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Belarus Releases 52 Political Prisoners After Meeting With U.S. Officials in Minsk

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Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko (center) and Trump deputy assistant John Coale (left).
belta.by

Belarus released dozens of political prisoners, including several from the West, following negotiations between U.S. and Belarusian officials in Minsk, Lithuania's president announced Thursday.

"No man left behind! 52 prisoners safely crossed the Lithuanian border from Belarus today, leaving behind barbed wire, barred windows and constant fear," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda wrote on X, noting that six Lithuanian nationals were among those released.

"I am deeply grateful to the United States and personally to President Donald Trump for their continued efforts to free political prisoners," Nausėda added, sharing a photo of Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kęstutis Budrys with one of the freed prisoners.

Belarusian state media reported that citizens of Poland, Latvia, France, Germany and Britain were also freed.

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Thursday's prisoner release followed U.S.-Belarusian talks in Minsk, which were attended by Trump's deputy assistant John Coale and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Trump has repeatedly called on Lukashenko to free political prisoners. On Friday, the American president claimed that Belarus was holding around 1,400 "hostages," saying that the Eastern European country is a "pretty harsh place."

During the talks in Minsk, Lukashenko floated what he called a "big deal" for the remaining detainees, the state-run news agency Belta reported.

"If Donald insists he's ready to take all these free people himself, then fine, let's try to work out... a 'big deal' as Mr. Trump likes to say," the Belarusian leader said in the meeting with Coale.

"We're not hiding anything here. Let's discuss it, even though for me it's not the main issue, and probably not for you either, since the world has enough other problems," Lukashenko added.

Rights groups estimate that nearly 1,200 political prisoners remain behind bars in Belarus.

Coale, in his turn, told Lukashenko that the United States had lifted sanctions against Belavia, the country's main airline. He also gave Lukashenko a gift of cufflinks from Trump, as well as a letter personally signed by the American president.

"He signed it 'Donald.' That's a rare act of personal friendship," Coale told Lukashenko after handing him the letter, where Trump congratulated the Belarusian leader on his 71st birthday last month.

Lukashenko said his main goal is to "stand with Trump and support his mission of peace," referring to stalled U.S. attempts to mediate an end to the war in nearby Ukraine. "His key priority now is ending the war in Ukraine, and for us, this is the most important thing too."

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