

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 10 July 2021 to Friday 16 July 2021

Crackdown on human rights defenders and non-profits

Since early morning on 14 July 2021, the largest crackdown on human rights and civil society organisations has taken place across all Belarus regions.¹ The following organisations have been searched:

- “Territory of rights” (“Территория прав”) Initiative, Minsk;
- “Lawtrend” Center of Legal Transformation, Minsk;
- “Names” (“Имена”) Platform, Minsk;
- “For freedom” (“За свободу”) Movement, Minsk;
- Belarusian National Front Party, Minsk;
- Belarusian Association of Journalists, Minsk,
- “Fatherland” (“Бацькаўшчына”) Union of Belarusians of the World, Minsk;
- “BEROC” Economic Research Center, Minsk;
- “Gender perspectives” Human Rights Organisation, Minsk;
- Office for European Expertise and Communications, Minsk;
- “Advocacy” (“Адвокацыя”) Legal Information Support Center for Socially Disadvantaged Groups, Polotsk;
- “Third sector” (“Третьй сектор”) Center, Grodno;
- Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Minsk;
- Union of Belarusian writers, Minsk;
- Lev Sapega Foundation, Minsk;
- Novak Laboratory, Minsk.

The following individuals have been searched and/or detained:

- Director of investors’ group Angel’s Band Nina Labkovich – detained in a criminal case;
- Human rights defender and head of “Viasna” human rights center Ales Bialiatski – detained in a criminal case;
- Human rights defender and board member of “Viasna” human rights center Valiantsin Stefanovich – detained in a criminal case;
- Journalist and human rights defender Siarhei Sys – searched and detained in a criminal case;
- Human rights defender Alena Laptcionak – searched and detained in a criminal case;
- Human rights defender Andrei Paluda – searched and detained in a criminal case;
- Human rights defender Yauheniya Babajeva – searched and detained in a criminal case;

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<https://belsat.eu/en/news/14-07-2021-en-masse-police-raiding-offices-of-belarusian-human-rights-organisations-flats-of-activists/>

- Human rights defender and director of “Lawtrend” center of legal transformation Volha Smalyanka – searched;
- Human rights defender Aleh Matskevich – interrogated;
- Human rights defender Ihar Kazmerchak – interrogated;
- Human rights defender Viktor Sazonau – searched and detained;
- Former employee of “Viasna” human rights center Marina Statkevich – searched and detained;
- Founder of “Names” (“Имена”) platform Katsyaryna Sinyuk – searched;
- Economist Yaraslau Ramanchuk – searched, the detention status is unknown;
- Politician Anatoly Lyabedzko – searched;
- Member of “Belarusian School Association” (“Таварыства беларускай школы”) organisation Tamara Matskevich – searched;
- Member of “Community” (“Супольнасць”) center Syarhei Matskevich – searched and detained in a criminal case;
- Human rights defender with Human Constanta Kiryl Kafanau – searched;
- Head of division of free labour union in Polatsk Mikalai Sharakh – searched and detained in a criminal case;
- Activist Arina Korshunava – detained for several hours;
- Activist Alexander Rutkevich – detained for several hours;
- Human rights defender Uladzimir Labkovich – detained in a criminal case;
- Head of the Belarusian Union of Writers Baris Pyatrovich – searched;
- Activist Alexander Kharyton – detained in a criminal case;
- Chair of the board of “Post” education center Safija Jemialjanava – searched;
- Director of SYMPA/BIPART Natalia Ryabova – searched;
- Human rights defender Ales Derhachou – searched and interrogated;
- Poet Lera Som – searched and interrogated;
- Vice chair of the “For Freedom” (“За свободу”) movement Viktor Yanchurevich – searched;
- Director of the “Names” (“Имена”) platform Katsyaryna Syarheeva – searched;
- Activist Artur Yusupau – interrogated;
- Member of the United Civil Party (“Объединённая гражданская партия”) Olha Belyavtsova – searched.²

Last week, during a crackdown on the journalists’ community, the State Security Committee (KGB) called the actions of law enforcement authorities “a purge to clean up radicals”.³ Following attacks on human rights defenders and civil society activists this week, Amnesty International’s Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Marie Struthers, and the US Ambassador to Belarus, Julie Fisher, have made statements condemning the new wave of repression in Belarus.⁴

² <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/352.html>

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<https://belsat.eu/en/news/09-07-2021-kgb-reports-large-scale-clean-up-operation-results-of-thursday-s-attack-on-press-and-activists/>

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<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/belarus-sweeping-crackdown-on-civil-society-organizations-must-be-stopped/>;

Persecution of lawyers

Following the disbarment of one of the most famous Belarusian lawyers, Dmitriy Laevski, last week,⁵ lawyer Anton Gashinskiy was deprived of his licence on 14 July 2021.⁶ In recent months, Gashinskiy has been representing the interests of defendants in politically motivated cases, including journalists. Recently Gashinskiy was representing the interests of Sophia Sapego, who was arrested together with Raman Pratasevich. Commenting on a series of disbarments, the chair of the Disciplinary commission of the Belarusian Republican Bar Association, Tatsiana Tkachenok, said that the disbarred lawyers “have no one to blame for their disbarments but themselves”.⁷

On 15 July 2021, two more lawyers, Katsyaryna Zheltonoga and Valery Zvyagintsev, were disbarred.⁸

New politically motivated sentences

The key developments in politically motivated cases include:

- Four volunteers from the “Country for Life” initiative, who packed food parcels and hygiene products for prisoners, face criminal charges for “financing extremists” under Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code, punishable by up to six years in prison;⁹
- Alyaksandr Ivulin, a journalist at sports media outlet Tribuna, blogger, and football player for the Krumkachy team, was detained on criminal charges of organising actions that grossly violate public order under Article 342 of the Criminal Code;¹⁰
- After receiving a five-year sentence in late February,¹¹ political prisoner Mikita Zalatarou was sentenced to another 1.5 years of imprisonment for “using violence against a law enforcement officer”. Mikita is underage and suffers from epilepsy.¹²

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/14-07-2021-criminalizing-independent-voices-us-envoy-julie-fisher-comments-on-crackdown-on-belarus-civil-society/>

⁵ https://t.me/s/advokat_laevski

⁶ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/329.html?tg>

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https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/341.html?utm_source=news.zerkalo.io&utm_medium=news-bottom-block&utm_campaign=relevant_news

⁸ <http://mediazona.by/news/2021/07/15/minyst>

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<https://belsat.eu/en/news/13-07-2021-minsk-volunteers-who-packed-food-parcels-for-prisoners-face-criminal-charge-for-financing-extremists/>

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<https://belsat.eu/en/news/12-07-2021-sports-journo-alyaksandr-ivulin-under-criminal-charge-for-blocking-road/>

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<https://belsat.eu/en/news/22-02-2021-homiel-underage-person-with-epilepsy-gets-5-year-jail-term-over-mass-riots/>

¹²

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/14-07-2021-underage-political-prisoner-mikita-zalatarou-gets-another-sentence-he-suffers-from-epilepsy/>

Torture and ill-treatment in Belarusian prisons

Political prisoner Ihar Losik wrote in a letter about what is happening in the prison where he is being held. He wrote of humiliation practices used against prisoners, “endless undressing, naked squatting, being escorted in handcuffs in a ‘swallow’ position”. In the letter he mentions feeling “like a prisoner in Auschwitz”.¹³

Another prisoner and the leader of the Belarusian People’s Front Party, Ryhor Kastusiou, has suggested that he has developed cancer during detention.¹⁴

Migration crisis at the border

As the migration crisis at the Belarusian–Lithuanian border continues to unfold, the Lithuanian Parliament has passed a resolution to allow mass detention of asylum seekers. Despite the concerns of civil society organisations about the violation of migrants’ human rights, the Lithuanian authorities state that they would qualify migrants as participants of Belarusian “hybrid aggression” against Lithuania.¹⁵ The notion of hybrid aggression is not defined in international law, and the permissibility of mass detention policies against migrants is brought into question by local and international actors.

Political prisoners

As of 16 July 2021, the total number of political prisoners in Belarus is 563.¹⁶ The number continues to grow daily.

¹³ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/11-07-2021-ihar-losik-writes-about-humiliation-in-homiel-detention-center/>

¹⁴ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/14-07-2021-jailed-politician-ryhor-kastusiou-suspects-he-has-cancer/>

¹⁵

https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lithuanian-parliament-votes-allow-mass-detention-asylum-seeker-s-2021-07-13/?fbclid=IwAR1XE88P3lv3u0yIZznQ1qxcq4C0atVb0-67xfFwkBCj_xplYcHiZon4IZM

¹⁶ <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>