



TIMELINE OF FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION VIOLATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS PERSECUTION

Belarus

August 2020-February 2022

August 2020

The Prosecutor General's Office of Belarus [opened a criminal case](#) over establishing the Coordinating Council (CC) of the Belarusian opposition announced on 18 August. It was initiated under Art. 361 of the Criminal Code for public calls for the seizure of state power, the commission of actions aimed at causing harm to national security, including using the media or the Internet. According to the Prosecutor General's Office, "the establishment of such bodies is not provided for by law, and their activities are unconstitutional." As part of this criminal case, members of the CC Praesidium Maria Kolesnikova and Maxim Znak were arrested. Ex-presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya is also the accused in this case.

Detention of CC members began: law enforcement officers detained members of the Praesidium Sergei Dylevsky and Olga Kovalkova in Minsk in an administrative case. CC member Lilia Vlasova was detained. Anatoly Bokun, co-chairperson of the Belaruskali strike committee, was detained by the State Security Committee (KGB) officers.

September 2020

Detentions of civil society activists in administrative cases. Chairperson of the NGO *Ecodom* Board Irina Sukhiy, *Green Portal's* author Nasta Zakharevich, fem-activist Aleksandra Kurochkina, the head of the executive bureau of the NGO *Assembly* Stanislava Gusakova, and activist of the LGBT+ rights movement Victoria Biran were detained after searches.

The CC Praesidium members Maxim Znak, Maria Kolesnikova, as well as lawyer Ilya Salei were detained in the criminal case. Subsequently, in September 2021, the court sentenced Maria Kolesnikova to 11 years in prison and Maxim Znak to 10 years in prison.

A video about the relationship between the IT company *PandaDoc* and the Centre for the Promotion of Women's Rights *Her Rights* was broadcast on the state TV (ATN "Agency of

Television News"). The video showed a scheme in which the company transfers money to the Centre to fund women's marches.

Coordinator of the *Viasna* Human Rights Centre's volunteer service Marfa Rabkova was detained. A search was conducted in her apartment; equipment, her money and belongings were seized. Later, it became known that she was charged under 11 articles of the Criminal Code: Art. 293(1) (organising mass riots); Art. 293(2) (preparing and deliberate creating conditions for participation in mass riots); Art. 293(3) (educating or other preparing persons for participation in mass riots, as well as financing or other material support for the activities); Art. 342(1) (organising group actions grossly violating public order); Art. 361(3) (calling for actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of the Republic of Belarus using the mass media or the global computer network Internet); Art. 361-1(1) (creating an extremist formation); Art. 285(1) (leading a criminal organisation); Art. 130(3) (inciting social discord by a group of persons); Art. 339(2) (malicious hooliganism); Art. 339(3) (particularly malicious hooliganism); Art. 341 (desecrating buildings and damaging property); Art. 218(3) (deliberate destruction or damaging another's property committed by an organised group); Art. 295-3(2) (Illegal actions in relation to objects, the damaging effect of which is based on the use of combustible substances, committed by a group of persons). According to these articles, Rabkova faces up to 20 years in prison.

There was a start of requesting information from civil society organisations, primarily from recipients of foreign gratuitous assistance, by financial control bodies, such as structures of the General Department for Combating Economic Crimes, the Department of Financial Investigations of the State Control Committee, the Department for humanitarian activities, as well as of justice departments and tax offices. Thus, the State Control Committee carried out an unscheduled inspection of the Local Cultural Foundation *Country of Castles*.

October 2020

Andrey Chepyuk, a volunteer for the *Viasna* human rights center, was detained by the General department for combating organized crimes and corruption (GUBOPiK) officers and then was charged under Art. 293(2) of the Criminal Code (participating in mass riots).

Director of *Ecodom* Marina Dubina, director of the research project 'Modern Society, Ethics, and Politics' Olga Shparaga, director of the *ABF* Effective Communication Development Center Yulia Mitskevich, the Coordinating Council member, coordinator of the movement *March, Baby* Svetlana Gatalskaya, activist of the Human Rights Center *Viasna* Marina Kostylyanchenko, and human rights activist of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee Leonid Markhotko (repeatedly) were detained and sentenced to administrative arrests.

There were inspections by the Department of Financial Investigations, the Sanitary and Epidemiological Station, refusal to conclude a lease agreement, and pressure of other kinds against the Grodno children's hospice.

November 2020

Searches were carried out at the office of the Belarusian Students' Association (ZBS), one of the oldest youth organizations in the country, as well as at the residences of its leaders and activists. Ten activists of the student movement, as well as a teacher for the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics were detained. Later, ZBS' press secretary Ksenia Syromolot, its activist and member of the Coordinating Council Alana Gebremariam, members Yegor Kanetsky, Yana Orobeiko, and Kasya Bud`ko were sentenced to two and a half years in a penal colony under Art. 342 of the Criminal Code (organizing and preparing actions grossly violating public order, or actively participating in them).

[A mass blocking of accounts](#) of recipients of assistance from the BY_help foundation supporting victims of mass repressions began.

December 2020

The Prosecutor General's Office, "taking into account the data obtained during the investigation by the Investigative Committee of the criminal case against members of the so-called coordinating council under Article 361, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code," decided to initiate criminal proceedings against S. Tikhanovskaya, M. Kolesnikova, M. Znak, P. Latushko, O. Kovalkova, S. Dylevsky, and other persons over creating and leading an extremist formation, i.e. committing a crime under Art. 361-1(1) of the Criminal Code. The Prosecutor General's Office opened a criminal case against A. Leonchik and others over financing the activities of an extremist formation under Art. 361-2 of the Criminal Code.

There were searches in the office of the Cultural and Educational Establishment *Journalistic Workshop Press Club* and in the homes of its managers and employees. Six people were detained: founder Yulia Slutskaya, program director Alla Sharko, financial director Sergei Olshevsky, programme director of the Press Club Academy Sergei Yakupov, cameraperson Piotr Slutsky, and Ksenia Lutskina, a former employee of the state broadcaster *Belteleradiocompaniya*. Subsequently, in August 2021, they were released, excepting the Coordinating Council member Ksenia Lutskina. [The Prosecutor General's Office announced](#) the closure of the criminal case in connection with a plea agreement, the compensation paid

for the damage (approximately 43.7 thousand US dollars) and the special criminal compensation paid.

There was an obvious increase in the number of non-profit organisations that made a decision to self-liquidate. As a result, from September 2020 by 15 March 2022, at least 239 non-profit organisations making decisions on self-liquidation were [recorded](#).

January 2021

Chairperson of the Gomel branch of the Human Rights Center *Viasna* Leonid Sudalenko, volunteers of *Viasna*, Tatiana Lasitsa and Maria Tarasenko, were detained. Afterwards, in November 2021, Leonid Sudalenko [was sentenced](#) to three years in prison under Art. 342 of the Criminal Code (organizing and preparing actions grossly violating public order, or actively participating in them), Tatyana Lasitsa [was sentenced](#) to two and a half years in prison under the same article. Maria Tarasenko was able to flee Belarus as a state prosecutor demanded a sentence of two and a half years in prison for her.

There was the inspection by the Department of Financial Investigations of the State Control Committee (DFI) in relation to the Educational Human Rights Establishment *Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities*'s staff members and other people over alleged misappropriation funds received by the establishment as charitable contributions and international assistance for assisting to citizens of the Republic of Belarus with disabilities in the period from 2020. This was followed by detention of the Office's leader Sergei Drozdovsky and lawyer Oleg Grablevsky, who were charged under Art. 209(2) of the Criminal Code (fraud committed by a group of persons). In July 2021, they were released under personal guarantee and had to flee Belarus.

Inspections of the Socio-Cultural Establishment *Kryly Khalopa Theater* by the Department of Financial Investigations and the Ministry of Emergency Situations began, which lasted more than four months.

February 2021

A wave of searches at Belarusian human rights activists' homes and in human rights organizations headquarters 'as a part of a preliminary investigation in order to establish the circumstances of funding protest activities' swept. There were raids in the premises of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) and its employees, as well as members of the REP trade union, *Viasna*'s human rights activists including members of its Mogilev branch Aleksey Kolchin and Boris Bukhel, coordinator of the campaign *Human rights activists against the death penalty in Belarus* Andrei Poluda, leader of its Mozyr branch Vladimir Telepun, leader of its Svetlogorsk branch Elena Maslyukova, Dmitry Solovyov, who was detained,

placed in custody and was subsequently released on his own recognisance, and others. In total, at least 90 searches were conducted across the country.

March 2021

A package of repressive legislation that significantly affects the interests of CSOs was urgently developed and adopted during the spring: a new edition of the Code of Administrative Offenses and amendments to the Criminal Code, legislation on countering extremism, on advocacy, etc. (Analysis of these regulations prepared by *Lawtrend* and BHC`s experts: <https://belhelcom.org/ru/document/novoe-zakonodatelnoe-regulirovanie-v-respublike-belarus-kak-reakciya-vlastey-na-sobytiya>)

The list of public associations and establishments that have lease benefits was almost halved.

The Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus announced the initiation of a criminal case over the activities of the Human Rights Centre *Viasna*. A wave of searches and interrogations of its members swept across the country.

A criminal case was filed over committing deliberate actions aimed at inciting hostility on the basis of ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliation and rehabilitating Nazism by a group of persons under Art. 130(3) of the Criminal Code. Inspections began to put pressure on Polish educational centres. Director of the *Polish School* Educational Public Association Anna Panisheva, director of the public school at the Union of Poles in Volkovysk Maria Tishkovskaya, the Lida branch of the Union of Poles` leader Irena Bernatskaya, chairperson of the Union of Poles Anzhelika Boris, journalist and member of the Union of Poles Andrei Poczobut were detained. Panisheva, Tishkovskaya, and Bernatskaya were released in May 2021 and taken to Poland. Boris and Poczobut were charged under Art. 130(3) of the Criminal Code.

The Centre for Urban Life`s leader Pavel Mozheiko and artist Ales Pushkin were detained under Art. 130(3) of the Criminal Code. Then, Mozheiko was released as "there were no grounds for detention."

April 2021

The *Zveno* Public Association was raided, as well as homes of human rights activists Tatiana Gatsura-Yavorskaya, Natalya Trenina, and Yulia Semenchenko. Five activists were detained in the administrative case. Later, Gatsura-Yavorskay was detained in a criminal case and released after nine days in custody. Yulia Semenchenko was [detained](#) again in December 2021 and arrested for 14 days under Article 19.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences (petty hooliganism).

A volunteer of the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus was detained; after having served an administrative arrest, he became a suspect in a criminal case under Art. 342(1) of the Criminal Code (organising and preparing actions that grossly violate public order, or actively participating in them). Security officials [raided](#) the apartment of *Human Constanta* team member, member of the Supervisory Board of the Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities Enira Bronitskaya as well as her parents' one. The official reason for the search was a criminal case over mass riots. However, according to the officials conducting the search, the true reason for their actions was the activities of the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus.

[The Minsk Department of the Investigative Committee](#) opened a criminal case against Aleksei Leonchik and Andrei Strizhak, co-founders of *BY_help* and *BYSOL* initiatives, under Art. 342(2) (other preparing persons for participating in group actions grossly violating public order) and Art. 361-2 (financing the activities of an extremist group) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus.

Belarus' Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei announced the prospect of destroying civil society in the event of strengthening sanctions against Belarus.

A. Lukashenko gave a mandate to deal fundamentally with all "doubtful associations and establishments" and to re-register them.

May 2021

Inspections of public associations documentation by justice departments (registering bodies) began; their requests contained a huge number of items, including internal documents, such as contracts with individuals and other persons, e-mails, information on donors, and lists of public associations members indicating their personal data.

At the meeting on a draft law on civil service, A. Lukashenko reiterated the need to re-register non-profit organizations.

June 2021

Tatyana Kuzina, a member of the Council and co-founder of the School of Young Managers for Public Administration *Sympa*, an expert for the *Bipart* research project, was detained. She [was charged](#) under Art. 357(1) (conspiracy or other actions committed with the aim of seizing or holding state power in an unconstitutional way) and Art. 361(3) (calling for action aimed at causing harm to the national security of the Republic of Belarus using the media or the Internet).

Inspections of public associations and foundations by justice departments intensified. Public associations and foundations began to receive written warnings over violations of the law.

July 2021

There was an unprecedented [wave of searches](#) affecting various civil society organisations, their leadership, members, and employees. Searches were carried out in such prominent Belarusian organisations as the Human Rights Centre *Viasna*, the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the Centre for Legal Transformation, *Names*, the Movement *For Freedom, Tell the Truth*, the Francišak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society, *Civil Forum*, *TimeAct* and many others; in the homes of *Legal Initiative*'s leader Viktoria Fedorova, member of the Board of this organisation Galina Ustinova, member of the organisation Yevgeny Pugach, the Public Association *Ekodom*'s leader Marina Dubina, leader of the Centre for Legal Transformation Olga Smolianko, chairperson of *the Francišak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society* Alena Anisim, the Belarusian language course *Mova Nanova*'s manager Gleb Lobodenko, and many others.

[Leaders](#) of the Human Rights Center *Viasna* [were detained](#) and placed in custody, that is its chairperson Ales Byalyatsky, the Board member Valentin Stefanovich, lawyer, coordinator of the campaign *Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections* Vladimir Labkovich, as well as his wife, executive director for the investor association, Nina Labkovich (released ten days later). Several other members of the organisation, Alena Laptенок, Sergei Sys, Viktor Sazonov, Oleg Matskevich, Andrei Poluda, Alexander Kaputsky, and Yevgenia Babayeva, were detained for various periods.

It was a start of mass forced liquidation of public associations, foundations, and establishments. This affected the oldest and credible organisations, such as the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the Public Association *Ecodom*, the Belarusian PEN Centre, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the Francišak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society, the World Association of Belarusians *Bačkaŭščyna*, the Belarusian School Society, the Union of Belarusian Writers, the Gomel Youth Local History Public Association *Talaka*, the International Public Association *Gender Perspectives*, the Public Association *Radislava*, the Public Association *Akhova Ptushak Batskaushchyny*, the Foundation *Dobra*, the Centre for Legal Transformation, the Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Office for European Expertise and Communications, and many others. As a result, by 15 March 2022, 382 non-

profit organisations [were known](#) to have been forcibly liquidated or to be in the process of forced liquidation.

The deputy chief of the KGB investigative department [said](#) that “in Belarus, an operation was underway to clean it from radical people.” During a [meeting](#) with local authorities activists, A. Lukashenko said that, as a result of the measures taken, 185 destructive structures posing a potential threat to national security were revealed, including a representative office of a foreign non-profit organisation, 71 republican and local public associations, and 113 establishments.

August 2021

Belarusian philosopher and methodologist, public and political figure, one of the founders of *the Flying University* and the *EuroBelarus Consortium* Vladimir Matskevich was detained. He [was charged](#) under Art. 342 (organising and preparing actions grossly violating public order, or actively participating in them) and Art. 361-1 (creating an extremist formation or participation in it) of the Criminal Code. Tatyana Vodolazhskaya, a senior analyst at *the Centre for European Transformation*, an expert of the analytical group for *the Agency for Humanitarian Technologies*, curator of *the Flying University*, was detained for ten days in a criminal case. The residence of Oksana Shelest, a senior analyst at the Centre for European Transformation, an expert of the analytical group for *the Agency for Humanitarian Technologies*, and public person Vlad Velichko was raided.

September 2021

[Searches were carried out](#), with seizure of equipment and documentation, at the residences of *the Green Portal*'s editor Yanina Melnikova and eco-activist Natalia Gerasimova. They both were detained for 72 hours. At the same time, the home of Irina Sukhiy, founder and member of the board of the *Ecodom* Public Association, an activist of the Belarusian anti-nuclear campaign, who had to leave Belarus earlier, was raided.

The issue of civil society organisations was once again [raised](#) by A. Lukashenko at a meeting with the Administration of the President. In particular, he proposed to define by law which subjects should be classified as civil society.

October 2021

The Financial Investigation Department of the State Control Committee's officers [searched](#) the home of human rights activist Tatyana Revyako. Then, she was taken for interrogation to the DFI and the Investigative Committee departments. Earlier, Revyako's residence had already been searched on 12 August 2020.

The Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 575 "On measures to counter extremism and rehabilitation of Nazism" came into force. There is a list of extremist formations on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As of 18 January 2022, it contained 29 'groups of citizens', including initiatives *the Workers' Movement*, *By_help*, the Solidarity Fund *BYSOL*, *BYPOL*, and the Platform of People's Representatives *Skhod*.

November 2021

Olga Gorbunova, a women's rights activist, ex-leader and member of the Board of the *Radislava* Public Association, [was charged](#) under Art. 293(1) (organising riots), Art. 293(2) (participating in riots), Art. 293(3) (training or other preparing persons for the participation in mass riots, or financing this activity), and Art. 342 (organising and preparing actions grossly violating public order, or actively participating in them) of the Criminal Code. Later, in January 2022, after a search by GUBOPiK officers, member of the Board of the *Radislava* Public Association Daria Tsarik [was detained](#) for eight days in the administrative case. On 13 January 2022, the homes of three more representatives of the *Radislava*'s Board and of their family members were raided.

The websites of several Belarus' public associations, which were decided to be forcibly liquidated, were blocked, in particular *zbsb.org* (the World Association of Belarusians *Bačkaŭščyna*), *perspektyva.org* (*Perspective*), *penbelarus.org* (*Belarusian PEN Centre*), *lit-bel.org* (the Union of Belarusian Writers), *baj.by* (the Belarusian Association of Journalists), *ecohome-ngo.by* (*Ecodom*), and *icomos-belarus.by* (Belarusian ICOMOS Committee).

A. Lukashenko signed the Decree No. 7, entering into force on 10 February 2022, to amend the Decree No. 3 of 25 May 2020 "On foreign gratuitous aid." The new decree counts citizens of the Republic of Belarus permanently staying outside the Republic of Belarus for more than 183 days during the 12 months preceding the month of providing the aid as senders of foreign gratuitous aid, as well as virtually all anonymous donors.

December 2021

The residences of more than twenty Human Rights Centre *Viasna*'s volunteers were searched. The people were detained, interrogated and had to sign non-disclosure agreements. The Ministry of Information included the Telegram channel of *Viasna* on the list of "extremist materials."

The requirements for public reporting by public associations and foundations were expanded: information on all the events they held during a year, indicating the purpose and content of the

events, as well as their participants, including journalists, bloggers, and social network community moderators must be published.

A criminal case under Art. 342 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (organising and preparing actions grossly violating public order, or actively participating in them) was initiated against cultural figure, [founder of *symbal.by* and Art Siadziba Pavel Belous](#), after three his administrative arrests.

The Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 761 was adopted that once again [significantly reduced](#) the list of organisations that have lease benefits: only 23 Belarusian non-profit organisations can use the benefits; by comparison, before this, there had been 103 of these ones.

[Amendments to the Criminal Code](#) came into force, in particular Art. 361, which criminalises calling for restrictive measures (sanctions).

At a meeting on countering sanctions, Lukashenko [said](#) that the NGOs liquidated in Belarus would never be re-established. Any foundations and organisations can exist in the country, provided that they are engaged in "a concrete business for the good of the motherland."

January 2022

The website of the human rights organisation *Human Constanta* was [blocked](#) by the decision of the Prosecutor of Minsk.

There were [searches](#) of the Public Organisation *Mogilev Human Rights Centre*'s members' residences and of its office, along with summoning its leader for interrogation.

The Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 144-3 "On Amending Codes" was adopted and entered into force. According to this law, the infamous article 193-1 was restored in the Criminal Code, which covers organising and participating in the activities of the public associations, including political parties, trade unions, religious organisations, and foundations, that either not to have been registered on the territory of Belarus or to have been liquidated by the decision come into force.

February 2022

The State Control Committee filed one more criminal case over financing extremist activities (Art. 361-2 of the Criminal Code) against founders of BY SOL and BY_Help initiatives, Andrei Strizhak and Aleksey Leonchik, as well as "other persons who participated in their financing."

The office of the Free Trade Union of Metalworkers was raided; equipment and means of communication were seized from its leaders and members. The deputy chairpersons of the trade union, Igor Komlik and Alexander Yevdokimchik, were detained.

The Human Rights Centre *Viasna*'s pages on social networks appeared in the Republican list of extremist materials; 21 Internet resources of the organisation were recognized as 'extremist materials.'