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## The Crisis as an Excuse

***By: Virginia Pérez Alonso, president, Platform for the Defence of Free Expression (PDLI)***

"Some of the most infamous human rights violations of the past 35 years were committed with the deliberate intent to prepare the ground for the introduction of radical free-market reforms," said Naomi Klein said in an interview shortly after publishing her book "The Shock Doctrine".

Klein's book was published in 2007, just as the greatest financial crisis in modern history was beginning to unfold, the consequences of which we are still immersed in today. In the name of this crisis there have emerged "reforms" and measures that have provoked a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the rest – and the resulting institutional and political abandonment of the latter. It is an exclusion always supported by nearly irrefutable arguments that rely on the idea of collective "salvation": economic recovery, security and stability.

But the crisis was also accompanied by the democratisation of information, understood as mass public access to the Internet, and the collective realisation that the management of information is key for continually checking and evaluating those who rule in our name. It was in this manner that citizen reporting and participation through social media began to have effects beyond the virtual realm: the protests against the Ley Sinde [Ed. an online intellectual property law] in 2008, the movement #nolesvotes (#don'tvoteforthem), the mobilisation of the Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth without Future) movement, among others. Finally, it included 15M and the fall of the two-party system in the most recent autonomous and municipal elections in May 2015, a direct consequence of those protests whose epicentre was the Puerta del Sol.

Those in power have seen in these new forms of communication and protest a clear threat to their interests. For that reason, months before the recent election, they began to develop a series of legal reforms aimed at protecting the status of that "establishment" at the cost of cutting back citizens' rights and liberties.

Many of these reforms have a common denominator: curtailing those methods of sharing information, placing barriers on the Internet as a space of free expression and penalising, in some cases in a disproportionate manner, new forms of protest. Some of these legislative initiatives are already the law of the land. Others will soon take effect – from the Law on



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the Protection of Public Security (better known as the “Gag Law”) to the double reform of the Penal Code – which has even been criticised by the human rights rapporteurs of the U.N. – through the new Law on Intellectual Property [and] the reform of the Law on Criminal Procedure.

It was against this backdrop that PDLI was born in October 2014 as a response to the concerns of a group of journalists, lawyers and certain social movements over what we consider to be a series of threats to freedom of expression, substantiated above all in the aforementioned legal reforms, but also in a lack of transparency in the activities of public institutions and administrations, which have consequences not only for the media and journalists, but also for society as a whole. As Art. 20 of our Constitution explains, the right to information is not only the right to communicate freely; it is also the right of the public to receive accurate information through any medium.

For this reason, PDLI defends freedom of expression as the guardian of democratic Spanish society. And for this reason, its main objective is to raise awareness about such threats and to analyse and highlight any attempt to restrict such freedom, providing the public with tools so that it can report any abuse that occurs in this sphere. We want to first record these challenges, and then later speak loudly about the reality of the situation, always with the objective to turn things around and to contribute to guaranteeing the free exercise of those rights.