

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

Saturday 9 December 2023 to Friday 12 January 2023

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by another *in absentia* sentence, harassment of election observers on the eve of parliamentary elections as well as administrators of pro-democratic Telegram-channels, an increase in the number of criminal cases for “high treason,” and the continued persecution for the support of Ukraine.

Persecution of activists *in absentia* continues

On 26 December 2023, Brest Regional Court sentenced businessman and political activist [Vadim Prokopyev](#) to 25 years in prison *in absentia* on charges of “inciting enmity,” “participating in an armed formation on the territory of another state,” “slandering and insulting Lukashenko,” and “insulting government officials” under Articles 130, 361-3, 367, 368 and 369 of the Criminal Code. Earlier, in June 2023, Prokopyev had already been sentenced to a similar term – according to state investigators, he was conspiring to seize power in Belarus.

Harassment of activists on the eve of parliamentary elections

Elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly and local Councils of Deputies will be held in Belarus on 25 February 2024. In anticipation of upcoming elections, the security forces intensified the persecution of activists who participated in the observation of the presidential elections in 2020. On 12 December 2023, Human rights center “Viasna” [reported](#) that KGB officers were conducting searches of former observers, checking the contents of their phones and warning them about criminal liability for “aiding extremist activities.”

On 28 December 2024, Investigative Committee [reported](#) the initiation of “special (*in absentia*) proceedings” against the head of “Malanka Media” Pavel Marinich, the creator of the “New Belarus” application Pavel Lieber, politician Alexander Dobrovolsky, and the head of “Honest People” initiative Elena Zhivoglod. They were charged with “impeding the legitimate activities of the Central Electoral Commission,” while a likelier ground of such persecution is to warn the society against documenting electoral fraud.

Harassment of administrators and members of Telegram chats

On 19 December 2023, Grodno Regional Court sentenced [Alexandra Kasko](#) to 10 years in prison under eight articles of the Criminal Code. In February 2023, she was detained upon her return to Belarus from Poland. According to the investigation, “she provided aid to extremist groups: by disseminating information regarding the planning, organization, preparation, and commission of attacks on the foundations of the constitutional order and public security of the Republic of Belarus.” According to the prosecution, she was the administrator of several “destructive” Telegram channels, recognized as “extremist formations.” The information contained in the chats was allegedly aimed at inciting social hostility, publicly insulting government officials, and illegally publishing their personal data. This case is an example of the mass persecution of Belarusians who return to Belarus after a long stay abroad – according to Viasna, at least 207 people [were detained](#) after border checks.

On 28 December 2023, state television [reported](#) the detention of at least 30 people from Polotsk and Novopolotsk, who were members of a Telegram chat of cyclists. According to the investigation, in August 2020 chat members used the platform to call for protests and plotting to “overthrow the government.”

Criminal cases related to the war in Ukraine

On 19 December 2023, Minsk Regional Court sentenced Belarusian [Czeslaw Kononovich](#) to 5 years in prison on charges of “financing extremist activities” under Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code. According to the prosecution, he made 10 donations to the Kalinovsky regiment (unit of Belarusian volunteer fighters on the side of Ukraine) totaling more than 1,200 rubles (about \$360).

On 28 December 2023, the security forces [reported](#) the detention of a Minsk resident for spreading “fakes” about the activities of mercenaries of the Wagner PMCs in a camp near Osipovichi. The detained person published online comments claiming that the mercenaries were engaged in looting and kept the city in constant fear. The security forces suggested that the man “incited national hatred in Ukrainian Telegram chats.”

High treason cases on the rise

On 15 December 2023, Minsk Regional Court sentenced ex-serviceman [Pavel Kuchinsky](#) to 19 years in prison for a number of “terrorist” articles of Criminal Code and for “high treason.” According to the organization of former security officers BYPOL, KGB officers, using torture, forced Pavel to take part in a provocation, during which he contacted BYPOL representatives and offered to engage in direct action against Belarusian authorities.

Also, “high treason” charges on unknown grounds were brought against the [Gomel family of four people](#) Vasily, Larisa, Anastasia, and Pavel Prokhorov, as well as [three customs officers](#) Evgeny Gurinovich, Vladimir Zhuromsky and Viktor Novik.

Persecution of independent musicians

On 5 January 2024, security forces detained members of the popular Belarusian [rock band Nizkiz](#). A story appeared on state television, featuring footage of the detention of musicians by special units, as well as “confession videos” in which musicians condemned protest actions in 2020. Apparently, the ground for the persecution was a music clip that was filmed at one of the protest marches. Later, on 8 January 2024, it became known that the members of the group were convicted of “distributing extremist materials” and punished with administrative arrest.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1415](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 12 January 2024, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 471 days](#).