PUBLIC REPORT 2016-2017

Human Constanța is quite a young organization in the Belarusian human rights sphere. It has been only 18 months since we launched our page on Facebook and only a year since we registered officially. Human Constanța has emerged as our response to contemporary challenges for human rights in Belarus. We focus on: a) fundamental rights of refugees and migrants; b) rights and freedoms in the digital era; c) fighting discrimination. In this general report, we would like to share with you our achievements and challenges we face.
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ALEXEY KOZLIUK

Human rights defender, jurist, researcher. Worked with research and legal issues in the Legal Transformation Center Lawtrend until 2016. Expert in the topic of access to information of the public sector, freedom of information online, privacy and data protection. Alexey took internship in the International Center for Non-Profit Law (USA) on the issue of restricting access to content under different jurisdictions; participated in the in the International Leadership Program 2014 (USA) and John Smith Trust Fellowship 2017 (Great Britain).

NASTA LOIKA

Jurist, trainer, human rights defender. Master of international and European law. She worked with the Committee for the Protection of the Repressed Sašudamiasts (Belarus) until 2010, and she has been a lawyer for the Human Rights Center Vyasa since 2010. Nasta actively participates in international human rights defense observation missions, holds trainings in the sphere of human rights education and enlightenment for youth, she drives the initiative of supporting migrants in Belarus. Nasta is an expert in the issues of forceful migration, legal aid to refugees, and the issues of antidiscrimination and equality. She participated in the International Leadership Program 2014 (USA).

VAŁDZIS FUHAŠ

Human rights defender, trainer, expert on educational and enlightening events in the sphere of human rights, humanism, antimilitarism, anti-totalitarianism, antiracism. He is a co-founder of the educational and enlightening initiative Praunija Darektary, of the Mahiloč human rights defense group (the initiative for the defense and promotion of human rights in the sphere of mental health in Belarus); he participates in the Youth Human Rights Defense Group-Belarus; in the Youth Human Rights Movement, and in the Youth Peace Ambassadors Network under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

YANA GONCHAROVA

Human rights defender. In 2015, she joined the Russian volunteer project RosUznik and became its coordinator; she specializes in rendering aid to Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia. Beside coordination of the project, she works with individual cases of political prisoners directly. Yana has been a journalist for Russian and Ukrainian media. She participated in the International Center for Journalist Program 2016 (USA) and John Smith Trust Fellowship 2017 (Great Britain).
ANNA BARANOVSKAYA

Jurist, human rights defender. Master of the international law. Anna has been in human rights defense and promotion since 2003; she worked with the Belarus Human Rights House in Vilnius (2012 – 2013), the Office for Democratic Belarus (2014 – 2016). Currently, Anna is an invited expert at the Helsinki Human Rights House (Warsaw), and a co-founder of the initiative Carbon-Free Travel. She participated in numerous international internships and research projects. Her sphere of competences includes the international law, project activities, enhancing organizational potential. In 2016, she completed the course Project Management Professional (PMP) / Technion University (Israel).

ANDREY SUSHKO

Human rights defender, jurist and analyst. He is an expert in the issues of access to information in the public sector, electronic government and citizen participation in decision-making online. He has profile education in the sphere of public governance at the Academy under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Belarus and at the Warsaw University. Andrey worked at the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the Committee for the Protection of the Repressed Salidarnasts, and the Center for Legal Transformation Lawtrend; has been a consultant in education and human rights for the Office for Rights of People with Disabilities and for the Belarusian National Youth Council RADA. He is also an invited expert for SYMPA/Bipart.

ENIRA BRONITSKAYA

Jurist, human rights defender. She has worked with human rights issues over 15 years. She was the deputy head of the civil initiative Partnership that observed elections in Belarus; then she was the deputy head of the Committee for the Protection of the Repressed Salidarnasts. She was the head of the Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities from 2011. Enira is a founder and an active member of the initiative Human Rights Defenders against Tortures. Almost for a decade, Enira has been an expert for the OSCE/ODIHR in election observation and worked with 13 missions in different countries of the OSCE region.

NIKITA MATUYSHCENKO

Human rights defender, jurist. Master of international humanitarian law and human rights law. From February to August 2017, a jurist at the Mission for rendering help to refugees. He represents families of refugees in strategic litigations at the European Court of Human Rights and at the UN Human Rights Committee. In 2015, he participated in the fellowship program Civil Society Leadership Awards (USA).
We created the page to be closer to our friends, colleagues and partners, and to those who need help as well.

We work with modern-day challenges regarding human rights in Belarus. Not with all of them, of course.

We deal with the rights of refugees and migrants because we want to see Belarus a hospitable and welcoming country with predictable laws. The country where people are judged by their actions, and not by skin color, language or religion.

We work with digital freedoms so that new technologies serve for the benefit of the society, instead of becoming an instrument of enslavement, following the worst scenarios of anti-utopia.

We research on the society, analyze the law, write articles, enlighten, consult and defend rights. There are specialists of different profiles in our team. We are united by professionalism and the belief that human rights can change the world for the better.

We stick to the principle that we do not support political parties or movements, but enjoy our right to criticize if they step back on the idea of respect for commonly accepted human rights. We emphasize that human rights defense is not equal to politics.

We cooperate with the government to the extent that it allows promoting civil society interests and constitutional freedoms. We are ready not only to criticize wrong decisions and speak about violations of rights, but also to be guides for international standards and practices into the Belarusian legislation and practice.

Sincerely Yours
Human Constanta Team

#humanconstantta #digitalfreedomslab

Andrew Sushko, Valdizis Kinik i ящэ 27
THE RIGHTS OF FOREIGN CITIZENS AND PERSONS WITHOUT CITIZENSHIP, INCLUDING FORCED MIGRANTS

Although human rights are universal, there are always vulnerable groups in society that need additional protection. In the course of our human rights activities, we found out that, beside the generally known violations of human rights faced by human rights defenders, journalists and activists, there have been foreigners and persons without citizenship who stay without attention and legal support in Belarus.

Migrants often face discrimination and human rights violations and turn out unable to defend themselves. We consult and render aid to those who have been made to flee their country because of threats to life, health and restrictions in rights – such people are called forced migrants or refugees.

We work to highlight the problems of this category of people, and we try to create an adequate image of refugees in society through enlightening activities; we also try to influence the legislation and legal practice in Belarus. Since, this is how our country can become truly hospitable.

OVER

200

PEOPLE RECEIVED AID DIRECTLY WITHIN THE MISSION OF HELPING REFUGEES IN BREST

PLUS

40

PEOPLE GOT CONSULTATIONS IN OTHER CITIES

(People coming from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Ukraine, Syria, Kenya, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, Armenia).
THE MISSION IN BREST

Brest is a city bordering Poland, the closest Polish border point is Terespol. Yet in 1990ies, it became a transit point for the Chechens fleeing war and persecutions. Belarus and Russia execute no passport control of citizens crossing the border; the train Brest-Terespol rides 19 minutes, and anyone can board the train without a Schengen visa. This is one of the few opportunities to get to the border of the European Union and apply for a refugee status.
In summer 2016, Polish border guards cut down drastically on the number of families allowed to enter the EU, and around 3000 refugees from Caucasian republics of Russia were stuck in the regional town of Brest. They all had arrived to try to get into Poland and apply for a refugee status. Based on testimonies of the migrants, information of international organization and our assessments, many of them faced serious danger if they returned home. On September 6, the team of Human Constanta unfolded a mission to help refugees in Brest. That was the start of the great work, continuing until now.

THE MISSION WORKS IN SEVERAL DIRECTIONS:

**HUMANITARIAN**
Collect requests for help and try to provide the people with medicine, food, baby napkins etc.

**LEGAL**
We provided a report on the situation in Brest in Russian and English languages, telling in details about the problems observed, and we tried to give objective estimates of the scope of the migration crisis.

**INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY**
Speak out on the issue at the level of the EU, UN, the Council of Europe.

**WORK WITH PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**
Try to prevent potential conflicts and human right violations.

**WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS**
Link the people who can help with those who are in need.

**WORK WITH THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC OPINION**
Show the real situation of the people whom we help.

We prepared a report on the situation in Brest in Russian and English languages, telling in details about the problems observed, and we tried to give objective estimates of the scope of the migration crisis.
7 MONTHS ON AVERAGE FAMILIES STAY IN BREST

78 THE LARGEST NUMBER OF ATTEMPTS A PERSON TOOK TO CROSS THE BORDER

60 FAMILIES SUBMITTED DOCUMENTS FOR ASYLUM WITH OUR AID

460 CONSULTATIONS HELD

8 EVENTS HELD IN BREST

9 REQUESTS AND COMPLAINTS THAT WE FILED TO INTERNATIONAL BODIES (ECHR, UN HRC)

240 KILOS OF HUMANITARIAN AID COLLECTED AND TRANSFERRED TO THE MIGRANTS

38 VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS HAVE JOINED US FROM BELARUS, RUSSIA, UKRAINE AND POLAND

18988 PEOPLE SIGNED OUR PETITION
ANTIDISCRIMINATION

It is hard to admit it, but the Belarusian society is not as tolerant to representatives of foreign cultures as it is considered generally. There are still existing stereotypes and prejudices aimed at people of other religions, other color, or in somewhat otherwise different from us.

We decided to face the challenge and contribute to the promotion of antidiscrimination. The team of Human Constanta has arranged a series of events with different audiences in the largest cities of Belarus, in order to promote the ideas of equality and respect for the rights of others, and to lower the level of phobia against migrants in society. These were movie screenings, interactive games, discussions, round-table discussions and expositions.

8 THEMATIC MOVIE SCREENINGS WITH DISCUSSIONS IN DIFFERENT CITIES OF BELARUS.

15 DISCUSSIONS, SEMINARS AND LECTURES.

ORGANIZED EXPOSITION “FORTRESS EUROPE, EASTERN BASTION”.

PARTICIPATED IN MALTA FESTIVAL POZNAN AND HELD A PERFORMANCE AND A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE SITUATION OF THE FORCED MIGRANTS IN BREST.

PARTICIPATED IN THE LARGE FESTIVAL OF MOBILITY «SAMAHOD» IN BREST AND IN MINSK.

PLAYED THE GAME “CAN I ENTER” WITH 32 PARTICIPANTS WHO TRIED THE ROLES OF BORDER GUARDS AND REFUGEE-SEEKERS.

JOINTLY WITH THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES IN BELARUS, TOOK PART IN THE YOUTH SUMMER CAMP “LEARN. ACT. SHARE”, ORGANIZED BY THE OFFICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON MIGRATION IN BELARUS.

COLLABORATED TO DRAFT AND SUBMIT AN ALTERNATIVE REPORT TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND TO THE UN COMMITTEE FOR ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION.

TOOK A PHOTO SERIES WITH SPORTS TEAMS WHO BACKED THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST DISCRIMINATION (THE NATIONAL TEAM OF BELARUS OF SPRINGBOARD DIVING, OF FREESTYLE SKIING AND THE FOOTBALL CLUB HOMEI).

HELD A THEMATIC PHOTO SESSION “MORE THAN SEEMS AT FIRST SIGHT”.

PUBLIC REPORT
Digital freedoms go broader than simply information and technical security. The notion encompasses the directions that are almost ignored in Belarus. These are the topics like Internet governance, freedom of information online, electronic governance, access to information of the public sector, free licenses, privacy on the web, the protection of personal data and massive indiscriminate surveillance over users. We suggest that we should view the digital future of Belarus through the prism of human rights, taking them into account and observing them while developing and implementing policies, laws and instruments. Now the questions of state policy in these spheres are being discussed and regulated without the participation of the civil society. We aim to change the approach, promoting the idea of multi-actor participation of the government, businesses and the civil society.

Considering the sphere of digital freedoms, we believe it is important not only to talk about them by ourselves, but also to create conditions for a dialogue for all parties concerned. Trying to regulate the Internet, the state needs to realize and borrow the international experience, comprehend the context, hold preliminary research and take into account the interest of citizens and other actors.

On the International Day of Personal Data Protection on January 28, we held a public lecture with a presentation and discussion in order to draw attention to the issues of privacy online and to remind that Belarus still lacks a law on personal data.

We issued a brochure with tips on information security, sticks for devices’ cameras and stickers to educate about the importance of media literacy and protection of personal data.
On May 16, an important event took place for which we had prepared for over half a year. Human Constanta was a co-organizer of the Belarusian Internet Governance Forum, jointly with the hosting provider Hoster.by and the Operational Analytical Center under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Belarus. Now, thanks to the joint efforts of business, the civil society and the state, the Forum is growing into a fully-fledged platform for an open, multilateral dialogue for the development of the Internet in Belarus including the issue of human rights in the online sphere.
It is impossible to work effectively in the area without cooperation with colleagues from other countries. We participated in 10 national and international specialized events related to the topic of digital freedoms, including the forum RightsCon, Central Asian IGF in Tajikistan, Stockholm Internet Forum. Together with colleagues from Eastern and Central Europe, we founded the Internet Freedom Network and signed the declaration for the support of free Internet.

Also, we promoted the digital agenda on human rights at friendly events in Belarus, including the Eco-Forum and the festival Remara.

Beside the events, our experts participated in three sets of research of SYMPA/Bipart on the problematics of reforming state governance: electronic governance, inclusive governance and electronic participation and transparency of public procurement.
WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO US

“Human Constanta for me is a good example how people can gather on the basis of common values to become more convincing together in promotion of humanism and human rights. With this, we try to find innovative means of work – we apply new mechanisms and approaches, we work with other civil organizations as well as with state bodies, international organizations, business, art community and others.”

“I like new challenges, to be useful, and to believe in what I do, that is how I came to the organization. I came to deal with the rights of migrants, refugees and persons without citizenship, the vulnerable group which so far have stayed by itself in Belarus.”

“People are important for me, their rights, especially when there is no one else to help them and to favor. In this regard, foreigners and persons without citizenship have become an important part in my life and in my focus of human rights activities. At their example, it is easier to understand something about human dignity, equality, and importance of protection against discrimination. A special value underlies in the principle of horizontality in decision-making in team work, that is why Human Constanta for me is a crucial personal experience on the way to changing the world for the better.”
For me Human Constanta means equal treatment and respect, new forms of interaction (with everyone, in particular – the team, the state, and people), a superb possibility to implement my desire to be useful, to be myself, and of course, for me Human Constanta is a guide to changes and development of the society.

For me human rights always seemed the most important thing which the humankind invented. It is a great honor to be among people who defend and promote other people’s rights. In Human Constanta, we seek for responses to new threats where you can find no ready-made solutions: migration and information technologies. And we do it with a superb team, professional and open to new ideas.

Having got into Human Constanta team by chance, I realized that the guys are full of cool ideas and plans. The issues that we deal with are among the biggest challenges of the 21st century. I want to bring positive changes to the world and make it in an interesting and comprehensive way, to show people the importance of our ideas. Human Constanta for me is a possibility to promote the values of human rights in a modern and a creative way.

This is a space for growth (personal and professional), the space of trust, mutual support, respect and democracy in practice, the space for experiments and opportunities, the space for discussing challenges of the sophisticated reality and for searching effective responses to them, based on the principles and values of human rights (freedom, equality, non-violence). I am sincerely happy to be part of the Team.
The specific of work at Human Constanta is horizontality in decision-making and internal democracy in practice; the use of human defense instruments for solving social issues; engaging of all parties concerned in the dialogue, including state bodies and representatives of international organizations; work with volunteers; transparency in activities; the use of contemporary media and online technologies – this is what we write in official letters.

Saying it in another way – we at Human Constanta take decisions jointly, having listened to all participants. We don’t have chiefs and subordinates. Working with tasks, we do not see a situation from one side, but rather involve all parties concerned in the process: business, the state, international and national organizations, initiatives and individuals.

We want more people to become active and the civil society to become more involved in human rights defense. Our organization is open for cooperation, and we gladly invite volunteers and share what we know.
Our team aspires not only to practice human defense, but also to enlighten, teach, and find out new audiences. We work openly and transparently, using contemporary technologies for promotion of our ideas and values.

Human Constanta is an organization of a new form, and we are happy to have our friends with us this year. We aspire to positive changes and try to be constructive, and set our own example how interaction, support and cooperation help to attain goals.

We would like to thank our volunteers, interns, business persons, journalists, lawyers, artists, human rights defenders, jurists, activists, representatives of public bodies, sportsmen and everyone who have been with us this year.

We are sure that the next year will be more fascinating, useful and rich in events!
Stay with us!