



## **Monitoring of the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus**

**May 2024**

Repressions in Belarus do not stop: searches, detentions, calls for “conversations”, initiation of administrative and criminal cases, including in connection with donations to solidarity funds and other structures, and assistance to political prisoners and their families continue to occur. Legislation on countering extremism continues to be actively used to suppress public activism. The resources of civil society organizations and initiatives, including those located abroad, are recognized as extremist materials, and the structures themselves are recognized as extremist formations. The authorities are trying to take full control and suppress the activities of Belarusians who have moved abroad. Criminal cases are being initiated against a large number of Belarusians expressing their civic position abroad, their property is being seized, and pressure is being exerted on their relatives.

The number of forcibly liquidated non-governmental organizations grows and as of the end of May 2024 amounts to at least 1.033 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which is 30 more organizations than in the previous monitoring period. As of the end of May 2024, the number of organizations that decided on self-liquidation is at least 632, which is 13 more organizations than in the previous monitoring period. Consequently, the losses in Belarus's civil sector since the post-election period of 2020 amount to no less than 1.665 institutionalized forms of NGOs, including civic associations, professional unions, political parties, foundations, non-governmental institutions, associations, and religious organizations.

As of May 31, 2024, there are 1404 people recognized as political prisoners in Belarus, currently held in places of detention.

### **Forced liquidation of non-governmental organizations<sup>1</sup>, decreasing number of public associations with republican status**

In total, as of May 31, 2024, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#), there have been 1033 NGOs in the process of forced liquidation, including lawsuits filed by registering authorities for liquidation or being forcibly excluded from the Unified State Register of Legal

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<sup>1</sup> The monitoring only records cases of forced liquidation and self-liquidation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and quantitative data does not include government institutions or republican state-public organizations. Consumer cooperatives and other organizational and legal forms of NGOs besides public associations, foundations, private institutions, religious organizations, and associations are also not taken into account.

Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR). This is 30 more NGOs than in the previous monitoring period.

Two cases of forced liquidation of non-governmental institutions have been recorded (previously, decisions on forced liquidation of institutions were made by the registering authorities in the summer of 2023). The tax authorities have once again resorted to the practice of liquidating non-governmental institutions due to their lack of entrepreneurial activity, which is not based on the law, as entrepreneurial activity is a right, not an obligation of institutions, and cannot be their purpose.

### **Non-governmental organizations deciding on self-liquidation**

NGOs continue to decide on self-liquidation, and the activity of this process does not decrease. As of May 31, 2024, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#), there have been 632 NGOs (civil associations, foundations, institutions, and political parties) in which the authorized body or founders have decided to liquidate. This is 13 more organizations than in the previous monitoring period.

As before, the decision on self-liquidation is primarily due to pressure on the members and employees of NGOs, an unfavourable legal environment, and the overall socio-political situation in the country. The practice of putting pressure on specific NGOs by authorities to make an independent decision on liquidation continues.

### **Administrative and criminal prosecution of the leadership and members of civil society organizations, and activists.**

Activist Maryna Uladyka of the "Mothers-328" movement was detained and sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest. A search was conducted in her apartment.

Representatives of religious organizations are also being persecuted. On May 8th, after a meeting of priests and monastics of the Vitsebsk Diocese, priests of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate order Pavel Lemech and Andzhej Yukhnevich, who is also the chairman of the Coordination Group of Superiors and Representatives of Monastic Communities of Belarus, were detained and sentenced to 10 and 15 days of administrative arrest, respectively. Pastor Yury Hardzey of the Pentecostal Church "Blagodat" was fined 1.200 rubles (about 400 euros) under part 2 of Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Belarus (possession for the purpose of distribution of information included in the national list of extremist materials). A criminal case has been initiated against Mikalai Khilo, a preacher of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church "Blagovestsie," who was detained on April 24th.

Due to the performance of their professional activities, human rights defenders continue to serve prison sentences:

- the coordinator of Viasna Volunteer Service **Marfa Rabkova** (sentenced to 14 years and 9 months in a general regime colony, listed as involved in terrorist and extremist activities);
- Viasna volunteer **Andrey Chapiuk** (sentenced to 5 years and 9 months in a medium security prison, listed as involved in terrorist and extremist activities);

- Viasna chairman and Nobel laureate **Ales Bialiatski** (listed as involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment in a colony under high security conditions);
- Viasna Board member and FIDH Vice-President **Valiantsin Stefanovich** (listed as involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 9 years of imprisonment in a colony under high security conditions);
- Lawyer, coordinator of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections", **Uladzimir Labkovich** (listed as involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment in a colony under high security conditions);
- human rights defender **Nasta (Anastasiya) Loika** (included in the list of persons involved in terrorist and extremist activities; sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment in a correctional colony of the general regime).

In places of deprivation of liberty, other representatives of civil society organizations continue being held, for example,

- members of the Coordination Council **Maxim Znak** (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities, sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment), **Marya Kalesnikava** (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities, sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment),
- public figure, founder of the "Flying University" **Uladzimir Matskevich** (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment),
- expert of the analytical group of the Agency for Humanitarian Technologies, coordinator of the "Flying University," senior analyst at the Center for European Transformation **Tatsiana Vadalazhskaya** (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of restricted freedom with placement in an open-type correctional facility ("chemistry")),
- member of the Council and co-founder of the School of Young Public Administration Managers Sympa, expert of the research project bipart **Tatsiana Kuzina** (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist and extremist activities, sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment),
- founder and editor of the expert community website "Our Opinion," head of the expert monitoring group "Belarus in Focus" **Valeryia Kastsuhova** (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment),
- founder of Symbal.by, **Pavel Belavus** (included in the lists of individuals involved in terrorist and extremist activities and sentenced to 13 years in a high-security correctional facility),
- Art manager **Uladzimir Bulauski** (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities and sentenced to 2 years in a general regime colony),
- former leader of the crowdfunding platforms Ulej and MolaMola, **Eduard Babaryka** (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist and terrorist activities, sentenced to 8 years in a high-security colony),

- **Pavel Mazheika**, a cultural figure and Hrodna activist who headed the "City Life Center" (sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment in a high-security colony, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).

According to Solidarity, an organization of trade union leaders and activists who were forced to leave Belarus, currently, there are 40 trade union activists and leaders of democratic trade unions imprisoned in Belarus. Thus, leaders and activists of Belarusian independent trade unions are being held in places of detention:

- **Aliaksandr Yarashuk**, Chairman of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).

- **Andrey Khanevich**, Chairman of the primary organization of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union at OJSC "Hrodna Azot" (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment).

- **Aliaksandr Mishuk**, Chairman of the Independent Trade Union at "Belaruskali" (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities and extremist activities, sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of imprisonment).

- **Henadz Fiadynich**, Head of the Independent Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers (sentenced to 9 years of imprisonment in high-security conditions, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).

- **Vasil Berasnieu**, Leader of the Orsha Independent Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers, acting Chairman of the Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers (sentenced to 9 years of imprisonment in high-security conditions, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities). Vasil has serious health problems.

- **Vatslau Areshka**, Activist of the Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers (sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).

- **Artsiom Zharnak**, Chairman of the primary trade union organization of the Free Metalworkers Union at MAZ (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities, sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment).

- **Maksim Senik**, Activist of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union at OJSC "Hrodna Azot" (sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment).

Regarding activist **Dzmitry Dashkevich**, who is in custody, a criminal case has been reopened under Part 2 of Article 411 of the Criminal Code (malicious disobedience to the requirements of the administration of a correctional facility implementing a custodial sentence).

### **Blocking of websites of civil society organizations.**

The practice of blocking the websites of organizations and initiatives continues.

[According to the resolution of the prosecutor of the Brest region](#), access to the website for conscripts povestka.org has been restricted, as stated on the official website of the department.

According to the prosecutor's office, the website published information "promoting ways to evade military service obligations and providing assistance to conscripts in evading compulsory military service. The operation of this internet resource contributed to the evasion of citizens of the Republic of Belarus from fulfilling military obligations, which contradicts the national interests of the state".

For a similar reason, access to the internet resource "Студэнцкая думка" ("Student Thought" (domain name – dumka.me) has been restricted [by the resolution of the prosecutor of the Minsk region](#). According to the prosecutor's office, "information promoting ways to evade military service obligations was published on the portal, as well as extremist information encouraging citizens to oppose the state authorities of the Republic of Belarus", which in turn "contradicted the national interests of the Republic of Belarus".

### **The use of legislation to combat extremism as a form of pressure on civil society organizations**

During the monitoring period, [materials deemed extremist included](#) content on the "Belarusian People's Front" account on TikTok, pages of the "Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Assembly)" on social networks such as Odnoklassniki, VKontakte, Facebook, and Instagram, pages of "Our City's Vector" on the social network VKontakte, and internet pages on Facebook under the name "Dapamoga."

Initiatives such as "Volunteers. Homel" and "Doctors for Truth and Justice" have been declared extremist formations [by decisions of the KGB](#).

The practice of holding accountable those who provide support to solidarity funds and other structures also continues. According to materials from the financial investigation bodies of the State Control Committee, in 2023, 80 criminal cases related to financing extremist formations and terrorist organizations were initiated. In turn, in 2022, based on State Control Committee materials, 11 criminal cases related to "financing extremist formations and terrorist organizations, as well as the participation of Belarusian citizens in the armed conflict on the side of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" were initiated.

### **Persecution of Belarusian activists who have been forced to leave the country**

There is a deliberate and harsh effort to suppress the activity of Belarusians who have been forced to leave abroad.

Following the adoption of a series of legislative acts in 2022-2023 that restrict the rights of Belarusians residing abroad, such as legislation on special (in absentia) criminal proceedings, deprivation of citizenship by birth, confiscation of property, inability to exchange passports outside Belarus, prohibition of selling real estate and vehicles under a power of attorney issued outside Belarus, etc., the authorities are increasingly implementing these norms in practice.

Belarusians who are forced to be abroad are constantly discredited in statements and declarations of "highest state authorities", and the term "fugitives" is regularly used to describe them. During the monitoring period, just one publication from the president's administration,

"SB.BY / Belarus Today," contained no fewer than 5 materials discrediting Belarusians who have been forced to leave abroad and continue to engage in activism, including fundraising activities.

There is active work to bring people to criminal responsibility within the framework of special (in absentia) proceedings. As of the end of May 2024, 106 individuals have been added to [the "List of persons against whom special proceedings have been initiated and who are summoned to the investigative authorities"](#). From 2022 to 2023, 35 individuals were added to this list, and 71 individuals were added in the first five months of 2024, including 12 individuals in May. For example, special proceedings have been initiated against the co-founders of the startup hub "Imaguru," Tatsiana Marynich and Anastasia Khamenkava, as well as human rights defender Alena Maslyukova.

As of May 31, three courts in the format of special proceedings have been scheduled in Belarus. These include proceedings related to the case of the "20 analysts of Tikhanouskaya," advisor to Sviatlana Tikhanouskaya, Franak Viachorka, and 6 activists: Andrey Pavuk, Volha Pavuk, Marharyta Liauchuk, Aliaksandr Chakhouski, Illia Saliankou, and Uladzislau Navazhylau. Among the numerous accusations against the defendants in these cases are Article 361-1, Parts 1 and 2 (creation of an extremist formation or participation in it, including repeated offenses) or Part 3 of Article 361-1 (participation in an extremist formation and membership in such a formation with the purpose of committing extremist crimes) of the Criminal Code.

On June 12, a date has been set for an extrajudicial trial of former political prisoner, sentenced to three years in prison and having fully served his term, human rights defender Leanid Sudalenka on criminal charges initiated in November 2023 under Parts 1 and 2 of Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (assistance to extremist activities).

The Minsk City Court on May 16, in absentia, sentenced Ivan Krautsou, a member of the Coordination Council and a member of the organizing committee for the creation of the "Razam" party, to 11 years of imprisonment with serving in a correctional colony under special conditions. The charges included Part 1 of Article 361-1 (creation of an extremist formation or participation in it), Part 4 of Article 209 (fraud), Part 1 of Article 357 (conspiracy or other actions aimed at seizing state power), and Part 3 of Article 130 (incitement of social discord or hatred).

[The Investigative Committee has reported data on over a hundred individuals](#) (with the list still being updated) who directly participated in street protests in different countries, considered suspects in a criminal case under Articles 361-1 (creation of an extremist formation and participation in it) and 369-1 (discrediting Belarus) of the Criminal Code. According to the Investigative Committee (IC) information, "during the investigation of the criminal case, information has already been obtained about real estate and property owned by these individuals in Belarus. Currently, investigative actions are being carried out, including inspections, searches, seizure of property, and other procedural measures." In March 2024, the IC announced the initiation of a criminal case against over 100 representatives of "People's Embassies" and "Belarusians Abroad," accusing them of allegedly attempting to "harm the national security of Belarus."

[The Investigative Committee also reported the initiation of criminal cases against 257 individuals residing abroad](#) who, according to the IC's statement, are representatives of extremist

organizations and who "started fighting for grants and organized pseudo-elections." As part of this case, searches and arrests of real estate have also been carried out across the country.

[The KGB has recognized all 12 lists of candidates for the Coordination Council as extremist formations.](#) The coalitions "Team of Latushka and Movement For Freedom," "Volya" / "Movement Volya" / "Block Volya," "European Choice," "Moladzevy Nastup," "Law and Order," "Enough Fear," "Public Movement Country For Life" / "PM CFL," "Our Concern," the association of political parties People's Assembly and Belarusian Christian Democracy "Solidarity," "Independent Belarusians," "Voice of Diasporas - Unity Beyond Borders," and "Block of Prakopieu-Yahorau," as well as participants of these coalitions, have been recognized as "extremist formations."