

ARTISTS AT RISK

a Perpetuum Mobilization

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The Minister of Migration of the Government of Sweden
The Swedish Migration Agency

February 19, 2019

Your Excellency Morgan Johansson, Minister of Justice,
The Honorable Magistrates of the Stockholm Migration Court

We, the undersigned, are writing to you to raise our concerns following the denial of asylum to members of the group **Pussy Riot**, **Lusine Dzijanyan** and **Alexey Knedlyakovsky** (known to the court as Nekrasov) and their children. Swedish and international human rights legislation protects individuals from extradition to countries where they face persecution. We believe that this legislation very much applies in the case of these members of Pussy Riot.

We urge you, the Stockholm Migration Court and the Minister of Justice of the Government of Sweden, to reconsider the decision to refuse the Dzijanyan-Knedlyakovsky family asylum in Sweden. In our considered estimation, their well-being, freedom and even their lives have been and continue to be at genuine risk.

Following a long series of well-documented infringements on their freedom of expression - both artistic and political - as well as open forms of intimidation, censorship and imprisonment, the Dzijanyan-Knedlyakovsky family left Russia and applied for asylum in Sweden on March 16, 2017.

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While Lusine Dzhanyan and Alexey Knedlyakovsky have been living in Sweden with their first child Tigran, they have had another son, Levon, born on 16 August 2018.

Following this application, Lusine Dzhanyan and Alexey Knedlyakovsky have been denied political asylum in Sweden in the first instance in an universally unexpected decision by the Swedish Migration Agency.

We, the undersigned, have well-founded concerns that Lusine Dzhanyan and Alexey Knedlyakovsky would be at risk of further repression if they are returned to Russia. This conclusion is drawn based on our knowledge of similar instances of persecution of artists, activists and politicians who are critical of the Russian government. The Migration Agency itself points out that “the increasingly harsh climate in Russia is particularly affecting those who are critical of Putin.”

The Migration Agency noted that it did not find the repressive measures against Lusine Dzhanyan and Alexey Knedlyakovsky to be “disproportionate”, or sustained consistently enough to merit the title of “persecution”. Yet the persecution by the Russian authorities of members of Pussy Riot and the violations of their freedom of expression has been an internationally recognized issue for many years.

The serious nature of this persecution has been proven once more *in extremis* recently through the case of **Pyotr Verzilov** who is, like the Dzhanyan-Knedlyakovskys, closely associated with the Pussy Riot group. Shortly after his participation in an intervention for basic rights at the 2018 FIFA World Cup Final, he was severely poisoned. He was subsequently hospitalized, and barely escaped with his life.

Knedlyakovsky and Dzhanyan have themselves faced violence at the hand of the Russian authorities following their participation in a protest with Pussy Riot against the 2014 Winter Olympics, held in Sochi. Further to this, Knedlyakovsky was jailed for 15 days following a protest he staged in Krasnodar in 2016. The full list of infringements of the rights of members of the Pussy Riot group is far longer.

We also would also like to remind the Your Excellencies of the murder of **Boris Nemtsov**, former Deputy Prime Minister and leader of an opposition party. Aleksey Knedlyakovsky was an active member of this party. He was compelled to leave Moscow for Krasnodar due to his continuous persecution by Russian institutions.

Given this clear evidence it is evident that, should they be returned to Russia, the continuous risk of their further repressive measures (not finding employment), harm (by third-party actors), imprisonment or worse is high, and indeed, to be fully expected.

Under international human rights law, Sweden is obliged not to return a person to a country where they are subject to persecution and risk of serious human rights violations. As such we urge Your Excellencies to ensure that Lusine Dzhanyan and Alexey Knedlyakovsky, and their family, are not forcibly returned to Russia. We appeal to you to reverse the initial decision of the Stockholm Migration Court and give the Dzhanyan-Nekrasov (Knedlyakovsky) family political asylum in Sweden.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. We remain at your disposal should you seek further information or clarification."

Yours Sincerely,



Ivor Stodolsky and Marita Muukkonen
Co-Founding Directors
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Jan Lothe Eriksen
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