

11.11.2021 – 15:23 Uhr

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya: “We need a radical transition and more bold action for democracy”



Hamburg (ots) -

Belarusian opposition leader gave inaugural Helmut Schmidt Lecture by German Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung (BKHS)

“We at the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung could not be prouder to have one of the most inspiring global voices for democracy as inaugural speaker of our *Helmut Schmidt Lecture*: Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the Belarusian democratic forces.” These were the opening words of Peer Steinbrück, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the BKHS, when he welcomed the guest of the first Helmut Schmidt Lecture yesterday.

The Belarusian opposition leader is not only the prominent face of the peaceful protests for democracy, she is the insistent voice for democracy in Europe: “What is often taken for granted in Germany and Europe, thousands of Belarusians have to fight for every day: freedom. This is not just about Belarus. It is about the future of democracy in Europe. We need a radical transition and more bold action for democracy.”

In her lecture she stressed that Europe must once again become a magnet for other countries and free itself from fatalism and the belief in its own powerlessness.

In a subsequent talk, she offered her view on the current crisis at the Polish border. “This migrant smuggling is encouraged and orchestrated by the Belarusian authoritarian ruler”, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya underlined on Wednesday evening in Berlin. “Lukashenko wants to take revenge on the EU – especially Poland and Lithuania – because it supports the democratic movement in Belarus. He wants an exchange deal: an end to the migration crisis for an end to the sanctions.” “But we should not be blinded by migration”, Tsikhanouskaya said. “The problem is the illegitimate power in Belarus. The regime that holds millions of people hostage and has become a threat to regional and global peace and security. Since the presidential election on August 9, 2020, more than 37,000 people have been imprisoned. Thousands have been humiliated, tortured, and traumatised. Currently, there are 834 political prisoners, and the numbers continue to rise.”

This year’s Helmut Schmidt Lecture theme “Living Democracy!” has become Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s guideline since August 2020. She has lived in exile in Lithuania since the arrest of her husband, who ran for president last year. In order to help her gathering support for a free and democratic Belarus the BKHS has organised a high-level political programme for Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya during her stay in Berlin. Above all she was received by German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Bellevue Palace. Furthermore, she met vice chancellor Olaf Scholz as well as other members of the German government and parliament.

The Helmut Schmidt Lecture will take place at a different European location every year, in cooperation with a local institution. This year's partner is the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), an independent think tank based in Berlin.

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*German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier welcomes Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Berlin.
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