

**Speech by Ms. Paulė Kuzmickienė,
Chair of the Seimas Freedom Prize Commission,
at the sitting of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania
dedicated to the 30th anniversary of 13 January 1991
and the Freedom Prize 2021 award ceremony**

I am pleased to announce that the 2020 Freedom Prize is awarded to the democratic opposition in Belarus.

This Prize is awarded to all Belarusians fighting for democracy and freedom, all who have joined the fight against aggression, and everyone who has clearly and unequivocally expressed the desire for change through rallying, protest campaigns, marches, human chains in the streets, and company strikes.

The Freedom Prize is awarded to political prisoners and protesters injured or murdered by the Lukashenko regime. It is aimed at mothers, women whose loved ones are in prisons today and who divide their hearts and love between their children and Belarus as they continue to fight.

Belarus fights daily without stopping. Seniors protest on Mondays and the disabled on Thursdays. Every morning medical workers flood the streets, and in the evening, residents of the capital city and the residential districts of other cities gather together.

Saturdays have become a day of women's protests, and every Sunday new massive marches take place. They are dedicated to Unity, Peace and Independence, Freedom and Justice both in Belarus and throughout Europe and the World.

The aspirations for freedom of Lithuania and Belarus are inextricably intertwined. In the 1863 uprising, Lithuanians, Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians came together shoulder to shoulder like brothers to oppose the tyranny of the Russian Empire. Even though the rebellion was suppressed, the desire for freedom has never been quenched in the hearts of Belarusians. I was deeply touched by the scene of the reburial of the remains of the uprising leaders, Konstanty Kalinowski and Zygmunt Sierakowski, and their comrades-in-arms in Vilnius. After the Holy Mass, the coffins were taken away from the Cathedral. Belarusians, who came to Vilnius from their country, were waiting outside the Cathedral in the great cold holding the red and white flags of freedom. As soon as they saw the procession, they fell on their knees right in the middle of the square. It was an extremely exciting moment. It is even more exciting now being aware that later these people were not going to kneel against the dictator Lukashenko ruling over their country.

Lithuanians have not been standing aside, neither before nor now. Together we were on the new Baltic Way, a human chain stretching from Vilnius to Minsk. In Vilnius, together with Belarusian and Lithuanian women, we walked from the Seimas through the Cathedral to the Town Hall while chanting *Zyvie Belarus*. We welcome

to our country our Belarusian brothers, who are fleeing the regime, and fight for them on a political level in Lithuania and Europe. We extend a helping hand to our brothers and sisters in Belarus without thinking about the losses and consequences.

We stand together with the Belarusians, because we are fully aware of the real cost of freedom and how important the support from the international community is in the light of suggestions to remain silent and indifferent and close one's eyes for the benefit of 'fatter butter'. Recalling its own history and the tragic events of the defence of freedom on January 13, Lithuania is well aware of one thing – there may be no compromise with one's conscience.

The Freedom Prize has been awarded to many outstanding personalities who dedicated their lives to the struggle for freedom, including Sergei Kovalev, Russian dissident; Vytautas Landsbergis, President of the Reconstituent Seimas; Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius, founder and editor of the underground publication of the Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania; President Valdas Adamkus, who was building bridges with Ukraine, partisans of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania as well as other people whose names will never be forgotten.

Today, however, it is our neighbours who are paying the highest price for their desire to be free. The Belarusian nation has awakened and is taking a very difficult but meaningful way towards freedom. This is why we want to say very clearly to all Belarusians – *vy nie adzny*. You are not alone.
