

Due to the fact that I am a judge, I should refrain from making political statements. Therefore, I will only share my experience of fighting against the destruction of democracy and the rule of law over the past 8 years in Poland being a judge, a member of the association of Polish judges Iustitia.

The key to maintaining the rule of law in any country is the awareness of its citizens. Awareness of the basics of democracy, particularly the importance of the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. These concepts are quite abstract for most of the people.

It's difficult to convince society that the independence of judges from politicians (who represent people's will - argument used very often by populists), judicial guarantees such as judicial immunity, and fair salaries are guarantees for the citizens themselves, not just for the judges.

Conversely, it's very easy to unleash a hate campaign against judges, who are often perceived as representing an out-of-touch elite, issuing rulings that are frequently incomprehensible and using obscure language.

We witnessed this in Turkey before 2016, in Poland under the rule of the Law and Justice party, in Hungary.

To raise public awareness, it is essential to invest primarily in education - from preschools to seniors. It is therefore necessary to systematically introduce education into the curriculum in schools, on public television, on social media, and to provide financial and organizational support to NGOs dealing with the rule of law. It is also essential to involve as many authorities, artists, lawyers, and judges themselves in this process.

It is important to train not only others, but also ourselves. For many judges in established democracies, judicial independence may be so obvious that they do not even notice when it is being limited by politicians.

That's why it's important to share experiences with judges from other countries where this independence had to be fought for.

The same recommendation I would also suggest for other professions, such as journalists or activists of non-governmental organizations.

Let us abandon the language of the elites and use a language understandable to all. Let's abandon arrogance, let's admit to our mistakes. Again - it is referring not only to judges, but also to other professions.

The fact that thousands of people took to the streets of Polish cities in defense of independent courts, and that populists lost in October 2023, was due in part to our success in convincing ordinary people that independent courts are essential for defending their rights.

We achieved this by participating in rock festivals, attending meetings with citizens in so-called legal cafes, going to schools, and organizing open trial simulations.

Another crucial issue is solidarity and cooperation among different social and professional groups. Populists operate by sowing discord; solidarity is what disrupts their process of capturing the state.

In summary, an educated civil society is more resilient to populism and manipulation. The outcome of the elections in Poland in October 2023 was determined by the younger generation. The education of this generation undertaken by civil society undoubtedly played a significant role in the victory of democracy.