

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 14 December 2024 to Friday 15 January 2025

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by the eighth stage of pardoning political prisoners and a demonstration of political prisoners who were previously held incommunicado, continuation of *in absentia* persecution, more harsh sentences for acts of direct resistance and alleged cooperation with foreign secret services, as well as the continuation of persecution for donations to pro-democratic organizations.

Eighth stage of pardoning political prisoners and demonstration of political prisoners who were held incommunicado

On 28 December 2024, Aliaksandar Lukashenka [signed a decree](#) pardoning 20 more political prisoners. The pardoned include 11 women, 14 people who suffer from chronic diseases, and 1 mother of four children. Thus, 227 political prisoners have been released overall during 8 stages of pardon since 3 July 2024. None of them were exonerated. The pardons affected only a fraction of the total number of arbitrarily detained and unjustly convicted, while more people were convicted than released since the pardons began.

State propaganda began publishing photos and videos of political prisoners who had been held incommunicado for a long time. On 8 January 2024 former political prisoner and now a pro-government blogger [Raman Pratasevich](#) met with ex-presidential candidate nominee [Viktar Babaryka](#), who was sentenced to 14 years, in a penal colony and published photos and videos from the meeting. On 14 January 2025, state television channel ONT [aired](#) a segment featuring political prisoner and journalist for "Radio Liberty" [Andrei Kuznechyk](#). On 15 January 2025, the channel broadcasted a segment with blogger and journalist for "Radio Liberty" [Ihar Losik](#). Additionally, segments featuring "Radio Free Europe" journalist [Ihar Karnei](#) and lawyer with U.S. citizenship [Yury Ziankovich](#) were announced.

Persecution *in absentia* continues

On 21 July 2022, Aliaksandar Lukashenka signed [Law No. 199-Z](#), which introduced the possibility to conduct special *in absentia* trials of people who are accused of "extremist" and "terrorist" crimes and reside outside Belarus. The Chairman of the Investigative Committee Dmitry Gora [stated](#) that one of the main goals of the adoption of this law was to create legal grounds for the confiscation of the property of political migrants. He believes that the conversion of such property into state income will allow "at least partially to cover the damage that has been done to the country." According to [the List of Persons Subject to Special Proceedings and Summoned by Criminal Prosecution Authorities](#), as of 13 December 2024, special proceedings have officially been initiated against 144 individuals in Belarus.

On 30 December 2024, the Minsk City Court sentenced stand-up comedian [Slava Kamissarenka](#) to 6 years of imprisonment *in absentia* on charges of "inciting hatred," "slander," and "insulting Lukashenka" under Articles 130, 367, and 368 of the Criminal Code respectively.

On 13 December 2024, the Investigative Committee initiated an *in absentia* proceedings against nine more individuals associated with Belarusian volunteer formations fighting on the side of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. [Vadzim Prakop'ew](#) (who is set to be tried *in absentia* for the third time), [Alyaksei Manchynski](#), [Raman Yaryomenka](#), [Pavel Kakhanovich](#), [Tsikhan](#)

[Klyukach](#), [Yauhen Karankevich](#), [Aliaksandr Piatrowski](#), [Yauhen Salokhin](#), and [Yahor Ispyankow](#) were charged with “participation in an extremist formation,” “participation in an armed conflict on the territory of a foreign state,” and “aiding extremist activities” under various parts of Articles 361-1, 361-3, and 361-4 of the Criminal Code. They were also charged under Article 361-5 of the Criminal Code, outlawing “undergoing training or other preparation for participation in extremist activities,” a provision that has only recently started to be applied, primarily in conjunction with Articles 361-3 and 361-4 of the Criminal Code.

The authorities continue to use accusations of “extremism activities” to persecute any form of dissent. On 25 November 2024, Aliaksandar Zhukau, Deputy Head of the Main Directorate of Procedural Control of the Investigative Committee, [stated](#) that since 2020, 22,500 “extremist crimes” had been recorded in Belarus.

Severe sentences for acts of direct resistance

The authorities continue to persecute people for acts of direct resistance to the regime, all of which are interpreted by law enforcement as “acts of terrorism.” Recently, state propaganda sources have been regularly publishing films about terrorist attacks and sabotage allegedly organized by “Western” or Ukrainian intelligence services. In many cases, traces of state involvement in provoking such crimes [can be found](#), and some of the alleged “sabotage” incidents were evidently entirely staged.

On 19 December 2024, the Minsk City Court [sentenced](#) residents of Hrodna, Ivan Barodich and Barys Pukhalski, along with Ukrainian citizen Ivan Likholat, to prison terms ranging from 11 to 25 years on charges of “an act of terrorism,” “attempting to disable railway transport,” “high treason,” and “intelligence activities” under Articles 289, 309, 356, and 358-1 of the Criminal Code respectively. [According to the investigation](#), under the commands of Ukrainian intelligence services, Likholat, together with Barodich and Pukhalski, intended to blow up a railway in the Talochyn district (a route designated for military equipment transportation) using hexogen explosives.. They were also accused of collecting information on military equipment movements, the movement of Russian troops, and the location of anti-aircraft missile systems.

On 23 December, the Minsk City Court [delivered verdicts](#) against former Special Purpose Police Detachment (OMON) officer Pavel Kulazhenka, who is fighting against Russian aggression in Ukraine as part of independent Belarusian units of Armed forces of Ukraine, and former military serviceman Vital Patekhin, whom law enforcement accused of executing a drone attack on an OMON base in Minsk in the fall of 2021. The court sentenced them to 24 and 23 years of imprisonment, respectively. Both were charged under several “terrorist” articles of the Criminal Code, including “an act of terrorism committed by a group,” “activities aimed at creating a terrorist organization,” and “organizing the activities of a terrorist organization” under Articles 289, 290-4, and 290-5 of the Criminal Code. According to the investigation, Kulazhenka and Patekhin were connected to the creation of the organizations “Busly Lyatsyats” (“Storks Flying” in Belarusian) and “Supratsiu” (“Resistance” in Belarusian). which were designated as “terrorist organizations” in Belarus.

“High treason” cases on the rise

Article 356 of the Criminal Code, outlawing “high treason,” is increasingly being used to persecute individuals who, according to the prosecution, might have ties to opposition organizations abroad or intelligence services of European countries. Nearly all trials under this article are held behind closed doors, leaving human rights defenders unaware of the specifics of the charges in most cases.

On 30 December 2024, Minsk Regional Court sentenced Catholic priest [Henrykh Akalatovich](#) to 11 years of imprisonment. This is the first case since Soviet times where a Catholic priest in Belarus was convicted under a political article. It was previously [reported](#) that he had been accused of passing “classified information” to unknown individuals, with the damage allegedly estimated at around €1 million. Additionally, at the end of December 2024, Minsk City Court sentenced [Aliaksandar Kudrevich](#), an officer of the Department of Criminal Intelligence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He was accused of “high treason committed by an official,” which is punishable by the death penalty.

Continuation of persecution for donations to pro-democratic organizations

On 10 January 2024, Brest Regional Court [sentenced](#) 44-year-old resident of Ivanava, Aliaksandar Darahakupets, to 5.5 years of imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 base units (approximately \$600,000) for donations amounting to 11,000 Belarusian rubles (around \$3,000) to the Kalinouski Regiment, a Belarusian volunteer unit fighting as part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The court imposed a lengthy prison term and an exorbitant fine despite the fact that Aliaksandar had previously donated \$600,000 to Belarusian care homes and medical centers as compensation.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1247](#), 58 new people were recognized as “political prisoners” during the analyzed period. As of 17 January 2025, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody for more than 2 years ([840 days](#)). On 6 January 2025, Nasta celebrated her [birthday](#) in prison for the third time.