

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 March 2023 to Friday 31 March 2023

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen – in the past weeks, representatives of the legal community were harassed and intimidated, security forces carried out arbitrary arrests of hundreds of people on the eve of Belarus Freedom Day, and independent journalists were subjected to persecution.

Persecution of lawyers continues

The period was marked by mass detentions of lawyers representing the interests of political prisoners. On 20 March 2023, the security forces [detained a minimum of six lawyers](#), including Vladimir Stankevich, Ivan Chizhik, Artem Semyanov, Yuri Kozikov, Inessa Olenskaya. Their homes were searched and their electronic equipment was confiscated. Subsequently, the Bar Qualification Commission of the Ministry of Justice [decided not to certify](#) Olenskaya allegedly “due to insufficient qualifications.” Moreover, Semyanov [was sentenced](#) to 15 days of arrest allegedly for “disobeying the police.”

On 22 March 2023, human rights activists learned that the Investigative Committee had brought an additional charge against lawyer [Anastasia Lazarenko](#), who has been in custody since June 2022. She was additionally accused of “illegal actions with regard to information about private life” and “organizing actions that grossly violate public order.” According to the investigation, she allegedly organized an “unauthorized mass event” when conducting legal consultations near the notorious Akrestina Detention Center in August 2020. Anastasia is also accused of leaking the personal data of security forces and judges to opposition Telegram channels.

Mass detentions on the eve of Belarus Freedom Day

Freedom Day is an unofficial national Belarusian holiday, which is celebrated annually on March 25 to mark the independence of Belarus People’s Republic founded in 1918. The authorities consider this holiday “oppositional” and curb any attempts to celebrate this date. On the eve of this day, security forces conducted searches and mass detentions in different regions of the country almost every day for several weeks. According to the human rights center “Viasna,” [at least 166 people were preemptively detained](#) and convicted for “spreading extremist materials” and “participating in an unauthorized event,” despite the fact that no marches or demonstrations were even openly held in Belarus. Security forces’ raids were documented in Pinsk, Miory, Orsha, Senno, Glubokoe, Mozyr, Brest, Ivatsevichi, Lepel, Polotsk, Novopolotsk, Gomel, and other regional cities.

Repressions against journalists

On 15 March 2023, the security forces conducted a search in the editorial office of the [“Info-Courier” media outlet](#), detaining three employees Sergey Stankevich, Gleb Rulev, and Oleg Rubchenya. Subsequently, the journalists [were sentenced to a 15-day administrative arrest](#) for allegedly “disobeying a policeman.” They were also [forced to appear in a “penitential video,”](#) in which they were accused of biased coverage of the events of 2020, traveling to study in Europe, and publishing “extremist materials” of the popular outlet TUT.by on their website.

On 23 March 2023, Minsk City Court sentenced [Dmitry Semchenko](#), a former employee of the presidential pool of the state channel ONT, to 3 years of prison for “inciting hostility.”

According to investigators, Semchenko published posts with a negative reaction about the actions of the security forces and representatives of the regime on his social networks. The prosecution stated that the journalist's actions were “crimes against the peace and security of mankind,” with the ultimate goal of “weakening the current state system.” On the same day, a criminal case was initiated against the founder and editor-in-chief of the “Regional Newspaper” [Alexander Mantsevich](#). He was then placed in a pre-trial detention center. On 24 March 2023, Bobruisk court arrested a journalist of the independent outlet “Commercial Courier” [Dmitry Suslov](#) for 15 days for the “distribution of extremist materials.”

Humanitarian crisis at the Belarus-EU border: Human Constanta 2022 report

Human Constanta [released the report](#) that maps the main stages of the humanitarian crisis in Belarus and at the border with the European Union in 2022, analyzes important developments in terms of the protection and promotion of human rights, and formulates recommendations for states affected by the humanitarian crisis and other important actors.

The report documents cases of intimidation, violence, and illegal actions against transit refugees by the border guards. Refugees unable to cross the border often found themselves in the forest without food, water and access to medical care or were bullied by security forces. Human rights defenders have also documented problems with effective access to humanitarian, medical, and legal assistance, as well as access to international protection procedures.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1476](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 31 March 2023, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody for 184 days.