

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 21 August 2021 to Friday 27 August 2021**

### **Political prisoners plea for pardon to be released**

After spending nearly eight months in pre-trial detention, the founder and head of Press Club, Yulia Slutskaya, along with the organisation's directors, Syarhei Alsheuski and Ala Sharko, and cameramen Pyotr Slutski and Dzyanis Sakalouski have been released. To date, there has been no information about the release of another defendant in the case, Kseniya Lutskina. They were accused of large-scale tax evasion.<sup>1</sup> The released defendants revealed that they were offered to admit guilt and submit a pardon petition by Belarusian authorities.<sup>2</sup> The organisation representatives had to admit guilt and repay the "damage caused to the state" to the amount of 109,769 Belarusian rubles, or approximately 43,885 USD, but the released detainees said that "[they] just needed to get out".<sup>3</sup>

The product manager of the PandaDoc company, Viktor Kuushynau, was also released from custody. He was detained as part of the PandaDoc case; the allegations against PandaDoc employees were that they committed "embezzlement by abuse of power". In the summer of 2020, the company's founders created a private initiative, which raised money for law enforcement officers who decided to change their profession. In September 2020, the Minsk office of PandaDoc was searched. As many as 7 of the 20 employees were detained for questioning. For two days, financial investigation officers questioned more than 100 company employees. One detainee, Dzmitry Rabtsevich, the director of the Minsk office, was released the day after Alexander Lukashenka met with political prisoners in the KGB detention center. In October 2020, the chief accountant Yulia Shardyka and human resources specialist Uladzislau Mikhalap were released from custody. The last detainee is Viktor Kuushynau. In February 2021, PandaDoc shut down its office in Belarus and opened its office in Ukraine, having transferred approximately 60 employees.<sup>4</sup>

Political prisoner and former Belarusian ambassador to Slovakia, Ihar Liashchenia, was released on 20 August 2021, according to his daughter. He was forced to sign a non-disclosure agreement and remains under travel restrictions. He had been in prison since 11 August 2020. Liashchenia was arrested as part of a criminal investigation into the "mass riots". In 2020, Liashchenia supported the peaceful protests in Belarus, condemned the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://belsat.eu/en/news/19-08-2021-minsk-press-club-belarus-employees-at-liberty/>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/21-08-2021-belarusian-press-club-founder-tells-about-her-time-in-jail-and-release/>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/21-08-2021-belarusian-press-club-founder-tells-about-her-time-in-jail-and-release/>; <http://spring96.org/en/news/104724>

<sup>4</sup> <https://belsat.eu/en/news/21-08-2021-pandadoc-manager-released/>

violence by security forces and resigned. Lukashenka fired him and stripped him of his diplomatic rank.<sup>5</sup>

### **Migration crisis at Belarusian borders**

While the migration crisis continues to intensify at the Belarusian borders, on 25 August 2021, the European Court of Human Rights decided to introduce interim measures in the cases *Amiri and Others v. Poland* (application no. 42120/21) and *Ahmed and Others v. Latvia* (application no. 42165/21), concerning recent events at the borders of Poland and Latvia with Belarus.

The Court decided, without prejudice to any duties that Belarus may have under international law regarding the situation of the applicants, to apply Rule 39 and request that the Polish and Latvian authorities provide all the applicants with food, water, clothing, adequate medical care and, if possible, temporary shelter.<sup>6</sup>

On 24 August 2021, Latvian President Egils Levits said that the country was considering building a wall at the Latvian–Belarusian border.<sup>7</sup>

### **Developments in politically motivated cases**

The key developments in politically motivated cases include:

- On 20 August 2021, six more people in Brest were sentenced to prison terms for “mass riots”, namely:
  - Uladzimir Kobrynets – 4 years;
  - Andrei Kandrasjuk – 4 years;
  - Artur Amirau – 3 years and 6 months;
  - Mykola Malyuta – 3 years;
  - Raman Paulenka – 3 years;
  - Vadzim Chapyalevich – 3 years.

At the trial, Kandrasjuk spoke about how he was beaten in the detention centre. Kobrynets said that he spent 24 hours in the ‘gym’ of the police station, where he was taken because he asked the law enforcement officers to call an ambulance for a protestor with a rubber bullet in his stomach;

- On 20 August 2021, children’s football coach Vadzim Chapelevich was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment in a maximum security prison for participating in “mass riots” in August 2020;
- On 23 August 2021, Homiel resident Syarhei Balakhonau was sentenced to one year of imprisonment for insulting the president by sharing the song ‘Lukashenka, Step Down’ on his social media;
- On 23 August 2021, two Minsk residents were sentenced to 2 years of restricted freedom for re-painting a mural of two djs who had turned on a protest song during a

<sup>5</sup> <http://spring96.org/en/news/104738>

<sup>6</sup> <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22003-7100942-9612632%22%5D%7D>

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/2019.html?tg>

pre-election meeting in summer 2020. The mural had been covered up by the authorities multiple times, but local residents restored it;<sup>8</sup>

- On 24 August 2021, former police lieutenant-colonel Pyotr Budzko was detained again after serving 32 days of administrative arrest. After he was detained, law enforcement officers searched his workplace, home, and summer cottage. He had been deprived of his rank because of his political views, despite serving in the police force for over 20 years;<sup>9</sup> and
- The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus has published its fifth report on crimes against humanity committed by Belarusian authorities.<sup>10</sup>

## Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is 650.<sup>11</sup> The number continues to grow daily.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/1964.html?tg>

<sup>9</sup> <https://belsat.eu/en/news/24-08-2021-former-police-lieutenant-colonel-who-served-time-in-jail-again/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://torture.tilda.ws/#rec348860018>

<sup>11</sup> <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>