



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

June 2024

The repression of civil society organizations and activists in Belarus continues. Searches, detentions, and initiation of administrative and criminal cases are becoming an everyday practice. Methods of typical totalitarianism are becoming widespread: denunciations, and explanatory notes about travelling abroad. Legislation on countering extremism continues to be actively used to suppress civil activism.

The wave of liquidation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is gaining new strength. This is primarily due to the campaign to liquidate public associations that have not brought their charters in accordance with the latest requirements of the Law “On Public Associations.”

The number of forcibly liquidated non-governmental organizations grows. As of the end of June 2024, it amounts to at least 1.061 NGOs which is 28 more organizations than in the previous monitoring period. As of the end of June 2024, the number of organizations that decided on self-liquidation has decreased yet is at least 635. Consequently, the losses in Belarus's civil sector since the post-election period of 2020 amount to no less than 1.696 institutionalized forms of NGOs, including civic associations, professional unions, political parties, foundations, non-governmental institutions, associations, and religious organizations.

European sanctions have been introduced against the first non-profit organization – the pro-state Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM).

Forced liquidation of non-governmental organizations

The number of forcibly liquidated NGOs increased significantly during the monitoring period. This is primarily due to the fact that the registration authorities have launched a campaign to liquidate public associations that have not brought their charters into compliance with the new provisions of the law “On Public Associations.” Such ground for the liquidation of public associations is recorded in statements of claim submitted to the court by registration authorities. Since changes to the law “On Public Associations” primarily affected republican public associations, which were forced to either change their status or provide in their charters for the mandatory creation of organizational structures in all regions of Belarus and the city of Minsk, the largest number of liquidation claims are filed in regarding republican public associations.

At the same time, public associations of various areas of activity (sports, national minorities, professional, social, and international law), created in different years, are liquidated. Among the

organizations liquidated at the initiative of the justice authorities are such well-known and authoritative structures as the Republican public organization "United Way", the Republican public association "World for All", the Public Association "Ecomir Fund", the Public Association "Open Society", public association "Belarusian Felinological Center "Felita", Republican Jewish Sports Society "Maccabi", Youth Public Association "Istorika" and many others.

The process of liquidation of public associations that have not brought their charters into compliance with the new provisions of the law is very uneven. Some public associations receive messages from the registration authority about the March 4 deadline for bringing their charters into compliance with the new provisions of the law and the need to urgently submit documents to comply with this legal requirement. Claims for liquidation are filed against other public associations without additional notice.

Detailed information about the new wave of liquidation of public associations can be found on the Lawtrend website [in a separate material](#).

In total, as of June 30, 2024, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#)¹, there have been 1061 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 Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR). This is 28 more NGOs than in the previous monitoring period.

Non-governmental organizations deciding on self-liquidation

The frequency of NGOs making decisions on self-liquidation has decreased. As of June 30, 2024, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#), there have been 635 NGOs (civil associations, foundations, institutions, and political parties) in which the authorized body or founders have decided to liquidate. This is 3 organizations more 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.

The decrease in the number of NGOs deciding to liquidate is an additional factor indicating some “normalization” of the situation in the country. The majority of NGOs that don’t consider it possible to continue their activities due to the difficult socio-political situation in the country have already decided to self-liquidate or have suspended their activities (in the latter case, they exist either only “on paper”, or about them a lawsuit for compulsory liquidation has been filed).

¹ 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.

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

In connection with the performance of their professional activities, participation in civil society organizations, and the manifestation of civic activism, 6 human rights defenders, dozens of representatives of civil society organizations, religious organizations, and 39 representatives of trade unions and the labor movement continue to serve prison sentences².

The Catholic priest, rector of the Roman Catholic parish in Shumilina, the sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima, Andzhej Yukhnievich, was not released from the Viciebsk detention facility after serving 45 days of arrest. His term expired on June 22. The detention term of the priest from Shumilina has been extended until July 2.

To suppress the civic activity of Belarusians who were forced to leave the country, the authorities widely use criminal legislation on special (absentia) proceedings. Work is actively underway to bring people to criminal liability in the framework of special (absentee) proceedings. At the end of June 2024, 109 people were included in the [List of persons against whom special proceedings have been initiated and summoned to the criminal prosecution authority. According to the head of the Investigative Committee](#), “persons who, through their extremist activities, cause damage to the national security and interests of our state” are identified systematically and evidence of their guilt is collected. In particular, their property is identified for further confiscation and conversion into state revenue as compensation for the harm caused. This work will not stop “until all those responsible are brought to justice.”

On June 17, in the Homiel Regional Court, the trial in absentia of a former political prisoner, previously sentenced to 3 years in prison in a general regime colony and who served his full sentence, human rights activist Leanid Sudalenka, ended. A new criminal case in the format of special proceedings (in absentia) was opened in November 2023. Leanid was accused under parts 1 and 2 of Art. 361-4 of the Criminal Code (promoting extremist activities). The human rights activist was sentenced to five years of imprisonment under strict conditions with a fine of 650 basic units.

On June 20, the Minsk City Court sentenced in absentia the chief adviser to Tsikhanouskaya, Franak Viachorka, to 20 years in prison to be served in a correctional colony under a high security regime, as well as a fine of 1,500 basic units, which is 60 thousand rubles, under 9 articles of the Criminal Code, including Part 3 of Art. 361 (calls for restrictive measures (sanctions), other actions aimed at harming the national security of Belarus), parts 1 and 2 of Art. 361-1 (creation of an extremist group or participation in it, including repeatedly), Art. 369-1 (discrediting the Republic of Belarus). Viachorka was also sued “in the interests of the state” for compensation for property damage of more than 30.9 million rubles “caused by illegal actions.”

On June 24, the Brest Regional Court sentenced six activists in absentia: Andrei Pavuk, Volha Pavuk, Marharyta Liauchuk, Aliaksandr Chakhouski, Illia Saliankou, Uladislau

² Examples of representatives of civil society organizations in prison with terms of imprisonment, information about being included in extremist and/or terrorist lists can be found in Lawtrend’s monthly reviews of the situation with freedom of association and the situation of civil society organizations, for example, [for May 2024](#).

Navazhylau. The case involved 14 articles of the Criminal Code, including “leadership of an extremist formation” (Part 3 of Article 361-3 of the Criminal Code); “participation in an extremist formation” (Part 1 of Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code), “collection of funds and other property by any means for the conscious support of extremist activities by a group of persons by prior conspiracy” (Part 2 of Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code). 7 activists were sentenced to terms of six to twelve years in prison with a fine of 500 to 5.000 basic units. Aliaksandr Chakhouski was sentenced to three months of arrest.

Blocking of websites of civil society organizations.

By order of the prosecutor of the Mahileu region, access to the Internet resource of the extremist formation “INeedHelpBY” (domain name – “ineedhelpby.org”) is limited. [According to the prosecutor's office](#), the basis for making such a decision was the resource's violation of the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On the Mass Media”: “In particular, the portal published information about discrediting the current government and law enforcement agencies, deliberately unlawful legitimization of the actions of persons who committed offences and crimes, including by giving them the pseudo-status of “political prisoners.”

The initiative offers food assistance to the families of political prisoners. By the decision of the State Security Committee of January 16, 2024 “On recognizing a group of citizens as an extremist formation and banning its activities,” the association called “INeedHelpBY” was recognized as extremist and its activities were prohibited on the territory of the Republic of Belarus. That same month, security forces conducted a large-scale raid of people receiving such assistance, resulting in the persecution of at least 257 people. Many were tried under administrative charges for “using foreign gratuitous assistance to carry out extremist activities.” Some were criminally prosecuted.

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

In Belarus, for several years now, anti-extremism legislation has been actively used against civil activists and representatives of civil society organizations. The authorities recognize as extremist any actions that contradict the course they have chosen.

During the monitoring period, political activist and member of the organizing committee for the creation of the Razam party Ivan Krautsou, as well as Aliaksand Verasovich, convicted of donating to solidarity funds, were included in [the List of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens or stateless persons involved in extremist activities](#).

During the monitoring period, [materials deemed extremist included](#), among others, the Telegram channel "Беларускі дом правоў чалавека імя Барыса Звозскава | The Barys Zvozskaou Belarusian Human Rights House", an Internet site with the name "Right to the defence", an Internet resource with the name "povestka.org", Telegram bot "Help for conscripts of the Republic of Belarus", Internet resource called "moladz.help", Telegram channel called "moladz.help | youth rights center", information products posted in Telegram channels under the names "Human Rights Lawyers", "Right to Defense".

During the monitoring period, 6 media initiatives and civil initiatives [were recognized as extremist formations](#), including the Civil organization “Belarus 2.0 Robimo Razam”, registered in the unified state register of enterprises and organizations of Ukraine.