

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 14 August 2021 to Friday 20 August 2021

Nasta Lojka's detention

On 13 August 2021, the co-founder of Human Constanta, Nasta Lojka, was detained and transferred to the Financial Monitoring Department of the State Control Committee of the Republic of Belarus. She was interrogated, her apartment was searched, and her equipment was confiscated. Following the interrogation and search, she was transferred to the notorious Akrestina detention facility.

Having spent approximately 72 hours under arrest, Lojka was released on condition of being subject to travel restrictions. She is officially a suspect in a criminal case against employees of the human rights centre Viasna on charges of “assisting in tax evasion”.¹ In an interview following her release, she described inhumane conditions at the detention centre.²

Crackdown on BelaPAN news agency

On 17 August 2021, Belarusian security forces made unexpected visits to a number of contributors to the independent news agency BelaPAN. Journalist Iryna Turchyna, editor Alyaksandr Zaitsau, and the company's accountant Katsyaryna Boyeva managed to inform their colleagues of the raids being conducted. The former director of BelaPAN, Dzmitry Navazhilau, editor-in-chief Iryna Leushyna, and accountant Katsyaryna Boyeva were detained.³

'Anti-extremism' persecution in Belarus

Human Constanta continues to monitor the use and abuse of 'anti-extremism' laws to silence political dissenters and peaceful protesters. Over the span of two months, June and July 2021, 115 new materials were considered 'extremist' through 71 judicial decisions, including 90 Telegram channels, chats, and bots, 5 YouTube channels, and 2 Tik-Toks. Persecution of people under the 'anti-extremist' articles of both Criminal and Administrative Codes continues and intensifies.

One of the most famous targets of the state-led 'anti-extremism' campaign is Belarus's largest independent media outlet, TUT.BY, which was recently blocked in the country. Platform

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<https://humanconstantaby/en/statement-on-the-politically-motivated-detention-of-human-rights-defender-nasta-lojka/>;

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/16-08-2021-reputed-belarusian-human-rights-activist-nasta-lojka-released-but-restricted/>; <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/1559.html?tg>

² <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/1766.html?tg>

³ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/18-08-2021-minsk-police-searching-homes-of-belapan-employees/>

Zerkalo.io, launched by the TUT.BY team, was declared extremist by Belarusian authorities on 13 August 2021.⁴ The editors called such a move “an attempt to erase history”.⁵

More information about the use of ‘anti-extremism’ laws can be found in Human Constanta’s regular report.⁶

Migration crisis at Belarusian borders

The migration crisis continues to intensify at the Belarusian borders. While in previous weeks the migration flows concentrated on the Belarusian–Lithuanian border, the Polish and Latvian borders are now facing similar issues. On 14 August 2021, 88 people were denied entry to Latvia.⁷ On 17 August 2021, 130 people were denied entry to Poland, 100 to Lithuania, and 46 to Latvia.⁸ Reportedly, there are families with children in the neutral zone, who are denied entry from either side of the border.⁹

Russian investigative centre Dossier and the German newspaper Der Spiegel found that Belarusian authorities are at the root of the migrant crisis, having helped migrants from Iraq to get to Lithuania and other European Union countries through a Belarusian state company.¹⁰

Developments in politically motivated cases

The key developments in politically motivated cases include:

- On 16 August 2021, political prisoner Stsiapan Latypau was sentenced to eight and a half years in a maximum security prison and fined 8,700 rubles (USD 3,500). The charges against him included “creating a neighbourhood community in order to publicly express their socio-political views and protest”, “organizing meetings”, and “triggering a protest mood among citizens”. On 1 June 2021, Latypau attempted to commit suicide in the courtroom.¹¹
- On 17 August 2021, Belarusian authorities opened a criminal case against Belarusian citizen Bazhena Zholudz – the girlfriend of Vital Shyshou, the deceased head of the Belarusian House in Ukraine. On 2 August 2021, Shyshou, who had left Belarus for Ukraine in fear of being persecuted, went for a run and disappeared. A day later, he

⁴ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/14-08-2021-content-of-tut-by-and-zerkalo-io-recognized-extremist/>

⁵ <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/1572.html?tg>

⁶ <https://humanconstantaby.by/obzor-borby-s-ekstremizmom-v-belarusi-za-iyun-i-iyul-2021/>

⁷ <https://news.zerkalo.io/world/1629.html?tg>

⁸ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/1758.html?tg>

⁹ <https://news.zerkalo.io/world/1757.html?tg>

¹⁰ <https://dossier.center/bel-tours/>;

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/14-08-2021-researchers-from-germany-and-russia-confirm-that-belarusian-authorities-are-behind-migrant-crisis/>

¹¹ <http://spring96.org/en/news/104678>; <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/1755.html?tg>.

was found hanged on the outskirts of Kyiv. Zholudz is accused of calling for mass riots and use of violence.¹²

- On 17 August 2021, Hrodna resident Leanid Herasimluk was sentenced to 3.5 years of imprisonment in a medium security prison for leaving 16 comments in one of the local Telegram channels. The prosecution qualified his actions as “incitement to terrorism and undermining national security of Belarus”.¹³
- On 18 August 2021, criminal charges were brought against Uladzimir Matskevich, a prominent Belarusian philosopher and scholar. He is accused of “organising actions that grossly violate public order”.¹⁴
- On 18 August 2021, a Homiel activist who sent over 2,000 letters to political prisoners was sentenced for 25 days in jail for wearing a T-shirt with the wording “Write Letters!”. According to the authorities, wearing the T-shirt amounted to an unauthorised picket.¹⁵

Disbarment of lawyers

The Qualification Commission under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice has disbarred three more Belarusian lawyers – Olha Karpushonok, Eugeniy Maslau, and Yulia Knyaz.¹⁶ The tendency to disbar lawyers who express views contrary to those of the Belarusian authorities continues.¹⁷

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is 637.¹⁸ The number continues to grow daily.

¹²

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/17-08-2021-regime-opens-criminal-case-against-girlfriend-of-activist-vital-shys-hou-he-was-found-dead-in-kyiv/>

¹³ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/1720.html?tg>

¹⁴ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/18-08-2021-charge-brought-against-philosopher-uladzimir-matskevich/>

¹⁵

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/18-08-2021-homiel-activist-who-sent-over-2k-letters-to-political-prisoners-gets-25-days-in-jail/>

¹⁶ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/1482.html?tg>

¹⁷

https://www.hfhr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Belarus_lawyers_Laevski-Statement_Segnees_07.2021_RU_ENG.pdf

¹⁸ <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>