

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT IN PENAL COLONY NO. 17, SHKLOV

PUBLIC INVESTIGATION REPORT

*«“YOU B**CH! FACE TO THE FLOOR!”
— SHOUT NINE OR TEN MASKED
MEN AS THEY STORM IN WITH
BATONS, USING RUBBER TO MAKE
THEIR POINT WITH BRUTE FORCE».*

THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE

FOR INVESTIGATION OF
TORTURE IN BELARUS

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

DEP – Department for the Execution of Punishments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus;

DAHC – Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony;

PC – Penal Colony;

PC-17 – Penal Colony No. 17 (Shklov);

LSS – Low Social Status (designation in the informal prison hierarchy);

CTP – Cell-Type Premises (also PKT);

IR – Internal Regulations;

SOR – Security and Operational Regime;

CCRB – Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus;

DC – Disciplinary Cell (also SHIZO).

SUMMARY

The purpose of this investigation is to provide an overview of the situation in Penal Colony No. 17 (PC-17), a facility under the authority of the Department for the Execution of Punishments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Mahiliou region.¹

The authors of this report analyzed 18 interviews (a total of 836 pages of transcripts) with former inmates who served sentences in PC-17 between December 2020 and June 2024. The average sentence served in the colony was 8.3 months, with a total cumulative duration of 149.5 months across all testimonies.

The individuals interviewed were unlawfully convicted following the 2020 presidential election in Belarus and were recognized by the Belarusian human rights community as political prisoners. The former inmates describe the living conditions in the prison units, an atmosphere of fear and lawlessness deliberately fostered by the colony's administration, physical and psychological violence against prisoners, and an informal prison hierarchy actively maintained and used by the authorities. They also highlight the specific treatment of political prisoners, for whom the already harsh conditions were deliberately made unbearable.

The report describes in detail various stages of incarceration in the colony, starting with quarantine, and outlines the types of violations and punishments imposed. Special attention is given to where and how inmates are made to work in PC-17, as well as the issue of compensation for their labor.

The section on medical care discusses how sick inmates are treated in the colony and what medical assistance is provided.

The authors also reveal new details about the death of civil society activist Vitold Ashurak in PC-17, based on the testimonies of former inmates who witnessed the events.

According to these testimonies, the treatment of political prisoners in the colony is exceptionally cruel, and most key orders reportedly come directly from the head of the colony, **Aliaksandr Karnienka**, who is included in the European Union sanctions list for his involvement in the abuse of detainees.

[1] <https://ru.hrodna.life/2021/05/22/lk-17-shklov/>

A significant section of this investigation focuses on the staff of the colony. Former inmates describe how representatives of the PC-17 administration carried out their official duties and the methods they employed. These accounts include numerous reports of blatant abuse of prisoners and violations of rules and standards governing their treatment. At the same time, the authors of the investigation also encountered positive assessments from former inmates regarding the actions of certain individual staff members.

In the conclusion section, the authors state that in places of detention in Belarus — specifically in PC-17 — many international standards concerning the treatment of prisoners are being grossly violated. This applies to all the key areas covered in this investigation.

The interviews with former inmates who served sentences in PC-17 were provided by The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus and the Human Rights Center «Viasna.» Identification of colony staff members was carried out using materials provided by the «Cyber Partisans» initiative.

The authors acknowledge their responsibility for the information disclosed in this public investigation. Therefore, all personal data from the interviews have been removed, and references to other prisoners have been anonymized. Experts from The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus are prepared to share all of this information with competent authorities for the purpose of future judicial proceedings.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT PC-17

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'Our unit is staffed by true professionals; each officer is a role model. Everyone is driven by a desire to serve and improve themselves — and we strive to ensure that people come to work and go home in a good mood.'^{2'}

Head of PC-17
Aliaksandr Karnienka



Photo: PC-17 in Shklov. Source: Google Maps

PC-17 was built on the outskirts of Shklov in 1980.³ Journalists have reported⁴ that Alyaksandr Lukashenka once worked as an employee at the building materials plant where inmates from this colony were employed. However, this fact is not mentioned in his official biography.

Inmates here serve sentences for a wide range of offenses — from petty crimes to murder and corruption-related offenses. The colony employs 65 certified staff members.

On April 1, 1993, the Republican Unitary Enterprise 'Semnadtsat' (translated as Seventeen) of the DEP was established. It is currently headed by **Mikalai Zborawski**. The enterprise employs prisoners serving their sentences in PC-17. The range of products manufactured is quite broad: garments of various styles and complexities, footwear, leather goods, furniture, windows, doors, containers, insignia, nails, chain-link fencing, cords, fuel chips, paving tiles, curb stones, bread, and pasta.

PC-17 is a general-regime colony. This means that it houses individuals convicted for the first time, and therefore, the conditions are supposed to be more lenient than in high-security prisons. However, despite the official media's attempts to present the facility as a modern correctional institution where inmates can learn IT skills, engage in sports, and attend church services, the reputation of PC-17 remains extremely negative due to the cruel treatment of prisoners.

Civil society activist Mikalai Astreika became the first political prisoner held there in 2006. After the 2010 presidential election, a number of Belarusian political prisoners served sentences in PC-17 — including Dzmitry Dashkevich, Aleh Hnedchyk, Aliaksandr Klaskouski, Uladzimir Loban, Dzmitry Novik, Arciom Prakapenka, Mikalai Dziadok, and Mikalai Statkevich.⁶

Colonel **Siarhei Yarmalitski**, who headed the colony in October 2011, was banned from entering the European Union⁷ for the mistreatment of prisoners and persecution of Mikalai Statkevich. On March 24, 2012, as international pressure on Belarusian authorities intensified, the EU visa sanctions were extended to two more officials from the colony – **Ihar Aleinikau and Vadzim Shamenau**.



Photo: PC-17 / Source: 'Udamy Front'

[2] <https://ru.hrodna.life/2021/05/22/ik-17-shklov/>

[3] Legal address: Republic of Belarus, Mogilev Region, Shklovsky District, Shklov, 1st Zavodskaya Street, Building 8.

[4] <https://nashaniva.com/ru/341509>

[5] <https://shklovinfo.by/chelovek-i-zakon/otbyvayushhie-nakazanie-v-ik-N°17-rabotayut-na-mnogoprofilnom-predpriyatii/>

[6] <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/abroad/belorussia/v-spiske-nevezdnyh-v-es-ministr-sudi-prokurory-i-tyuremshchiki-50574188>

[7] <https://ru.hrodna.life/2021/05/22/ik-17-shklov/>

After the 2020 events, a number of individuals convicted on political grounds were sent to Shklov to serve their sentences: lawyer and “Viasna” human rights defender Uladzimir Labkovich, trade union leader Aliaksandr Yarashuk⁸, lawyers Vitaly Braginieć and Aliaksandr Danilevich, journalists Jauheni Merkiś and Dzmitry Luksha⁹, cameraman Pavel Padabed, artist Hienadz Drazdou¹⁰, Symbal.by founder Pavel Bielaus, transplantologist Aliaksei Aliakseichyk¹¹, drummer Aliaksei Sanchuk, student Arciom Boiarski¹², defendant in the Autuchovich case Pavel Rezanovich¹³, anarchist Akikhira Hajeuski-Khanada¹⁴, IT businessman Bahdan Karovieć¹⁵, among others.



Photo: Conversation with inmates at PC-17. Source: shklovinfo.by.

Following the violent death of activist Vitold Ashurak in the colony, the head of PC-17 **Aliaksandr Karnienka** and the head of the head of the Security and Operational Regime department Siarhei Karcheuski were placed on sanctions lists by the European Union, Canada, and other countries¹⁶.

It is important to note that the harsh detention regime for inmates at PC-17 is rooted in the traditions and customs of the Soviet penitentiary system, actively relying on the informal prison hierarchy (status) to suppress dissent and maintain internal control¹⁷.

PC-17 holds a large number of individuals convicted under Article 328 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. Back in 2015, Aliaksandr Lukashenka reportedly ordered the creation of unbearable conditions in the colony so that ‘they would beg for death.’¹⁸ Since the 2020 events, the previously developed method for toughening incarceration conditions for specific categories of inmates in places of detention has been widely applied — not only in PC-17 and not only to those convicted under ‘narcotics’ articles¹⁹, but also under ‘political’ ones.

[8] Transferred to Prison No. 4.

[9] Released in July 2024.

[10] Released in February 2025.

[11] Released in August 2024.

[12] Released in January 2025.

[13] Transferred to Prison No. 1.

[14] Transferred to Prison No. 4.

[15] Released in July 2024.

[16] <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2024/04/sanctions-in-response-to-ongoing-human-rights-violations-in-belarus.html> (Sanctions list of Canada). <https://gels-avours.dgtresor.gouv.fr/Gels/RegistreDetail?idRegistre=6853> (Sanctions list of France).

[17] Belarusian correctional facilities have evolved since 1994 into so-called “red” zones, where power is represented solely by the colony administration and its subordinates and is built on their dominance.

[18] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KobFXuPSWJs>

[19] Individuals serving sentences under Article 328 of the CCRB (for the use and distribution of narcotics).

PRISONERS SPEAK ABOUT THE COLONY



Prisoners in PC-17 are divided into 17 units located in different buildings. There is well-developed infrastructure for maintaining the facility and for inmates' leisure: a large sports field, a football pitch, an area for ice rink flooding, a basketball court, a church, a bathhouse, showers, a warehouse, an indoor gym (only for activists and special events), a cafeteria, and a medical unit.

The units are housed in brick buildings, usually four units per building. According to former inmates, the most well-maintained area is **the first unit**, which receives the most funding and houses most of the patrons.

“

'When they were filming a video about how great it is to serve time in Penal Colony No. 17, almost all political prisoners refused to take part. They found someone who walked around showing how wonderfully he lives there, how great everything is, how he's full of remorse...'

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'It's very polished there... They even have a home theater. Each unit has a Smart TV and VOKA, so there's an option to watch movies in the common area.'

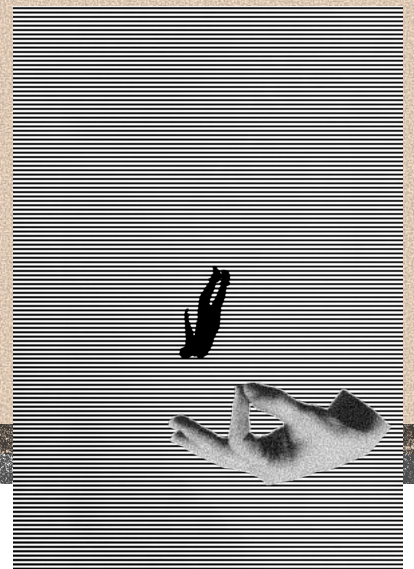
The second unit is responsible for the cafeteria and the meals for prisoners.

The remaining units are part of the industrial zone, and inmates from these units work at various production sites. For example, **the eighth unit** specializes in manufacturing shoes for inmates and for the military complex. **The thirteenth unit** is mainly engaged in repair work.

“

'I was assigned to the 13th unit, the repair section. We repaired all kinds of engines and Makita tools. There's woodworking, a shop for forklifts and cars... We chopped firewood, burned wires, which constantly sent smoke into the sky. That soot drifts over residential areas and other zones — it stinks, and some chemical stuff is pouring out of that pipe.'

“PATRONAGE” – EXTORTION OF MONEY FROM PRISONERS



As previously noted, PC-17 is a fairly modern colony, equipped with developed infrastructure, its own production facilities, household, computer, and other equipment and technologies. This entire system is largely maintained and operated using prisoners' money. The extortion system is well organized.

What advantages does being a patron (“mecenat”) offer inmates? They are promised early release, access to the indoor gym, more phone calls, better food, and other privileges. Periodically, patrons are gathered for meetings and told that money is needed for some colony-related expenses. In practice, patronage is often the only way for inmates to maintain their dignity in the colony — not “snitching” to the administration, not becoming an “activist”²⁰, while still getting some comforts. This is mostly used by those convicted of economic, corruption-related, or business-related crimes. However, this unwritten rule doesn't always work: if at some point a person refuses to pay, problems begin.

“

'Being a patron isn't exactly voluntary. Once you agree to it, even voluntarily, they won't leave you alone. They'll keep squeezing you for money. The administration itself, with no 'blatnye' (criminal hierarchy) in power, has filled the vacuum — they've become the main thieves.'

“

'In our unit, there were people who funded things, and then stopped. For example, if you're soon up for parole, there's no point in continuing to fund. But that's when the problems begin — 'Oh, so you're trying to wiggle out now...' And they'll do it through the activists, the administration doesn't get its hands dirty directly. — 'That's not how it works, we trusted you, where's the money?' And then the administration finds a violation, and with that violation, you don't pass the parole board.'

For political prisoners, the extortion looks different. In their case, it's not about promising privileges — it's about “just so things don't get worse.”

[20] “Activists” — inmates working for the prison administration.

“

'So we won't touch you at all, we definitely won't send you to the disciplinary cell unlike others. We won't make things easier for you, but we won't make them worse either.'

A thousand euros for squad repairs (the average amount) are either suggested or enforced to be transferred 'voluntarily' to the account of senior duty prisoners or one of the activists. Naturally, this financial burden falls on the families and close relatives of the prisoners.

Inspections and visits to the colony.

Inspection commissions from the DEP, Prosecutor's Office, Presidential Administration, various state structures, and public (pro-government) organizations regularly visit the colony. Usually, all visits are pre-planned and organized in advance. As a rule, all prisoners are removed from the inspectors' sight: they are distributed across squads, the daily schedule is changed, they are locked in educational rooms or leisure rooms where TVs and additional benches are placed to keep them from walking around the colony.

“

'Let your family put the money into this criminal's account, and this criminal will write it off as industrial zone repairs — and in return, you'll get some leniency.'

“

'So the commission comes to see how the colony is doing, but there are no inmates in sight, everything is spotless. No one walks down "Broadway", even the staff are hiding somewhere. The colony chief, Karnienka, only shows off the renovated buildings: "We renovated this, the state budget went here — look at this nice gym. And the equipment there — all bought by sponsors (patrons)."

“

'Once an inspector came, he came to my workplace. I gave a report, wrote an article, and he told me: "You have the great honor of working in your homeland, serving your sentence in the homeland of this great man. Back in the early 1980s, Alyaksandr Hryhoryevich [Lukashenka] himself worked in this very section, in the transport department."

TRANSFER, ARRIVAL, AND QUARANTINE



“

'We realized that there would be no talking here — nine or ten people in masks with batons would rush in and explain everything they needed with rubber. No questions asked, everything was fast and "secure."

Transfer, arrival at the colony. As a rule, prisoners are transported in Stolypin wagons at night. The journey can take several days depending on the distance from the departure point to the colony. Prisoners convicted under political articles are transported in handcuffs, which are placed on them while still in the pre-trial detention center and removed only at transfer points or upon arrival at the colony.

“

'Then I traveled in a Stolypin wagon. ... I was in handcuffs for nearly 24 hours — they don't remove them. That's the rule. On the files of political prisoners, they wrote PPUVD (meaning 'Subject to Registration in the Departmental Logbook.').'

“

'We were transported in a compartment car, but instead of regular compartments, they had turned them into cells with metal bars. Everyone convicted under political articles was handcuffed during transport, and even inside the compartments we were in handcuffs — we slept in them.'

From the Shklov train station, prisoners are transported to the colony, which is located nearby.

“

'We were met at the station by car, again with dogs, running, rushed us inside, put us into a "glass box," there were more than 10 of us. We arrived at 5:30 a.m., and in the "glass box," without leaning against the walls, we had to stand and wait until 9:00 a.m.'

At the colony, prisoners are met by armed guards with service dogs.

“

'It started raining outside — a downpour. We got out, and were immediately ordered to squat down with our hands on our heads. Armed guards stood nearby, and a "keisher" was next to us ("keisher" means "bag" in prison slang). So we stayed squatting like that for about an hour in the rain at the colony gates. They slowly walked past the group, reading out names. Each person had to jump up and introduce themselves. A full report — first name, last name, patronymic, year of birth, article, part of the article, start and end of the sentence, and the prisoner classification category ("profuchet").'

Quarantine. Newly arrived prisoners are immediately placed in quarantine for two weeks. The main tasks of quarantine are sanitation and helping prisoners adapt to life in detention.

Medical staff typically work with the inmates — conducting medical tests, taking medical histories, requesting records from healthcare institutions, and performing chest X-rays. However, according to former prisoners, some never received any medical examination during quarantine. The primary medical checkup was often conducted later, after assignment to a unit, which posed a risk in the case of infectious diseases (tuberculosis, meningitis, etc.).

“

... it was just a standard checkup. They asked about medical contraindications, some illnesses... But then, already in the colony a few days later — four maybe — we went to the sanitation unit where we underwent medical tests. The main procedures were done there.'

The psychologist at PC-17 uses individual sessions to instill full obedience and compliance with institutional rules.

At the same time, for the security officers of PC-17, quarantine is one of the key stages in initiating their repressive work with prisoners — especially political ones, who receive particular attention. When new inmates arrive, each already has a file from pre-trial detention, during transport, or even from the police van. As soon as political prisoners arrive at the colony, reports are written against them for minor or fabricated violations — things that are hard to avoid early on: an unbuttoned shirt, incorrect address to a guard, speaking without permission, failure to stand up straight from bed, and much more. As a result, political prisoners are deprived of visits and parcels. They are sent to a Disciplinary Cell (SHIZO) for 3 to 5 days.

“

'The pressure started literally from the first days of quarantine. For example, we'd be standing and talking, I'd go to the toilet, come back to the same room, and if I didn't greet them again, that would be considered a violation. It reached the point of absurdity. If you had — just as an example — 19 cigarettes in your bag instead of 20, as listed, that was a violation. They were just nitpicking to get you placed on the preventive supervision list ('profuchet').'

For example, Vitold Ashurak²¹ received twelve disciplinary reports²² without even leaving quarantine.

“

'Every day they read out the same thing. One of the prisoners was always called up to read it aloud, and the rest had to sit and listen silently — no whispering, no talking. And this was constantly monitored.'

[21] Vitold Ashurak — a civil activist from Biarezawka who died in PC-17 on May 21, 2021.

[22] According to what was said in the colony, Vitold Ashurak had 12 disciplinary violations. <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32145796.html>

In quarantine, prisoners are mainly introduced to the Internal Regulations of the colony (PVR)²³, the daily routine, and the forms of communication with the facility's administration. New arrivals are dressed in prison uniforms and tags with "special registry" ('profuchet') identification are sewn on²⁴. Typically, all clothes and food brought with them are thrown into the trash.

“

'When it was my turn, there was a metal detector, they started inspecting my belongings. A lot of what I was allowed to have wasn't approved. Things I had bought at the prison shop in Mahiliou — condensed milk, other products — much of it was simply thrown away.'

Former prisoners describe the living conditions in quarantine as fairly decent. The building is solid and located in the right wing of the administrative block. It includes a common sleeping area, a canteen, a recreation room (lenkomnata), an educational room where one can watch TV or read books, a storage room, a cloakroom, washbasins, and a toilet.

Quarantine is considered a separate unit. There is a unit head with the rank of captain and four so-called senior inmates — themselves prisoners serving long sentences. The routine is strict: the day starts at 6:30 a.m. After wake-up — hygiene procedures. Meals are in a separate canteen. Daily cleaning is mandatory. On Saturdays, there's a general cleaning: bunks are carried outside, all shoe racks from the cloakroom as well. Inmates must thoroughly clean the ceilings, floors, and walls. Officers closely monitor the process and make remarks.

“

'Then an officer or two show up wearing gloves, looking for even a speck of dust, and they warn that if they find one — even a single speck — the general cleaning will start all over again.'

Regarding restrictions for political prisoners, interviewees noted that they were allowed to call their relatives only in the presence of a DEP officer.

“

'As soon as we approached the phones or someone went to the computer room, they'd say outright: 'We don't let extremists make calls.' They had extremist registry status ('profuchet'), so they weren't allowed to call... In the end, one of the DEP officers came, and only in his presence were the 'politicals' allowed to make calls.'

[23] PVR - Internal Regulations of the colony.
[24] Yellow tags for political prisoners.

DAILY LIFE IN THE COLONY

'The whole system was designed to teach everyone that you are a wolf, you are alone, you are needed by no one, you don't have to help anyone, and no one has to help you either.'



According to former inmates, life in PC-17 is strictly regulated according to a daily schedule. The table below reflects the main points of the daily routine (time indicated based on interviews with former inmates).

Time (hour)	Activity
5:45-6:00 - 6:15	Wake-up, hygiene
6:15 - 6:45	Breakfast.
7:00	Roll call
8:00 - 12:00, 13:00 - 16:00	Work
12:00	Lunch
16:00 - 17:00	Free time in the unit or attendance at lectures, mandatory talks, or sessions with the educational department
17:00	Evening roll call
18:00	Dinner
21:00	Line-up – preventive registry check
22:00	Lights out

Table 1. Daily Routine in PC-17

Former inmates reported that there was never enough time for hygiene and leisure activities. In the mornings, as soon as the lights came on and the national anthem started playing, prisoners were expected to make their beds, get dressed, and be ready for morning exercises (4–5 minutes), which were mandatory for everyone. As a result, most prisoners would wake up 5–10 minutes before the official wake-up call to avoid bottlenecks and get everything done on time.

Twice a day, prisoners were required to clean their living quarters. They had a maximum of one to one and a half hours of free time during the day. During this time, they usually tried to prepare something to eat for themselves (tea, coffee, sandwiches). At 17:00, the evening roll call began — a line-up of the entire unit within the designated area.

After that, the inmates go to dinner. After dinner, there is usually a lecture, a film screening, a visit to the cultural-educational club, or mandatory regime-related activities. Several units are gathered in the assembly hall, and one of the officers from the educational department reads them lectures about extremism, the dangers of alcohol, and drug use.

Lights-out is at 22:00, signaled accordingly.

On weekends, the schedule is almost the same. The main difference is that on Sundays, wake-up is half an hour later and there is no work. There are more events in the residential area and mandatory visits to the events hall.

Living conditions in the units. Since 2021, former prisoners in PC-17 have described life in the colony as follows.

A unit usually consists of a barrack-style building. The sleeping area has bunk beds for around 80 people. The kitchen is a separate room with refrigerators, several tables, and electric kettles. The toilet has three to four seated toilets, several urinals, and washbasins. There's also an educational room with a TV, stools, and chairs, as well as a storage room and a drying room where jackets and sportswear are stored.

“

'While we were going back and forth, making phone calls home, sometimes we also had shopping opportunities. Then we'd return to the unit and have half an hour to an hour of time to maybe mend or patch something up, or cook a small meal.'

“

'On Saturdays, it was either activities based on the schedule, visits to the library, or to the church. Cleaning the territory, watching a movie, watching TV. Everything had to be clean and in order again, inventories had to be updated. Sometimes they held fire drills — when the administration got bored — to make us take everything outside, and then they'd double-check everything. Sunday was bath day; everyone went to the bathhouse.'

“

'In the colony, it's never a comfortable temperature. It's either extremely hot, and you're forced to wear that zip-up uniform and T-shirt fully buttoned — because an unbuttoned button would immediately result in a report. Or it's extremely cold. Because we had to wear that same T-shirt and jacket regardless of the temperature. If it was +10°C, your teeth would be chattering. It was very cold.'

“

'...in winter, it was simply the most hellish period of life. You covered yourself with anything and everything you could find.'

“

'In general, the conditions in the colony are bleak. There is no personal space, no opportunity to sit down, lie down, or rest. That would immediately be considered a violation of the rules and result in a written reprimand if you fell asleep — whether in the TV room or elsewhere. The administration would periodically catch and punish those who were sleeping.'

Many of the interviewees spoke about the numerous inconveniences caused by constant renovations in the housing units. Prisoners were not relocated during these works — first, one side of the dormitory was repaired, and then the other.

“

'There was always concrete, dampness — when they poured something, it had to dry, and you were constantly breathing that in. Dust covered the beds; if you slapped the mattress, a whole cloud rose. The blue blankets were sometimes completely white from all the dust...'

Prisoners typically showered after working in the industrial zone.

“

'After the work shift, you get a maximum of five minutes to wash — that's the absolute limit because there's a long line. There are only 8 shower cabins for 40 people. By the time the hot water starts flowing... So many inmates just learned to shower in cold water. They bathe in cold water both in summer and winter.'

Once a week, a general bath is held. Everyone is required to go. Those who refuse to wash have to wait until the others finish.

Clothing. A standard inmate outfit consists of trousers, a jacket with side patch pockets, a winter coat, and a black hat for winter; in summer, a cap is worn.

“

'The padded jackets didn't keep you warm at all. There were no warm insoles in the boots that were supposed to be for winter — your feet froze through. The boots were made by the inmates themselves, and the quality speaks for itself.'

Work clothing is green. All jackets have tags sewn onto them with personal data; political prisoners wear a distinctive yellow tag.

Nutrition. It is impossible to speak of a balanced diet with an adequate amount of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and vitamins. Interviewed former prisoners noted that inmates without access to store purchases or parcels from relatives appeared thin and emaciated.



Photo: Inside the food unit of PC-17 Source: shkloinfo.by

“

'If you do physical labor and try to stay in shape, it's simply impossible to survive on the standard food portions they provide — just impossible.'

“

'But again, those who didn't receive any extra food — who lived solely on the rations provided by the colony — were all extremely thin, almost emaciated.'

Other prisoners, speaking about the food in the colony, complained about poorly prepared meals, undercooked porridge or potatoes, low-quality bread, and a complete lack of vegetables and fruit.

“

'They feed dogs better than us. For example, there's a dish called bigus — supposedly cabbage with meat. Calling it cabbage is generous — it's smelly, barely nutritious, mostly water. Sometimes they served us undercooked potatoes. There were times it was basically water instead of potatoes. The oil was of poor quality. The bread was made in some strange way, supposedly yeast-free. It caused people to have diarrhea and constant farting. The morning meal was usually some kind of porridge — rice, oats, something like that. Lunch was soup, and a second course, usually with cabbage. Dinner — something similar to lunch but without the soup. The only drink was tea. Tea in the morning, too. As for vitamins — nothing. No fruit at all. Tooth loss was a recurring issue. There was garlic, added from time to time during autumn and winter — in summer, one clove per person per meal.'

With such a diet, prisoners experience significant weight loss, digestive issues, and metabolic disorders. Due to a lack of essential nutrients, their musculoskeletal system suffers — teeth fall out, joints become inflamed, and muscles weaken. Former prisoners emphasize that the food is low in calories and of poor quality, the portions are extremely small, and they constantly felt hungry.

“

'Many people lost up to 20 kilograms in just a month and a half or two. The food is extremely low-calorie — you might eat a first, second, and third course at lunch, but the portions are so small that literally an hour or an hour and a half later, you're overwhelmed with hunger again — like you could eat a horse.'

Regarding food in the disciplinary cell (SHIZO), everyone is unanimous — there is not enough food, and the administration uses this as an additional form of torture against prisoners.

“

'When you're in the disciplinary cell, there's just not enough food. It's cold, your nerves are shot, and the food — whether you eat it or not — makes no difference. When I was in SHIZO... I ate, and I didn't even feel like I had eaten anything. You're constantly hungry. They give you 10 days in the punishment cell, and for 10 days you will feel constant hunger.'

CORRESPONDENCE, PARCELS, VISITS, PHONE CALLS, AND LAWYERS



The Penal Enforcement Code of the Republic of Belarus stipulates that visits and phone calls for convicted persons are allowed with close relatives in accordance with the Internal Regulations. At the same time, correspondence of prisoners cannot be limited solely to close relatives. However, in practice, political prisoners are prohibited from sending and receiving letters from individuals not approved by the colony administration. Prisoners' correspondence is subject to censorship, and phone calls are monitored by prison staff.²⁵

“

'Correspondence in the colony is only allowed with relatives... but even letters from relatives can be destroyed. They might label them as containing "cynical content." What does "cynical content" even mean? There's no clear definition... they just destroy the letters, and there's no way for you to verify or challenge it.'

“

'I can say for certain that it is specifically people convicted under political articles who are subjected to these restrictions. All other categories receive letters from anyone.'

Since the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the right of political prisoners to send and receive correspondence has been increasingly restricted.

“

'From the beginning of the war, all political prisoners simply stopped receiving letters overnight. Any mail coming from people who weren't close relatives or weren't listed in your case file just never arrived.'

Discrimination against political prisoners was also evident in the order of access to phone calls. They were allowed to call only last — and only in the presence of a colony officer.

“

'Ordinary inmates were allowed to make calls first. Then, separately, those classified as LSS (Low Social Status) were allowed to call. Only after that, political prisoners were brought in to make their calls. And politicals were always allowed to call only in the presence of a DEP officer — unlike the others, who could call without supervision.'

[25] Art. 73(4), 85, 86 of the Criminal Enforcement Code of the Republic of Belarus.

“

'There had to be either a DAHC (Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony) or an officer from the operations unit — the local security agent. He would walk around and could jump into the conversation at any moment, saying: "Hello, I'm [name], an officer of this facility. Identify yourself.' In other words, even when making a call, it had to be to the contact address previously listed on your official form.'

Visits from Relatives (Short- and Long-Term). According to the Criminal Procedure Code, convicted individuals are entitled to one long and one short visit every four months. However, they are often deprived of visits for the most minor infractions. Arbitrary disciplinary sanctions against political prisoners — such as denying scheduled visits — result in fundamental violations of their basic rights.

“

'Before every visit, you're 100% guaranteed to receive a violation... They'd take away parcels, packages, short- and long-term visits. One time, I was denied a visit just two days beforehand. They placed me in the DC. Luckily, I was able to get word to my family not to come.'

Meetings with a Lawyer. The constitutional right to legal assistance cannot be restricted for persons serving prison sentences. They are guaranteed the right to consult with lawyers²⁶. Yet in PC-17, this right is regularly violated.

“

'As soon as I submitted a request to see my lawyer — I gave it to the DAHC — I received a violation that same day.'

[26] Art. 62 Constitution, Parts 8 & 10 Penal Enforcement Code.

LABOUR IN THE COLONY

'...considering that you cannot refuse to go to work, it's more like slave labor, because there's no payment for the work, no safety at all, and if someone ends up in the disciplinary cell, they automatically lose their vacation.'

'There are tractors there, but why do you need tractors if you have extremists?'



Photo: Industrial area of PC-17. Source: shklovinfo.by

There are 12 workshops and production units on the territory of the colony where inmates work.

The woodworking facility is divided into a sawmill, which is considered one of the most physically demanding types of work, and the production of Euro pallets. The dirtiest and most hazardous job is cable stripping. In the workshop where cables are stripped, there is also a furnace used to melt the cables. As a rule, political prisoners are assigned specifically to these harmful tasks.

“

'I worked in woodworking. In PC-17, there's also shoemaking, a sewing workshop, a repair shop where vehicles are fixed, woodworking, a bakery in the residential area... in the summer, they also smash paving tiles.'

“

'They also burn rubber there, polluting the air. People from nearby villages say they call and complain that it reeks of black smoke. They burn rubber there, which is completely prohibited. We were breathing in burnt rubber, that smoke. I wore two or three masks — it didn't help. I rinsed out my nose, and it was completely black. And people breathe that in.'

“

«...the byproducts of burning those cables — various chlorides, plastic, rubber, insulation — it's a very harsh job. The sawmill — there are two — where you have to load logs and cut them on a bandsaw. Usually, the more 'dangerous' political prisoners, those who are supposed to have fewer connections with other inmates, are placed on the sawmill and on the night shift.»

There is also a maintenance unit responsible for repair and construction work inside the colony.

“

«It's an open, drafty workshop, especially in 2020–21 during the winter — temperatures dropped to -30°C in Shklov. And we worked in that. It's not automated production. You roll the logs in pairs with a partner. Then you push the log on a trolley along the tracks toward the saw, and that's where it all gets cut.»

“

«There is also a maintenance unit that does all the other work around the colony. Construction, all kinds of tasks, general maintenance of the area... The inmates build the colony for themselves, build it so that they can't escape from it.»



Photo: Items produced by inmates of PC-17.
Source: shklovinfo.by

“

«A lot of products were sewn. There's a company from Svetlogorsk — 'Svetloteks.' We sewed workwear for construction workers, regular blue work uniforms with reflective elements. We also made workwear for 'Mogilevliftmash.'»

“

«We produced firewood chips for some foreign company. We even had packaging bags for it — I think the company was from the United Kingdom.»

After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, numerous orders began to arrive for military agencies. For example, at the woodworking facility, crates for shells and rockets were being manufactured, with samples sent from Russia. There were also large orders for the production of military uniforms.

Labor in the colony is mandatory. Even disability is not considered a valid reason for exemption from work. Any refusal to perform labor — whether for physical or moral reasons — ends with being placed in the DC. Notably, placement in the disciplinary cell does not necessarily mean the person will be exempt from work — some prisoners are even brought to work from there.

The workday in the industrial zone starts at 8:00 a.m. and lasts until around 3:30 p.m. A five-day work week is established. After work, prisoners are allowed to take a shower: each 30-minute time slot per shower cabin is shared by 3 to 5 people. A 5-10 minute break is given every hour, and at 11:30 they go for lunch. Forced overtime work depends on the production facility where the prisoner is assigned. Additionally, they are often made to perform personal tasks for the administration, such as repairing shoes, clothing, or vehicles.

“

'We were forced to make boxes for 120-millimeter rockets — maybe 120 or 122 millimeters, I can't say exactly. The only thing I saw was a sample box that was supposed to serve as a prototype. It had a military unit from the Russian Federation indicated on it.'

“

'At the woodworking site, we were making TM-62 boxes for anti-tank mines. Then we made boxes for Grad rockets. We also made boxes for some other types of shells — in very large quantities...'

“

'...after that, a large order came in from the Ministry of Defense — 65,000 uniform sets — and then they started sewing military uniforms.'

“

'In the colony, work is mandatory for absolutely everyone. So mandatory that, while I was there, there was even a prisoner who had only one arm — he had lost the other in an accident... And they still forced him to go to work with just one arm. Refusing to go to work meant immediate placement in the disciplinary cell.'

“

'...there were cases when prisoners were taken out of the disciplinary cell to work.'

“

'Work starts at 8 a.m. and ends at 4. Around 3:30 they give water so we can wash up. But washing up there goes like this: you soap up, rinse off — that's it, because there are 3 to 5 people per one shower stall, and everyone has to make it in time.'

The production facilities are equipped with outdated machinery that does not meet safety standards. Inmates are not provided with work clothing or protective gear. In fact, the responsibility for their safety lies with the prisoner, not the administration that forces them to work. Conditions in the workshops vary greatly.

“

'Later, I was coughing up paint. My snot was the same color as the paint I had been using. There were filters, of course — well, respirators, technically — but there were no filters for them.'

“

'A complete disregard for conditions and safety regulations. Absolute indifference. Sometimes we were given workwear, sometimes we weren't.'

Interviewees report injuries occurring in the PC-17 production facilities. Even in such cases, prisoners often choose not to seek medical assistance, as doing so inevitably leads to punishment.

“

'There was a case when a person simply slipped while unloading a vehicle and twisted his ankle. He was placed in the medical unit. But after spending some time there, he was transferred to the disciplinary cell. Everything there is done to keep people silent.'

“

'The injuries were work-related. I got electrocuted twice because the sewing machines were not grounded, and once I pierced my finger — right through the nail — with a needle.'

Due to the lack of compliance with safety regulations in the workplace, accidents are common, including severed fingers and hands, as well as lacerations and puncture wounds caused by tools. The most injury-prone work area is the sawmill.

“

'There is also a machine that grinds the leftover wood cut on the sawmills into wood chips, which are then used to heat the colony. There was a case where a board was thrown into the chipper, but it bounced back and shot out, piercing straight through a person's hand.'

“

'I personally witnessed a man lose his pinky finger and two phalanges of his ring finger due to such technical issues.'

In reality, prisoners receive almost no wages. They are paid from a few kopecks to a few rubles per month, while the majority is withheld by the colony administration to cover 'maintenance costs.' In rare production sites, and mainly for those who have been imprisoned for a long time, prisoners manage to earn 20–70 rubles per month — with the official minimum wage in Belarus set at 726 rubles²⁷.

[27] Established as of January 1, 2025, by Resolution No. 935 of the Council of Ministers 'On the establishment of the monthly minimum wage.

“

'I was earning around 2 rubles a month working at the sawmill.'

“

'The pay was 40–60 kopeeks a month. That's very little. It's just ridiculous.'

In addition to working in the industrial zone, prisoners are also assigned various labor duties related to the maintenance of the colony. According to a schedule, they are responsible for cleaning their housing unit, and political prisoners are often assigned these duties more frequently. They are also required to clean the colony's outdoor areas. However, cleaning the toilets is not part of the general cleaning schedule; this task is assigned to low-status inmates. There is also a duty schedule for so-called «duty orderlies» («dnevalnye»), who are required to answer the phone and keep a record of everyone entering and exiting the unit.

Prisoners are also involved in repair and construction work within the colony, for which they are not paid.

“

'Every day, seven inmates from the unit were assigned to cleaning duties. Two of them swept the territory in the evening, and five cleaned the unit in the morning and evening.'

“

'In addition to that, we had cleaning shifts, and the schedule always assigned more duties to political prisoners than to others.'

INFORMAL PRISON HIERARCHY

'The administration deliberately supports this system with "petukhi" [prisoners assigned the lowest status]^[28] and others like them in order to have leverage over inmates later. That is, no prisoner can allow themselves to fall into the "low status" category, as this immediately leads to social isolation. And social isolation truly drives people insane...'

It should be noted that the caste-based division system remains relevant in nearly all post-Soviet countries. Essentially, there are four main prisoner statuses within this informal prison hierarchy. However, the situation may vary slightly from country to country. Some countries or colonies may include intermediate statuses. But the basic structure has remained practically unchanged.

Describing the prison hierarchy as a system means we cannot ignore certain rules. One of them is quite simple: it's very hard to climb from the bottom up, but it's quite easy to fall. This process is called «being lowered» [«opuskaniye»].

In Belarus, the laws of the informal prison hierarchy have somewhat evolved over time. As a rule, prisoners with low social status are designated as such by the prison administration.



*'There is such a division between ordinary inmates and "petukhi" [untouchables], the lowest status. Low status means humiliation and torture of a person, because no one talks to them, no one befriends them, except for others of the same low status. These individuals are subjected to systematic verbal abuse by both prison staff and fellow inmates. There is a practice where, following orders from the head of the colony — for example, with the approval of the head of the operations department, **Aliaksandr Siarheevich Melnikau** — staff force other inmates to make them take out the trash, which, in turn, transfers the person to low status.'*

As mentioned earlier, PC-17 functions as a «red» zone — a facility dominated by the colony administration and its subordinates. On one hand, this is manifested in the strict observance of procedural and penal-executive legislation and other norms that regulate the conditions of detention. At the same time, the informal prison hierarchy (dividing inmates into statuses or castes) serves the administration as a powerful tool to maintain order, suppress dissent, and target «politicals.» As prisoners note, the administration itself upholds and enforces the criminal underworld's culture and unwritten rules.

[28] "Petukhi" are a caste of "untouchables" in the informal hierarchy of inmates within the institutions of the DEP. These individuals are rejected by other prisoners for various reasons (for example, because they were subjected to sexualized violence or committed sexualized crimes, or simply because they had contact with others labeled as "petukhi") and are considered to be at high risk of severe abuse by other inmates.

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'In reality, the police are no different from the inmates — they follow the same code. According to this code, a prisoner is not allowed to ask questions. So you sit in a police officer's office, say something, and he responds bluntly: 'Who do you think you are to be asking questions?' That is, he doesn't just forbid questions — he refers directly to the prison subculture to justify it.'

According to former inmates, the caste system of the informal hierarchy in PC-17 looks approximately like this:



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'They invent their own rules to force inmates to live by them. These rules are supposedly created by the regime, but they're only formal. For example, a squad leader is also seen as part of the same system — like an activist. One time, one of them beat up a guy who didn't want to work at the sawmill. The police cover this up — it's convenient for them. That way, they don't have to get their own hands dirty.'

«**Kozly**» work with calony staff to maintain order or fulfill administrative tasks. This is a privileged class — such as warehouse keepers, squad leaders, or senior inmates.

The vast majority of prisoners fall into the broad category known as «**Muzhiki**». They follow an informal code of conduct, refraining from close cooperation with the prison administration.

«**Petukhi**», «**untouchables**», „**downgraded**», or „**disgraced**“, are assigned tasks considered inappropriate for other inmates due to their „unclean“ status — such as cleaning latrines, toilets, showers, baths, or exercise yards.

There is also a small group known as “**Krysy**” (“**rats**”) — inmates who were caught stealing, including from **the “petukhi.”** Another group is known as “Cherty” (“filthy,” “doesn't wash,” “half-homeless”) — they also hold a low position in the hierarchy.

According to the prison subculture, inmates convicted of sexualized crimes (such as rape, pedophilia, etc.) are automatically assigned to **the “petukhi”** group. The prison administration itself often designates separate toilets, sinks, sleeping areas, and dining tables for these individuals.

“

'People ended up there for "serious" charges — Articles 168, 167, in short, articles related to sexual violence. We also had cases where someone ended up there for some kind of offense — that is, they became a "petukh". It's not necessarily about homosexuality — no. These are so-called 'disgraced ones,' people who did something wrong — like dropped something in the toilet, touched a petukh, took something from their hands, or borrowed something from them.'

“

'They have a separate bed in the corner of the barrack, a separate locker, separate dishes, separate plates, separate place in the canteen, separate urinal, sink — everything is marked. Even their clothing is different, with a "HSS" label [short for "LSS — Low Social Status"]. The same engraving appears on their utensils. Even on their clothes you could see that label on their back.'

It's important to note that in prisons and punishment cells, cleaning the toilet, taking out the trash, or other degrading tasks do not in themselves lead to a lower status among inmates.

“

'In prison it's not considered shameful. Like, if you cleaned the toilet, it doesn't mean you're a petukh. If you clean up after yourself, even in disciplinary cell, that's allowed — it's not a disgrace.'

How someone ends up in the lowest social caste — how the process of «being lowered» works:

“

'There are certain rules you must not break. Like picking up something off the toilet floor, or if someone thinks you have homosexual tendencies, or you once engaged in oral sex. They can just place you in a cell with others of low status, and that alone is enough to make you "one of them." There are many such methods.'

How someone ends up in the lowest social caste — how the process of «being lowered» works:

“

'There was a guy in our unit, just in front of me — I didn't get to see him, because they transferred him to a high-security prison. He was one of the 'politicals'. Three police officers came — a captain, a major — and said: 'Take out the trash.' The guy took it and carried it out. That was it. After that, they started working on him — he was put in disciplinary cell, talked to by psychologists and operatives. They told him: 'That's it, now you're a 'petukh', now you're 'opushchennyi' (a social outcast), part of the lowest caste.'

“

'When I went to the warden, he asked me: "Why didn't you take out the trash?" I said: "Don't you understand that by doing that, you're pushing me into a low social status?" And he replied: "What? You support these criminal traditions?" I stood there in silence, thinking, "I won't even mention the canteen, where 'petukhs' eat separately — and you know that, you're just supporting it."

In situations involving political prisoners, when authorities want to transfer someone to prison regime, they often tell them to clean the toilet. This is usually filmed on mobile camera worn by staff. The prisoner knows that such an action will immediately degrade their social status within the criminal hierarchy. If the prisoner refuses, it is classified as disobeying a lawful order. As punishment, they can be placed in a punishment cell (SHIZO) or a so-called "bur" (a strict-regime cell block), typically for several months. While there, the prisoner is often provoked into further violations, which leads to Article 411 of the Criminal Code of Belarus [Malicious Disobedience to Penal Administration] being applied — either adding prison time or transferring the person from the penal colony to a prison.

“

'That's exactly what happened with N. He refused several times to take out the trash, but that wasn't enough for them. The third time they offered, he agreed and took it out. That meant he effectively admitted to accepting a low social status. He was tricked into doing it — they had tortured him psychologically for a long time, they only released him from SHIZO after that. He was in bad shape, both mentally and physically. He simply carried the trash out, and the officers didn't know what to do next. He couldn't sit at the table with the others — because of his new status. They had to isolate him, they didn't know what to do. He spent another day held separately, then they quickly wrote him up for several violations and placed him in the strict-regime block. Three months later, they added another year or year and a half to his sentence and transferred him from the colony to a high-security prison. When news from prison started coming in, it turned out that he was now sitting with the regular criminal population — and had no 'low status' there.'

POLITICAL PRISONERS: PECULIARITIES OF IMPRISONMENT

'PC-17 is something like the Gestapo. Just like people walked around Auschwitz with yellow stars on their chests, in PC-17 political prisoners wear yellow tags. And we're not allowed anything — everything is cut off: visits, parcels, handovers.'

Political prisoners are almost always placed on a special watchlist for «extremism» and/or for alleged tendencies to attack prison staff, often already during pre-trial detention. The basis for this is typically the fact of being convicted under protest-related articles since 2020. However, being placed on such a list can also result from simply speaking Belarusian or communicating with political prisoners. Those labeled as extremists wear yellow tags on their clothing. Those considered prone to violence are marked with red. People on this list are usually assigned the hardest labor, such as sawing logs or stripping cables.

“

'It meant that they were on a preventive watchlist. All political prisoners were given such a tag, and it signaled to staff that this person could be humiliated, mocked however they liked, assigned the most absurd tasks. You could take it out on them, and the administration would support it.'

“

'They were called "extremists", "yellow-taggers", or more often — "zmagary" ["fighters" from Belarussian — a derogatory term for political opponents].'

“

'There were even people who were given a preventive tag just for speaking their native Belarussian language.'

Those convicted under 'political' articles are punished more frequently than others, with prison authorities trying to designate them as persistent violators of prison rules as quickly as possible²⁹. This results in a number of negative consequences, such as restrictions on purchasing items in the canteen store, receiving incentives, or qualifying for early release. The most severe consequences include being transferred to a stricter imprisonment regime and being convicted under Article 411 of the Criminal Code (Malicious Disobedience to Penal Administration), which carries a penalty of up to one year of imprisonment — or up to two years in the case of a dangerous repeat offense or a serious/especially serious crime.

[29] According to Article 117 of the Penal Enforcement Code of the Republic of Belarus, a prisoner is considered a persistent violator of the established procedure for serving a sentence if, during the period of disciplinary sanctions, they commit:

1. four violations punishable by reprimand or assignment to unscheduled duties;
2. three violations, one of which is a deprivation of the right to receive parcels or visits;
3. two violations, one of which results in placement in a disciplinary cell (SHIZO).

“

'All political prisoners were deliberately and rapidly classified as persistent violators of the prison regime. The administration did this intentionally — to deny us the right to early conditional release or to prevent our cases from being sent to court for sentence reduction. They reduced our canteen allowance from six base units to just two [a base unit or basic value is an official monetary reference used in Belarus to calculate fines, fees, and allowances], restricted the number of parcels we could receive, and periodically placed us in solitary confinement. The treatment we received was clearly worse than that of the other inmates.'

“

'As soon as political prisoners arrive, they are immediately labeled as persistent offenders... We hadn't even entered the facility properly — no documents were signed, no belongings searched — and they already issued us a violation.'

“

'Not a single political prisoner was granted early release, because within the first few months of arriving at the colony, we were all formally declared persistent violators of the rules.'

Being designated as «extremist» results in a wide range of restrictions and obligations associated with this status. For example, during roll calls, the prisoner is required to state their status; they are restricted from visiting certain public places and are subject to additional checks and surveillance. Former prisoners note that most of these restrictions were introduced after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022.

“

'For those of us registered for preventive supervision, additional inspections were organized where absolutely everything was checked: whether we were clean-shaven, whether our uniforms were in perfect order — we had to look like we'd stepped out of a display window. They turned some people into model prisoners. Sometimes it reached the point of absurdity.'

“

'They deliberately issued violations against you to restrict your parcels and visits. They imposed limitations on everything — movement, access to stadiums, gyms, the library. Political prisoners were prohibited from engaging in or participating in sports activities.'

The colony administration creates an environment in which political prisoners become targets for harassment by other inmates. Communication between political prisoners — or between them and others — can lead to trouble, which is why 'yellow-tagged' prisoners are generally avoided.

“

'...Interacting with fellow political prisoners or supporting them was punished — the administration encouraged regular inmates to avoid any contact with politicals.'

“

'If more than three political prisoners gathered together, it could already be considered a violation. Talking about politics was also very risky — even a casual conversation with a friend could be overheard and reported to the staff, and you'd be punished.'

Moreover, the heightened attention from the administration toward political prisoners often provokes resentment and hostility from other inmates.

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'The more politicals there are, the more searches, the more attention to the unit. Obviously, it's done to intimidate the politicals, but at the same time the administration does it so that other prisoners get angry at them. Yes, they stir things up intentionally.'

It is also common practice to place political prisoners in the punishment cell (SHIZO) shortly before their release. This is done to prevent them from receiving messages from fellow inmates, passing on personal belongings, or informing their relatives about the exact time and procedure of release.

“

'Almost all convicted political prisoners were released straight from SHIZO into freedom.'



PROVOCATIONS AND INFORMANTS

'The scariest ones weren't even the officers — it was the 'snitches,' other inmates who were basically like cops, just without the uniform.'

The colony administration closely cooperates with inmates to create an atmosphere of distrust and fear. Through such inmates, the administration targets political prisoners and other undesirable individuals by staging provocations that result in either disciplinary reports and punishment or unbearable psychological pressure, and also carries out 24/7 surveillance of all prisoners.

Inmates who cooperate with the administration are unofficially referred to as 'suki' (traitors) or 'kozly' (snitches). Officially, there is a so-called squad active group, whose duties include maintaining order and handling household tasks within the unit. Members of this group wear special triangular badges on their clothing. However, not only active group members act as provocateurs and informants — others among the imprisoned also fulfill this role. It's worth noting that not all members of the active group are informants — for instance, some unit stewards genuinely help inmates in their unit, regardless of whether they are political prisoners or not. Informing is carried out not only by inmates but also by civilian staff, including the prison chaplain (priest).

“

'...the category of informants. These people earned themselves points by reporting all sorts of violations to the colony staff.'

“

*'Inmates would joke among themselves, saying, "Well, **Chernyavko"s** off to file a report." And then the next day, or even the same day, someone would be summoned by the unit officer and asked to write an explanatory note.'*

“

'Usually, this triangle is worn by the so-called activists. That's what they call themselves, and that's how the colony administration refers to them — 'activists.' Although, according to the prison subculture, they've long had another name — either 'kozyol' [snitch] or 'suka' [traitor], whichever one suits you better.'

“

'The priest is a former operative of the same colony. Just like in those old communist jokes about Chekists and all the other informers.'

One of the prominent representatives of the 'activists' in PC-17 is **Vladimir Batura**, the head of quarantine. His duties include introducing newly arrived prisoners to the rules and procedures established in the colony. The quarantine period is supposed to be a time for explaining conditions and rules, and for allowing prisoners to adapt. However, through the actions of **Vladimir Batura**, political prisoners begin receiving disciplinary reports for violations already during quarantine.



According to the interviewees, **Vladimir Batura** does not refuse the administration's requests to use force or stage provocations against other prisoners. During the quarantine period – when a person has not yet fully understood the established rules – he organizes provocations that result in the prisoner being assigned a low social status.

“

'An ordinary person wouldn't be appointed as the top 'kozel' in quarantine... And he didn't really hide it either. He only pressured political prisoners. He didn't touch anyone else. He assigned cleaning duties exclusively to politicals. I don't think it was about ideology – he has none. He's just a swindler convicted under Article 209 [fraud].'

“

*"**Batura** himself beat people, and he did it under orders from a staff member."*

“

*'At 14:40, we were supposed to do cleaning. **Batura** calls and tells us to line up. We all line up, the squad leader comes and asks, "Why aren't you cleaning?" ... And then he writes up a report on all of us for not cleaning. Most of us ended up in the punishment cell.'*

“

*'**Batura** handed a trash bin to one guy, also a political prisoner... **Batura** personally designated him as a petukh, already during quarantine.'*

“

*'**Batura** beat him with his hands and feet, drove him to tears... That man cooperated with the administration.'*

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE OF PRISONERS

'...nine or ten masked men as they storm in with batons, using rubber to make their point with brute force.'

Beatings of Prisoners. Cases of prisoner beatings during the quarantine period at PC-17 have already been reported in the media. "Beatings can be carried out by both security officers and quarantine activists (there are always three of them: the senior orderly, and the day and night 'attendants'). They do it in blind spots where there are no cameras. There have been cases when they burst in wearing masks or balaclavas and started beating everyone indiscriminately.³⁰"

There is documented evidence of violence used against prisoners immediately after their transfer to the correctional facility. Beatings often occur within the first hours or days of their stay.

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'They throw you... to the floor, hands behind your head, and start beating you like this. One of them says: "So life doesn't seem like a bed of roses." They kept beating me like that for about five minutes, then started twisting my arms behind my back, twisted them, pushed me against the wall and began to explain how exactly I should stand next to it. They beat me on the legs, in a stretch position, for 10–15 minutes. One of them would come over — whack on the leg — I fall, get up. I stand again — another whack — I fall again.'

Interviewees most frequently mention the head of the security and operational regime unit, **Siarhei Karcheuski**, when describing beatings at PC-17:

“

'...who is always biased during searches — rips off buttons, can tear your clothes, insult you, humiliate you, or make degrading jokes. He constantly threatens to "pay a visit" — to the DC...'

“

*'Most of the beatings happen either in the SOR officer's office or in the office of the regime department staff, where **Karcheuski** is the head. It's a standard scheme.'*

Staff frequently use various objects as tools of punishment. Prisoners report being forced to wear a hood that limits their vision, preventing them from identifying those delivering blows with batons or other objects. Such actions are described by interviewees as a systematic practice. Beatings are applied not only in response to disciplinary violations but also as punishment for protest statements or actions by inmates.

[30] <https://nashaniva.com/ru/341509>

“

'... either in the operations office or the regime office. They've got all sorts of stuff there – like from a prank store – batons and other 'toys' they use to beat inmates. I mean, different types. And usually, it goes like this: they put some thing on your head so you can't see who's hitting you. Then they beat you – that's like a classic. They can also beat you in the punishment cell, not even for violations, but just for sharp remarks or any protest actions.'

The harshest violence takes place in the DC (SHIZO)³¹, where there are no surveillance cameras³².

“

'They have a separate room at the checkpoint, including for isolation. And there are few witnesses there. They prefer to do it when there are few witnesses. They don't do it in front of others. They like to torture in silence.'

“

'... the last time I was in the DC, I saw a guy who'd been badly beaten. He had open wounds. How to say it – a bruise, and on top of it – a split, fresh wound.'

Psychological Pressure. In addition to fabricated violations, reports, surveillance, and informants, prisoners are constantly subjected to psychological pressure. They are threatened with being downgraded in social status, with violence, the arrest of their relatives, and additional prison sentences.

“

'... they kept giving him a trash bin, and he kept refusing. Then they'd write him up – it's a form of pressure. If you take out the trash, it means you're a 'petukh' [a prisoner of the lowest status]. But if you don't – it's considered refusal. And multiple refusals add up to persistent disobedience. That's it, they can then invoke Article 411 and pile on extra prison time. They use this tool – they exploit the caste system.'

Often, the administration creates conditions where a prisoner is formally granted a visit or a parcel, but has no way to inform their relatives.

“

'The administration also likes to set prisoners up. For example, they might approve a short-term visit but not notify the inmate's family – and at the same time prevent the inmate from making phone calls to let their relatives know that the visit was approved for a specific date.'

[31] Some former prisoners report the existence of a separate torture room at the checkpoint (KPP).

[32] The colony is equipped with a video surveillance system, to which the Department for the Execution of Punishments (DEP) leadership has direct access.

The administration creates an atmosphere of total suppression of personality and humiliation of human dignity. Regular strip searches – including in front of women – forced singing of the national anthem, pointless line-ups and control over even the smallest actions, as well as inhumane conditions in the DC and CTP, push prisoners to psychological breakdowns, suicidal thoughts, and acts of self-harm.

“

'They forced us to sing the anthem. If you didn't — a report, then DC. One time it was just because my T-shirt was drying in the wrong place. It breaks you.'

“

'Stripping naked in front of female staff — it's unpleasant, humiliating. Swearing and rudeness were the norm.'

“

'...if it hadn't been the very end of my sentence, I probably would've resorted to self-harm.'



VIOLATIONS AND PUNISHMENTS

'Violations rained down on political prisoners like leaves in the fall.'

Article 112 of the Penal Enforcement Code of the Republic of Belarus defines a list of penalties that can be imposed for violating the established procedure of serving a sentence³³. However, the legislation does not define what constitutes a “violation of the procedure for serving a sentence,” allowing the administration of correctional facilities to interpret this provision at its own discretion. For example, one of the most common violations for which prisoners are punished is failing to greet a prison staff member. Yet the situation often becomes absurd, as inmates are required to greet the same person with a full formal report 30–50 times a day. Another pretext used to fabricate violations is the appearance of publications about prisoners in opposition media outlets.

“

“There’s a clear pattern: whenever someone on the outside wrote about me – Nasha Niva or Zerkalo – I would immediately get a penalty in the colony.”

“

‘They can constantly come up to you from behind and say, “Why didn’t you greet me?” — even if you were walking and didn’t see them. And that’s it – a violation...’

Disciplinary reports are reviewed by a commission consisting of colony administration members, headed by the colony chief. Prisoners refer to the commission’s sessions as ‘baptisms.’ The process is purely formal – no one attempts to determine whether a violation actually occurred or assess its severity. The prisoner is simply given the punishment that is most convenient for the administration at the time. After being sentenced to a stint in the DC, the prisoner is taken from the warden’s office to the regime department in the ‘swallow’ position [bent-over position, arms locked behind your back] – often with the office door opened using the prisoner’s head.

“

‘As a rule, groups of people are brought in en masse to be punished by the warden... When he was being dragged out of the office, head-first into the door, he lost consciousness. Just imagine – you’re being marched in the ‘swallow’ position toward the door, and it’s not just that you’re led through it. You open the door with your head.’

[33] Article 112 of the Penal Enforcement Code of the Republic of Belarus.

Political prisoners are often subjected to disciplinary sanctions such as denial of visits – even when already approved – denial of parcels, or being assigned unscheduled cleaning duties. Since regulations do not define which punishment corresponds to which violation, everything depends entirely on the will of a particular prison official. For the smallest infraction – an unbuttoned collar, an allegedly unshaved face, or something similarly petty – one can lose a long-awaited visit from family that both sides have anticipated for an entire year. In addition, political prisoners are subject to constant inspections of their lists of personal belongings and food items, where violations are always easy to find – since food is consumed and quantities change regularly, and it is practically impossible to weigh everything accurately.

“

“...for those two violations, I was denied a parcel, labeled a persistent offender, and stripped of a short-term visit. The warden said, ‘Think about who you talk to and associate with – I warned you.’”

“

“They came up with a rather creative way of issuing reprimands – checking the inventory list. So, he comes over and starts rummaging through my bag, pulls out a bag of tea and asks, ‘How much is in here?’ I say, ‘I’d guess around 800 grams.’ He says, ‘No way, there’s less.’ I reply, ‘Well, how can I weigh it? We’re not allowed to have scales, so I just said approximately 800!’ He goes, ‘Nope, you’ve got less,’ and writes me up a report for having less tea than listed.’”

Being assigned an unscheduled cleaning duty may not seem like a severe punishment, but in practice, it is often used by the administration as a pretext for placing prisoners in the punishment cell (SHIZO). You might be ordered to clean the toilet or take out the trash – and then face a de facto choice: accept the task and risk being labeled as having ‘low status,’ or refuse and be sent to SHIZO.

“

“That’s how the scheme works. For example, they might assign someone to clean – which means scrubbing the toilet. If the person refuses on personal grounds, they receive a second punishment for failing to comply with the first one – this time a more severe one, like being sent to the punishment cell.”

Sometimes, disciplinary reports were filed even when no violations had occurred.

“

“...when I received my first violation upon arrival to quarantine – allegedly for swearing, using slang expressions, and addressing the search officer informally – I said I hadn’t done any of that. In the end, they punished me anyway, and no one even tried to find out whether it really happened or not. Logically, there should at least have been a recording from a bodycam or something to prove I actually said it.”

“

“They don’t bother figuring out who’s right or wrong – they don’t even collect any evidence. It’s all made up. They have full carte blanche for any kind of illegal actions.”

Political prisoners, in particular, are punished for things that are considered normal for others — and the punishment is always more severe. Some are beaten before being placed in solitary confinement.

“

'... it was no secret to anyone that violence against prisoners was taking place — particularly when they were being taken to solitary confinement for alleged violations.'

“

'They labelled all of us as persistent violators. Everyone with yellow tags.'

“

'Right at the beginning, when I had just arrived at the colony, I was beaten and thrown into the punishment cell for allegedly introducing myself incorrectly. They labelled me a persistent violator, stripped me of the five base units I was legally entitled to, and left me with only two.'



DISCIPLINARY CELL (SHIZO) AND CELL-TYPE PREMISES (PKT)

'They use the punishment cells like small torture chambers.'

'Men in their 40s or 50s spend ten days in there and come out with grey hair. Their eyes change, everything changes. People age ten years in ten days.'

According to former inmates, a specific 'ritual' exists in the Shklov colony, used by the administration to break the psyche of newly arrived prisoners — to turn them into fully submissive subjects. This practice primarily targets political prisoners: they are sent straight from quarantine to the punishment cell (SHIZO), and are quickly assigned the status of 'persistent regime violator.' The punishment cells are almost always filled mainly with political inmates.

Conditions in the punishment cell (SHIZO) can be summarized as follows:

- Concrete (plastered) walls, floors, and ceiling;
- Cell size — 3 by 5 meters;
- Temperature — as low as +8°C, especially in spring and autumn;
- Clothing — a thin pajama and undershirt, even in winter;
- No access to hot water;
- Toilet paper and soap are rationed;
- Sleeping is only allowed at night and only on a wooden board — the bedding is unfastened after 10:00 p.m.;
- Lights stay on 24/7, with checks 3 to 5 times per night.

“

'... in our unit, in winter, the walls are covered with a layer of ice, and you're standing there in a regular prison uniform — just a thin cotton pajama... The guards walk the corridors in warm coats, while the inmates sit there in pajamas.'

“

'Slippers under my head, T-shirt over my feet. My body doesn't respond — it's too cold.'

“

'Concrete floor, everything's concrete. The only wooden things are the plank bed — which gets unhooked — and a small table and bench, but they're covered with metal. Not comfortable to sit on — the metal is cold and cuts into you. As for clothing: underwear, socks, slippers, and a very thin cotton jacket and trousers.'

To stay warm, people are forced to keep moving around the cell. The heating system is outdated and ineffective: during the day, the radiators are cold; at night, they're so hot that touching them can cause burns. Sleep deprivation, lack of food, and constant movement in circles due to the cold lead to hallucinations, other mental disturbances, flare-ups of chronic illnesses, premature physical deterioration, and lasting damage to health. Although the rules require daily visits from a doctor and a psychologist, no actual medical assistance is provided during these visits.

“

'I was forced to hug the radiator. The radiators are large cylinders, so they don't heat properly. If you stand too close, you can get burned; if you stand farther away, they don't warm you at all. They do this systematically: at night, they heat the radiators until they're scalding hot — enough to burn your skin if you touch them.'

Confinement in the punishment cell (SHIZO) creates perfect conditions for physical and psychological abuse: there are no witnesses, and no one to help. A common practice is to place a person in SHIZO after they have been beaten by colony staff, and keep them there until the bruises and marks fade. Political prisoners in SHIZO are forced to sing the Belarusian national anthem.

“

'At 5:30 a.m., everyone gets up on command and must sing the anthem. The officer opens the peephole to check. If you're just moving your lips, they might issue a warning. If you don't sing at all — you get written up.'

“

*'Turns out that while I was in the punishment cell, **Aliaksandr Henadzievich Vanilouski** drew up documents against me, allegedly for being unbuttoned while washing up — in the punishment cell. On Monday, they locked me up again for 10 days... Then again in the morning, while we were getting dressed for work, an officer from about 20 meters away yelled at me, saying I hadn't greeted him. He filed another report on me... Out of the last 31 days, I spent 25 in the punishment cell.'*

“

'Later I even started having visual and auditory hallucinations. I'd stare at one spot, and it was like being on LSD — even though I've never actually tried LSD. Like a kaleidoscope forming weird shapes, faces, all sorts of strange stuff.'

“

'When political prisoners first arrived, they were all immediately sent through the punishment cell and forced to sing the national anthem. Honestly, stuff like that breaks a person more than a beating. It's the mockery — being made to do things like that — that gets to you.'

The maximum term of placement in the punishment cell (SHIZO) is 15 days. However, once someone is sent there, a 'carousel' of violations begins — at some point, they stop even bringing the person to the disciplinary commission ('krestiny') and simply announce the next term. As a result, people end up spending months in SHIZO.

PKT – Cell-Type Premises. The main differences between PKT and SHIZO are the availability of bedding, the ability to make limited purchases in the prison shop (up to the amount of one basic unit per month), daily walks, and permission to keep personal belongings. The maximum term of confinement in PKT is six months.

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'In the PKT, you're just waiting to 'expire'. You're not allowed to speak to anyone, no books are given, the light is minimal. It's a coffin.'

The repressive system in PC-17 is designed to break a person — if not through physical torture, then through sleep deprivation, isolation, humiliation, and fear. One of the most common forms of torture is sleep deprivation. In both the DC and the CTP, the light is never turned off — neither during the day nor at night. Checks are conducted every 2–3 hours. Even if a person is not beaten, they are simply not allowed to sleep, and this, combined with the cold and the inability to sleep during the day, takes a severe toll.

“

'The conditions there differ in that you get daily walks, there's bedding at night, and you're allowed to buy items from the store — up to the amount of one basic unit per month.'

“

'When I was in the cell-type premises (CTP) during the winter, my hands were covered in burns because I would boil a mug of water and warm myself with it. I didn't even feel the burns — it was so cold my hands were frozen. Later, I had blisters all over — on my hands, on my chest.'

“

'Every 2–3 hours they woke us up. The light was never turned off. It disrupts melatonin production — your mental and psychological health just collapses.'

“

'During the day, one lamp stays on. At night — another, slightly dimmer. Your eyes never get a break.'



MEDICAL CARE

'There was this man, a truck driver, Valera — I don't remember his last name. He had a stroke once, a minor one. And then a second one happened right in front of me. He didn't recognize anyone — his face was completely distorted. But the doctors didn't believe he had a stroke, no matter what we said.'

This section of the investigation examines the impact of detention conditions in PC-17 on the physical and psychological well-being of prisoners. Particular attention is paid to the functioning of the so-called 'medical care' system within the facility, as well as the consequences faced by individuals held in the Disciplinary Cell, Cell-Type Premises, and those subjected to psychological pressure from the administration. The analysis highlights common violations in the provision of medical assistance and outlines the range of illnesses and disorders that develop as a result of prolonged isolation and continuous stress.

In all documented cases, former prisoners noted one common pattern: **they received no proper medical assistance in PC-17.** The healthcare system in the colony exists only on paper and in practice works against the prisoner. Medical staff do not provide treatment — instead, they serve the regime and become part of the repressive apparatus: they fail to record injuries, ignore symptoms of illness, and disregard complaints and requests for medical care.

“

'The paramedic saw my injuries and said: "You probably don't like OMON, do you?" [OMON — Belarusian riot police]. And recorded nothing.'

“

'The psychologist signed off on placing me in the punishment cell, despite my depression. It was a pure formality.'

Conditions that contribute to deteriorating health. Cold temperatures, lack of fresh air and sunlight, constant stress, and poor sanitary and hygiene conditions contribute to the development of chronic illnesses among prisoners. Combined, these factors violate their right to health care and lead to numerous physical and psychological problems they face while in the colony.

Denial of medical assistance. Even when a prisoner requests help, they are most often either denied care or prescribed outdated and ineffective medications as "treatment."

“

'Fever, blood pressure, heart issues — no one cares. They gave me a pill a few days later and that was it.'

“

'For two years, no one examined me, even though I kept complaining about lower back pain. I didn't even realize — I thought maybe it was from lifting something heavy. Turned out it was a kidney stone, five millimeters.'

Fake check-ups and “performing for the camera.” After the death of political prisoner Vitold Ashurak in 2021, according to interviewed inmates, medical staff at the facility began to stage superficial displays of concern for prisoners.

“

‘They started knocking on the hatch: “Any complaints?” And immediately shut it again — just so it’s on camera that they showed up.’

Blocking of medical parcels. Many prisoners noted that medical parcels from relatives — containing medications, vitamins, and hygiene products — never reached them.

“

‘They wouldn’t accept medications from the outside — they said, ‘We have our own.’ They gave out some strange pills from Barysau [a Belarusian pharmaceutical factory known for producing low-quality generic drugs].’

Health problems caused by psychosomatic stress. Many inmates, subjected to constant emotional pressure, describe experiencing panic attacks, spikes in blood pressure, heart and stomach issues, and severe headaches.

“

“I developed hypertension in the colony. My blood pressure keeps spiking. It’s all from the stress.”

“

“Psychosomatics are real. Headaches, insomnia, heartburn. But the doctor doesn’t care.”

LONG-TERM HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF IMPRISONMENT



Most political prisoners released from PC-17 face severe medical, psycho-emotional, and social consequences that persist for years, and not all have the resources necessary to address them.

Many interviewees reported such after-effects of imprisonment as insomnia, weakened immunity, deterioration of vision and hearing, high blood pressure, impaired cardiac and gastrointestinal function, depression, and post-traumatic disorders. Often, a person leaves not merely weakened, but with a disability.

Rapid weight loss and exhaustion. Most interviewees experienced weight loss of between 15 and 45 kilograms during their imprisonment. This was linked to poor nutrition, hard forced labor, dehydration, and constant stress.



'When I was released, I weighed 82 kilograms. I had lost 28 kilograms over two years.'



'After being in the DC, a person loses 8–10 kilograms, whether they want to or not. Because of the cold, you go to the toilet 10 times a day.'

Dental problems. Due to a lack of vitamins, low-calorie food, absence of treatment, and unsanitary conditions, prisoners lose their teeth en masse.



'... I would literally catch the doctors right at the checkpoint when they were coming to work, already begging: "I'm dying, my tooth hurts a lot." And still, they wouldn't let me in — they would send me to work. This was literally at 7 a.m. or 6 a.m., when it was still dark outside, and she tells me, right there in the darkness: "Open your mouth. Which tooth hurts?" I show her something, and she says: "Oh, that's just a molar coming in."'



'I lost almost all my teeth, and now I have periodontitis.'

Loss of vision and hearing. Impaired vision is one of the systemic consequences of isolation and lack of daylight.

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'I can't properly focus on objects farther than 8 meters. My eyesight deteriorated from constantly being in an enclosed space.'

“

'My hearing has deteriorated. It still hasn't recovered.'

Kidney and gastrointestinal problems. Systematic hypothermia, lack of medical examinations and treatment, and forced starvation lead to stomach and kidney issues.

“

'I was tormented by heartburn. I asked for a pill — they didn't believe me. I got 5 days in the DC for 'walking after lights-out.''

Musculoskeletal disorders. Prisoners develop joint and bone problems, especially after being held in the DC and CTP, as well as skin diseases.

“

'I couldn't run properly after the CTP. My knees hurt, my vision worsened, everything was trembling inside.'

“

'My muscles, bones, and ligaments became weak. Various ailments started appearing all over my body.'

Many prisoners sustain injuries in the PC; however, even in such cases, they receive no treatment, and no rehabilitation is provided after injuries.

“

'The head of the medical service... when I said that I needed an MRI because my leg hurt, they told me that everything was fine, that I had just strained a muscle, that I should take painkillers for a couple of days and that would be it. But in reality — surgery, six months without sports, a week of just lying down, and another month and a half of bed rest.'

“

'My thumbs stopped functioning after being in handcuffs — the tendons were damaged.'

Psyche: anxiety, PTSD, fear. Many former prisoners describe symptoms of PTSD, including insomnia, irritability, fear of sounds, and paranoia. The stress accumulated over the years and does not go away after release.

“

'Every morning feels like you're in the DC — fear, trembling. I live in a constant state of expecting them to come for me.'

“

'After the DC, you can't sleep normally. Even after being released, you sleep as if you were at war.'



'The psychologist advised: "Forget it, or you'll mess things up. But how can you forget if inside you're still there? "



'You sleep as if you were at war. Even at home, after being released, you can't fall asleep normally.'

Being held in PC-17 has severe, often irreversible consequences for prisoners' physical and mental health. Psychologists call this a 'slow violence' trauma — when psychological and physical injuries together gradually destroy a person's health. The person does not scream from pain, but their body is being destroyed: the nervous system, memory, and organs are damaged, and mental health suffers.

Victim	Diagnoses / Symptoms	Conditions of Detention and Unlawful Actions by Staff	Quote
Witness No. 1	Hallucinations, hair loss, and hearing loss.	Cold, manipulation with food, arbitrary sanctions.	'A lawyer was like a torch against wolves — if a lawyer comes to you once a month, they simply won't tear you to pieces alive.'
Witness No. 2	Complete loss of teeth, deterioration of vision and hearing, osteochondrosis, sinusitis.	Basement, DC, cold, mattresses in netting, strip searches.	'My teeth crumbled completely. Now I'm actively getting treatment.'
Witness No. 3	PTSD, deteriorating vision, anxiety.	DC, CTP, solitary confinement, cold drafts, light 24/7.	'I sleep in a T-shirt, socks, and a jacket on the bare board. The draft goes right through me.'
Witness No. 4	Chronic cough, kidney pain, destroyed joints, loss of hearing and vision.	DC, CTP, forced labor, psychological pressure.	'My cough doesn't go away. Sometimes I cough like General Grievous from Star Wars.'

Table 2. Correlation Between Prisoners' Health Conditions and the Conditions of Detention and Ill-Treatment by Colony Staff

Witness No. 5	Problems with blood pressure, shoulder, panic attacks, hallucinations.	DC, cold, no glasses, insomnia.	'After 10 days in solitary confinement, I started having auditory and visual hallucinations. I even started getting a kick out of them.'
Witness No. 6	Kidney injuries, hand trauma, stage II hypertension, exhaustion.	DC, cold, forced labor.	'I have stage II hypertension — in cold and high-pressure conditions, this is dangerous.'
Witness No. 7	Heart pain, high blood pressure, panic, hypertension.	DC, torture by cold, provocations.	'They labeled me a "troublemaker," deprived me of everything — parcels, visits, letters.'
Witness No. 8	Kidney stones, 28 kg weight loss, exhaustion and physical injuries	Transfers, DC, drafts.	'I fell. Surgery. Half a year without sports.'
Witness No. 9	Injuries after vaccination, weakness, exhaustion.	Industrial zone, "study," DC, exhausting work.	'It's almost impossible to get into the medical unit. Release from the industrial zone is rare.'
Witness No. 10	Sleep problems, psycho-emotional exhaustion.	Temporary detention facility, colony, DC, lighting 24/7, cold.	'One hundred percent, my nerves were damaged... Mostly the nerves.'
Witness No. 11	Kidney injuries, hematomas, stage II hypertension, hand trauma.	DC, forced labor, cold, isolation.	'The paramedic saw my bruises and said: "You probably don't like the OMON?" — and didn't record anything.'

Witness No. 12	Hypertension, hernia, digestive issues, anxiety.	Post-prison supervision, ideological pressure, social isolation.	'Hypertension appeared in 2022. My blood pressure spikes. I never had it before. It's all from nerves.'
Witness No. 13	Numbness in hands from handcuffs, sleep disturbances, chronic stress.	Lighting 24/7, cold drafts, cold, psychological pressure.	'Even after release, I feel like I'm still there — in captivity and danger. And I don't know how to live further.'
Witness No. 14	Physical exhaustion, insomnia, heartburn, headache, deprivation.	Transfers, travel in handcuffs, DC for fabricated reasons, severe food shortage.	'They gave us water only after 7–8 hours. Before that — not a single sip.'
Witness No. 15	Panic attacks, insomnia, numbness in hands, hypothermia.	Cold cell without sleep, drafts, aggression, torture in the 'swallow' position.	'After 10 days, you start losing your grip on reality. The light was never turned off.'

DEATHS IN THE COLONY



According to the calculations of one of the interviewees, during his time in the colony, up to 8 people died each year. Naturally, the causes of death were never disclosed to the prisoners.

“

'But there were cases when the special vehicle didn't arrive in time. They would let people into the unit, they had already gone to bed. In the foyer, there's a body lying in a bag. And then, sometime during the night, this vehicle arrives, they carry it down, the feet dragging along the steps. All of this is horrifying.'

“

'Many different people die. I don't know why, but often.'

“

'A man in the neighboring unit died of a heart attack. He had only a few months left until release. He just lay down, collapsed among the others, and died because no one provided any help. The medical staff member appeared only after the ambulance arrived.'



THE DEATH OF VITOLD ASHURAK

“

'In a closed system like a penal colony, there are no deaths in which no one is to blame. And it is obvious that the Investigative Committee's excuses for why he was not given the additional medical assistance he needed — which was limited to simply taping up a cut eyebrow — are absolutely insufficient. In a normal system, this would most likely be grounds for a criminal case, at least for negligence, if not for murder. No one knows how Vitold ended up in the condition in which he was seen in the video.'

One of the most high-profile deaths in PC-17 was the death of civil activist from Berezovka, Vitold Ashurak, which became known on May 21, 2021. Many independent media outlets reported on the tragic incident³⁴.

On April 22, 2021, after his appeal against the verdict was rejected, Vitold Ashurak was transferred to Penal Colony No. 17 in Shklov to serve his sentence.

After arriving at PC-17, Vitold Ashurak was never assigned to any of the colony's units — he spent all his days there in isolation, first in quarantine and then in the DC. Former prisoners of the same colony told the media that Vitold might have been beaten and abused there³⁵.

Almost immediately after the incident, the investigative authorities released a video showing a man in a prisoner's uniform (presumably Ashurak) first falling and hitting his head while trying to enter the toilet; then his head is bandaged, and later he falls again.

[34] <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=273305&lang=ru>
[35] <https://svaboda.org/a/32145796.html>



Photo: Screenshot from the announcement of the Investigative Committee of the Mahilou Region, published on the website of the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus³⁶.

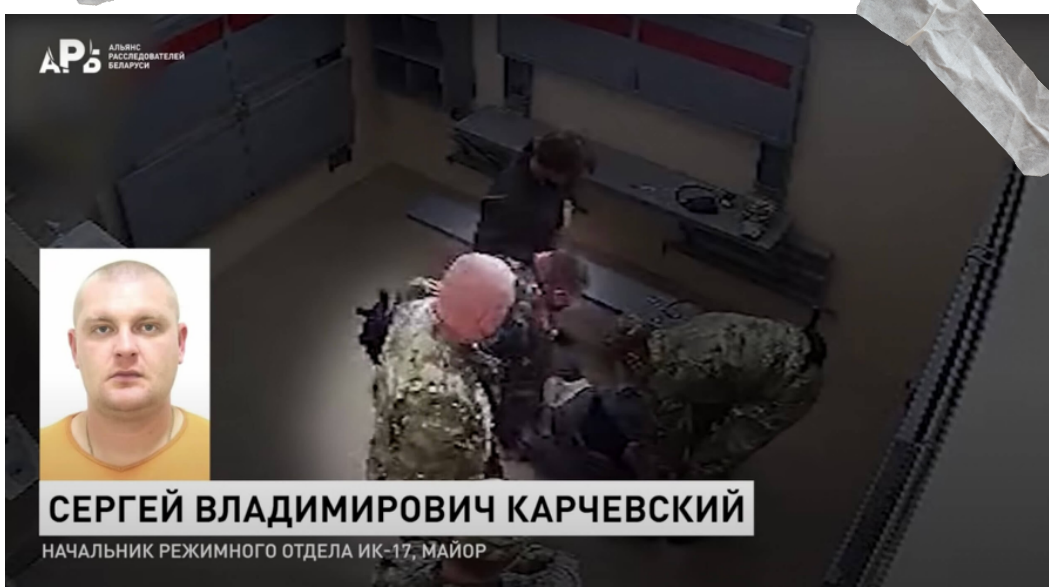


Photo: Screenshot from a video — officers are next to the prisoner. In the photo: Sjarhei Karcheuskii, Head of the Regime Department of PC-17³⁷.

In the above-mentioned photos and videos, you can see the Head of the Regime Department of PC-17, **Sjarhei Karcheuskii**. He directs the actions of other staff members. According to testimonies from former PC-17 prisoners, he personally engages in beatings and other forms of violence in the colony.

At the same time, the authorities claimed that Ashurak was found in his cell unconscious after the second fall; medical staff from the colony and emergency medical services were called to assist him, but despite resuscitation efforts, the prisoner could not be saved. According to colony staff, *'the convict, having broken his head, did not complain about his health condition, refused help and hospitalization.'*

Through the published video and comments, the regime attempted to present to the public the version that they had no involvement in Ashurak's death and that his death was in no way caused by their actions.

[36] <https://sk.gov.by/ru/news-usk-mogilev-ru/view/sledovateli-ustanavlivajut-obstoitelstva-smerti-osuzhdennogo-v-kolonii-v-shklove-10022/>

[37] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5M1yCVAYks>

The authors of this investigation possess unique information obtained from prisoners of PC-17 who served their sentences there during the period of Vitold Ashurak's death. Below are their testimonies regarding the causes of his death and the presumed perpetrators of the incident.

According to testimonies from people who met Vitold Ashurak during the transfer, biased treatment toward him began already at that stage. The prisoners traveled in an overcrowded train carriage for more than a day, hungry, without dry rations, with handcuffs on their wrists, without sleep or rest.

“

'There was little time. The transfer from Hrodna to Mahiliou was hard because it took more than a day in handcuffs.'

(From a letter by Vitold Ashurak)

“

'... there was 20 people where only six were supposed to be. We had to somehow lie on top of each other, all in handcuffs. That's where I met Vitold Ashurak. I realized he was a man with inner strength — he wasn't afraid of them, he kept speaking out. He engaged in dialogue with the staff: 'What are you doing? You can see everything yourselves.' He explained things to them in an informed and accessible way. In reality, all he got in return was aggression — the staff constantly saying: 'Shut up, or it will get worse.'

Despite the rude reactions, Vitold continued talking to the escorts and expressing his views on what was happening. No arguments from the other transferred prisoners could persuade him otherwise.

“

'And he told me: "Guys, everyone has their own purpose. You didn't pass by — you did your part, fulfilled your mission, and nothing depends on you anymore. But I am still doing what I'm doing, I will still play a role in this story." It was as if he wanted to achieve something greater.'

As is known, Vitold was placed directly into the DC from quarantine.

“

'Rumors began to spread... Prisoners were saying that around May 15, his belongings were to be moved to the fifth unit — the one with low social status (LSS). When I found out about all this... I don't even want to remember, it's horrifying. The staff said to put his things separately from everyone else's, there, with the low social status.'

Prisoners believe that this information reached Vitold while he was in the DC (SHIZO). It is possible that this was the reason he did not want to leave the DC, and for this he was subjected to brutal beatings there.

“

'Because if you agree to this nonsense even once — by the rules of the prison, the colony ... If you put your belongings there yourself, voluntarily sat down, lay down, greeted someone with low status, you immediately become an outcast, you immediately turn into low social status. When I found out, I just couldn't understand how this could be. What kind of nonsense is this, what kind of measures, and how can the staff continue to support this.'

Several more testimonies about the beatings of Vitold in the DC and the direct perpetrators of the torture:

“

'Mostly, it all came through whispers, rumors, that Vitold openly expressed his opinion about the current government and the administration, for which he was repeatedly placed in the DC. At that time, no other methods were used — only physical force. They probably didn't take into account that when a person spends a long time in the DC, the body becomes weaker, and most likely they also didn't take into account the number of those beatings.'

“

*'I was summoned to the office of the Head of the Operations Department, Major **Aliaksandr Siarheevich Melnikau**, where I heard a remarkable phrase: "Do you understand? No one killed Vitold! You see, it just happened." To which I replied: "You know, in my unit there are a lot of people under Article 139 for murder, and they all say they didn't mean to kill — it just happened. But they got 15, 20 years for that." Well, after that, I ended up in the DC again.'*

“

*'Rumors were going around from the guys that the operative officer with **Karcheuski**, the Head of the Regime Department, was beating people. I didn't look into it too much because it was very dangerous and it's unclear how it all ended; when a person starts taking an interest in such things, they very quickly get on the radar, so these were just the rumors we heard.'*

“

*'It was the Head of the Regime Department, directly involved in the murder — that's **Karcheuski**.'*

“

*'Then senior operative **Karcheuski** joined in. He is the most likely killer of Vitold Ashurak. A huge bald guy. There were two such thugs there — one's surname is **Maskaliou**. He is the Deputy Head for Regime and Operations. If you ask any prisoner, everyone will confirm that if you end up in the DC, there is always **Karcheuski**, who will beat you. The two probable killers are **Maskaliou**, because he is also involved in physical violence. The two of them are big guys. So it's not some skinny type — both of them are like two bulls. These two thugs are the ones engaged in physical violence there.'*

According to former prisoners, there are also direct eyewitnesses to Ashurak's beatings. However, for security reasons, the authors do not provide detailed information about these individuals.

“

"We all heard how this process was happening, in the computer class, right next to us there were loud screams. From the neighboring cell of the DC, you could also hear everything clearly."

The version of how the facts were fabricated by the institution's staff is also voiced by former prisoners.

“

'On that video with Ashurak that was published — it wasn't Ashurak... according to people familiar with the situation, the person filmed in the video was from a neighboring unit, from behind his silhouette looked like Ashurak — by his haircut, by everything. I was told that the person who was filmed in the video told some people that it was him, and he was in the unit next to ours... he was in the 6th unit. This happened in the evening. Immediately, there was a lot of commotion in the headquarters. It's unclear whether he was killed in the DC or in some blind spot in the headquarters. Because in the DC there are cameras everywhere. They don't beat people on camera, because DEP staff who are not stationed in the colony may have access to the footage. They try to do it in blind spots. The only blind spot in the DC is the search room, where they give you the DC uniform and then take you to the cell.'

According to prisoners, after Vitold's death, many staff members rushed to one of the “monkey cages” (a holding cell in the DC). All activists who were in the headquarters at that moment were also removed — which was unusual. The building was completely cleared of prisoners of any category. As one prisoner assumes, this was on the day Vitold died. And the incident most likely took place in the headquarters. (As political prisoners said, at first, when the first of them appeared in the colony, they were taken for beatings to the headquarters, not to the DC, precisely because there are no cameras there.)

According to other prisoners, Vitold's skull was crushed — either from a strong blow against the wall, or from severe beatings with batons, including blows to the head.

Prisoners' assumptions about the head injury are also supported by the testimony of Vitold Ashurak's brother:

“

'... they rolled him out on a gurney. And then I was shocked. You've probably seen his photos online? There was a layer of bandages from top to bottom. I was shocked. I understand that they might have dropped the body, but I'm not a doctor, and I understand that even if you drop a body, why would you re-bandage it? There would be no blood — he was dead. That's how they returned him to us.'

Vitold's body was returned to his relatives almost completely bandaged, with the head wrapped with particular thoroughness. Even at first glance, it was clear that Vitold's nose was broken, his eyes had sunken, and he was severely emaciated (having lost about 20 kilograms).

“

'When my mother stepped away to speak with Andrei, I approached Vitold: his bandage was such that only the tip of his nose was sticking out, and the bandage was wrapped to a thickness of about 7 millimeters. It was literally like a helmet.'

“

'My mother said: "God, what is left of him? This is a schoolboy, not a man. Very thin. I can't say exactly if it's 15, 20, or 22.5 kilograms, but he is very thin. He lost 15–20 kilograms. If a person is not fed, the body becomes emaciated."

The brother points out several inconsistencies between the official version and the documents and photos he was able to see from the investigator when he collected Vitold's body.

“

'These photos were definitely not taken in the DC, not on the floor there, because there's no tiling. The photos are black-and-white. He is lying on a grey floor. This is either, as was mentioned in the film, an ambulance or something else, but it's not a DC cell. He is bare-chested and already has his head bandaged, but the head is not fully wrapped up to the eyes — only the very top is bandaged. Most likely, the head was fully wrapped in the morgue. I don't know for what reason. Yes, his nose was broken. Yes, his eyes had sunken in. Why were his eyes sunken — from a blow or something else? Could it have been from a craniotomy?'

Before the funeral, Vitold Ashurak's relatives and friends showed his body to an independent forensic expert, who examined it in the presence of four people. The relatives also took photos of the body from different angles and recorded a video of the examination. The expert understood that without a thorough study of the body and the results of the histology, it was impossible to make definitive conclusions about the cause of death, so he was very cautious in his statements.

“

*'And the expert said: "As a relative, you should be provided with the histology report. I would like to see it. Then I will understand what they are hiding. As a specialist, I will be able to determine the real cause. I do not see a single blow that caused death. The entire head was not unwrapped, not unbandaged!" He felt it and said: "I don't think there are multiple fractures there. But let's not unwrap it, because we have little time, and I'm afraid we won't be able to wrap it back properly so that everything remains unnoticed.' Regarding all the injuries on the body — the bruises, the cuts on the left leg that hadn't been there before and had already been stitched — he said: **'Most likely, this was a combination of measures that made survival impossible. This includes multiple beatings, torture by sleep deprivation, and starvation, which led to death. ...** Most likely, it was all of this combined that led to death, but certainly not cardiac arrest just like that. Cardiac arrest is a consequence, not a cause.'*

A close friend of Vitold, after watching the video, also made critical remarks regarding the reality of the events the official side was trying to present.

“

'The forensic expert palpated and said that there were no bone fractures — all the bones were intact. He said they tried to unwind the bandage on the head, lifted it slightly. Andrei said that it was terrible — the nose was practically dangling on the skin.'

“

'... even under the makeup, it was visible that his face was completely purple. The body was jaundiced, like that of a deceased person, with livor mortis spots. I don't think that after the first fall, when he hit the pipe, there were just abrasions on his beard, and when they lifted the bandage, Andrei said that his eyebrow was split. But that wouldn't make the face turn purple... the cause of death has not been determined. I noticed that in the second-to-last episode, Vitold falls with his head to the left, starts to stretch out his leg, and the video cuts off. He just barely twitches his leg. I tried to imagine that my hands were in handcuffs, I fall on my side, and the only way to get up is to stretch out the leg, use it as leverage, roll over onto the stomach, push up with the hands, and only then stand up... I immediately said that I had doubts that Vitold actually died on the 21st. At the very least, it must have been on the 20th, because there were already signs of postmortem changes on his face.'

“

"The forensic expert who also additionally reviewed this video expressed doubts, noting that in the final frames, the face already appeared blue. He said that, in theory, signs of postmortem decomposition should not appear so quickly."

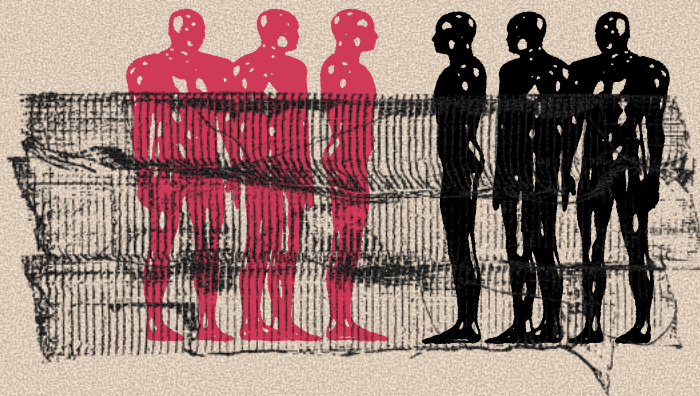
A criminal case into the death of Vitold Ashurak was never opened. His relatives were not given access to the results of the official forensic examination or the case review materials³⁸. The Investigative Committee stopped responding to the family's requests.

The regime is deliberately concealing both from the public and from the relatives even the official cause of death and the circumstances of Vitold Ashurak's death, despite the fact that, under the law, the family has the right to review the case materials regarding his death.

[38] <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/31-03-2022-prichiny-smerti-vitolda-ashurka-zaklyucheniya-nezavisimyh-ekspertov>

COLONY STAFF

'Traps at every step. They mock you, they enjoy it — most of the staff are outright sadists.'



All officials of the Department for the Execution of Punishments (DEP) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs serving in PC-17 should be regarded as staff members of this correctional facility. The colony staff operate within a hierarchy, with administrative subordination of lower-ranking officers to higher-ranking ones. Accordingly, representatives of the lower ranks cannot carry out certain actions without the order or knowledge of their superiors. All officials of the colony are obliged to comply with the Penal Enforcement Code (PEC) and other legislation of the Republic of Belarus, adhere to professional ethics, and follow moral and ethical norms. Any violation of these obligations entails criminal or disciplinary liability.

The hierarchy of officials in the colony indicates strict subordination of all administration staff to the senior officials, including the head of the colony and his deputies. Any violations of prisoners' rights — beatings, the deliberate creation of inhumane conditions of serving a sentence, arbitrary application of sanctions, and persecution of political prisoners — are committed on the direct orders of, or with the knowledge of, the colony's leadership.

An analysis of the conducted interviews and information from open sources by the authors of the investigation has documented numerous cases of criminal, inhumane, unprofessional, and unethical acts committed by PC-17 officials, primarily against political prisoners, but also against all prisoners in general.

“

*'The higher the rank of an officer, the more vile things he did to political prisoners. Take **Semionau** — he's a major — he behaved in the most despicable way compared to the unit heads with the rank of lieutenant or so... this is connected to some sort of bloody initiation they have, but the system works exactly like this: the higher the person's rank, the more crimes he committed.'*

“

*'The real sadists are mostly from the SOR Department. **Semionau... Udodau, Halinouski, Kamarou** — these are the four worst sadists.'*

“

*'... **Maskaliou** is the main one giving orders for the use of physical violence. **Karcheuski** is more of an enforcer. They are also assisted by ordinary SOR officers — **Prokharau**, for example. There was also **Kravchanka**, a regime officer, who was present during the beatings.'*

“

*'... there are about four people who enjoy these beatings — **Karcheuski, Kravchanka**, his subordinate who just works in the regime department, and possibly **Riashchykau**, the deputy head for operations.'*

HEAD OF THE PENAL COLONY AND HIS DEPUTIES



Full name: Aliaksandr Uladzimiravich
Karnienka

Position: Head of Penal Colony No. 17

Date of birth: 9 January 1979

Aliaksandr Karnienka, as the highest-ranking official of the colony, is responsible for torture and ill-treatment in the penitentiary facility under his command, psychological pressure on political prisoners, holding them in inhumane conditions, and failing to fulfill his duties to ensure the protection of prisoners' lives and health.

In execution of the orders of the DEP of the Ministry of Internal Affairs leadership and other senior officials of the regime, he has organized and continues to enforce a harsh, discriminatory regime of detention for political prisoners in the colony under his control. **Karnienka** has been included in the sanctions lists of several countries³⁹.

“

*'And the two of them (with **Melnikau**) make the main decisions on transferring people to prison regime, assigning them to "low status," and imposing punishments.'*

“

'As for the head — what can I say, he has a good memory, but he's a complete scoundrel, a convinced scoundrel. About all political prisoners, he even once said in a conversation: 'How I hate you.'

“

'The head of the colony hit one prisoner a couple of times because the latter supposedly knew where he lived, that he had a dog and children...'

[39] <https://dilisense.com/en/search/Alexander%20Kornienko>



Full name: Aliaksei Hryhoryevich Maskaliou

Position: Deputy Head of the Penal Colony for Regime and Operations

Date of birth: 30 May 1980

Maskaliou, as a representative of the colony administration, does not fulfill his direct duties in accordance with the law. In addition, **Maskaliou** is directly involved in the organization and use of torture against prisoners and in creating cruel and inhumane conditions for political prisoners to serve their sentences.



*'... physical violence is also carried out by the Deputy Head of the Penal Colony for Regime and Operations, **Maskaliou**...'*



*'Regime and operations officers are generally fond of beating people, like **Karcheuski**, because physically they are almost two meters tall, weigh around 100–120 kilograms, and are very confident in their own strength and ability to exert force — they are outright sadists.'*



Full name: Siarhei Uladzimiravich Karcheuski

Position: Head of the Regime Department

Date of birth: 15 June 1983

The Head of the Regime Department of PC-17, Siarhei Karcheuski, is responsible for torture and ill-treatment in PC-17, as well as for violence and psychological pressure on political prisoners.

Immediately after the death of Vitold Ashurak, he suddenly went on a month-long vacation. According to prisoners, it was he who inflicted the injuries that killed Vitold. In the office of the Regime Department, where there are no cameras, he systematically uses physical violence against prisoners. He has been included in personal sanctions lists by several countries^{40,41}.

[40] <https://luka.zone/person/fb61762d-2878-478a-ab23-4e3987309f8e>

[41] <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2024/04/sanctions-in-response-to-ongoing-human-rights-violations-in-belarus.html>; <https://gels-avours.dgtresor.gouv.fr/Gels/RegistreDetail?idRegistre=6853>

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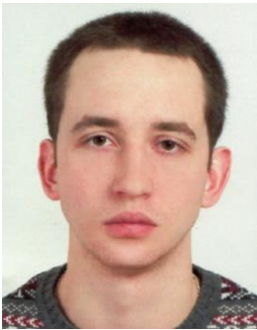
'They say Karcheuski either drove Vitold to his death or killed him in the DC.'

“

'He did a lot of very, very bad things. I know for sure he beat people in the "stretch" position — that's his signature.'

“

*'I know for certain that one of those who beat Vitold was **Karcheuski**, because he's the kind who likes to use physical force.'*



Full name: Aliaksandr Siarheevich Melnikau

Position: Head of the Operations Department

Date of birth: 27 August 1992

As Head of the Operations Department of PC-17, **Aliaksandr Melnikau** is responsible for torture and psychological pressure on political prisoners, both from the colony staff and from other prisoners.

“

'He was the one running the whole operation. He decided who should be pressured and who should not...'

“

'He personally threatened me with filing a report so that I would sign a cooperation agreement with the administration, to inform on others. And towards the end of my time in the DC, he came and said that if I told anyone outside what was happening in the Shklov colony, he would supposedly publish it all.'

OPERATIVE OFFICERS

Operative officers of PC-17, in accordance with the law, are supposed to carry out operative-search measures inside the correctional facility, suppress crimes and violations of the internal regulations committed by prisoners. Instead of fulfilling their functions, they engage in torture and cruel, degrading treatment of prisoners, including applying psychological pressure on political prisoners. The employees named below participate in this process.

“

‘...there are few operatives there. Only five for the entire colony, and they are also the main collectors of denunciations. Each operative has about a hundred informants... There were operative officers who took their own initiative somewhere.’

“

‘We’ll call them punitive enforcers because of their biased attitude – they took letters and threw them away, somewhere they falsified reports, somewhere they recommended to the work supervisor to assign the most physically demanding jobs, and sent people to the most exhausting work under the pretext of extremism.’

“

*‘A guy was being transferred to quarantine... they beat him with a water pipe, this was done by **Melnikau**, and the operative department deals with all such beatings.’*



Full name: Prudkouski Maksim Alehavich

Position: Operative Department Officer

Date of birth: 1986-02-10

“

‘...He would not allow us to read letters; he destroyed them in our presence. He personally summoned me for registered letters. He threatened me with Article 411, forced me to sign for receiving these letters, and then, without reading them, threw them into the trash.’



Full name: Riashchykau Artur Uladzimiravich

Position: Operative Department Officer

Date of birth: 1987-10-21



'He pits us against each other and incites prisoners to inform on one another. There was a situation: if you don't tell me anything, I will write a report on you saying that you swore at me using obscene and offensive language.'



'When registered letters arrived, he demonstratively read them and that was it – you're not allowed to have this letter. You're not allowed to have postcards, you're not allowed to have anything.'

DUTY ASSISTANTS TO THE HEAD OF THE COLONY

According to the law, DAHCs play an important role in the system of internal control in the colony: they oversee general order, monitor prisoners' behavior, and ensure compliance with the correctional facility regime. At the same time, in PC-17, DAHCs act as an instrument of repression and persecution against political prisoners – arbitrarily imposing disciplinary penalties on fabricated grounds, restricting correspondence, banning visits and parcels, and using physical violence against prisoners.



Full name: Semionau Aliaksei Uladzimiravich

Position: Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony

Date of birth: 1982-07-06

“

‘...a man who was out of his mind, even by the standards of the administration itself – they later demoted him to an ordinary DAHC... He felt like such a ruler; he wanted to see despair in people’s eyes, he didn’t care whom to beat.’

“

*‘I remembered one of the idiots who could also beat people – **Semionau**.’*

“

‘Then the worst thing – he took part in my attempted humiliation when the toilet was completely smeared with excrement, and I was told to clean it.’



Full name: Udodau Dzmitry Mikhailavich

Position: Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony

Date of birth: 1985-08-16

“

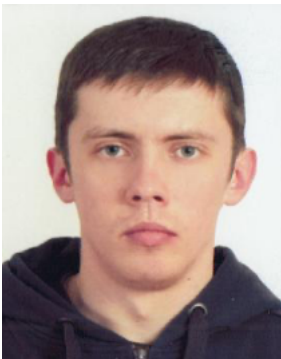
*‘Major **Udodau** was the chief executioner and a typical schizophrenic with sadistic tendencies... In the corridor he would talk to you, no one around, no cameras anywhere – then suddenly check your chest and land a punch or two to the kidneys.’*

“

‘He draws up documents en masse, even from a distance, and even other administration staff commented about him: “Every family has its Udod.”’

“

*‘**Udodau** is from Mahiliou, he said: “How I hate you.” Even as late as 2022, they were still asking all of us: “How much were you paid?”’*



Full name: Prokharau Pavel Mikalaevich

Position: Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony

Date of birth: 1993-10-10

“

*'Prokharau would commit these abuses simply for his own amusement; it gave him pleasure. "I'll remember you," – that's what he would say, laughing... **Prakharau** showed initiative.'*

“

'He also drew up documents on political prisoners.'



Full name: Halinouski Aliaksandr Henadzievich

Position: Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony

Date of birth: 1976-10-17

“

'When I was in the DC for the first time, he gave me a violation for supposedly not greeting him and not giving him my report, even though I always greeted him and reported... He constantly carried out orders – if they told him to issue a violation, he would go and make one up against me.'



Full name: Ageyeu Pavel Mikalaevich

Position: Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony

Date of birth: 1985-07-03

“

*'The first violation was issued by **Ageyeu** for not greeting him. An entire unit of seventy people walked past him without greeting, but he wrote the report on me personally. This happened after I told the unit that I was not afraid of the regime.'*

“

*'**Ageyeu Pavel Mikalaevich** drew up reports on political prisoners.'*



Full name: Kamarou Dzianis Aliaksandravich

Position: Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony

Date of birth: 1984-03-22



'He also draws up reports and verbally humiliates prisoners, not only political ones.'



Full name: Mashchenok Aleh Mikhailavich

Position: Duty Assistant to the Head of the Colony

Date of birth: 1981-01-20



'I saw him more often when I was in the CTP and the DC. He would come in and just hand me a violation for no clear reason, that's all.'



'He also, in my presence, drew up documents on political prisoners for fabricated violations.'

OTHER STAFF



'By the way, the staff turnover there is very high; they are constantly being replaced. They themselves run away from there because it is impossible to work in such a system.'



Full name: Dobradzerevets Natallia Ivanavna

Position: Head of the Medical Unit

Date of birth: 1981-04-19

Natallia Dobradzerevets, being the Head of the Medical Unit of Penal Colony No. 17 and directly subordinate to the Head of the Colony Aliaksandr Karnienka, deliberately neglects her official duties to ensure the protection of the life and health of prisoners and to provide them with effective and timely medical care. She contributes to the creation of a harsh discriminatory detention regime for political prisoners, which has serious consequences for their health.

Thus, with the approval of the colony's medical unit, political prisoner Vitold Ashurak was held in the DC for an extended period, in inhumane conditions, in a painful state that clearly precluded holding him in isolation. Contrary to the requirements of departmental regulations, **Natallia Dobradzerevets** and the staff of the medical unit under her command grossly ignored the fact that Ashurak was in the DC in an obviously unhealthy condition, which led to his death.

The deliberate creation of inhumane conditions of detention for political prisoner Vitold Ashurak, combined with the failure to provide him with necessary medical assistance after torture, makes it possible to regard the Head of the Medical Unit of Penal Colony No. 17, **Natallia Dobradzerevets**, as a person responsible for cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment amounting to torture, which resulted in the prisoner's death.



*'She treats her duties very poorly;
she doesn't provide any treatment at all.'*



*'A woman became the head of the medical
unit there. You will not receive proper medical
assistance.'*



*'But when I said that I needed an MRI because my leg hurt, they told me that
everything was fine, that I would just take painkillers for a couple of days and that
would be it. In fact – I needed surgery.'*



Full name: Halanou Ivan Andreievich

Position: Officer of the Security and Operational Regime

Department

Date of birth: 1996-08-15

This officer exceeds his official authority, including by unjustifiably using physical force against prisoners.

“

*'When they search me and take away my belongings again, one SOR officer starts picking on me – his name is **Halanou**. He is a well-known security officer there because he likes, during searches – and in the pre-trial detention center in general – to make everyone do the splits. He has become a specialist in forced splits.'*



Full name: Kravchanka Vitali Anatolievich

Position: Officer of the Security and Operational Regime

Department

Date of birth: 1995-06-25

This officer violates the law in the performance of his official duties, participates in unlawful actions, and takes part in the persecution of political prisoners together with other staff members.

“

*'**Kravchanka** – we called him “the dog”... he and **Karcheuski** liked to walk around with a sledgehammer, liked to break lockers or something else, break benches. Cut something up, cut the pockets off a uniform, cut something else... turn over bedside tables.'*



Full name: Drazdou Mikalai Iurievich
Position: Presumably Head of a Prison Unit
Date of birth: 1992-02-07

Mikalai Drazdou, together with other staff members, took part in unlawful actions aimed at persecuting prisoners and maintaining an informal caste hierarchy among them.



'He participated in the process of turning one of the prisoners into a low social status inmate.'



Full name: Rodichkin Aliaksandr Alehovich
Position: Warrant Officer of the Internal Service
Date of birth: 1978-12-11

This officer directly participates in the persecution of political prisoners, drafting arbitrary reports that serve as a basis for falsifying disciplinary penalties.



"He's kind of an alcoholic, around 45, closer to 50 years old. He's of a slender build.

Rodychkin – his nickname there was 'Rodja'.
He wrote in the report that I openly refused to clean."



'And once he gave me a violation completely out of nowhere, and even later told me himself that he could give me a violation for being unshaven or for anything at all. And then one day, he just opens the door for me at lunchtime and says, "Why aren't you greeting me?" – and that's it, a violation.'

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the interviews with former prisoners who served their sentences in Penal Colony No. 17 in Shklov, the following conclusions can be drawn.

The conditions of detention in the penal colony, especially in the disciplinary cells (DC) and cell-type premises (CTP), violate international standards, in particular those established by **the Nelson Mandela Rules** (the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners).

The main violations include:

● **Torture, cruel and inhuman conditions of detention:**

regular beatings and humiliation, cold, unsanitary conditions, physical and psychological violence in the DC and CTP, as well as round-the-clock lighting. Such practices contradict the principles enshrined in the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

● **Inadequate medical care:** access to medical assistance is limited, the quality of treatment is unsatisfactory, and medical personnel often ignore prisoners' health complaints, leading to permanent health damage and even deaths among prisoners.

● **Improper nutrition:** the diet does not meet the minimum standards of caloric intake and balance, often resulting in deterioration of prisoners' health.

● **Exploitation of prison labour:** the colony practices forced labour without proper pay and without compliance with occupational safety standards, especially in harmful and dangerous industries. Refusal to work is punished with disciplinary measures, including placement in the DC. This violates provisions of international instruments prohibiting forced labour and contains elements of modern forms of slavery (ILO Convention No. 29 and other international treaties). There are no social guarantees for prisoners in the event of workplace injuries in the colony.



● **Demonization of political prisoners:**

the administration shapes the image of those convicted on political grounds as a source of repression and problems for other prisoners, thereby provoking isolation and hostility toward political prisoners from other inmates. Holding political prisoners in such conditions is regarded as a discriminatory and punitive measure against opponents of the authorities.

● **Manipulation by the administration:** in PC-17, there is a system of informants and provocateurs that facilitates the fabrication of violations and increases control. This creates constant tension and suppression of individuality, maintaining an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among prisoners.

● **Use of the informal prison hierarchy:** the colony has a system of castes (or statuses) typical of prison subculture, which is tacitly encouraged by the staff themselves. This hierarchy serves the administration as a convenient tool for suppressing dissent, maintaining a controlled environment, and exerting additional pressure on political prisoners. The use of criminal subculture concepts in the official penitentiary system violates the principles of legality, non-discrimination, and respect for human dignity.

Particular attention should be paid to the death of political prisoner Vitold Ashurak. Contrary to the regime's position, there are grounds to assert that by keeping Ashurak in the DC for an extended period, the colony administration deliberately subjected him to severe physical and mental suffering, which, under international law, in itself may amount to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

The authors of this investigation believe that Vitold Ashurak died as a result of torture, cruel conditions of detention, and the denial of medical care.

It should be noted that the death of Vitold Ashurak is not an isolated case. The Belarusian regime conceals the circumstances of other killings and mass torture following the events of August 2020⁴². All such cases require thorough and impartial investigation and the fair prosecution of those responsible for the deaths and acts of torture.

[42] https://login.info/laravel-filemanager/files/shares/political_murder_Belarus%5Blogin.info%5D.pdf

The administrative staff of the penal colony – from the facility's leadership to rank-and-file guards – plays a key role in operating the repressive mechanism directed against prisoners. Under the pretext of enforcing regime requirements, staff members systematically commit actions that violate both Belarusian legislation and international standards for the treatment of prisoners. These practices include regular physical and psychological violence aimed at breaking the will, demoralizing, and coercing prisoners into submission. The actions described bear the hallmarks of crimes under both national and international law.

The facts presented in this investigation indicate systemic violations in Penal Colony No. 17 and highlight the urgent need for international response, access for independent observers, and bringing detention conditions into compliance with the state's international human rights obligations, including the prohibition of torture, discrimination, and forced labour.

**THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE**

**FOR INVESTIGATION OF
TORTURE IN BELARUS**

