

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 8 May 2021 to Tuesday 18 May 2021

A year since the beginning of the presidential election campaign 2020

On 8 May 2020, the presidential election campaign started in Belarus, marking the unification of civil society, as well as the start of mass political repressions in Belarus, which continue until the present day, with the number of political prisoners being 397¹.

Two key members of Viktor Babaryka campaign team Maryia Kalesnikava and Maxim Znak, detained in September 2020, – were officially charged with unconstitutional seizure of power, creating and operating an extremist organization, endangering national security.² They may be sentenced up to 12 years of imprisonment.

Freedom of speech

On 18 May 2021 an unprecedented attack on TUT.BY, an independent media outlet with 20 million unique daily visitors, that has extensively covered the demonstrations and the violent crackdown by the authorities took place. The agents of the Belarusian Financial Investigation Department (DFR)³ have searched TUT.by offices in Minsk as well as the regional offices Brest, Vitsebsk and Hrodna.⁴ The Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus has blocked tut.by website.⁵ Chief editor Marina Zolotova was also one of the targets of the raid.⁶

The European Union delegation to Belarus condemned the crackdown on Tut.by, saying that the media outlet has been “the flagship of Belarusian journalism for the past 20 years, read and appreciated by most Internet users in the country and many beyond it, as well as by diplomats working with Belarus.”⁷

Students and human rights

On 14 May 2020, the Oktyabrsky District Court of Minsk began to consider the “case of students” who were detained last November and accused of organizing and preparing actions that grossly violate public order. There are 12 accused in total: ten students from different Minsk universities, a medical graduate and a teacher. For more than six months they have

¹ <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>

² <https://news.tut.by/economics/729898.html?tg>; <https://news.tut.by/economics/730027.html>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57156836>

⁴

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/18-05-2021-popular-media-outlet-tut-by-in-crosshairs-raids-on-offices-journos-homes/>

⁵ <http://mininform.gov.by/news/all/ogranichenie-dostupa-k-internet-resursam-tut-by/>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/tutby/status/1394556073630130176>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/EUinBelarus/posts/3980157412033566>

been detained. Hundred people came to the courthouse, few managed to get inside. Journalists of independent media were barred from attending.⁸

Over the past 8 months of the study year, Belarusian Students' Association and Student Initiative Group have collected evidence of 466 detained and 153 expelled students.⁹

Suppression of workers' rights

Anatoliy Bokun – the chair of the strike committee at state-owned company “Belaruskaliy” was detained on 8 May 2021. His parents' house was searched. Later, the local police department confirmed his detention.¹⁰

Digital and human rights

Access to 99 (+25 since January) websites, including independent media and human rights organisations, remains blocked. On 17 May, 2021 the Ministry of Information's took the decision to block access to human rights support website Probono.by, which was launched in 2020 during mass protests in the aftermath of the presidential election.

Probono.by is an aggregator of open initiatives that help victims of human right violations and those who need assistance in connection with detentions and arrests. It is worth noting that the project is organised on a volunteer basis by human rights activists. The website contains details of more than 200 initiatives and information resources, including legal support, medical and psychological assistance.

Access to the website was blocked not only in Belarus, the site could not be accessed even using a VPN and from abroad, as access to the server itself was blocked. According to representatives from the initiative, this was due to the fact that probono.by is hosted in Belarus and the server is physically located in the data centre of Beltelecom (the national telecommunications company). After being blocked, the initiative moved the website to a different server, making it possible for people to access it from abroad and via VPN.¹¹

To understand more about recent challenges in the field of digital rights - visit our recent [analytical article](#).

⁸ <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-12-young-activists-trial-protests-minsk/31255087.html>

⁹ <https://zbsunion.by/en>

¹⁰ <https://news.tut.by/society/729786.html?tg>

¹¹ <https://www.article19.org/resources/belarus-officials-block-access-to-human-rights-website/>