

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 29 May 2021 to Friday 4 June 2021

Suicide attempt in the courtroom

On 1 June 2021, Stepan Latypov – a civil society activist, facing criminal charges for organising protests, inciting social unrest, and resisting arrest – stabbed himself in the throat with a pen during a court hearing after claiming that state investigators had threatened to come after his family and neighbours if he did not plead guilty.¹

According to the Ministry of Health, he is receiving treatment at a public hospital and is in a stable condition. However, independent media report that he was transferred from the hospital to a detention facility the day after his emergency surgery.²

Journalists arrested

On 4 June 2021, two Tribuna.com journalists – Alexander Ivylin and Yaroslav Pisarenko – were arrested and detained. The two journalists are known for presenting an online show, interviewing representatives from the Belarusian athletes' community who were subjected to torture and political persecution.³

Amendments to the Law on Legal Practice in Belarus

A law amending the Law on Legal Practice in Belarus was signed by Alexander Lukashenko in May 2021. The law tightens the grip of state authorities on independent legal practice, increasing state control over lawyers and legal practitioners. The law was drafted without the wide participation of representatives of the legal profession. Key changes, provided by the Law, include:⁴

- *Limits on lawyers' self-governance*

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/01/world/europe/belarus-court-suicide-attempt.html>;

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/01/europe/belarus-activist-stabs-himself-court-intl/index.html>

² <https://reform.by/230080-stepan-latypov-bolshe-ne-nahoditsja-v-bolnice-na-ulice-semashko>;
<https://belsat.eu/en/news/02-06-2021-political-prisoner-stsyapan-latypau-taken-to-jail-again-he-attempted-suicide-in-court-day-before/>

³ <https://by.tribuna.com/tribuna/blogs/editors/2928537.html#supertop>

⁴

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/belarus-parliament-moves-to-pass-law-banning-private-lawyers-alexander-lukashenko-kyiv-ukraine-belarus-ministry-of-justice-b1832826.html>;

<https://mediazona.by/article/2021/04/22/advokatura>;

<https://vb.by/politics/republic/chastnye-advokaty-i-advokatskie-byuro-v-belarusi-budut-pod-zapretom.html>;

<https://officelife.media/news/25318-bnpa-predlozhila-obshchestvennoe-obsuzhdenie-izmeneniy-v-zakon-ob-advokature-part2/>.

In this updated edition of the Law, all the elected candidates for territorial lawyers' collegiums (self-governing bodies of the lawyers' community) will have to be approved by the Ministry of Justice. If the Ministry rejects the suggested candidacies, it may appoint its own collegium members. The Ministry is also to approve all candidates for heads of regional legal consultancies, territorial legal collegiums, and the head of the Belarusian Republican Collegium of Lawyers. As a result of this change, independent lawyers are almost completely detached from decision-making and self-governance processes.

- *Limits on private legal practice*
Private legal practice is effectively prohibited by the law. Previously, lawyers could practice in one of three organisational forms: as part of a state-controlled legal consultancy, as part of a private law firm, or individually. Once the law enters into force, the only possible organisational form of legal practice would be a legal consultancy, with a high degree of state control.
- *Total state control over access to the legal profession*
Although the procedure of complying with Belarusian bar requirements still includes the obligatory internship of potential candidates for the bar, under the amended law the internship candidates will now have to be approved by the Ministry of Justice before they can start the internship. Such a step increases state control and gatekeeping of the legal profession.
- *Total state control over disbarment procedures*
The codification of the key role of the Qualification Commission under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice in the process of attestation of lawyers and the imposition of disciplinary punishments and disbarments – including through “emergency attestation sessions”, initiated at complete discretion of the Qualification Commission with no participation of the legal community – increases state control over the legal profession and the ability to arbitrarily disbar lawyers who are associated with politically sensitive cases.

Political prisoners

As of 4 June 2021, the total number of political prisoners in Belarus is 472.⁵ The number continues to grow daily.

⁵ <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>