

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 8 July 2023 to Friday 21 July 2023

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by the continued deaths of political prisoners in places of captivity due to an intentional failure to provide medical care; harsh sentences and new cases of criminal prosecution of people who wished to take part in active anti-war actions, while at the same time the Belarusian authorities ignored illegal actions by mercenaries fighting on the side of Russia; punishment for leaving links to “prohibited” resources in academic papers; ongoing repression against the clergy.

Review of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus for April-June 2023

Human Constanta published an analytical review that reflects the main trends in the use of the markers “extremism” and “terrorism” in Belarus from April to June 2023. Within the period, at least 163 new criminal cases and 770 administrative cases were documented. The number of cases for “extremist reposts” in the first half of 2023 was almost 1.7 times higher than the number of such cases for the same period in 2022. Read more about the “extremist” trends in Belarus in the [full version of the review](#) on Human Constanta website (English translation is pending).

Political prisoner Ales Pushkin died in prison

On the night of 11 July 2023, artist and political prisoner [Ales Pushkin](#) died in intensive care under “unclear circumstances.” In 2022, he was sentenced to 5 years in prison for painting a portrait of an anti-Soviet underground figure Yevgeny Zhikhar, whom the Belarusian authorities consider a “collaborationist.” While serving his sentence, the political prisoner complained about health problems, while medical assistance was denied to him. Anonymous sources reported that Ales was brought to the hospital in critical condition with an unlikely chance of surviving, which indicates that prison administration did not take active measures to provide required medical assistance.

Moreover, on 13 July 2023, media outlet “Novy Chas” [reported](#) that at the beginning of the summer, another prisoner, Andrei Makarevich, who was convicted on political grounds, died in Akrestina Detention Center in Minsk. The detention center is [notorious](#) for the torture of detainees by the law enforcement officers. His former cellmates reported that he was convicted of “extremist reposts,” and died in his cell while serving his punishment.

Persecution related to the war in Ukraine

On 13 July 2023, pro-government media outlets reported that Gomel Regional Court sentenced [Maxim Drobnitsa](#), a 22-year-old resident of Svetlogorsk, to 8 years of imprisonment on charges of “participation in an extremist formation” and “attempted participation in the activities of a terrorist organization” under part 3 of Article 361-1 and part 2 of Article 290-5 of the Criminal Code respectively. According to the investigation, he registered in the opposition initiative “Plan Peramoga” (an initiative that unites people who stand against the regime) to perform actions aiming to stop the war in Ukraine. Having received the necessary instructions, the young man arrived at the designated place, where law enforcement officers were already waiting for him. Most likely, he registered in the “fake” chatbot of the initiative, which the security forces [continue to create](#) for direct provocations of people in order to increase the number of political detainees.

On 17 July 2023, a pro-government Telegram channel [reported](#) on the detention and initiation of a criminal case against a resident of Bobruisk. In the published [“confession video.”](#) the detainee, under pressure, declared that “he wanted to join the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU),” but did not know how to do it, hence he engaged in various correspondence to get more information about this issue. At the same time, it is not indicated whether the Bobruisk resident really contacted anyone connected to the AFU. The security forces routinely continue to initiate criminal cases under Article 361-3 of the Criminal Code (“participation in an armed formation or armed conflict, military operations on the territory of a foreign state, recruitment or preparation of persons for such participation”) against potential volunteer fighters and people who keep in touch with members of groups fighting on the side of Ukraine against Russia.

At the same time, the Belarusian security forces are not taking any measures to prosecute people who fought in Ukraine on the side of the Russian Armed Forces. [According to the “Belarusky Hajun” initiative](#), at least 2,000 PMC Wagner mercenaries were stationed on the territory of Belarus and one of the commanders of the PMC [announced](#) that up to 10,000 mercenaries are yet to arrive in Belarus. There is no information about criminal cases against such people in Belarus, despite the fact that the Criminal Code of Belarus prohibits engaging in “mercenary activities” and “participation in an armed conflict on the territory of a foreign state.”

People were punished for “forbidden” references in a university thesis

On 17 July 2023, security forces [detained](#) a 4th year law student for using sources “recognized as extremist materials” in her thesis. The student was later expelled from the university. The sources in question included links to materials of human rights center “Viasna” and independent media outlet “TUT.BY.” In the “confession video,” the author of the thesis says that she “looked at the text, but not at the links.”

Repression against the clergy continues

On 17 July 2023, Novogrudok district court fined priest [Yuri Zhagarin](#) for liking and reposting the 2016 publication of the recognized as “extremist” media outlet “Radio Liberty” back in 2021. Thus, the practice of holding people accountable for reposts of materials made before such materials were even recognized as “extremist” continues.

On 18 July 2023, the security forces initiated a criminal case for “inciting hostility” against [Vladislav Beloded](#), an employee of the Catholic Cathedral Church in Minsk. Pro-government sources indicate that during the protests in 2020, he allegedly sheltered persecuted protesters in the cathedral and used the cathedral tower to monitor the movements of security forces and warn protesters. He is also accused of making critical comments against the security forces online.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1476](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 21 July 2023, our colleague Nasta Lojka has been in custody for 296 days.