

The information is aggregated from open source online resources and our own practice. In these newsletters, we will update you in brief on everyday human rights violations in numbers and facts.

Summary: Saturday 20 March 2021 to Friday 26 March 2021

Political pressure on lawyers and human rights defenders

Belarusian authorities continue to apply disbarment and disciplinary procedures to lawyers who are representing political prisoners in courts or are otherwise critical of the regime.

On 24 March 2021, the Qualification Commission on lawyers' activities, under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus, conducted an extraordinary attestation session for lawyers. As a result of the session:

- The Commission decided to disbar lawyers Olga Baranchik, Sergey Zikratskiy, Boris Leskovskiy, and Vladislav Phillipovich based on "lack of legal qualification";
- The Commission officially deprived lawyers Andrey Bartashevich, Nikolai Yotka, and Elena Shinkarevich of their licences; and
- The Commission expelled lawyer Vladimir Sozvonchuk from the Minsk city bar association.

Sergey Zikratskiy is famous for representing a number of political prisoners, including in Belsat and Press-club cases.¹ Another lawyer who is at risk of being disbarred at the next attestation session is Dmitriy Laevskiy, who currently represents the interests of two famous political prisoners, Viktor Babariko and Maxim Znak.²

The recent disbarment proceedings fit within the larger pattern of exerting pressure on lawyers and human rights defenders. The Qualification Commission previously disbarred lawyers Alexander Pylchenko, Ludmila Kazak, Konstantin Mikhel, Mikhail Kiriluk, and Maxim Conon, who were representing political prisoners or had expressed political views contrary to those of the Belarusian *de facto* leadership.

On 19 March 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, made a [statement](#), expressing concern about the increasing crackdown against human rights defenders in Belarus.

The launch of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus

On 24 March 2021, a coalition of independent human rights organisations launched the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, tasked with collecting, consolidating, verifying,

¹ <https://news.tut.by/economics/723694.html>

² <https://news.tut.by/economics/723803.html>

and preserving evidence of grave human rights violations, including torture, committed by Belarusian authorities in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath.³

19 states have made a [joint statement](#) in support of the initiative.

Other news

Belarus celebrates Freedom Day

Freedom Day is an unofficial national holiday celebrated on 25 March to commemorate the establishment of the People's Republic of Belarus in 1918. Although the People's Republic existed as an independent state for less than a year, it marks an important moment in Belarusian history and plays a significant role for national self-identification.

People wishing to have a public celebration of the holiday applied to the Minsk city executive committee to obtain official permission for a mass public gathering, but it was denied. Law enforcement officials called upon citizens to abstain from taking part in public gatherings on 25 March 2021, explaining it as “possible provocations”.⁴

More than 100 people were detained on 25 March 2021.

³ <https://iapbelarus.org/>

⁴ <https://news.tut.by/economics/723809.html>