

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 3 April 2021 to Friday 9 April 2021

Crackdown on human rights defenders and civil society activists

On 5 April 2021, the homes of human rights defender Tatiana Gatsura-Yavorkaya and activists Natalia Trenina and Yulia Semchenko were searched. The searches were related to an exhibition they organised called 'The Machine is Breathing, but I Am Not'. The exhibition was dedicated to Belarusian medical workers and patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, the politicisation of healthcare, and the pressure exerted on doctors. It opened on 30 March 2021 and was promptly closed by the decision of Belarusian authorities. Following the search, Gatsura-Yavorkaya was arrested and charged with a criminal offence.

On 6 April 2021, the house of human rights defender Enira Bronitskaya was searched, following a search at her parents' apartment. At the time of the search she was at home with her children. The law enforcement officers turned off electricity in her apartment during the search and confiscated all technical equipment, including her children's laptops, and personal funds. On 7 April 2021, she was called in for questioning by the Investigative Committee.

The recent cases of persecuting human rights defenders are part of a larger pattern of exerting constant pressure on activists. Searches were previously conducted at the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Human Rights Center "Viasna". Several human rights defenders are currently behind bars, including Marfa Rabkova, Andrei Chapiuk, Leanid Sudalenka, Tatsiana Lasitsa, and Aleh Hrableuski, while Siarhei Drazdouski is under house arrest.¹ All of them have been recognised as political prisoners.²

Recently, it was announced that public pressure on non-governmental organisations would continue, given the government's course of "dealing with all suspicious organisations".³

Political dissenters under criminal persecution

The State Security Committee (KGB) updated the list of "organisations and individuals connected to terrorist activities". There are 18 new names on the list, including:

- Former presidential candidate and politician Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya;
- Former diplomat and head of the [National Anti-Crisis Management](#) Pavel Latushka;
- Blogger and author of a popular Telegram channel, 'MotolkoHelp', Anton Motolko;
- Former law enforcement officer, Igor Makar;
- Former law enforcement officer and one of the co-founders of the 'BYPOL' initiative, Andrey Ostapovich;

¹

<https://humanconstanta.by/zayavlenie-o-nedopustimosti-davleniya-na-tatyanyu-gacuru-yavorskuyu-i-eniru-bronickuyu/>

² <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>

³ <https://news.tut.by/society/725405.html?tg>

- Former state investigator, Svetlana Khilko; and
- Former law enforcement officer, Stanislav Luponosov.⁴

Previously, the General Prosecutor's office opened a criminal case against Tsikhanouskaya and the 'BYPOL' initiative for allegedly planning two terror attacks that Belarusian law enforcement officers were able to prevent. This is the fourth criminal charge brought against Tsikhanouskaya since October and the second against the 'BYPOL' initiative.⁵

Another criminal case was brought against the founder of the Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation and two times Olympic runner-up, Aliaksandra Herasimenia, and the Foundation's executive director, Alexander Opeikin. While both had left Belarus, their houses in Belarus were searched.⁶ According to the official comment of the Investigative Committee, they have harmed the national security of Belarus by "spreading misinformation about the presidential election results" and advocating for the cancellation of sports events, including the now cancelled World Ice Hockey Championship.⁷

Civic tech project '23.34' reports on mass repression

Online initiative '23.34', launched to monitor the conditions of detention in Belarusian facilities and document human rights violations, published its first report.⁸ The report is based on submissions from more than 5,000 people who were charged with violation of Article 23.34 (now 24.23) of the Code of Administrative Offences for "unauthorised public gatherings". Some of the data systematised by the report is given below:

- in 26% of reported cases law enforcement officers used physical violence during detention, and in 52% of reported cases psychological violence was used;
- in 71% of reported cases people stayed in detention until trial;
- in 58% of reported cases relatives of the detainees were not informed about their detention;
- in 47% of reported cases lawyers were not allowed into police stations, and in 16% they were denied access to court proceedings;
- in 95% of reported cases the detained individuals stated that the witness statements of police officers were false; and
- in 91% of reported cases the conditions of detention were in violation of rules and standards of detention.

⁴ <https://news.tut.by/economics/724986.html?c>

⁵ <https://news.tut.by/economics/724320.html?c>

⁶ <https://sport.tut.by/news/aboutsport/724987.html?c>

⁷ <https://sport.tut.by/news/aboutsport/724987.html?c>

⁸ <https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/5458afac-84dd-4ec8-bb61-6ff5c2990e5c/page/1i4sB>