

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 27 January 2023 to Friday 16 February 2023

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by continued persecution of political prisoners' relatives; conducting military exercises and repressing activists ahead of parliamentary elections; imposing harsh sentences *in absentia* on former security officials; announcing the intention of the Belarusian and Russian authorities to merge their "extremist" lists.

"Extremist" lists in Belarus and Russia could be merged soon

On 8 February 2023, the Ambassador of Belarus to Russia Dmitry Krutoy [stated](#) that Belarus and Russia are working to merge the lists of "extremists" and "extremist resources" in the two countries. These changes may lead to increased cooperation between the security forces of Belarus and Russia to repress dissenters, including in the context of prosecution for anti-war positions, as well as the expansion of prohibitive measures against various initiatives of civil society.

Persecution of activists *in absentia* continues

On 15 February 2024, Minsk City Court issued a verdict against representatives and ex-members of the [BYPOL organization](#), which unites former law enforcement officers who sided with the democratic forces. This organization was recognized as "[terrorist](#)" on the territory of Belarus due to organizing acts of resistance and publishing investigations about the representatives of the regime. The trial took place in the format of special proceedings (*in absentia*). Alexander Azarov was sentenced to 25 years in prison, Matvey Kupreichik, Vladimir Zhigar, Oleg Talerchik and Igor Loban to 12 years in prison, Andrei Ostapovich – to 11 years. The court also imposed large fines, amounting to about 320 thousand euros in total. The convicted, depending on their role in the organization, were accused under 13 "political" articles of the Criminal Code, including "inciting enmity," "acts of terrorism," "high treason," "conspiracy," "calls to harm national security" (Articles 130, 289, 356, 357, and 361 of the Criminal Code).

Moreover, on 17 February 2024, the Investigative Committee initiated a special procedure against entrepreneur [Igor Porankevich](#), who in 2020 [collected money](#) at his bar and sent it to the By_Help solidarity fund. He is accused of "inciting enmity," "threatening to use violence against a security official," and "insulting Lukashenko" under Articles 130, 364, and 368 of the Criminal Code.

On 21 July 2022, Alexander Lukashenko signed [Law No. 199-Z](#), which introduced the possibility to conduct special *in absentia* trials of people who are accused of "extremist" and "terrorist" crimes and reside outside Belarus. The chairman of the Investigative Committee Dmitry Gora [stated](#) that one of the main goals of this law was to create legal grounds for the confiscation of the property of political migrants. He believes that the conversion of such property into state income will allow "at least partially to cover the damage that has been done to the country."

Mass persecution of political prisoners' relatives continues

On 23 January 2023, the social initiative "I Need Help BY," which helped victims of state repression and their relatives with food, was recognized as an "extremist formation." On the same day, the State Security Committee (KGB) officers began [mass searches and](#)

[detentions](#) of relatives of political prisoners who received food parcels from the above-mentioned initiative. According to the [human rights center “Viasna.”](#) at least 257 people were persecuted by security forces, while criminal cases were initiated against at least 24 people for “participation in an extremist formation,” as well as “financing” or “promoting extremist activities” under Articles 361-1, 361-2, and 361-4 of the Criminal Code.

At least 65 people were convicted of “using foreign gratuitous assistance to carry out extremist activities” under Article 24.15 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, which was used for the first time in the history of human rights activists’ observations. The courts imposed large fines and ordered compensation for the assistance received. In the protocols of these cases it was noted that people “received and used foreign gratuitous assistance in the form of goods for the purpose of carrying out extremist activities, expressed in the illegal legitimization of the actions of persons who committed crimes, including by assigning them the pseudo-status of «political prisoners», illegally leveling the consequences of punishment, which created a threat of harm to the state.” For example, [Oksana Khinevich](#), a relative of an ex-political prisoner who was forced to leave Belarus after searches, was convicted directly through the Viber messenger.

Repressive measures ahead of parliamentary elections continues

The 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 protest actions or in the observation of the past presidential elections. Human rights activists reported that preventive conversations with telephone searches, as well as administrative detentions, [are continued](#) throughout the country. On 12 February 2024, security forces detained [Anatoly Pryshchik](#), a former member of the Hramada party, who was an observer at previous elections on several occasions. It is reported that fifteen armed special unit officers arrived to detain the 74-year-old man, throwing him face down on the ground.

The authorities are conducting various military engagements to prepare to suppress potential protest actions. On 15 February 2024, it became known that the Minsk police [conducted training exercises](#) on serving at polling stations – photo reports show that the security forces were training for armed suppression of protests. The commander of the internal troops, Nikolai Karpenkov, also [announced](#) that trainings are held ahead of the elections, including under the instructions of mercenaries from the Wagner PMC. He added that the mercenaries could be involved in work during the elections. Moreover, on 15 February 2024, [the regime of counter-terrorist operation](#) was declared in the Lelchitsy region, on the border with Ukraine: authorities, without giving any details, also [said](#) they were conducting military training. Later, Alexander Lukashenko [stated](#) that during the “counterterrorist operation” several “saboteurs from Ukraine” were detained. The Lukashenko regime regularly [issues statements](#) about the detention of “foreign saboteurs,” which are most likely fake – this is done to demonstrate imaginary threats to national security and intensify repressions.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1420](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 16 February 2024, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 506 days](#).