

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 2 October 2021 to Friday 8 October 2021

Repression for posting online commentaries

EPAM Systems employee Andrey Zeltsar and State Security Committee (KGB) employee Dmitriy Fedosiuk died in the course of a search conducted in Zeltsar's apartment on the grounds of investigating alleged "terrorist" activities. After [opening a criminal case](#) on charges of murder of a person acting in an official capacity and [arresting Zeltsar's wife](#), Belarusian state authorities began a major crackdown on people leaving comments on social media about the incident.

Between 29 September 2021 and 1 October 2021, people were [detained](#) *en masse* and placed into detention centers; all of them have been criminally charged under Article 369 (insulting a state official) and Article 130 (inciting social hatred) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. At least [119](#) people have been detained so far, while the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus stated that more than [200](#) people who made "insulting remarks" were identified.

Additionally, Komsomolskaya Pravda journalist [Henadz Mazheika](#) was detained in Moscow and charged with the same articles of the Belarusian Criminal Code for publishing an article about Zeltsar. A criminal case on the same grounds was also initiated against [anarchist activists](#) who organised a protest in support of Zeltsar in Poland.

The trend towards the use of "anti-extremism" legislation to punish political dissenters, including those in Zeltsar's case, is analysed in detail in a recent [piece](#) by Human Constanta, covering the period of August to September 2021.

Migration crisis at Belarusian border

The migration crisis continues to intensify at the Belarusian border with Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. On 3 October 2021, [398](#) attempts to cross the Polish border were made. On the same day, [40](#) migrants attempted to cross the Lithuanian border. Lithuanian border control authorities [reported](#) hearing a gunshot from the side of the Belarusian border. More than [700](#) people escaped the migration camps at the Lithuanian border, with only 146 people found so far. On 4 October 2021, a 24-year-old [Congolesse citizen](#) crossed the Belarusian–Polish border and gave birth shortly after, having been transferred to a hospital in Poland.

On 1 October 2021, Poland [extended](#) the state of emergency in relation to the migration crisis by another 60 days. Polish officials have also decided to send [humanitarian aid](#) to the border. Iraqi authorities [stated](#) that they will assist those trapped at the Belarusian border with Lithuania in returning to Iraq.

On 5 October 2021, European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson raised the issue of the ongoing migration crisis in her [speech](#) at the European Parliament Plenary on the situation in Belarus. According to her, there have been more than 6,000 irregular attempts to cross the Belarus–EU border, compared to barely 150 last year. She called the steps taken by the Belarusian authorities “state-run instrumentalisation of migrants” and highlighted “Lukashenka’s blatant disregard of international norms.”

On 6 October 2021, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and Special Rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health made a joint statement entitled '[Belarus and Poland: Stop sacrificing migrant lives to political dispute](#),' calling upon both Belarus and Poland to conduct a thorough investigation into the deaths at the border.

Repressive legislative changes expected as Parliament convenes for a regular session

At the opening of the sixth session of the House of Representatives, Belarusian parliamentarians [adopted](#) the first draft of the bill “On Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus.” The document seeks to amend Article 361 of the Criminal Code, introducing criminal responsibility of up to 12 years of imprisonment for calls for sanctions against government officials.

Meanwhile, the head of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus, Piotr Miklashevich, [commented](#) on the draft amendments to the Belarusian constitution, which are planned to be offered for adoption through a referendum. The amendments are expected to, *inter alia*, limit the number of presidential terms one can serve and enshrine the definition of marriage as a union of a man and a woman. The amendments face criticism for being merely a performative response from the government, which is unwilling to stop mass political repression.

A decision on suspending the international treaty on [readmission](#), concluded with the European Union, was passed by the Belarusian Parliament at the first reading.

Some [other draft laws](#) to be discussed in the Belarusian Parliament include those on increasing economic cooperation with Russia and other member states of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Developments in politically motivated cases

Some of the key developments in politically motivated cases include:

- On 1 October 2021, political prisoner [Pavel Lukyanau](#) was sentenced to 4 years in a maximum security prison for violating the public order by blocking roads during protests, disrupting the work of the city passenger transport, and damaging a garbage can;
- On 1 October 2021, Deutsche Welle cameraman [Ehor Kamarouski](#) was detained on suspicion of committing an “act of terrorism.” His apartment was searched;

- On 5 October 2021, the office of the only independent print publication in the Brest region, [Hantsavitski Chas](#), was searched on an unknown premise. The police confiscated mobile phones from the employees, as well as all computers in the office;
- On 5 October 2021, human rights defender [Tatsiana Revyako](#)'s apartment was searched and her equipment was confiscated. She was called in for questioning but not detained;
- On 6 October 2021, a criminal case was initiated against a [Hrodna YouTube blogger](#) for referencing the personal data of a state investigator in his video. The blogger is charged with breaching rules on personal data protection and insulting a state official;
- On 7 October 2021, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus [charged](#) all detained journalists and employees of Belarusian independent media outlet TUT.BY with “inciting social hatred” under Article 130 of the Criminal Code. The offence, applied to all TUT.BY staff, is punishable by up to 12 years of imprisonment. Previously, all journalistic materials by TUT.BY and its social media satellites were recognised as “extremist” by Belarusian authorities;
- Political prisoner [Pavel Sevyarynets](#), after being informed of the death of his father, Belarusian author and translator Kanstantsin Sevyarynets, was barred from attending the funeral;
- The mother of 17-year-old political prisoner [Mikita Zalatarou](#) was barred from visiting him since, according to prison authorities, he was put in “punitive confinement;”
- At least [976](#) people were found guilty in criminal cases, initiated on political grounds. 449 of them were imprisoned or restricted in their liberty. The given number does include approximately [35,000](#) people charged with administrative offences and subjected to arbitrary detention in the past year.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [801](#). The number continues to grow daily.