

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 4 February 2023 to Friday 17 February 2023

Arbitrary detentions of people for political reasons continue in Belarus. Every day, human rights activists [report](#) detentions and court judgements 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 2020-2023, the analyzed period is marked by intensifying the persecution of independent journalists, rendering extremely harsh sentences against “railway partisans,” and creating a special commission for the return of political emigres.

Persecution of Nasta Lojka

On 17 February 2023, information surfaced that in addition to accusations of “actions grossly violating public order” under Article 342 of Criminal Code, human rights defender Nasta Lojka was [charged with “inciting social enmity”](#) under Article 130 of Criminal Code. Nasta faces up to 12 years in prison. The basis for the latter charge was Nasta's alleged participation in writing a 2018 report regarding the persecution of anarchist community in Belarus. The report gave a critical assessment of the activities of police officers, which investigators in Nasta's case qualify as “inciting enmity” against a professional group of police officers. These charges confirm the fact that Nasta is being persecuted by the regime solely because of her human rights work.

Nasta Lojka was recognized [as a political prisoner](#). She has been detained for a total of 144 days.

Persecution of independent journalists intensifies

On 6 February 2023, security forces detained [Anastasia Sharkevich](#), the administrator of the Telegram channel of the media outlet “Narodnaya Volya” on charges of participating in protests in 2020.

On 8 February 2023, Grodno Regional Court sentenced journalist and member of the Union of Poles [Andrzej Poczobut](#) to 8 years in prison on charges of “inciting enmity” under Article 130 of the Criminal Code and “calls for actions aimed at harming national security” under Article 361 of the Criminal Code. [According to Rzeczpospolita](#), the reasons for initiating criminal case were “discussion of Soviet aggression against Poland,” an article in *Gazeta Wyborcza* about the dispersal of peaceful protests in Belarus in 2020, as well as a 2006 article about the commander of the Polish anti-communist underground movement in the Grodno region.

On 15 February 2023, security forces came with an “inspection” to the editorial office of the independent media outlet from Baranovichi [“Intex-Press”](#) and seized all the equipment allegedly on the grounds that “traces of an administrative offense may have been spotted in the editorial office.” Security forces came to inspect the office of the outlet because of the videos on the outlet's YouTube channel with street polls of local residents on social topics. The next day, an employee of the outlet who conducted these surveys [was detained](#) for 72 hours.

Also on 15 February 2023, the Ministry of Internal Affairs recognized independent journalistic project [“Malanka Media”](#) as an “extremist formation” in extrajudicial manner. Now, any form of

cooperation with the outlet – for instance, an interview or sending information – may be punishable by up to 7 years of imprisonment.

Harsh sentences for “rail partisans”

The courts continued to pass extremely harsh sentences against “rail partisans” or “guerillas” – people accused of damaging railway tracks in order to slow down the movement of Russian military equipment on the territory of Belarus. In almost all cases, actions to damage transport routes were interpreted by the security forces as an act of terrorism under Article 289 of the Criminal Code.

On 8 February 2023, Gomel Regional Court sentenced two “railroad partisans” from Mozyr. Sergei Pleshkun was sentenced to 16 years in prison, Yuri Selvich – to 14 years. According to the case file, from August 2020 to February 2022, they purchased ingredients for the production of Molotov cocktails and discussed the possibility of sabotage on the railway. On 10 February 2023, Mogilev Regional Court sentenced two residents of Bobruisk, [Dzmitryi Klimau](#) and [Uladzimir Auramtsau](#), to 22 years in prison for destroying two relay cabinets of a signal installation on the railway near Osipovichi. During the detention, weapons were used against them, and after the detention, they were purposefully shot in the knee joints, despite not resisting the police.

Special commission for the return of political emigres

On 6 February 2023, Alexander Lukashenko [signed Decree No. 25](#), creating a special commission to work with “political” emigrants who want to return to their homeland. Belarusians who “have committed administrative offenses or crimes related to protest activities since 1 January 2020” and who are afraid of returning to the country because of the threat of persecution by the security forces, will have the chance to apply to the commission in order to avoid or reduce their responsibility upon returning to the homeland. This measure was taken in response to the massive outflow of Belarusians abroad due to political repressions: for example, about [150 thousand Belarusians](#) left for Poland in the post-election period.

To get a chance to come back to Belarus without consequences, such people must “show remorse for what they have done, inform the commission of their readiness to make public apologies, compensate for the damage caused, consciously and actively perform their civic duty.” Citizens who applied to the commission will be informed about the presence or absence of a criminal or administrative case initiated against them, as well as about the possibility of such cases’ termination. The commission board will include odious propagandists Grigory Azarenok and Marat Markov, heads of the State Security Committee (KGB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as other security officials, civil servants, and parliamentarians. This decree contains many legal loopholes that can formally be used to repress people, even if they have fulfilled all the requirements of the commission.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1445](#). The number continues to grow daily.