

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

Summary Wednesday, September 2 - Friday, August 4:

In Belarus, unprecedented violations of human rights continue.¹ The legal system and rule of law does not work, and mass detentions continue. New criminal, politically motivated cases are being initiated.

Pressure on the Coordination Council continues. Law enforcement agencies of Belarus have opened a criminal case on tax evasion against a member of the Presidium of the Coordination Council Lilia Vlasova and her son.

Another member of the Coordination Council, Olga Kovalkova will be kept in detention for another 15 days in prison. She finished her previous sentence of 10 days today, but was immediately charged with another offence.²

9 people³, who were recently charged under Art. 293 of the Criminal Code (mass riots) has been recognized as political prisoners, since charges against them is solely connected with the exercise of their freedom of peaceful assembly.⁴

The Investigative Committee received about 1000 reports of torture and abuse of power by law enforcement officers from August 9 to August 13. No criminal cases have been opened. The Investigative Committee responded to the appeal of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee on the fact of mass torture of people “since your appeal does not contain information about specific crimes and other circumstances, there are no grounds for the Investigative Committee to open cases”. Definitely, the Investigative Committee has enough data to initiate a criminal case.⁵ Belarusian human rights defenders will appeal this decision.⁶

The human rights center “Viasna” and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee appealed to the UN Committee Against Torture, asking to investigate the systematic use of torture in Belarus on behalf of 47 victims of peaceful protests.⁷

¹ It's been 27 days since Belarus started its fight for the basic human right.

² <https://news.tut.by/economics/699155.html>

³ Raman Bahnavets, Daniil Bohnat, Dzmitry Kubarau, Viktor Pantsialeyeu, Vital Prapakchuk, Yahor Prapakchuk, Viachaslau Rahashchuk, Artur Khalimonchyk, and Aleh Rubets

⁴ <http://spring96.org/en/news/99393>

⁵ These are numerous statements of citizens about torture, publications in the media, numerous photo and video materials, as well as medical documents that indicate the nature and severity of the injuries and the circumstances under which they were received.

⁶ https://belhelcom.org/ru/news/otvet-sk-na-obrashchenie-po-faktu-massovyh-pytok-korotko-zamyliyayut?fbclid=IwAR0tFXsXCDtQftL_eAQwrLeOGzrquFo-duxcbtKlb_rWy8MguNaO9YHowVg

⁷ <http://spring96.org/en/news/99390>

The Investigative Committee has begun to open new criminal cases against those who had previously filed a complaint to investigate tortures. One of the examples, the Investigative Committee claims that 16-year-old Timur, who (like many other Belarusians from 9–13 August) was accidentally detained and beaten by the riot police so badly that he went into a coma, had been involved in an armed assault on a truck driver.⁸

Freedom of Speech & Independent Media

The pressure and harassment of journalists, bloggers, photographers continue. Foreign journalists have been denied accreditation. The printing house does not print newspapers that mention human rights violations related to peaceful election protests. The websites of independent media are blocked.

TV channel "Sfera" in Zhodzina was closed by the authorities for showing violent suppression of protests, doing interviews with foreign political analysts, and calling for strikes. This content was deemed "destabilizing the situation among the Zhodzina populace."⁹

On September 2, showmen and TV hosts Denis Dudinsky and Dmitry Kokhno, who had previously worked at state television but publicly criticised police brutality against peaceful protesters, were detained in Minsk. On September 3, both Denis Dudinsky and Dmitry Kokhno were sentenced to 10 days of arrest."¹⁰

6 journalists were detained at student rallies on September 1, while fulfilling their professional duties, they were marked with blue vests with the words "Press" (in capital letters) on their backs.¹¹ However, the police claimed that the reporters allegedly called on students to protest and "even coordinated the actions of the crowd." The trial of the journalists began in the afternoon of September 2, the cases were carried out remotely via Skype. The court returned all administrative cases to the police for revision. However, the journalists were not released. They were taken to the detention centre in Akrestsina Street. On September 4, at a new court session, the journalists were sentenced to three days in jail.¹²

⁸ <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus-podrostok-napadenie/30820690.html>

⁹ <https://ex-press.by/rubrics/novosti-zhodino/2020/08/17/v-zhodino-za-chestnye-novosti-priostanovili-rab-otu-gorodskogo-telekanala-sfera>

¹⁰ <https://www.rbc.ru/society/03/09/2020/5f50afb29a79476b0dae722c>

¹¹ <https://belarusfeed.com/belarus-students-protests-journalists-guilty-released/>

¹² <https://belsat.eu/en/news/journalists-detained-on-september-1-transferred-to-remand-center/>

Business and Human Rights

Pressure on business, including IT companies, has increased. IT export is a serious business for the Belarusian economy.¹³

Many High-Tech Park leaders and residents joined rallies in support of opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya.¹⁴ Some 300 CEOs of Belarus' leading IT companies and their investors have signed a letter demanding a new election, an end to police violence and the release of political prisoners.¹⁵

Other IT sector employees were active donors of public funds for victims of police violence and striking workers. IT company PandaDoc has set up a fund in support of law enforcement (OMON) officers who refused to continue to serve in the forces, nearly 594 applications had been received so far by the fund.

During this week the Minsk offices of the IT company PandaDoc were searched by the Financial Investigation Department, 4 persons detained.¹⁶ And the criminal case initiated against the company.

Strikes at many state businesses continue: workers created striking committees to coordinate protest activities and authorities replied with repressions and intimidations. Many members of the striking committees had to withdraw due to enormous pressure on themselves and members of their families. Some have even had to escape to neighbouring countries over fears to their life and freedom.¹⁷

By persecuting citizens and businesses for political reasons the authorities generate a serious blow to the economy and the investment climate in Belarus. For example, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia stated that they will not purchase electricity from the nuclear power plant in Astravets, Belarus.

¹³ Only for the High-Tech Park in Minsk 267 companies and over 45,700 people were working in 2019

¹⁴ Senior figure of EPAM, even came out as one of the developers of an alternate vote-counting platform that showed Lukashenko did not receive 80 percent of votes (although the platform could not prove a conclusive victory for Tikhanovskaya). EPAM's senior vice president, Makism Bahretsou, went on leave from the company to join the National Coordination Council, an opposition structure created to facilitate a peaceful transfer of power.

¹⁵<https://intellinews.com/500-belarus-it-ceos-threaten-to-move-their-business-out-of-the-country-unless-violence-ends-new-elections-are-held-189569/>

¹⁶ <https://incrusia.ru/news/panda-doc-mikado/>

¹⁷ <http://www.industrialunion.org/union-activist-detained-in-belarus-over-protest-action>

Academic liberties

This week, Belarusian students have taken to the streets with peaceful protests to demand democracy and new elections in Belarus, in continuation of the month-long peaceful demonstrations. Masked individuals in civilian clothes and riot police dressed in black have entered universities and infiltrated peaceful protests to illegally detain students and underaged children.

On Friday, 4 September, riot police and plain clothed men brutally detained students of Minsk State Linguistic University (MSLU) right inside the university building.

The security guard of the Belarusian State Medical University did not let a student with white-red-white ribbons on his backpack into the university.

A group of female students from the Department of Humanities of the Belarusian State University wrote a few quotes from popular works of literature in chalk on the pavement. The list of quoted authors included many well-known and respected names, such as Alekseyevich, Tsetka, Evtushenko, Kupala, and Kolas. The students were taken to the detention center at Okrestina.

Employees who took part in the protests are fired from the Institute of Genetics of the National Academy of Sciences.¹⁸

Digital Freedoms

External Internet will be turned off for government institutions. From September 15, the Internet service provider “Business Network” will block foreign DNS servers for government agencies and organizations. They will only have access to authorized Belarusian sites.¹⁹

Good News

No good news)))

¹⁸https://greenbelarus.info/articles/02-09-2020/z-institutu-genetyki-nan-zvalnyayuc-supracounikau-yakiy-a-udzelnichali-u?fbclid=IwAR0I7N0dty_d-j0K5O7MMhRzgWN0DNK6FSAq5ago9fYPS5uQ1HKQgOSybLQ

¹⁹ <https://t.me/belsat/17036>