



Free Belarus Museum: Development Concept

2026

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INTRODUCTION



In the contemporary world, a museum has long ceased to be merely a repository of artefacts and a place for displaying the past. It increasingly functions as a space of public memory, dialogue, research, cultural self-defence and social responsibility. A museum not only preserves historical testimonies but also shapes ways of understanding history, provides society with a language for reflecting on complex experiences, and helps reveal the connections between the past, the present and the future.

Museums acquire particular significance in situations of historical trauma, political violence, forced migration and the threat of losing cultural identity. Under such circumstances, the process of musealisation becomes not only a professional museum practice but also a form of preserving collective memory, a means of resisting oblivion, falsification and the destruction of testimonies.

In contemporary Belarus, the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka consistently eliminates an independent Belarusian national agenda from education, culture, media and public space, replacing it with an ideology of state loyalty, Soviet-imperial myths and narratives of the "Russian world". Museums, archives, libraries, educational and cultural institutions inside the country are increasingly subordinated to state propaganda. Topics related to Belarusian democratic traditions, the 2020 revolution, political repression, solidarity, the European choice and resistance to authoritarianism are being removed from public discourse. At the same time, repression continues against cultural figures, museum workers, researchers, artists, journalists and activists.

Under these circumstances, the establishment of the Free Belarus Museum in Warsaw became a response to the urgent need to create an alternative museum space for Belarusian memory. The museum was founded in exile as a place where testimonies of Belarusians' struggle for freedom, human dignity, human rights, democracy and a European future can be collected, preserved, researched and publicly presented. Today, such work is impossible inside Belarus without the risk of confiscation, destruction of materials and persecution of people connected with them.

Since its opening in 2022, the Free Belarus Museum has undergone an important stage of institutional development. It has become not only a museum initiative, but also a cultural, educational, documentation and communication centre for the Belarusian community in Poland. Its premises host exhibitions, discussions, theatre and literary events, meetings, educational programmes, commemorative events and solidarity initiatives. The museum has become a place where Belarusians in exile can experience a connection with their homeland, language, culture and shared experience, while Polish and international audiences can better understand contemporary Belarus through personal stories, artefacts and cultural expressions.

During its first years of operation, the museum has significantly strengthened its collection, organisational and professional potential. A collection of museum objects has been formed, connected with the Belarusian protests of 2020, political repression, the fates of political prisoners, emigration, the participation of Belarusians in the defence of Ukraine, as well as with the broader history of the Belarusian democratic and national movement. The museum has begun systematic work on the inventorying, documentation and digitalisation of collections, develops public access

to them, strengthens partnerships and builds a professional community around itself, including through the initiative of the Belarusian Museum Laboratory.

At the same time, the Free Belarus Museum continues to operate in difficult and unstable conditions. Its activities take place in the context of forced emigration, ongoing repression in Belarus, Russia's war against Ukraine, the threat of losing Belarusian cultural subjectivity and the need to integrate into the Polish and European cultural sphere. Therefore, the museum must simultaneously fulfil several interconnected roles: a place of memory, a documentation centre, a cultural home for the Belarusian diaspora, a professional museum institution, a platform for dialogue with Polish and international society, as well as a potential foundation for future museum infrastructure in a democratic Belarus.

This Concept views the Free Belarus Museum as an institution of memory, cultural resistance and public dialogue. It analyses the history of its formation, its current state, key challenges and opportunities, and defines conceptual and strategic directions for further development. The Concept is based on the understanding that the museum should develop as a sustainable professional institution in Warsaw while maintaining its connection with Belarus and its potential future role in restoring a democratic cultural space in its homeland.

The Free Belarus Museum is not only a project of preserving the past. It is a space where memory of the present is being shaped, where conditions for solidarity are created, where the experience of exile and resistance is reflected upon, where Belarusian identity is supported and where the right of Belarusians to be part of the European cultural and democratic community is affirmed.

1

FREE BELARUS MUSEUM AS A «PLACE OF MEMORY»



1.1 History of the Creation and Formation of the Free Belarus Museum

The idea of establishing the Free Belarus Museum emerged within the Belarusian democratic community in the aftermath of the events of 2020, when hundreds of thousands of Belarusians took to the streets in peaceful protests against the falsification of the presidential election, state violence and the authoritarian system. Following the brutal suppression of the protests, mass repression, criminal prosecution, dismissals, torture and forced exile, there arose an urgent need to preserve the material evidence of this historic experience.

In Belarus, the open collection, preservation and public display of objects related to the protests, the democratic movement, political repression and civic solidarity became virtually impossible. Such materials could be confiscated, destroyed or used against their owners as grounds for persecution. Some artefacts remained hidden in private homes, while others were taken abroad by Belarusians forced to leave the country because of political persecution and danger. For this reason, the establishment of a museum institution in exile became not only a cultural undertaking but also a civic necessity.

The Free Belarus Museum was conceived as a space capable of collecting, preserving, documenting and presenting evidence of the Belarusian protest movement, the democratic movement and the struggle for human rights. From the outset, it possessed a dual character. On the one hand, it was a museum initiative aimed at building collections and creating an alternative narrative of memory; on the other, it was a cultural and civic space essential for Belarusians in exile as a place for gathering, mutual support, solidarity and the preservation of identity.

The initiative to establish the museum was supported by representatives of the Belarusian democratic community, cultural figures, experts and partner organisations in Poland and abroad. An important role in advancing the initiative was played by the institutions of the Belarusian democratic movement in exile, as well as by Polish partners, who recognised the future museum as an important cultural and civic institution capable of presenting the Belarusian experience in Warsaw and within the broader European context.

On 17 July 2022, the Free Belarus Museum was officially opened in the historic building at 11 Foksal Street in central Warsaw. The museum occupies approximately 367 square metres and includes a large exhibition hall, a museum room, office and representative spaces, as well as additional technical facilities. For selected events, the museum also makes use of the building's inner courtyards. Its location in the centre of Warsaw has provided not only practical accessibility but also symbolic significance: a Belarusian space of memory and freedom has been established in one of the principal cultural and civic centres of the Polish capital.

Already in its first year of operation, the museum became one of the most visible centres of Belarusian cultural and civic life in Poland. It welcomed approximately 9,000 visitors, while its programme included more than 150 cultural and educational events for adults and children. The

museum hosted exhibitions, theatre performances, concerts, literary evenings, discussions, presentations, workshops and acts of solidarity. Particular attention was drawn to artistic and documentary projects addressing the experience of the protests, political imprisonment, exile and Belarusian cultural identity.

At the next stage of its development, the museum gradually evolved from an initiative and cultural venue into a more stable institutional model. On 5 May 2023, it acquired the status of an independent legal entity in Poland and began operating as the registered civic organisation Association "Free Belarus Museum." This represented an important milestone for its further development, strengthening governance, financial accountability, partnerships and professional museum practice.

Between 2023 and 2025, the museum maintained a highly active public programme and continued to serve as one of the central Belarusian cultural venues in Warsaw. Its premises hosted festivals, exhibitions, theatre performances, discussions, literary meetings, commemorative events and projects devoted to political prisoners, artists, the Belarusian resistance, solidarity with Ukraine and Belarusian cultural heritage. The museum collaborated with Belarusian cultural initiatives, human rights and civic organisations, Polish institutions, international partners, artists, researchers and experts.

At the same time, the museum began systematically developing its core museum functions. While the earliest acquisitions focused primarily on artefacts from the 2020 protests, over time both the thematic and chronological scope of collecting expanded. Today, the collection includes objects related to the protest movement, political repression, the fate of political prisoners, the Belarusian diaspora, the participation of Belarusians in the defence of Ukraine against Russian aggression, as well as the longer history of the Belarusian democratic and national movement. The museum collection has also been enriched with historical artefacts reflecting the Belarusian struggle for freedom, political agency and the European choice; the earliest document in the collection dates from 1773.

An important stage in the museum's development was the establishment of systematic collection management, inventory procedures and digitisation. The museum maintains inventory registers and documents its holdings according to a structure compatible with professional museum standards, including those recommended by the Ministry of Culture of Poland and the Spectrum 5.0 collections management standard. Part of the collection has been digitised and made publicly accessible through the museum's new website in the .museum domain, significantly expanding access to its materials for Belarusians across different countries, as well as for researchers, journalists and international audiences.

The museum has also gradually established a more stable organisational structure. It has a small but professional team responsible for management, curatorial work, collection management, communication, event organisation and documentation. Alongside the core staff, the museum works with volunteers, partners, external experts and contractors. Representatives of the

Belarusian community in exile, former political prisoners, families of those subjected to repression, Belarusian veterans, artists, researchers and cultural figures all play a particularly important role in the life of the museum.

In 2025, the museum launched the Belarusian Museum Laboratory, a professional platform for Belarusian museum professionals and cultural heritage specialists who found themselves in exile. The Laboratory became an important step in building a professional community around the museum, preserving the human and intellectual potential of the Belarusian museum sector, and preparing for the future restoration of cultural institutions in a democratic Belarus.

Thus, during the first years of its existence, the Free Belarus Museum evolved from an urgent civic initiative—an immediate civic response to repression and exile—into a multifunctional museum and cultural institution. It has retained its role as a “Belarusian home” in Warsaw while simultaneously becoming a centre for professional documentation, collecting, public history, education and international dialogue. This evolution has not diminished the museum's original mission; on the contrary, it has deepened it, transforming the Free Belarus Museum into one of the key institutions preserving Belarusian memory in exile.

1.2 The Search for Identity and the Definition of the Museum's Mission

The process of establishing the Free Belarus Museum has been, and continues to be, closely linked to the search for an appropriate institutional identity. The Museum emerged under extraordinary circumstances—as a response to political repression, forced exile, the threat of losing historical evidence, and the need to create a safe Belarusian space of memory in Warsaw. From the outset, therefore, it could not develop as a conventional museum with a predefined structure, stable collections, and a long-term exhibition model. Its identity has been shaped through practice: by collecting artefacts, organizing public events, working with the community, building partnerships, fostering public debate, and responding to contemporary challenges.

During the Museum's initial stage of development, different visions of its future coexisted. Some were based on the idea that both the collections and the institution itself would soon return to a democratic Belarus. Other approaches viewed the Museum primarily as a temporary repository for preserving evidence of the 2020 protests. Gradually, however, it became clear that the Museum had a broader and more long-term mission. The continuation of repression in Belarus, the expansion of exile, Russia's war against Ukraine, the growing threat to Belarusian cultural agency, and the need for sustainable Belarusian institutions in exile demonstrated that the Free Belarus Museum should develop as an independent professional institution in Warsaw while maintaining a strategic connection with the future of Belarus.

An important contribution to the development of the Museum's identity came from the scholarly and professional seminar *Museum Reflection on Political Transformations and Contested Memory: Perspectives of Representation in the Belarusian Context*, held in November 2023. During the seminar, historians, cultural scholars, museum professionals, and experts discussed possible thematic and chronological frameworks for future musealization—from documenting the 2020 Revolution and contemporary political repression to presenting the broader history of the Belarusian democratic and national movement. Although participants represented different perspectives, they agreed on one essential point: the institution established in Warsaw has exceptional importance for preserving materials and meanings that cannot currently be safely collected or presented within Belarus.

Over the following years, the Museum's identity became more clearly defined. Today, the Free Belarus Museum can be described as a multifunctional institution combining several interconnected roles. First, it is a museum and documentation centre that collects, preserves, researches, and presents material evidence of the Belarusian struggle for freedom, human dignity, human rights, and a European future. Second, it is a cultural and educational centre hosting exhibitions, lectures, discussions, theatre performances, film screenings, literary events, educational programmes, and activities for children and adults. Third, it is a community space—a "Belarusian home" in Warsaw—where Belarusians in exile can maintain their connection to their language, culture, history, and one another. Fourth, it is a platform for dialogue with Polish and

international audiences, helping to place the Belarusian experience within a broader European context.

This multifunctional character does not dilute the Museum's essence; on the contrary, it reflects the contemporary understanding of a museum as an open public platform. The Free Belarus Museum works with collections while simultaneously working with living memory. It preserves artefacts while creating space for testimony, dialogue, and collective reflection. It develops museum collections without separating them from the people whose lives and experiences they represent.

In this sense, the Museum's identity is based not only on objects themselves, but also on the relationship between artefacts, personal experience, and broader social meaning. The dress of the "White-Red-White Bride," the belongings of political prisoners, documents relating to political repression, protest posters and symbols, the personal items of Belarusian volunteers, historical documents, and works of art become more than museum exhibits. They serve as material testimony to individual choices, risk, solidarity, trauma, hope, and responsibility.

At the same time, the Museum has become increasingly aware of its role within the Polish and European cultural landscape. It cannot remain solely an internal space for the Belarusian diaspora. Located in the centre of Warsaw, it must remain open to Polish visitors, international partners, researchers, journalists, students, cultural practitioners, and everyone seeking to understand Belarus not only through political news but also through personal stories, culture, memory, and historical experience. Consequently, one of the Museum's principal development priorities is the expansion of communication in Polish and English, the strengthening of partnerships with Polish institutions, and the creation of projects that present Belarus as an integral part of European history and contemporary Europe.

Another important element of the Museum's evolving identity is the understanding of itself as a museum in exile. This refers not only to its physical location outside Belarus, but also to its distinctive mission: to preserve what cannot be preserved at home; to present what is silenced or destroyed there; to support those who have been forced to leave; and to create the potential for the future return of memory, knowledge, collections, and professional museum practices to a democratic Belarus.

In this context, the Free Belarus Museum also fulfils the function of cultural resistance. It resists not through political confrontation but through the preservation of language, memory, artefacts, stories, human dignity, and the right to interpret both the past and the present independently. The Museum affirms that the Belarusian experience cannot be appropriated, erased, or rewritten by an authoritarian state or by imperial propaganda.

Accordingly, the Museum's mission can today be formulated as follows:

The Free Belarus Museum in Warsaw is a museum, cultural, and educational centre that preserves and presents the memory of the Belarusian democratic movement, civic resistance, political

repression, exile, and the Belarusian struggle for freedom, human dignity, and a European future. The Museum collects and documents artefacts, stories, and testimonies that cannot be safely preserved or presented in present-day Belarus, making them accessible through exhibitions, education, research, public programmes, and digital resources.

The Museum serves as a place of belonging for Belarusians in exile, a platform for professional and civic dialogue, and a space for communication with Polish and international audiences. Through culture, memory, and community participation, it promotes the values of freedom, democracy, solidarity, human rights, Belarusian identity, and European integration.

Several key conclusions regarding the Museum's current identity follow from this mission:

1. The Free Belarus Museum has already established itself as a multifunctional museum, cultural, and documentation centre for Belarusians in Poland. It combines the collection and preservation of museum holdings with public programming, educational activities, communication, community support, and international dialogue.
2. The museum function remains its highest priority. It is the collections, museum documentation, preservation, digitization, and interpretation of objects that form the foundation of its long-term institutional sustainability and distinguish the Museum from an ordinary cultural venue.
3. The Museum should continue to develop as a sustainable institution in Warsaw without abandoning the prospect of playing a future role in Belarus. Returning to a democratic Belarus may become one possible scenario for its future development, but already today the Museum possesses independent value as a Belarusian and European institution of memory in exile.
4. Integration into the Polish and broader European context is an essential condition for future development. The Museum must remain a space of Belarusian identity while simultaneously creating meaningful and accessible narratives for Polish and international audiences.
5. The Museum works not only with the past but also with a present that is still unfolding. This requires particular responsibility when dealing with personal testimonies, trauma, political risk, the safety of donors and witnesses, and the interpretation of events that have not yet acquired full historical distance.
6. The Museum should continue its process of professionalization. The next stage of development should focus on strengthening its collections policy, improving preservation conditions, expanding digital tools, developing research and educational activities, and building a sustainable financial and organizational model.

1.3 Key Challenges Facing the Museum

During its first years of existence, the Free Belarus Museum has gone through an important stage of institutional development. A number of the challenges identified during its initial phase have already been partially or substantially addressed: the Museum has obtained legal status, established a core professional team, developed a structured public programme, introduced museum inventory records, expanded its collections, launched a new website, begun the digitization of its holdings, strengthened its network of partners, and become one of the best-known Belarusian cultural venues in Warsaw.

At the same time, the Museum continues to face a number of challenges that define the next stage of its development. These can no longer be understood merely as the difficulties of an emerging institution. Rather, they are structural challenges inherent to an institution operating in exile, working with traumatic and politically sensitive memory, fulfilling multiple functions simultaneously, and striving to meet professional museum standards.

1. Limited Space and the Need for Further Functional Zoning

The Museum's premises at 11 Foksal Street have made it possible to establish an active public venue. However, they are constrained by limited floor space, the historic status of the building, and the impossibility of substantial structural alterations. The Museum simultaneously uses the space for exhibitions, public events, meetings, staff work, collection storage, and technical operations. This multifunctional use requires more precise spatial planning, improved visitor navigation, clearer separation of public, operational, and collection storage areas, and, in the longer term, the identification of additional premises or partnership solutions for storing the collections.

2. Collection Preservation and the Development of Collection Infrastructure

As the collections continue to grow, their preservation has become one of the Museum's highest priorities. The Museum already maintains inventory records and continues to improve documentation and digitization procedures. However, the building was not originally designed for museum storage. Further improvements are therefore required, including better storage materials, controlled access, condition monitoring, systematic organization of storage areas, consultations with conservators, and the exploration of opportunities to use specialized storage facilities, museum cabinets, display cases, or partner storage solutions.

3. Professionalization of Museum Operations

The Museum already has a small professional team, yet the volume of responsibilities significantly exceeds the capacity of its current staff. Collections management, exhibitions, public programming, communications, education, documentation, partnerships, fundraising, and visitor services must all be carried out simultaneously. One of the Museum's principal challenges is

therefore the gradual expansion of its professional capacity by attracting specialists in conservation, collections management, museum documentation, education, research, communications, audience development, and fundraising. An important resource in this respect is the Belarusian Museum Laboratory, which has the potential to become a platform for professional consultation, knowledge exchange, and collaborative practice.

4. Balancing the Museum Function with the Role of a Cultural Venue

One of the Free Belarus Museum's greatest strengths is its openness and the high intensity of its public programme. At the same time, the large number of public events may compete with museum activities that require time, concentration, precision, and continuity, including inventory work, research, documentation, digitization, conservation, and exhibition preparation. The Museum must therefore establish a sustainable balance between activities that attract audiences, strengthen partnerships, and sustain the community, and museum work that creates long-term institutional value.

5. Communication with Polish and International Audiences

The Museum has become an important space for the Belarusian community. However, its continued development requires greater visibility within the Polish and international cultural landscape. It is essential to continue expanding communication in Polish and English while strengthening cooperation with Polish media, museums, universities, cultural institutions, and civic initiatives. Equally important is the development of exhibitions and programmes that are meaningful not only for Belarusian visitors but also for Polish, European, and international audiences, addressing themes such as shared history, democracy, human rights, migration, war, solidarity, and cultural identity.

6. The Security of People, Data, and Collections

The Museum operates under unique circumstances, working with materials and individuals who may be considered threatening by the Lukashenka regime and its propaganda apparatus. Some donors, witnesses, volunteers, staff members, and partners remain exposed to various forms of risk. Consequently, the Museum must continue to develop ethical and secure practices for handling personal stories, personal data, publication of sensitive materials, digital access, and communication with people inside Belarus. The preservation of memory must never create additional risks for those who entrust the Museum with their experiences.

7. Financial Sustainability and Institutional Independence

The Museum is developing a diversified funding model that includes grants, private sponsorship, self-generated income, and donations. This provides a basis for medium-term planning, yet financial sustainability remains a significant challenge. Future development requires expanding the donor base, establishing long-term partnerships, developing additional museum services, and

maintaining institutional independence so that the Museum can fulfil its mission regardless of political or economic changes.

8. Scenario Planning for the Future

The Museum operates within an unstable geopolitical environment. Belarus may follow different future trajectories—from deeper dependence and increasing threats to its sovereignty to democratic transformation and the subsequent need to rebuild cultural institutions within the country. The Free Belarus Museum must therefore remain adaptable: developing as a sustainable institution in Warsaw, serving as a national archive and museum in exile should conditions deteriorate further, and preparing to become a future resource for the repatriation of knowledge, collections, and professional museum practices to a democratic Belarus.

In conclusion, the principal challenge of the Museum's next stage of development is to preserve its dynamic, open, and socially engaged character while simultaneously strengthening its professional museum foundations. The Free Belarus Museum should continue to serve as a place of community and solidarity while further developing as an institution dedicated to the long-term preservation, research, documentation, and public interpretation of Belarusian memory.

2

CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FREE BELARUS MUSEUM



2.1 Development Directions

The Free Belarus Museum was established in response to a specific historical moment—the 2020 revolution, mass political repression, forced emigration, and the threat of the destruction of evidence documenting Belarusian civic resistance. However, during its first years of existence, it became clear that its mission extends beyond documenting a single period or event. The museum has gradually evolved into an institution that engages with the broader narrative of the Belarusian struggle for freedom, human dignity, democracy, national agency, and the European choice.

In the long term, the Free Belarus Museum has the potential to become one of the foundations of the future museum and documentation infrastructure of a democratic Belarus—as part of a possible system of memory institutions or as an independent institution researching, documenting, and presenting the history of the Belarusian democratic movement, political repression, civil society, emigration, and resistance to authoritarianism. It can become a place where Belarusian society reflects on its own experience of violence, resistance, solidarity, loss, and hope.

At the same time, under present conditions, the museum cannot be viewed merely as a temporary structure awaiting its return to Belarus. It already exists as an independent Belarusian and European institution in Warsaw, integrated into Poland's cultural, civic, and museum landscape. Its development should therefore be based on two complementary scenarios: strengthening the museum as a sustainable professional institution in exile while preserving its potential future role in a democratic Belarus.

At the current stage, several key directions for the museum's development can be identified.

1. The Museum as an Institution of Memory and Documentation

The primary direction of development remains the establishment of the museum as a centre for preserving, documenting, and interpreting evidence of the Belarusian struggle for freedom and democracy. This includes building collections, inventorying, cataloguing, digitising, preserving objects, collecting personal stories and testimonies, and creating a research base for future exhibitions, educational programmes, and publications.

The significance of this direction lies in the fact that many of these materials cannot be safely preserved in Belarus. The museum assumes responsibility for protecting documentary and material evidence that might otherwise be destroyed, confiscated, or hidden out of fear of persecution.

2. Developing the Collection

The museum's collection should continue to develop across several interconnected thematic and chronological areas. Its initial core consisted of artefacts from the 2020 protests, documents and

objects related to political repression, political prisoners, and emigration. Over time, the collection policy has expanded to include materials reflecting Belarusians' participation in the defence of Ukraine, the history of the Belarusian democratic movement since the late twentieth century, as well as earlier historical evidence of the Belarusian struggle for freedom, national agency, and the European choice.

This expansion does not imply transforming the museum into a universal national history museum. On the contrary, it enables the events of 2020 and the contemporary democratic movement to be understood not as isolated episodes, but as part of the long tradition of Belarusian aspirations for freedom, self-government, dignity, and European political culture.

3. The Museum as a Cultural and Educational Centre

The museum has already become one of the most important Belarusian cultural venues in Warsaw. This role should be maintained and further developed, since public programming enables the museum to remain connected to its community, broaden its audience, and transform collections into a living public experience.

Exhibitions, discussions, theatre performances, film screenings, literary evenings, workshops, children's programmes, commemorative events, and educational projects allow the museum to work not only with objects but also with people. This direction is particularly important for Belarusians in exile, for whom the museum serves as a place of belonging, cultural continuity, and shared memory.

4. Integration into the Polish and European Cultural Context

The Free Belarus Museum should develop not only as a space for the Belarusian diaspora but also as an open institution for Polish and international audiences. This requires expanding communication in Polish and English, while strengthening partnerships with Polish museums, universities, cultural centres, media outlets, and civic organisations.

Particularly promising themes include Belarusian-Polish relations, shared history, migration, the memory of totalitarianism, democratic resistance, solidarity with Ukraine, and Belarus's European choice. Through these themes, the museum can become both accessible and meaningful to broader audiences in Poland and across Europe.

5. Digital Development and Access for Audiences in Belarus

Digital development is one of the key priorities for a museum in exile. It enables broader access to collections and knowledge for people who cannot physically visit the museum in Warsaw. This is especially important for Belarusians inside Belarus, where independent history and the memory of protests, repression, and the democratic movement are censored or destroyed.

Digitisation of collections, online presentations, virtual exhibitions, educational materials, archival resources, and secure forms of digital communication should become essential elements of future development. The digital environment does not replace the physical museum, but significantly expands its reach, accessibility, and impact.

6. The Museum as a Professional Centre and Platform for the Belarusian Museum Community

The Belarusian Museum Laboratory has become an important milestone in developing the museum as a professional hub. It brings together museum professionals and cultural heritage specialists living in exile, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange, training, collaborative projects, and professional support.

In the future, this direction may establish the Free Belarus Museum as one of the key institutions preserving the human and intellectual potential of the Belarusian museum sector. This is important both for professional work in exile and for the future restoration of cultural institutions in a democratic Belarus.

7. Scenario-Based Development and the Museum's Future Role in Belarus

The museum must remain prepared for different future scenarios. Should the political situation deteriorate further and Belarusian independence come under greater threat, the museum will increasingly assume the role of a national archive and museum in exile, preserving what might otherwise be erased or appropriated by aggressive imperial policies.

In the event of democratic transformation in Belarus, the museum could become the foundation or a key partner in establishing a new museum and documentation institution in the country. Parts of its collections, expertise, professional practices, and international networks could help fill significant gaps in the public history of contemporary Belarus. At the same time, its Warsaw location could remain as a European branch or as a centre for Belarusian-Polish and international dialogue.

Thus, the Free Belarus Museum is developing as a comprehensive institution: a museum, a documentation centre, a cultural venue, an educational resource, a professional hub, and a place of community. Its future depends on its ability to maintain a balance among these functions while never losing sight of its primary mission—museum work with collections, memory, testimony, and the public interpretation of the Belarusian experience.

2.2 Mission, Values, and Vision of the Museum

The mission is the foundation of every museum institution. It defines why the museum exists, to whom it is accountable, what values it represents, and how it works with collections, audiences, and society. For the Free Belarus Museum, the mission carries particular significance, as the institution emerged not under stable conditions but in the context of repression, exile, the threat of losing historical memory, and the need for cultural resistance.

Today, the mission of the Free Belarus Museum can be formulated as follows:

The Free Belarus Museum in Warsaw is a museum, cultural, and educational centre that preserves and presents the memory of the Belarusian democratic movement, civic resistance, political repression, exile, and the Belarusian struggle for freedom, human dignity, and a European future.

The museum collects, documents, preserves, and interprets artefacts, stories, and testimonies that cannot be safely collected or presented in present-day Belarus. It makes them accessible through exhibitions, educational programmes, research, public events, and digital resources.

The Museum serves as a place of belonging for Belarusians in exile, a platform for professional and civic dialogue, and a space for communication with Polish and international audiences. Through culture, memory, education, and community participation, it promotes the values of freedom, democracy, solidarity, human rights, Belarusian identity, and the European choice.

This mission is built upon several key principles.

1. Preserving Memory and Testimony

The museum assumes responsibility for preserving both the tangible and intangible evidence of the Belarusian struggle for freedom and democracy. Particular attention is given to artefacts, documents, and personal stories that are at risk of destruction, confiscation, or oblivion. The museum approaches memory not as an abstract concept but through concrete objects, voices, and individual lives.

2. Human Dignity and Human Rights

The museum's primary ethical framework is respect for human dignity. It tells the stories of people who have experienced repression, imprisonment, exile, torture, and the loss of their homes, while also highlighting those who have preserved their capacity for solidarity, creativity, resistance, and responsibility. The right to memory, the right to a voice, and the right to one's own history are regarded as inseparable elements of human rights.

3. Freedom and Democracy

The Free Belarus Museum exists as a space affirming the values of freedom, democracy, civic responsibility, and the right of society to self-determination. It not only documents political violence but also demonstrates that Belarusian society possesses its own democratic tradition, its own history of resistance, and its own vision of the future.

4. Belarusian Identity and Cultural Continuity

In the context of exile, the museum serves to preserve the Belarusian language, culture, symbols, historical memory, and shared experience. It helps Belarusians living abroad maintain their connection to their homeland and pass that connection on to future generations. At the same time, it presents Belarusian culture to Polish and international audiences as vibrant, contemporary, and European.

5. Solidarity and Community Participation

The museum develops together with the community for which—and with which—it works. Donors, volunteers, former political prisoners, families of victims of repression, artists, researchers, veterans, activists, and members of the Belarusian diaspora do not merely visit the museum—they actively participate in shaping it. They donate objects, share their stories, contribute to public events, assist with organisation, provide expertise, and help define the institution's meaning. Community participation is one of the fundamental pillars of the museum's public value.

6. The European Choice and International Dialogue

The museum views the history of the Belarusian democratic movement as part of the broader European history of the struggle for freedom, human rights, and dignity. Belarus is not outside Europe—it is part of Europe's cultural, historical, and political space. The museum strives to make the Belarusian experience understandable to Polish and international audiences and to foster dialogue between Belarusian, Polish, and wider European societies.

7. Professionalism and Responsibility Towards the Collections

The museum's mission requires a professional approach to its collections. Objects entering the museum must be properly documented, catalogued, preserved, researched, and interpreted. The museum seeks to develop its collection management, digitisation, preservation, and exhibition practices in accordance with contemporary museum standards, recognising that collections are not only resources for today's programmes but also a responsibility to future generations.

| MUSEUM VALUES

The values of the Free Belarus Museum arise directly from its mission and everyday practice. They include:

- **Freedom** — as the right of individuals and societies to self-determination, freedom of thought, expression, choice, and a life of dignity;
- **Human dignity** — as the fundamental ethical basis for working with stories of repression, trauma, and resistance;
- **Democracy** — as a value that the museum not only documents but also practices through openness, participation, and dialogue;
- **Memory** — as a form of responsibility towards those who struggled, suffered, died, were forced into exile, or continue to live under threat;
- **Solidarity** — as a principle of mutual support, collective effort, and care for people affected by repression, exile, or war;
- **Belarusian identity** — as the living combination of language, culture, history, symbols, civic experience, and European belonging;
- **Openness** — as a commitment to cooperation with diverse audiences, institutions, communities, and international partners;
- **Professional responsibility** — as the obligation to preserve, document, research, and present collections with respect for museum standards and for the people connected to the objects.

| VISION OF THE MUSEUM

The vision of the Free Belarus Museum defines the place the institution seeks to occupy in the future. It takes into account both the current reality of exile and repression and the historical changes that may take place in Belarus.

The Free Belarus Museum aspires to become a sustainable European institution of Belarusian memory in exile—professionally managed, socially significant, open to diverse audiences, and capable of preserving the heritage of the Belarusian democratic movement for future generations.

In the short and medium term, the museum envisions itself as:

- a museum and documentation centre that preserves and researches artefacts, documents, and personal testimonies of the Belarusian struggle for freedom;
- a cultural home for Belarusians in Warsaw, supporting language, identity, solidarity, and ties with the homeland;
- a European public platform explaining the Belarusian experience to Polish and international audiences;

- a digital bridge connecting with Belarusians inside the country by providing secure access to memory and knowledge that are censored or destroyed in Belarus;
- a professional hub that, through the Belarusian Museum Laboratory, preserves and develops the intellectual potential of the Belarusian museum community;
- a potential foundation for a future museum and documentation centre in a democratic Belarus.

Should threats to Belarusian independence intensify, the museum will strengthen its role as a national archive and museum in exile, capable of preserving what may otherwise be erased, destroyed, or appropriated by authoritarian and imperial policies. Should democratic change occur in Belarus, the museum will be prepared to contribute to the return of memory, collections, knowledge, and professional practices to the homeland, while maintaining its Warsaw location as a European centre for Belarusian-Polish and international dialogue.

Thus, the vision of the Free Belarus Museum combines two complementary dimensions: sustainable development in Warsaw and responsibility for the future of Belarus. The museum seeks not only to preserve the past but also to create the institutional, cultural, and professional foundations for the democratic future of Belarusian society.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Legal Status and Institutional Sustainability of the Museum

During its first years of existence, the Free Belarus Museum has taken an important step towards institutional stability. On 5 May 2023, it acquired the status of an independent legal entity in Poland and now operates as a registered non-governmental organisation—the Association “Free Belarus Museum.” This status has enabled the museum to formalise its activities within the legal framework, develop partnerships, conclude contracts, secure funding, employ staff, implement projects, and present itself as an independent non-profit cultural institution.

At the same time, registration as a non-governmental organisation does not fully resolve the question of the museum's institutional status. The Free Belarus Museum already performs the core functions of a museum institution: it collects and develops collections, maintains inventory records, documents and catalogues objects, works on their digitisation, presents collections through exhibitions and public programmes, and develops educational and research activities. These functions define its museum character and provide the basis for its further legal and professional recognition within the museum sectors of Poland and Europe.

Under Polish legislation, a museum is understood as a non-profit institution that collects and preserves tangible and intangible heritage, develops collections, disseminates knowledge about cultural values, creates an educational and aesthetic environment, and ensures public access to its collections. To fully meet these requirements, an institution must possess not only a mission and collections but also appropriate conditions for their preservation, documentation, security, presentation, and accessibility.

From this perspective, the next stage in the development of the Free Belarus Museum is not only to maintain its current legal status but also to move progressively towards professional museum standards that may, in the future, enable stronger recognition within the Polish and European museum systems. This involves several key priorities.

First, the museum must continue developing its collections management system. It already maintains inventory books and catalogues objects according to a structure compatible with the standards recommended by the Polish Ministry of Culture and compliant with the international Spectrum 5.0 standard. This work should continue through the standardisation of documentation, clarification of ownership rights and provenance, the creation of a comprehensive digital database, regular updating of records, and ensuring data security.

Second, the museum must continue strengthening its collection preservation system. The historic building at 11 Foksal Street does not allow for the creation of a conventional museum storage facility. The museum therefore needs to employ a combination of practical solutions: professional packaging, controlled access, condition monitoring, specialised cabinets and display cases, consultations with conservators, and partnership agreements with institutions able to provide expertise and facilities for preservation and conservation.

Third, institutional sustainability must be strengthened through the continued development of the museum's team and management structure. At present, the museum operates with a small staff responsible for a wide range of functions. In the future, it will be necessary to gradually strengthen expertise in collection management, preservation, education, research, communications, audience development, fundraising, and administration. This may be achieved partly through expanding the permanent staff and partly through a network of experts, partners, volunteers, and the Belarusian Museum Laboratory.

Fourth, the museum should continue strengthening its financial model. At present, it relies on a mixed funding structure consisting of grants, private sponsorship, earned income, and donations. This diversified model reduces dependence on any single source of funding. However, long-term sustainability will require expanding the donor base, developing multi-year support programmes, working with Polish and European foundations, exploring opportunities for institutional funding, and expanding income-generating services without compromising the museum's non-profit character.

Fifth, the museum should continue developing its governance and accountability framework. As a non-governmental organisation, it already has governing and oversight bodies. However, as its collections, budgets, partnerships, and public role continue to grow, there is an increasing need for transparent decision-making procedures, financial accountability, collection management policies, ethical guidelines, personal data protection, and mechanisms for evaluating institutional performance.

Particular attention should also be given to the museum's future status in relation to Belarus. The Free Belarus Museum was established in exile, yet its mission is directly connected to the Belarusian nation and the future of a democratic Belarus. Consequently, its legal and institutional development in Poland should not exclude the possibility of the future repatriation of parts of its collections, expertise, and professional practices to Belarus if political circumstances change. On the contrary, the more professionally and sustainably the museum develops today, the more valuable a resource it will become for the future reconstruction of Belarusian cultural and museum infrastructure.

At the same time, it should be recognised that even in the event of democratic change in Belarus, the museum's Warsaw location can and should retain its significance. For many members of the Belarusian diaspora, Poland has already become a place of long-term residence, work, education, and community building. The Free Belarus Museum in Warsaw can therefore continue to serve as a European centre of Belarusian memory, Belarusian-Polish dialogue, international solidarity, and the presentation of Belarusian issues within Europe.

Thus, the strategic objective in the area of legal status and institutional sustainability is to develop the museum as a non-profit, professional, accountable, and adaptable institution capable of operating under several possible historical scenarios. Under present circumstances, this means strengthening the legal, organisational, financial, and museum foundations of its work in Poland. In

the long term, it means preparing the museum to become one of the key centres of Belarusian memory—both in exile and in a future democratic Belarus.

3.2 Development of the Collection and Documentation Centre

Collection development and documentation constitute the foundation of the Free Belarus Museum's institutional identity. They are what distinguish the Museum from a cultural venue, community centre, or discussion platform. Public programmes, educational activities, exhibitions, and communication can have lasting value only when they are based on systematically acquired, documented, preserved, and interpreted collections.

Initially, the Museum's collection was centred on the events of the Belarusian Revolution of 2020. It comprised protest artefacts, documents, posters, symbols, personal belongings of participants in peaceful demonstrations, works of art, and materials related to political repression and civic solidarity. This focus was natural, as the events of 2020 directly led to the establishment of the Museum and the forced emigration of a significant part of Belarusian civil society.

Over time, however, it became evident that the events of 2020 should not be presented in isolation but within a broader historical context. The Belarusian Revolution, mass repression, civic resistance, solidarity, exile, and the country's European aspirations form part of a much longer history of Belarusian struggles for freedom, human dignity, human rights, national agency, and a democratic future. Consequently, the Museum's collecting policy has expanded both thematically and chronologically.

At present, the Museum's collection encompasses several principal thematic areas:

1. **The Belarusian Revolution and the 2020 Protests.** Artefacts from peaceful demonstrations, protest symbols, posters, leaflets, personal belongings of participants, artistic expressions, photographs, video materials, and testimonies of those involved.
2. **Political Repression and the Lives of Political Prisoners.** Documents, correspondence, objects, personal narratives, and materials relating to court proceedings, imprisonment, "home confinement" (restricted freedom sentences), forced exile, post-release experiences, and solidarity initiatives supporting political prisoners.
3. **Belarusian Exile after 2020.** Materials documenting forced migration, adaptation abroad, the establishment of new communities, cultural initiatives, media projects, organisations, and networks of solidarity in Poland and other countries.
4. **Belarus under Authoritarian and Totalitarian Control.** Evidence of state violence, ideological pressure, censorship, political persecution, the dismantling of independent institutions, the destruction of cultural and educational spaces, as well as personal accounts of resistance.
5. **Belarusians in the Defence of Ukraine.** Artefacts, documents, and testimonies relating to Belarusian volunteers, humanitarian initiatives, and solidarity efforts supporting Ukraine in its resistance to Russian aggression.
6. **The History of the Belarusian Democratic and National Movement.** Materials illustrating the longer tradition of Belarusian struggles for freedom, self-government, human rights, national culture, and European orientation. These include documents and artefacts connected with

socio-political developments since the late twentieth century, as well as earlier historical sources. The oldest document currently held by the Museum dates from 1773.

- 7. Belarusian–Polish Relations and Dialogue.** Materials documenting the historical, cultural, political, and social ties between Belarusians and Poles, including contemporary expressions of solidarity, support for the Belarusian democratic community in Poland, and the development of the Belarusian presence in Warsaw.

This thematic expansion does not represent a departure from the Museum's original mission. On the contrary, it provides a broader historical framework for understanding contemporary events. The protests of 2020, political repression, and forced migration become part of a longer historical process through which Belarusian society has repeatedly asserted its right to freedom, self-determination, culture, and European belonging.

The Museum's collection possesses not only historical but also ethical significance. Many objects are donated by individuals who have personally experienced protests, imprisonment, political persecution, forced migration, or war. Consequently, museum practice requires particular attention to provenance, personal narratives, the safety of donors and witnesses, publication rights, anonymity where appropriate, and the careful interpretation of traumatic experiences.

The principal methods of collection development include:

- accepting museum-significant objects donated by individuals, families, communities, and organisations;
- documenting personal stories associated with the objects;
- recording interviews and oral testimonies of participants in historical events;
- collecting documents, printed materials, photographs, and audiovisual records;
- acquiring selected historical artefacts consistent with the Museum's collecting profile;
- cooperating with Belarusian and international museums, archives, initiatives, and private collectors;
- digitising materials and creating digital surrogates where the transfer of original objects is impossible or poses security risks.

Documentation represents an equally important area of the Museum's work. The Free Belarus Museum should develop not only as a repository of objects but also as a centre for the systematic collection of information, testimonies, and historical context. This is particularly important when documenting contemporary history, which is still unfolding. An object without its story may lose much of its significance, while a personal testimony without a material reference point may be more difficult to integrate into museum interpretation. The Museum's task is therefore to connect artefacts, narratives, documentary evidence, visual materials, and their historical context.

The Museum already maintains inventory registers recording essential information about each object, including inventory number, accession date, quantity, title, description, creator or manufacturer, date and place of origin, materials, techniques, dimensions, provenance, and additional remarks. Its documentation practices follow the standard recommended by the Polish Ministry of Culture and are compatible with the Spectrum 5.0 collections management standard. This approach gradually aligns the Museum's documentation with professional museum practice and creates a foundation for future integration into the Polish and European museum community.

Digitisation constitutes one of the Museum's strategic priorities. It serves several purposes: providing additional security for collection data, expanding access for researchers and visitors, making the collections accessible to Belarusians worldwide, and enabling secure access for audiences within Belarus. Digital collections and online resources should therefore be developed as an integral part of the Museum's infrastructure rather than merely as a supplement to its physical exhibitions.

In the future, the Free Belarus Museum aims to establish a comprehensive Documentation Centre comprising museum collections, an archive, a media library, a digital database, a specialist library, and research resources. The Centre may perform the following functions:

- preserving and organising museum objects and documentary materials;
- collecting and archiving personal testimonies;
- creating thematic databases;
- supporting researchers, journalists, students, and educational initiatives;
- preparing exhibition and educational materials;
- developing publishing and editorial projects;
- organising seminars, conferences, webinars, and research programmes;
- cooperating with Belarusian, Polish, and international archives, museums, and academic institutions.

Another essential priority is ensuring the security of documentation activities. The Museum works with materials that may pose risks to individuals living in Belarus or to those whose family members remain there. It is therefore necessary to develop internal policies governing the handling of personal data, photographs, videos, testimonies, publication rights, anonymisation procedures, and access to sensitive materials. This is particularly important in relation to digital collections and online publications.

The development of the Museum's collections and Documentation Centre is therefore a strategic priority that will determine its future as a professional museum institution. The collections and the stories associated with them constitute the Museum's unique identity. They enable the Free Belarus Museum to function not merely as a venue for events, but as an institution of memory

preserving the material and intangible evidence of the Belarusian experience for contemporary audiences, future generations, and, ultimately, for a democratic Belarus.

3.3 Exhibition and Display Activities

Exhibition and display activities are among the primary ways through which the Free Belarus Museum communicates its mission to the public. Exhibitions transform collections, documents, and personal stories into coherent museum narratives that are accessible to Belarusian, Polish, and international audiences.

Since its opening, the Museum has developed an intensive and diverse exhibition programme, presenting artistic, documentary, memorial, and interdisciplinary projects dedicated to the Belarusian protest movement, political repression, the experiences of political prisoners, exile, solidarity with Ukraine, Belarusian culture, and contemporary artistic expression. Alongside museum exhibitions, the Museum regularly hosts theatrical performances, literary events, concerts, public discussions, and performative projects that frequently extend or deepen the themes explored in its exhibitions.

At the present stage, the Museum's exhibition activities fulfil several key functions.

1. Public Interpretation of the Collections

As its collections continue to grow, the Museum increasingly uses its own holdings as the foundation for exhibition projects. This enables a gradual transition from the model of a cultural venue to a more clearly defined museum institution, in which artefacts, documents, and personal testimonies become the core of public interpretation and communication. It is particularly important that each object be presented not merely as a visual or commemorative item, but as evidence of a specific human experience and historical context.

2. Musealisation of Contemporary History

The Museum works with history that is still unfolding. The events of 2020, political repression, forced migration, the war in Ukraine, the struggle for Belarusian identity, and Belarus's European aspirations have not yet acquired full historical distance. For this reason, the Museum's exhibition practice must combine historical accuracy, scholarly research, ethical sensitivity, and openness to multiple personal perspectives.

Rather than offering a single definitive interpretation of recent events, the Museum should create a space for public history in which artefacts, documents, personal testimonies, artistic works, and scholarly commentary engage in dialogue. Such an approach avoids oversimplification, acknowledges the diversity of lived experience, and helps maintain the trust of the communities whose histories it preserves.

3. Working with Trauma and Personal Testimonies

Many of the subjects addressed by the Museum are directly connected with violence, loss, exile, imprisonment, war, and ongoing insecurity. Exhibition practice must therefore take into account

the ethical challenges of presenting traumatic experiences. Personal stories of political prisoners, former detainees, families of the persecuted, refugees, volunteers, and combatants require careful handling, informed consent for publication, respect for privacy, and an understanding of the potential risks faced by individuals who remain in Belarus.

In this sense, museum exhibitions should not merely inform or evoke emotion. They should create conditions for dignified testimony, reflection, and dialogue without turning human suffering into a spectacle.

4. Combining Documentary and Artistic Approaches

One of the Museum's particular strengths lies in its ability to combine documentary materials with artistic and performative practices. Contemporary Belarusian art, theatre, literature, music, and photography frequently serve as means of interpreting political events and lived experience. Accordingly, the Museum's exhibition programme can continue to develop at the intersection of museum documentation, contemporary art, public history, and civic education.

This approach is especially valuable for audiences who may not readily engage with Belarusian history through conventional historical presentation alone. Artistic expression opens pathways to complex subjects through emotion, imagery, voice, movement, space, and personal experience.

5. Temporary Exhibitions and a Flexible Exhibition Model

Given the Museum's limited premises and the multifunctional character of its facilities, creating a large permanent exhibition is not currently the most realistic option. At this stage, a programme of temporary, thematic, and travelling exhibitions represents a more effective model, allowing the Museum to respond flexibly to current developments, gradually introduce newly acquired objects into public circulation, and test future exhibition narratives.

At the same time, the Museum should develop elements of a more permanent presentation. Small permanent or semi-permanent displays introducing the Museum's mission, the principal themes of its collections, the history of its establishment, selected key artefacts, and its main narrative lines would help visitors—particularly Polish and international audiences—quickly understand what the Free Belarus Museum is and why it exists in Warsaw.

6. Exhibitions as a Tool for Dialogue with Polish and International Audiences

The Museum should continue developing exhibitions that are meaningful not only to Belarusians but also to Polish and international visitors. To achieve this, exhibitions should employ multilingual interpretation, clear narrative structures, sufficient historical context, comparative perspectives, and themes of universal relevance, including freedom, repression, migration, war, identity, solidarity, human rights, and cultures of remembrance.

Particular potential lies in exhibitions devoted to Belarusian-Polish relations, shared historical experiences, the Belarusian presence in Poland, Polish support for Belarusian democratic initiatives, and Warsaw's role as a centre of Belarusian memory and political exile.

7. Digital and Travelling Exhibitions

Digital exhibitions should become an important extension of the Museum's physical exhibition programme. They enable collections and stories to reach audiences unable to visit Warsaw, including people living in Belarus, the Belarusian diaspora worldwide, researchers, journalists, and international partners. Digital exhibitions can also provide an appropriate and secure format for presenting sensitive materials when physical display or full public access is not possible.

Travelling exhibitions, in turn, can broaden the Museum's presence throughout Poland and across Europe, presenting Belarusian history and contemporary experience in universities, cultural centres, museums, libraries, and public spaces.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

In the short and medium term, the Museum's exhibition programme should focus on the following priorities:

1. Developing thematic exhibitions based primarily on the Museum's own collections.
2. Gradually establishing a core exhibition that introduces the Museum's mission and principal themes.
3. Expanding documentary and memorial exhibitions devoted to the 2020 protests, political prisoners, political repression, exile, and civic resistance.
4. Broadening the historical perspective through exhibitions on the Belarusian democratic and national movements, Belarus's European orientation, and Belarusian-Polish relations.
5. Integrating museum collections with contemporary art, theatre, literature, photography, and performance.
6. Producing multilingual exhibition materials in Belarusian, Polish, and English.
7. Developing digital and travelling exhibitions.
8. Strengthening cooperation with Polish, Belarusian, and European curators, museums, archives, researchers, and cultural institutions.
9. Involving community members, witnesses, donors, former political prisoners, artists, and volunteers in the development of exhibition narratives.
10. Establishing ethical guidelines for working with traumatic experiences, personal testimonies, and sensitive materials.

In conclusion, exhibition and display activities should become not only the Museum's principal means of public presentation but also one of its most important mechanisms for the musealisation of contemporary Belarusian history. Through its exhibitions, the Free Belarus Museum can connect artefacts with personal stories, individual experience with collective meaning, and Belarusian memory with the broader European conversation on freedom, dignity, solidarity, and responsibility.

3.4 Museum Audience

Understanding the audience is one of the key conditions for the development of the Free Belarus Museum. The Museum emerged as a response to the needs of the Belarusian community in exile; however, its potential significance extends far beyond this group. It operates simultaneously with several categories of visitors, each with different motivations, levels of knowledge, language needs, experiences, and expectations.

At the present stage, the Museum's primary audience consists of Belarusians living in Poland and other European countries. This includes people who were forced to leave Belarus due to political repression, the threat of persecution, dismissal from employment, participation in protests, or involvement in civic and cultural activities. For this audience, the Museum is not merely a place for receiving information or attending cultural events. It serves the function of a "home away from home" – a space where visitors can hear the Belarusian language, meet people with similar experiences, maintain a connection with their homeland, pass knowledge about Belarus on to their children, and participate in community life.

A particularly important part of this audience consists of people directly affected by political repression: former political prisoners, families of detainees and those persecuted by the authorities, activists, journalists, artists, human rights defenders, volunteers, participants of protests, and people who were forced into exile because of their civic position. For them, the Museum can serve as a place of testimony, remembrance, support, and dignified representation of personal experiences.

An important audience group is Belarusian children and young people living in exile. This generation is growing up outside Belarus or spending a significant part of its lives within a different cultural and linguistic environment. For them, the Museum can become a place to discover Belarusian history, language, culture, symbols, and contemporary civic experience. Therefore, the development of children's, family, and youth programmes should remain one of the Museum's priorities.

A separate audience group consists of Belarusians who continue to live in Belarus. Physical access to the Museum is limited for them, and participation in public communication may involve personal risks. Nevertheless, this remains one of the most important audiences from the perspective of the Museum's mission. Through digital resources, online collections, virtual exhibitions, educational materials, and careful communication strategies, the Museum can provide access to narratives and testimonies that are censored, suppressed, or erased within Belarus.

Another significant area of audience development is work with Polish visitors. The Museum is located in the centre of Warsaw and should remain understandable, open, and engaging for Polish audiences. These may include people who follow developments in Belarus, support the Belarusian democratic community, are interested in regional history, human rights, cultures of

remembrance, migration, the war in Ukraine, and Belarusian-Polish relations. For this audience, the Museum should provide clear historical context, multilingual materials, and programmes that do not require prior in-depth knowledge of Belarusian history.

The Museum is also oriented towards an international audience, including diplomats, journalists, researchers, students, museum professionals, representatives of human rights, cultural, and educational organisations, tourists, and anyone interested in contemporary Belarus, Eastern Europe, authoritarianism, war, migration, and democratic movements. For this audience, the Museum can serve as a source of knowledge, context, personal stories, and material evidence that helps present Belarus as part of European history and contemporary affairs.

An important group consists of researchers, students, educators, curators, museum professionals, and specialists working in the fields of history, culture, sociology, political science, memory studies, migration, and human rights. For them, the Museum can provide access to collections, documents, personal testimonies, expert networks, research topics, and a platform for professional discussion.

The Museum's audience is not merely passive. A significant number of visitors and programme participants simultaneously act as donors, volunteers, witnesses, partners, experts, organisers, and co-creators of museum activities. This is particularly important for the Free Belarus Museum, as its collections and public programmes are largely built through trust and community participation.

For further development, the Museum needs to study its audience in a more systematic way. Visitor registration is already being conducted, allowing the institution to better understand quantitative indicators. The next step should include qualitative research: surveys, interviews, analysis of visitor motivations, examination of the needs of different linguistic and age groups, assessment of programme accessibility, and evaluation of how the Museum is perceived by Belarusian, Polish, and international audiences.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES IN AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

- 1.** Maintaining and strengthening the trust of the Belarusian community in Poland and other countries.
- 2.** Expanding programmes for children, young people, and families.
- 3.** Developing safe digital formats for Belarusians living inside Belarus.
- 4.** Expanding Polish-language and English-language communication.
- 5.** Creating exhibitions and programmes accessible to visitors without prior knowledge of Belarus.
- 6.** Strengthening cooperation with educational institutions, universities, museums, and cultural organisations.

7. Developing volunteer-based and participatory models of engagement.
8. Conducting regular audience monitoring and evaluating the quality of the museum experience.

In conclusion, the audience of the Free Belarus Museum is not a single homogeneous group, but a complex and diverse community. The Museum must be simultaneously close and safe for Belarusians, understandable for Polish audiences, open to international visitors, and valuable for professional and research communities. Its ability to work effectively with these different audiences will determine its public relevance, quality, and long-term significance.

3.5 Expansion of the Range of Services and Programmes

The expansion of the range of services and programmes offered by the Museum of Free Belarus should be understood not only as a way of attracting additional audiences or generating its own income, but above all as a tool for more fully implementing the museum's mission. Through educational, digital, research, communication and cultural formats, the museum can make its collections, knowledge and public space more accessible to different groups of visitors.

Already today, the museum offers a wide range of public activities: exhibitions, discussions, theatre and film screenings, literary evenings, lectures, meetings, workshops, educational programmes, commemorative events and partner initiatives. In the future, it will be important to systematise these areas, define their connection with the museum's mission and develop those formats that strengthen the museum's identity rather than merely fill the events calendar.

The main directions for expanding services and programmes may include the following.

1. Educational Programmes

Educational activities should become one of the key areas of the museum's development. They may include classes for children and teenagers, family programmes, lectures for adults, thematic courses, educational materials for schools and universities, workshops, summer schools and online courses.

Of particular importance are programmes that help Belarusians in exile maintain a connection with their language, culture and history, while also explaining contemporary Belarus to Polish and international audiences within an understandable historical and cultural context. It is important that educational programmes are based on the museum's collections, personal stories, documents and artefacts, rather than existing separately from the museum's core mission.

2. Digital Products and Online Access

Digital development creates opportunities to engage audiences who are unable to visit the museum physically. This is particularly important for Belarusians living in Belarus, Belarusians in other countries, researchers, journalists, students and international partners.

The museum can develop virtual exhibitions, online collection presentations, digital educational materials, video lectures, podcasts, interactive maps, online games and thematic media resources. Such formats should serve not only the purpose of popularisation, but also provide safe access to knowledge that is censored or suppressed in Belarus.

3. Guided Tours and Visitor Programmes

As exhibition activities develop, the museum can expand its guided tour offer: general tours, thematic exhibition tours, curator-led visits, meetings with donors and witnesses, programmes for school and university groups, as well as specialised routes for Polish and international audiences.

A separate area of development could be the creation of urban routes connected with the Belarusian presence in Warsaw, the history of Belarusian emigration, Belarusian–Polish relations and places of solidarity.

4. Cultural Events and Community Programmes

Cultural events remain an important means of supporting the community and expanding the museum's audience. The museum can continue developing concerts, theatre performances, film screenings, literary events, discussions, and meetings with authors, artists, former political prisoners, veterans, researchers and public figures.

It is important that these events are not a random collection of activities, but rather part of the museum's overall programme policy. They should support the museum's core themes: memory, freedom, human rights, Belarusian culture, the experience of exile, solidarity, European choice, war and responsibility.

5. Research and Expert Programmes

The museum has the potential to become a platform for research into contemporary Belarusian history, memory, emigration, political repression, cultural resistance and Belarusian–Polish relations. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop cooperation with universities, research centres, archives, museums, human rights organisations and independent experts.

Possible formats include research seminars, conferences, round tables, publications, collections of academic materials, internships, summer schools, joint projects with researchers and access to the museum's documentation resources.

6. Programmes for the Professional Community

The Belarusian Museum Laboratory can become the foundation for developing a separate area of services and programmes aimed at museum professionals, curators, archivists, researchers and cultural heritage specialists. These may include training sessions, professional consultations, seminars on museum documentation, preservation, digitisation, exhibition development, ethics and security, as well as joint projects with Polish and European museums.

This direction is important not only for the museum itself, but also for preserving the professional capacity of the Belarusian museum sector in exile.

7. Partner and Representative Events

The museum can continue providing its space for events organised by Belarusian cultural, educational, civic and democratic initiatives, provided that they correspond with the museum's mission and values. This strengthens the museum's role as a community platform and allows it to expand its network of partners.

At the same time, it is necessary to maintain a balance between external events and the museum's own programme, so that the museum does not become merely a rental venue or event space.

8. Museum Shop and Own Revenue Generation

In the future, the museum may develop a museum shop or an online store offering products connected with Belarusian culture, art, museum projects and symbolism. These may include catalogues, publications, postcards, posters, souvenirs, original works and products created in cooperation with Belarusian artists.

This direction can contribute not only to generating the museum's own income, but also to promoting Belarusian culture. At the same time, the commercial aspect should remain supportive in nature and must not conflict with the museum's non-profit mission.

9. Event Organisation Services

The museum's experience in organising cultural and community events can be partially transformed into a service generating additional income. The museum already has experience in preparing and coordinating events, technical organisation, audience communication and cooperation with partners. Developing this area can contribute to financial sustainability, but it requires a clear distinction between commercial services and mission-driven activities.

Thus, the expansion of the range of services and programmes should be linked to three main objectives: increasing the accessibility of the museum, strengthening its social role and supporting institutional sustainability. The Museum of Free Belarus should develop new formats not for the sake of increasing the number of events, but in order to achieve deeper audience engagement, make better use of its collections, expand its educational and research impact, and create long-term value for the Belarusian, Polish and international communities.

3.6 Development of the Museum Communication Model

The museum communication model of the Museum of Free Belarus is based on the understanding of the museum as an open space for memory, dialogue, participation and public reflection on contemporary Belarusian history. The museum not only preserves and displays objects, but also creates connections between collections, people, communities, researchers, partners and different audiences.

For the Museum of Free Belarus, communication has particular importance. It operates in exile and works with topics that are censored, suppressed or persecuted inside Belarus. Therefore, its communication must be simultaneously open, accurate, ethical and secure. The museum must explain the Belarusian experience to those who are unfamiliar with it, maintain connections with those who have been forced to leave Belarus, and carefully engage with audiences inside the country without creating additional risks.

The main principles of the museum communication model can be formulated as follows.

1. Openness and Accessibility

The museum seeks to remain open to different audiences: Belarusians in Poland and other countries, Belarusians inside Belarus, Polish audiences, international visitors, researchers, journalists, students, cultural and civic organisations. This requires the development of multilingual communication, clear contextual explanations, accessible navigation, understandable exhibition texts and digital resources.

Free access to the museum and most of its programmes is of particular importance. It makes the museum accessible to people with different financial capacities, including forced migrants, families, students and people who have experienced repression.

2. Communication Through Collections and Personal Stories

The main strength of the museum's communication lies in the connection between objects and human stories. Protest artefacts, documents related to repression, personal belongings of political prisoners, artworks, objects connected with emigration, belongings of Belarusian volunteers and historical documents should not be presented in isolation, but through the context of the people and events with which they are connected.

This approach helps avoid abstraction and ideological simplification. It makes history understandable, emotionally accurate and human, while preserving respect for facts and the museum's responsibility.

3. Community Participation

The museum develops communication not as a one-way transmission of information, but as a process of interaction. The community participates in the life of the museum through donating objects, providing testimonies, volunteering, giving presentations, offering consultations, organising events, and participating in artistic and educational projects.

Former political prisoners, families of those subjected to repression, activists, artists, researchers, veterans, children and young people become not only an audience, but also co-creators of the museum's meaning.

Such a participatory model is particularly important for a museum working with living and traumatic memory. Community trust is a key condition for collecting materials, documenting testimonies and publicly presenting complex topics.

4. A Bridge Between Belarusian, Polish and International Communities

The Museum of Free Belarus should serve as an interpreter of the Belarusian experience for Polish and international audiences. This means not only translating texts into Polish and English, but also translating the broader context: explaining historical causes, political circumstances, cultural symbols, personal choices and social processes.

The museum can become a place where Belarus is presented not only as a subject of political crisis, but also as a culture, a society and a European community with its own history, voice and future. In this sense, museum communication should contribute to Belarusian–Polish dialogue, solidarity and a deeper understanding of the contemporary challenges facing the region.

5. Ethical and Secure Communication

Since the museum works with people and materials that may be connected with political risks, its communication must take security considerations into account. Not all stories can be published in their entirety, not all names can be disclosed, and not all materials can be openly displayed online. The museum should develop internal procedures for working with personal data, publication consent, anonymisation, photo and video materials, as well as digital security risks.

Ethical communication also means respect for traumatic experiences. The museum should not use suffering, repression or war merely as tools of emotional impact without proper context and respect. The fundamental principle should remain the dignified representation of people and their stories.

6. Digital Communication

Digital channels are among the most important tools of museum communication. The website, social media, online collections, video materials, online events, newsletters and digital exhibitions allow the museum to expand its audience far beyond Warsaw.

It is particularly important that digital formats can provide access for Belarusians inside Belarus and for the diaspora in different countries. However, this requires a balance between openness and security: the museum should make materials accessible while ensuring that people connected with these materials are not exposed to risk.

7. Communication as Education

Every exhibition message, public event, guided tour, social media post or online resource can serve an educational function. The museum should not only inform audiences about its activities, but also gradually build understanding of Belarusian history, culture, political repression, the democratic movement, emigration and the European choice.

This requires the development of high-quality content that combines accuracy, accessible language, visual clarity and respect for the complexity of the subject. The museum's communication should not function merely as promotion aimed at increasing attendance, but as part of its educational and public mission.

8. Partnership Communication

The museum operates within a broad network of cultural, civic, educational, human rights and museum partnerships. Partnership communication allows the museum to expand its audience, combine resources, create more complex projects and present Belarusian issues in different contexts.

At the same time, it is important that partnerships remain consistent with the museum's mission and values. The museum should preserve its own voice and curatorial responsibility, even when projects are implemented jointly with other organisations.

| NEAR-TERM DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

1. Expanding communication in Belarusian, Polish and English.
2. More systematic work with the website and online collection.
3. Developing digital formats for Belarusians inside Belarus and the diaspora.
4. Creating a unified communication style connected with the museum's identity.
5. Preparing multilingual exhibition and educational materials.
6. Developing newsletters, media partnerships and relations with Polish journalists.
7. Conducting audience research and analysing communication effectiveness.
8. Developing ethical guidelines for publishing sensitive materials.
9. Strengthening communication with the professional museum community through the Belarusian Museum Laboratory.

10. Expanding the museum's presence in the Polish and European cultural sphere.

Thus, the museum communication model of the Museum of Free Belarus should develop as a system of open, secure and responsible dialogue. It should connect collections with stories, the Belarusian community with Polish and international audiences, the physical museum space with digital access, and contemporary traumatic memory with a long-term understanding of Belarusian history and its European future.

CONCLUSION



The Museum of Free Belarus was created during a period of profound historical rupture, when Belarusian society faced mass repression, forced emigration, the destruction of independent cultural space, and attempts by an authoritarian regime to erase the memory of civic resistance. In these circumstances, the Museum emerged as a necessary institution for preserving testimonies, supporting the community, and affirming the right of Belarusians to their own history.

During the first years of its existence, the Museum of Free Belarus has developed from an urgent civic initiative into a multifunctional museum and cultural institution in Warsaw. It has acquired legal status, built a team, created and expanded its collection, launched systematic documentation and digitisation of objects, established a rich public programme, strengthened partnerships, and become one of the important Belarusian cultural centres in Poland.

Today, the Museum of Free Belarus performs several interconnected roles. It is a museum and documentation centre that preserves material evidence of Belarusian struggles for freedom, human dignity, human rights, and a European future. It is a cultural home for Belarusians in exile, a place of meeting, memory, support, and solidarity. It is a platform for public dialogue with Polish and international society, helping to present the Belarusian experience within a broader European context. It is also becoming a professional hub for the Belarusian museum community in exile.

The main value of the Museum lies in the fact that it works with memory that is still being formed. Objects, documents, and personal stories entering the Museum are often connected with living experiences of repression, displacement, war, loss, and resistance. Therefore, museum work requires exceptional ethical, professional, and human responsibility. The Museum must not only collect and present artefacts, but also preserve the trust of people who share their stories, protect sensitive materials, and create conditions for a dignified public understanding of complex experiences.

The updated Concept is based on the understanding that the Museum of Free Belarus cannot be viewed merely as a temporary platform until the moment of return to Belarus. It already possesses independent institutional, cultural, and social value in Warsaw and Europe. At the same time, its connection with Belarus and its potential future role in a democratic Belarus remain part of its strategic vision. The Museum should develop in a way that allows it to respond to different scenarios: continued existence as a museum in exile, functioning as a national archive of Belarusian memory in the event of further deterioration of the situation, or participation in the restoration of museum and documentation infrastructure in Belarus following democratic change.

The further development of the Museum should be based on strengthening its museum foundations. Priorities include the development of collection policies, improvement of preservation conditions, professionalisation of museum documentation, expansion of digitisation, creation of research and educational resources, development of digital access, strengthening of the team, and ensuring financial sustainability. Particular attention should be given to work with audiences, including Belarusians inside Belarus, the Belarusian diaspora, Polish audiences, international visitors, researchers, children, and young people.

The Museum of Free Belarus should continue to develop as an open yet responsible institution. Its multifunctional character — as a museum, documentation centre, cultural platform, educational resource, community space, and professional hub — is not a weakness but a distinctive feature. At the same time, this requires a constant balance between an active public programme and deep museum work, between immediate responses to current events and long-term preservation, between openness and security.

The Concept is not a closed or unchangeable document. It should remain a framework that can be reviewed and adjusted depending on the Museum's development, changes in Belarus, the needs of the community, professional standards, and the international context. Its purpose is not to confine the Museum within a single model, but to define the direction of development and the principles that will allow it to grow under complex and unpredictable conditions.

The Museum of Free Belarus is an institution of memory created in exile, yet oriented towards the future. It preserves evidence of what an authoritarian system seeks to destroy or rewrite. It supports a community that was forced to leave its homeland but has not abandoned it. It presents Belarus to Polish and international audiences as a European country with its own history of freedom, resistance, and dignity. Therefore, its further development is important not only for the Belarusian diaspora, but also for the future of Belarusian culture, memory, and democracy.

