

Sida has ceased to provide assistance after threats from the KGB



*article by Nils Resare
see the original version [here](#)*

The KGB security service threatened a Swedish official at Sida.

After this threat, the Swedish Agency for International Development has suspended its support provided to an NGO in Moldova.

– It's an outrageous and deeply unfortunate decision, says Robert Hårdh, head of the Civil Rights Defenders.

Through Civil Rights Defenders, Sida supports various human rights organizations in Moldova. One of them is Promo-LEX, which provides legal aid to people who have been subjected to torture in the prisons of the breakaway republic of Transnistria.

The aid stopped

But this aid, which had lasted for about ten years, was now stopped because it is assumed to make negotiations with Transnistria's self-proclaimed regime more difficult.

– It's an outrageous and deeply unfortunate decision. I'm afraid it will mean a stronger politicization of Swedish aid and undermine the human rights activity, says Robert Hårdh, heads of the Civil Rights Defenders. Transnistria, located between Moldova and Ukraine, is known for organized crime, arms smuggling and human trafficking. The country is not recognized by any nation but receives financial and military

support from Russia.

Tries to extort money

Promo-LEX, working from Moldova, has so far helped 27 victims of torture from Transnistria to make their case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. So far they have won all the cases that have been completed.

Some court cases are about victims of economic blackmail. The regime has tried to extort money or financial assets by torturing prisoners in jails and prisons.

Has spread threatening videos

The rulers of Transnistria are deeply bothered by the fact that these cases are dealt with in an international court. Last year, the secret police, the KGB, accused Promo-LEX of espionage and undermining of the security of Transnistria. In a press release KGB wrote that a preliminary investigation had been opened against the organization's lawyers.

KGB is also suspected to have spread two threatening films about Promo-LEX and a number of journalists in social media. The films show how a number of named individuals get their email accounts hacked.

The films also send a warning to the organizations financing the work of Promo-LEX.

A Swedish national threatened

One of the e-mail accounts that are exposed in the films belongs to Månstråle Dahlström, Second Secretary at the Swedish Embassy in Moldova. Dahlström is responsible for Sweden's support for human rights in the region and for the now discontinued support for Promo-LEX.

According to the head of Sweden's aid in Moldova, Henrik Huitfeldt, the decision to stop aid has nothing to do with the threats. In contrast, according to the Swedish Embassy in Moldova, the activity of Promo-LEX complicates the talks on Transdnistria's future that the security organization, the OSCE, is trying to lead.

Refuses to negotiate

The authorities in Transnistria have so far refused to join the negotiations as long as Promo-LEX work continues.

– Promo-LEX does a lot of good things, but they also do things that do not favor negotiations. Promo-LEX have pushed their cases hard. We do not believe that it is a viable strategy for improving the human rights situation in Transnistria for the long term, says Henrik Huitfeldt.

"Sida should have supported Promo-LEX"

Sida's reasoning is challenged by both Civil Rights Defenders and Promo-LEX. They argue that the work with torture victims should not be sacrificed for the attempts to resume the negotiations on Transnistria. Sweden should not bow to the KGB's claims.

– Promo-LEX is an independent human rights organization that does an excellent legal work. Sida should have supported Promo-LEX when they were attacked by the KGB rather than cutting aid, says Robert Hårdh.

A longer report by Blank Spot Project on the situation in Transnistrian region [here!](#)

Sida responds to criticism: "Absolutely wrong"

After this article had been published, Sida's press secretary Inga-Lill Hagberg contacted *Aftonbladet*. She believes that the title of the article is absolutely wrong – according to Sida, the aid was not stopped after the threats.

– We have not been subjected to any threats, either in Sweden or in Moldova. Nothing like that happened, says Inga-Lill Hagberg at Sida.

Nobody at Sida knew anything about the films before the reporter Nils Resare contacted the Agency for an opinion, says Inga-Lill Hagberg. Since January this year, Sida has indeed stopped paying out money to PromoLex.

– We said we should not support Promo-LEX, but no threat is behind the decision. We have other reasons. The situation in the breakaway region of Transnistria is very difficult. We try to help resolve the conflict with the Moldovan government and the de facto authorities in place. Promo-LEX hampers the dialogue and undermines the conflict resolution process in Transnistria, says Sida's press secretary Inga-Lill Hagberg.