

Dear Iryna,

Just a little flare to you, from the Amsterdam rain. It is grey above the canals, but the streets are full of excited children: today Sinterklaas arrived in the city, the Dutch Santa Calls. According to tradition he came in an old steamboat, full of presents from Spain. That is the folk story here, and that is how it is still told in modern Amsterdam families, with songs and all.

It's a small part of normal life here, and my heart breaks when I realize that you have been missing things like this for so long. Your fate, and that of so many others, hangs like a shadow over our existence these years. Because you are not only fighting for your country and your world, but just as much for us, for our world and for the values and ideals that we have in common across Europe.

Know that we are very aware of this, even in this distant and peaceful Amsterdam. And that we think of you and stand next to you. Because no matter how great the distance is at the moment, literally and figuratively, you are one of us.

Hold on, be embraced,

Geert