

THE GANG: 15 YEARS ON AND STILL SILENT



DECEMBER 17, 2014

Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Washington: 2015

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
234 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-1901
csce@mail.house.gov
http://www.csce.gov

Legislative Branch Commissioners

SENATE

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND,
Chairman
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, RHODE ISLAND
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, CONNECTICUT
ROGER WICKER, MISSISSIPPI
SAXBY CHAMBLISS, GEORGIA
JOHN BOOZMAN, ARKANSAS

HOUSE

CHRISTOPHER SMITH, NEW JERSEY,
Co-Chairman
JOSEPH PITTS, PENNSYLVANIA
ROBERT ADERHOLT, ALABAMA
PHIL GINGREY, GEORGIA
MICHAEL BURGESS, TEXAS
ALCEE HASTINGS, FLORIDA
LOUISE MCINTOSH SLAUGHTER,
NEW YORK
MIKE MCINTYRE, NORTH CAROLINA
STEVE COHEN, TENNESSEE

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 56 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

THE GANG: 15 YEARS ON AND STILL SILENT

DECEMBER 17, 2014

WITNESSES

	Page
Raisa Mikhailovskaya, Founder and Director, Belarusian Document Center	2
Irina Krasovskaya, Co-founder and President, We Remember Foundation	3

PARTICIPANT

Orest Deychakiwsky, Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe .	1
--	---

(IV)

THE GANG: 15 YEARS ON AND STILL SILENT

December 17, 2014

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held in HVC-201 United States Capitol Visitor Center, Washington D.C., Orest Deychakiwsky, Policy Advisor, CSCE, presiding.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. Good afternoon.

I'd like to welcome all of you here to tonight's event. We're very pleased to host this screening of the documentary, "The Gang: 15 Years and Still Silent", with the participation of Freedom House and The German Marshall Fund. This event would not be possible without these organizations, so I want to thank both of them at the outset, and for their tremendous work in promoting democracy and freedom and human rights in Belarus and beyond.

It's important that we not forget about Belarus.

Understandably, attention these days is focused on Ukraine. Indeed, what happens in Ukraine has tremendous implications for Belarus.

But it's also important that we not lose sight of the nature of the Lukashenka regime and its human rights abuses, of which the disappearances of the four subjects of this film is perhaps the most egregious example.

The Helsinki Commission, throughout the last two decades, has been vocal in condemning the Lukashenka regime for its human rights violations and is trying to support human rights and democracy there.

We've often voiced our deep concerns about the fate of the four disappeared in commission hearings, briefings, press releases, resolutions and bills, most notably the three Belarus Democracy Acts authored by our co-chairman and presumably our incoming chairman, Representative Chris Smith.

For example, the Belarus Democracy Act of 2006—and there have been three of them—states that, and I quote, "the government of Belarus has failed to make a credible effort to solve the cases of disappeared opposition figures Yuri Zakharenka, Victor Hanchar, Anatoly Krasovsky, in 1999, and journalist Dmitri Zavadski in 2000, even though credible allegations and evidence exist linking top officials of the Lukashenka regime with those disappearances."

I want to emphasize that one of the conditions for the lifting of sanctions that are found in the Belarus Democracy Act is, and I quote, "a full accounting of the disappear-

ances of these opposition leaders and journalist, and the prosecution of those individuals who are in any way responsible for their disappearances.” With that, let me introduce our speakers.

I’m very pleased to welcome the producer of the documentary, Ms. Raisa Mikhailovskaya, founder and director of Belarusian Documentation Center, which collects and analyzes legal evidence of human rights abuses under the Lukashenka regime.

A lawyer by trade, Raisa has founded and led several organizations that provide legal aid, advocate for the release of political prisoners and fight for the civil rights of Belarusian citizens.

In 2012, she became the first woman to be awarded the Knight of the Year title by the Defenders of the Fatherland, an organization named in honor of the disappeared Belarusian minister Yuri Zakharenka. And Ms. Mikhailovskaya founded and served as an editor in chief of the legal advocacy newspaper, Citizen and Law. “The Gang” is her second film production, which follows “On the Forefront of Truth,” a documentary about the Belarusian political prisoners.

Dr. Irina Krasovskaya is the co-founder and president of the We Remember Foundation, which seeks justice for the politically oppressed in Belarus.

Since the disappearance of her husband, Anatoly Krasovsky, in 1999, Irina’s work has focused on human rights abuses and disappearances throughout Eastern Europe, Belarus, the Caucasus and other regions. This work has resulted in U.N. resolutions in support of accountability and justice in Belarus. She’s also helped to create investigative bodies under the auspices of PACE, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, to look into missing person cases.

Irina is a member of the steering committee of the International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances, which played an important role in the adoption of the U.N. convention to protect all persons from enforced disappearances, and continues to work toward the ratification and implementation of the convention by all U.N. member states.

Irina was named the White House Champion of Freedom in 2005.

Prior to the screening, Ms. Mikhailovskaya will give a very brief introduction, to set the scene.

Her interpreter will be Sofya Orloski of Freedom House, who has absolutely been instrumental in making this event happen.

Following the film, Raisa and Irina will say a few words and then we’ll open it up to Q&A.

I’m supposed to say, too, that for anybody wanting to tweet, our handle is—and I lost it.

Ms. HOPE. It’s @helsinkicomm.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. @helsinkicomm, thank you very much.

That’s from our new communications director, Stacy Hope.

OK, with that, we can proceed.

Raisa.

Ms. MIKHAILOVSKAYA (through interpreter). Thank you for coming to the premiere screening of the film. You are, so to speak, lucky, because you are the first ones to see it.

After the screening, we are hoping to show the film to others and also in major European capitals. The goal is one and the same: to once again remind about the events that took place 15 years ago.

Fifteen years ago, three opposition politicians and one journalist disappeared under unknown circumstances. Criminal cases were opened, investigations were opened, but over this time, neither the family members nor the public at large know who the perpetrators were, and they haven't been brought to justice.

Fifteen years is a long time. It's long enough for a criminal case. It's also a long time for an individual's life. But, unfortunately, it was not enough time for the Belarusian government to give us an answer who was responsible for these crimes.

Fifteen years was a period for a whole new generation of Belarusians to grow up, and most of these people have barely heard something about these cases, and they definitely don't know the details. Having heard something is one thing, but knowing for sure is totally different.

To paraphrase one of the people who you will see in this film, we need to be constantly bothering, bothering, bothering these people, so that they don't forget.

We didn't want to impose our subjective point of view to the viewer—onto the viewer. That's why the film is full of documents, it's full of photographic and literal evidence. It's full of interviews.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. OK, then with that, I think we could proceed with the showing of the film.

Now we'll hear from the producer of this very well done, very powerful documentary, Raisa Mikhailovskaya.

Ms. MIKHAILOVSKAYA. Can we have a minute?

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. Sure. Okay. A little change of plans. We will start with Irina Krasovskaya.

Ms. KRASOVSKAYA. Thank you so much.

Dear friends, dear colleagues, dear guests! Thank to everybody here who came to listen to our voice. These 15 years are very tragic and intolerable time for families. What did we do all those years to find truth and justice for our loved ones—and for ourselves? All those years we tried to use all possible legal instruments inside Belarus and outside, as well as public awareness campaign.

List of our actions includes: Meetings with presidents and governments of many democratic countries; events with international Human Rights and Non-Governmental organizations; participation in hearings in many parliaments and in US congress; cooperation with such international institutions as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Inter-Parliamentary union (IPU), the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances and UN Human Rights Committee. And it is only small part of our activity.

Of course, inside Belarus with the help of our lawyers we tried to use legal procedure. We sent hundreds and hundreds of requests, demands and questions to the investigators and their supervisors. Mostly our petitions were rejected. The official answers for our requests were usually a combination of three phrases: "Secrecy of investigations. There is no reason. It is not possible."

Once, in 2003, investigation was suspended and we were allowed to read the papers of investigation. We found a lot of interesting facts and contradictions in the case. Of course, we officially asked questions, and of course, we never got answers.

Some of these questions are basic for solving the case. For instance:

—For what purpose officials of Ministry of interior used the official execution gun which was withdrawn by them from prison number 1 two times, which coincided with the dates of disappearances?

—Why General Prosecutor did order from Russia special equipment and experienced staff to locate buried bodies?

—Why the marks of car paint found at the place of abduction of Gonchar and Krasovsky was not compared with the car paint of main suspect colonel Pavlichenko? And many other questions.

All this means that “a proper investigation of the disappearances has not been carried out by Belarusian authorities”. As it was said in 2004 Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe report, known as Pourgourides, report: “. . . the information gathered by the rapporteur leads it to believe that steps were taken at the highest level of the state to actively cover up the true circumstances of the disappearances, and to suspect that senior officials of the state may themselves be involved in these disappearances”.

In the report concluded and it is very important that “. . . it hard to believe that the above could have taken place without the knowledge of the President”. It explains everything.

We did not have success on local level. Could we use international legal mechanism for justice in cases of disappeared in Belarus? Yes. In reality only UN HRC. My daughter and I won the case against Belarus in UN HRC established under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In April 2012 The Human Rights Committee concluded that Belarus had violated its obligation to investigate properly and take appropriate remedial action regarding Mr. Krasovski’s disappearance. HRC requested Belarus to provide the victims with an effective remedy, which should include a thorough and diligent investigation of the facts, the prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators, adequate information about the results of its inquiries, and adequate compensation to the authors.

The Belarus response was that they do not recognize Committee’s rules of procedure. This means that no one single judgment of UN HRC under ICCPR won by citizens against Belarus, all together 77 cases, was acted on by the Belarus state, even Belarus signed Optional protocol and has to fulfill their obligations.

Where is the situation today?

Today we still do not know what happened to our loved ones and where they buried. The perpetrators are not punished yet. Belarus is still not going toward democracy. But at least we have some achievements which help us to believe in future:

—No more political disappearances occurred in Belarus after 2000;

—My family won the case again Belarus in UNHRC. One day Belarus will fulfill this decision.

—Those four high ranking officials suspected in organizing disappearances of political opponents were put on visa ban lists in EU, USA, Canada and many other countries in 2004. In 2006, Lukashenka was added to this sanctions list.

—Many politicians and governments in the democratic world including US follow closely the situation in Belarus.

What else can we do?

Of course we will continue public awareness campaign. We rely on all of you, on journalists, politicians and people in Belarus. We collect and save documents which will help us in future when there will be political will to investigate the cases.

We will ask again International institutes to push government of Belarus to fulfill the obligation they undertook.

We will try to persuade the governments of US and EU countries do not warm up relationships on political level with Belarus until there are political prisoners and unsolved cases of disappearances.

Thank you for your attention. Thank you very much for your support. And I am very happy we are here today.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. Thanks, Irina.

That's certainly a reminder to the international community too, that we must keep pushing for justice in these cases.

Raisa.

Ms. MIKHAILOVSKAYA. I'm also very grateful that you came today, and I'm grateful for your reaction.

It is very important for us, as the creators of the film, to know how well you, the viewers, understood the idea, how well we communicated it to you.

If something was unclear from the first time you saw the film, I wouldn't be surprised. It's, indeed, a very difficult—a lot of details here are hard to grasp. So if you'll come back and see the film over and over again, I'm very grateful for that.

This was one of our purposes, to ignite this interest, so that people have the desire to learn more and more about the disappearances and the others.

We had to begin with the events in 1996, from the mysterious death of former Vice Speaker Henadz Karpenka, and never assume that those deaths were by accident.

We had to follow the events in the film chronologically because it was difficult to grasp all the events not only for the viewer, but also for us, as film producers. Fifteen years have passed, and people have moved on, and have moved to various parts of the world.

We went to Germany to meet with Oleg Alkayev, a former head of the Detention Center Number 1, who told us about the execution gun. We also met with Mr. Wieck, who was heading the OSCE office in Minsk at the time and is very well aware of the background of these events.

We also met there with Zaxharanka's family, with his wife, his two daughters and two grandsons. And this little boy that you saw, he's very young and he has never seen his grandfather, and he knows about him only from photographs. He looks immensely like his grandfather.

Dmitry Petrushkevich, former prosecutor, who is a very important witness in these cases, he currently lives here in the United States. Christos Pourgourides, who was a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, authored a memorandum back in the day.

It was also difficult to track down information and people because a lot of those with the knowledge are scared. General Lopatik, who is the former head of the criminal police. The former prosecutor and the minister of the interior, is currently in Russia.

It was also easy to work on this for me, because for all these 15 years, I followed these cases very closely, I've known the members of their families, I'm a member of a public commission that has been raising awareness and investigating these cases, we have produced numerous awareness-raising materials and we've collected an enormous amount of legal evidence.

As for members of the families of those who disappeared, many of them have told me that such a film is important. It has to exist. It's important not only for them, but also for Belarusian history so that the Belarusian people not forget that those who disappeared are prominent Belarusian citizens and they deserve a prominent place in the Belarusian history.

More civilized societies have long developed effective legal mechanisms to protect citizens whose rights have been violated, and the rule of law prevails in such societies.

Unfortunately, such mechanisms do not work in contemporary Belarus. The government's actions, the actions of the authorities look more like those of bandits rather than rule of law.

Belarusian human rights defenders have been advocating on the issue of political disappearances over and over. We have been demanding a thorough and open investigation and bringing perpetrators to justice.

I also would like for this film to have a sequel in which we will be able to tell what has happened, how the investigations were actually carried out and who was brought to justice in these heinous crimes.

Thank you.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. OK. Thank you very much.

Now we could go to our Q&A session. Please come up to the mic. That's for the sake of the transcriber. Please identify yourself and ask your question or feel free to make a comment, as long as it's not too long.

Please, Valery.

QUESTIONER. My name is Valery and I'm from the Human Rights organization Are you subjecting yourself to danger by producing this film, because the government they are the same people in power?

Ms. MIKHAILOVSKAYA (through interpreter). You are not the first to ask this question. I don't know what to expect from the government. It would be reasonable to expect a thorough and transparent investigation and trial. Would they prosecute me? For what? For telling the truth? I don't know.

This has been the furthest attempt to show the highest people in the Belarusian government are implicated in those crimes. So the authorities in this case actually have to prove that they're not. If there is documentary evidence proving that they have not been implicated, they should uncover those documents and present them to the public.

QUESTIONER. The problem of the political disappearance entered into my life on September 17, 1999. I then worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belarus and was a U.S. desk officer.

I had a working meeting with a representative from the U.S. Embassy. And they were the first to tell me that the two active opposition figures disappeared on the eve.

That was a new stage in the history of Belarus.

In two years, after presidential elections of 2001, when Lukashenka, again, won in his elections, I went to the OSCE human dimension meeting in Warsaw. And for the first time, I saw Irina Krasovskaya and they were speaking about this problem. I was deeply impressed on a personal level with their passion, with the way they presented their case, and with the reaction of the audience. Everyone was deeply moved by what Irina Krasovskaya told about the disappearances.

In so such a way I became deeply involved and involved on a personal level in these cases.

There has been much to do. Many of the diplomats, the minister of foreign affairs the embassy of Belarus to the United States, people in Europe—they care about this. Not many people can do much about this.

However, 15 years later, what we see is that those in the outside, in the United States and in Europe, European Union, people start forgetting about those cases. And it seems that people's memories are fading. Some people are questioning why the relations with Belarus are so bad now. Like, what is the reason? They are young. Lukashenka is maybe misunderstood. He's a good guy.

People seem to forget very simple, very concrete fact that egregious crimes were committed by Lukashenka and his regime. Those were the most serious crimes.

But remarkably, in the time there were so many people capable of running the state, but now there are so few who can compete with Lukashenka, who can actually take a stand at the helm on the state.

Somehow, this competition is gone, and now Lukashenka is the only one, as many people think, who can do the job. Which is absurd. I mean, in 20 years, there's no one else coming. Because people disappeared, people have to leave the country, people stayed behind the bars.

To conclude my comment, I would like to ask a question. What, in your opinion, should United States and European Union do this? Because there were no answers in the cases. There was systemic approach to political opposition in Belarus and it will continue to stay the same way.

Thank you.

Ms. MIKHAILOVSKAYA. My hope is that this time is dedicated to meeting with people and brainstorming, coming up with suggestions what the United States could do to keep this issue on their agenda.

Unfortunately, the cyclical nature of the socio-political situation in Belarus that followed the presidential election cycle is very apparent, and right now, we're witnessing a warming up in the relations between Belarus and the West. Foreign Minister Makei is welcomed in all European countries. There was an interagency visit from the United States to Belarus. Unfortunately, political prisoners are becoming forgotten. Most of the presidential candidates who have been imprisoned after the last elections have come out of jail for—with the exception of one. And it looks like time heals and diplomats have very short memory.

This is one of our purposes as human rights defenders—to constantly remind and also to warn representatives of other countries so that they could then make use of all the mechanisms at their disposal and pressure governments like Belarus.

Ms. KRASOVSKAYA. United States was always very helpful in our cases of disappearances and also in supporting human rights in Belarus. So from beginning, United States was the first country which suggested help in investigation of disappearances. And those strong resolutions on Belarus and cases on disappearances released by OSCE and other international institutes were made with the support of US Belarus Democracy Act of 2004—is a greatest support for democratic community in Belarus.

Also, we have to thank US government for their strong statement on 15th anniversary of disappearances Gonchar and Krasovski.

But we have to remind US and EU countries—and this film is a good opportunity for that—that Belarus is still dictatorship, and there should not be cooperation with Lukashenka until we have political prisoners, including Nikalai Statkevich- candidate for Presidency—and unsolved cases of disappearances.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. I couldn't put it any better. Clearly, we do—I see my State Department colleagues and friends here. Obviously, we need to be careful in terms of our policies towards Belarus not to act prematurely, not to go overboard, to take a very calibrated, measured approach in how we deal with the Lukashenka regime.

We certainly—and that was one reason in my introduction I wanted to point out that one of the conditions for not lifting the sanctions found in the Belarus Democracy Act was. So we need to proceed carefully.

You mentioned the interagency visit. I thought that it was very good that it also included Tom Melia from DRL—Democracy, Human Rights and Labor—because that definitely sent a signal to the people they met with in Belarus that human rights and democracy is by no means off the table.

I'll leave it at that for now.

Thank you for your work, and thank you for the film.

QUESTIONER. I'll speak in English, and then if you want, I can reproduce it in Russian too. First of all, thank you so much for the enormous work, your dedication and the strength that you demonstrate to the whole world. It is impossible to overestimate the amount of work you've invested, the amount of emotions you've invested into this movie, into similar projects.

Second, I did have two questions to—for Raisa and also for Irina.

Raisa, you were asked about the fear and the potential for the government actions towards yourself and your colleagues, and you made a joke of it. But have you experienced political prisoners in Belarus? I can assure you all that the work that Raisa and her colleagues do can result in very serious consequences. So thank you for your bravery.

Second, Raisa, can you speak about the support on international level while preparing the movie. Was it difficult for you?

Second part of the question. Is it true that you're planning to organize a screening in Minsk? Again, those who have been in Minsk know that this is impossible—to organize and handle without arrest, without very serious consequences. Do you have any partners to rely on? What is your stance and position on that? Belarus does not recognize the decision of the U.N. Committee on Human Rights anymore. They have sent their official note

to the U.N. committee stating that they do not recognize the decision, which is direct violation of the protocols that they signed and their responsibilities under the covenant of civil and political rights, which results in international instruments who seek justice for Belarusians.

To Irina, what do you think international community should be doing in this regard? Should this question be raised on international level in the light of the upcoming elections, in the light of the changes in international policy towards Belarus?

Thank you so much.

Ms. MIKHAILOVSKAYA (through translator). Thank you for your questions.

It took us two years from—about two years from when we had the idea for the film till now till presenting it to you.

I actually originally wanted to have this film released by May 7th, which is the anniversary of Yuri Zakharenka's disappearance. I have sought assistance from several foundations, and only the third foundation that I talked to responded favorably.

The application process took a while, and maybe I should've applied to 10 places simultaneously, but I was so sure that the subject was so important that I would hear back positively actually immediately from the first place that I went to.

I got a response from one place, but I just missed the deadline, essentially. Another funder that I went to said that, "We don't see the outcome. We just don't see it how it will be useful."

Professionally, we haven't seen the results and outcomes for 15 years, either. So I'm very grateful to the German Marshall Fund that they believed in us and supported us in producing this film.

As to how to show this film in Belarus, I think I have an idea of how to do it. But I also want to first show this film in as many European capitals as possible, so as that the citizens of those countries that can act on the international level to pressure the Belarusian government are aware of these facts.

Even if we are not able to show it openly in Belarus, we will put it online in open access. And Internet penetration in Belarus is pretty high right now, so I'm pretty sure that people will be able to see it online at some point.

Ms. KRASOVSKAYA. As you know there is no justice in Belarus on cases of enforced disappearances. In addition to UN Human Rights Committee we also can use the procedure of Universal Jurisdiction. We are working on this in order to prepare the cases against perpetrators; even we cannot use it now. But you never know what will happen in future.

For those 77 cases won by people against Belarus we have to put more pressure on UN Followed up Committee of Human Rights Committee. It is their jurisdiction to punish countries which did not fulfill their decisions. As I was informed there were created organization which united people from this list of 77 cases. Maybe voice of organization will be heard better then voices of individuals.

QUESTIONER. Thank you.

Ms. KRASOVSKAYA. Thank you.

QUESTIONER. OK, great. My name's Matthew Gunman. I'm a returning Peace Corps volunteer from Ukraine. And first of all, I wanted to start out by saying I really admire what you have done here. I actually was listening to a podcast yesterday on NPR about

bravery and people standing up for what they believe in when everyone else is being silent. That's the perfect example of that. So I commend you. Second of all, today President Obama announced that there would be renewed relations with Cuba for the first time in 50 years, another dictator state, like Belarus.

My question is if President Obama were to continue warmer relations with Belarus, Irina and Raisa, you've already suggested that this would be bad because it suggests, "Well, abuse of human rights is OK. We will still work with you."

My question is could warming relations with Belarus actually have a positive outcome in some ways?

Ms. MIKHAILOVSKAYA (through interpreter). While the positive effects are possible, but I would see them more on the humanitarian side: working on social issues, medicine, medical issues and improving medical assistance, helping promote rights of people with disabilities—that sort of stuff such as local governance.

So promoting democracy through those elements, but without, kind of, establishing this brotherly, friendly relationship with Lukashenka that he may take as an opportunity for him to guarantee preferential treatment in terms of international economy and otherwise strengthen his own regime.

If this warming relationship were to happen, I would rather see it on the humanitarian issues.

Ms. KRASOVSKAYA. I think that today warming up relationship between Belarus and the United States on political level not possible, because there is no trust between the countries today and the issues on which sanctions were imposed still on the same level. To renew the relationships with US Belarus has to—first—release all political prisoners, which is easy to do. The second—cases of disappearances have to be investigated, which authority is not going to do now because high ranking official are involved in this crime. The third condition is free and fair election—which also did not improve recently. So relationships between US and Belarus could be successful on students programs, visa issues, cultural projects but not on political level cooperation.

Hope that United States will not try to warm up relations with Belarus without insisting on fulfilling those conditions.

Also, I personally met with President Bush three times. And he knew where Belarus is. I'm not sure about President Obama and his view on Belarus; I have never heard that he met human rights activists from Belarus.

QUESTIONER. For the people of Belarus, do you feel that—studying the revolutions that took place in Eastern Europe from '89 to '91. Do you feel that there are some similarities that you could draw on from Ceausescu or Milosevic?

Lukashenka's crimes aren't as extensive as theirs. So I see similarities there. And I'm just wondering if you've had any cooperation people in Romania or Czech Republic.

QUESTIONER. Here in Washington, D.C., we advocate for the freedom and democracy in Belarus and put additional pressure on Lukashenko.

They have been very active for a number of years. And have been part of all of these efforts for many years already.

It's hard to say if dictators in the other countries. It can be helpful in doing this, but the situation in all the other countries is unique. And what you have in Belarus is unique as well.

Efforts of the government and the government may expend the effort to remain in power. I mean, Lukashenka himself and his bosses.

Cooperation here in Washington and Lukashenka and with the support of Russia he's really strong.

There are limitations on what the Western governments can do. They have to follow the rules of international law.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. Do you want to follow up? Please come to the mike for the sake of the transcriber.

QUESTIONER. A follow-up to that, as I understand, from the Western powers in Belarus that there would be somewhat a strong international legal and military (ph) way to deal with them. It seems to be that, when you compare to North Korea, that's a pretty—that's a pretty serious accusation. It seems to me like you've got a serious effort.

QUESTIONER. Well it takes the decision of the Security Council of the United Nations to send a person like Lukashenka to the International Criminal Court. And with Russia being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, it is not feasible. It's not realistic at the moment.

These days when—this Ukrainian war, it has overshadowed every concern in those. Lukashenka suddenly became not so bad, and on the continent, he suddenly became a little bit better than Putin, for example. And this urge to reinstall relations with him.

It is very concerning the lessons from previous years are being overlooked at this point in time.

Mr. DEYCHAKIWSKY. OK, thanks.

I think that concern is legitimate. But, based on what I see, I don't see that that urge necessarily is that strong. And I think this film reminds us why the urge shouldn't be that strong.

I think we need to wrap it up here.

I want to thank again Freedom House and GMF.

I want to thank both Raisa and Irina, Raisa for a truly powerful, detailed, outstanding film, and both of you for your noble work.

Thank you all for coming.



This is an official publication of the
**Commission on Security and
Cooperation in Europe.**



This publication is intended to document
developments and trends in participating
States of the Organization for Security
and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).



All Commission publications may be freely
reproduced, in any form, with appropriate
credit. The Commission encourages
the widest possible dissemination
of its publications.



<http://www.csce.gov> @HelsinkiComm

The Commission's Web site provides
access to the latest press releases
and reports, as well as hearings and
briefings. Using the Commission's electronic
subscription service, readers are able
to receive press releases, articles,
and other materials by topic or countries
of particular interest.

Please subscribe today.