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# HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS: THE MAIN TRENDS OF PUBLIC POLICY

GENERAL MEASURES | LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE | KEY REACTIONS  
OF INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURES



In 2024, AI is not only getting «smarter» but also becoming more accessible to a growing number of people. To capture our audience's attention, we create cover images for reviews using AI, reflecting the reality in Belarus.

As of more than halfway through 2024, there has been no significant surge in the legalization of repressions. The state, like a crocodile that «bit off» a large chunk of rights and freedoms in 2023, is now «digesting» it, focusing on making necessary changes to lower-level regulations and expanding the range of illegal practices.

In the image generated by Shutterstock.AI, the crocodile appears relaxed, but in reality, it remains dangerous for everyone.



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# | INTRODUCTION

The human rights situation in Belarus remains the subject of monitoring and analysis by both Belarusian and international NGOs and international organisations. Since 2012, the mandate of the [Special Rapporteur](#) on the situation of human rights in Belarus has been in place. Civil society's alternative reports to treaty bodies overseeing the implementation of the core UN human rights conventions, as well as in the [reports](#) of these bodies themselves, also provide reviews. In response to the unjustified use of force, torture against peaceful protesters contesting the 2020 rigged elections, and the subsequent repressions, a special [Mandate on the human rights situation in Belarus](#) was established under the auspices of the OHCHR in March 2021. In 2024, it was [changed](#) to a group of independent experts, which means more autonomy and independence for this mechanism.

Since 2019, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee has been calculating [the Belarus Human Rights Index](#), within which more than 40 Belarusian experts assess changes in each specific human right. Belarusian NGOs regularly conduct targeted human rights situation monitoring based on their areas of expertise.<sup>1</sup>

The events of 2020, followed by the war in Ukraine and Belarus' complicity in Russia's aggression, have significantly altered the situation in the country, including its policies and practices in the realm of human rights. The situation is continually deteriorating, with daily updates on legislative changes, government initiatives,<sup>2</sup> specific violations, etc. Amidst this influx of information, **maintaining focus** and distinguishing between essential and minor aspects **becomes challenging**.

To ensure that significant events are not overlooked and to gain a better understanding of the situation in Belarus regarding the rule of law and human rights, we track **the most significant and qualitative changes in the main trends of state policy in the field of human rights**.

For this purpose, since July 2023, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee has been issuing a periodic review. Its aim is to present our expert assessments of **the most significant and qualitative changes in the trends of Belarusian state policy** in the field of human rights and the international community's reactions to it over the reporting period in three areas:

- *general measures*: systemic issues – legislation, strategies, and policies that generally shape the conditions and prerequisites for the fulfilment of human rights in the country;

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<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, *Analytical reviews of the situation with human rights prepared by Human Rights Center «Viasna»*: <https://spring96.org/ru/publications/>;

*Monitoring the situation of freedom of association and civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus by Lawtrend*: <https://www.lawtrend.org/english/>;

*Electronic bulletins of mass media in Belarus by the Belarusian Association of Journalists*: [https://baj.media/en/aglyady\\_category/baj-monitors/](https://baj.media/en/aglyady_category/baj-monitors/) and others.

<sup>2</sup> We consider the current authorities in Belarus as the *de facto* authorities.

- *law enforcement practices*: trends in violations of civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights;
- *key decisions and reactions of international institutions* related to the human rights situation in Belarus.

Our analytics will contribute to a better understanding of human rights trends in Belarus, aid international partners in navigating the Belarusian agenda, facilitate monitoring of systemic and qualitative changes in the situation, expand the human rights focus of analytics in related areas (political, economic, social, etc.), and serve as a useful resource for developing strategies and positions.

The analysis for 2023 is presented in 2 reviews. Issues for 2023, as well as a summary analysis of the year as an interactive presentation can be found [here](#).

In 2024, the review will be published three times (after every four months). The January-April 2024 issue can be found [here](#).

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## | SUMMARY

- Just as in the first trimester of 2024, there was no significant surge in the legalisation of repressions with qualitative changes from May to August. It appears that, having made a significant leap in this area in 2023, the state is now «digesting» the changes, focusing on updating lower-level regulations and expanding the range of illegal practices, many of which will likely be formalised over time.
- The formalisation of loyalty requirements for the authorities continues to extend to new professional groups, while also tightening against groups already subject to state control. This time, notaries have been added to the list, and the rules for certifying guides-interpreters have also been tightened (with changes to their professional ethics rules occurring earlier in 2024). This trend of departing from the formal equality principle by altering access rules and professional ethics not only leads to the persecution of specific individuals but also systematically distorts the essence of various professions.
- There is evidence that the state is attempting to address the catastrophic consequences for the consistency of legislation and public administration caused by the arbitrary process of implementing its «Passport Decree». A new provision was introduced, obliging to provide information on civil status acts registered outside the Republic of Belarus to the Belarusian civil registry offices. Clearly, the prohibitions introduced by the Decree have created systemic inconveniences for the state, which is unable to obtain necessary information about its citizens. Efforts to correct this with new amendments only highlight the chaotic and dysfunctional nature of state administration and lawmaking.
- Probably, the state intends to interpret the situation of persons with expired passports, who, for security reasons and due to the state's own fault («Passport Decree»), were unable to return to the country to renew passports and could not exchange them abroad as a voluntary refusal by the individual to use their passport. Formally, the state does not deny the possibility of renewing it on its territory. Thus, the legislation on identity confirmation for pension provision introduced the phrase «including citizens of the Republic of Belarus previously documented with a passport who refused to use it».
- Social protection measures for children continue to be aggravated, paving the way for repressive actions and indoctrination. This time, changes also reflect a trend toward adopting Russian practices: a new type of orphanages is being introduced by law – namely, orphanages attached to monasteries. These institutions, created by monasteries, are intended for orphans and children left without parental care between the ages of 3 and 18. Given the role of



both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Belarusian Orthodox Church in propaganda (including military one), this measure serves as an additional tool for the indoctrination of vulnerable children who are entirely dependent on the state. It may also infringe upon freedom of religion and children's right to a family.

- A significant block of legislative changes concerns the mandatory work placement for graduates and the reimbursement of tuition fees. On one hand, new regulations further complicate the situation for certain categories of graduates, including those who studied at public or organisational expense. The rules for the mandatory placement of spouses, graduates of some specialisations, and those assigned to rural areas are being tightened, as are the rules for reimbursing funds for students trained within employer-sponsored education framework. On the other hand, new guarantees and benefits for mandatory placement and tuition reimbursement are established for members of the security apparatus, their families, and conscripts. Additionally, the state classifier of specialisations and qualifications in higher education has been revised to expand the list of specialisations related to national security. This reflects a renewed effort by the state to strengthen the capacity of the security apparatus through the education and employment system.
- The formalisation of ideology is intensifying, particularly with the militaristic component of school education. The state is encouraging those responsible for military-patriotic education in schools to be more active and «innovative». A national competition, «Head of Military-Patriotic Education», has been introduced for secondary education institutions. This will most likely motivate people in these positions to ingratiate themselves and lead to an increase in pointless activities for children and a greater emphasis on militarism in ideological education.
- Social guarantees for retired persons in places of deprivation of liberty have been reduced. The rule on the mandatory minimum pension payments has been abolished, and the list of grounds for deductions from such payments has been expanded. Deductions may now be made from retirees in these places to cover the costs of food, utilities, personal hygiene products, clothing, and footwear.
- A key change in the authorities' policy in the second trimester of 2024 is the shift in behaviour towards political prisoners. A systematic and noticeable pardoning process began. During July and August, at least 48 persons were released. In early to mid-September, at least another 67 were freed. Therefore, by the time of release of this analysis, at least 115 persons had been pardoned.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Although this review covers the period from May to August, we also note the September releases here, as it is evident that these are steps taken by the state as part of the same process.

- The authorities have used the death sentence against a foreigner for political purposes. German citizen Rico Krieger, who was arrested in Belarus, faced charges under six articles of the Criminal Code, including mercenarism and terrorism. This marks the first death sentence for actions that did not result in human casualties and the first death sentence for a foreigner in the last 15 years (the campaign «Human Rights Defenders Against the Death Penalty in Belarus» have been monitoring death sentences since 2009). A week after the verdict, Krieger was pardoned by Lukashenko and became part of a «large exchange» involving primarily Russian political prisoners and foreign nationals accused of espionage in Russia. This exchange included FSB officers and others between Russia, the United States, Germany, and several other countries. Notably, despite the Belarusian authorities' involvement in the «Krieger case», no Belarusian political prisoners were included in the exchange list.
- New practices are emerging in the enforcement of extremism laws. For the first time, internet resources providing assistance to conscripts have been recognized as extremist. Additionally, a criminal case has been initiated for reposting news from a resource deemed extremist; sending news to a public chat has been classified as facilitating extremist activity under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code.
- Pressure related to travel to «unfriendly countries» (primarily Lithuania, Poland, Latvia) is expanding in the workplace. At state enterprises and institutions, full-time KGB officers («deputy security officers») are applying various forms of pressure on employees, regardless of their position or purpose of travel (business trip or vacation). This reflects a pervasiveness of control, as well as a growing trend towards an «iron curtain» reminiscent of Soviet times, which has been observed since 2023 and is part of the Belarusian regime's «anti-Westernism» policy.
- There is increasing pressure on individuals who have left the state due to persecution:
  - **Firstly**, new forms of pressure include the practice of recording «repentant videos» with relatives.
  - **Secondly**, pressure through the arrest and confiscation of property is increasing: the number of «suspects» in the case against Belarusian diasporas abroad, which was initiated in March 2024, has risen. The authorities have added another 104 individuals who participated in the celebration of Freedom Day on March 25, 2024, in various cities abroad. Their property will be seized. Additionally, criminal charges have been brought against all 257 persons who ran in the elections for the Coordination Council, and their property has also been seized.

- **Thirdly**, it was revealed that a court annulled the sale of an apartment by proxy belonging to a Belarusian woman who had left the country and against whom a criminal case for «aiding extremist activities» had been initiated. The apartment had been sold by the woman's brother to their father nine months before the case was opened.
  - **Fourthly**, persecution for donations to funds that support political prisoners has extended abroad. KGB officers are requesting data from IT companies on those who have left, contacting the latter and offering them to return to Belarus to reimburse their «debt».
- Among the international responses to the human rights crisis in Belarus during the second trimester of 2024, only the re-launch of the OSCE Vienna Mechanism can be noted. This mechanism was reactivated at the initiative of 38 OSCE member states due to the lack of response from the Belarusian authorities to the report from the second Moscow Mechanism, presented in May 2023.

# I. GENERAL MEASURES: LEGISLATION, STRATEGIES, POLICIES, THAT SHAPE THE CONDITIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COUNTRY

## KEY POINTS:

- Opportunities for political persecution were expanded through changes in the rules for accessing professions and professional ethics. These changes not only target specific individuals but also systematically distort the essence of various professions and exacerbate the existing «social schizophrenia».
- Rules for mandatory work placement for students and tuition fee reimbursement have been modified. Conditions for certain categories of graduates have been tightened, while benefits for members of the power apparatus have been extended.
- Social guarantees for retirees in detention centres have been reduced.

## EXPANSION OF THE LEGALIZATION OF SYSTEMIC REPRESSIONS

1. **Formalisation of Loyalty Requirements:** The formalisation of loyalty requirements to the authorities continues to extend to new professional groups while tightening controls over those already under scrutiny.<sup>4</sup>

**Firstly**, an **unprecedented political filter has been introduced for tour guides and guides-interpreters**. We remind you that in July 2023, the state approved new professional and ethical requirements for these roles, which included discriminatory and human rights-violating provisions. Recent **amendments** to the **Regulation on the Procedure and Conditions for Professional Certification**, which verifies the qualifications of tour guides and guides-interpreters, have introduced additional restrictions:

<sup>4</sup> In July 2023, it concerned tour guides and guides-interpreters; in March 2024, astronauts.

- Individuals who have been criminally prosecuted under «protest» articles<sup>5</sup> are now barred from certification entirely, regardless of whether their criminal record has been expunged or their prosecution terminated.
- Individuals who have been administratively penalised under «protest» articles<sup>6</sup> can only be certified after a 5-year period from the date the administrative penalty was imposed.
- Individuals whose certification was revoked for gross violations of professional and ethical standards<sup>7</sup> may only be recertified after 5 years from the date of the revocation.

Additionally, the amended Regulation stipulates that the Attestation Commission – an instrument of state control – can summon a tour guide or guide-interpreter for explanations if a complaint is received (from citizens, legal entities, state bodies, or even commission members) regarding violations of ethical or professional standards. Simply put, in cases of delations.

**Secondly**, the Ministry of Justice has approved **new Rules of Professional Ethics for notaries**. The new rules include various misdemeanours that tarnish a notary's honour and dignity, such as: participation in unauthorised mass events, involvement in any activities aimed at discrediting the Republic of Belarus, its state authorities, and administration (including personal participation, mediation, or cooperation by providing services, registration in extremist formations, subscribing to extremist information resources, and replicating or distributing their content).

This reflects a continuing trend of departing from the principle of formal equality, embedding direct discriminatory provisions related to political loyalty. By incorporating these provisions into the professional ethics rules, the regulations effectively hinder individuals from performing their professional duties properly. Instead, they are forced to prioritise political considerations over the true ethical standards of their profession.

2. The **trend of intimidating civil servants and military personnel** is evolving. Criminal liability **has been introduced** for individuals whose right to leave the

<sup>5</sup> Articles 123, 130–130-1, 293, 341-1, 342, 357, 361, 367–369-1, 369-3, and 370 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>6</sup> Articles 19.8, 19.10, 19.11, 24.22, and 24.23 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>7</sup> According to the amendments, gross violations include, among other things: 'showing disrespect for the state symbols of the Republic of Belarus, the history of the development of Belarusian statehood; refusing to promote the image of the Republic of Belarus as an attractive country for tourists; allowing subjective, inappropriate assessments and statements about the Republic of Belarus and other countries during excursions; failure to prevent tourists, excursion participants, or other individuals from making inappropriate, provocative, or other negative remarks or actions.'

Republic of Belarus is known to be temporarily restricted and who are aware of state secrets. Article 375-2, «Violation of Requirements for Protection of State Secrets», which was part of the [repressive changes](#) to criminal legislation introduced in early 2023<sup>8</sup>, initially only addressed the illegal transfer of tangible media containing state secrets outside Belarus. The new amendments now extend liability to illegal departure of such individuals from the country.

## AN ATTEMPT TO REMEDY THE CONSEQUENCES OF REPRESSIVE LAWMAKING (THE «PASSPORT DECREE») FOR THE SYSTEM ITSELF

1. In early July 2024, the [Law «On Amendments to the Laws on the Regulation of Marriage and Family Relations»](#) was signed. Among other changes, it introduces a new provision into the Code on Marriage and Family, **requiring citizens to submit information on acts of civil status registered outside the Republic of Belarus to Belarusian civil registry offices**. This must be done within 6 months from the date of registration. The provision applies to all acts registered by Belarusian citizens abroad, regardless of whether they are permanently residing or temporarily staying outside the country.

Such acts, according to the Code, include: birth, marriage, adoption, establishment of maternity and/or paternity, change of surname, first name, and patronymic, death, and dissolution of marriage.

On one hand, it is highly probable that the regime is attempting to address the disastrous consequences for the systemic nature of legislation and state administration caused by the arbitrary implementation of the «Passport Decree» (see [here](#) for a detailed analysis). The prohibition on issuing certificates for civil status acts, duplicative certificates, and the obstacles to obtaining valid passports at diplomatic and consular institutions have inevitably created systemic inconveniences for the state. It is unable to obtain vital information about its citizens.

In this context, it is important to note that the new provision on the registration of acts of civil status has also been updated. The purpose of such registration has been clarified to include not only the protection of personal non-property and property rights of citizens, and the safeguarding of state and public interests, but also «the collection of complete, reliable, and timely information on civil status».

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<sup>8</sup> *At that time, the death penalty for treason was introduced for certain categories of public officials and military personnel.*

However, unlike the obligation to report the existence of a foreign residence permit<sup>9</sup>, the requirement to report the registration of such acts abroad cannot be unambiguously deemed illegal. The state has the right to establish a list of acts that must be registered and to maintain records of them. This is a function performed by the state's representations abroad, as was specified in the Code before these amendments. Nevertheless, given the state's own unscrupulous behaviour and deliberate obstructions to the regular process of updating civil status for citizens abroad, this innovation appears not only cynical but also chaotic, highlighting the **dysfunction in state administration and lawmaking**.

2. In July, **amendments** were made to the **Regulation** on the Procedure for Confirming the Identity of Citizens of the Republic of Belarus Who Do Not Have an Identity Document for the Purpose of Pension Provision. The list of individuals who can apply to local authorities to confirm their identity for acquiring pension was clarified. Specifically, the phrase «including those previously documented with a passport of a citizen of the Republic of Belarus who refused to use it» was added to the description of «citizens of the Republic of Belarus who do not have an identity document».

It can be assumed that such wording – **«previously documented with a passport of a citizen of the Republic of Belarus who refused to use it»** – is intended to embrace individuals who, due to security reasons or the state's own actions, have been unable to return to the country to replace their passport and are instead seeking to exchange it abroad. The state appears to plan to interpret this situation as a refusal to use the passport, since it formally does not refuse to replace it within its territory.

## CHANGING SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES FOR CHILDREN, CREATING GROUNDS FOR REPRESSIONS AND INDOCTRINATION

At the beginning of July 2024, **amendments** to the 2011 Ministry of Education Decree No. 124 «On Orphanages, Children's Villages, Children's Towns» came into effect. The amendments introduce **a new type of orphanage – children's homes at monasteries**. According to the document, these institutions are established by monasteries and are intended for orphans and children left without parental care between the ages of 3 and 18. The decree also states that these institutions will

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<sup>9</sup> The amendments made to the Law 'On Citizenship' in early January 2023, which came into force on July 1, 2023, have been analysed [here](#) (p. 15).

provide post-internship support for graduates and can be either public or private. This initiative aligns with an idea that N. Kachanova [discussed](#) in May 2023 with representatives of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, emphasising that this is a Russian practice that she deems necessary to adopt.

Given the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (of which the Belarusian Orthodox Church is a part) in promoting Russian state ideology, including the concept of the «Russian world - Russkij mir» and various forms of propaganda (including military propaganda), these orphanages are likely to become instruments for the extensive indoctrination of the most vulnerable children – those who are entirely dependent on the state.

The document states that when children are sent to such orphanages, «if available, their attitude to religion and religious traditions of the families where the children were brought up shall be taken into account». However, it is difficult to envision a genuine consideration of this, particularly given the vague stipulation «subject to the availability of information» and the obvious pro-government stance of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. It can be anticipated that the implementation of this measure will result in violations of, at the very least, freedom of religion.

The use of monasteries is discriminatory against other forms of religious life organisation. Additionally, it will infringe upon children's freedom of expression and their right to family life, as the current standard prioritises family placements for orphans.

It is also important to relate these measures to the overall trend of changing social protection policies, which are creating a foundation for repressive actions, a trend we [observed](#) in the second half of 2023. Among them are changes to the list of indicators of socially dangerous situations (SDS), and, accordingly, changes to the criteria for placing a family under SDS status.

## STRENGTHENING OF THE SECURITY SECTOR'S CAPACITY THROUGH THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM

1. During the reporting period, a comprehensive [Draft](#) law «On the Amendment of Laws on Education» was introduced in parliament. **A significant portion of the amendments pertains to the distribution and reimbursement of tuition fees.** On one hand, the draft law enshrines provisions that complicate the situation for certain



categories of graduates who studied at public or organisational expense (see below in this section). On the other hand, it establishes new guarantees and benefits specifically for members of the power apparatus, their families, and conscripts.

**Firstly**, there are **new favourable conditions for the allocation of employees from law enforcement agencies**. Amendments have been made to the provisions regarding the compulsory allocation of individuals who studied full-time for at least half of their program at the state's expense. Now, those who are employees of the Security Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus, paramilitary organisations, state security bodies, customs authorities, and procuracy are exempt from mandatory work placement.

**Secondly**, previously, young specialists who did not fulfil their compulsory placement obligation were exempt from reimbursement to the state budget if it was impossible to provide them with a new job in the locality where their spouse works or serves in the military, provided the spouse resides permanently in Belarus or is assigned to work in a diplomatic mission. Now, **exemption from reimbursement will only be possible if the spouse:**

- is elected to an elective office as an employee of a public body,
- is a serviceman (excluding those performing fixed-term military service, serving in the reserve, or in alternative service, including cadets),
- is a senior or rank-and-file member of paramilitary organisations, or an employee of the Security Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus, state security bodies, customs authorities, or procuracy.

**Thirdly**, labour guarantees for individuals in connection with military and alternative service have been strengthened. Previously, benefits were established for the period following dismissal from military service. Now, under the amendments to the Labor Code, the employer is required, within 5 days of receiving notification from the military commissariat, **to reinstate an individual «dismissed in connection with the call-up for military service, but not sent for military service»**.

2. In June 2024, the state classifier of specialties and qualifications in higher education **was revised, expanding the component related to national security**. New specialties introduced include «Financial Analysis in Ensuring National Security» (qualification: Specialist in Ensuring National Security, Financial Analyst) and «Ideological Work and Personnel Policy in Emergency Situations Bodies and Units».

The qualification for the specialty «Psychology in Ensuring National Security» has also been updated; it was previously labelled simply «Psychologist» and is now classified as «Specialist in the Field of Ensuring National Security, Psychologist». Additionally, the qualification designated as «closed qualification» for a specialised field has been amended.

## STRENGTHENING CONTROL AND IDEOLOGIZATION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

1. In the summer of 2024, **the two oldest private universities in Belarus were nearly forced to close by the state**: the Belarusian Institute of Law (operating since 1990) and the Institute of Entrepreneurship (operating since 1992). Another private university, the Institute of Parliamentarism and Entrepreneurship, announced that while it would not close, it would not be recruiting freshmen for the new academic year, as the Ministry of Education did not approve the recruitment. Additionally, a representative of the city authorities responsible for education **confirmed** in June 2024 that **there were no private kindergartens remaining in Minsk**.

The state's grievances with private educational institutions are a continuation of the events of 2020, with their «cleansing» at all levels reflecting a broader repressive policy aimed at suppressing dissent<sup>10</sup>. Private institutions are more challenging for the state to oversee for ideological compliance compared to public ones. Consequently, parents have been systematically deprived of the option to choose educational settings for their children. Public schools and kindergartens, often viewed by parents as alternatives to state schools due to less ideological influence, are now their only options, violating the right to education and freedom of choice. These actions also infringe upon the constitutional guarantee of equal protection and equal conditions for the development of all forms of property.

Moreover, it is essential to note that following the events of 2020, private higher education institutions (HEIs) have provided employment opportunities for teachers dismissed from public HEIs for political reasons. For many affected individuals, the closure of these universities represents a second job loss, as they often struggle to find positions in public universities due to being placed on «blacklists» as politically unreliable.

<sup>10</sup> *In the fall of 2022, a law on the licensing of private schools and kindergartens was passed, accompanied by rhetoric from A. Lukashenko stating that 'it turned out that their leadership fundamentally does not accept the Belarusian state', although the formal pretext was an incident involving a shooting by students from one of the private schools in Minsk*

2. There is an **increasing formalisation of ideology in education, particularly concerning the militaristic components in schools.**

**First**, in June, it was **reported** that the Ministry of Education sent a letter to schools with **recommendations on instilling respect for state symbols among young people**. Specifically, it suggested holding a «ceremony of honouring state symbols and pledging allegiance to them» during the admission process for the pioneer organisation or BRSM.

**Secondly**, in June, **the republican competition «Head of Military-Patriotic Education»** for secondary education institutions **was instituted**. One of the contest's objectives is to elevate the prestige of this role and identify «best practices» in military-patriotic education. A key component of the competition will require military instructors to demonstrate their effectiveness in fostering students' «aspiration to serve in military formations and paramilitary organisations».<sup>11</sup>

The introduction of such a competition will likely encourage those in these positions to be more proactive, leading to an increase in meaningless activities for children and a heightened emphasis on militarism within ideological education.

## INTENSIFICATION OF MILITARIZATION

1. In June, **it was reported** that the Ministry of Defence had developed **a new methodology for assessing military security**, although the text is not publicly available. According to A. Wolfowitz, State Secretary of the Security Council, the new criteria for evaluating political security risks will include metrics such as public trust in the head of state, trust in the authorities, and confidence in other state governance institutions. Based on the new Military Doctrine, which we **analysed** last trimester and which identifies various forms of dissent as military threats, we can predict that this methodology will lead to an even more arbitrary interpretation of dissenters' actions as military threats and risks, resulting in subjective assessments of military security.

2. A **decision** was made **to increase the republican budget expenditures for the state public association «Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation and Navy of the Republic of Belarus»** by Br3,850,000 (about 1,072,154 Eur) to support mobilisation training and preparedness for mobilisation, specifically for the purchase of aviation equipment.

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<sup>11</sup> *Let us recall that this position is a remnant of the Soviet system, which was abolished after the collapse of the USSR, but was reinstated in the Belarusian education system after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Since 2023, schools in Belarus have been actively seeking people to fill these vacancies.*

# ADDRESSING THE LACK OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND THE OUTFLOW OF HUMAN CAPITAL THROUGH VIOLATIONS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

1. Traditionally addressing the issues of forcibly mobilising resources and people through the higher education system, the government has now decided to tighten the conditions for graduates and young professionals. A [draft law](#) titled «On Amendments to the Laws on Education» has been submitted to Parliament, and a significant portion of the proposed changes pertains to the mandatory placement and reimbursement of tuition fees.

## Tightening mandatory placement rules

- The mandatory professional placement rules for spouses have become stricter. The phrase «at the will of the graduate» has been removed from the relevant provision, and there is now an obligation to coordinate placement within the location of the spouse's residence or work with the organisation where the graduate was originally assigned.
- The rules for redirecting graduates of certain specialties and those assigned to rural areas have also tightened. Previously, only the redirection of medical professionals and graduates in the field of «Agriculture» had to be coordinated with the Ministry of Health and the regional executive committee (or the Minsk city executive committee) at the place of mandatory placement. The recent amendments have added «Veterinary Science» and «Fish industry» to this list of specialties with specific placement procedures. Additionally, for young specialists assigned to rural areas, any redirection to another location must now be coordinated with the relevant regional executive committee.
- At the same time, despite the privileges granted to military and law enforcement personnel (as noted above in this section), mandatory placement rules for traditionally «privileged» individuals – such as children of military and police officers, KGB officers, and veterans of the Afghanistan War who became disabled or died in service – have also become stricter. They can now be assigned to a different workplace without their consent (previously, this was only permissible with the graduate's consent), and the new assignment can only be to the place of their parents' residence (as opposed to also including the residence of their spouses, as was the case before).

## Tightening of rules for reimbursement of funds for «free» education

- A new rule has been introduced regarding the reimbursement of funds for employer-sponsored education. If the contract for such targeted training is cancelled during the program at the employer's initiative (due to liquidation or employment obstacles), the student has the right, «where possible», to transfer to budget funding. However, if the student refuses, he or she must reimburse the cost of their education. Previously, such individuals were just exempt from reimbursement.
- The rules for reimbursement of tuition fees for pregnant graduates who have not completed their full placement have also tightened. Previously, reimbursement was not required if reallocation was impossible only in the woman's place of residence. Now, the places of residence of both the parents and spouse have been added to the criteria. In other words, the conditions for non-reimbursement have become more complicated, expanding the number of exceptions for pregnant women allowing her not to reimburse the funds.

These new changes further increase the dependence of individuals receiving state-funded education, effectively placing them in a bonded position.

### 2. Amendments to the Law «On Pension Provision» have been introduced, **reducing social guarantees for retirees in places of deprivation of liberty.**

**Firstly, the rules for pension payments to these retirees have changed.** Previously, Article 88 of the Law stipulated the amount of pension and minimum payments for different categories of retirees («but not less than...»), which the state was obliged to adhere to. Now, these guarantees for minimum payments have been abolished.

**Secondly,** the list of grounds for deductions from pensions has been expanded. In addition to the existing two grounds (enforcement proceedings and overpaid pensions due to retiree abuse), a third ground has been added: pensions for individuals in prison may now be withheld to reimburse the costs of food, utilities, personal hygiene products, clothing, and footwear.

3. At the end of July, Lukashenko signed an Order «On Eliminating the Consequences of Dangerous Meteorological Phenomena», which requires local authorities to mobilise citizens to clean up the aftermath of such events. This order was issued in response to the hurricane that struck Belarus on July 13-14, 2024, causing extensive

damage to power transmission systems, disrupting water supply, and resulting in destruction. An emergency regime was even declared in the Homel region, where seven persons lost their lives. Citizens expressed grievances against the authorities for their inadequate response and lack of coordinated efforts in dealing with the aftermath, a sentiment **acknowledged** by officials themselves. Lukashenko accused citizens of not being ready «to do something to overcome the disaster». As a result, such «readiness» was mandated through regulations, further demonstrating the state's reliance on citizens to fulfil responsibilities that should be undertaken by the government.

## II. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE: VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

### KEY POINTS:

- The authorities have begun releasing political prisoners: by the time of this review, at least 115 individuals had been released.
- Workplace pressures are increasing for those wishing to leave for «unfriendly states».
- There is growing pressure on Belarusians who have been forced to leave, including arrests and property confiscation.

## CHANGE IN THE REGIME'S BEHAVIOUR WITH REGARD TO POLITICAL PRISONERS

The most significant change in law enforcement practices from May to August 2024 is the shift in behaviour towards political prisoners, marked by a **systematic and noticeable trend in pardoning them**.

Between July and early September 2024, **the authorities released at least 78 individuals**. On July 3, 2024, [it was reported](#) that 18 political prisoners were released. This occurred just before the signing of the Law on Amnesty, which notably excluded the articles under which political prisoners were convicted. Additionally, A. Lukashenko [indicated](#) the day prior that he intended to release some seriously ill political prisoners; however, only one of those released – Ryhor Kastusiu – was seriously ill. [According to Viasna](#), these individuals were released under the conditions of pardon and amnesty.

On August 16, [news emerged](#) of the pardon of 30 more individuals, [followed](#) by another 30 pardoned on September 4. On September 16, another decree [was signed](#) pardoning 37 more persons. Therefore, by the time of the release of this analysis, at least 115 individuals had been pardoned.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, the process remains opaque; the acts of pardon are not publicly disclosed, and human rights defenders learn the names of those pardoned primarily through reports from relatives, friends, other released individuals, or state media interviews featuring some of the pardoned.

<sup>12</sup> Although this analysis covers the period from May to August, we also note the September releases here, as it is evident that these are steps taken by the state as part of the same process.

While it is challenging to ascertain the specific reasons and motivations behind this shift in behaviour, it is evident that such a change has occurred. Meanwhile, pro-government activist and propagandist Y. Voskresensky [stated](#) on state television that political prisoners have submitted 900 petitions for pardon.

## WIDESPREAD REPLACEMENT OF PUNISHMENT IN THE FORM OF RESTRICTED FREEDOM WITHOUT ASSIGNMENT TO A PENAL COLONY WITH A HARSHER PENALTY

According to [information from Viasna](#), at least 15 cases of harshened punishment have been recorded since July. Individuals convicted under «political» articles and serving sentences with the restriction of freedom without referral to detention facilities are being transferred to penal colonies. While this practice is not new, it is now employed on a massive scale.

## THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY AS A POLITICAL TOOL

On June 24, a death sentence [was handed down](#) to Rico Krieger, a German national, who was accused of mercenarism, committing a terrorist act, and other offences deemed «extremist». This marks the **first death sentence** in Belarus **for actions that did not result in human casualties and the first such sentence for a foreigner since the start of the campaign** «Human Rights Defenders Against the Death Penalty in Belarus» in 2009. On July 30, Rico Krieger submitted a petition for pardon to A. Lukashenko and [was pardoned](#) the same day.

**Firstly**, human rights defenders [point out](#) that several of the charges against him were not factually committed. The classification of his actions as a terrorist act was arbitrary, aimed at providing grounds for a death penalty conviction despite the absence of human victims. This became possible following amendments to the Criminal Code in 2022, which expanded the application of the death penalty. There are numerous indications that Krieger was a victim of provocation by Belarusian security services.

**Secondly**, on August 1, a significant [prisoner exchange](#) took place between Russia and the USA, Germany, involving four other countries. Krieger was among those exchanged. Analysts [suggest that Krieger's death sentence served as leverage for](#)



**Germany to negotiate**, as Russia sought the return of FSB officer Vadim Krasikov, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in Germany.

As a result of the exchange, 16 individuals were released by Russia, at least 8 of whom had been sentenced for political reasons as opponents of the authorities and representatives of the opposition. Notably, **Belarusian political prisoners were not included in this exchange, despite the fact that the «Krieger case» was orchestrated by the Belarusian authorities.**

## NEW PRACTICES OF PROSECUTION UNDER «EXTREMIST» ARTICLES

In the second trimester of 2024, political prosecutions under «extremist articles» continue to evolve.

**Firstly**, for the first time, internet resources **providing assistance to conscripts** have been **recognized as extremist** and subsequently blocked. The Prosecutor General's Office stated that this measure aims to identify «negative factors that can affect the staffing of formations and military units and create a threat to national security».

**Secondly**, according to **information** from a Telegram channel affiliated with the State Department for Combating Organized Crime, **a criminal case has been initiated for reposting news from a resource designated as extremist.** Generally, administrative liability is imposed for distributing extremist materials. However, in this instance, reposting news in a public chat was classified as «aiding extremist activity» under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code.

**Thirdly**, for the first time, there has been **official confirmation** (noted in a court decision) that **the authorities physically destroy publications recognized as extremist.** It is significant to mention that most of these materials are books in the Belarusian language and/or devoted to nation-related issues. This as well reflects the current authorities' struggle against national culture, evidenced by the destruction of Belarusian literature.

**Fourthly**, at the end of April<sup>13</sup>, **the first and only cancellation of a decision recognizing a publication as extremist was recorded.** The collections of works by Belarusian classicist Vintsent Dunin-Martsinkevich, which led to their designation as extremist, were removed from the Republican List of Extremist Materials, having been included in that list in November 2023.

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<sup>13</sup> We haven't mentioned this fact in the previous review.

## PRESSURE BUILD-UP AT WORKPLACES

1. **Politically motivated pressure on public sector employees regarding travel to «unfriendly countries»** continues to evolve. In the first trimester of 2024, we noted the introduction of a questionnaire that all BSU employees travelling (even for holidays) to any country other than Russia are now required to complete upon arrival. By the second trimester, it became clear that this practice is widespread.

It came to light that in various public sectors, regular KGB employees are holding conversations and advocate against travelling to 'unfriendly countries' (primarily Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia). Some are even threatening dismissal if it becomes known that someone is travelling to these countries without a valid reason. Others claim that while there will be no immediate punishment, such travel may be taken into account when evaluating an employee's career advancement. Another practice from a regional city involves a regular KGB employee issuing an order, which the employees were required to sign, obligating them to submit a report to the director upon return, detailing their travel route and meetings during the trip. At another large state enterprise, it was reported that all employees, regardless of position, must now get approval from higher management for trips (including vacations) to «unfriendly countries».

The variety of pressure tactics indicates that there is no single centralised instruction, but rather a general directive to monitor such visits. It is evident that this practice is expanding and will likely continue to take on new forms.

2. In June, it was reported that employees of private companies are being compelled to sign documents in which they commit «not to take actions violating the legislation of the Republic of Belarus, not to allow destructive manifestations at their place of work and residence, not to participate in unsanctioned mass events and other protest actions, not to join extremist and other destructive organisations, communities, and groups (chats), and not to assist them in their activities». Such practices violate the rights to favourable and decent working conditions, freedom of expression, and constitute politically motivated discrimination.

## INCREASED PRESSURE ON THE RELATIVES OF PERSONS FORCED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

In the first trimester of 2024, we observed a trend of increasing pressure on the relatives of dissenters – political prisoners or people forced to leave the country. In the second trimester, new manifestations of this pressure and persecution of relatives became evident. In July, security forces came to the relatives of those running the TikTok accounts of 'Zerkalo'. Not only did they hold a conversation with them, but they also recorded «repentant videos».

## NEW PRACTICES AND INTENSIFIED PERSECUTION OF INDIVIDUALS FORCED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The authorities continue to explore new methods of pressure on individuals who have left the state and are unable to return due to political persecution. **One of the actively developing tactics is the arrest and confiscation of property.**

1. In May 2024, the Investigative Committee **expanded** the number of «suspects» in **the case** against Belarusian diasporas abroad, which it had initiated in March. **Criminal cases were brought against an additional 104 persons who participated in the celebration of the Freedom Day on March 25, 2024.** These individuals are accused of creating an «extremist formation» and discrediting the Republic of Belarus. Notably, the prosecution includes individuals who are not members of any diaspora organisation but simply took part in the event. The Investigative Committee **characterises** the celebration of the Freedom Day abroad as «the implementation of a criminal plan by fugitive leaders aimed at harming the strategic national interests of the Republic of Belarus to ensure independence, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the inviolability of the constitutional order». Reports indicate that the property of these individuals will be seized.

In general, state television propagandists **noted** that the number of Belarusians who have left the country and whose property has been seized or is slated for confiscation is approaching 1,000.

2. In August, a new trend **came to light** concerning the handling of property belonging to Belarusians who have left the country. A court **annulled the sale of an apartment by proxy owned by a Belarusian woman who had left the country** and was facing criminal charges for 'aiding extremist activities'. The apartment had been sold nine months before the case was initiated by the woman's brother to their father. The property was seized.

3. **Pressure for donations to solidarity funds**, which **began** in the first half of 2023 and **intensified** in the first trimester of 2024, continues to evolve. **This pressure has now extended to individuals abroad.** In May, **it was reported** that KGB officers were reaching out to IT companies in Belarus to obtain contact information for employees who had left abroad. The officers then contacted such individuals, urging them to return to Belarus for «reimbursement».

## ANOTHER WAVE OF REPRESSION AGAINST PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH DEMOCRATIC FORCES

In May 2024, the Investigative Committee **initiated a criminal case against all 257 individuals who ran for election to the Coordination Council.** They are charged

with conspiracy to seize power (Article 357 of the Criminal Code), calls for restrictive measures (Article 361 of the Criminal Code), creation of an «extremist» formation (Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code), and assistance to «extremist» activities (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code). The property of these individuals in Belarus has been seized.

### III. KEY CHANGES IN THE REACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CONCERNING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

#### RE-LAUNCHING THE VIENNA MECHANISM OF THE OSCE WITH REGARD TO BELARUS

In July 2024, the Vienna Mechanism was **reactivated** concerning the situation in Belarus at the initiative of 38 OSCE member states. The first time this mechanism was **initiated** was in November 2021, at the initiative of 35 OSCE member states, in response to the 2020 events.

The states involved have expressed dissatisfaction with the authorities' response to the findings presented in the second **Moscow Mechanism report**, submitted in May 2023 following its re-launch in March 2023. They have noted a deterioration in the situation over the 11 months since that report was issued. Consequently, several questions have been directed to the Belarusian authorities as part of the re-launch of the Vienna Mechanism. These questions pertain to the conditions of detention for political prisoners, their potential release, possible deprivation of citizenship, pressure on the families of political prisoners, and access to places of detention for representatives of international organisations, including the ICRC and foreign state representatives.

It is important to note that the real impact of these OSCE mechanisms in our situation can only be assessed based on the outcomes of the first Moscow Mechanism. At that time, Professor Benedek's recommendations largely served as the basis for the establishment of a special expert mission on Belarus under the UN framework. However, given the current trend of releasing political prisoners, it can be assumed that the state will have something to respond to on some of the issues raised.



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