

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 16 November 2024 to Friday 29 November 2024**

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by the sixth stage of pardoning political prisoners in recent months, extradition of Kalinovsky Regiment fighter to Belarus, harsh *in absentia* sentences, first criminal conviction for monitoring court hearings, and growing repression ahead of the presidential election.

### **The sixth stage of pardoning political prisoners**

On 20 November 2024, Aliaksandar Lukashenka decided to pardon 32 people convicted of “extremist crimes.” Lukashenka's press service reported that 8 women and 24 men were pardoned, 17 of whom have chronic diseases. 17 of the pardoned have children. It is also known that 9 of the pardoned are over 50 years old. Thus, 178 political prisoners have been released during 6 stages of pardon since 3 July 2024. However, the pardons affected a small share of the total number of arbitrarily detained and unjustly convicted, and, as the information described below shows, during the reporting period more people were convicted and detained than released.

### **Kalinovsky Regiment fighter extradited to Belarus**

On 20 November 2024, state channel ONT showed footage of a former fighter of the Kalinovsky Regiment (a Belarusian military formation that is part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine) Vasily Veremeychik (call sign “Patsuk”), who was detained in Vietnam in mid-November and the day after his detention was handed over to Belarus. His associates from the political movement “Prokopyev-Egorov Bloc” stated that Veremeychik's detention was not just a coincidence, but a special operation of the State Security Committee of Belarus (KGB). It is known that Veremeychik ended up in Vietnam because Lithuania recognized him as a threat to national security and, as a result, banned him from entering the Schengen zone. The charges brought against Veremeychik are unknown, however, in connection with the recognition of the Kalinovsky Regiment as a “terrorist organization” on the territory of Belarus, he may be charged with “terrorist activity” and in this case he may face the death penalty. The TV channel also showed another detained fighter of the Kalinovsky Regiment, Maksim Ralko – it is unknown how and when he got to the territory of Belarus.

### **Harsh *in absentia* sentences**

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. Chairman of the Investigative Committee Dmitry Gora stated that one of the main goals of the adoption 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.” According to the List of Persons Subject to Special Proceedings and Summoned by Criminal Prosecution Authorities, as of 29 November 2024, special proceedings have officially been initiated against 122 individuals in Belarus.

On 21 November 2024, the Grodno Regional Court sentenced activist and member of the United Civil Party Jerzy Grigench *in absentia* to 6 years of imprisonment and a fine of 40,000 Belarusian rubles (about \$12,000) on charges of “inciting enmity,” “aiding extremist activity,”

“slander” and “insult” against Lukashenko under Articles 130, 361-4, 367, and 368 of the Criminal Code.

On 25 November 2024, Minsk City Court sentenced the founder of the “New Vision” clinic, Oleg Kovrigin, *in absentia* to 12 years in prison. He was found guilty of “inciting enmity,” “tax evasion,” “calling for harm to national security,” “aiding extremist activity,” and “discrediting Belarus” under Articles 130, 243-1, 361, 361-4, and 369-1 of the Criminal Code. Kovrigin was also fined 100,000 Belarusian rubles (about \$122,500), and was ordered to pay more than 3 million Belarusian rubles (about \$918,500) in damages. The chief accountant of the medical center, the deputy director and the head nurse were also convicted in person in this case – they were sentenced to imprisonment for a term of 3 years and 3 months to 3 years and 6 months with a 3-year deferment of execution.

### **Volunteer faces first criminal conviction for monitoring court hearings**

In 2024, human rights activists recorded the initiation of the first criminal cases for attending court sessions to collect information for human rights purposes. On 28 March 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported the detention of three residents of the Brest region who were monitoring court proceedings in cooperation with the Human Rights Center “Viasna.” According to law enforcement, “a 40-year-old resident of Brest, together with accomplices, systematically attended trials in criminal cases of an extremist nature at the direction of organizers from abroad. They recorded the proceedings and outcomes of the sessions, as well as information about witnesses and law enforcement representatives,” and then sent this information “to foreign coordinators for publication on destructive online platforms.” Criminal cases were initiated against all three individuals for “aiding extremist activities” under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code. On 22 November 2024, pro-government sources reported that one of the observers, 41-year-old Brest resident Vitaly Chopik, was sentenced to 7 years in prison and fined 1,000 base units (over \$12,000).

### **Growing repression ahead of the presidential election**

On 23 October 2024, the House of Representatives of the National Assembly scheduled the presidential elections of the Republic of Belarus for 26 January 2025. Traditionally, the pre-election period is marked by increased repression. Thus, on 15 November 2024, mass arrests took place in Belarus. In recent days, security forces have been arresting and searching former political prisoners and relatives of political prisoners. The greatest activity of security forces was observed in Polotsk and Novopolotsk.

### **Political prisoners**

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is 1296 (during the analyzed period, human rights activists recognized 47 new people as political prisoners). As of 29 November 2024, our colleague Nasta Lojka has been in custody for more than 2 years (794 days).