

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.

## **Saturday 26 February 2022 to Friday 4 March 2022**

Human Constanta expresses its [solidarity](#) with the people of Ukraine. We urge the international community to prioritize the voices and stories of Ukrainians, highlight violations of human rights and international law, call for accountability for the actions of the aggressor, and [support the most vulnerable groups fleeing the war without discrimination](#).

### **Tsikhanouskaya is charged with “harming national security” for anti-war address**

The General Prosecutor’s Office in Belarus has [charged](#) ex-presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya with another criminal offense. In addition to six criminal charges applied to her earlier, including one of terrorism, she is now accused of “calling to impose sanctions or committing other acts harming national security” under newly created part 3 of Article 361 of the Criminal Code. The charge followed promptly after Tsikhanouskaya recorded an anti-war address and published an [Anti-War Mobilization manifesto](#).

### **Political persecution on the day of the constitutional referendum / Suppression of opinion regarding Russian aggression against Ukraine**

Since 24 February 2022, when Russian authorities invaded Ukraine and escalated the eight year armed conflict to an unprecedented scale, Belarusians in exile and within the country have stood up against the war. While people living in exile have been able to express their solidarity and participate in [initiatives](#) supporting vulnerable groups in Ukraine, Belarusians who live in Belarus have faced arrests and mass repression.

On 27 February 2022, the third day of the invasion and the main voting day for the referendum on amendments to the Belarusian Constitution, ordinary citizens got together at polling stations to express their position on the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, [800 people were detained](#). According to the Human Rights Center “Viasna”, [more than 900 people were detained](#). The authorities immediately initiated criminal cases for “actions grossly violating public order”, and almost all detainees were sentenced by the courts from 10 to 15 days of arrest under the infamous Article 24.23 of the Code of Administrative Offenses for “violating the procedure for organizing mass events”.

[Human rights activists have also recorded](#) a number of gross violations during voting, which clearly violate the electoral law and standards for fair elections:

- the voters list contained the names of dead people or people serving sentences under criminal articles, who, according to the law, do not have the right to vote;
- voting booths were not equipped with curtains, and therefore all actions of voters, including their choice, were visible to members of the election commission, which violates the principle of secret voting;
- there were arrests of people who tried to take a picture of their ballot;
- there were arrests of people who tried to invalidate the ballot (to demonstrate disagreement with any proposed option in the referendum);
- measures were taken to anonymize members of election commissions; and
- people were forced to vote in hospitals and factories.

[According to human rights activists](#), preventive detentions began two weeks before the start of the referendum, with searches carried out at the homes of those convicted under political

articles and potential activists. On voting day, riot police (OMON) disproportionately and actively detained people who were simply waiting for their turn to vote or people who, on a 'tip' from members of election commissions, were somehow expressing dissenting opinions at polling stations. All people who brought Ukrainian symbols or posters with anti-war slogans were detained. Subsequent anti-war actions in city centers and near the Ukrainian embassy were aggressively dispersed by the security forces and were marked by arbitrary detentions.

On 28 February 2022, [anti-war protests continued](#) at Minsk railway station and in other Belarusian cities. Law enforcement officers brought paddy wagons and carried out detentions of people shouting the slogans "No to war!". Seventy people are reported to have been arrested.

On 3 March 2022, women who came to a cathedral in Minsk to pray for an end to the war were [detained](#) by the riot police.

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

- On 3 March 2022, the Sovietsky District Court of Minsk sentenced [Aleh Gruzdilovich](#), a former journalist of the independent publication Radio Svoboda, to 1.5 years in prison in a general regime colony under Article 342 of the Criminal Code ("Actions grossly violating public order"). Gruzdilovich was accused of taking part in an unauthorized protest, which caused damage to public transport work, despite the fact that at that time he was already deprived of his journalistic accreditation.
- On 2 March 2022, Novogrudok District Court sentenced [Dmitry Sushchik](#) to 1.5 years in a general regime colony under Article 368 ("Insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus") and Article 370 of the Criminal Code ("Desecration of state symbols") for various critical comments about Alexander Lukashenko and the current de-facto authorities. It is known that the security forces interrogated him in the forest and forced him to take part in the filming of a video in which he admits that he repents of his deeds.
- On 28 February 2022, Zavodskoy District Court of Minsk began considering a criminal case against [Yegor Martinovich](#), editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper Nasha Niva, and [Andrey Skurko](#), head of the marketing and advertising department, under Article 216 of the Criminal Code ("Infliction of property damage"), under which they could face up to five years in prison. They are charged with paying utility bills at the wrong rates.
- On 28 February 2022, it became known that the Gantsevichi district court sentenced [Vladimir Pavlovich](#) to arrest for three months under the Article "insulting the president" for criticizing Lukashenko.
- On 25 February 2022, the [independent media Charter'97](#) website was recognized as extremist material. Now, storing or distributing publications from this resource can result in an administrative arrest of up to 15 days or a hefty fine.
- On 24 February 2022, it became known that the court of the Verkhnedvinsky district sentenced a local resident, [Denis Petko](#), to 2.5 years of restriction for "insulting the president of the Republic of Belarus" and "insulting a representative of the authorities" for leaving comments under photographs of the military, prosecutors, journalists, and Lukashenko.

### **Mistreatment of prisoners**

[It is reported](#) that for detainees of administrative cases in the Temporary Detention Facility in the city of Zhodzina and the Detention Center on Akrestsina Street in Minsk, employees do not accept parcels with food, clothing, and medicines, allegedly due to COVID-19. The detainees are kept in inhumane conditions: people are beaten and denied food.

## **Political prisoners**

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1082](#). The number continues to grow daily.