



SVIATLANA
TSIKHANOUSKAYA
OFFICE

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

by Belarusian Democratic Forces
and Civil Society

2025



This report provides an overview of how the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society have used culture as a strategic tool for international engagement between 2020 and 2025. Through concrete examples, it documents efforts to keep Belarus on the global agenda — not only as a political cause, but as a nation with a vibrant identity, resilient communities, and a deep connection to European cultural heritage.

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“When we cannot speak in official halls, we speak through art, music, and memory. Cultural diplomacy is how we show the world who we are — not just what we fight against, but what we stand for. It’s how we remind others — and ourselves — that Belarus is more than a place on the map. It’s a people, a culture, a voice that refuses to be silenced.”

— Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

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Introduction

For the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, cultural diplomacy has become one of the most compelling tools for engaging with the world. Through exhibitions, concerts, festivals, literary events, partnerships, and acts of historical remembrance, they present Belarus as a country rooted in European traditions, with a living language, a strong identity, and an unbreakable aspiration for freedom.

Between 2020 and 2025, in the face of repression and exile, Belarusians turned to culture to maintain their presence on the world stage. In the absence of official diplomatic channels, the democratic movement and civic actors used cultural initiatives to communicate Belarus's values and aspirations — not only what they are fighting against, but what they stand for. From Brussels to Berlin, from Stockholm to Kyiv, and across North America, they organized hundreds of cultural events: exhibitions in parliaments, solidarity concerts in public squares, literary evenings in exile hubs, and artistic campaigns of remembrance and resistance. These efforts humanized the political struggle and built bonds with international audiences based on shared values and emotion.

“On every visit, we look for ways to bring something Belarusian — to connect our music, art, and culture with the societies and countries we work in. We started focusing on this after meeting Madeleine Albright in 2021. She was known for her brooches, and she asked us how we practice public diplomacy. She advised us to focus on it more. Since then, we’ve put greater effort into cultural diplomacy. It helps show that we come to Europe not from scratch, but united through centuries of shared history.”

— Dzianis Kuchynski, diplomatic advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

This work was not random or episodic — it became a strategic, consistent effort. The democratic movement honored historic figures like Kastus Kalinouski and Francysk Skaryna, staged plays by repressed artists, translated Belarusian literature into foreign languages, and created murals, installations, and spaces of memory. Cultural diplomacy became a means of advocacy, of preserving identity, and of forging new partnerships with governments, cultural institutions, and global civil society. It demonstrated that Belarus's fight for democracy is also a cultural and civilizational struggle — one rooted in history, language, dignity, and the power of human connection.

This report demonstrates how the Belarusian democratic movement uses cultural diplomacy as an integral part of its political and civic engagement. It does not aim to capture every initiative, but rather illustrates — through sectoral overviews, project examples, photos, and reflections — why this work matters, now and in the long term.



History and Memory

Memory becomes a powerful tool when it transforms into a space of cultural presence. For the Belarusian democratic forces, commemorating the past is not only about honoring national heritage but also a form of cultural diplomacy — one that unites Belarusians with other European nations through shared history, values, and remembrance. Initiatives such as commemorative ceremonies, cultural heritage preservation, and symbolic acts at historical sites abroad serve to connect Belarus's struggle for freedom with universal narratives of resistance, human dignity, and solidarity. Whether honoring Francysk Skaryna in Prague, Kosciuszko in Washington and Switzerland, or victims of totalitarian repression such as the executed Belarusian poets of 1937 — these events strengthen Belarus's European identity and amplify its voice on the global stage.



Annual Commemoration of the 1863–1864 Uprising and Kastus Kalinouski

Each year, a solemn ceremony takes place at the Rasos Cemetery in Vilnius, where Kastus Kalinouski and his fellow insurgents of the 1863–1864 anti-imperial uprising are buried. This regular, high-level commemoration gathers top Lithuanian officials — including Lithuanian and

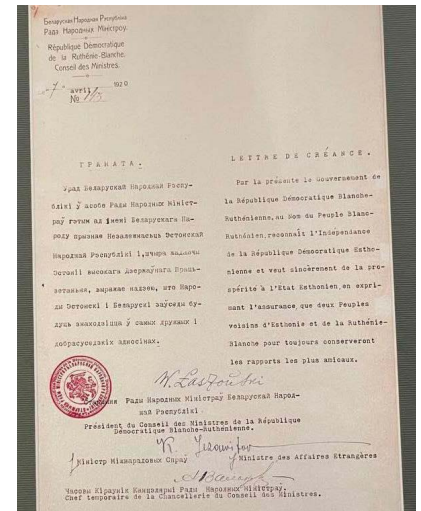
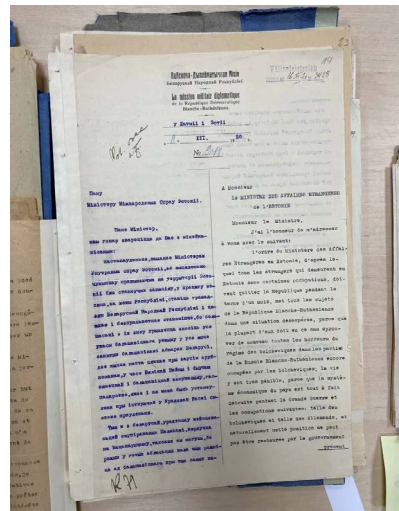
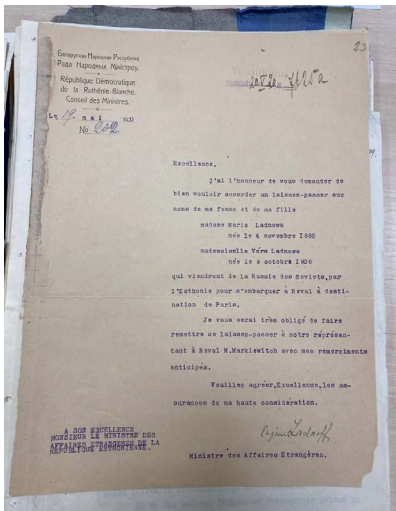
Polish Presidents — alongside the Ambassadors of Poland, Ukraine, and other countries. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya participates in the ceremony every year, honoring Kalinouski as a national hero and symbol of the Belarusian struggle for freedom and dignity.





Historic Belarus–Estonia Correspondence

During her visit to Estonia in October 2022, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Urmas Reinsalu jointly announced the discovery of a remarkable historical document: original correspondence from the 1920s between the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) and the government of Estonia. This exchange confirms Estonia's recognition of the BNR's statehood and is a powerful symbol of Belarus's historical sovereignty. Their rediscovery reinforces the continuity between the democratic aspirations of the BNR and today's Belarusian democratic forces.



Tribute to Chagall and Soutine (2021)

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya paid tribute to artists of Belarusian origin during her visit to the Paris Opera Garnier, where she viewed the legendary ceiling painted by Marc Chagall — a native of Belarus. She also visited an exhibition dedicated to Chaim Soutine, born in Smilavichy.

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“Some of his paintings — thanks to people like Viktor Babaryka — found their way to Belarus after decades. His work Eva became a symbol of our protest.”

— Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya



Annual Commemoration: Night of the Executed Poets

Each year on October 29, the Belarusian democratic forces commemorate the *Night of the Executed Poets* — a solemn remembrance of the mass execution of over 100 Belarusian cultural figures by the Stalinist regime in 1937. The memorial, initiated by the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya together with the Council on Culture and Diaspora, has become a regular international event. Through poetry, music, and speeches, the event honors victims of totalitarian violence while linking their legacy to today's struggle for freedom. The *Night of the Executed Poets* has grown into a powerful example of cultural diplomacy.

Memorial Plaque Honoring Francysk Skaryna in Prague

On June 7, 2021, during her official visit to the Czech Republic, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met with Miloš Vystrčil, President of the Czech Senate. Together, they laid flowers at the memorial plaque dedicated to Francysk Skaryna, located on the building of the National Library of the Czech Republic — the Clementinum. This site holds special significance: it was in Prague, in 1517, that Skaryna published the first books in Old Belarusian, marking the beginning of Belarusian printing. Tsikhanouskaya also presented the President of the Czech Senate with an engraving of Francysk Skaryna.

Honoring the Memory of Moyshe Kulbak (2021)

On the eve of the Night of the Executed Poets in 2021, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya joined Israeli Ambassador Yosef Levy and Lithuanian Jewish leader Faina Kukliansky in a *moment of silence* for Moyshe Kulbak — a Jewish Belarusian poet executed by the Stalinist regime in 1937. Born in Smarhon', Kulbak became a leading literary voice across Kaunas, Vilnius, and Minsk. His legacy, especially the novel *Zelmenyaner*, reflects the intertwined cultural heritage of Belarus, Lithuania, and Israel.

Holocaust remembrance

Holocaust remembrance has become an important dimension of the Belarusian democratic forces' cultural diplomacy, reinforcing their commitment to human rights, historical truth, and the fight against authoritarianism. In January 2025, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya joined world leaders at the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, honoring the victims — including Jews deported from Belarus and Belarusian resistance fighters — and emphasizing the link between memory and contemporary struggles against tyranny. In May 2025, Pavel Latushka led a delegation to the commemoration of the Mauthausen concentration camp's liberation in Austria, participating alongside European heads of state.

Unveiling of the “Solidarity” Monument in Warsaw (2021)

The event commemorated the 32nd anniversary of Poland's partially free elections in 1989 — a defining moment in the nation's democratic transition. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya joined Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski at the unveiling ceremony in June 2021. Poland's “Solidarity” movement has long served as an inspiration for Belarusians. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it helped spark the awakening of national consciousness and the Belarusian independence movement, fostering ideas of democratic change and societal mobilization that continue to resonate today.



Tribute at the Tadeusz Kościuszko Monument in Washington, D.C. (2021)

On July 22, 2021, Tsikhanouskaya paid tribute to Tadeusz Kościuszko, laying flowers at his monument in Washington alongside U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Julie Fisher and the Ambassadors of Lithuania and Poland to the U.S. In her remarks, Tsikhanouskaya emphasized that Kościuszko's ideals — liberty, justice, and equality — are timeless and deeply relevant to Belarus today. Born in present-day Belarus, Kościuszko is not only a hero of Poland, Lithuania and the United States but also a figure of immense significance to Belarusians. His legacy of fighting for the rights of all people, regardless of status or origin, continues to inspire Belarusians in their struggle for freedom and dignity.



Meeting with Belarusians at the Kosciuszko Monument in Solothurn, Switzerland (2022)

In 2022, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met with the Belarusian community in Solothurn, where Tadeusz Kosciuszko spent his final years. Standing by his monument, she emphasized the enduring relevance of his legacy.

“Two centuries later, Kosciuszko’s pledge to defend national sovereignty and universal freedom is still our fight,” she said. “Tyranny enslaved people in his time — and does so today, through war and occupation.”

Commemoration at the Holodomor Memorial in Washington

Together with Ukrainian Ambassador Oksana Markarova, Tsikhanouskaya *honored* the victims of the Holodomor — the man-made famine orchestrated by Stalin's regime in 1932–1933. While the Holodomor is most commonly associated with Ukraine, it also deeply affected southern regions of Belarus, where thousands of Belarusian families perished from starvation and repression. The shared trauma of Soviet terror unites the historical memory of Belarusians and Ukrainians, underscoring the need to preserve this memory as a warning against totalitarianism and a call to defend human rights and national sovereignty.



Monument to Klaudziy Duzh-Dusheuski in Kaunas (2023)

In 2023, a monument was unveiled in Kaunas honoring Klaudziy Duzh-Dusheuski (1891–1959) — architect, academic, member of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, and designer of the white-red-white flag. A victim of both Soviet and Nazi repression, he was posthumously recognized by Lithuania for rescuing Jews during

WWII. The ceremony gathered his descendants and families of Holocaust survivors he saved. Representing Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office, advisor Aliaksandr Dabravolski emphasized Duzh-Dusheuski's lasting legacy and his symbolic place in Belarusian and European history.

Visiting Belarusian Church and Library in London (2023)

In March 2023, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya visited two key institutions of the Belarusian diaspora in London. The Belarusian Church, internationally recognized as one of the world's most remarkable religious buildings, is considered the first wooden church built in London since the Great Fire of the 17th century. A prayer service was held there in memory of the victims of the 2020 repressions and for a free Belarus. Tsikhanouskaya also paid tribute at the grave of Vera Rich, the renowned translator of Belarusian literature into English. At the Belarusian Library, she viewed rare artifacts, including pages of early printed books, Belarusian texts written in Arabic script, the prison uniform of poet Larysa Henijush, traditional Slutsk sashes, and an exhibition dedicated to today's political prisoners in Belarus.



Tribute to Presidents of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Prague (2024)

On March 25, 2024 — Freedom Day and the 106th anniversary of the declaration of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic — a commemorative ceremony was held in Prague to honor Belarusian political leaders. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, together with Miloš Vystrčil, President of the Czech Senate, laid flowers at the graves of BNR Presidents at Olšany Cemetery.

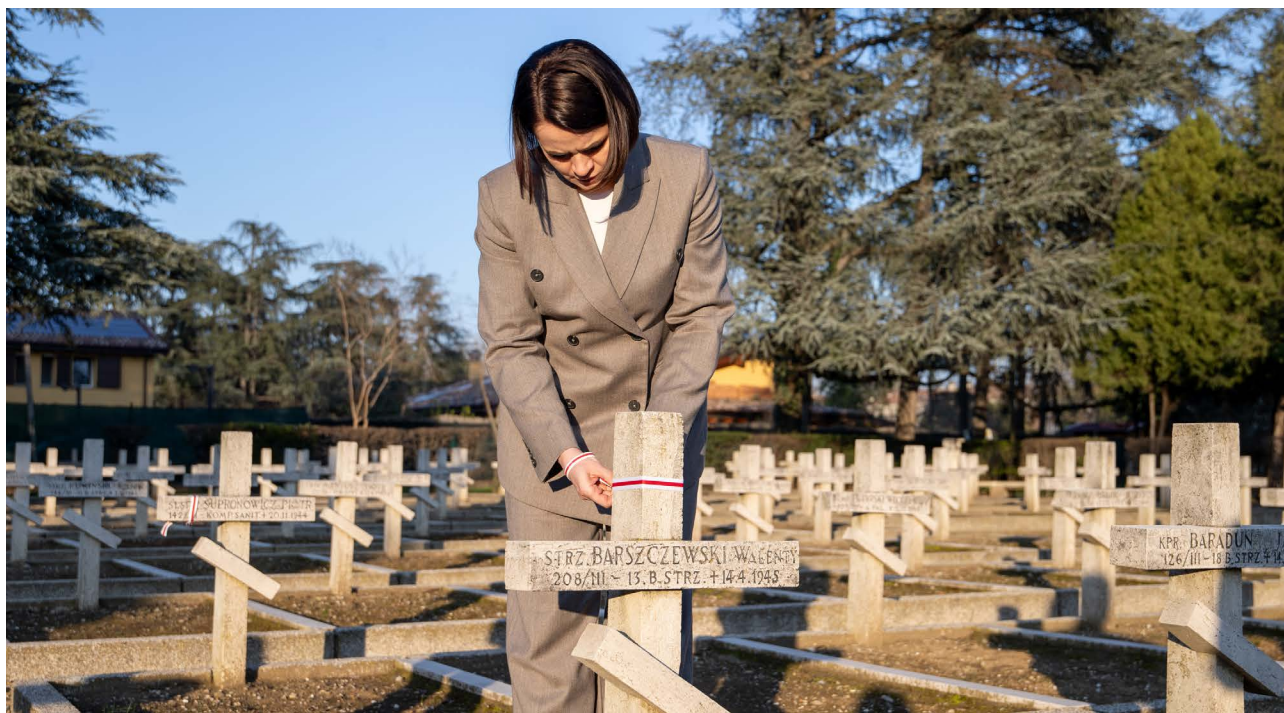
Visit to Polish World War Cemetery in Bologna (2025)

In March 2025, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya visited Bologna to honor Belarusian soldiers who fought within General Anders' Army for the liberation of Italy during World War II. At the Polish War Cemetery, she laid flowers on the graves of Belarusians who helped free the city.

“Eighty years ago, Bologna was under Nazi occupation. The first to enter and liberate the city were soldiers of Anders' Army — mostly Polish citizens, but many were Belarusians. They fought not only for Italy's freedom but for values: democracy, independence, and the right to live without dictatorship,” said Tsikhanouskaya.

During the visit, she met Bologna's Mayor Matteo Lepore to discuss support for the Belarusian diaspora, cultural initiatives, and youth education programs. She was awarded an honorary diploma of Bologna citizenship — a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the Belarusian people.



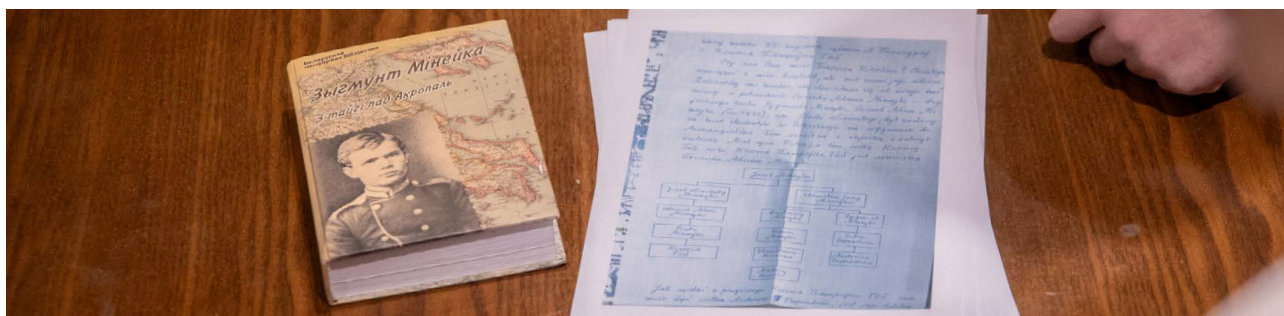


Book about Zygmunt Mineyko to Former Greek Prime Minister (2024)

In April 2024, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met with former Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou during her official visit to Athens. She presented him with archival materials and a book about his great-grandfather — Zygmunt Mineyko, a Belarusian-born participant in the 1863–1864 uprising led by Kastus Kalinowski. Born in present-day Belarus, Mineyko was sentenced to death for his role in the uprising, later commuted to exile in Siberia. He escaped, eventually settling in Greece, where he became a respected engineer and public figure. His descendants include three Greek prime ministers. Tsikhanouskaya gave Papandreou the Belarusian-language edition of Mineyko's memoir *From the Taiga to the Acropolis*, along with family estate records and photos.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya Visits Santa Croce Basilica in Florence

In March 2025, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya visited Florence, where she received the historic Seal of Peace from Mayor Sara Funaro for her commitment to democracy and human rights. She also paid tribute to Michał Kleofas Ogiński, Belarusian-born composer and diplomat, by visiting his tomb at the Santa Croce Basilica. Ogiński's legacy, including his famous polonaise Farewell to the Homeland, remains a vital part of Belarusian, Polish, and European heritage.



Tribute to Shipyard Workers and Kosciuszko Forum in Gdańsk (2025)

In February 2025, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya *laid* flowers at the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers in Gdańsk, honoring those killed during the 1970 protests against the communist regime. Joined by European politicians, she paid tribute to the victims and emphasized:

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“Just as Poland once walked its path to freedom, so will Belarusians.”



Cultural Initiatives

Over the past years, the Belarusian democratic community with partners has launched a wide array of cultural actions that go far beyond artistic performance — blending civic engagement with creative expression. These initiatives range from international campaigns like *Voices Across Borders*, symbolic events like repainting the Berlin Wall, and national evenings such as *Get to Know Belarus!*, to high-profile programs like *Belarus Days* in the

European Parliament. Community gatherings, sports tournaments, public exhibitions, and commemorations such as Kupalle celebrations help preserve identity in exile and amplify the call for freedom. Whether through embroidery, theater, or shared meals, these events keep Belarus on the international agenda and build solidarity through culture.

Belarus Days in Brussels (2024)

In December 2024, Brussels hosted *Belarus Days* — a series of political and cultural events organized by the European Commission, the European External Action Service, and the European Parliament to express solidarity with the Belarusian people. The program featured a rich mix of cultural diplomacy: a concert by Belarusian musicians, *Unbreakable* — an exhibition dedicated to five imprisoned Viasna human rights defenders, film screenings, and powerful art installations that told the stories of Belarusians in exile and under repression. A special highlight was the display of embroidered works by Czech-based artist Rufina Bazlova, whose pieces reinterpret traditional Belarusian patterns to depict the events of 2020 and the stories of political prisoners. On December 11, a musical evening with renowned accordionist Yegor Zabelov and a photo exhibition by Aliaksandr Kot-Zaitsau explored the theme of “home” in exile. Both artists are part of EU-supported initiatives like EU4Culture and ArtPower Belarus. Hosted by the European Commission with support from the Goethe-Institut, the events reinforced the role of culture as a bridge between Belarusians and the European community.





Christmas Receptions Hosted by the President of Poland

From 2021 to 2025, Polish President Andrzej Duda has annually *hosted* Christmas and New Year receptions for the Belarusian democratic community at the Belweder Palace in Warsaw. These gatherings have grown into a tradition of cultural diplomacy — not only expressing political solidarity but also celebrating Belarusian heritage in exile. Over the years, the receptions have featured traditional Belarusian carols performed by Siarhei Douhushau and folk ensembles, special musical sets by Lavon Volski, and joint performances by children's choirs singing Belarusian and Polish songs. These moments of shared culture and remembrance have offered a sense of unity, warmth, and support for Belarusians far from home.



Meeting with the Belarusian Creative Community in Warsaw (2023)

As Belarusian democratic forces and the creative community work hand in hand to keep Belarus on the international agenda, a special meeting took place in 2023 in Warsaw with exiled Belarusian artists, cultural managers, and independent media representatives. Emphasis was placed on the role of culture and language as tools of

resistance and as foundations of national identity. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya highlighted that culture is not only a form of expression, but a powerful weapon in the fight for freedom — and called for deeper cooperation between cultural actors and democratic institutions to preserve Belarusian identity and counter Russification.

Kupalle Celebration (2024)

Belarusians around the world traditionally celebrate Kupalle — one of the most cherished and ancient traditional holidays — as a way to preserve cultural identity in times of exile and resistance. In June 2024, the Belarusian community in Vilnius held a festive Kupalle gathering, joined by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. The event featured wreath-making, folk singing, dancing, and the symbolic search for the mythical fern flower — rituals that

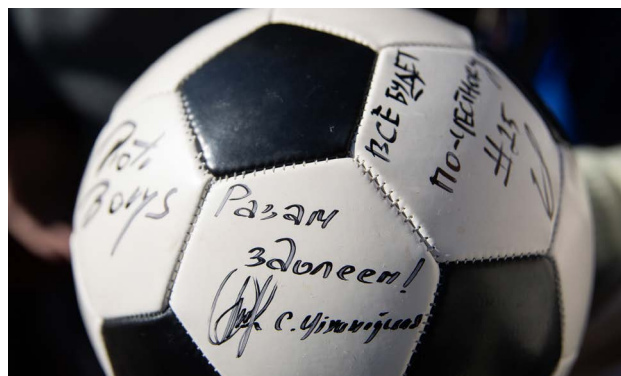
mark midsummer and embody hope, light, and renewal. Tsikhanouskaya thanked the diaspora for keeping Belarusian traditions alive and shared childhood memories of celebrating Kupalle in her grandmother's village. She emphasized that no matter where Belarusians are, these customs are a living link to their roots and a powerful expression of cultural resilience.



Ivulin Cup (2024)

Launched by Belarusians in exile, the Ivulin Cup is more than just an amateur football tournament — it has become a cultural phenomenon and a symbol of solidarity through sport. Created to support political prisoners in Belarus, the 2024 edition brought together teams from across Europe, turning the event into a space of unity, resistance, and shared identity. The opening ceremony featured speeches by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

and Polish Deputy Minister of Sport and Tourism Piotr Borys, emphasizing the power of sports to foster community and amplify civic values. The tournament is named after journalist and footballer Alyaksandr Ivulin, who was imprisoned for 624 days for his political beliefs. After his release in 2023, Ivulin became one of the driving forces behind the event.



Cultural Evening “Belarus – The Land of Light” (Stockholm, 2024)

On November 30, 2024, the Belarusian community and People’s Embassy in Sweden hosted a cultural evening celebrating Belarus’s enduring spirit under repression. The event featured an exhibition by artist MamaKiskis, whose symbolic works reflect national identity and resilience. The

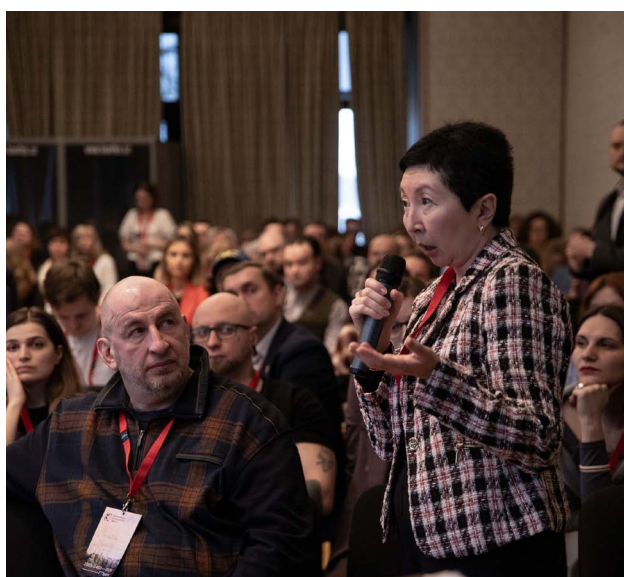
program included a lecture on Belarus–Sweden historical ties during the Great Northern War and highlighted the Belarusian school in Stockholm, which helps exiled children preserve their language and heritage.

Conferences

Conferences organized by the Belarusian democratic forces in cooperation with partners across Europe have become a vital tool of cultural diplomacy. These forums serve not only to discuss political and civic issues but also to present Belarusian culture, language, and identity as strategic assets in the struggle for democracy. Such conferences already took place in Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, and in Brussels. They highlight the depth, diversity, and resilience of the Belarusian community.

Conference of Belarusians of the World

This annual event serves as a key platform for uniting the Belarusian diaspora and international partners around shared goals of democracy, cultural preservation, and global solidarity. Organized by the democratic forces of Belarus in cooperation with civil society, the conference combines strategic dialogue with cultural programming. More than just a political forum, the conference engages Belarusians in exile in cultural diplomacy and international advocacy. It strengthens the diaspora's role as an active voice for democratic change, while showcasing Belarusian identity, creativity, and resilience to audiences across Europe and beyond.



Conference “Belarus–Lithuania: Into the Future Through Shared Values” (2024)

On December 2, 2024, Vilnius hosted a high-level conference dedicated to Belarusian–Lithuanian cultural ties. The event brought together democratic leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, First Deputy Speaker of the Lithuanian Seimas Juozas Olekas, and cultural, academic, and civil society representatives from both countries. The discussions focused on deepening cooperation in culture, education, and civic engagement. The conference highlighted the long-standing historical bonds between Belarus and Lithuania, as well as their shared values of freedom, dignity, and European identity. Belarusian democratic forces systematically engage with Lithuanian institutions and society to explore common historical narratives and promote cultural understanding.



Stockholm Conference on Belarus (2024)

On May 21–22, 2024, Stockholm hosted a landmark Conference on Belarus, organized in cooperation with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A distinctive feature of the program was its strong cultural dimension, emphasizing the role of identity, language, and the arts in Belarus's democratic struggle. On May 21, the cultural evening *"My Future, an Empty Seat"* was held at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern. The public event showcased contemporary Belarusian literature, music, and reflections on national identity. Featured artists included Eva Vežnaviec (Sviatlana Kurs), who presented her novel *What Is It You Seek, Wolf?*, recently translated into Swedish by Ersatz;

award-winning poet and translator Valzhyna Mort; and acclaimed singer and actress Sviatlana Ben'.

"The discussion on Belarusian identity and language was especially important," said Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya during the conference. "Just a few years ago, this would have been unimaginable at such a high level. But today, the international community recognizes that culture, language, and identity are our strongest defense against the 'Russian world.' Nothing demonstrates our European belonging more powerfully than our culture."



Kosciuszko Forum in Gdansk

The *Kosciuszko Forum*, held in Gdańsk in February 2025, was a high-level international event co-organized by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Belarusian democratic forces. The forum brought together prominent politicians, experts, and people of culture to discuss democratic transformation in Belarus and the broader region. The forum featured a rich cultural program, including the opening of a special exhibition and a screening of the acclaimed documentary KOS. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya opened the event, stating that Kościuszko's ideals — freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty — are as relevant today as ever. She stressed that independence and democracy require both internal resilience and strong international support, framing Kościuszko's legacy as a powerful inspiration for modern-day Belarus.



Urban Spaces

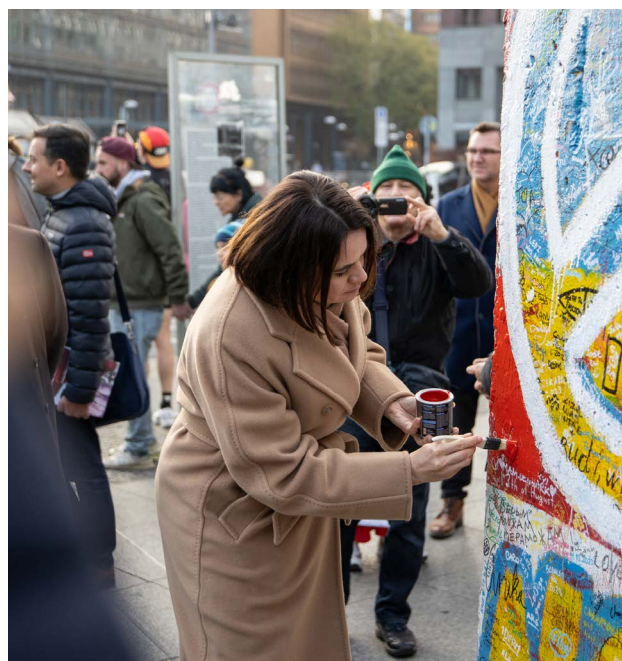
Across Europe, the Belarusian democratic community has actively transformed urban spaces into symbols of solidarity, resistance, and memory. Through the naming of squares, creation of murals, commemorative events, and public art, Belarusians in exile have made their presence visible and meaningful. These initiatives

not only honor political prisoners and national heroes, but also foster international awareness and support. By engaging city councils, artists, and local partners, the democratic forces have secured lasting markers of Belarusian identity and struggle—turning European cities into allies in the fight for freedom.



Repainting the Berlin Wall for Belarus (2024)

In November 2024, during the 35th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya participated in a symbolic ceremony in Berlin. A historic segment of the wall was restored and repainted to reflect new struggles for freedom — this time in Belarus and Ukraine. The act became a powerful metaphor for societal renewal and the enduring relevance of the values the wall once represented. A year earlier, in 2023, a separate fragment of the Berlin Wall on Potsdamer Platz had been painted with graffiti supporting Belarusian and Ukrainian democratic movements and protesting the regimes of Lukashenka and Putin. This artistic-political action reimagined one of Europe's most iconic symbols of division as a canvas for unity, solidarity, and resistance.



Memorial Plaque Honoring Francysk Skaryna in Prague (2024)

In 2023, a memorial plaque was installed on Old Town Square in Prague, marking the presumed location of Francysk Skaryna's historic printing house. The unveiling ceremony took place in March 2024 with the participation of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

“Skaryna was — and will always remain — the foremost historical figure for Belarusians. He embodies everything that makes us European. Skaryna brought Europe to Belarus — but also brought Belarus into Europe,”

Tsikhanouskaya noted in her address. The plaque features Skaryna's personal emblem — a radiant sun and crescent moon — alongside the Latin inscription *Domus Severini. Institoris*. The design was created by Czech artist Jiří Altmann, with financial support from Lithuania. The initiative represents a trilateral cultural alliance, symbolizing the political and moral support for Belarus from its neighbors and European Union partners.



Francysk Skaryna Square in Riga (2023)

As a result of cooperation between Belarusians in Latvia, Belarusian democratic forces, and the Riga City Council, one of the squares in the Latvian capital was renamed in honor of the East-European first printer Francysk Skaryna – European symbol of humanism and enlightenment. During her visit to Riga in November 2023, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met with Latvian officials and representatives of the Belarusian diaspora. She also visited the National Library of Latvia, where she was shown a rare edition of the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. As a gesture of gratitude, she presented the library with the book *Belarus* by Uladzimir Arlou.

Free Belarus Square and Street in Poland (July 2023)

In 2021 and 2023, two symbolic public spaces in Poland were named in honor of Belarus's struggle for freedom. In Warsaw, the city inaugurated the Roundabout of Free Belarus (Rondo Wolnej Białorusi) — a visible act of solidarity with the Belarusian democratic movement. In Białystok, a street was officially named Free Belarus Street (*ulica Wolnej Białorusi*). Both initiatives, supported by local authorities and the Belarusian diaspora, have become part of the urban landscape, serving as permanent reminders of the fight for freedom, dignity, and human rights in Belarus. “This place has truly earned its name,” Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said during the speech. “It has already entered history thanks to those who, since the 1990s, have gathered here to support the struggle for a free Belarus.”



Belarusian Houses and Museums in Warsaw, Prague, Vilnius, Tallinn

In Warsaw, the Museum of Free Belarus was established as a vibrant space for exhibitions, events, and the display of historical artifacts. It serves as a platform to promote Belarus's European heritage and national identity. Similar spaces have been created in other countries as well. In Vilnius, the Ivan Lutskievič Belarusian Museum was opened to honor Belarusian cultural legacy. In Prague, with support from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Democratic Forces of Belarus was established. Belarus missions also operate in Brussels and Tallinn, representing the Belarusian democratic movement and engaging in advocacy, cultural diplomacy, and public outreach.

Murals Honoring Belarusian Political Prisoners Unveiled in Warsaw (2024)

In 2023 and 2024, two murals were unveiled in Warsaw as acts of solidarity with Belarusian political prisoners. The 2023 mural *Unbreakable Belarusians*, on the wall of the Belarusian House, depicted Ales Bialiatski, Nasta Loika, Pavel Belavus, Mikalai Statkevich, Katsyaryna Andreeva, and Darya Losik — symbols of courage and resistance. In 2024, another mural initiated by Amnesty International Polska was unveiled at the Szczepański roundabout, featuring portraits and quotes of Ales Bialiatski, Maria Kalesnikava, Andrzej Poczobut, and Marfa Rabkova. At the ceremony, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya thanked Poland for its support and stressed the urgency of freeing all political prisoners.

Opening of a Belarus-themed Mural in Vienna (2021)

In November 2021, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya took part in a series of cultural and political events in Vienna held alongside the High-Level International Conference on Belarus. On 21 November, she attended the unveiling of a Belarus-themed mural in Vienna's Ruth Maier Park. The mural, dedicated to Belarus's struggle for freedom and democracy, became a symbol of solidarity with the Belarusian people.



Visual Arts and Exhibitions

Visual art has become one of the most expressive and impactful tools of Belarusian cultural diplomacy. In exile and solidarity, artists, human rights defenders, and democratic institutions have joined forces to turn exhibitions into spaces of testimony, remembrance, and resistance. These initiatives — often hosted in parliaments, universities, museums, and city streets across

Europe — give visibility to Belarusian struggles and aspirations through portraits of political prisoners, symbolic installations, and emotionally charged graphic narratives. From Brussels to Riga, Florence to Tallinn, each exhibition serves as a cultural act that preserves Belarusian identity, fosters global solidarity, and keeps the truth about Belarus on the world's agenda.

A Gift of Aleś Puškin's Painting to the President of Flanders (2024)

In May 2024, democratic leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya presented Jan Jambon, President of Flanders, with the painting "Belarusian Sun" by the late Belarusian artist Aleś Puškin. The handover took place during the EU Council of Ministers of Culture in Brussels and served as a striking act of cultural diplomacy, linking Belarusian heritage with European values. The painting, created in 2011, features a pumpkin — a traditional Belarusian symbol of fertility, abundance, and connection to the land. Puškin crafted the frame himself from old fence boards from his native village of Bobr, underlining the personal and national roots embedded in the work. Known for his outspoken opposition to the Lukashenka regime, Aleś Puškin died in July 2023 after being transferred from prison to a hospital in critical condition.



Exhibition «ЖЫВЕ БЕЛАРУСЬ / Belarus Lebт!» (2021)

In 2021, the Pilecki Institute in Berlin hosted the exhibition "ЖЫВЕ БЕЛАРУСЬ / Belarus Lebт!" presenting works by 20 Belarusian artists and anonymous Minsk residents. The pieces included drawings, photos, and posters, some created while in detention. The exhibition highlighted the role of art in the Belarusian fight for freedom and strengthened ties between Polish institutions and the Belarusian democratic community

«Remembering Democracy» in Brussels (2021)

One of the earliest major initiatives was the 2021 exhibition "Remembering Democracy" at the Mission of Democratic Belarus in Brussels. It featured works by Belarusian artists who use visual expression as a means of resistance and remembrance. Located in the political heart of the European Union, it aimed to generate sympathy and support among EU institutions through artistic language that often speaks louder than political statements.

Exhibition about Female journalists (2021)

In Paris, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya opened an exhibition dedicated to Belarusian female journalists in September 2021. Co-organized by her Office, the Polish Institute, the Lithuanian Embassy, and French partners, this project was both an artistic act and a political statement. It drew attention to the persecution of independent journalists in Belarus, particularly women, and showcased cultural diplomacy as a coalition-building mechanism.

„Vladimir TSESLER made for Belarus“ Exhibition (2021)

An exhibition was held in the former Lukishki prison in Vilnius in June 2021, featuring works by Belarusian artist and designer Vladimir Tsesler, along with the project Miazha. It told the stories of Belarusians who were forced to flee their country due to violence and persecution. Lukishki prison is one of the most infamous sites in Belarusian history, where prominent figures such as Frantsishak Aliakhnovich, Maksim Haretski, Maksim Tank, Branislau Tarashkevich, Barys Kit, and Adam Stankevich were imprisoned under various regimes.

HITLERKAPUTIN Exhibition (2022)

In July 2022, Vilnius hosted the exhibition HITLERKAPUTIN by renowned Belarusian artist and designer Uladzimir Tsesler — a powerful collection of anti-authoritarian visual art displayed in the heart of the city, at Town Hall Square. Organized by the Belarusian Council for Culture and LIONS CLUB under the patronage of the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the open-air exhibition featured more than 20 large-format political posters. The works juxtaposed historical totalitarian figures with contemporary dictators, including Putin and Lukashenka, drawing bold visual parallels to expose the enduring nature of repression and propaganda. Using satire, minimalist symbolism, and sharp visual contrasts, Tsesler challenged viewers to recognize the dangers of unchecked power and cults of personality. The exhibition attracted local residents, tourists, and politicians, and served as a direct, street-level intervention in Europe's public conversation on dictatorship, war, and freedom.



Hope Without Fear (2023)

On November 2, 2023, in Pisa, Italy, Belarusian artist Nadzia Buka opened her solo exhibition *Hope Without Fear*. The exhibition showcased 34 works, including intricate papercuts, paintings created in Warsaw, and a stained-glass piece. It marked the

start of a traveling series that continued to Florence and Rome, providing international audiences with an intimate glimpse into Belarusian resistance, beauty, and resilience.

Belarusian Martyrology (2023–2024)

In September 2023, the European Parliament in Strasbourg hosted *Belarusian Martyrology*, an *exhibition* by artist *Xisha Angelova / Ксиша Ангелава*. The display featured over 900 portraits of Belarusian political prisoners, created in response to the post-election crackdown in Belarus. The project was inspired by the brutal death of Raman Bandarenka, and each portrait represents an individual persecuted by the regime. Later, the exhibition traveled to Vilnius and in May 2024, to *Turin*, Italy, where it was hosted by the Luigi Firpo Foundation and organized by the Belarusian association “Talaka”. The exhibition continues to highlight the human cost of authoritarian repression and serves as an enduring call for justice and remembrance.

Exhibition Dedicated to Ales Bialiatski (2023–2024)

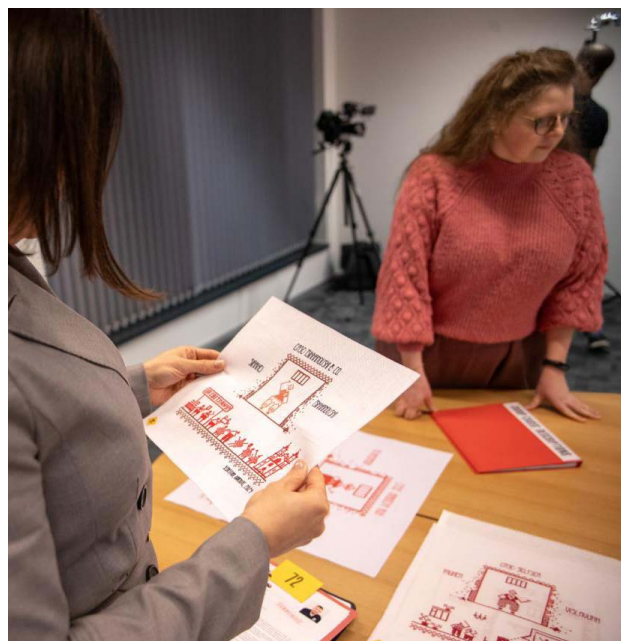
In September 2023, the Pilecki Institute organized the exhibition *I Am Not Afraid — Let Them Be Afraid*, dedicated to the life and work of Ales Bialiatski, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Belarusian human rights defender. The event included the launch of the book *Ales Bialiatski: Path of Influence* and the screening of the documentary *Bialiacki* by Malanka Media, with support from PEN Belarus and other partners. Following its debut in Berlin, the exhibition traveled to Warsaw and Paris, where it was expanded to include materials about Russian human rights advocate Oleg Orlov. This contextualization emphasized the shared plight of human rights defenders across the region and the need for international solidarity. In autumn 2024, the exhibition was hosted in Prague, with a private vernissage on Bialiatski’s *birthday*, September 25, at the *Office* of the Belarusian Democratic Forces in the Czech Republic. It was later displayed at *Masaryk University* in Brno and *Charles University in Prague*, underlining the role of academic and civil institutions in supporting cultural diplomacy and human rights awareness.

#FramedInBelarus Exhibition (2024)

On December 10, 2024 — Human Rights Day — the exhibition *#FramedInBelarus* opened at the Mission of Democratic Belarus in Brussels as a central cultural highlight of the **Belarus Days**. Initiated by artist **Rufina Bazlova** and curator **Sofia Tokar**, the exhibition featured over 250 embroidered works, each dedicated to an individual Belarusian political prisoner.

“These works are deeply emotional, even though they tell stories in a simple visual language. They combine the essence of traditional Belarusian art with modern media and a powerful political message. I believe art is stronger than prisons or bullets. Our culture is the soul of Belarus. Even in exile, while it is being destroyed at home, preserving it is vital. Culture and art help us fight back against the Russian world and dictatorship,”

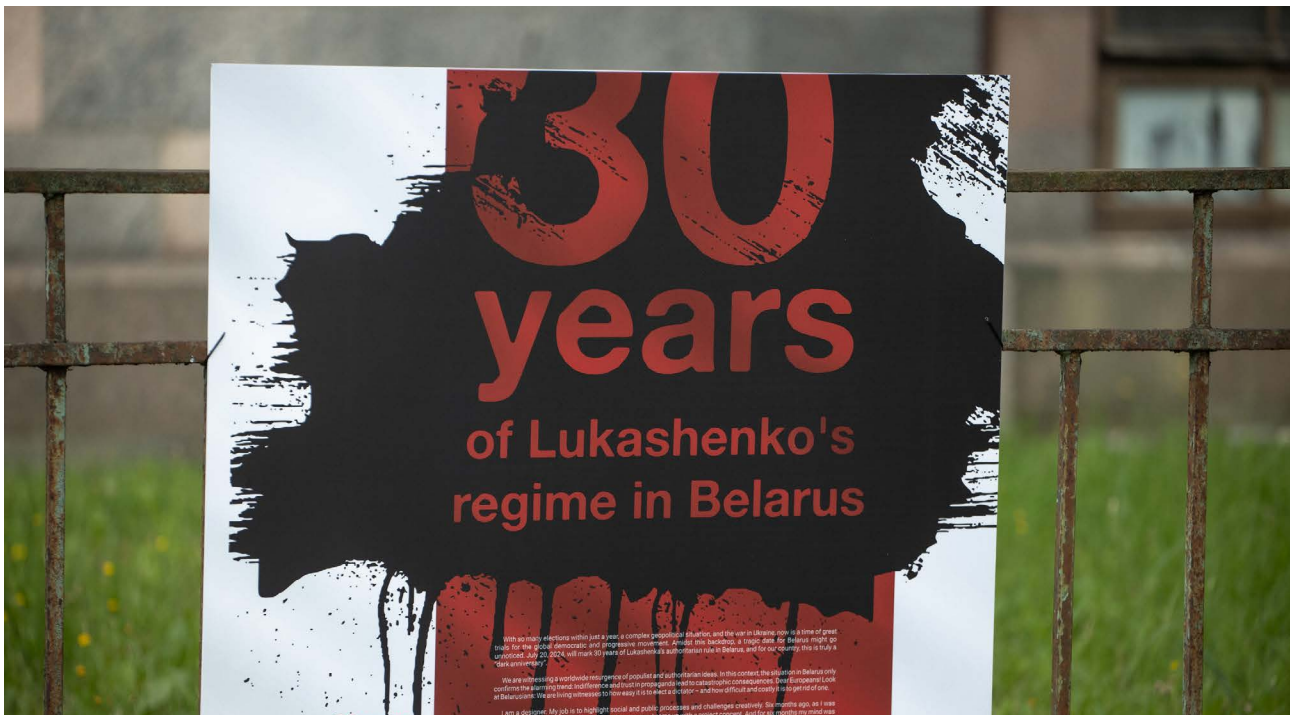
said Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya at the opening.



Exhibition: 30 Years of Dictatorship in 30 Posters (2024)

In July 2024, the exhibition *30 Years of Dictatorship in 30 Posters* by Belarusian graphic designer Artur Vakarau opened in Vilnius. The exhibition features 30 large-format posters, each capturing the impact of Alyaksandr Lukashenko's authoritarian rule on Belarusian society, politics, economy, and culture. The central motif of each piece is the number "30", symbolizing three decades of repression and resistance. The opening was attended by

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Lithuanian politicians, and members of the Belarusian diaspora. The exhibition has since traveled across Europe. In January 2025, it was presented at the Museum of Free Belarus in Warsaw. Additionally, an artbook featuring Vakarau's posters was published in *Italy*, extending the exhibition's reach and impact through new cultural formats.



Exhibition: Dresses for Freedom (2024)

In June 2024, the *exhibition Dresses for Freedom* by artist Hanna Karan opened in Brussels, presenting dresses that symbolized the courage and resilience of Belarusian women who stood up against injustice. Each garment told a story — of doctors, athletes, teachers, and countless others who played a vital role in Belarus's pro-democracy movement. The exhibition was organized in partnership with the Mission of Democratic Belarus in Brussels. At the opening, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya emphasized the significance of women's leadership in the Belarusian revolution:

“You know, our revolution is often called a women’s revolution. These are the dresses of all those brave Belarusian women who rose against injustice — doctors, athletes, teachers. Some now live in exile, some are still in Belarus waiting for loved ones to come home from prison. Some are imprisoned themselves. What unites them is one dream: the dream of a new Belarus, the dream of freedom. And that dream still unites Belarusians. It gives us strength to continue the struggle,”

she said.

Exhibition: 25 Steps to Freedom (2024)

In July 2024, the city of Daugavpils, Latvia, hosted the opening of *25 Steps to Freedom*, an exhibition by Belarusian artist Volha Yakubouskaya. The exhibition features 25 illustrated characters — anthropomorphic cats — each representing real individuals who played a meaningful role in the Belarusian pro-democracy movement following the 2020 uprising. With subtle irony and rich symbolism, the artist uses these feline personas

to reflect the courage, sacrifice, and individuality of those shaping Belarus's modern history. The event was organized by the Latvian Belarusian Association “Supolka” and the cultural space New East, with support from the Danish Cultural Institute in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. The opening ceremony gathered members of the Belarusian diaspora, Latvian politicians, and members of the Parliamentary Group for Democratic Belarus.

Exhibition: Belarus = Europe (2024)

On November 19, 2024, a street *exhibition* titled *Belarus = Europe* opened in Tammsaare Park, Tallinn, as part of the Voices Across Borders project. Initiated and organized by the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the exhibition was launched during her official visit to Estonia. The exhibition featured a series of posters by exiled Belarusian artist ZmiThor, whose minimalist and striking graphic style challenges stereotypes about Belarus and asserts its deep-rooted European identity.

“In 2020, we launched our first exhibition in Tallinn online due to the pandemic. Since then, we’ve organized solidarity events, street installations, concerts, and cultural festivals — all to make Belarus visible and to connect with Estonian society,”

said Vitaly Malchanau, Representative of Tsikhanouskaya's Office in Estonia and Latvia. The Tallinn team's ongoing cultural diplomacy includes public art actions, such as placing 605 chairs with names of political prisoners in Freedom Square, organizing Belarusian Christmas and Kupalle celebrations, and hosting concerts and film screenings.



Exhibition: Art Behind Bars (2025)

On May 9, 2025, during her visit to Riga, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya opened the exhibition Art Behind Bars, organized by the Latvian Belarusian Association “Supolka” and the Human Rights Center Viasna. The exhibition showcases drawings, poems, and artworks created by Belarusian political prisoners — expressions of resilience, hope, and the enduring human spirit under repression.

“These works were created in prison cells — under surveillance, in the cold, or without proper light. They are not just drawings; they are acts of defiance and promises that Belarusians will not forget, surrender, or stop until every political prisoner is free,” said Tsikhanouskaya.



Opening of the Exhibition Women’s March by Volha Yakubouskaya (2023)

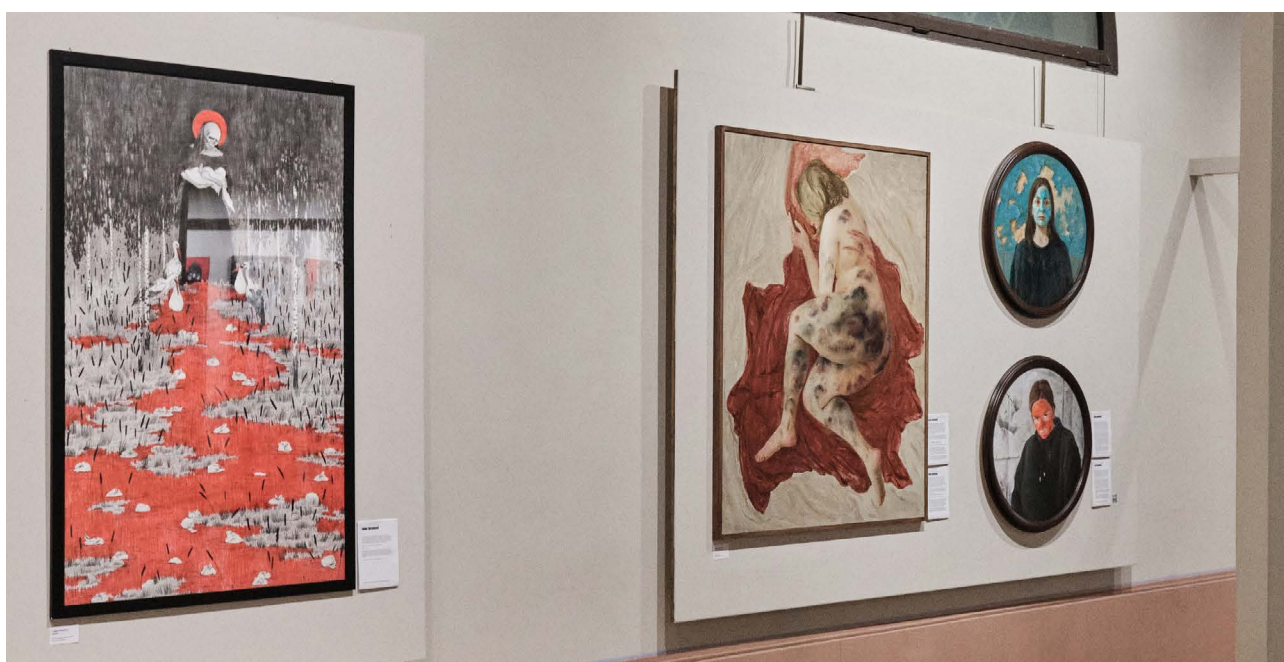
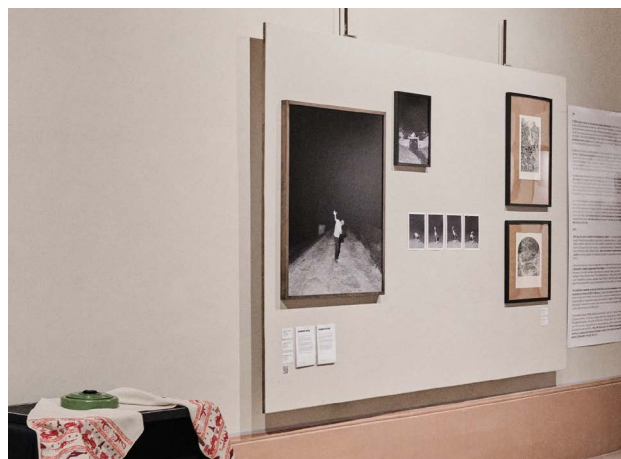
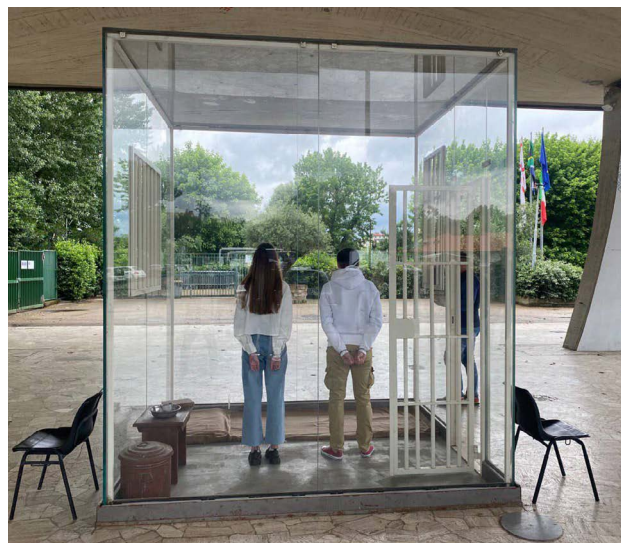
The exhibition opened at the *Palazzo of the Tuscany* Region in 2023, drawing a broad audience — local officials, diplomats, artists, and members of the Belarusian diaspora. Yakubouskaya’s emotionally charged, symbol-rich works focused on themes of freedom, feminine strength, and Belarusian national identity. Tuscany region representatives highlighted the importance of cultural exchange and supporting artists engaged in social and political change. The artist thanked the organizers and urged continued support for Belarusian culture in exile.



Exhibition: Art in Exile (2024)

In December 2024, the exhibition *Art in Exile* took place at the RFK International House of Human Rights in Florence as part of the Voices Across Borders initiative. It featured works by Belarusian artists including Yana Chernova, Aliaksandr Kot-Zaitsau, Anton Radzivonau and others who were forced to flee the country following the 2020 crackdown. Their art reflected memories of home, exile experiences, and the emotional cost of repression. The exhibition highlighted art as a form of resistance, self-expression, and solidarity in the face of persecution. It also served as a tribute to political prisoners and victims of repression. Following its success in Florence, the exhibition traveled to other cities, including Berlin, where it was the centerpiece of a panel discussion titled “Belarusian Art in Exile: Who Cares?” at the Voices Performing Arts Festival in November 2024.

Despite bureaucratic challenges and limited funding, Belarusian exiles in Italy — with support from local foundations and trade unions — organized an impressive number of cultural events in 2024. These included exhibitions of Xisha Angelava’s Belarusian Martyrology in Turin and Bologna, including a showing at the Italian Parliament with Christian Vision; an art performance at the Nelson Mandela Forum on the Day of the Political Prisoner; a Kupalle celebration in Tuscany, with traditional rituals, a book launch (“From 2 to 15. My Mom in Prison” by Volha Vialichka), and folk crafts; a Solidarity Sports Tournament, reinforcing the community spirit among Belarusians in exile.



Exhibition of Political Posters by Uladzimir Tsesler in Slovenia (2022)

In September 2022, the City Hall of Ljubljana hosted an exhibition of political posters by renowned Belarusian artist Uladzimir Tsesler. Held from September 6 to 18, the exhibition featured over 100 works created in response to major political events in Belarus — including police brutality during protests, arrests of political activists, the forced landing of the Ryanair flight, repression of Belarusian athletes at the Olympic Games, the cancellation of the Ice Hockey World Championship in Belarus, and the engineered migration crisis at the Belarus–Poland border. Tsesler, a prominent designer and visual artist, has become one of the most recognized voices in anti-war and protest art. His posters, marked by sharp visual symbolism and powerful political messaging, serve as a compelling tool of cultural resistance and international awareness.

Theatre and Performance

Since 2020, theatre has emerged as one of the most dynamic and emotionally resonant forms of cultural diplomacy for the Belarusian democratic movement. In exile, Belarusian artists and playwrights have used the stage to confront authoritarianism, share personal testimonies, and preserve national memory. Their performances — based on real letters, court cases, protest experiences, and historical trauma — serve not only as acts of artistic expression but also as tools of political resistance and international advocacy.

These works have been performed across Europe and North America, in venues ranging from parliament halls to leading theatres and festivals. Whether through monologues by political prisoners, reenactments of protest trials, or symbolic explorations of identity, Belarusian theatre gives voice to the silenced and builds bridges with global audiences — reminding the world that behind every statistic and headline is a human story that must be heard.

Premiere of *Zekameron* (2024)

On December 4, 2024, in Prague, the theatre troupe *Free Kupalaŭcy* premiered *Zekameron* — a production based on the prison writings of Belarusian political prisoner and lawyer *Maksim Znack*, composed while he was held in pre-trial detention. The title references Boccaccio's Decameron, but instead of tales from plague-stricken Florence, it recounts life behind bars in a Belarusian prison.

Zekameron is more than just a play — it is an act of resistance. It voices what is often silenced and proves that even in confinement, one can remain a thinker, a writer, a human being. The performance bears witness to pain, resilience, and unwavering belief in freedom. The premiere was organized with the support of the *Office of Democratic Forces of Belarus in the Czech Republic*, which sees cultural diplomacy as a core pillar of its work. The venue, *Divadlo Venuše ve Švehlovce*, became not only a stage but a site of remembrance — spotlighting the stories of those imprisoned for their beliefs.



KS6: Small Forward (2024)

In 2024, *KS6: Small Forward*, a production by *Belarus Free Theatre*, premiered at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in New York. The play tells the story of basketball star Katsiaryna Snytsina, who became a symbol of democratic resistance after publicly opposing the Lukashenka regime. On September 24, a public conversation followed the show, featuring Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Natalia Kaliada, Margaret Hoover, and Snytsina herself — highlighting how sport, personal courage, and storytelling intersect in the broader fight for freedom. Founded in Minsk and forced into exile, *Belarus Free Theatre* has become one of the most powerful voices in cultural resistance to dictatorship. It stages politically charged productions across the world, supports persecuted artists, and collaborates with international institutions. Its recent European tour, including performances in Tallinn, continues to engage audiences and mobilize solidarity through art.



Postchildhood (2024) – European Parliament, Brussels

In March 2024, the European Parliament in Brussels became an unlikely but powerful stage for *Postchildhood*, a performance by *Belarus Free Theatre*. The play reflects on lost youth, exile, and war as seen through the eyes and hearts of young people forced into adulthood too soon. The actors share deeply personal stories — of childhood interrupted by violence, of fear, survival, and the fragile thread of hope that weaves through life at the margins of freedom. It was more than theatre: it was a political statement. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya attended the performance and emphasized in her speech:

“Culture is the language of truth. It reaches those deaf to numbers and slogans and reminds us that behind every statistic is a human life.”

King Stakh’s Wild Hunt (2023) – London

This global *premiere* took place at London’s prestigious Barbican Theatre from September 14–16, 2023. Directed by Belarus Free Theatre’s co-founders Nicolai Khalezin and Natalia Kaliada, the performance adapted the classic Belarusian Gothic novel into a multimedia stage experience. Combining video projection, live performance, and Belarusian choral music, the play was performed in Belarusian with English subtitles.



Tikhari (2023) – Vilnius

Premiering in July 2023 in Vilnius, *Tikhari* is based on a play by Belarusian author Sasha Filipenko. It tells the powerful story of a doctor who, during the 2020 protests, refuses to treat a riot police officer — only to find himself on trial ten years later. The performance cuts to the core of ethical responsibility, memory, and moral courage. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya attended the premiere and remarked that the play was “a reminder that even in the darkest times, one must not lose their humanity — no matter the cost.”



Premiere of Voices from Chernobyl (2025)

On March 25, 2025 — Freedom Day — the Belarusian diaspora in Cyprus gathered at the *Rialto Theatre in Limassol* for the premiere of *Voices from Chernobyl*, a stage adaptation of the Nobel Prize-winning book by *Svetlana Alexievich*. The performance marked the opening of a Belarusian theatre festival and offered a poignant reflection on memory, identity, and loss. Directed by Maria Kyriakou, the production weaves together firsthand monologues of those who lived through the *Chernobyl nuclear disaster*, exploring themes of love, faith, and the deep connection to one's land and people. Through emotional storytelling, it depicts not only the trauma of displacement but also the strength found in returning — even to a place marked by tragedy.

My Mom is in Prison (2024) – Warsaw, Vilnius, Białystok

This emotionally charged *performance* is based on the book “*From 2 to 15: My Mom is in Prison*” by psychologist *Volha Vialichka*, which documents the traumatic experiences of children whose parents have been imprisoned for political reasons. Blending contemporary testimonies with reflections on Soviet repression — including the stories of women and children detained in the infamous ALZHIR camp in Kazakhstan — the production explores intergenerational trauma and the enduring fight for dignity. Directed by Natalia Liavonava, with former actors from the Grodno Drama Theatre and the Old Vilnius Theatre, the play features children from the “Razam” theatre school. It has been performed in several cities, including Warsaw, Vilnius, and Białystok, in Belarusian with Polish subtitles.



Monodrama “Connection” by Maryna Yakubovich (2024)

Connection is a powerful monologue created in 2024, based on real letters and stories of Belarusian women political prisoners. The performance explores captivity, guilt, resilience, and the cost of dissent, and is dedicated to opposition activist Maria Kalesnikava, with whom contact was lost after her 2022 imprisonment. Staged in several cities, the production drew strong international attention. At the Schauspielhaus Wien premiere on November 11, 2024, Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg voiced support for persecuted artists. A post-show discussion featured Yakubovich and Tatsiana Khomich, Maria’s sister, who spoke about her critical condition in prison. One of the final performances was held in Prague as part of *Her Story, Our Future*, marking five years since Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya launched her presidential campaign.

Voice of the New Belarus (2025)

On April 4, 2025, the *event Voice of the New Belarus* took place in Kranj, Slovenia — a heartfelt cultural and civic tribute to Belarusian political prisoners. Organized by the People’s Embassy of Belarus in Slovenia and the Belarusian diaspora, the event was part of the Slovenian Theatre Week program. Through speeches and performances, the event honored the courage and suffering of those imprisoned for their beliefs. The theatrical format allowed for a powerful expression of solidarity while showcasing Belarusian culture, language, and resistance. More than just an artistic evening, *Voice of the New Belarus* served as a reminder that cultural identity and the fight for freedom remain deeply intertwined.

Belarusian Global Reading Project “Insulted”

Insulted. Belarus(sia) is a powerful play by Belarusian playwright Andrei Kureichik, written in August 2020 amid the mass protests following the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus. The script portrays the brutality of Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s regime and the resilience of the Belarusian people in the face of repression. Translated into English by John Freedman, the play became the foundation for the Global Reading Project, which launched on September 12, 2020, with its first reading in Kherson, Ukraine. Since then, the project has reached over 30 countries, including the USA, UK, Czech Republic, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, India, Canada, Israel, Nigeria, Georgia, and many more. With more than 200 staged readings in 29 languages, the project transformed into a unique form of cultural resistance and solidarity, connecting global audiences with the Belarusian struggle for freedom through theatre and empathy.

Cinema

Since the 2020 uprising, Belarusian cinema has emerged as a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy and resistance. Filmmakers in exile have produced documentaries and fiction films that expose repression, preserve memory, and humanize the democratic struggle. Their works have reached global audiences through major festivals like Berlinale and Artdocfest, and have been screened in parliaments, cultural centers, and universities

Belarusian Cinema at Berlinale (2021–2025)

The Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) has become a vital platform for Belarusian cinema and cultural diplomacy. In 2021, *Courage* by Aliaksei Paluyan *made history* as the first Belarusian film included in the Berlinale Special program. The *documentary* follows the mass peaceful protests after the rigged 2020 presidential election, highlighting the bravery of artists who joined the uprising. In December 2022, the film received the Cinema for Peace Award for Best Political Film, praised as “an inspiring and uplifting documentary about a nation’s peaceful uprising against injustice and the brutal suppression of its democratic movements.” Belarus’s presence at Berlinale continued to grow. In 2023, the Belarusian Independent Film Academy (BIFA), a collective of exiled filmmakers, made its debut at the European Film Market (EFM). By 2025, BIFA returned with a major presentation of 10 new projects, including *August* (Nela Agrenič), *The Swan Song of Fedor Ozerov* (Yury Siamashka), *Lithuania Minor* (Artsiom Lobach), and *Judgment of the Dead* (Andrei Kashperski & Mikhail Zuy). These works were showcased to international producers and distributors, underlining the resilience and ambition of Belarusian cinema. In 2024, *Ungewollte Verwandtschaft*, a short film by Belarusian-German director Pavel Mozhar, was selected for Berlinale Shorts. Mixing personal reflection with documentary form, it explored Belarus’s complicity in Russia’s war against Ukraine — further cementing Belarusian filmmakers as bold and essential voices on the global stage.

across Europe and beyond. In 2023, the Belarusian Independent Film Academy (BIFA) was launched as a platform for exiled filmmakers to present new projects and connect with international partners. Belarusian cinema now plays a key role in shaping the country’s image abroad — amplifying the voices of political prisoners, exiled communities, and citizens who continue to resist dictatorship.



Film “7 Symptoms of Belarusianness” (2024)

7 Symptoms of Belarusianness is an artistic exploration of what it means to be Belarusian in today's world. The film takes viewers on a symbolic journey through a universe of “Belarusianness,” where pain meets hope, oppression meets resistance, and identity undergoes transformation. Through the experiences of the two main characters, the film reflects the emotional depth and complexity of Belarusian identity in exile and transition. The project was directed by Jakob Wöllenstein, head of the Belarus Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, in collaboration with Malanka Media and other independent creatives. The film features well-known Belarusian figures such as Artsiom Shraibman, Lavon Volski, or Pavel Liber. Blending documentary elements with musical theatre, it includes original songs written by Wöllenstein, and Volski, adding emotional resonance to the narrative. The premiere took place in Vilnius on October 24, 2024, at the *Pasaka* cinema, followed by screenings in other cities, offering a unique cultural experience and a poetic lens on modern Belarusian identity.



Film “Love Is Stronger Than Fear” (2023)

Love Is Stronger Than Fear is a documentary historical drama that sheds light on the 2020 Belarusian protests and the brutal repression that followed. Featuring real testimonies from victims of the regime, the film highlights the courage and resilience of Belarusians fighting for freedom and democracy. In November 2023, a segment of the film (originally titled *Insulted. Belarus*) was screened in New York. It is a collaborative work by Belarusian playwright Andrei Kureichik and director Oksana Mysina, created as a cultural response to political persecution and as a tribute to Belarus's political prisoners.



Belarusian Cinema Days in Latvia (2024)

In March 2024, the Artdocfest film festival in Riga hosted a special Belarusian program titled “Long Live Belarus”, presenting four compelling documentaries that captured life under dictatorship and the resilience of those who resist it. The lineup included *The Accidental President* by Mike Lerner and Martin Hering — a portrait of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, highlighting both her diplomatic work and the emotional toll of leading a democratic movement. *Motherland* by Alexander Mihalkovich and Hanna Badziaka, winner of the Grand Prix at CPH:DOX, exposed systemic violence within Belarus’s military. *Pisushi* by Darya Andreyanova and Mikalai Kuprych shared the hidden stories of LGBTQ+ Belarusians erased by the regime. *I Want to Go to War* by Alena Charniauskaya followed Belarusian volunteers fighting for Ukraine, emphasizing personal bravery and transnational solidarity.



Accidental President (2024)

Accidental President is a powerful documentary that traces the extraordinary transformation of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya — from a teacher and mother to the face of Belarus’s democratic movement. The film captures her rise following the 2020 presidential election, the peaceful uprising it sparked, and the global campaign for freedom she continues to lead in exile. The film has been screened in multiple countries, including the Czech Republic, where it received significant attention. Two notable screenings took place in Prague: the first at the renowned *Lucerna* Cinema during the One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival (Jeden svět), with Tsikhanouskaya *herself* in attendance alongside UK Ambassador Matt Field and Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil. The second was held at the *Chamber of Deputies* as part of a special congress on political prisoners in Belarus, organized by the Office of Democratic Forces of Belarus in the Czech Republic.



Music and Concerts

Since 2020, music has played a consistent role in the cultural diplomacy of the Belarusian democratic movement. Concerts, festivals, and collaborative projects have helped sustain national identity, raise awareness about political repression, and strengthen international solidarity. From protest songs to contemporary arrangements of Belarusian folklore, musicians in exile have used their work to engage diverse audiences, support political prisoners, and preserve cultural memory. These performances — ranging from small gatherings to international festivals — serve both artistic and civic purposes, keeping Belarus visible in the global cultural landscape.

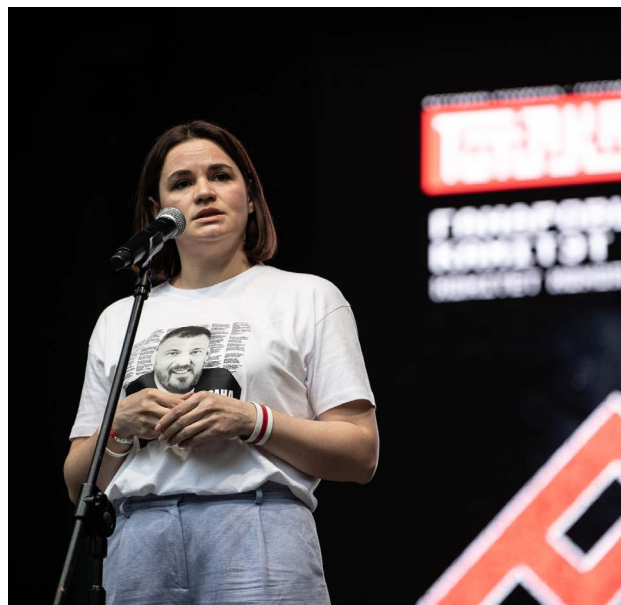


TUTAKA — Festival of the Awakened (July 2023)

Held annually in the village of Boryk in Poland's Podlasie region, *TUTAKA* is a grassroots festival that unites Belarusians in exile through music, art, history, and civic dialogue. The event features concerts by independent Belarusian musicians, workshops on language and heritage, exhibitions, poetry readings, and public discussions on democracy and cultural identity. It has become a key platform for preserving Belarusian traditions while fostering community resilience. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who regularly attends the festival, emphasized the importance of cultural connection:

“Even in exile, our language, culture, and history hold us together.”

The festival stands as a living expression of Belarusian spirit, despite the repression at home.



Free Choir Concert in Prague on Freedom Day (2025)

On March 27, 2025, the halls of the Czech Museum of Music in Prague hosted a special concert by the *Volny Chor* (Free Choir) — an ensemble whose voice has become inseparable from the Belarusian pro-democracy movement. Marking the 107th anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, the concert was organized by the Office of Democratic Forces of Belarus in the Czech Republic as part of the Freedom Day celebrations. Born out of the 2020 protests, the *Volny Chor* brings together exiled Belarusian vocalists who perform a powerful repertoire of folk songs, protest anthems, and original compositions dedicated to political prisoners and the fight for dignity. Their performances — often held in public spaces, streets, parliaments, and prestigious concert halls — have taken place across dozens of countries, from Lithuania and Poland to Germany and Belgium, and beyond.



Belarus Outside Sound System

The festival Belarus Outside Sound System X BYSOLidarity Relay brought together modern Belarusian musicians, including post-punk duo *Super Besse*, hypno-pop artist *Anastasia Rydlevskaya*, and DJs *Stereobeaver*, *Kornej*, and *Papa Bo Selektah*. Held as part of the international solidarity relay Voices Across Borders, the event blended music and activism to spotlight the Belarusian struggle for freedom. Organized by the *Belarus Outside Sound System* — a collective of progressive Belarusian music artists — the festival embodied the use of music as a form of soft power and social change. It raised €3,000 in support of Belarusian political prisoners.

On January 26, 2025, as the Lukashenko regime staged its sham elections, *Belarus Outside Sound System* organized a synchronized series of protest concerts across Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, and Gdańsk. Branded as a “synchronous audio journey,” the event celebrated freedom through music, solidarity, and creativity.

Literature

Since 2020, literature has become a vital force of cultural resistance and identity, especially in exile. Writers, poets, and playwrights forced to flee repression have continued their work abroad — giving voice to the silenced, documenting the struggle, and reimagining the future of a free Belarus. Through prose, poetry, and drama, they explore themes of trauma, exile, memory, and hope. Publishers and literary organizations in

exile have played a crucial role in sustaining this movement. They continue to print and distribute Belarusian-language books, organize readings, debates, and educational events, and ensure Belarus's presence at major international book fairs and literary festivals. In doing so, they not only preserve the Belarusian word but also amplify it globally — asserting culture as an act of defiance and continuity.

“Culture in Exile” Festival in Kraków (June 2023)

On June 3–4, 2023, Kraków became the cultural capital of the Belarusian diaspora, hosting the Culture in Exile festival. The event brought together poets, musicians, performers, and artists committed to preserving Belarusian identity through creativity and community. The program included author talks, theatrical performances, workshops, and panel discussions exploring the role of art in times of political repression. During the festival, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya emphasized:

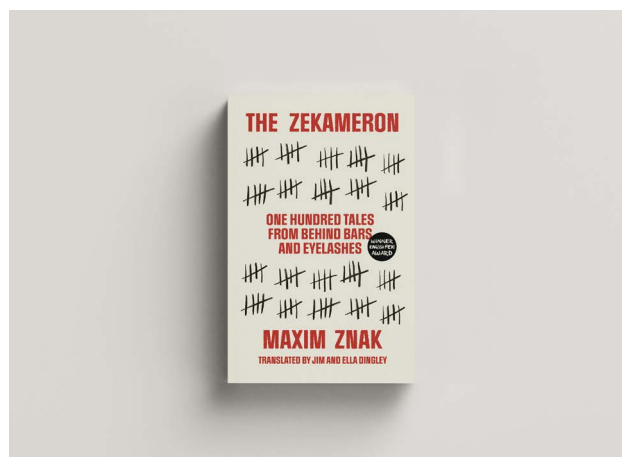
“Culture is not only a means of expression — it is a tool in the struggle for freedom. It helps us stay united, grounded, and hopeful.”

“Lodołamaczka. Sviatlana Cichanouska” — Kraków, Poland (2022)

The biography *Lodołamaczka* (“Icebreaker”) by Polish journalist Ruslan Szoszyn presents a detailed account of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's path from private life to political leadership, set against the backdrop of Belarus's 2020 presidential election and subsequent protests. Launched in Kraków in 2022, the book was positively received by critics and widely presented across Poland, contributing to greater public understanding of the Belarusian democratic movement. In addition to documenting Tsikhanouskaya's role, it highlights broader political and social developments in Belarus, offering insight into the country's recent history and challenges.

“Zekameron” by Maksim Znak (2022)

In 2022, the book *Zekameron* was presented in Vilnius — a remarkable collection of texts written by imprisoned lawyer and activist Maksim Znak imprisoned by Lukashenka's regime. Deeply ironic, poignant, and filled with both pain and humanity, the book became a symbol of unbroken spirit behind bars and the enduring power of the written word. The launch featured Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Ilya Saley, Iryna Herasimovich, and other members of the Belarusian democratic community. Readings from *Zekameron* reminded the audience that even in a prison cell, language can resist silence, bear witness, and inspire solidarity. Since its release, the book has been translated into multiple languages and presented in dozens of countries — from Europe to North America — drawing global attention to the plight of Belarusian political prisoners and reinforcing the importance of cultural resistance in the face of repression.



Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya Donates “I’m Going Out” to the U.S. Library of Congress

In July 2021, democratic leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya visited the Library of Congress together with U.S. Ambassador Julie Fisher. During the visit, she donated a signed copy of the photo book “*I’m Going Out*” (Я выхожу) to the library’s permanent collection. The book documents the peaceful Belarusian protests of 2020 through 350 powerful photographs from marches and demonstrations, capturing the most iconic symbols and moments since the contested presidential election on August 9.



“The Price of Freedom” by Daria Shut (2024)

Published in 2024 by Norwegian publishing house *Vigmostad & Bjørke*, *The Price of Freedom* is the powerful debut book by Daria Shut. Blending autofiction with the historical reality of Belarus, it tells the coming-of-age story of a young girl growing up in the 1990s — a time when her father became a political opponent of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Through personal narrative and emotional depth, the book explores how major political shifts shaped the everyday lives of ordinary families. It captures the atmosphere of fear, defiance, and resilience, offering international readers a rare and intimate window into Belarusian society under dictatorship.



Book The Belarusian National Idea (2024)

The Belarusian National Idea is a multi-volume publication that explores various dimensions of Belarusian identity, culture, and the vision for the country's future. Written by Dzmitry Lukashuk and Maksim Harunou, the book brings together interviews with prominent cultural figures, politicians, and intellectuals who reflect on what it means to be Belarusian today — and what Belarus could become. Since its release in 2024, the book has been presented at literary and academic events across Europe and beyond, including in Vilnius, Warsaw, Berlin, Brussels, and New York. Several editions — including digital formats — have been published to meet growing interest among both Belarusian readers and the international community.

“Belarus Overturned” — Literary Event in Prague (2024)

In 2024, Belarusian poet Dzmitry Strotsau presented his poetic reportage *Belarus Overturned* during a literary event at the Office of Democratic Forces of Belarus in the Czech Republic. The book is a vivid, emotionally charged reflection on the 2020 protests — capturing the heroism, pain, and defiance of the Belarusian people through lyrical precision and metaphor. Strotsau, who personally took part in the demonstrations and was detained during the protests, offers a firsthand poetic testimony of a society in upheaval.

Fairs and Festivals

Multicultural, ethnocultural, and diplomatic fairs have become meaningful platforms for Belarusians in exile to present their culture, connect with other nations, and reaffirm their European identity. Participation in such events allows the Belarusian democratic community to engage broader audiences, build solidarity, and foster mutual understanding through food, crafts, language, and traditions. From national days hosted by

embassies to city-wide multicultural festivals, Belarusians use these spaces not only to celebrate heritage but also to raise awareness about the country's struggle for freedom. Whether at RefuFest in Prague or the International Diplomatic Bazaar in Ljubljana, Belarusian stands — curated by civic and cultural leaders — have become vibrant beacons of resistance and resilience.

Artigiano in Fiera

In June 2025, the Belarusian community in Italy took part in the Antiprima d'estate Artigiano in Fiera exhibition in Milan — one of the largest Italian events dedicated to crafts, culture, and intercultural dialogue. Belarusians hosted a stand, where visitors could discover Belarusian culture, traditions, and the work of democratic initiatives in Italy. Participation in this event became a meaningful act of cultural diplomacy and solidarity: through crafts, symbols, and personal conversations, Belarusians shared the story of their country, its resistance to dictatorship, and its hope for a free future. The exhibition demonstrated that Belarus lives and speaks — even far from home.



Belarusian Stand at Poland Day in the Czech Republic

In June 2022, during Poland Day in Prague, held in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, Poland extended a gesture of solidarity by offering space to both Ukrainian and Belarusian communities to showcase their cultures. The Belarusian stand, curated by Krystsina Shyianok — who would later become the director of the Office of Democratic Forces of Belarus in the Czech Republic — presented Belarusian heritage alongside Ukrainian, symbolizing shared resistance to aggression and authoritarianism. Among the visitors was the Czech Minister of Culture, Martin Baxa.

Lampa Festival in Latvia

In 2024, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya participated in the LAMPA Conversation Festival — Latvia's largest platform for civic dialogue and cultural understanding, held annually in the town of Cēsis. The festival brings together thousands of participants for open discussions on democracy, human rights, and the culture. Speaking on a main-stage panel about resilience, Tsikhanouskaya highlighted the strength of Belarusian society and the importance of international solidarity. She emphasized that true power comes not from authoritarian regimes, but from the courage of ordinary people — political prisoners, volunteers, and families in exile — who continue to stand up for freedom.

Multicultural Festival RefuFest in Prague

RefuFest is one of the largest multicultural festivals in Prague, celebrating cultural diversity, inclusion, and solidarity through art, music, food, and storytelling. Held annually, the event brings together dozens of communities from across the world who have found a home in the Czech Republic, offering them a platform to share their traditions and experiences. Belarus has become a visible part of RefuFest in recent years. The Belarusian stand has featured traditional crafts, language activities, music performances, and interactive cultural presentations that invite festivalgoers to discover the richness of Belarusian heritage. In 2024, the stand was curated with a special focus on freedom and identity, offering a space not only for celebration but also for reflection on the ongoing struggles in Belarus.



International Diplomatic Bazaar in Ljubljana

The International Diplomatic Bazaar is a major annual charity *event* in Slovenia's capital, where embassies present their national cultures, cuisines, and traditions to promote friendship and support social causes. In 2024, the People's Embassy of Belarus in Slovenia, led by Alexandra Mamaeva, offered a vibrant display of Belarusian food, crafts, and solidarity symbols. Joined by *representatives* from the Belarusian People's Embassies in Italy and Austria, their presence highlighted the unity and resilience of Belarusians in exile.



Religion

In recent years, the religious initiatives of the Belarusian diaspora abroad have become a powerful form of both spiritual support and political solidarity. Through masses, prayers, commemorative services, and open dialogues with clergy, Belarusians in exile — together with

international partners — express compassion and unity with those facing repression in Belarus. These gatherings often bring together people of different backgrounds, nationalities, and faiths around shared values of justice, human dignity, and the defense of fundamental rights.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Speech in Berlin Cathedral (2020)

In October 2020, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya delivered a moving *speech* at Berlin Cathedral following an ecumenical prayer for Belarus. The event gathered Belarusians, Germans, and international supporters in a powerful moment of unity, reflection, and solidarity amidst the ongoing crackdown in Belarus. In her address, Tsikhanouskaya emphasized the moral strength of the Belarusian people, who stood up against violence with courage, dignity, and peace. She spoke of a nation that had awakened, guided

not by hatred but by a deep longing for justice, freedom, and truth.

“We have no weapons but our voice, our love for Belarus, and our belief in the future,”

she said. Tsikhanouskaya also drew on Christian values of compassion, sacrifice, and perseverance, calling on the international community to support those suffering under repression and to keep Belarus in their prayers.

Prayer for Political Prisoners in Belarus at Berlin's Gethsemane Church (2021)

On June 12, 2021, a special prayer service for the freedom of Belarusian political prisoners was *held* at the Gethsemane Church in Berlin, hosted by the prayer group Wachet und betet. The event

welcomed Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and activist Tatsiana Khomich, sister of Maryia Kalesnikava. The service was accompanied by an exhibition on the 2020 pro-democracy protests in Belarus.

Tsikhanouskaya's Speech at the Conference of European Churches General Assembly (Tallinn, 2023)

At the 16th General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches in Tallinn in June 2023, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya delivered a powerful address calling on Christian leaders to stand with the people of Belarus in their peaceful struggle for freedom, justice, and dignity. Speaking under the assembly's theme, *“Under God's blessing – shaping the future”*, she reminded delegates that silence in the face of injustice enables oppression to thrive.

Tsikhanouskaya urged European churches to speak out against the violence, repression, and lies propagated by the Lukashenko regime and to support those imprisoned, exiled, or persecuted for standing up for truth and human rights. She highlighted the deep spiritual dimension of the Belarusian democratic movement, rooted in nonviolence, compassion, and hope.

Camino for Belarus – Diplomacy on Foot

Camino for Belarus combined pilgrimage with civic activism. Organized by the People's Embassy of Belarus in Slovenia as part of the *Voices Across Borders* campaign, participants walked the Camino de Santiago to raise awareness about the struggle for freedom in Belarus. Along the 315 km route,

Aliaksandra Mamaeva shared Belarusian stories, distributed leaflets, and carried a QR-coded backpack linking to a solidarity platform. The walk sparked meaningful conversations on identity, resistance, and democracy — turning Belarus from a distant headline into a personal human story.

Mass in Solidarity with Persecuted Poles, Belarusians, and Other Minorities in Belarus (2021)

A special mass held in Stockholm, Sweden, became a powerful gesture of international solidarity with persecuted communities in Belarus—particularly Poles, Belarusians, and other minorities. The event raised global awareness about ongoing repression

and affirmed the commitment to human rights and freedom. It highlighted the role of cultural and religious unity in times of political crisis, demonstrating how the international community can stand with those facing oppression.

Masses and Spiritual Conversations in Austria (2023)

In 2023, the People's Embassy of Belarus in Austria organized a series of spiritual initiatives to support the Belarusian community in exile and express solidarity with those suffering repression at home. Belarusian-rite Greek-Catholic masses were held in Mariazell and Vienna, providing a space for prayer,

remembrance, and spiritual support. Alongside the services, a series of online conversations with Belarusian priests allowed participants to discuss current challenges and strengthen their connection to Belarus through faith and shared values.

Night of the Executed Poets: Masses in Italy and Latvia (2023)

On October 29, the People's Embassy of Belarus in Italy *held* memorial events in Florence and Rome, including church services. On the night of October 30, a memorial *service* took place in Riga, organized by the Belarusian diaspora and

the People's Embassy in Latvia. Latvian officials joined in honoring victims of Stalinist repression, including Belarusian and Latvian poets executed in Kurapaty.

Awards and Honors

To recognize those who have stood with the Belarusian people in their fight for freedom, the Belarusian democratic forces have established a system of symbolic national awards. These honors are often presented to public figures, foreign leaders, diplomats, and who have demonstrated exceptional solidarity with democratic Belarus — through advocacy, humanitarian support, cultural cooperation, or political leadership.

Cross of Good Neighborhood.

This special award is given to presidents, ministers, and political leaders who have made significant contributions to the Belarusian democratic cause. It recognizes long-term solidarity, advocacy, and international leadership in support of Belarus. Cross of Good Neighborhood recipients: George W. Bush (43rd President of the United States), Roberta Metsola (President of the European Parliament), Josep Borrell (EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs), Andrzej Duda (President of Poland), Petr Pavel (President of the Czech Republic), Jan Lipavský (Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic), Hillary Clinton (former U.S. Secretary of State), Gabrielius Landsbergis (Foreign Minister of Lithuania), Tobias Billström (Foreign Minister of Sweden), Ambassador Stefan Eriksson, Urmas Reinsalu (Estonian Foreign Minister) and others.



Cross of the Revival of Belarus.

Established in 2024, this honor is awarded for outstanding service to the Belarusian people and significant contributions to the development of Belarusian culture. It is a moral response to decades of cultural erasure and suppression of national consciousness. More than a symbol of pride, the Cross is a tool for shaping a new tradition rooted in independence, dignity, and solidarity.



Medal of Honor and Dignity.

This award recognizes exceptional moral courage and steadfastness in serving Belarus. It is given to those who, in the face of hardship, remain committed to truth, public service, and the values of a democratic society. Not only Belarusians, but also several Polish and Lithuanian researchers and activists have been awarded this medal.



Medal for Service to Belarus.

Awarded for notable achievements in professional and civic life, this medal honors those whose everyday work — in education, journalism, healthcare, the arts, and community organizing — sustains Belarusian identity and resilience. Especially in times of exile and repression, it affirms that not only protest, but also constructive, creative work is vital to the survival and revival of the nation.





**SVIATLANA
TSIKHANOUSKAYA**
OFFICE

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

by Belarusian Democratic
Forces and Civil Society

2025