

The information is aggregated from open source online resources and our own practice. In these newsletters, we will update you in brief on everyday human rights violations in numbers and facts.

### **Summary: Saturday 13 February to Friday 19 February 2021**

Human Rights Center “Viasna” reports that human rights activists have recognised 10 people as political prisoners. Nine of them were charged under articles of mass disorder; one was sentenced to four years in prison in a maximum security colony.

In total, as of 19 February, 253 people in Belarus have been recognised as political prisoners.

On 12 February 2021, Belarusian opposition Coordination Council member Maria Kolesnikova and her lawyer Maxim Znak, who have been imprisoned since September 2020, were charged with new offences, “Plotting to seize state power in an unconstitutional manner” and “Organising and controlling an extremist group”.<sup>1</sup> Previously, Kolesnikova was charged with “Publicly calling for actions threatening national security”.<sup>2</sup> Alexander Lukashenko’s key rival, Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya, as well as other exiled opposition leaders, including Pavel Latushko, Olga Kovalkovskaya, Sergey Dylevskiy, were charged under the same laws.<sup>3</sup>

Marfa Rabkova, a well-known human rights defender from Human Rights Center “Viasna”, was charged with two more ‘extremist’ offences — “Inciting hatred or bias” and “Organising a criminal group or joining it”.<sup>4</sup> Previously, Rabkova was charged with “Training and other preparation of people to take part in mass riots, or financing such activities”.<sup>5</sup>

The KGB added 17 Belarusians to the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities. All Belarusians added on 12 February 2021 to the updated KGB list are charged under Art. 289 (Act of Terrorism) of the Criminal Code of Belarus.<sup>6</sup>

### **The right to defence**

On 19 February, the Ministry of Justice decided to terminate the licence of lawyer Lyudmila Kazak, who is currently defending the prominent activist and political prisoner Maria Kalesnikava; the loss of her licence made it impossible for Kazak to continue practicing law. This is Kalesnikava’s fourth lawyer who is disbarred.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthias Williams, Reuters, [Two opponents of Belarus leader face more jail time as he floats reform](#).

<sup>2</sup> Meduza, [Belarusian opposition leader Maria Kolesnikova charged with threatening national security](#).

<sup>3</sup> Meduza, [Светлану Тихановскую объявили в розыск в России](#).

<sup>4</sup> TUT.BY, [Белорусской правозащитнице Марфе Рабковой предъявлено обвинение еще по двум статьям УК. Ей грозит до 12 лет](#).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/718940.html?c>

<sup>7</sup> <https://spring96.org/ru/news/101863>

Earlier, the licences were revoked from: Alexander Pylchenko, who represented the interests of Viktor Babaryka and Maria Kalesnikava; Ilya Salei, who is under house arrest; and Maxim Znak, who has been in jail for five months already.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, three more prominent lawyers went through the disbarment consideration process, including lawyer Mikhail Kirilyuk for “Incorrect expressions against representatives of state bodies on the Internet”, which is an act, according to the Ministry of Justice, “incompatible with the title of a lawyer”.<sup>9</sup> All of them were disbarred.

### **Pressure on human rights defenders and journalists**

Journalists and human rights activists in different cities were subjected to 90 searches. Among them were the offices of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), the Human Rights Center “Viasna”, and the independent trade union REP. According to the Investigative Committee, the searches are being carried out “In order to establish the circumstances of financing the protest activities”.<sup>10</sup>

In Belarus, a draft law on foreign agents is starting to be developed, according to which individuals and organisations that receive funding for political activities from abroad are proposed to be included.<sup>11</sup>

### **Right to fair trial**

On Wednesday 17 February, the trial began in the ‘Case of Belgazprombank’ and Viktor Babariko, who attempted to become Lukashenko’s main rival in the presidential elections in August 2020. The case is being considered by the Supreme Court in the Moscow district court building.<sup>12</sup>

Belsat journalists Darya Chultsova and Katerina Bakhvalova were sentenced to two years in a general regime colony for a live stream from the Square of Changes.<sup>13</sup>

### **Links to recent international organisations’ statements on Belarus**

- [Article 19](#)
- [OSCE](#)
- [FIDH](#)
- [HRW](#)

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<sup>8</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/718632.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/718917.html?c>

<sup>10</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/719061.html?c>

<sup>11</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/719131.html?c>

<sup>12</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/719206.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/719354.html>