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Summary: Saturday 30 January to 5 February 2021

Political prisoners

The number of political prisoners in Belarus continues to increase. Human rights activists recognise four more arrested people as political prisoners, a total of 224. This week, 21 sentences were passed on 'political cases'. The Ministry of Internal Affairs states that after the presidential elections in Belarus on 9 August 2020, 1,750 crimes related to protests were registered in the country.¹

Freedom of association and pressure on human rights defenders

Sergey Drozdovsky and Oleg Grablevsky from the Office for Rights of Persons with Disabilities were detained on the afternoon of 3 February and taken for questioning to the Investigative Committee. Grablevsky was detained for three days after the interrogation and placed in a temporary detention facility in Akrestsin Street. According to human rights defenders, he is suspected of fraud. A preventive measure in the form of house arrest was applied to Drozdovsky, who is deprived of any means of communication, including letters. Previously, the Department of Financial Investigations had searched the organisation's office and confiscated equipment. Currently, their lawyers are under a nondisclosure agreement. And even the article under which Drozdovsky is suspected is not yet known. Based on the information on Grablevsky's Facebook page, this pressure is due to the fact that the organisation helped people find and get access to the help of lawyers, including under Art. 23.34 (participation in an unauthorised mass event).

The Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a human rights organisation, aiming to change the understanding of disability in Belarus. The organisation bases its activities on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They promote the idea that disability is not a problem of human health, but a problem in fulfilling human rights. Belarus has joined the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *inter alia* thanks to the extensive work of the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. For many years, this Office has been advising people with disabilities on rights violations, advocating for changes in legislation, and conducting educational activities to change attitudes towards people with disabilities.

Sport and human rights

World champion Alexandra Romanovskaya was fired from the Freestyle Republicun Sport Centre. Information about the dismissal of Romanovskaya appeared in October last year. The official reason is absenteeism. However, Romanovskaya signed a letter for new elections and against violence. She took part in recording a video message to Belarusian sports officials who put pressure on athletes because of their civic position and signatures,

¹ https://interfax.by/news/policy/vnutrennyaya_politika/1290674/

under the appeal of the sports community. She also joined the Free Association of Athletes of Belarus.²

Freedom of expression

Pressure on independent media continues. Grodno Special Purpose Police Detachment (OMON) riot Hrodna.life and Newgrodno.by media outlets.

According to riot police, these Internet resources store extremist information. Specifically, they refer to materials from the Telegram channel, which on 20 October 2020 by Central District Court in Minsk was recognized as “extremist”.³

Cultural rights

Belarusian association of writers ‘the PEN Centre’ prepared a year-long analytical report,⁴ according to it, the number of documented cases of human rights violations against cultural figures and cultural rights reached 593 in Belarus in 2020.

Right to a fair trial

Viktor Babariko’s trial will begin on 17 February. It will be considered by the Supreme Court, which happens only in exceptional cases. The decisions of the Supreme Court cannot be appealed. Human rights activists emphasise that according to Part 5 of Art. 370 of the Criminal Procedure Code, “Sentences, rulings, decisions of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus cannot be appealed”. Accordingly, sentences by the Supreme Court take effect immediately.

However, paragraph 5 of Art. 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that, “Everyone who has been convicted of any crime has the right to have his conviction and sentence reviewed by a higher court in accordance with the law”.

² <https://sport.tut.by/news/freestyle-skiing/717592.html?c>

³ <https://news.tut.by/society/716876.html?c>

⁴ <https://pen-centre.by/en/2021/01/28/bez-prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2020.html>

