

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 2 March 2024 to Friday 14 March 2024

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by continued prosecution of activists abroad during *in absentia* proceedings for “protest” and “defamation” crimes; the resumption of the use of the article on “denial of the genocide of the Belarusian people” for varying opinions about the history of Belarus; mass detentions of independent lawyers; mass arrests of residents of the Brest region for “distribution of extremist materials.”

Persecution of Belarusians *in absentia* continues

The Investigative Committee (IC) continued to initiate special (*in absentia*) criminal proceedings against activists and protesters in 2020, who were forced to flee repression abroad. On 4 March 2024, IC initiated special proceedings against human rights activist and former political prisoner [Leanid Sudalenka](#). He was accused of “aiding extremist activities” under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code. Apparently, charges under this article were brought because Leanid spoke about his prison experience in an interview with independent media, in particular he spoke about torture in Belarusian prisons and poor conditions of detention. Human rights activist and journalist [Vladimir Khilmanovich](#) as well as the owner of a store of Belarusian national symbols [Sergei Veremenko](#) were charged under the same article.

Special proceedings were also initiated against [Yuriy Shchuchko](#), [Olga Velichko](#), [Ilona Rudenya](#), [Lyudmila Boreyko](#), and [Igor Kazmerchak](#) who had previously participated in various acts of civil disobedience – all of them were charged under “protest,” “defamation,” and other “extremist” articles 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 IC 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 emigres. He believes that the expropriation of such property into state income will allow “at least partially to cover the damage that has been done to the country.”

Mass detentions of independent lawyers

On 28 February 2024, employees of the State Security Committee (KGB) [carried out mass detentions](#) of lawyers in Belarus, many of whom defended people in politically motivated cases. The exact number of detainees and the reasons remain unknown, but human rights activists estimate the figure at 12 lawyers. Criminal cases were brought against some lawyers – for example, lawyer [Galina Parkhimchik](#) was forced to leave Belarus after she was charged with “financing extremist activities.”

Mass detentions in the Brest region

According to the Belsat, on 7 March 2024, in Brest and Malorita (Brest region), security forces [detained at least 40 people](#). Most of them were sentenced to 15 days of arrest for “distributing extremist materials” online. It was reported that the Brest temporary detention center was overcrowded – in addition to the detainees mentioned, there were many people detained after crossing the border and truck drivers. The charges against detained people are unknown.

First arrest for the “denial of the genocide of the Belarusian people”

The period was marked by the resumption of the use of Article 130-2 of the Criminal Code ([“denial of the genocide of the Belarusian people”](#)) to prosecute opinions about the history of Belarus during the Second World War and post-war years that contradict the official position of the authorities. Human rights activists recorded the first arrest under this article – earlier, cases under this article were brought only against independent media or journalists located abroad.

On 3 March 2024, state media [reported](#) the detention of a 54-year-old resident of Minsk for administering an online community on historical topics. According to investigators, he “told his subscribers that the atrocities committed on the territory of Belarus were erroneously attributed to the Nazi occupiers” – he claimed that the notorious village of Khatyn was burned down by Soviet partisans rather than Nazi occupying forces. For these actions, the detainee may face a disproportionately harsh punishment – the article provides for punishment of up to 5 years in prison.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1412](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 14 March 2024, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 534 days](#).