under Biden, but also under 'the previous Trump'. Although left-wingers do not question Washington's right to withhold support, they argue that it will harm democracy.

This claim needs to be diversified. USAID funds in Poland have flowed into many explicitly ideological and left-wing initiatives. This group includes LGBT organisations and, for example, various groups working in the field of migration, which also receive funding (e.g. Polskie Forum Migracyjne - eng. Polish Migration Forum). Cutting off their funding is clearly a positive thing. I think even many Poles who are not at all convinced conservatives would

agree with this. After all, hardly anyone thinks that funding a specific ideological project by a foreign power is a praiseworthy thing - and that is what we were dealing with.

The media or any 'journalism centres' are a separate problem. On the surface, it seems that Donald Trump's critics are right: good journalism is difficult to maintain on a purely commercial basis. People don't want to pay for reliable content, preferring to click on free, low-quality material. In fact, the past few years have seen a dramatic decline in the online press. In this context, only 'democratic aid' from the USA or other countries could save reliable journalism. However, this is not the case. No one questions the need to keep an eye on the government and expose financial scandals. This was one of the areas of focus for the journalists from the 'Reporters Foundation' mentioned above. However, after Donald Tusk took office, they started writing about... Marcin Romanowski and Daniel Obajtek. Who is being looked into here? Of course, these cases should also be investigated, but from the perspective of the public interest, it is much more important to keep an eye on what the ministers in Tusk's government are doing, rather than on people associated with the former ruling camp. However, the support from the liberal Biden administration apparently involved a different focus of interest. In this way, journalism dependent on foreign grants was often reduced to being a tool in a political dispute, on one side.

For obvious reasons, we have been discussing the US government's funding of organisations and the media in recent days. However, it should be remembered that USAID is only one piece of the puzzle. There is also money from many other countries, from Germany to Norway. In addition, there is a lot of money donated to Polish entities by private centres, led by Soros' flagship Open Society.

Dependence – only on readers

This whole issue, I think, should lead to one conclusion: it is worth choosing a different model. For example, the one used by PCh24.pl. Our portal is published by the Father Piotr Skarga Association. It is a Polish organisation supported exclusively by Polish donors. No subsidies from the government in Warsaw, no subsidies from the government in Washington, not a single cent from any organised entity. PCh24.pl exists because the readers of the website and the viewers of the PCh24 TV channel want it to, and because of all those who support the work of the Father Piotr Skarga Society. It seems that this kind of operating model is a genuine guarantee of independence: our only dependence is on the faith of the Catholic Church and the sympathy of those who want to use our works. Of course, many people may not like our activities: too conservative, not ecumenical enough, not synodal... We write and say what we believe in and what we consider to be objectively true - and not what the financial incentives of foreign centres 'encourage'.

One can only hope that more and more organisations and media outlets will want to operate in this way, focusing on Poles and their own readers, rather than on foreign grants.

I believe it is simply a matter of basic honesty.

Paweł Chmielewski

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS

The list, which is by no means complete, was published by the '[Money.pl website](#)'. According to the authors, the names of the projects were taken directly from the USAspending.gov database. Here, we present only the elements which clearly have ideological connotations.

1. **Fundacja Kulawa Warszawa [en. Limping Warsaw Foundation]** (USD 75,000). Original theatre project – workshop and final performance by young Polish people with disabilities. September 2023 – February 2025;
2. **Stowarzyszenie na rzecz osób LGBT Tolerado [en. Tolerado Association]** (USD 49,700) inter alia, organisation of the VI Congress of Marching Cities. September 2023 – November 2024;
3. **Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę [en. Empowering Children Foundation]**(USD 48,500). LGBT Plus Me: Strengthening Polish Youth as LGBT+ Allies. September 2023 – November 2024;
4. **Federacja Znaki Równości [en. Signs of Equality]** (USD 30,000). Empowering members of the LGBTQI+ community entering the labour market. Promotion of the DEI Certificate. September 2023 – 2024;
5. **Fundacja Herstory [en. HerStory Foundation]** (USD 20,000 + 19,700). Capacity building for activists and service providers working with the LGBTQI+ community in Poland through educational programmes, workshops, mentoring sessions for therapists, medical staff educators. Additionally, the Rainbow Empowerment educational project;
6. **My, rodzice – Stowarzyszenie matek i ojców sojuszników osób LGBTQIA [en. We, the parents – Association of Mothers, Fathers and Allies of LGBTQIA People]** (USD 16,500). Family diversity project. September 2021 – July 2022;
7. **Polskie Towarzystwo Prawa Antydyskryminacyjnego [en. The Polish Society of Anti-Discrimination Law]** (USD 17,800). Support to the LGBTI rights in practice project – training for lawyers. September 2021 – December 2022;
8. **Kampania Przeciw Homofobii [en. Campaign Against Homophobia]** (USD 14,900). LGBTQIA allies corporate workshop. July 2022 – October 2023;
9. **Fundacja Wspomagania Wsi [en. The Rural Development Foundation]** (USD 84,100 + 18,900). Organising leadership workshops and mentoring for 24 participants and building supportive communities for LGBT+ people in rural areas;
10. **Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego we Wrocławiu [en. The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław]** (USD 80,000). Training and support of Polish journalists in content development to improve the quality of reporting on issues related to the situation of Ukrainians, including the return of refugees and the reconstruction of their country (continues until May 2025). September 2024 – December 2025;
11. **Fundacja im. Kazimierza Pułaskiego [en. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation]** (USD 74,800). Building the capacity and policy-making capabilities of Ukraine's international victory centre and supporting Ukraine-based civil society activists. June 2022 – June 2023;
12. **Stowarzyszenie Demagog [en. (Demagog Association)]** (USD 40,000). Funding the organisation of a year-long media literacy/fact-checking programme. September 2024 – June 2025;
13. **Europejska Fundacja Kosmiczna [en. European Space Foundation]** (USD 40,000). Partial funding for the Artemis Day project, which is part of the European Rover Challenge 2023 Inspiration Zone. April 2023 – December 2025;

14. **Fundacja New Space [en. New Space Foundation]** (USD 39,800). Organisation of the Splot Artemis Generation programme. The project aims to engage young space exploration enthusiasts. August 2024 – August 2025;
15. **Fundacja Pro Futuro [en. Pro Futuro Foundation]** (USD 20,000). Educational programme for Ukrainian refugees: Work in Your Field. September 2023-January 2024;
16. **Fundacja Owiro [en. Owiro Foundation]** (USD 20,000). Funding for the Psychological Support for the Deaf Community in Poland project. August 2023 – December 2024;
17. **BoMiasto [en. BoMiasto Association]** (USD 17,000). Partial costs associated with the project: Silesia – a Coal Region in Transition – an Inclusive Dialogue for the Transition to Clean Energy. August 2021 – August 2022;
18. **Fundacja Galicia Jewish Heritage Institute [en. Galicia Jewish Heritage Institute Foundation]** (USD 150,000). For support of the three-year educational project: Education, Memory, Action. Building a Nationwide Network of Teachers and Educators. September 2024 – June 2027;
19. **Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich Polin [en. POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews]** (USD 60,300). Recruitment and travel of 12 teachers participating in the US Holocaust Teacher Training programme 2020 – 2021 extended programme. March 2020 – December 2026;
20. **Fundacja Zapomniane [en. The Forgotten Foundation]** (USD 20,000). The Future of Our Past. Restoring the Forgotten Heritage of Polish Jews project. September 2023 – May 2024;
21. **Fundacja Szkoła z Klasą [en. School with Class Foundation]** (USD 137,500). Youth designs for society ('Impulse. School Change Workshop'). September 2024 – May 2027;
22. **Fundacja Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej [en. (The Center for Citizenship Education)]** (approx. USD 177,000) to cover the costs of the organisation of the 9-day Citizenship Academy 2023 for secondary school students (March 2023 – February 2025) and to cover the costs of the School of Democracy programme for the representatives of student councils in Polish schools (August 2024 – June 2025);
23. **Kraków miastem startupów [en. Krakow City of Startups]** (USD 18,100). Organisation of two hackathons. September 2024 – January 2025;
24. **Stowarzyszenie Nowe Horyzonty [en. New Horizons Association]** (USD 35,000). American Film Festival support. August 2023 – January 2026;
25. **Fundacja "Tygodnika Powszechnego" [en. 'Tygodnik Powszechny' Foundation]** (USD 10,000). Partial costs of the organisation of the 'Reading Lessons' in the American Literature project. June 2022 – March 2023;
26. **Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka [en. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights]** (USD 9,200). States Documentaries: screening of US human rights documentaries at the 24th IFF Watch Docs. August – December 2024;
27. **Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna im. Jana Pawła II w Opolu [en. John Paul II Municipal Public Library in Opole]** (USD 3,000). Programmes and workshops about American culture, society and science and the purchase of books and DVDs through the America@Your Library programme. September 2024 – December 2025).