

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 29 April 2023 to Friday 12 May 2023

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. In the past weeks, human rights defenders have received information about regular cases of degrading treatment in places of detention and about cases of death of political prisoners. The courts have passed more harsh sentences against representatives of civil society, opposition leaders, and independent lawyers.

Inhumane and degrading treatment of political prisoners

On 7 May 2023, human rights defenders reported that political prisoner, blogger, and public figure [Mikalai Klimovich](#) died in prison at the age of 61. In February 2023, he was sentenced to 1 year in prison for a caricature about Alexander Lukashenko, despite the fact that he had a second degree disability due to a stroke and severe heart disease. Before the verdict was announced, he told reporters the following: “Any prison term is death for me, because I have to be under constant supervision of a doctor, take a lot of serious medications. I may hold out for a month.”

On the same day information appeared that political prisoner [Viktoryia Kulsha](#) was beaten in a women's prison, and after hunger strikes in protest against the deteriorating conditions of detention, she had a heart attack twice. According to human rights activists, one of the guards strangled Kulsha with his elbow and “dragged” her around the cell. In addition, she was “often insulted and humiliated” in front of other guards.

The location of political prisoner and 2020 presidential candidate Viktor Babaryka as well as the state of his health have been unknown for two weeks. On the night of 24-25 April 2023, he was taken from Novopolotsk prison to the city hospital [with traces of beatings](#). Since that date, virtually no information about him was communicated, despite [requests from civil society](#) to report on his condition.

Persecution of independent attorneys

On 11 May 2023, Minsk City Court sentenced lawyer [Anastasiya Lazarenka](#) to 6 years of imprisonment. Earlier, she volunteered near the walls of the infamous temporary detention facility on Akrestina street in 2020, and also defended some people accused for political reasons. Lazarenka was accused of “gross violation of public order,” “illegal actions with respect to information about private life,” and “assistance in inciting enmity or discord” under Articles 342, 203-1 and 130 of the Criminal Code. The basis for the charges was her participation in 2020 protests, as well as the fact that she allegedly transferred personal data about two police officers to opposition resources.

On the same day, Right to Defense project published information that attorney [Igor Stepanov](#) from the city of Liozno was expelled from the bar association for “committing a misdemeanor discrediting the title of attorney, the bar and incompatible with advocacy,” thereby depriving him of the right to a profession. Probably, the reason for the sanction was his 15-day administrative arrest in February 2023 for “liking” the page of one of the online stores, included in the Republican List of Extremist Materials.

Harsh verdict against the founder of the national symbols store

On 11 May 2023, Minsk City Court sentenced the founder of the national symbols store “Symbal.by” [Pavel Belavus](#) to 13 years in prison and a hefty fine. He was found guilty of “high treason,” “gross violation of public order,” “calls to harm the national security of the Republic of Belarus,” and “leadership of an extremist formation” under Articles 356, 342, 361, and 361-1 of the Criminal Code. Pro-government sources [reported](#) that “for several years he and his accomplices carried out tasks of foreign states and organizations for monetary remuneration, promoting the idea of a “Polish world,” inciting enmity to the state.” Pavel is also charged with supplying people with protest symbols and coordinating activities aimed at seizing power using force.

Another *in absentia* verdict against opposition activists

On 3 May 2023, Minsk Regional Court [sentenced](#) the founder of NEXTA Telegram channel Stepan Putilo to 20 years in prison, the channel’s moderator Jan Rudik to 19 years in prison, and journalist Roman Protasevich (detained after infamous [Ryanair incident](#)) to 8 years in prison. Putilo and Rudik were convicted *in absentia*, since they both reside abroad. Protasevich remained under house arrest until the verdict came into force. [According to the prosecution](#), the aforementioned people, “conspired to seize state power in Belarus in an unconstitutional way,” published informational “destructive” materials in the networks of NEXTA and “Belarus of the Brain” Telegram channels, aimed at “inciting people to participate in mass riots” and “calls for acts of terrorism committed by citizens prone to protest”. They were charged under 10 “extremist” articles of the Criminal Code, Putilo was also separately charged with “organizing the activities of a terrorist organization and participating in its activities.” 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](#).

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1487](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 14 May 2023, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody for 228 days. According to our data, the investigation against Nasta has been completed, her case will soon be sent to court.