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Summary: Friday 22 January to Friday 29 January 2021

Protests in Belarus continue as do repressions by Lukashenka's regime against activists, independent media, businesses, and citizens who showed solidarity with those demanding free elections, condemning police violence, and standing for justice and the rule of law in the country.

Political prisoners

As of 29 January, 219 people in Belarus are considered political prisoners.¹ Thirty one new political prisoners, added to the list this week, have already been convicted.² Human rights defenders insist on retrials and the release of accused.

Freedom of speech

Independent media and social media opinion makers remain the main targets for the de-facto Belarusian authorities. Thus, on 27 January, the financial police searched the office of *The Binokl*, a private newspaper in Brest. The police confiscated computers and other office equipment.³ In Hrodna the police searched the office of Hrodna.life.⁴ A freelance journalist who filmed during court hearings was detained and now faces a criminal charge (hooliganism).⁵

Economic and labour rights

There are numerous cases of people losing their jobs for expressing a point of view that is different from that of the country's official 'ideology'. A recent case: in Minsk, a chief infectious diseases doctor (and a member of the coordination council) was dismissed after he [stated](#) that keeping doctors in jail as punishment for 'illegal meetings' was outrageous, especially during the pandemic.⁶

Small businesses that dared to show they sympathise with the protests have been forced to close.⁷ The reasons given range from alleged tax evasion and fire safety shortcomings to simply threatening the owners.

As for big businesses that 'feed' the regime, they have started looking for ways to escape the effects of EU sanctions that have targeted particular people and businesses.⁸ The most obvious way is by a formal change of ownership or name. There are voices from Belarus pointing out

¹ See Viasna: <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>

² See Viasna: <http://spring96.org/en/news/101557>

³ See RFE: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/31071530.html>

⁴ See BAJ: <https://baj.by/be/content/v-redakcii-grodnenskih-media-prishli-sotrudniki-milicii-i-omon>

⁵ See RFE: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/31061694.html>

⁶ See tut.by: <https://news.tut.by/society/716415.html?tg>

⁷ See RFE: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/31074235.html>

⁸ See tut.by: <https://news.tut.by/economics/716324.html?tg>

this trend and saying that the 'big sharks' enjoying unprecedented privileges – and paying the regime for those – should not escape the effect of the sanctions, even if they apply smart tricks to do so. A detailed investigation based on open sources is available [here](#) (in Russian).

Other news

On 26 January, the Russian Committee Against Torture and the World Organization Against Torture released a [report](#) on the violence committed by the Belarusian security forces against protesters. A 46-page document describes cases of 13 people who were abused between 9 and 13 August 2020.⁹

⁹ See NN: <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=267320&lang=ru>