

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 16 September 2023 to Friday 29 September 2023**

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by continued persecution of journalists and anti-war activists, as well as an increase in the number of sentences for donations to solidarity funds. Human rights activists documented continued detentions at the border with the European Union. More harsh sentences were passed against people who handed over the personal data of the security forces to opposition resources.

#### **First detentions in connection with the adoption of the Decree on denying consular services**

On 7 September 2023, Alexander Lukashenko's [Decree](#) “On the procedure for issuing documents and performing actions” [was published](#) and immediately entered into force. According to the decree, Belarusians who reside abroad will no longer be able to exchange their passports or extend their validity in Belarusian consular offices abroad. Now a passport can only be obtained through the internal affairs bodies at the place of one’s last registered residence, *i.e.* upon returning to Belarus. As [was predicted by the experts](#), some political refugees whose documents expired decided to take a risk and head to Belarus in order to replace their documents. This resulted in the first arrests in this regard. On 27 September 2023, the co-founder of the BYSOL foundation, Andrey Strizhak, [reported](#) on the first case of detention at the border of a person who went to Belarus to resolve issues with documents. Strizhak also noted that at least once a week human rights defenders receive information about the detention of people who reside abroad at the border .

#### **Persecution for donations to pro-democracy organizations**

The practice of punishing people for making donations to pro-democratic organizations, subsequently recognized as [“extremist formations.”](#) continues. The prosecution is carried out under Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code (“financing extremist activities”), which provides for a maximum punishment of up to 8 years in prison. In all cases, criminal prosecution was carried out against people who had donated to solidarity funds long before they were recognized as “extremist,” in violation of national and international legal standards (for more information see [our analytical article](#)). During the analyzed period, we are aware of at least 3 sentences in this regard:

- On 20 September 2023, Gomel Regional Court sentenced [Victoria Gavrulina](#) to 3 years and 3 months in prison for donating to an “extremist formation;”
- On 21 September 2023, Minsk City Court sentenced businessman [Pavel Kharitonov](#) to 5 years in prison for one donation of \$20 to the solidarity fund;
- On 26 September 2023, Brest Regional Court sentenced the psychologist [Olesya Lentsevich](#) to 4 years in prison for several donations in the total amount of \$97 to the “BySOL” and “ByHelp” funds.

#### **Persecution related to the war in Ukraine**

On 26 September 2023, employees of the [notorious](#) Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBOPiK) [detained](#) a man who allegedly insulted a visitor wearing a chevron of Wagner PMCs at the post office.

On 26 September 2023, a Belarusian [was detained](#) for contacting a fake chatbot of the Kalinovsky Regiment (Belarusian unit fighting on the side of the Armed Forces of Ukraine). After he left a message in the chatbot, police officers called him and asked to come to Vitebsk, where allegedly the meeting point for the regiment recruits was situated. After the guy arrived at the specified place, he was detained. He was presumably charged under Article 361-3 of the Criminal Code (“participation in an armed formation or armed conflict, military operations, recruitment or preparation of persons for such participation on the territory of a foreign state”), which provides for a maximum punishment of up to 5 years in prison.

### **Persecution of journalists**

On 21 September 2023, journalist of the First Region newspaper [Sergei Gordeevich](#) was detained at the border and sentenced to 15 days of arrest for “distributing extremist materials”, which were detected during the inspection of his phone, under Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences. Sergei is a former political prisoner who recently served a sentence of 1.5 years in prison for “defamation crimes.”

On 25 September 2023, Vitebsk Regional Court sentenced videographer [Vyacheslav Lazarev](#) and his wife [Tatsiana Pytko](#) to 5.5 years in prison on charges of “aiding extremist activities” and to 3 years in prison on charges of “participating in an extremist formation” under Articles 361-4 and 361-1 of the Criminal Code, respectively. According to the investigation, the accused collaborated with the independent media outlet Belsat, recognized as an “extremist formation” in Belarus.

The courts continued to impose harsh sentences for transferring information about the places of residence and phone numbers of civil servants and security forces to the Black Book of Belarus – an initiative dealing with de-anonymization of government officials accused of human rights violations. Most of the charges related to the “leaks” are based in Article 130 of the Criminal Code (“incitement of social enmity”), which provides for a maximum punishment of up to 12 years in prison.

On 15 September 2023, Brest Regional Court sentenced ex-police officer [Kirill Gnyazdilov](#) to 8 years in prison under Articles 130 and 179 (“illegal actions with respect to information about private life”) for “leaking” data about his former colleagues. On 18 September 2023, Minsk City Court sentenced [Alexey Kuzmin](#), ex-manager of the MTS mobile operator, to 7 years in prison. According to the prosecution, having gained access to the personal information of MTS clients, he “leaked” information about at least 57 representatives of the regime to the Telegram channels, including the information about security forces officers, government officials, prosecutors, judges, state businessmen and propagandists, as well as their family members.

### **Political prisoners**

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1492](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 26 September 2023, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for a year](#).