

Awardee: Irina Shcherbakova

Historian and civil rights activist, Russia

For decades, Irina Shcherbakova has been working to shed light on the repressive policies of the former Soviet Union. In 1988, she was a founding member of Memorial, the first Soviet non-governmental organisation, which still fights for the protection of human rights in Russia and has been on the list of “foreign agents” since 2016. She has published numerous books on Russian history and current politics, most recently *Der Russland-Reflex. Einsichten in eine Beziehungskrise* (2015) in collaboration with the German historian of Eastern Europe, Karl Schlögel. As a sought-after interlocutor on German-Russian relations, she plays a decisive role in rapprochement between the two countries.

The historian Irina Shcherbakova, who was born in Moscow in 1949, is a journalist and a translator. After studying German and history at Moscow State University, she received her doctorate in German language studies in 1972. In the following years, she worked primarily as a translator of German fiction and as a journalist. In the late 1970s, Shcherbakova began compiling taped interviews of victims of Stalinism. Since 1991, she has been researching the archives of the KGB. She began her university career in 1992 as a lecturer at the Russian State University of Human Sciences in Moscow, where she taught oral history and visual anthropology until 2006. She was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, in Vienna and Freiburg, and was a guest professor at the universities in Salzburg, Bremen and Jena. Irina Shcherbakova's research fields include oral history, totalitarianism, Stalinism, Gulag and Soviet special camps on German soil after 1945, cultural memory in Russia and the politics of remembrance.

As an author and editor, Irina Shcherbakova has published numerous books on Stalinism and remembrance culture, many of which have been published in German. Most recently, she received great attention for *Der Russland-Reflex. Einsichten in eine Beziehungskrise* (2015), a dialogue book written in collaboration with the German historian of Eastern Europe, Karl Schlögel. In addition to Shcherbakova's academic and journalistic work, she is distinguished by her extraordinary commitment to civil society. Since 1988, she has been a member of Memorial, at that time the first independent, civil society organisation in the Soviet Union. Memorial is committed to shedding light on Soviet repression and the protection of human rights in Russia today. Irina Shcherbakova is the director of youth and education programmes, coordinates oral history projects as well as the yearly, nationwide student competition “People in History: Twentieth Century Russia.” In October 2016, Memorial was placed on the list of “foreign agents” by the Russian Ministry of Justice.

Her ties to the German language and to Germany are closely interwoven with her family history. Shcherbakova's grandfather spoke excellent German and her father, a literary scholar, counted well-known German writers such as Heinrich Böll amongst his friends. She has had a long-standing collaborative relationship with the Goethe-Institut, among other things for various exhibitions and publications. As a sought-after interlocutor on Russian-German relations, she is instrumental in dialogue and understanding between the two countries. Irina Shcherbakova is a member of several foundations, such as the board of trustees of the Buchenwald Memorial in Weimar. She is a member of the international advisory board of the Stiftung Topographie des Terrors in Berlin. In 2005, she was awarded

the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany), and in 2014 she received the Carl von Ossietzky Prize for Contemporary History and Politics. Since 2010, Irina Shcherbakova has been an honorary member of the Centre for Literary and Cultural Research (ZfL) in Berlin.

Quotes by Irina Shcherbakova

“Only a small section of society is interested in personal destinies from the war and postwar years. It is a huge contradiction, because if the Great Patriotic War plays such a major role, the slogan should be: Read what witnesses have left behind, the books in which they write that they could only say half the truth, watch their films, which were made under censorship. But that is hardly possible today.” (Interview with Irina Shcherbakova, Sonja Vogel, “Weil Utopien fehlen, wird der Krieg zum Kult,” *die tageszeitung*, 08.07.2016)

“Myths are always shiny. They glow, they are simple. But the truth is often grey, ugly, and there are moments in this truth that you don’t even want to know about. Yet when you hide them it gets even worse.” (Interview with Irina Shcherbakova, Isabelle Daniel/Moskau, “Wir werden marginalisiert,” *Neue Luzerner Zeitung*, 05.10.2016)

“One of the most important experiences and lessons in my life was the fall of the Berlin Wall. I considered this event a great miracle, a great liberation for my generation. It is a very important experience that – even when it seems that a dictatorship will last forever – people can change circumstances and walls do fall. We experienced that in the GDR in 1989 and also in Russia, where hundreds of thousands took to the streets. Perhaps we can attempt to convey to later generations that such a great upheaval can happen in everyone’s lifetime.” (Conversation with Irina Shcherbakova and Karl Schlögel, “Putins Fantasie-Russen,” *DIE WELT*, 06.10.2015)

Quotes about Irina Shcherbakova

“For Irina Shcherbakova, history is her life’s mission. The coordinator of the Russian history competition for young people, organised annually since 1999 by the human rights organisation MEMORIAL, learned early on from her Jewish family how deep the scars left by the Second World War, National Socialism and Stalinism are in people. That is one reason that she has been listening to witnesses in Russia, other countries of the former Soviet Union and Germany for decades and recording their ‘lived histories.’” (www.koerberstiftung.de, portrait of Irina Shcherbakova from the *Grenzgänger* series)

Publications (selection)

1997: *Moskauer Küchengespräche*, with Susanne Scholl, Verlag Styria, Graz.

2000: *Nur ein Wunder konnte uns retten: Leben und Überleben unter Stalins Terror*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.

2003: *Russlands Gedächtnis - Jugendliche entdecken vergessene Lebensgeschichten*, editor, Edition Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg.

2006: *Unruhige Zeiten: Lebensgeschichten aus Russland und Deutschland*, editor, Edition Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg.

2010: *Zerrissene Erinnerung: Der Umgang mit Stalinismus und Zweitem Weltkrieg im heutigen Russland*, Wallstein Verlag (series: Jena Center. Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Vorträge und Kolloquien), Göttingen.

2012: *Gulag. Spuren und Zeugnisse 1929-1956*, co-editor, with Volkhard Knigge, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, Weimar.

2014: *Gulag - Texte und Dokumente 1929 - 1956*, co-editor, with Julia Landau, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, Weimar.

2015: *Der Russland-Reflex. Einsichten in eine Beziehungskrise*, with Karl Schlögel, Edition Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg.

Awards (selection)

1994: Catholic Journalists' Award for the film *Alexander Men. Treibjagd auf das Sonnenlicht* (WDR 1993)

2005: Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany

2013: Medal of the Human Rights Commissioner of the Russian Federation

2014: Carl von Ossietzky Prize for Contemporary History and Politics