



Monitoring of the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus

July 2023

Repressions against Belarusian citizens and Belarusian civil society organizations continue unabated in Belarus. The number of NGOs being liquidated in Belarus continues to rise. As of the end of July 2023, no fewer than 880 non-governmental organizations are in the process of forced liquidation, either through filed lawsuits for forced liquidation in court or by being forcibly removed from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR). The number of organizations that have decided to voluntarily liquidate amounts to no fewer than 492 organizations as of the end of July. Thus, the losses in the public sector of Belarus, starting from the post-election period in 2020, now amount to at least 1372 institutionalized forms of non-governmental organizations (associations, professional unions, political parties, foundations, non-governmental institutions, and associations). This is 35 organizations more than in the previous monitoring period. To forcibly liquidated public associations, trade unions, associations, foundations, and non-governmental institutions, political parties have been added. Information materials and initiatives are being recognized as extremist and citizens as involved in extremist and/or terrorist activities. The practice of holding individuals accountable for donations made to allegedly extremist funds is becoming increasingly widespread.

As of July 31, 2023, there are 1474 people recognized as political prisoners in Belarus, currently held in places of detention.

1. The liquidation of non-governmental organizations in Belarus – trends.

In Belarus, there is an active process of establishing its own (pro-government) civil society, including through the liquidation of independent civil society organizations. The authorities are also making efforts to liquidate opposition political parties and maintain a few parties that support the existing political course in the country. However, the process of purging public associations, trade unions, foundations, private institutions, and political parties in Belarus differs.

Regarding political parties, the law on political parties was amended, resulting in a call for re-registration. By changing the criteria for the establishment and activities of political parties, considering the overall policy of mass repression in the country, opposition parties found it unsafe to provide any personal information about their members during the re-registration process¹. As a

¹ On the necessity for political parties to provide a list of members during the reregistration process and the legality of such a requirement – Monitoring of the situation of freedom of association and civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus, June 2023.

result, the authorities used this as a formal basis for the simultaneous liquidation of opposition political structures by claiming their failure to undergo re-registration. At the same time, despite the introduction of formal legal justification for the liquidation of opposition parties, the authorities did not hide the anticipated outcome of this process. Minister of Justice Siarhei Khramenka even [stated](#) that the number of political parties in Belarus would be reduced to 3-4 after re-registration. However, as of January 1, 2023, according to [statistics from the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus](#), there were 15 registered political parties in the country. Another political party, "Belaya Rus" ("White Ruthenia"), was registered by the Ministry of Justice on May 2, 2023 (thus exempt from the re-registration procedure).

Regarding public associations (as well as other non-governmental organizations such as foundations and private institutions), initially, universal re-registration was considered. Thus, in April 2021, during [a meeting on foreign policy issues](#), Aliaksandr Lukashenka demanded that the head of the presidential administration organize the process of reregistering public associations and institutions. Then, in early May 2021, during a meeting on the draft law on public service, Aliaksandr Lukashenka [once again reminded](#) about the necessity of reregistering non-governmental organizations. However, it became clear in June 2021 that the purging of public associations, private institutions, and foundations in Belarus would be carried out differently. Over the past two years, numerous lawsuits have been actively filed with the judiciary authorities as registering bodies seeking the liquidation of public associations and foundations. Decisions on the forced liquidation of private institutions were mainly made in the second half of 2021 and the first half of 2022, based on orders from the KGB, law enforcement and financial authorities. Currently, decisions on the forced liquidation of private institutions are made on a selective basis. Another widely used practice, mainly concerning regional organizations, involves controlling bodies coercing non-governmental organizations to decide on self-liquidation. After amendments were made to the law "On Public Associations" in February 2023, declaring a general re-registration of public associations unnecessary, the authorities emphasized the need for these organizations to bring their charters in line with the new requirements. This created an additional lever of influence on this organizational legal form of non-governmental organizations. As a result, after the completion of the process of aligning charters with the new requirements in March 2024, a significant number of associations that had maintained their registered status in Belarus may face liquidation.

Currently, Belarus is also developing changes to the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations". The proposed new version of the law [suggests re-registering all religious organizations existing in Belarus](#), including major republican confessional associations ("religious unions") and individual religious communities and churches ("religious communities"). During the monitoring period, [public discussion of the draft new version of the law has concluded](#). According to the information from the Commissioner for Religious and Ethnic Affairs, [the proposals received during the discussion were not taken into account](#) since they did not establish new or fundamentally change existing approaches to the legal regulation of specific areas of public relations. Therefore, shortly, re-registration and significant reduction of another organizational legal form of non-governmental organizations – religious associations (organizations) – are expected in Belarus.

1.1. Forced liquidation of non-governmental organizations²

As of July 31, 2023, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#), there have been 880 NGOs in the process of forced liquidation, including lawsuits filed by registering authorities for liquidation or being forcibly excluded from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR). This is 26 organizations more than in the previous monitoring period. During the monitoring period, both court decisions on the forced liquidation of public associations and new lawsuits for their liquidation were filed. The majority of liquidation lawsuits were filed by the Ministry of Justice against republican public associations as well as by the main justice department of the Minsk City Executive Committee. A characteristic feature of this monitoring period was the beginning of the forced liquidation of political parties in Belarus after they completed the process of submitting documents for reregistration (for more details on the situation with political parties, please refer to the relevant section of this overview).

1.2. Non-governmental organizations deciding on self-liquidation

The process of NGOs independently deciding on liquidation continues (during the monitoring period, this includes public associations and non-governmental institutions). As of July 31, 2023, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#), there have been 492 NGOs (public associations, foundations, and institutions) in which the authorized body or founders have decided to liquidate.

As before, the decision on self-liquidation is primarily due to pressure on the members and employees of NGOs, an unfavourable legal environment, the overall socio-political situation in the country, and often the authorities' pressure on NGOs to make such a decision.

1.3. Re-registration of political parties.

According to the Law of the Republic of Belarus dated February 14, 2023, "On Amending Laws on the Activities of Political Parties and Other Public Associations," the deadline for political parties to submit documents to the Ministry of Justice for their re-registration has expired on June 5th.

The law establishes that political parties that have not submitted documents for re-registration by June 5, inclusively, and have not decided on self-liquidation will be subject to liquidation based on the decisions of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus upon the lawsuits filed by the Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice is obliged to conduct re-registration by September 5, 2023. However, despite this deadline, the process of liquidating opposition political parties due to their failure to undergo the re-registration procedure actively began in mid-July: on July 20, the case of liquidation of the Conservative Christian Party – BNF was considered in the Supreme Court, on July 24 – the Belarusian Patriotic Party, on July 27 – the Belarusian Party "Greens," and on July 31 – the Belarusian Social Democratic "Hramada". On

² The monitoring only records cases of forced liquidation and self-liquidation of non-commercial organizations (NGOs), and quantitative data does not include government institutions or republican state-public organizations. Religious organizations, consumer cooperatives, and other organizational and legal forms of NGOs besides public associations, foundations, private institutions, and associations are also not taken into account.

August 8, the case of liquidation of the Republican Party, on August 9 – the Social Democratic Party of Popular Accord, and on August 14, the case of liquidation of the BNF Party will be reviewed.

Overall, the situation regarding the mandatory re-registration of political parties as of the end of July 2023, based on the information available in open sources (online publications, party websites, Ministry of Justice website), is as follows.

№	Political Party Name	Completion of the Re-registration Process
1	Belarusian Party "Belaya Rus" ("White Ruthenia") (Leader: Aleh Ramanau)	Registered after the amendments to the Law on Political Parties came into effect. Did not undergo re-registration (information from the Ministry of Justice)
2	Liberal Democratic Party (Leader: Aleh Haidukevich)	Completed the re-registration process. The party's new name is the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus (information from the Ministry of Justice).
3	Communist Party of Belarus (Leader: Aliaksei Sokal)	Completed the re-registration process (information from the Ministry of Justice).
4	Republican Party of Labour and Justice (Leader: Aliaksandr Hizhnyak)	Completed the re-registration process (information from online publications citing the Ministry of Justice's press service).
5	Belarusian Social-Sports Party (Leader: Uladzimir Aleksandrovich)	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration.
6	Belarusian Party "Zelenyye" ("Greens") (Leader: Dzmitry Kuchuk)	<p>Documents for re-registration have been submitted.</p> <p>A resolution was adopted to terminate the Law on Political Parties in its new version due to its non-compliance with the Constitution and Belarus's international obligations, as well as the party's failure to provide the Ministry of Justice with a list of members due to lack of security guarantees and associated consequences. The Ministry of Justice responded with a proposal to hold a congress, decide on self-liquidation, and report within one week from the date of the letter on the measures taken to fulfil these actions (information from online publications and press conferences, joint resolution).</p> <p>The Ministry of Justice filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On July 27, the lawsuit was considered in the Supreme Court. On July 28, the entry in the Unified State Register (USR) was updated to show that the party is in the process of liquidation.</p>
7	Social-Democratic Party of People's Consent (Leader: Siarhei Yarmak)	<p>No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration.</p> <p>The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On August 9, a court hearing is scheduled to consider the lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Justice for the liquidation of the party.</p>

8	Belarusian Agrarian Party (Leader: Mikhail Rusy)	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration.
9	Republican Party (No information about the leader, including on the Ministry of Justice's website)	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration. The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On August 8, a court hearing is scheduled to consider the lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Justice for the liquidation of the party.
10	Conservative-Christian Party – BNF (Leader: Zyanon Paznyak)	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration. The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On July 20, the lawsuit was considered in the Supreme Court. The entry in the Unified State Register (USR) was updated to show that the party is in the process of liquidation .
11	BNF Party (Leader: Ryhor Kastusiou, political prisoner)	Decision made not to submit documents for re-registration. A resolution was adopted to terminate the Law on Political Parties in its new version due to its non-compliance with the Constitution and Belarus's international obligations, as well as the party's failure to provide the Ministry of Justice with a list of members due to lack of security guarantees and associated consequences (information from online publications, press conferences, joint resolution). The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On August 14, a court hearing is scheduled to consider the lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Justice for the liquidation of the party.
12	Belarusian Left Party "Spravedlivyi Mir" ("Fair World") (Leader: Siarhei Kalyakin)	Documents for re-registration have been submitted. At the congress, a decision was made not to disclose the list of party members with personal data to ensure their safety (information from the party's website and online publications).
13	United Civic Party (Leader: Mikalai Kazlou, political prisoner)	Decision made not to submit documents for re-registration. A resolution was adopted to terminate the Law on Political Parties in its new version due to its non-compliance with the Constitution and Belarus's international obligations, as well as the party's failure to provide the Ministry of Justice with a list of members due to lack of security guarantees and associated consequences (information from online publications, press conferences, joint resolution).
14	Belarusian Patriotic Party (Leader: Mikalai Ulakhovich)	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration.

		The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On July 24, the lawsuit was considered in the Supreme Court. The entry in the Unified State Register (USR) was updated to show that the party is in the process of liquidation .
15	Belarusian Democratic (Leader: Siarhei Cherachen) Social Hramada	Documents for re-registration have been submitted . No individual list is provided. The accompanying document contains a commitment to bring the number of organizational structures in line with the new requirement of the law within a year (information from the party's website). The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On July 31, the lawsuit was considered in the Supreme Court. The party disappeared from the list of registered from the website of the Ministry of Justice, in the UGR as of 31.07.23 is in registered status.
16	Belarusian Democratic (Hramada) (Leader: Ihar Barysau) Social-Party	Documents for re-registration have been submitted. A resolution was adopted to terminate the Law on Political Parties in its new version due to its non-compliance with the Constitution and Belarus's international obligations, as well as the party's failure to provide the Ministry of Justice with a list of members due to lack of security guarantees and associated consequences (information from online publications, press conferences, joint resolution). The party's reregistration request was denied by the Ministry of Justice. The party's leadership has stated their intention to appeal the denial of re-registration in court.

Analysis of the overall statistics of forcibly liquidated (or being liquidated) NGOs and NGOs that have decided on self-liquidation shows that starting from September 2020 until the end of July 2023, there has been a decrease (or will soon be due to judicial reviews) of at least 1372 non-governmental organizations (including public associations, including professional unions, political parties, funds, institutions, and associations) in Belarus.

2. The other pressure on civil society organizations and activists.

Due to the performance of their professional activities, human rights defenders continue to serve prison sentences: the coordinator of Viasna Volunteer Service [Marfa Rabkova](#) (sentenced to 14 years and 9 months in a general regime colony, listed as involved in terrorist and extremist activities), Viasna volunteer [Andrey Chapiuk](#) (sentenced to 5 years and 9 months in a medium security prison, listed as involved in terrorist and extremist activities); Viasna chairman and Nobel laureate [Ales Bialiatski](#); Viasna Board member and FIDH Vice-President [Valiantsin Stefanovich](#); lawyer [Uladzimir Labkovich](#), coordinator of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections", human rights defender [Nasta \(Anastasiya\) Loika](#) (sentenced to seven years of imprisonment in a correctional colony of the general regime).

On July 21, due to the completion of his full sentence in Vitebsk Penitentiary No. 3, human rights defender [Leaniid Sudalenka](#) was released (he was included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities and sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment in a general regime penal colony).

In places of deprivation of liberty, other representatives of civil society organizations are also being held, for example,

- members of the Coordination Council [Maxim Znak](#) (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities, sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment), [Marya Kalesnikava](#) (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities, sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment),
- representative of the "Green Patrol" initiative [Pavel Nazdra](#) (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment),
- former leader of the Public Association "Akhova Ptushak Batskaushchyny" [Viktar Fianchuk](#) (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of imprisonment),
- public figure, founder of the "Flying University" [Uladzimir Matskevich](#) (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment),
- expert of the analytical group of the Agency for Humanitarian Technologies, coordinator of the "Flying University," senior analyst at the Center for European Transformation [Tatsiana Vadalazhskaya](#) (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of restricted freedom with placement in an open-type correctional facility ("chemistry")),
- member of the Council and co-founder of the School of Young Public Administration Managers Sympa, expert of the research project bipart [Tatsiana Kuzina](#) (sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment),
- founder and editor of the expert community website "Our Opinion," head of the expert monitoring group "Belarus in Focus" [Valeryia Kastsyuhova](#) (sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment),
- co-chair of the association "Tell the Truth", and former presidential candidate [Andrey Dzmitryeu](#) (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 1.5 years in a colony),
- founder of Symbal.by, [Pavel Belavus](#), has been included in the lists of individuals involved in terrorist and extremist activities and has been sentenced to 13 years in a high-security correctional facility,
- art manager [Uladzimir Bulauski](#) has been included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities and has been sentenced to 2 years in a general regime colony.

Deputy Director of Minsk Cycling Society, [Maksim Puchynski](#), has been included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities and is subjected to a 2-year and 6-month

restriction of freedom without being sent to an open-type correctional facility (probation / "home chemistry").

On July 5, the Minsk Regional Court sentenced the former director of the crowdfunding platforms Ulej and MolaMola, [Eduard Babaryka](#), to eight years in a penal colony with strengthened security conditions. He was charged under Article 130, Part 3 (incitement to social enmity) and Article 243, Part 2 (tax evasion) of the Criminal Code. The state prosecution dropped the accusation of money laundering (Article 235, Part 2 – laundering funds obtained through criminal means) against Eduard Babaryka. Additionally, the charges related to complicity in organizing mass riots (Article 16, Part 6, and Article 293, Part 1) were reclassified to charges of complicity in organizing actions that grossly violate public order (Article 16, Part 6, and Article 342 of the Criminal Code).

On July 26, the Hrodna Regional Court sentenced a cultural figure and Hrodna activist, [Pavel Mazheika](#), who headed the institution "City Life Center," to 6 years in a penal colony with strengthened security conditions. He was charged with repeated involvement in extremist activities in collusion with a group of people under Article 361-4, Part 2, of the Criminal Code.

The unprecedented pressure on representatives of non-governmental organizations and other organizational forms, including religious organizations, is taking place. For instance, [according to "Khrysciyanskaya Viziya"](#), on July 13-14, a search was conducted at the monastery of the Minsk Archcathedral. During the search, violence was used against the priests. Before the search, there were detentions and arrests of a Catholic believer and a catechism teacher, Uladzislau Beladzed, as well as the dismissal of a priest, Father Antony Klimantovich.

According to the Belarusian Independent Trade Union, currently, nearly four dozen trade union activists and leaders of democratic trade unions are imprisoned in Belarus. Thus, leaders and activists of Belarusian independent trade unions are being held in places of detention:

- [Aliaksandr Yarashuk](#), Chairman of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).
- [Siarhei Antusevich](#), Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).
- [Iryna But-Husaim](#), Accountant (sentenced to 1.5 years of imprisonment, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).
- [Andrey Khanevich](#), Chairman of the primary organization of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union at OJSC "Hrodna Azot" (included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities, sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment).
- [Aliaksandr Mishuk](#), Chairman of the Independent Trade Union at "Belaruskali" (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities and extremist activities, sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of imprisonment).

- [Henadz Fiadynich](#), Head of the Independent Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers (sentenced to 9 years of imprisonment in high-security conditions, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).
- [Vasil Berasniew](#), Leader of the Orsha Independent Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers, acting Chairman of the Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers (sentenced to 9 years of imprisonment in high-security conditions, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).
- [Vatslau Areshka](#), Activist of the Trade Union of Radioelectronics Industry Workers (sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment, included in the list of individuals involved in extremist activities).
- [Artsiom Zharnak](#), Chairman of the primary trade union organization of the Free Metalworkers Union at MAZ (included in the list of individuals involved in terrorist activities, sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment).
- [Maksim Senik](#), Activist of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union at OJSC "Hrodna Azot" (sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment).

[Mikhail Hromau](#), Secretary of the liquidated Free Metalworkers Union was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of restricted freedom without placement in an open-type correctional facility (probation / "home chemistry").

[Vital Chychmarou](#), Head of the primary trade union organization of the Free Metalworkers Union was sentenced to 3 years of restricted freedom without placement in an open-type correctional facility (probation / "home chemistry").

The practice of recognizing information products, including initiatives posted abroad, as "extremist materials," and expanding the lists of individuals, organizations, formations, and individual entrepreneurs involved in extremist activities is continuing.

During the monitoring period, the following individuals [sentenced in absentia as part of a criminal case related to the Coordination Council](#) were included in the [List of Belarusian citizens, foreign citizens, or stateless persons involved in extremist activities](#): [Maryia Maroz](#), [Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya](#), [Pavel Latushka](#), [Volha Kavalkova](#), and [Siarhei Dyleuski](#).

Several online resources, including websites, social media platforms, video-hosting channels, and Telegram channels, have been [classified as "extremist materials"](#). These include the Internet site, social networks, and "YouTube" video-hosting channel of the Belarusian Youth Council "Rada"; the initiative "Dissidentby", the Instagram account "bssf.team", the Sports Solidarity Foundation, the social network community (group) "SYMPA" on Facebook, the Telegram channels "Правовая инициатива" ("the Legal Initiative"), "Міжнародны камітэт па расследаванні катаванняў у Беларусі" ("the International Committee for Investigation of Tortures in Belarus"), and "Аб'яднанне сваякоў і колішніх палітвязняў" ("the Association of relatives and former political prisoners").

In addition, during the monitoring period, several resources that unite or provide assistance to Belarusians abroad have been categorized as "extremist materials." This includes social media

platforms such as "Razam - фонд помощи беларусам в Литве" ("Razam - Fund for Assisting Belarusians in Lithuania"), the internet site and Telegram group "Беларусы в Кракове" ("Belarusians in Krakow") internet sites "BELARUSIANS IN CHICAGO", "Беларусы у Мадрыдзе" ("Belarusians in Madrid"), social media pages "Belarusians in Austria", "belarus_in_moscow", "belaruscanada", "Беларусы ў Рызе / Белорусы в Риге" ("Belarusians in Riga"), and others.

The practice of prosecuting citizens for alleged financing of extremist activities is becoming increasingly active, particularly for transferring donations to various funds. However, such practice seems to be selective as some individuals are invited to talks by the KGB for transferring donations to so-called extremist organizations and are coerced to transfer significant amounts of money to specific governmental bank accounts, meanwhile, cases of detention and criminal charges for the same actions are recorded for some other individuals. [According to information from "Viasna"](#), at least 19 people have been sentenced for "financing extremism," with 12 of them being imprisoned for three to six years. At least ten more individuals are held in detention awaiting trial.

For example, on July 24, the scientist [Yuryi Adamau](#), a participant in the Belarusian free software community and co-founder of the sci-pop zine "Pamyłka" in Belarusian, was sentenced to 3 years in a penal colony for general regime conditions under Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code (financing extremist activities) by the Minsk City Court. [According to the presidential administration publication "СБ. Беларусь Сегодня" \("SB. Belarus Today"\)](#), Yuri was detained for making 24 donations to "BySol" and "ByHelp" with a total amount of 1 590 dollars.

3. The legal regulation.

Starting from July 11, 2023, changes to the Law of the Republic of Belarus dated August 1, 2002, No. 136-Z "On Citizenship of the Republic of Belarus" have come into effect. Specifically, citizens of the Republic of Belarus who acquire citizenship of a foreign state, obtain a residence permit, or any other foreign state document granting privileges and other benefits are required to inform the internal affairs authorities or diplomatic service within three months from the date of receiving the relevant documents.

The law also provides for the possibility of an individual losing their Belarusian citizenship acquired by birth, due to the existence of a legally binding verdict of a court in the Republic of Belarus confirming their involvement in extremist activities or causing significant harm to the interests of the country, if the individual is outside its borders. The decision to revoke citizenship will be made by a commission on citizenship matters, which will prepare corresponding proposals for the President's consideration.

By [the Law of the Republic of Belarus dated July 12, 2023, No. 281-Z "On the Amendments to Laws on Local Government and Self-Government"](#), amendments have been made to the Law of the Republic of Belarus dated January 4, 2010, No. 108-Z "On Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus". Among the novelties of the law is a new article on the implementation of civic initiatives (Article 36-1). The law defines civic initiatives as measures aimed at improving the quality of life of the population in the administrative-territorial unit or a part thereof, including improvement of the territory, construction (erection, repair, reconstruction,

restoration, improvement) of socially important objects, general prevention of offences, prevention of injuries and fatalities, as well as solution of other issues of local importance. This norm is incorporated into the Law according to the Program of Socio-Economic Development of Belarus for 2021-2025, approved by Decree No. 292 of 29 July 2021, according to which every local budget shall be drawn up taking into account civil initiatives.

The law establishes basic requirements for the initiators of civic initiatives and the content of civic initiative projects. The procedure for their competitive selection has been entrusted to the Councils at the regional level.

Initiative (participatory) budgeting as a mechanism of involving citizens in the decisions on the choice of priorities of budget spending as well as the subsequent public control over the expenditures is widespread in the world. In this connection, the introduction of the norm on such budgeting into the legislation is progressive and it has been lobbied by civil society organisations for a long time. At the same time, neither the law itself nor the current emerging practice of implementation of the initiatives answers the question of how this mechanism will work in practice now. For example, it is not clear from the law how the initiative group will be able to exercise public control over the progress of the work, etc.

It is also notable that the introduction of a provision into legislation regarding the implementation and financing possibilities of civic initiatives occurred against the backdrop of the prohibition of activities of unregistered organizations in Belarus and the reinstatement of criminal liability for organizing and participating in the activities of unregistered organizations.

4. International Reaction to Human Rights Violations, Particularly Freedom of Association, in Belarus.

On July 5, 2023, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus, Anaïs Marin, presented her [report No. A/HRC/53/53](#) dated May 3, 2023, at the 53rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur concludes that the human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate. The report particularly focuses on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including media freedoms and academic freedoms, as well as the interconnected rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

During the 53rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, [Resolution No. 53/19 "Situation of human rights in Belarus"](#) was discussed, voted on and adopted (adopted by a recorded vote (20 to 6, with 21 abstentions), 35th meeting, 13 July 2023). The resolution decides to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus for another year. The resolution also calls upon the Belarusian authorities to revoke the decisions on the forced dissolution of civil society entities, to enter into a genuine, constructive, inclusive and transparent national dialogue with civil society, and to develop and implement, without delay, in close cooperation with civil society, a new plan on human rights, taking into consideration the recommendations accepted by the State in the context of the third universal periodic review, and the recommendations made by the treaty bodies, human rights mechanisms and civil society, and to create and maintain a safe enabling environment, both online and offline, in which civil society can operate free from arbitrary surveillance, hindrance and insecurity.