



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

August 2023

Despite the summer season, repression against Belarusian civil society organizations and activists continues unabated. The number of NGOs being liquidated in Belarus continues to rise. As of the end of August 2023, no less than 900 non-governmental organizations are in the process of forced liquidation, either through lawsuits filed for compulsory dissolution 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 chosen voluntary dissolution amounts to no less than 507 organizations as of the end of August. The liquidation of political parties is ongoing. Consequently, the losses in Belarus's civil sector since the post-election period of 2020 amount to no less than 1,407 institutionalized forms of non-governmental organizations, including civic associations, professional unions, political parties, foundations, non-governmental institutions, and associations. The number of arrests and convictions for involvement in the activities of initiatives and organizations deemed extremist formations by arbitrary decisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the State Security Committee (KGB) is steadily increasing. People are continuously summoned to the State Security Committee for allegedly financing extremist formations, even for making online donations of very small amounts. The Human Rights Center "Viasna" and "Homiel Viasna" have been declared extremist formations.

As of August 31, 2023, there are 1496 people recognized as political prisoners in Belarus, currently held in places of detention.

The liquidation of political parties

The process of liquidating opposition political parties due to their failure to undergo re-registration procedures is ongoing. On August 8th, the lawsuit for the liquidation of the Republican Party was considered, on August 9th, the Social Democratic Party of People's Accord, on August 14th, the BNF Party, and on August 15th, the United Civil Party. On September 4th, the Supreme Court has scheduled the consideration of the case for the liquidation of the Belarusian Social and Sports Party, and on September 22nd, the case for the liquidation of the Belarusian Left Party "Spravedlivyi Mir" ("Fair World") will be considered.

Due to the submission of new lawsuits and changes in the status of some political parties, Lawtrend experts have updated the table with information on the progress of political parties' mandatory re-registration and their forced liquidation as of the end of August 2023. The information presented in this table is based on open sources (online publications, political party websites, and the Ministry of Justice website).

№	Political Party Name	The status of the political party	Comments
1	Belarusian Party "Belaya Rus" ("White Ruthenia") (Leader: Aleh Ramanau)	Registered	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)	Registered	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)	Registered	Completed the re-registration process (information from the Ministry of Justice).
4	Republican Party of Labour and Justice (Leader: Aliaksandr Hizhnyak)	Registered	Completed the re-registration process (information from online publications citing the Ministry of Justice's press service).
5	Belarusian Social and Sports Party (Leader: Uladzimir Aleksandrovich)	It is currently registered, but a lawsuit for liquidation has been filed.	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration. On September 4, 2023, the consideration of the Ministry of Justice's lawsuit for the liquidation of the party is scheduled in the Supreme Court.
6	Belarusian Party "Zelenyye" ("Greens")	In the process of liquidation	<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	In the process of liquidation	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for reregistration. The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On August 9, a court hearing was scheduled to consider the lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Justice for the liquidation of the party. Entry in the Unified State Register : In the process of liquidation.
8	Belarusian Agrarian Party	In the process of liquidation (an independent decision on liquidation)	No information is available in accessible online sources regarding the party's submission of documents for re-registration. On 12.08.2023 the decision on self-liquidation of the political party was adopted.
9	Republican Party	In the process of liquidation	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 was scheduled to consider the lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Justice for the liquidation of the party. Entry in the Unified State Register: In the process of liquidation.
10	Conservative-Christian Party – BNF	In the process of liquidation	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. Entry in the Unified State Register: in the process of liquidation .
11	BNF Party	In the process of liquidation	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).

			<p>The Ministry of Justice has filed a lawsuit for the liquidation of the party. On August 14, a court hearing was scheduled to consider the lawsuit filed by the Ministry of Justice for the liquidation of the party.</p> <p>Entry in the Unified State Register: In the process of liquidation.</p>
12	Belarusian Left Party "Spravedlivyi Mir" ("Fair World")	It is currently registered, but a lawsuit for liquidation has been filed.	<p>Documents for re-registration have been submitted.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>On September 22, the consideration of the Ministry of Justice's lawsuit for the liquidation of the party is scheduled.</p>
13	United Civic Party	In the process of liquidation	<p>Decision made not to submit documents for re-registration.</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 (information from online publications, press conferences, joint resolution).</p> <p>Entry in the Unified State Register: In the process of liquidation.</p>
14	Belarusian Patriotic Party (Leader: Mikalai Ulakhovich)	In the process of liquidation	<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 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.</p>
15	Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada	In the process of liquidation	<p>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</p>

			<p>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. Entry in the Unified State Register: In the process of liquidation.</p>
16	Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Hramada) (Leader: Ihar Barysau)	Registered	<p>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 re-registration 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. The party's leadership has appealed the denial of re-registration to the Supreme Court. Initially, the case for the liquidation of the party was scheduled for September 11th. However, due to the filing of the complaint, the case has currently been removed from the Supreme Court's schedule. On September 5th, the consideration of the party's complaint regarding the denial of re-registration is scheduled.</p>

Forced liquidation of non-governmental organizations¹

As of August 31, 2023, according to [the monitoring conducted by Lawtrend](#), there have been 900 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 20 organizations more than in the previous monitoring period. A decision has been recorded for the forced liquidation of a private institution, the Charitable Institution for Aid to People in Difficult Life Situations "Person in Motion." This

¹ 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.

decision is made by the registering authority in a simplified procedure, without the need for a court hearing.

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 August 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.

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 August 2023, there has been a decrease (or will soon be due to judicial reviews) of at least 1 407 non-governmental organizations (including public associations, including professional unions, political parties, funds, institutions, and associations) in Belarus.

The other pressure on civil society organizations and activists.

The practice of dispersing events initiated by non-profit initiatives continues. For example, in the forest near Navahrudak (Hrodna region), after a "preventive conversation" with the organizers, law enforcement authorities dispersed a Catholic scout camp.

On August 24, Aleh and Volha Rudakovy were detained. Oleg, who had been living in Belarus recently, had been leading the Irkutsk Society of Belarusian Culture named after Ioann Chersky for 17 years. It was one of the largest national-cultural organizations and one of the most active Belarusian communities in Russia.

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).

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,

- former leader of the crowdfunding platforms Ulej and MolaMola, [Eduard Babaryka](#), has been sentenced to 8 years in a high-security colony.

- [Pavel Mazheika](#), a cultural figure and Hrodna activist who headed the "City Life Center," has been sentenced to six years of imprisonment in a high-security 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").

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 Berasnieu](#), 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").

During the monitoring period, OMON (Special Purpose Mobile Unit) officers detained Volha Brytsikava, the former chairwoman of the independent trade union at OJSC "Naftan," and Aliaksandr Kukharenka, a Naftan strike committee member. Both individuals had previously faced multiple administrative detentions in 2020-2022. They are now facing charges under Article 361, Part 2 of the Criminal Code (calls for sanctions and other actions aimed at harming the national security of Belarus).

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. The number of arrests and convictions for involvement in the activities of initiatives and organizations deemed extremist formations by arbitrary decisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the State Security Committee (KGB) is steadily increasing.

On August 9, 2023, the State Security Committee (KGB) of the Republic of Belarus decided to recognize "Homiel Viasna" as an extremist formation. The mentioned website, "Homiel Viasna," is a human rights website of Homiel and Homiel region, covering activities in the Homiel department the human rights center "Viasna."

On August 23, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus decided to recognize the Human Rights Center "Viasna" as an extremist formation. According to this decision, a group of citizens associated with the Human Rights Center "Viasna" is engaging in extremist activities, including through internet resources with the same name, including regional branches. [According to BelTA](#), the decision was made in connection with "organizing activities aimed at undermining the sovereignty and public security of Belarus, discrediting and insulting government officials." The activities of the group and its associated more than 30 resources are prohibited in Belarus.

Similar decisions by the KGB or the Ministry of Internal Affairs provide grounds for criminal liability of up to 7 years for individuals who are involved in the activities or provide information to representatives of the Human Rights Center "Viasna," "Homiel Viasna."

Belarusian human rights organizations have issued [a joint statement](#) regarding the recognition of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" as an extremist formation.

During the monitoring period, [Tatsiana Kuzina](#) and [Valeryia Kastsiuhova](#) have been added to [the List](#) of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens, or stateless persons allegedly been involved in extremist activities.

To the list of the extremist materials have been added the website, social media accounts, YouTube and Telegram channels, the logo of the "Zadzinochannye Belaruskich Studentau (ZBS)," social media accounts and TikTok account "@rabochi_rux," the website "Kosht urada," the logo "Alliance of Belarus Investigators," YouTube channel "DAPAMOGA," and Telegram channels "Belaruski Dom" and "Belaruski Dom va Ukrainie (BDU)."

There is a growing practice of prosecuting citizens for alleged financing of extremist activities, including donations to various funds.

For example, on August 17, businessman Yury Tashkinau was sentenced to three years in a general regime colony, including under Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code (financing the activities of the extremist formation), for donating around \$100 to the Fund for Solidarity "Bysol." On August 24, the Minsk City Court sentenced Arciom Liabedzka to three years and six months in a high-security regime colony under Article 361-2 of the Criminal Code for donations to solidarity funds.

This practice is selective and varies over the past few months. Alongside arrests and criminal charges against individuals for online donations to alleged extremist formations, there is a mass calling in for interviews by the State Security Committee regarding the same actions. Previously, lists of those called in for allegedly making such donations were sent to their workplaces, but in recent months, such calls have been made directly to individuals. These interviews serve as warnings against future similar actions, with threats of possible criminal prosecution if funds are not transferred to specified bank accounts. The requested amounts can be ten or even fifty times larger than the donations made by individuals in 2020-2021.