

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: Friday 11 June 2021 to Friday 18 June 2021**

### **New developments in politically motivated cases**

Political persecution is ongoing in Belarus, with the number of detentions, open criminal cases, and new court hearings growing daily. Some of the key developments in such cases include:

- The General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus has initiated a criminal case for national flag desecration against a prominent Belarusian opera singer in exile, Marharyta Lyauchuk, for a Youtube video she made;<sup>1</sup>
- A group of three Homiel residents was detained and charged with national flag desecration for posting a video of them throwing a red-green flag into a bonfire and shouting "Long live Belarus!";<sup>2</sup>
- Kanstantsin Yakauleu, the Vitsyaz handball club's senior coach and a Free Association of Athletes of Belarus activist, was detained by Belarusian law enforcement officers on unknown charges;<sup>3</sup>
- Former Minsk Prosecutor's office employee Eugeniy Babak, who left his prosecutor's assistant position in August 2020 in protest at repressive governmental policies, was sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest. Before detention, his apartment was searched without notice and his property was severely damaged;<sup>4</sup>
- Political prisoner Vitaliya Bandarenka,<sup>5</sup> sentenced to four years in prison for participation in mass riots, informed her mother that she was made to sign five blank papers for unknown purposes – an act which may be suggestive of manipulation on behalf of law enforcement authorities and prison personnel. She also confirmed that political prisoners are marked by prison guards, with many of them labeled as "prone to extremism";<sup>6</sup>
- Former political prisoner Anatol Liabedzka, recently released from his 30-day administrative arrest, described conditions in Belarusian prisons, mentioning routine sleep deprivation, absence of hot water, and overcrowded cells.<sup>7</sup>

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<https://belsat.eu/en/news/16-06-2021-reputed-opera-singer-marharyta-lyauchuk-facing-criminal-case-over-mockery-of-state-flag/>

2 <https://belsat.eu/en/news/16-06-2021-police-detain-young-people-for-throwing-flag-into-fire/>

3

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/16-06-2021-vitsyaz-handball-club-head-coach-kanstantsin-yakauleu-detained/>

4

<https://telegra.ph/Uvolivshijsya-v-avguste-v-znak-protesta-prokurorskij-rabotnik-poluchil-15-sutok-aresta-06-11>

5 <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/vitalija-bandarenka>

6 <https://www.svaboda.org/a/31302966.html>

7 <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=274450&lang=ru>

## **Lack of medical treatment reported by a family sheltered by the Swedish Embassy**

A father and son, Vitaly and Vladislav Kuznechiki, who were harboured by the Swedish Embassy when fleeing persecution by Belarusian law enforcement authorities in September 2020,<sup>8</sup> have been denied medical treatment. Vladislav has two medical conditions requiring regular medical examination – malignant appendix cancer and optic atrophy – while Vitaly has been experiencing stomach aches and fever. While the Kuznechikis' case is being considered by the Committee against Torture, with interim measures in place,<sup>9</sup> the Swedish authorities' official response mentions that providing medical assistance to the family falls outside of the scope of the interim measures requested by the Committee.<sup>10</sup>

## **Dismissal of independent labour unions' members**

Belarusian state factories continue the policy of firing members of independent labour unions and people on strike. The leadership of state-owned fertilizer company Grodno Azot's has already terminated contracts with seven employees, reportedly threatening to fire more people unless they leave independent labour unions and openly criticise such unions in the factory newspaper.<sup>11</sup>

## **Changes in Belarusian legislation**

On 16 June 2021 the recently amended Law On Countering Extremism<sup>12</sup> and Law On Prohibition of Rehabilitation of Nazism have entered into force.<sup>13</sup> Analysis of the 'anti-extremism' laws and their application between April and May 2021 can be found in Human Constanta's recent report.<sup>14</sup>

There is also a legislative effort to amend laws governing the protection of Belarusian sovereignty, the procedure of introducing the state of emergency, and the role of the Belarusian Security Council.<sup>15</sup>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/09/swedish-embassy-in-minsk-harbours-two-belarusians-for-five-months>

<sup>9</sup> <https://drozdov.ch/cases/kuznechiki-protiv-shvetcii>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/kuznechiki-belarus/31299036.html>

<sup>11</sup>

<https://belsat.eu/ru/news/16-06-2021-rukovodstvo-grodnenskogo-azota-uvolnyaet-nesoglasnyh-i-aktivistov-profsoyuzov/>

<sup>12</sup>

[https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12100104&p1=1&fbclid=IwAR1C\\_uIE8FzLO8QHPg-OiEG017I\\_0KFo6uAcLH1AovvKoeC-9Kck4Ctpuu8](https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12100104&p1=1&fbclid=IwAR1C_uIE8FzLO8QHPg-OiEG017I_0KFo6uAcLH1AovvKoeC-9Kck4Ctpuu8)

<sup>13</sup> [https://pravo.by/upload/docs/op/H12100103\\_1621026000.pdf](https://pravo.by/upload/docs/op/H12100103_1621026000.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://humanconstantaby.by/obzor-borby-s-ekstremizmom-v-belarusi-za-aprel-maj-2021/>

<sup>15</sup>

<https://reform.by/233857-palata-predstavitelej-v-pervom-chtenii-prinjala-izmenenija-v-zakony-o-zashhite-suvereniteta>

## **News from the border**

Lithuanian authorities are considering building a fence across the Lithuanian–Belarusian border to control migration flows.<sup>16</sup> The procedure of leaving Belarus via ground borders is further complicated by the authorities’ recent decision to introduce a fee for transport crossing the border.<sup>17</sup>

## **Belarusian authorities to resume visits to penitentiary institutions**

The Belarusian Ministry of Justice announced that prison control commissions, which primarily consist of members of pro-government organisations, will resume their in-person visits to prisons in June 2021. The conclusions, summarising the outcomes of such visits, will be published online.<sup>18</sup>

## **Pressure on women lawyers, human rights defenders, and representatives of the legal profession in Belarus**

In response to the call for input on human rights in Belarus for the report from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus to the United Nations General Assembly, human rights organisations Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, World Organisation Against Torture, and ARTICLE 19 have prepared a submission on the situation with the rights of women lawyers, human rights defenders, and representatives of the legal profession in Belarus. The submission analyses the gender aspects of the right to defence; highlights the intersecting forms of discrimination to which victims are subjected both on the grounds of their sex and their professional activity; considers individual cases of political persecution of women lawyers, human rights defenders, and representatives of the legal profession; and assesses how Belarusian laws and their application affect women’s rights.<sup>19</sup>

## **Political prisoners**

As of 18 June 2021, the total number of political prisoners in Belarus is 500.<sup>20</sup> The number continues to grow daily.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://euroradio.fm/ru/mvd-litvy-hochet-postroit-zabor-na-granice-s-belarusyu>

<sup>17</sup> <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/17-06-2021-brestskie-deputaty-tozhe-vveli-sbor-za-vyezd-za-granitsu/>

<sup>18</sup>

[https://minjust.gov.by/be/press/news/15062021000/?fbclid=IwAR2WP78MRcAS3Eoi9J54TzOLj1hvZXWRLETDzKerWTJCCxiBCaI\\_O0uEvdI](https://minjust.gov.by/be/press/news/15062021000/?fbclid=IwAR2WP78MRcAS3Eoi9J54TzOLj1hvZXWRLETDzKerWTJCCxiBCaI_O0uEvdI)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.hfhr.pl/en/right-to-defence-in-belarus-a-gender-perspective/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>