

1 Dear friends,

My name is Andrey Gnyot. I have been free for just two and a half months. This past year has been a fight for my life: seven months in prison and another five under house arrest. During this time, Serbia attempted to extradite me to Belarus. You know what happens to filmmakers, journalists, and activists like me in my homecountry.

3 Thank you for standing up for our real national leaders Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Pavel Latushka, they desperately need your support as we are! Your contribution is invaluable! Poland has become a home for hundreds of thousands of displaced Belarusians. Thanks to your support, our voices are louder on the international stage. You are our strongest ally, and that is why I want to speak with you as openly as possible.

2 The fact that I am standing before you today is the result of incredible solidarity. My freedom was fought for by civil society, the media, artists, lawyers, diplomats, and politicians. I want to specifically huge thank the Community of Democracies for their strong diplomatic support. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to Polish politicians and public figures for their partnership with our democratic forces.

4 Today, I will not celebrate our shared victory or recount what I've been through. You can find those details online or on my Instagram page.

5 Instead, I want to draw your attention to urgent issues. In 11 days, I will become an illegal person. I have repeatedly received formal rejections from the Polish consulate in Berlin. Even a simple visa is inaccessible to me. And my existing German visa, which will expire very soon, does not allow me, to my great regret, to fully restore my expatriate life. I'm in a trap now.

7 Belarusians need documents. We need protection. Poland is the most open country in the EU towards us, and we are deeply grateful for that. But there is still much work to be done and in other countries, such as Germany. For example, we cannot renew our passports. A single law has stripped hundreds of thousands of Belarusians of their basic rights. These are educated, talented, and resourceful people who could contribute greatly to any society. Time is working against us: every day, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians become increasingly vulnerable to a system determined to destroy their future.

6 I am not speaking only out of personal fear. Look at the case of Vasily Veremeychik. He found himself in extremely hard life situation. He was forced to fly wherever he could depends of his personal issues, regardless of the risks. He was deported from Vietnam to Belarus, where he now faces the death penalty. No one knows what kind of torture he is enduring at this very moment. This is a tragedy that could have been prevented.

8 Democracy must be flexible to outpace dictatorships. A dictatorship serves one man, but democracy serves everyone. I urge you to simplify procedures, shorten waiting times, and introduce more flexibility in issuing documents and protection. Belarusians will repay this debt with interest—through their taxes, culture, creativity, and skills. We are already the second-highest group of foreign taxpayers in Poland, even though we rank only eighth in population numbers. In other countries, we are able to do the same good.

9 Lukashenko's regime is hunting us even abroad. If you have a Belarusian passport, you are subject to "special restrictions." For example, an ordinary Pole can fly to Istanbul, but a Belarusian cannot. This is modern segregation, reminiscent of the Pale of Settlement for Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries, when millions of people were denied the basic right to freedom of movement. We have already lost our country; we cannot afford to lose others. We have done nothing to deserve this punishment. This is Lukashenko's goal: to complicate life for exiled Belarusians.

11 A single false document from Minsk destroyed my life, and I am still trying to piece it back together. Behind me stand hundreds of thousands of people in the same situation. Today, I speak for those who cannot. We ask you to act. In 2020, we all stood up to defend democratic values and paid a heavy price. Now, we ask those values to protect us in return.

10 We must stop this. God gave us language and reason to negotiate, even with the most difficult partners. I am not afraid to risk my life. I am ready to be your representative and travel to Turkey, Morocco, South Africa, or any other country to explain that Lukashenko is illegitimate and cannot use international institutions to oppress Belarusians. This is a risk I accept without hesitation because it is the right thing to do.

12 Thank you for your support and empathy!