

The information is aggregated from open online sources and our own practice. In these newsletters, we will update you in brief on everyday human rights violations in numbers and facts.

Saturday 17 December 2022 to Saturday 31 December 2022

Arbitrary detentions of people for political reasons continue in Belarus. Every day, human rights activists report detentions and court indictments for participating in protest actions, criticizing the authorities on social networks, and spreading information critical of the regime. In addition to the general trends of politically motivated persecution, characteristic of the period 2020-2022, the analyzed period is marked by another criminal prosecution of Belarusian human rights defenders, the first trial *in absentia* against political emigrants, harsh punishments for “partisan” sabotage on the railways.

Criminal prosecution of human rights defenders continues

On 24 December 2022, information appeared human rights defender Anastasia Loika ([Nasta Lojka](#)) [was charged](#) under two articles of the Criminal Code, including “actions grossly violating public order” under Article 342. Earlier, a complaint of Loika [to the United Nations Human Rights Committee](#) was registered and interim measures were taken. The Committee demanded that the Belarusian authorities provide her with immediate access to independent medical care, including a transfer to a relevant medical facility to receive adequate medical treatment, if necessary, and ensure that her life, physical and mental integrity are safeguarded, including by providing her with the seasonally appropriate clothes, , while her case is under consideration by the Committee.

On 20 December 2022, pro-government newspaper “Belarus Today” published [an article](#) under the title “Espionage network under the guise of human rights activists was uncovered by the employees of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.” This article notes that law enforcement agencies are conducting a criminal investigation against members of a human rights organization. According to pro-government journalist, human rights defenders are accused of “collecting information about Belarusians and selling it to foreign structures,” “advising criminals on how to behave with the police,” “paying lawyers and fines for street riots,” “attending seminars on encryption techniques,” and other actions directed against the state. The organization itself, according to pro-government sources, “deceived people, forced them to take active actions, and worked against the country.” This material includes a video of Lojka's interrogation, filmed under pressure from the security forces, in which her “recruitment” by foreign organizations is discussed. Human Constanta announced [in its statement](#) that all accusations cited in the article are unfounded and it would continue its human rights mission.

The first in absentia sentence against opposition

On 26 December 2022, Minsk City Court sentenced Olympic medalist [Alexandra Gerasimenia](#) and acting director of the Sports Solidarity Fund [Alexander Opeikin](#) to 12 years in prison on charges of calling for harm to national security (part 3 of Article 361 of the Criminal Code) *in absentia*. According to the Investigative Committee, they demanded the imposition of sanctions against the National Olympic Committee of Belarus and other sports organizations, insisted not to hold international competitions on the territory of Belarus, in particular, the Ice Hockey World Championship, and urged to abandon their sponsorship. Among other things, the defendants urged not to allow the athletes of the Belarusian national team to participate in competitions, including the Olympic Games, and not to be allowed to perform under the official flag.

All property belonging to Gerasimenia, located on the territory of Belarus, was confiscated for the purpose of compensation for harm: more than 48 thousand dollars in bank accounts, mobile phones, an apartment, a car seat, a refrigerator, a speaker system were seized. The main purpose of such trials is to put pressure on opposition activists abroad [by confiscating their property](#) and, most recently, having the possibility to [deprive such people of Belarusian citizenship](#). Prosecutor General Andrey Shved [stated](#) that the practice of proceedings via correspondence “is now being developed, and there will be more and more such processes in the near future.”

Harsh sentences for “rail partisans”

Sentences continue to be passed under Article 289 of the Criminal Code (“act of terrorism”) against people who committed sabotage on railway tracks in order to stop the advancement of Russian military equipment on the territory of Belarus. On 22 December 2022, “rail partisan” [Vitaly Melnik](#) was sentenced to 15 years in prison on charges of setting fire to the relay cabinet of an automatic blocking traffic light on the railway in order to disable the alarm system. It is known that during the arrest the man was shot through the knee joints. On 27 December 2022, The Gomel Regional Court sentenced three “partisans” from Svetlogorsk [Dmitry Ravich, Denis Dikun, and Oleg Molchanov](#) to terms from 21 to 23 years in prison on charges of arson of a security alarm on one of the sections of the railway. In addition to the charges of “terrorism,” they were also charged with “high treason” under Article 356 of the Criminal Code since they were allegedly tasked with disabling equipment by the opposition organization of former security officers “BYPOL,” located abroad.

Aleh Hulak

On 16 December 2022, human rights activist, the head of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee [Aleh Hulak passed](#) away at the age of 55. Aleh Hulak was a prominent human rights defender who made an invaluable contribution to advancing the rule of law and human rights in Belarus. The Human Constanta team, with sadness in its heart, expresses deepest condolences to the family and colleagues of Aleh.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1455](#). The number continues to grow daily.