

PRIX DE
SOLÉURE
NOMINIERT
2023

THIS KIND OF HOPE

PRESS BOOKLET



THIS KIND OF HOPE

A FILM COMPANY and DEPARTURES FILM present

A film by Pawel Siczek

CH/D 2023

83 min

LOGLINE

Diplomacy is Andrei Sannikov's life. Having succeeded in demobilizing the world's most dangerous nuclear weapons arsenal, this master diplomat is now armed with a tie and business cards fighting for the return of a vanished democracy.

Press Contact
+ 49 163 33 23 777

For photos, EPK please contact
presse@departuresfilm.de

CONTENTS

S.4	SYNOPSIS
S.5-6	INTERVIEW WITH ANDREI SANNIKOV
S.7-8	A BRIEF HISTORY OF BELARUS
S.9	ANDREI SANNIKOV - PROTAGONIST
S.10	PAWEL SICZEK - AUTHOR & DIRECTOR
S.11	CREDITS

SYNOPSIS

Diplomacy is Andrei Sannikov's life. Having succeeded in demobilizing the world's most dangerous nuclear weapons arsenal, this master diplomat is now armed with a tie and business cards fighting for the return of a vanished democracy.

Sannikov never stops being a diplomat. He is a diplomat when he talks about his life and his country while staying in exile in Warsaw. Sannikov weighs every word knowing that people in Belarus could be tortured or killed for it. And yet he never loses that kind of hope or his fine sense of humor.

»» SO YOU SEE, THIS IS A VERY SMALL SQUARE WHERE I WAS BORN, WENT TO SCHOOL, WENT TO PRISON, TO ANOTHER PRISON. IT ALL HAPPENED HERE. IT'S THE VERY CENTER OF MINSK.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, everything seems possible. Sannikov is entrusted with a very special task: As a diplomat, he is significantly involved in the nuclear demobilization of Belarus. At first, due to the circumstances, he doesn't even know how many nuclear warheads are stationed in the country. After the horrors of the Cold War, the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union raises international hopes that a world without nuclear weapons may one day be possible.

»» DID WE LIVE BETTER IN THE EARLY 90S? NO! WE LIVED WORSE. BUT THE MOOD OF THE SOCIETY, THE GENERAL MOOD OF THE PEOPLE WAS VERY ENCOURAGING.

Sannikov's story is a deep insight into the history as well as into the present of Belarus. After Lukashenko took office as president in 1994, he quickly crushed hopes for democracy.

In protest, Sannikov resigned from his post as deputy foreign minister in 1996. After that, he kept on fighting for a Belarusian democracy without even having official status.

Sannikov never stopped being a diplomat – not in the Belarusian opposition movement when he had to mourn the political murders of his fellow campaigners, not when he ran for president against Lukashenko in 2010. Neither in KGB prison nor after his release. Even when the regime drove him into exile, Sannikov never lost sight of his goal.

»» EXILE IS THE DREAM OF COMING BACK.

Today, Sannikov is a diplomat in exile for a democratic Belarus that has yet to rediscover itself. Therefore, he remains on the diplomatic stage where he fights for the support of the world community to finally support a free Belarus. For years, he has been warning about Putin and Lukashenko and how they threaten international security.

Armed with business cards and a tie, Sannikov fights for democracy, giving us THIS KIND OF HOPE that the world can be a better place.

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREI SANNIKOV

» ACTIVISM IS NEEDED TO
PROVIDE PEOPLE WITH VOICES
INTERNATIONALLY.

About THIS KIND OF HOPE, the situation in Belarus, Russia's war against Ukraine, and how change is possible.

You have been warning about Lukashenko and Putin for many years. When Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, many Western observers seemed very surprised. Were you surprised?

I wasn't surprised when Russia attacked Ukraine. I knew that all large-scale Russian-Belarusian military drills on the territory of Belarus for the last 10 years were organized to prepare for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Me and my colleagues from "European Belarus" tried to warn the West that Lukashenko was being used by Putin to prepare attacks on Europe, and that was why his regime was a threat to international security.

Unfortunately, Western observers have been repeatedly surprised since the collapse of the Soviet Union which they also did not anticipate. And Western observers continue to be surprised by every major development in the region instead of listening to the people who know what is going on here – people from Belarus, the Baltic states, Ukraine.

How effective are sanctions? And do you think the current sanctions are sufficient?

Sanctions are effective. Sanctions helped to free Eastern Europe from communist rule. The problem is that in the case of Belarus, sanctions have not really been implemented until recently. A visa ban cannot be considered an effective sanction. Only after the atrocities of 2020 did the West begin to introduce real sanctions of an economic nature. Unfortunately, it started quite late, after about eight months of violence unleashed by the regime in Belarus, and they still aren't enough. Lukashenko is declared a co-aggressor in the war against Ukraine, but the sanctions against his regime are softer than those against Putin's. That's why he continues his horrendous repression of innocent people on a daily basis. The sanctions are morally justified because they come with the demand that all political prisoners in Belarus be released. Their number today is more than 4,000 people.

What are the differences between diplomacy and activism?

Very good question, which requires a more detailed answer. In short, it can be said that in the situation of dictatorship, activism is the only way for the opposition and the civil society to activate diplomatic factors to put pressure on the regime. Authoritarian regimes have diplomatic channels but they use them to legitimize themselves and to conceal the truth about the situation in their respective countries. Activism is needed to provide a voice for people internationally.

What does attention economy mean for your fight for a European Belarus?

Lack of attention is a common thing for many countries fighting against tyranny, including Belarus. It is natural since the world cannot be expected to watch our situation with the same attention all the time. What is really bad is the fact that when we warn about a window of opportunity and even give an exact time, as we did for 2020, the international community is yet again "surprised" and unprepared to support the democratic forces and to react strongly to the crimes of the regime.

You are not the kind of person to put yourself in the spotlight – why did you agree to make this film?

It's true, I don't like to be in the spotlight. I enjoy it more when I see my friends and colleagues at the forefront. I like to see the results of our collaborative activities in which I have been involved, and I know that in many cases it is better not to go public until you have achieved something.

Have you ever imagined yourself as a movie star?

This film is a special case because it is about Belarus and I had a chance to use different means to draw attention to the things that are important for my country. It was truly "the offer you cannot refuse" although I tried.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BELARUS

A Way to National Identity

Belarus was once a very important part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was a powerful European state that existed from the 13th century. Later, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania merged with Poland to form the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which lasted until 1795. Since 1795, the territory of present-day Belarus has included the Russian Empire. After the Bolshevik coup in 1917, Belarus attempted to break away from Russia and proclaimed the Belarusian People's Republic in March 1918. This attempt was crushed, and Belarus found itself divided by a Russia-dominated state called the Soviet Union and a re-established Poland. Thus, for a long time in history, Belarus was denied its own language, traditions, and national identity.

Post-Soviet Struggles and Challenges for Democracy

Glasnost and Perestroika and the resulting erosion of the Soviet Union led to an extraordinary diplomatic act: On December 8, 1991, the leaders Shushkevich (Belarus), Leonid Kravchuk (Ukraine), and Boris Yeltsin (Russia) signed an agreement to dissolve the Soviet Union. With the so-called Belovezha Accords, Belarus and Ukraine gained their national independence. The young democratic state of Belarus faced the challenges of post-Soviet struggles and challenges. One of these problems was the presence of nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory. The United States and Russia wanted the country to abandon all nuclear weapons without prior negotiations. Finally, Andrei Sannikov was in charge of diplomatic negotiations for Belarus to ensure that the country's rights were protected. The negotiations led to the Budapest Memorandum, where, on December 5, 1994, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and abandoned their nuclear arsenals. In exchange, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia agreed on security assurances to protect the territorial integrity of the state parties.

»» SOMEBODY SAID BLESSED
ARE THOSE WHO DON'T
REMEMBER THE NAMES OF
THEIR COUNTRY'S LEADERSHIP.

Last European Dictator

Meanwhile, in July 1994, Aljaksandr Lukashenko was elected president of Belarus. Within a short time, he transformed democratic Belarus into an autocracy. "He came with the intention never to leave", comments Andrei Sannikov in THIS KIND OF HOPE. Andrei Sannikov, who served in the Foreign Ministry of Belarus as Deputy Foreign Minister from 1995 to 1996, resigned in protest against Lukashenko's policy in 1996 before the "referendum" which Lukashenko organized to seize power.

Belarusian Civil Society

Charter'97 was one of the first movements against Lukashenko. The Belarusian civil society started to rise up against Lukashenko's government, which transformed more and more into a dictatorship. He even took the contemptuous title of "Last European dictator" with pride. When the then German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle called him that, Lukashenko replied: "Better a dictator than gay."

Still, Lukashenko is heavily dependent on Putin's Russia. During the nearly 30 years of Lukashenko's dictatorship, there have been frequent protests by civil society, most of which were covered by Western media around the presidential elections of 2001, 2006, 2010, 2015, and 2020, when electoral fraud led to the largest mass protests so far. The regime responded with arrests, suppression, and torture.

» "IT'S QUITE A
DIFFICULT TASK TO
PREVENT EUROPE FROM
SACRIFICING BELARUS
TO RUSSIA."

Belarus's Fight for Freedom Today

The European Union imposed sanctions against Lukashenko and other Belarusian officials in 2020 and 2022 following Russia's war against Ukraine. Some Belarusians are opposing the war with guerrilla actions such as blocking the railways supplying the Russian military. Opposition leaders are either in prison, like civil rights activist Maria Kolesnikova, or in exile, like Andrei Sannikov or Svetlana Tichanovskaya, a presidential candidate in the 2020 elections. Nevertheless, they continue to fight for a democratic Belarus.

ANDREI SANNIKOV

PROTAGONIST

Chairman of the European Belarus Foundation and leader of the European Belarus civil campaign



As a career diplomat, Sannikov worked in the Foreign Ministry of Belarus, serving as Deputy Foreign Minister from 1995-96. He resigned in protest against Lukashenko's policy in 1996. Sannikov has since been active in civil society and opposition politics.

In 1997, Sannikov co-founded the civic initiative Charter'97, which in 1998 launched the website charter97.org which is still one of the most popular independent media in Belarus.

In 2008, he initiated the civil campaign "European Belarus". The campaign advocates the integration of Belarus into the European and Trans-Atlantic communities.

Sannikov was a candidate in the 2010 presidential elections in Belarus, and Lukashenko's government says that Sannikov had the second-highest percentage of the popular votes.

On December 19, 2010, Andrei Sannikov was incarcerated in a Minsk KGB facility for peacefully protesting at a post-election rally. Amnesty International recognized him as a prisoner of conscience. Released under international pressure on April 14, 2012. After his release, Sannikov had to leave Belarus and now lives and works in exile in Europe.

In 2005, Sannikov was awarded the Bruno Kreisky Prize for Human Rights Protection.

Author of the book „My Story: Belarusian Amerikanka or Elections Under Dictatorship" (2016) which was published in five languages.

Sannikov continues to campaign for the interests of a democratic Belarus to this day.

PAWEL SICZEK

DIRECTOR AND AUTHOR

Pawel Siczek was born in Warsaw in 1977. He grew up in Libya and Switzerland and studied film and TV Documentary at the HFF Munich. Since 2008, Siczek has worked as a documentary filmmaker and has directed several feature-length documentaries.

"Living in exile has shaped my whole existence. I was born in communist Poland, spent my early years in Gaddafi's Libya, and escaped to Switzerland with my parents and brothers when I was 8 years old. We spent the first year there in the refugee home," Siczek says about his very personal connection to this project.



FILMOGRAPHY

2023

THIS KIND OF HOPE
84 min, feature-length documentary

2016

VOX POPULI
trans-media project with Causa Creations,
Daniel Samer and Ganzfeld

2015

HALF THE TOWN
86 min., cinema documentary (partly animated)

2010

PEDESTRIAN ZONE
60 min, feature-length documentary with Daniel Samer

2008

BASSIONA AMOROSA
98 min, documentary

2007

DORFTROTTEL
29 min, short film, HFF Munich

2004

THE OTHER AUTUMN
19 Min., short documentary, HFF Munich

2001

COUNTRY
short documentary, HFF Munich

CREDITS

THIS KIND OF HOPE
CH / D 2023
83 min

Written & Directed by PAWEL SICZEK
Producers VALENTIN GREUTERT & THOMAS KRÁL
Cinematographer DANIEL SAMER
Editor CLAUDIO CEA
Sound PAWEL SICZEK & JONATHAN SKORUPA
Sound Design & Editing FABIAN SCHNEIDER
Score Music DAVID LANGHARD
Re-Recording Mixer KAI TEBBEL

A production by A FILM COMPANY
in co-production with DEPARTURES FILM
SRF SCHWEIZER RADIO UND FERNSEHEN and RUNDFUNK BERLIN-
BRANDENBURG
in Cooperation with BELSAT TV

With the support of
BUNDESAMT FÜR KULTUR (BAK) SCHWEIZ
ZÜRCHER FILMSTIFTUNG
SUISSIMAGE
MITTELDEUTSCHE MEDIENFÖRDERUNG
GERD RUGE STIPENDIUM der FILM- UND MEDIENSTIFTUNG NRW