



**BELARUSIAN SPORT
SOLIDARITY
FOUNDATION**

Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation (BSSF) Report Highlights 2023

Background information

The Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation (BSSF) was founded on the initiative of Belarusian sports community representatives in response to mass repressions against athletes in Belarus.

The main goals of the BSSF are to protect rights of athletes against discrimination and promote human rights, freedom and democratic values through sport. The BSSF provides financial, organizational and legal support to Belarusian athletes and sports specialists who suffered for openly expressing their civic stance.

The BSSF has shown remarkable capability in effectively confronting repressive actions of the violent Lukashenka's regime in Belarus and challenging its propaganda narratives.

Thus, the BSSF deprived Lukashenka of the opportunity to legitimize his power by holding international sports competitions in Belarus after the violent crackdown on peaceful protests in 2020, and transferred all major sports events from Belarus, including the 2021 World Ice Hockey Championship, 2021 Modern Pentathlon World Championship, 2021 European Track Cycling Championship, UEFA Futsal Champions League Final, U19 Women's European Championship and others.

Furthermore, the BSSF forced the dictator to resign as the President of the NOC Belarus after 24 years in office and played a decisive role in the IOC imposing sanctions against the NOC Belarus and Alexander Lukashenka personally for repressions against athletes.

Considering the popularity of sports among Belarusian society, the BSSF contributed to creation of a strong sports community of athletes, coaches, sports managers and fans in Belarus who stand for peace and democracy to oppose the actions of a brutal regime.

Among other our accomplishments are as follows:

- Provision of more than 500 000 EUR of financial support to Belarusian athletes who suffered for their civic stance, was dismissed and forced to live the home country.
- Conducting 6 training camps in 2021 to prepare Belarusian free athletes for the Olympic Games and other significant sports events.

- Sponsoring of 8 trips to Olympic qualification events for Belarusian free athletes in 2021 due to the lack of support from the Belarusian NOC and national federations because of their civic stance.
- Provision of legal assistance to Belarusian athletes, sports professionals, and civic activists, resulting in the successful acquisition of over 200 humanitarian visas and more than 20 international protection cases in Poland, Lithuania, Germany, Norway, and other European countries.
- Provision of more than 100 000 EUR support to Ukrainian athletes to help them continue their sports career during the war
- Launch of the International Anti-War Declaration that was signed by more than 500 athletes and sports representatives from 30 countries worldwide, including more than 40 Olympic and Paralympic champions and medallists, 120 World champions and medallists.
- Organization of 4 Marathon for Freedom charity online races, the latest of which brought together more than 5000 participants from 54 countries.
- Holding the first SportTech Hackathon for Belarus, within which more than 20 teams of talented programmers, marketers, business analysts and managers competed for the title of the best project.
- Launch of the BSSF Academy with more than 50 students already graduated.
- Organization of a large series of auctions 'World Sports for Ukraine' that collected more than 150.000 EUR and helped purchase and deliver humanitarian assistance including medicines, baby food and protective equipment to Ukraine.
- Organization of a charity event called Chess Solidarity Cup to support the largest children's hospital in Ukraine Okhmatdit.
- Organization of the Sports Solidarity Day in 2022, celebrated by the Belarusian diaspora in 14 cities of 9 countries (USA, France, Italy, Austria, Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Estonia and Belgium) by organizing sports activities in support of the Belarusian political prisoners.
- Organization of video production team and production of videos covering topics related to the developments in Belarusian sports and repressions carried out by sports officials.

Since its establishment in 2020, the BSSF has gained international recognition as a full-fledged influencer in the sphere of sports policy in the region of the Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, the Baltic States).

The BSSF on a regular basis participates in the official meetings with the U.S. Department of State, the European Parliament and the European Commission, meet with U.S. Senators' offices, cooperates with the IOC, international sports federations, national governments, NOCs and Ministries of Sport of various countries (USA, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine and others).

The BSSF is involved in international discussions and strategy development on the admission of Belarusian and Russian athletes to international sports events, strengthening sanctions against aggressor countries and implementing projects in support of Ukrainian and Belarusian free athletes, acting as an expert and representative of Belarusian sport in such negotiations.

Together with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism of Poland the BSSF became the first to create a precedent of developing admission criteria for Russian and Belarusian athletes to

international sports events. This practice has been widely used by various international sports federations and governments.

During the war in Ukraine, where Belarus acts as an aggressor, the BSSF managed to establish official contacts with the Ukrainian side. The BSSF signed a trilateral memorandum of cooperation with the Department of Youth and Sports of Kyiv City State Administration and the Olga Saladukha's Charitable Initiatives Foundation. The memorandum became the first official treaty between Ukrainian and Belarusian organizations since the beginning of the war.

Furthermore, the BSSF established partnerships with such sports organizations as World Players Association, Athleten Deutschland, Global Athlete, FIFPRO, ISLA, UNI Global Union and others.

Mentions of the BSSF activities and achievements appeared in such world media as CNN, The Times, The Guardian, The Washington Post, Forbes, Der Spiegel, Inside the Games, Frankfurter Allemande, RBC and many others.

In recognition of the BSSF's achievements and contributions to international sport, the BSSF was recognized as the best sports initiative and received the main award at the Play the Game 2022 major sports conference in Denmark for the work it has done since its foundation.

BSSF achievements in 2023

In 2023 the BSSF continued its work with Ukrainian colleagues on sports sanctions and the adoption of Belarusian and Russian athletes. Thus, on the BSSF initiative, a **Working group on sports sanctions was established in Ukraine**. It included representatives of the Office of the President of Ukraine, NOC of Ukraine, Ministry of Sports, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, as well as representatives of sports media.

In January 2023 the BSSF signed a **trilateral memorandum of cooperation** with the Department of Youth and Sports of Kyiv City State Administration and the Olga Saladukha's Charitable Initiatives Foundation. The memorandum became the first official treaty between Ukrainian and Belarusian organizations since the beginning of the war.

The aims of the memorandum are the establishment of a long-term effective cooperation between the parties, introduction of visa and economic sanctions in the field of sport against the regimes of Belarus and Russia, creation of programs of financial support for athletes of Ukraine, creation and development of educational programs in the field of sport, launch of information campaigns to inform the international community about the situation with the military aggression in Ukraine and human rights violations in Belarus.

As part of the memorandum, the BSSF together with the Department of Youth and Sports of Kyiv City State Administration and the Olga Saladukha's Charitable Initiatives Foundation developed a **program of support of 30 young Ukrainian athletes** to help them continue their sports careers during wartime.

The BSSF became a partner of the all-Ukrainian children's athletics competition series White Panther Cup, organized by the Olga Saladukha's Charitable Initiatives Foundation. In January 2023, the **White Panther Cup** event was held in Kiev and gathered 239 participants. The event received positive feedback on the successful organization from the Ukrainian sports authorities, media and the public.

The BSSF continued its actions on the protection of Belarusian athletes' rights. Thus, together with the Polish Tennis Association the criteria for admission of Belarusian athletes to competitions have been developed. As a result, starting from January 2023 the Polish Tennis Association has been **renewing gaming licenses for Belarusian youth athletes**.

In February 2023, the BSSF delegation participated in the **working meetings in the European Parliament and the European Commission**. During the meetings the latest decisions of the IOC were discussed, the projects supporting Ukrainian and Belarusian free athletes who suffered from the actions of the regime were presented. In the course of the meetings the BSSF paid particular attention of the European Parliament and European Commission representatives to the necessity of the sanctions policy in the field of sports against the aggressor countries' regimes.

Furthermore, in March the members of the European Parliament addressed UEFA with a demand to exclude the Belarus national team from the EURO'2024 qualifying campaign. More than 100 MEPs outlined the reasons for their call in a collective letter sent to UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin. They noted that those players who still play for the Belarusian national football team support the Lukashenko's regime.

In March 2023, the **CAS ruled in the case of the BSSF against UEFA and the Belarusian Football Federation (ABFF)**. As the result of the procedure, CAS admitted that it has no legal tools to compel UEFA to investigate the ABFF. At the same time, CAS stated that the decision to deny the appeal does not justify any actions taken by the Belarusian sports and political authorities that discriminated against or persecuted any of the complainants. CAS also expressed regret that in this case UEFA decided not to initiate an investigation into the ABFF, as the case file would have justified such an investigation.

In April 2023, the BSSF paid another **official visit to the USA**. Within the framework of the visit working meetings were held with the U.S. Senators' offices, USAID, the U.S. Department of State representatives responsible for relations with Europe, Belarus, Russia, culture and education, public and political diplomacy.

The BSSF presented its work in regional and international sports, discussed with American colleagues the latest decision of the IOC concerning the admission of Belarusian and Russian athletes and sanctions in sports, appealed to support Belarusian free athletes and Ukrainian athletes who suffer from Russian military aggression and independent media. In addition to sports issues, the problems of release of Belarusian political prisoners, including athletes, distribution of nuclear weapons in Belarus, and the threat of loss of independence of Belarus in today's conditions were touched upon.

In May 2023, the BSSF organized the **international sports conference "Athletes for Peace and Freedom"** in Tallinn, Estonia. The conference was attended by prominent athletes, sports experts and journalists from Ukraine, Belarus, Germany, the USA and the Baltic States.

The conference became a platform for Belarusian and Ukrainian athletes and sports professionals to discuss the most pressing problems of European and world sport, establish cooperation on confronting the Russian and Belarusian regimes' propaganda, creating projects to support free athletes, promoting freedom and democracy through sports.

The **declaration adopted at the international sports conference "Athletes for Peace and Freedom"** was directed to international sports organizations and federations, including the IOC, National Olympic Committees and sponsors of the Olympic movement.

During the Conference in Tallinn the BSSF representatives, Belarusian and Ukrainian athletes met with the representatives of the Estonian NOC. The BSSF agreed with the Estonian NOC and Nike company on the purchase of sportswear for young Ukrainian athletes and organized the delivery of the **charity cargo to Ukraine**. 5 large sports schools in Kyiv, Lviv, Vinnitsa, Rivne and Poltava were fully equipped.

In June 2023, the BSSF representatives took part in the **meetings of the Working group of the Committee on Youth and Sports of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine**. The BSSF presented to the Ukrainian sports community its views on improving the effectiveness of sports sanctions, possible actions in the international diplomatic arena, and also shared its vision of the situation. An international declaration was proposed as the ultimate criterion for the possible admission of Russian and Belarusian athletes to competitions.

In July 2023, the BSSF representatives took part in the **discussion in the European Parliament** "Should Belarusian and Russian athletes take part in the Paris 2024 Olympics?". The discussion was organized by MEPs from the Committee on Culture and Sport Michaela Šojdrová and Tomasz Frankowski. The discussion was also attended by Michael Žantovský, Head of the Czech NOC Expert Group and Dominik Hašek, 1998 Olympic Champion and two-time Stanley Cup winner.

The Czech NOC opposed the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the Olympics. However, recommendations were adopted to allow individual athletes from Belarus and Russia to compete under a neutral flag on condition of signing an anti-war declaration. The recommendations were based on the statements of the **declaration of the Athletes for Peace and Freedom conference** organized by the BSSF. The Czech Olympic Committee directed these recommendations to the IOC, European and American NOCs.

In turn, these recommendations served as the basis for an appeal by members of the European Parliament to the IOC and the 27 EU NOCs not to allow athletes from Belarus and Russia to compete at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games or any other international sports event, unless they sign an anti-war declaration. Those measures were proposed in order to prevent using sport by both regimes in propaganda purposes.

In August 2023, the World Athletics National Review Panel agreed to **shorten the 3-year waiting period for Krystsina Tsimanouskaya**, whose story became known to the whole world after she was forcibly removed from the Tokyo Olympics and sought refuge in Poland. She was granted the right to represent Poland in national representative competitions starting from August 2023.

The BSSF and the Polish Athletic Association have done everything possible to ensure that Krystsina Tsimanouskaya can once again compete on the international stage. Krystsina Tsimanouskaya was **admitted to participate in the World Athletics Championships** in Budapest. There she competed in the distances of 100, 200 meters and 4*100 relay.

During the 2023 World Championships in Budapest, Tsimanouskaya achieved a significant milestone in her career by securing a spot in the 200m semifinals for the first time. Additionally, she joined forces with the Polish team and delivered an impressive performance in the 4x100 relay final, ultimately finishing in 5th place. This achievement marked the best result ever achieved by Poland in this particular discipline, highlighting her outstanding contribution to the team's success.

In August 2023, the BSSF became an **official partner of the Belarusian FC “Pahonia Warszawa”**. The team received permission to participate in the Polish Cup from the Polish Football Association. FC Pahonia Warszawa was established in 2022 and has played many amateur matches and even tournaments in support of Belarusian political prisoners.

In August the BSSF provided legal support to the Belarusian long-distance runner Raman Adamovich to help him participate in the XI Tyski Półmaraton in Poland. The documentation supplied by the BSSF served as the foundation for the athlete's admission to the competition.

In September 2023, in observance of Sports Solidarity Day, the BSSF in collaboration with the BYSOL Foundation and the Human Rights Center “Viasna” conducted a **charitable fundraising event** to provide assistance to Belarusian athletes who have been subjected to political imprisonment. The funds raised will cover legal expenses, ensure access to adequate medical care, and offer assistance to the families of incarcerated athletes.

In October 2023 the BSSF, in collaboration with BELSAT TV, organized an **Open Discussion titled "Olympic Games in Paris in Shadow of the War in Europe"**. The two-hour live stream debate was dedicated to the Sport Solidarity Day. Distinguished speakers, including Members of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of Committee on Culture and Education, the Head of the Play the Game Conference, the former Secretary General of the Polish Gymnastics Federation, prominent Belarusian, Ukrainian and German athletes among others, took part in the debate.

The main topic of the discussion was the eligibility of Belarusian and Russian athletes to participate in international sports competitions, including the upcoming Olympic Games in Paris in 2024. Moreover, within the debate Belarusian free athletes shared their stories of opposing the regime and fighting against repression, dictatorship, and propaganda.

The outcomes of the discussion, along with its key points, were documented and forwarded to international sports organizations and federations, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC), National Olympic Committees, and sponsors of the Olympic movement.

In November, the BSSF delegates engaged in impactful **working sessions at both the European Parliament and the European Commission**. The primary focus of these meetings was a comprehensive dialogue on the international sports policy towards Belarus and participation of Belarusian athletes in international competitions, including the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

In December 2023 the BSSF organized a **fundraising campaign** on the Global Giving platform to secure financial support for the **participation of Belarusian chess player Vladislav Kovalev's in the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championships 2023** in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The required sum was successfully gathered within a single day, showcasing the incredible responsiveness and generosity of the Belarusian and global community.

In 2023, the BSSF continued its mission to **protect Belarusian athletes' rights**, assisting those affected by the regime with financial, legal, and organizational support. Athletes, including children and youth, and sports professionals in exile received assistance in immigration, employment issues, received working licenses in sports sphere and were allowed to participate in sports competitions in their countries of residence. The BSSF ensured that many athletes and sports professionals obtained international protection and legal documents in various European countries, allowing them to safely integrate and continue their sports careers despite difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, the BSSF continued its efforts to **engage Belarusian athletes and sports professionals in the discussion of the admission** of Belarusian and Russian athletes to **international sports events** on a global stage.

Thus, the International Sports Conference “Athletes for Peace and Freedom” and the Open Debate organized by the BSSF in 2023, the results of which were disseminated to international sports organizations and federations, provided Belarusian free athletes in exile with an opportunity to share their stories with the international sporting community, urging it to take their situation into account when making any decisions.

Such dialogues serve as a crucial platform for Belarusian athletes, sports professionals, and human rights advocates to express their views and influence the decisions made by international sports organizations and federations.

For more details on our initiatives and achievements, please feel free to contact the BSSF team.