

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 17 February 2024 to Friday 1 March 2024

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by the death of the fifth political prisoner in captivity due to failure to provide medical care, the prosecution of protesters *in absentia*, the detention of people in connection with the hacking of advertising screens and the broadcast of pro-democracy narratives on them, the initiation of a criminal case against another pro-democracy educational initiative.

Political prisoner Ihar Lednik died in prison

On 20 February 2024, former member of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) [Ihar Lednik died](#) in prison at the age of 63 because of heart failure. Since the beginning of 2020, this is the fifth death of a Belarusian political prisoner behind bars. In 2022, he was sentenced to 3 years in prison on charges of “slander of Lukashenko” under Article 367 of the Criminal Code. According to the prosecution, his article in the party magazine contained “deliberately false, defamatory and humiliating information accusing him of serious crimes, including against humanity.”

Despite having a second-degree disability due to heart problems, he was still sentenced to imprisonment. In prison, his [condition worsened](#) – Lednik said to his cellmates that he would most likely die in the colony if he was not provided with qualified and timely medical care. Political prisoners who served their sentences in the same penal colony as Lednik [claimed](#) that there was practically no medical care provided and even sick political prisoners were forced to do hazardous work.

Detentions for possible involvement in broadcasting Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s address

On 24 February 2023, the organization of former security officials BELPOL carried out an [act of civil disobedience](#), broadcasting Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s speech on the anniversary of the start of Russian aggression in Ukraine and the boycott of parliamentary elections in Belarus. The message was displayed on more than two thousand advertising screens in shopping centers throughout Belarus.

The next day, a Telegram channel close to the security forces published a “confession video” with [four detained employees](#) of the “Legion-104” company, responsible for operating advertising screens. The director of the company [denied](#) the company’s involvement in broadcasting the speech and said that the servers were hacked from abroad. Representatives of BELPOL stated that the detained employees were not related to this action while the real organizers were located outside Belarus. Despite that, security forces initiated a criminal case against the company’s employees. The company’s director was forced to remain in Poland, where he was visiting his family, to avoid prosecution.

Persecution of Belarusians *in absentia* continues

On 23 February 2024, the Investigative Committee [initiated](#) more criminal cases in the format of special proceedings (*in absentia*). This time, the procedure was used against ordinary Belarusians who participated in 2020 protests, while the previously given format of persecution was used only against prominent opposition figures. It is reported that cases have been initiated against nine Belarusians – Vitaly Pakhomchik, Viktor Puzan, Gennady Gutor, Irina Toloka, Alexander Telyuk, Anatoly Ostrovsky, Lyudmila Arastovich, Olga and

Evgeny Prudnikov. All of them are accused of participating in “actions grossly violating public order” under Article 342 of the Criminal Code. Security forces typically use this article to persecute people who participated in peaceful protests in 2020. Additionally, Vitaly Pakhomchik was accused of “insulting a representative of the authorities” under Article 369 of the Criminal Code – this article is mainly used to prosecute for criticising the regime online.

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.”

Another persecution of participants in pro-democracy educational initiatives

On 14 February 2024, the Investigative Committee [initiated](#) a criminal case against representatives and participants of the “[Personnel Reserve for New Belarus](#)” initiative, organized by the United Transitional Cabinet. This initiative was launched at the end of 2022 and provides for the selection and training of future managers for central and local authorities in democratic Belarus. Previously, it was recognized as an “extremist formation” on the territory of Belarus.

A case was initiated on charges of “participation in an extremist formation” under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code. According to investigators, the participants in the initiative planned to “while armed, enter the territory of the country, conduct mass lustrations against government officials loyal to the homeland, and bring fellow radicals to tear the country apart.” It is reported that the *in absentia* proceedings will be conducted against identified participants located outside Belarus. On state TV, propagandists showed photographs of at least 14 people detained in this case, while representatives of the opposition [denied](#) the involvement of these people in the initiative as well as the fact that the security forces received a database of participants.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1410](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 1 March 2024, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 520 days](#).