

## **Message of Support for the Freedom of Information Reform (Scotland) Bill from Marzena Błaszczyk, Sieć Obywatelska Watchdog Polska (Citiznes Network Watchdog Poland)**

At the Scottish Public Information Forum in December, attendees heard from Marzena Błaszczyk from Sieć Obywatelska Watchdog Polska (Citiznes Network Watchdog Poland) about the global importance of the Freedom of Information Reform (Scotland) Bill. Below contains extracts from her speech where she praised the Bill.

“My name is Marzena Błaszczyk, and I work with Sieć Obywatelska Watchdog Polska, or in English: the Citiznes Network Watchdog Poland. We are an organisation dedicated to defending and strengthening the right of access to public information. For more than twenty years we have been supporting citizens, journalists, community groups, and activists who use freedom of information every day to make better decisions and to hold power accountable.”

“For many years, Scotland has been among the countries seen as leaders in FOI implementation. Your independent Information Commissioner, your culture of public debate, and your efforts to hold government accountable have been watched closely across Europe.

When Scotland strengthens its FOI regime, it creates a positive example. It offers arguments we can use in our advocacy and litigation. It sends a signal that democratic societies are not only protecting FOI, but actively modernising it. Freedom of information does not operate in isolation. Legislators, courts, ombuds institutions, civil society organisations—we all look at comparative standards. If Scotland expands the scope of FOI to cover publicly funded bodies, outsourcing, and contractors, we can point to that when fighting for similar reforms in Poland. If Scotland improves response timelines or enforcement mechanisms, we can cite that. If Scotland explicitly integrates FOI with human rights frameworks, we can use that reasoning too. Strong transparency systems are one of the most important democratic safeguards. They prevent corruption and arbitrariness. They help expose abuses of power. They support investigative journalism.

In countries facing democratic pressures—Poland is not alone—examples of strong openness laws elsewhere create a kind of shield. They make it harder for governments to justify weakening transparency norms.

If one of Europe’s respected FOI regimes takes a step forward, it sends a message: “Transparency is not optional. It is modern, necessary, and achievable.”

Scotland's framing of FOI within human rights—particularly through the lens of International Human Rights Day—is powerful.

In our work in Poland, we also emphasise that access to information is not simply an administrative convenience. It is connected to:

- environmental rights,
- the right to participate in public life,
- freedom of expression,
- the right to a fair process,
- and even social rights, such as access to healthcare or education.

When Scotland articulates FOI as a human right, it strengthens the global understanding of transparency as part of the human rights architecture.

Let me share a few stories from our legal counselling practice. These are anonymised, but very typical.”

“If Scotland implements these reforms, it will not only serve Scottish citizens—it will strengthen transparency movements across Europe. I want to close by reflecting on why this international connection matters. We often think of FOI laws as domestic issues. And in a legal sense, they are. They are passed by national parliaments, implemented by national institutions, and used by people in their own communities. But in reality, the struggle for transparency is global. We are facing similar problems: secrecy, delays, political interference, privatisation of public functions, SLAPPs, misinformation, administrative resistance, digital challenges. And we are working toward similar goals: democratic oversight, informed debate, accountability, and protection of human rights.

When Scotland takes a step forward, it shines a light for all of us. When Scotland chooses openness over secrecy, it strengthens our arguments in court. When Scotland protects requesters, it helps us advocate for people facing retaliation. When Scotland modernises FOI for the digital era, it helps us push for the same. When Scotland embraces transparency as a human right, it helps shift the narrative across Europe.

Your reform is not happening in isolation. It is part of a larger movement of people defending democratic principles in challenging times. And from Poland, from our own difficult experiences, we look to your work with admiration and hope.”

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