

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

Saturday 18 February 2023 to Friday 3 March 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 arbitrary detentions of minors, detentions related to the incident with destroying a Russian military aircraft in Machulishchi, harsh sentences against civil society activists at enterprises and the carrying out of a death sentence.

Detentions related to the incident with the destroying Russian military aircraft in Machulishchi

On 26 February 2023, the community of former Belarusian security officials BYPOL [stated](#) that two explosions occurred at the Machulishchi airfield, as a result of which a Russian military transport plane and snow removal equipment were damaged. The organization stated that the sabotage was committed by members of the opposition initiative “Plan Peramoga.” This incident was followed by mass arbitrary detentions of the residents of cities located near the airfield.

Six people were detained in [Dzerzhinsk](#). Detentions also took place in [Machulishchi](#) and [Fanipol](#). The true grounds for the persecution of the detainees are unknown, but they were all sentenced to an administrative arrest for “disobedience to the authorities.” Human rights activists report that the detainees might have been beaten. It is known that the security forces [have been monitoring messages](#) on social networks in order to identify and punish people who speak positively about the incident.

Harsh sentences against labor activists

On 17 February 2023, Gomel Regional Court handed down a verdict against ten [participants of the “Rabochu Ruh” initiative](#), who were engaged in anti-government activism at enterprises. All of them were found guilty and sentenced to terms of imprisonment from 11 to 15 years on charges of high treason and creation of extremist formations. According to the investigators, participants of the movement passed on official information about ways state-owned enterprises circumvent sanctions to the intelligence services of the United States and Lithuania. Additionally, the defendants in the case were accused of collaborating with the headquarters of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and planning to block the production activities of the Belarusian Metallurgical Plant (BMZ) and JSC Grodnoazot.

Mass detentions of teenage anime enthusiasts for “violating public order”

“PMK Redan” is a youth subcultural movement that was named after the criminal organization “Genei Redan” from Japanese animation “Hunter X Hunter.” For unknown reasons, the Belarusian authorities believed that the movement was “destructive” and detained teenagers belonging to the subculture *en masse*. The detentions took place near the meeting places of teenagers, announced on social networks.

On 28 February 2023, security forces [detained](#) 200 people, 183 of whom were minors, during their meeting in Gomel shopping center. [According to local media](#), teenagers were forced to stand facing the wall on the street in cold weather on the territory of the police station. Mass detentions also took place in other cities: 80 people (65 minors) were detained

[in Minsk](#), 52 people were detained [in Brest](#). The detentions also took place in [Mogilev](#) and [Orsha](#).

The Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that the detained teenagers under 16 years of age would be put on the “register” in the juvenile affairs inspectorate, while older detainees would face administrative responsibility “for participation in illegal mass gatherings” (presumably, under Article 24.23 of the Code of Administrative Offenses). Some minors were forced to appear in “confession videos,” in which they urged parents to look after their children more carefully. Moreover, the Investigative Committee [initiated a criminal case](#) under Article 342 of the Criminal Code (“actions grossly violating public order”) against the organizers of such meetings. These articles are notoriously used as tools of punishing people for participating in peaceful assemblies and criticizing the current regime.

Death sentence carried out

On 17 February 2023, information surfaced that [Viktor Skrundyk](#), convicted of the murder in the Slutsk gang case, was executed on 16 July 2022. He was sentenced to death by firing squad in March 2020. In June 2020 the Supreme Court overturned the verdict and sent the case for review. In January 2021, Skrundyk was sentenced to the death penalty again.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1462](#). The number continues to grow daily.

As of 3 March 2023, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody for 156 days. Her preventive measure in the form of detention has been extended at least until 14 April 2023.