



Den norske Forfatterforening

The works of a number of writers have been declared extremist

interview with Dmitry Strotsev

recipient of The Norwegian Authors' Union's Freedom of Expression Prize 2020

When did you receive the message that you were awarded the prize, and how did you react?

I probably learned the news that Hanna Komar and I had been awarded the Norwegian Authors' Union Prize in March 2021. I was still at home, in Belarus, and this news was very encouraging then.

Has the prize influenced your work or situation, and in that case, how?

At the time of receiving the prize, I did not yet have Norwegian translations of my poems. Firstly, I realized that the poetic testimony of Belarusian authors is seen very widely in the world, and this influence needs to be developed, and for this it is necessary that Belarusians also have Norwegian translations.

The prize stimulated my contacts with Norwegian colleagues, and in 2022 my first Norwegian book appeared, translated by Gunnar Wærness and Mikael Nydahl. Thanks to friendship with colleagues from the Norwegian Authors' Union, I got a six-month residency in Berlin in the second half of 2022. And, of course, the bonus money really supported me at first, when I was forced to leave Belarus abroad.

How has the situation for writers in your country developed since the time you received the prize?

The situation with writers in Belarus has deteriorated greatly. Many of my fellow writers, such as Maxim Znak, Alexander Feduta, Pavel Seviarynets and others, are imprisoned in Belarusian prisons. Thousands of creative people were forced to leave Belarus due to persecution by illegitimate authorities, and among them many writers, including Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich.

The works of a number of writers have been declared extremist in Belarus. The Union of Belarusian Writers and the Belarusian PEN Center were liquidated. Books by authors disloyal to the regime are confiscated from library collections and possibly destroyed. Almost all independent publishing houses were crushed and destroyed. At the same time, relying on international support, Belarusian writers continue to be active abroad.

Would you like to share some of what you are currently working on?

I write new texts, participate in literary events in different European countries. These are understandable things. But in addition, I created a new Belarusian publishing house, which is based in Berlin and publishes books of Belarusian poetry. This became possible thanks to the support of my German and Swedish friends and colleagues.

Such a new publishing house is necessary because, starting from 2020, Belarusian authors are writing new texts, testifying to a suffering and unbroken Belarus, and these texts must be presented in the form of original books. Such books now cannot be published at home, in Belarus, both because they expose the crimes of the illegitimate authorities, and because at home, in Belarus, almost all independent publishing houses have been destroyed.

If you were to award the next prize, who would you like to give it to?

Like many other Belarusians, I am following with compassion and hope what is happening in Ukraine. I believe in the victory of Ukraine, and I associate the liberation of my country with this victory. I read new texts by Ukrainian poets, which are written in the space of war, often under fire and even on the front line. The voice of the young Ukrainian poet Maxim Krivtsov is very important to me. Maxim fights at the front and, at the same time, writes wonderful poems that retain all the properties of real poetry and, above all, humanity.