

Moien, good morning, dear speakers and guests,

Let us begin the conference.

Allow me to briefly introduce myself. I am a sociologist and the founder of LuxEureka a.s.b.l., the organiser of this conference. Although our association officially began its work only in 2025, it has already held nearly 30 events in support of anti-war, Russian-speaking people living in Luxembourg.

The topic of today's conference is "Democracy and Human Rights: Current Challenges in Post-Soviet Countries", with a particular focus on the repressive regimes in Russia and Belarus. Maybe some of you have asked yourself: *Is this the right time for such discussions?*

Last year, I was in Norway as part of the Russian School of Civil Society, where we visited Utøya Island. On that very day, Anders Breivik applied for early release from prison. I was deeply impressed that such a request was even legally possible. The Norwegian hosts explained their position to us very clearly: *if we cannot guarantee human rights to the worst among us, we cannot guarantee them to anybody.*

That answer changed me profoundly. It led me to a deeper understanding of how essential it is to speak not only about condemning repressive regimes, but also about the rights of ordinary people living under those regimes, and about the rights of those who have been forced to flee them.

This is our first conference, but certainly not the last. We hope to continue addressing other post-Soviet countries and the evolving challenges to democracy and human rights. My core message is simple: when a state becomes dangerous to its own citizens, it also may risk becoming a danger to its neighbors. That is why supporting the struggle for human rights across borders is so crucial.

We have brought together high-level experts, and I am confident that their contributions will offer new perspectives on the current situations in Russia and Belarus.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to ACAT Luxembourg for the initial idea of this conference. I am also deeply thankful to the European Parliament in Luxembourg for hosting us today, and personally to Deputy Isabel Wiseler-Lima for her support.

I would like to thank everyone working in the field of human rights, as well as the journalists who help bring human rights violations to public attention, including those currently covering the case of Mikhail Lotshchin, a Belgian-Russian citizen who remains imprisoned.

My thanks also go to our speakers who have travelled from different countries — from Georgia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and beyond.

The conference will be moderated by Alessandro Morini from Amnesty International.

Unfortunately, there have been minor changes to the program: our speaker from Belarus is unable to join us today due to illness. Nevertheless, I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to the Belarusian democratic opposition on the recent release of 123 political prisoners, including Maria Kolesnikova.

And now, let's begin.

It is my great pleasure to give the floor to our first speaker, Deputy Isabel Wiseler-Lima.