

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 15 February 2024 to Friday 7 March 2025

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by more harsh sentences for alleged cooperation with foreign states, several civil initiatives and independent media recognized as “extremist formations,” entry into force of amendments to the Criminal Code.

“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 27 February 2025 information surfaced that the Minsk Regional Court [sentenced](#) the head of the analytical center Belarus Security Blog and military expert Andrei Parotnikau to 10 years in prison. He was accused of “obstructing the right to participate in a referendum,” “high treason,” “conspiracy to seize power,” “creating an extremist formation,” and “aiding extremist activity” under Articles 191, 356, 357, 361-1 and 361-4 of the Criminal Code. The KGB [accused the analyst](#) of “high treason” for allegedly cooperating with Polish intelligence and transmitting classified information, though available evidence suggests he only used open sources, attended press conferences, and communicated with security officials.

On 3 March 2025, the Grodno Regional Court [began considering the case](#) against Grodno resident Yahor Satyshura on charges of “high treason” under Article 356 of the Criminal Code. He is accused of collecting and transferring to a foreign state the personal data of the odious propagandist Grigory Azarenok. The statement to law enforcement agencies against Yahor was filed by the propagandist himself for posting information about him on the Internet. In one of his interviews, Azarenok said: “I am happy to file claims, and they go to jail.”

Civil initiatives and independent media recognized as “extremist formations”

The authorities continued to recognize independent civil initiatives as “extremist formations” extrajudicially. During the analyzed period independent outlet [“Mediazona. Belarus.”](#) the initiative of the popular opposition politician Zyanon Paznyak [“Free Belarus.”](#) the initiative for the development of a sustainable media environment in Europe [“Democratic Media Institute.”](#) information outlet [“About Vitebsk.”](#) and even the information and methodological portal for Belarusian teachers [“Nastaunik.info”](#) were recognized as “extremist.” The security forces explain this designation saying the outlets and initiatives were allegedly involved in “organizing activities to prepare for attacks on the sovereignty and public security of the Republic of Belarus, discrediting and insulting state officials.” Following the designation, criminal liability may arise for any form of cooperation with them.

Lukashenko signs amendments to the Criminal Code

On 17 February 2025, Aliaksandar Lukashenka signed [Law No. 61-Z](#) “On Amendments to the Codes on Criminal Liability.” The law is officially presented by the authorities as a “humanitarian” initiative, revising sanctions for 97 offenses, introducing more lenient penalties for 65 of them, and adjusting the severity of punishments in 32 cases. However,

regarding punishments for “extremist crimes” (political offenses), the law only tightens existing regulations.

The law removes the possibility of more lenient punishments and preventive measures for minors, parents of young children, and individuals with disabilities who have committed a non-serious crime for the first time – if they were convicted of “extremist offenses.”

Additionally, the law expands the list of crimes for which Belarusian citizens or permanent residents can be held criminally liable under Belarusian law, even if these offenses were committed outside the country and regardless of whether they are considered crimes in the country where they were committed. The newly added offenses include “terrorist,” “defamation,” and other “extremist” articles of the Criminal Code, which are often used to prosecute individuals critical of the regime. This change facilitates the formal expansion of cross-border repression.

The law also introduces two new articles into the Criminal Code that fall under crimes against the system of governance and, according to the Law “On Countering Extremism,” may be classified as “extremist activities.”

First, Article 375-3 of the Criminal Code, “Unauthorized Dissemination of Information on the Location or Movement of Military Units, Weapons, Military Equipment, and Ammunition,” was introduced, carrying a maximum penalty of 6 years in prison. This provision is likely to be actively used to punish individuals who share information about military movements or locations of military facilities with opposition organizations or foreign intelligence services, who are already heavily targeted.

Second, Article 366-1 of the Criminal Code, “Violence or Threats Against the President of the Republic of Belarus, Including a Former President,” was added, with penalties of up to 8 years in prison. In addition to introducing this new article, the law amends Article 367 (“Defamation Against the President of the Republic of Belarus”) and Article 368 (“Insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus”) of the Criminal Code, extending their application not only to the current head of state but also to former president. These changes enable the authorities not only to prosecute any form of criticism of the current *de facto* leader but also to prevent potential legal actions against a former president.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1227](#), 48 new people were recognized as “political prisoners” during the analyzed period. As of 7 March 2025, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody for more than 2 years ([889 days](#)).