

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: Wednesday 19 May 2021 to Friday 21 May 2021

### Massive crackdown on independent media in Belarus

On 19 May 2021 several independent media outlets were targeted by Belarusian authorities. According to recent information, at least 16 journalists and media professionals are behind bars in Belarus, and 11 of them face criminal charges.<sup>1</sup>

The largest independent media outlet, TUT.BY, was blocked. The authorities searched its offices and affiliates, as well as the homes of several editors, including its editor-in-chief, Maryna Zolatava. The financial investigations department of the State Control Committee announced that the outlet was being investigated on charges of tax evasion.<sup>2</sup> At least 14 TUT.BY employees were detained.<sup>3</sup>

The home of Egor Martsinovich, editor-in-chief of independent media outlet Nasha Niva, and his wife, Adarya Gushtyn – a journalist with TUT.BY – was searched. All technical equipment was confiscated from the apartment, and the couple were made to sign a non-disclosure agreement.<sup>4</sup>

The directors of website hosting company Hoster.by and website Av.by, covering news in the automobile industry, were also detained.<sup>5</sup>

### Legislative changes overview

Following the 2020 presidential election, amendments to existing laws and adoption of new laws are taking place. Many of the recent legislative changes serve as a tool to exert pressure on civil society and curb fundamental rights and freedoms.<sup>6</sup>

Key developments may be summarised as follows:

- **The Code on Administrative Offences** was amended to toughen the punishment for violating the procedure of organising a mass public event. The maximum fine for taking

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<sup>1</sup> <http://spring96.org/en/news/103418>

<sup>2</sup>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/belaruss-channels-of-civil-society-are-being-destroyed-another-just-went-dark/2021/05/18/920531d0-b807-11eb-a6b1-81296da0339b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/belaruss-channels-of-civil-society-are-being-destroyed-another-just-went-dark/2021/05/18/920531d0-b807-11eb-a6b1-81296da0339b_story.html);  
<https://apnews.com/article/europe-belarus-business-government-and-politics-d4f891c24bfd9c52e6a4da40c0eeab22>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.svaboda.org/a/31260643.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://t.me/nashaniva/28733>

<sup>5</sup> <https://udf.name/news/society/228819-zaderzhany-direktory-hosterby-i-avby.html>

<sup>6</sup> The Legal Transformation Center Lawtrend and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee have drawn up a comprehensive [report](#) on key legislative changes.

part in “unauthorised public events” increased fourfold – from 50 to 200 basic values,<sup>7</sup> while the possible imprisonment term for the same violation increased from between 1 and 15 days to between 15 and 30 days.

*The new edition of the Code entered into force on 1 March 2021.*

- **The Draft Law on Amendments to the Criminal Liability Codes** amends the provisions of **the Criminal Code**. The key changes concern harsher punishments for engaging in “extremist activities”, introduction of criminal responsibility for repeated violations of the procedure of organising public events, and introduction of criminal responsibility for discrediting the state and offending state representatives and their relatives.

*The Draft Law has been approved by the higher chamber of the Belarusian Parliament on 7 May 2021 and will enter into force a month after it is signed by President Lukashenko.*

- **The Law on Preventing the Rehabilitation of Nazism** is a new law allegedly seeking to prevent the rehabilitation of Nazism and veneration of war criminals. Given the recent rhetoric of Belarusian authorities on the connection between the use of white-red-white flags by Nazi collaborators and the use of white-red-white flags by peaceful protesters, it is likely that the law will be used to target individuals associated with peaceful civil resistance.

*The Law will enter into force on 16 June 2021.*

- **The Law on Countering Extremism** has been amended to widen the meaning of extremism and harshen the punishment for engaging in “extremist activities”, thus simplifying the procedure of recognising organisations as extremist and liquidating them or suspending their activities. The Law is already employed against individuals and entities who oppose government policies, and the amendments will further ease the process of political persecution.<sup>8</sup>

*The new edition of the Law will enter into force on 16 June 2021.*

- **The Law on Mass Public Events** has been amended to make the conditions for holding public events stricter. The amendments will cancel the notification procedure for holding some public events, meaning that all public gatherings will have to be approved by local authorities. It also strips journalists of their special protected status at public events, subjecting them to the same public order requirements that apply to meetings’ organisers and participants. Live streaming from mass events is also prohibited under the new amendments. The proposed changes threaten to undermine freedom of speech and peaceful assembly.

*The Draft Law was approved by the higher chamber of the Belarusian Parliament on 21 April 2021 and will enter into force a month after it is signed by Lukashenko.*

- **The Draft Law on Amendments to Laws on Labour Relations** will amend the provisions of **the Labour Code** and other laws in the labour relations field. Under the proposed amendments, the Labour Code is supplemented with new grounds for

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<sup>7</sup> [Directive 783](#) of the Cabinet of Ministers of 30 December 2020 sets the basic value at 29 rubles (a little less than 10 euros) from 1 January 2021.

<sup>8</sup> <https://humanconstantaby/en/whom-do-the-belarusian-authorities-consider-terrorists/>;  
<https://humanconstantaby/en/analysis-of-the-proposed-amendments-to-the-anti-extremist-legislation/>;  
<https://humanconstantaby/en/belarus-right-to-freedom-of-expression-and-extremism-restrictions/>;  
<https://humanconstantaby/en/review-of-the-fight-against-extremism-in-belarus-for-january-march-2021/>

employee dismissal, including when workers go on strike or are absent from work because they are detained for administrative offences. The amendments also prohibit making political demands during a strike.

*The Draft Law was approved by the higher chamber of the Belarusian Parliament on 21 April 2021 and will enter into force a month after it is signed by Lukashenko.*

- **The Draft Law on Amendments to Laws on Mass Media Issues** extends the grounds for refusing to register a media outlet, including when the outlet disseminates messages or materials that allegedly undermine national security or when the name of the online publication should but does not match the domain name of the Internet resource (a common practice by many media outlets was to create website 'mirrors' in case of state blockages and shutdowns).

*The Draft Law was approved by the higher chamber of the Belarusian Parliament on 21 April 2021 and will enter into force a month after it is signed by Lukashenko.*

- **The Draft Law on Amendments to the Laws on Ensuring National Security of the Republic of Belarus** will amend several laws concerning the use of force by law enforcement officers. The amendments will extend the range of situations when arms can be used by the police. The Draft Law also provides that law enforcement officers shall not be liable for damage caused as a result of the use of physical force, special means, military or special equipment, or the use of weapons, if they were acting under the provisions of the Draft Law.

*The amendments will enter into force on 16 June 2021.*

- **The Draft Law on Amendments to the Laws on Legal Defence Activities** provides for a range of changes in the way legal activities can be conducted in Belarus. Some of the changes directly affect the ability of lawyers to perform their duties. New forms of legal defence, such as private defenders' offices and individual practices focusing on legal defence, are eliminated under the Draft Law. Defence attorneys who practiced individually or in an independent law office will have to change to providing legal consultancy (which typically experiences a higher degree of state control and intervention) in order to continue their legal work.

*The Draft Law was approved by the lower chamber of the Belarusian Parliament on 16 April 2021 in the first reading.*

- **The Draft Law on Data Protection** will introduce a system for regulating personal data online. Although some of the provisions introduced by the document are progressive and based on best data protection practices, there are risks that the law will be selectively used to protect state officials' data.

*The Draft Law was approved by the lower chamber of the Belarusian Parliament on 2 April 2021.*

## Other news

A Belarusian State University student was apprehended during the celebration of the university's 100th anniversary. She was fined 2,900 BYN (approximately 1,150 USD) for a white-red-white sticker on her laptop.<sup>9</sup>

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<https://belsat.eu/en/news/19-05-2021-minsk-student-gets-record-high-fine-she-had-white-red-sticker-on-laptop/>