

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

### Saturday 27 July 2024 to Friday 9 August 2024

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by pardoning a German resident sentenced to death, expanding the practice of prosecuting activists *in absentia*, continuing repression against independent bloggers and journalists, mass convictions and detentions for participating in the 2020 protests, detentions for disseminating independent information, publishing information about Belarusian requests for personal data to large companies.

#### German citizen sentenced to death pardoned

On 22 July 2024, human rights activists reported on the death sentence [handed down](#) at the end of June against German citizen Rico Krieger. He was accused of “mercenarism,” “an act of terrorism,” “illegal actions with regard to firearms,” “causing transport routes to become unusable,” “espionage,” and “participation in an extremist formation” under Articles 133, 289, 295, 309, 358-1, and 361-1 of the Criminal Code. On 30 July 2024, Alexander Lukashenko [decided to pardon him](#), and on 1 August 2024 he [was returned to Germany](#) as part of a prisoner exchange between the United States, Germany, and Russia with the participation of Belarus. During the exchange, Russian agents were released by the three former countries and returned to Russia, while several Russian political prisoners (including citizens of Western countries) and Krieger were transferred to the territory of the United States and Germany. Other political prisoners located in Belarus did not participate in the exchange.

#### The prosecution of activists *in absentia* continues

On 29 July 2024, Vitebsk Regional Court sentenced [Andrei Zuev](#), an activist from Novopolotsk, to 7 years in prison *in absentia* for “inciting hatred,” “mass protests,” “participating in an extremist formation,” and “insulting state representatives.” On 2 August 2024, Grodno Regional Court sentenced activist [Olga Velichko](#) to 9 years in prison *in absentia* under seven articles of the Criminal Code, including Article 193-1 on the “illegal organization of the activities of a public association,” a sentence for which was handed down for the first time since this article was introduced into the Criminal Code in 2022. Olga was charged under this article for being the director of the Grodno hospice, which was forcibly liquidated by the authorities in 2021, as part of a massive [crackdown](#) on civil society. On the same day Grodno Regional Court sentenced publicist and former deputy chairman of the Young Front organization [Alexander Kirkevich](#) to 7 years in prison *in absentia*. On 6 August 2024, Minsk Regional Court sentenced [Igor Porunkevich](#), an entrepreneur from Postavy who collected money to help protesters, to 6 years in prison *in absentia*. On the same day Grodno's Oktyabrsky District Court sentenced Grodno activist [Ekaterina Tumanova](#) to 2.5 years in prison *in absentia*.

It is also known that *in absentia* proceedings were initiated against a former security officer [Pavel Kulazhenko](#), a Belarusian volunteer fighting against Russian aggression; former security officer [Vitaly Potekhin](#), who is accused of organizing a small explosion at a police base in Minsk; Mogilev resident [Aleksandr Yatsenko](#); Molodechno resident [Aleksandr Korneyev](#), information about whom is not publicly available. Such *en masse* initiation of new proceedings demonstrates that the instrument of special proceedings is used not only against well-known activists, but also against non-public people who have committed civil resistance acts against the regime.

#### Repression against journalists and bloggers continues

On 31 July 2024, Mogilev Regional Court sentenced blogger [Ales Sobolevsky](#) to 4 years and journalist [Evgeny Glushkov](#) to 3 years in prison on charges of “creating an extremist formation” and “participating in an armed conflict on the territory of a foreign state” under Articles 361-1 and 361-3 of the Criminal Code. Details of the case are unknown.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists [reported](#) that in June and July 2024, at least 21 searches were conducted at the homes of independent media employees who had left the country. In some cases, security forces forced relatives of journalists to participate in “confession videos.”

### **Mass arrests for dissemination of “extremist materials”**

Mass detentions continued in regional cities as part of raids in government institutions and enterprises. During such operations, security forces inspect the devices of workers previously suspected of disloyalty to the regime. During the analyzed period, such raids [affected](#) the city of Mozyr (Gomel region), where at least 5 people were detained for “distributing extremist materials.” Videos published by security forces show how the police officers broke down the doors of houses and apartments, and brutally detained their residents.

As of 1 July 2024, the Republican List of Extremist Materials [contains](#) 5,813 materials, including 1,794 Telegram resources. During the analyzed period, resources of a number of non-profit organizations [were recognized as “extremist materials,”](#) in particular Belarusian Helsinki Committee, International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, and the Office for European Expertise and Communication.

### **Mass repressions for participating in the 2020 protests**

Sentences and arrests for participation in protests on charges of “gross violation of public order” under Article 342 of the Criminal Code continue. In all such cases, security forces claim that protesters “went out onto the roadway” and “blocked traffic.”

The repressions in the analyzed period were especially intense in the Brest region. On 7 August 2024, the Leninsky District Court of Brest [sentenced](#) 8 local residents to imprisonment for terms of 1.5 to 2.5 years. At the end of July, two more Brest residents [were also sentenced](#) to terms of 1 to 1.5 years of imprisonment. Detentions continued – security forces [reported the detention](#) of at least 15 residents of Kobrin. Detentions for protests also affected other regions of Belarus – two residents of Fanipol (Minsk region) [were detained](#) on 8 August 2024.

### **Increase in requests for information from Belarusian authorities to Google**

Media outlet “Zerkalo” [studied](#) the “transparency reports” of Google, Meta, Telegram and Apple – many of them mention the facts of transferring confidential user data to the Belarusian authorities at their request. It is known that in total, the Belarusian authorities asked Google to disclose information 67 times, the requests concerned 79 accounts, for 35 of these requests, Google decided to provide “some data,” while details about the nature of the information are not provided. Since 2021, in parallel with the beginning of mass repressions in Belarus, the number of requests from the Belarusian authorities to Google has increased – if in 2021 the company received 8 requests, in 2023 it has already received 43 requests. From 2015 to 2023, Meta received 10 requests from Belarus, but the company decided not to share information on any of them. From 2015 to 2021, Apple received 12

requests and provided information on 7 of them. Telegram and TikTok did not receive requests from the Belarusian authorities.

### **Political prisoners**

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1385](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 9 August 2024, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 681 days](#).