

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 18 May 2024 to Friday 31 May 2024

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by revealing the use of Pegasus spyware against Belarusian activists in exile, an increase in the number of cases against foreign citizens for “espionage,” growing repression against activists abroad, announcing an amnesty for prisoners on the Independence Day (which will not affect political prisoners), extending the prison terms for political prisoners on “malicious disobedience” ground, and applying extremely harsh sentence for critical online comments.

Belarusian activists subjected to surveillance using Pegasus software

On 30 May 2024, international digital security expert Nikolai Kvantiliani, the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, and Access Now co-published a study, confirming that at least seven people, namely Belarusian, Israeli, Russian, and Latvian journalists, [were targeted by the Pegasus spyware](#). Three Belarusians are known to have been targeted – politician and head of the European Belarus campaign Andrei Sannikov, editor-in-chief of Charter-97 Natallia Radina, and an unnamed member of Belarusian civil society living in Vilnius.

The number of “espionage” cases against foreign citizens is increasing

On 20 May, 2024 the Brest Regional Court sentenced 25-year-old Ukrainian citizen [Artem Makovey](#) to 6 years in prison for “foreign intelligence activities” under Article 358-1 of the Criminal Code. The State Security Committee (KGB) did not comment on the essence of the charges, but told Artem's relatives that he “posed a threat to the Republic of Belarus.”

On 23 May 2024, a trial against Lithuanian citizen [Elena Romanauskiene](#) commenced under the same article of the Criminal Code. The essence of the charges is unknown, but it is reported that she worked at the “Belarus” sanatorium in Druskininkai – earlier, at the end of 2022, the former director of this sanatorium [Andrei Kobel](#) was detained in Belarus on charges of “high treason.”

***In absentia* repressions against political activists abroad continue**

Security forces continued the prosecution *in absentia* against those participating in the elections to the Coordination Council of Belarusian opposition, which were held on 25-28 May 2024. The Investigative Committee simultaneously [initiated](#) criminal cases against 257 people running for the Coordination Council. They are accused of “conspiracy to seize power,” “calls for action against national security,” “creation of an extremist formation,” and “aiding extremist activity” under Articles 357, 361, 361-1 and 361-4 of the Criminal Code, respectively. The department stated that investigative actions with respect to these people, including inspections, searches, seizure of property and other procedural measures, would continue.

Criminal cases have also been initiated *in absentia* against Svetlogorsk human rights activist [Elena Maslyukova](#), co-owner of the national symbols store “Admetnasc” [Olga Veremeyenko](#), and media expert [Irina Chernyavka](#) – all of them are accused of “aiding extremist activity” under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code. Under 10 “political” and “economic” articles of the Criminal Code, a case was initiated against the founder of the medical center “New Vision” [Oleg Kovrigin](#).

Government plans amnesty for Independence Day

A [draft law on amnesty](#) was published on the National Legal Portal. According to preliminary data, it will [soften the sentences for 7850 convicts](#). According to the document, the sentences of mothers with many children who committed murder or caused serious bodily harm, as well as single fathers and mothers of minors convicted of drug trafficking, will be reduced by one year. The sentences of persons convicted for organizing or involving in prostitution will also be softened. Minors convicted under the “drug” articles will have their prison terms reduced by one year. This amnesty will not affect political prisoners.

Mass punishments of political prisoners for “malicious disobedience” continue

The practice of punishing political prisoners under Article 411 of the Criminal Code (“malicious disobedience to the requirements of the administration of a correctional institution”) is expanding. The article is commonly used to put pressure on political prisoners, tighten the conditions in places of detention, and lengthen prison sentences. During the analyzed period, information surfaced that a third in a row criminal case has been initiated under this article against activist [Polina Sharenda-Panasyuk](#), who was expected to be released on 21 May 2024. A case under this article was also initiated against anarchist movement activist [Alexander Frantskevich](#).

Courts continue to hand down harsh sentences for critical online comments

On 22 May 2024, Brest Regional Court sentenced a 69-year-old resident of Lyakhovichi [Boris Vitko](#) for writing critical comments online to 7 years and 3 months in prison on six “diffamatory” criminal charges – inciting enmity, slander, calling for actions causing harm to national security, slander against Lukashenko, insulting Lukashenko, and insulting a government official under Articles 130, 188, 361, 367, 368, 369 of the Criminal Code, respectively. He was detained in May 2023 by a group of Special Purpose Police Unit (OMON) officers wearing bulletproof vests and armed with shotguns.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1402](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 31 May 2024, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 611 days](#).