

ANALYTICAL REVIEW

THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE

FOR INVESTIGATION OF
TORTURE IN BELARUS

THE EXILED

Pardon and forced expulsion of political prisoners from Belarus:
legal assessment and consequences



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INTRODUCTION

This document examines one of the most complex and paradoxical features of the institution of pardon in Belarus – forced expulsion from the country, whereby an act meant to demonstrate the state's humanity in fact becomes the starting point for new violations.

In recent years, Belarusian political prisoners have increasingly become not only victims of repression but also objects of political bargaining. Their release is not an unconditional restoration of the right that was violated; in practice it turns into an element of a deal between states, political regimes and other centres of influence. A person may be released in exchange for another prisoner, a diplomatic concession, the easing of sanctions, political recognition or the fulfilment of informal arrangements.

For this reason, a pardon in the Belarusian context cannot be assessed solely as an act of humanity. Where release results from closed intergovernmental arrangements and is accompanied by forcible transfer across the border, the annulment of documents or the threat of deprivation of nationality, it does not end the persecution but merely changes its form.

Imprisonment gives way to exile from one's homeland, legal dependence on the Belarusian state gives way to vulnerability before foreign jurisdictions, and the person remains a means of political bargaining even after leaving prison.

The central question of this document is whether a state may invoke the humanity of a pardon if it first created a hostage, used that person's freedom as a bargaining chip and then transferred to them the risks of exile, statelessness and transnational persecution.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the events of 2020, political imprisonment in Belarus became not only a tool for suppressing dissent but also a way of building up a political “exchange fund”. The authorities had used this cynical practice before, but after 2020 it acquired its largest scale. People arbitrarily deprived of their liberty are at a certain point “pardoned”, and their release is presented as a concession by the authorities and used in negotiations on sanctions, diplomatic contacts and the normalisation of relations with other states.

A petition admitting guilt is often a precondition for a pardon, even though the prosecution itself was politically motivated. Petitions for pardon, especially in 2021–2022, when the first pardons began, were a widespread instrument of pressure on political prisoners. According to official sources, all of them wrote a petition for pardon addressed to Lukashenka. At the same time, political prisoners released after 2024 report that they were no longer required to write such petitions.

2024

2024 was marked by several waves of pardons, in the course of which a total of

227

political prisoners¹ were released.

2025

According to the Viasna Human Rights Centre, at least

360

political prisoners, pardoned during 2025, including 143 people in December².

2026

For 2026, at least

318

pardoned political prisoners are known.

[1] “Another 30 protest participants pardoned in Belarus” // Radio Svoboda. 4 September 2024.

[2] “The human rights situation in Belarus. December 2025” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 31 December 2025.

As a result of negotiations involving the United States, **463 people** were released between June 2025 and September 2026:

- **14** – in June 2025,
- **51** – in September 2025,
- **123** – in December 2025,
- **250** – in March 2026³,
- **25** – in September 2026.

In 2026 the practice of pardons continued and reached the largest scale of the entire post-2020 period. The most significant wave came on 19 March, when 250 political prisoners were pardoned following talks with representatives of the United States. These releases were not accompanied by rehabilitation, however: some people were forcibly expelled from Belarus without documents, while those who remained in the country continued to face tight control and restrictions, as well as the risk of renewed prosecution.

When granting pardons, the authorities almost never disclose the names of those released, emphasise their “repentance” and “admission of guilt”, and assign the Ministry of Internal Affairs the function of monitoring their conduct after release.

All releases took place against a backdrop of unceasing repression and new detentions. The political prisoners who were taken out of the country have in effect been **forcibly exiled** and deprived of any possibility of returning to their homeland.

According to human rights defenders

886

political prisoners

have been pardoned since 2024.

Of these,

205

people

were forcibly expelled from Belarus
immediately after their release⁴.

Two more political prisoners can be added to this figure (Andrei Kuznechyk and Alena Moushuk), who were taken to the Lithuanian border in 2025.

On 16 September 2026, another 25 political prisoners were taken from Belarus to Lithuania.

Many of those released and forcibly taken out of the country had between two and six months of their sentence left to serve.

[3] “A year since the start of the mass releases and expulsions: how the political prisoners taken out of Belarus are adapting” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 21 June 2026.

[4] “From mass detentions to transnational persecution: six years of repression in Belarus” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 9 August 2026.

[5] “Political prisoners Andrei Kuznechyk and Alena Moushuk and US citizen Mikalai Shuhaeu have been released” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 13 February 2025 (updated 24 February).

The state uses administrative, criminal-law and passport mechanisms to retain control over its citizens even after they have left the country:

- the forced expulsion of former political prisoners,
- the arbitrary **annulment of their passports** and
- the denial of consular services.

All of this places people in a state of legal vulnerability and restrict their freedom of movement and their access to regularisation of status, work, medical care and family life.

Despite attempts to give the pardon procedure the appearance of a legally proper form, in a number of cases the release of prisoners in fact departed from **national legislation and established procedures** and also violated **international human rights standards**.

For some prisoners, release was conditional on their compulsory departure from Belarus. They had no real opportunity to refuse expulsion freely and knowingly. The only publicly known case of resistance to the system was Mikalai Statkevich's refusal to cross the state border of the Republic of Belarus. Despite the act of pardon issued in his name, this refusal led to his immediate return to detention.

The case of journalist Andrzej Poczobut's trip to Belarus stands out from the general trend. On 8 September 2026, Poczobut, who had been released in April as part of a prisoner exchange, travelled to Belarus and returned to Poland on 15 September. The fact that such a trip was possible does not in itself indicate any improvement in the human rights situation or an end to repression in the country: it should be seen in the context of the individual guarantees and diplomatic arrangements that secured his release. It may be assumed that such concessions serve the Belarusian authorities' aim of obtaining the easing of sanctions and the normalisation of relations with Poland, although a direct link between Poczobut's trip and any specific sanctions relief is not confirmed by the available sources.

In most known cases, pardoned prisoners crossed the state border without passports or other identity documents. As a result, they found themselves outside Belarus in a state of legal uncertainty that restricted their ability to move freely, regularise their stay and obtain consular or other protection.

Despite the pardon, pressure on political prisoners continues in other forms after they leave places of detention: through **renewed criminal prosecution and wanted notices issued after the pardon**, restricted access to housing and bank accounts, and restrictions on rights arising from the inclusion of those released in the lists of persons involved in **"extremist" and "terrorist" activity**.

[6] "Poczobut has returned to Poland and will shortly travel to the United States and Canada" // Pozirk. 15 September 2026.

KEY FINDINGS

For political prisoners expelled from the country, a pardon therefore constitutes not an unconditional release but a complex set of interconnected actions: the termination of imprisonment, forcible transfer across the state border and de facto exile. The absence of voluntary consent and of valid documents casts doubt on the lawfulness of the entire procedure.

An act formally proclaimed as one of humanity becomes a mechanism of expulsion in which a person's right to liberty is made conditional on their agreement to leave their own country. As the case of Mikalai Statkevich shows, refusing expulsion means the de facto continuation of deprivation of liberty and thus demonstrates the conditional nature of the pardon.

New criminal cases against former political prisoners prevent them from returning safely to Belarus and create grounds for international wanted notices and extradition requests. Property-related, administrative and criminal-law measures become a continuation of the punishment beyond the walls of the penal institution.

The confiscation of property affects not only those released but also the family members who remain in Belarus. It deprives the expelled person of material support and of the possibility of returning to their former life, entrenching the consequences of de facto exile.

Consequently, an act of pardon terminates only the execution of the sentence previously imposed, but not necessarily the persecution itself. Combined with forced departure, undocumented border crossing, confiscation of property and new charges, it is used by the Belarusian authoritarian authorities as part of a single mechanism: to physically remove a person from the country, to sever their legal and material ties with it, and to retain the ability to exert further pressure. In these circumstances a pardon becomes conditional and reversible, providing neither full release nor effective restoration of violated rights.

The selective waves of pardons of political prisoners after 2020, the failure to observe even the pardon procedures laid down in law, and the demonstrative character of such "releases" show that the institution of pardon is being used as an instrument of the authoritarian regime's domestic and foreign policy.

Given their widespread and systematic character, it can be concluded that the actions of the Belarusian authorities directed against the civilian population bear the hallmarks of crimes against humanity in the form of persecution and deportation or forcible transfer of population under international criminal law.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors examined **64 interviews** with former political prisoners expelled from the country.

The authors also analysed **153 cases** of prisoners being expelled from the country⁷.

This study is based on an analysis of open-source material and on interviews with former political prisoners who were released and subsequently expelled from the Republic of Belarus between 2022 and 2026.

Respondents were asked about the circumstances of their pardon and release, whether and in what form they consented to departure, how they were moved across the state border, whether they had documents, whether they could refuse expulsion, and about the forms of pressure and persecution they faced after release.

The data describe the socio-demographic profile of those concerned, the circumstances of their criminal prosecution, the sentences imposed, the country of expulsion and the consequences of the "pardon".

The accounts obtained were cross-checked against open-source information, including official statements, legal acts, publications by human rights organisations, materials of international bodies and media reports. This cross-checking was used to verify the facts and to identify recurring practices.

For reasons of safety and confidentiality, information that could identify individual respondents is not given. Quotations have, where necessary, been edited minimally without altering their content. The findings of the study reflect the information available to the authors at the time of writing (September 2026) and do not claim to describe exhaustively every case of pardon and subsequent expulsion of political prisoners.

In preparing this document, the authors drew on interviews with former political prisoners forcibly taken out of Belarus, provided by the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus and the Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[7] Information from interviews conducted by the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus and the Viasna Human Rights Centre.

PARDON: THE LEGAL MECHANISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

A pardon, granted in the form of a constitutional-law act of the highest state authority, is a separate ground for release from punishment (in full or in part), for the mitigation of punishment and for the expungement of a criminal record. Under the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the exclusive right to grant pardons belongs to the President.

The principal purpose of this institution is to demonstrate the humanity of the state, to correct judicial and investigative errors, and to take account of exceptional personal circumstances of the convicted person or of considerations of state and political expediency. The person is not, however, found innocent: the judgment against them is not quashed and the court's assessment of the offence committed is unchanged.

The main difference between a pardon and an amnesty is that an amnesty is addressed to an indeterminate group of individuals — that is, it releases from liability and punishment all persons who meet the established criteria (categories of offence, age, social status, sex) — and is adopted by parliament in the form of a law, whereas a pardon is an individualised, extrajudicial act issued by presidential decree in respect of one specific person.

The institution of pardon is governed by Article 96 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. Under that article, an act of pardon may take the following forms:

- full or partial release from the principal and additional punishment;
- replacement of the unserved part of the sentence with a more lenient punishment;
- conditional release from punishment;
- commutation of the death penalty to life imprisonment;
- expungement of the criminal record.

The law provides for a special procedure for granting a pardon to a specific person.

The handling of petitions is set out in detail in **the Regulation on the procedure for granting pardons**⁸. The auxiliary body in this process is the Commission on Pardons and Release from Criminal Liability under the President of the Republic of Belarus.

The Commission carries out a preliminary examination of the materials received and assesses the gravity of the offence, the personality of the convicted person, their conduct in detention, their admission of guilt and their compensation of the harm caused.

[8] Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus "On the procedure for pardoning convicted persons and for releasing from criminal liability persons who assisted in solving crimes and eliminating their consequences" (as amended on 20 February 2026) of 3 December 1994, No. 250

The Commission's decisions are advisory and are taken by simple majority, after which its proposals are submitted for the President's final decision. In addition, a petition for pardon may be filed only once the court judgment has entered into legal force. Within the penal enforcement process, the bodies and institutions executing the sentence draw up character references on the convicted person and certificates on compensation of damage and forward the package of documents for subsequent consideration.

The current Commission consists of seven members: three of them represent political bodies (two from the Presidential Administration and one from the House of Representatives), two are lawyers who support the official line of the authoritarian regime, one is the director of an institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, and one is an advocate⁹.

The Commission also includes the Chairperson of the Constitutional Court, the Chairperson of the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General, the Chairperson of the Investigative Committee, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Justice and the Chairperson of the State Security Committee (KGB). Where these officials are unavailable, one of their deputies takes part in the Commission's work.

In the Belarusian context, a pardon does not amount to rehabilitation. As a rule, the authorities emphasise that those released have "admitted their guilt", "repented" and filed a petition for pardon. The criminal record is not automatically expunged, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs may place those released under behavioural supervision. The Viasna Human Rights Centre has written about this separately in a piece on the legal status of pardoned persons¹⁰.

In today's Belarus, however, practice shows that **the pardon has been transformed from a humanitarian measure into a political instrument** used to give legal form to the authoritarian regime's "deals" involving the release of political prisoners.

The practice of pardoning political prisoners currently applied in Belarus is inseparable from a set of formal requirements which, in the reality of the Belarusian penitentiary system, amount to an "admission of guilt" and the writing of a petition for pardon addressed to Aliaksandr Lukashenka. As human rights defenders rightly note, a person unlawfully convicted who has committed no offence is forced to admit "guilt for a crime" and to appeal to the illegitimate Lukashenka in order to be released before the end of their term, since no other mechanisms under the Criminal Code are currently available¹¹.

[9] Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus "On the procedure for pardoning convicted persons and for releasing from criminal liability persons who assisted in solving crimes and eliminating their consequences" (as amended on 20 February 2026) of 3 December 1994, No. 250

[10] "Will the criminal records of pardoned political prisoners be expunged? Leanid Sudalenka explains" // Viasna Human Rights Centre, 9 September 2024.

[11] "Innocent people are forced to ask the dictator to set them free". Pavel Sapelka on the admission of guilt required for a pardon // Viasna Human Rights Centre, 23 August 2024.

In the pardons of political prisoners granted over the past two or three years, the Belarusian legal system has proved unable to give these releases from further service of sentence any adequate legal form.

Thus, in interviews with human rights defenders, former political prisoners noted:

“*“I don't know what my status is, because on the website I am still listed as 'serving a sentence'. In the certificate from the Citizenship and Migration Department the reason for release was given as – escort to the KGB pre-trial detention centre. And it was signed by the head of the penal colony.”*

“*“Anyone who approached the Belarusian authorities with a written request, or through someone else, by power of attorney, or through acquaintances, anyone who tried to find something out – we are in the KGB pre-trial detention centre.”*

With this kind of “release”, political prisoners are left without any documents at all, and there is no official information on whether they still have a criminal record or what the legal features of their status now are.

“*“The authorities should have seen to this and given us the relevant document before the deportation, so that we could read it and sign it, stating on what grounds we were released from the penal colony. Was it a pardon, was it some kind of decree? We saw no document at all. And naturally, as things stand today, any appearance of mine in Belarus could end in imprisonment on the spot, because my term of imprisonment ends in **** 202*.”*

“*“There is simply no official information of any kind. That is, we were given nothing, no certificates, no documents. I signed nothing. It is a mystery what status we are in.”*

“*“No release certificate, nothing about a pardon. Legally I am still in detention, that is, I still have not served my sentence. I am effectively a person without legal status.”*

The absence of a proper procedure is indirectly confirmed by the case of Mikalai Statkevich, who did not wish to leave the territory of Belarus after his release and after the attempt to take him out of the country. He was simply sent to a penal colony to continue serving his sentence¹².

[12] “The Ministry of Internal Affairs told Statkevich's relatives that he is ‘serving his sentence in accordance with the judgment’ – human rights defenders” // Pozirk. 25 November 2025.

“

"A week later I knew that Mikalai Statkevich was in Hlybokaye. Because if he had been pardoned, they should not have sent him to a penal colony. That means there is a strong likelihood that for all the people who were deported to Lithuania... no corresponding act on their release exists at all. There is simply a list on the basis of which the KGB expelled them, and that is all. There is no other way Mikalai could have ended up in Hlybokaye on such grounds if a pardon decree had been issued."



THE SYSTEM OF SPECIAL LISTS AND REGISTERS FOR PERSONS DESIGNATED AS INVOLVED IN “EXTREMIST” AND “TERRORIST” ACTIVITY

Legislation and law-enforcement practice show that a citizen's physical release from detention, including through pardon procedures or forced expulsion from the country, does not automatically bring an end to persecution and the accompanying legal restrictions. Persons released under acts of pardon, as well as former political prisoners expelled from the country or forced to leave it, remain subject to an extensive system of administrative supervision, property-related enforcement measures and financial restrictions.

The main reason this discriminatory status persists is **the criminal record**.

The criminal record continues to affect a person's legal position even after the sentence has been served or after they have left Belarus. When a person is convicted or charged under articles linked to so-called extremist or terrorist activity, that criminal-law classification triggers the mechanism for entering the citizen in special lists¹³.

An act of pardon does not in itself quash the court judgment and is not a ground for automatic removal of the designation as involved in “extremism” or “terrorism”.

The same applies to persons who are outside Belarusian jurisdiction. The subordinate legislation governing the maintenance of the special lists contains exhaustive lists¹⁴ of grounds for removing a person from them, and neither a pardon nor expulsion from the country is among them.

As a result, citizens who have been released and expelled find themselves in a situation of prolonged deprivation of rights, in which the end of physical detention does not restore their civil, professional and economic legal capacity.

[13] Law of the Republic of Belarus of 4 January 2007 No. 203-Z “On countering extremism”; Law of the Republic of Belarus of 30 June 2014 No. 165-Z “On measures to prevent the legalisation of proceeds of crime, the financing of terrorist activity and the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction”.

[14] Namely Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 12 October 2021 No. 575 “On measures to counter extremism and the rehabilitation of Nazism” and Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 30 December 2014 No. 1256 “On approving the Regulation on the procedure for determining the list of organisations and individuals, including sole traders, involved in terrorist activity, for appealing against a decision to include an organisation or individual, including a sole trader, in such a list and for considering other applications from those organisations or individuals, including sole traders, and for communicating that list to persons carrying out financial transactions and to the financial monitoring body” // [National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus](#). 09.01.2015. No. 5/39958.

A politically motivated criminal conviction continues to follow the person in the form of indefinite or long-term extrajudicial pressure affecting transactions in property, employment, notarial acts and family relations, both inside the country and in forced emigration.

Belarusian law provides for two separate state registers (lists) which formally pursue national security aims but in practice form a system of legal restrictions imposed on those the authorities find undesirable.

The first is **the “List of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign nationals and stateless persons involved in extremist activity”**, which is compiled and maintained by the Ministry of Internal Affairs¹⁵.

Citizens are entered in this register solely on the basis of a court judgment that has entered into legal force in respect of an offence classified by the legislature as an offence “of an extremist nature”. The transfer of data is strictly regulated: the court that issued the judgment must send a copy to the Ministry of Internal Affairs no later than three working days after the judgment enters into legal force. The Ministry adds the citizen to the list on the very day the court decision is received, and the updated list is published on the Ministry's official website within five working days.

The law provides for no separate judicial or administrative hearing on whether a particular person should be listed, and excludes any prior notification of the person or any assessment of the individual danger they pose.

“Offences of an extremist nature” include both articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus that are covered in their entirety (in particular Articles 130, 293, 342, 357, 361, 361¹, 361², 361⁴, 368 and 369¹) and individual parts of articles to which the law attaches the qualifier “for the purpose of carrying out terrorist or other extremist activity” – that is, the article is treated as “extremist” only where the accused pursued such a purpose. In addition, the structure of the List contains an open-ended category that allows any other offence under the Criminal Code to be classified as an offence of an extremist nature if the court finds that the act was committed out of racial, national, religious, political or ideological hatred, or hatred towards any social group.

The second is **the “List of organisations and individuals, including sole traders, involved in terrorist activity”**, which is maintained by the State Security Committee (KGB)¹⁶.

[15] Article 18 of the Law of 4 January 2007 No. 203-Z “On countering extremism”; Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 12 October 2021 No. 575.

[16] Article 1 of the Law of 3 January 2002 No. 77-Z “On combating terrorism”; Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 30 December 2014 No. 1256.

Unlike the “extremist” list, a citizen may be entered in the “terrorist” register not only on the basis of a court judgment that has entered into legal force but also at the pre-trial investigation stage, on the basis of a procedural decision charging the person as an accused.

Further grounds include inclusion in international lists recognised in Belarus, or decisions of the competent authorities of foreign states. Before the events of 2020, this list contained only persons designated as involved in terrorist activity on the basis of international practice (in particular, on the basis of UN information).

The offences that allow a citizen to be entered in the KGB’s “terrorist” list are set out in Articles 126, 130, 289, 290, 290¹–290⁵, 293, 359, 360 and 361 of the Criminal Code. The decision to add a person to the “terrorist” list is taken by the KGB Chairperson or a deputy chairperson within one working day of receipt of the information, is published immediately and is transmitted to the financial monitoring system without any prior notification of the citizen. The practice of entering people in the register of “terrorists” before trial constitutes a substantial departure from the presumption of innocence, since the status and its consequences take effect before guilt has been established by a court.

Designating a political prisoner as a person involved in “extremist” or “terrorist” activity entails legal consequences affecting basic civil, labour, financial and property rights.

First of all, it means **discrimination in professional and social life**.

Persons included in the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ “extremist” list are prohibited by law from engaging in teaching (as regards the delivery of educational programmes) and publishing, from holding public office and performing military service, and from working in fields involving the circulation of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, weapons, ammunition and explosives. These professional bans apply automatically throughout the period during which the sentence is served, remain in force while the criminal record subsists, and continue to apply for five years after the record has been spent or expunged (Article 18(2) of Law No. 203-Z).

The financial and property restrictions

imposed on persons on these lists are no less significant¹⁷. For citizens entered in the KGB’s “terrorist” list, inclusion means the automatic and immediate freezing of all their funds, securities, electronic money, other property and property rights, together with a complete blocking ban on any financial transactions.

Citizens on the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ “extremist” list are subject to a regime of special monitoring and enhanced identification by financial monitoring entities, which in practice results in blocked bank cards, delayed or refused transfers and closed accounts. Listed persons lose the ability to carry out transactions involving real estate, vehicles and securities, to issue notarised powers of attorney and to perform notarial acts.

Even where lawful payments (pensions, wages, benefits, maintenance payments or money transfers) are credited to an account, those funds are immediately frozen and cannot be used.

To ensure basic subsistence, the law provides for a special authorisation procedure.

For those abroad (including people who have been pardoned and expelled), this regime means that they are effectively unable to manage assets remaining in the territory of the Republic of Belarus. The impossibility of issuing a notarised power of attorney at consular offices or through foreign notaries blocks their ownership rights to flats, land plots and vehicles.

At the same time, substantial legal and financial risks are created for relatives living in Belarus. Under criminal procedure law, investigative bodies make active use of Article 103 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Belarus, which allows the property of third parties to be seized where there are grounds to believe that it was obtained through criminal acts or is intended to finance "extremist" or "terrorist" activity (Article 103(3) of the Code of Criminal Procedure). Close relatives of persons released or expelled are subjected to financial checks, temporary freezing of accounts and the risk of confiscation of property.

Public stigmatisation is compounded by the official publication of citizens' personal data, including surname, first name and patronymic, date of birth, nationality, former place of residence and the ground for inclusion.

The format of the public list draws no distinction between violent offences and peaceful civic or informational activity, applying a single state label of "extremist" or "terrorist", which may provoke discrimination in everyday life.

The statutory mechanisms for removing citizens from the "extremist" and "terrorist" registers are rigidly formalised and of little practical effect. The regulations provide for only **three grounds**:

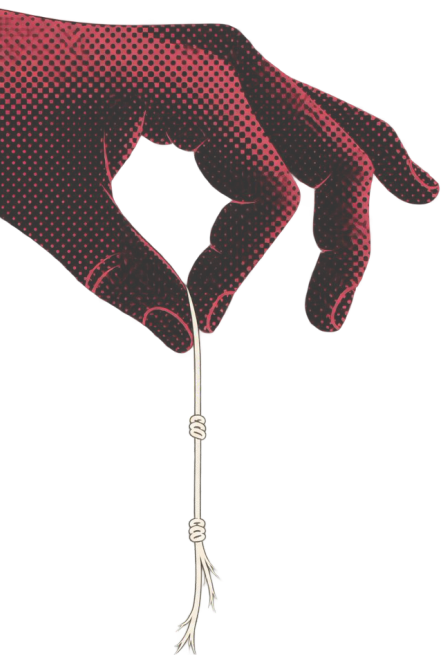
- the quashing of a court judgment that has entered into legal force;
- documented death of the citizen;
- the expiry of five years from the date on which the criminal record was spent or expunged.

None of those released under an act of pardon, including persons expelled from the country, are removed from the list automatically, because an act of pardon does not quash the judgment and the criminal record continues to run under the general rules of the Criminal Code. For grave and especially grave offences, a criminal record takes a long time to become spent (up to eight years after the sentence has been served), to which the anti-extremism legislation adds a further five years of mandatory inclusion in the list. As a result, the total period during which a person remains on the "extremist" list, together with the associated professional restrictions, may amount to as much as 13 years after release from detention.

The grounds for removal from the "terrorist" list include: the quashing of the judgment; the discontinuation of the criminal prosecution (for persons listed at the charging stage); the criminal record becoming spent or being expunged; and changes to international or foreign lists. The procedures for appealing against listing decisions contain substantial procedural barriers.

[17] Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 16 September 2016 No. 735 and Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 23 November 2016 No. 954.

THE PRACTICE OF PARDONING AND EXPELLING POLITICAL PRISONERS FROM THE COUNTRY



Below are the results of an analysis of data on

153

**cases of forced
expulsion of
prisoners from
Belarus.**

Since 2024, pardons in Belarus have become a regular but tightly controlled mechanism for the partial release of political prisoners. They do not mean an end to repression: new criminal cases are opened, criminal records remain, and some of those released are kept under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In 2025–2026, pardons were increasingly accompanied by forced expulsion from Belarus.

21 June 2026 marked one year since the start of the mass releases of Belarusian political prisoners in the framework of negotiations between the Belarusian authorities and the United States. According to the human rights defenders of Viasna, 440 political prisoners were released during that period, 207 of whom were forcibly expelled from Belarus. For many of them, release meant not a return home but the beginning of life in forced emigration and confrontation with new challenges^{18,19}.

Human rights defenders see this as an additional instrument of pressure: a person is formally released, but loses the ability to return home, recover their documents, see their family or continue their life in the country.

The information collected describes the socio-demographic profile of those expelled, the circumstances of their criminal prosecution, the sentences imposed and the regimes under which they were held, the destinations of expulsion, and certain consequences of the so-called pardon. The authors did not seek to construct an average profile of an expelled political prisoner.

The main aim of the analysis was to identify the general patterns, the scale and the characteristic features of this practice, including its connection with politically motivated persecution and subsequent forms of transnational repression.

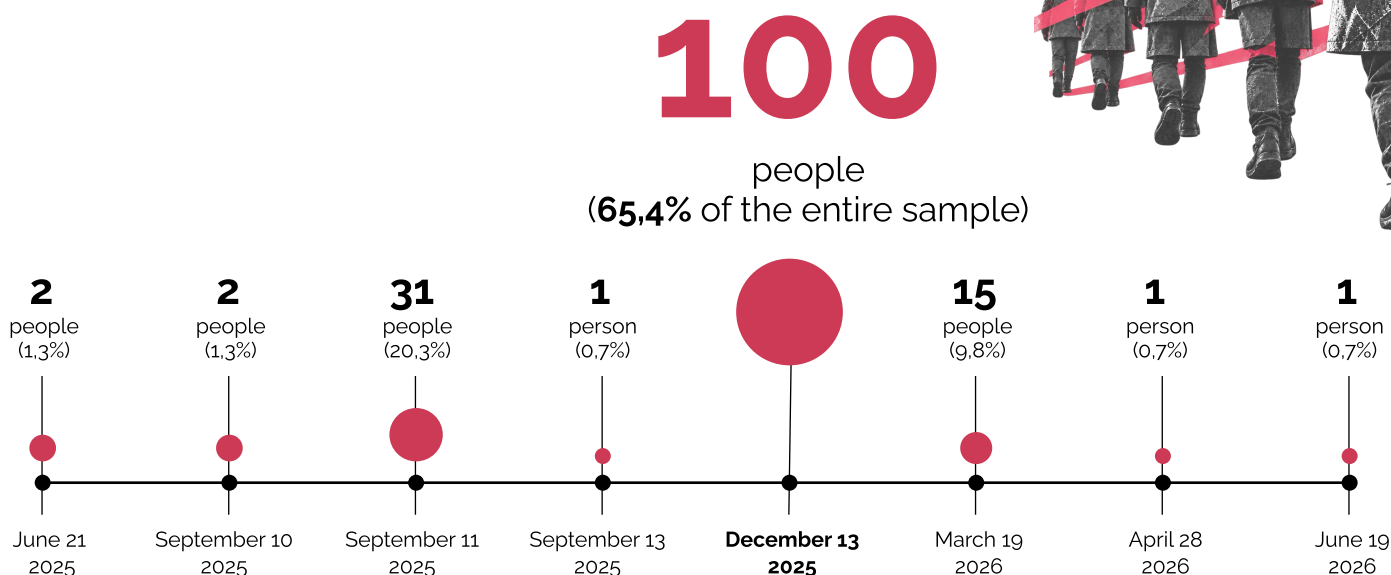
[18] "A year since the start of the mass releases and expulsions: how the political prisoners taken out of Belarus are adapting" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 21 June 2026.

[19] "Political prisoners Andrei Kuznechyk and Alena Moushuk and US citizen Mikalai Shuhaeu have been released" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 13 February 2025 (updated 24 February).

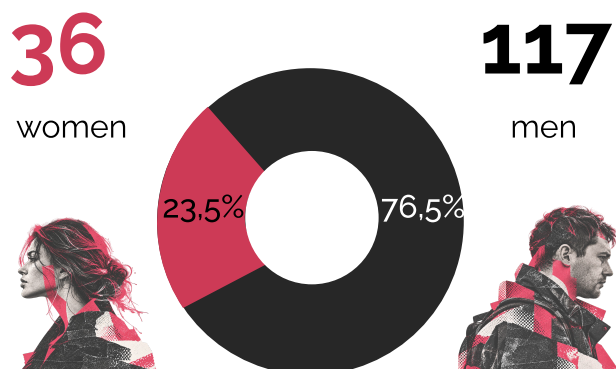
KEY DATA ON EXPELLED POLITICAL PRISONERS

01 THE DATES OF EXPULSION

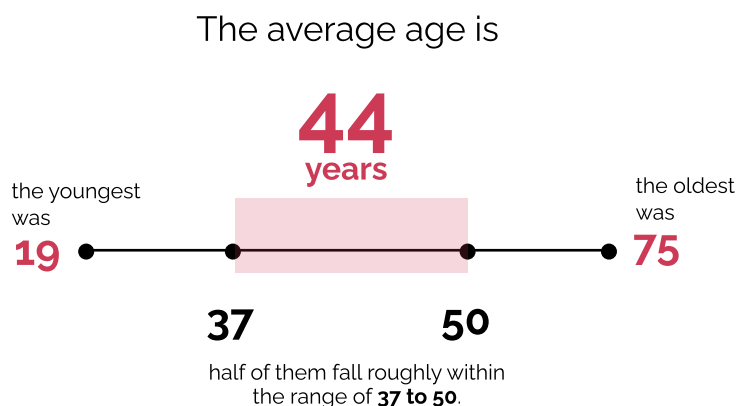
If the start of the American campaign to secure the release of Belarusian political prisoners is taken to be **21 June 2025** – the date on which the first large group was released following talks with US Special Envoy Keith Kellogg – then, of the **153 people expelled**, 2 (1,3%) were expelled on that very day and the remaining 151 (98,7%) after it.



02 THE GENDER OF EXPELLED PERSONS

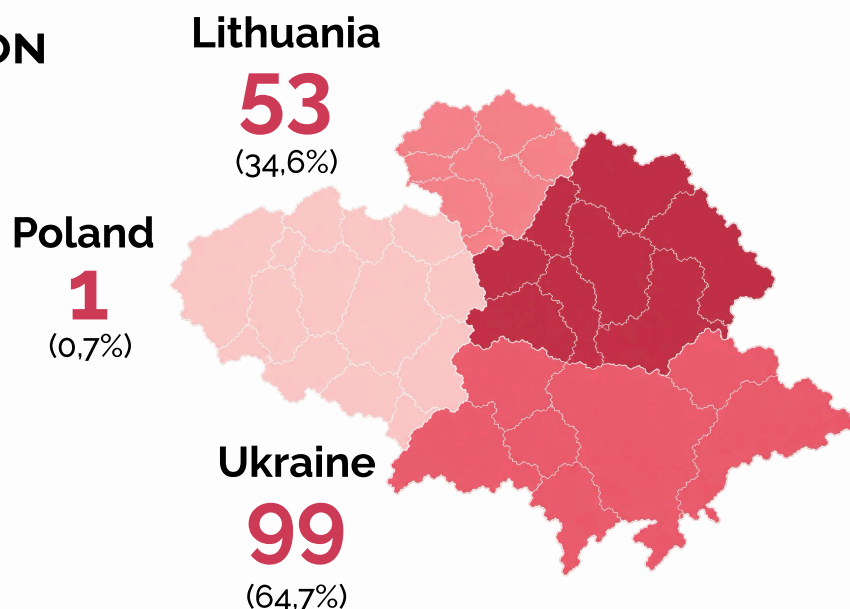


03 AGE OF EXPELLED PERSONS



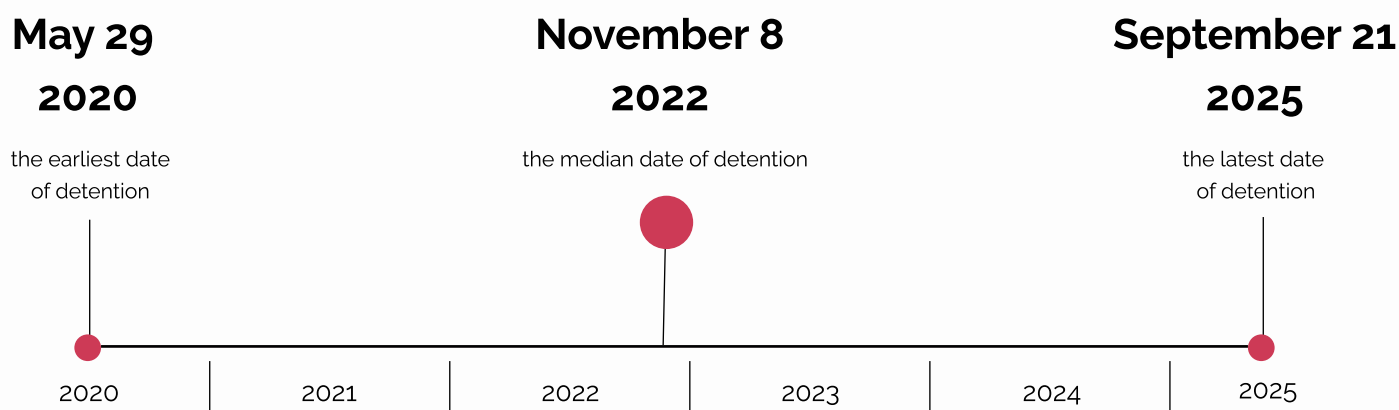
04 THE MAIN DESTINATION OF EXPULSION

The main destination of expulsion was **Ukraine**. Ukraine and Lithuania together account for **99,3%** of all records.

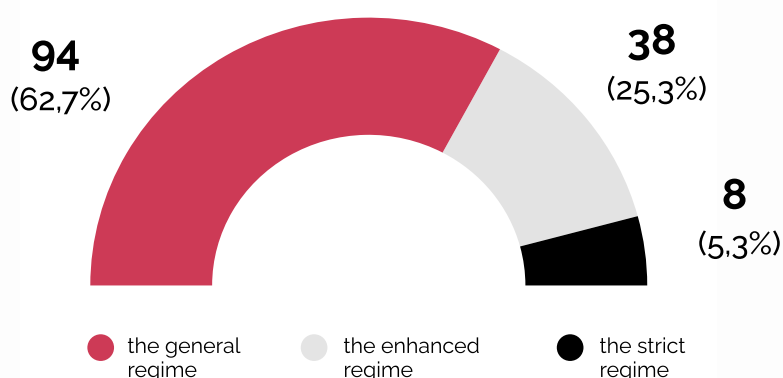


05 THE DATES OF DETENTION

About half of the known detentions took place before **November 8**, and the other half took place after that date.



06 THE SENTENCE EXECUTION REGIME

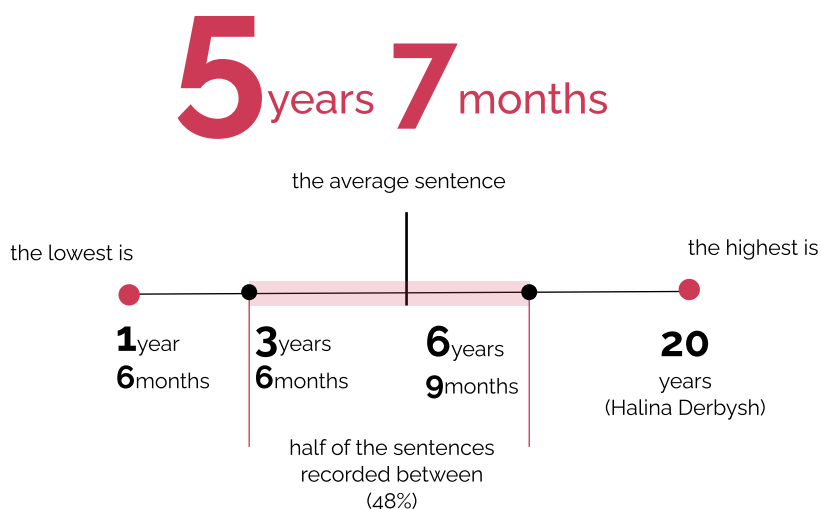


In a further **10 records** the regime was combined with a period in prison: strict plus prison – 6 cases, general plus prison – 3 cases, and enhanced plus prison – 1.

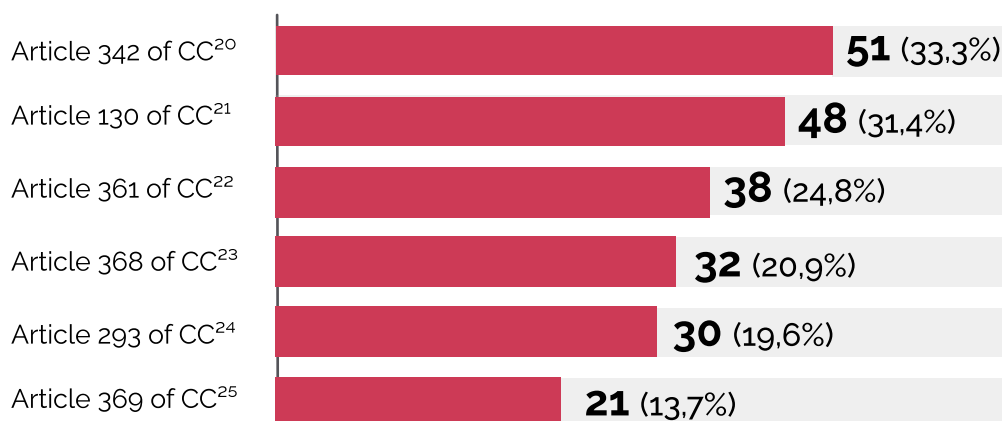
* The data was provided by only 150 out of 153 people



07 THE AVERAGE SENTENCE



08 THE INFORMATION ON THE ARTICLES APPLIED



69,3%

106 of the 153 people, were charged under more than one article.



[20] Article 342 of the Criminal Code – “Organising and preparing acts that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them”. In practice, this article has been applied in particular to participants in mass protest actions.

[21] Article 130 of the Criminal Code – “Incitement of racial, national, religious or other social enmity or discord”.

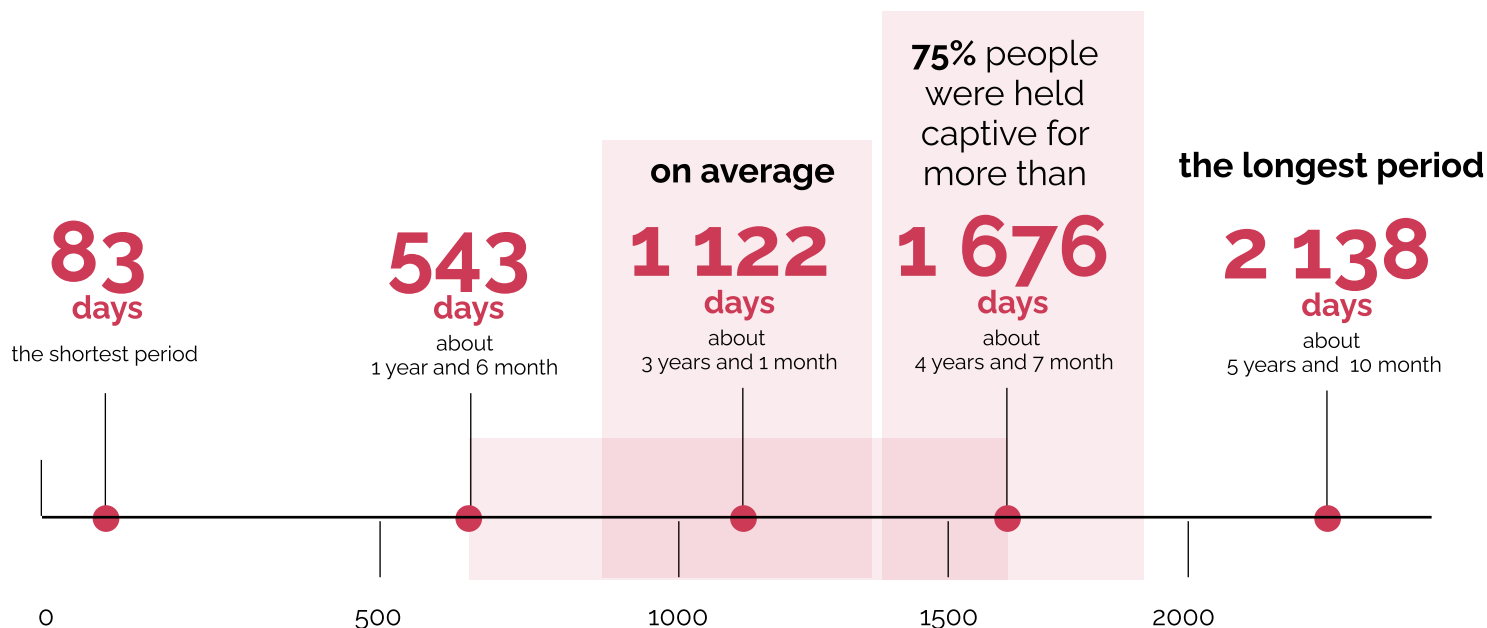
[22] Article 361 of the Criminal Code provides for liability for public calls for sanctions or other actions which the authorities classify as intended to harm national security.

[23] Article 368 of the Criminal Code – “Insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus”.

[24] Article 293 of the Criminal Code – “Participation in mass riots”.

[25] Article 369 of the Criminal Code – “Insulting a representative of the authorities”.

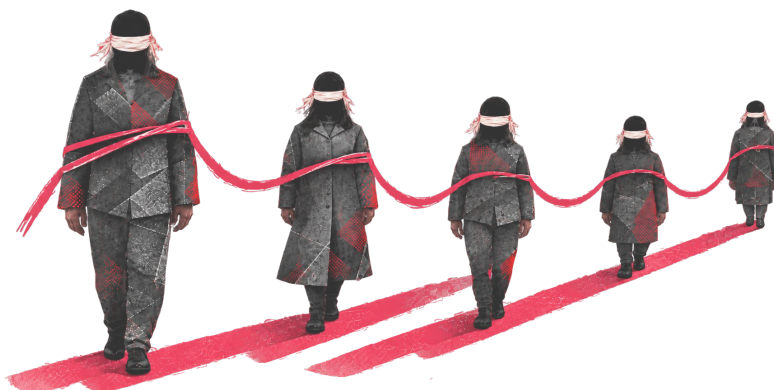
09 THE TIME SPENT IN CAPTIVITY



10 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The notes contain information on

- nationality (citizens of Lithuania, the United States, Latvia, Ukraine, Poland and Japan),
- disability,
- pension-related problems
- transfers to prison
- the consequences of the "pardon" (the opening of new criminal cases over interviews given to the media and to human rights defenders, obstacles to family reunification, bans on entering Belarus, and the seizure or annulment of documents).



2022 – 2023

February 18, 2022

The first cases of political prisoners being pardoned after 2020.
Aleh Hruzdilovich, Tatsiana Lasitsa, Sofia Sapega, Natallia Hersche

Swiss national **Natallia Hersche** was released after 17 months in detention, as a result of Swiss diplomatic efforts.

According to her brother, Natallia Hersche did not write a petition for pardon addressed to Lukashenka. After her release she returned to Switzerland.



Natallia Hersche with her brother and the Swiss Ambassador to Minsk, Christine Honegger, after her release. Source: <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-belarusi-osvobodili-grazdanku-svejcarii-natalu-herse/a-60828404>

September 21, 2022

it became known that Radio Svaboda journalist **Aleh Hruzdilovich** had been released under a pardon. The journalist was taken to the border with Lithuania, where his wife Maryana was brought straight from hospital.



Aleh Hruzdilovich with his wife Maryana after his release, in Vilnius. Source: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32044030.html>

September 24, 2022

Following a pardon, Tatsiana Lasitsa was released from the penal colony in Homiel; no information about her forced expulsion from Belarus was published.

Aliaksandr Lukashenka also pardoned Russian national **Sofia Sapega**. On 7 June 2023 she was handed over to a delegation led by the Governor of Primorsky Krai, Oleg Kozhemyako (Sapega was born in Vladivostok).



Sofia Sapega (centre) with her lawyer (Photo: Leonid Shcheglov / BelTA / TASS). Source: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/07/06/2023/64809e8b9a79479888383251>

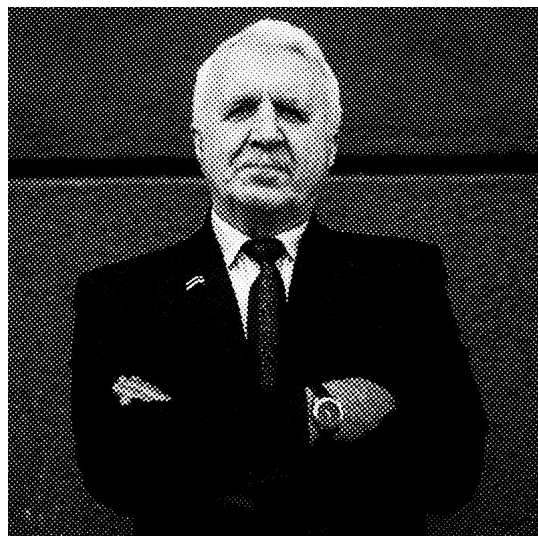
2024

18 pardoned

Among them were four women and 14 men²⁸.

Many linked this to the amnesty law adopted to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Belarus from the Nazi invaders. That law, however, did not provide for the release of political prisoners. According to human rights defenders, they were released **under a pardon**.

Moreover, despite Lukashenka's statement about releasing political prisoners with serious illnesses, only one person from the **List of political prisoners at particular risk behind bars**²⁹ is reliably known to have been released – 67-year-old **Ryhor Kastusiou**.



Those released include Ryhor Kastusiou, who has cancer. Source: <https://prisoners.springg6.org/ru/person/ryhor-kastusiou>

[26] Editor of the Telegram channel "Black Book of Belarus", which published personal information about internal affairs officers allegedly involved in human rights violations and was designated "extremist".

[27] On 22 May 2023 it became known that Raman Pratasevich, who had been detained together with Sapega in 2021, had been pardoned.

[28] "More than 15 political prisoners released under amnesty and pardon, among them Ryhor Kastusiou" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 5 July 2024.

[29] "I will probably just die here": which political prisoners are at particular risk behind bars" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 8 June 2026.

August 16, 2024

30 pardoned

"On 16 August, President of Belarus Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a Decree pardoning 30 persons convicted of protest-related offences. Those pardoned include 14 women and 16 men, some of whom have serious illnesses. There are people of retirement age among them," Lukashenka's press service announced. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is to monitor their "law-abiding behaviour"^[30].

September 4, 2024

30 pardoned

On 4 September 2024 it became known that Aliaksandr Lukashenka had signed a decree pardoning 30 people convicted of taking part in protests and of other "protest-related offences". Those pardoned included 7 women and 23 men. Most of them were parents of minor and young children. This was reported by the state news agency BelTA. Lukashenka's press service called the pardon decision a "humane gesture"^[31].

As Radio Svaboda reported, this was already the third recent decision to pardon people convicted of taking part in protests against Lukashenka's rule^[32].

As in the two previous cases, the names of those pardoned were not officially disclosed. The authorities claimed that all of them had admitted their guilt, "sincerely repented" and promised to lead a "law-abiding way of life".

September 16, 2024

37 pardoned

People convicted under "extremism" articles were pardoned, among them 6 women; some had chronic illnesses, disabilities or were of retirement age^[33]. This was announced by the dictator's press service.

[30] ["Lukashenka pardons 30 people convicted over the protests"](#) // Interfax. 16 August 2024.

[31] ["Lukashenka pardons another 30 people convicted of protest-related offences"](#) // Belarusian Telegraph Agency (BelTA). 4 September 2024.

[32] ["Lukashenka has pardoned another 30 political prisoners. The names of 2 of them have become known"](#) // Radio Svaboda. 4 September 2024.

[33] ["Lukashenka pardons another 37 political prisoners"](#) // Polish Press Agency (PAP). 16 September 2024.

November 7, 2024

31 pardoned

Two women and 29 men were pardoned; 17 had chronic illnesses, 3 had disabilities and 27 had children. The convictions of those released were not expunged, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs was to monitor them³⁴.

November 20, 2024

32 pardoned

Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a decree pardoning 32 political prisoners convicted in Belarus under "extremism" articles. This was reported by the Telegram channel Pul Pervogo. Eight women and 24 men were pardoned; 17 had chronic illnesses, one had a disability, 17 had children and 9 were over 50⁵.

December 9, 2024

29 pardoned

Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned 29 people convicted in Belarus under articles "of an extremist nature". This was reported by the state news agency BelTA. According to the report, 11 women and 18 men were pardoned, including six people under the age of 25, three pensioners, two people with disabilities and 15 with chronic illnesses.

It is claimed that all of them "repented of what they had done and filed a petition for pardon". As before, the names of the pardoned political prisoners are not disclosed³⁶.

December 28, 2024

20 pardoned

Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned a further 20 people convicted in Belarus of "offences of an extremist nature". This was announced on his website³⁷.

"Of those pardoned, 11 are women, 14 have chronic illnesses, 10 of the convicted persons have children, and one woman has 4 children," the statement says. Lukashenka's press service claims that "all of them petitioned for a pardon and repented of what they had done". The names of the pardoned political prisoners are not disclosed.

[34] "31 Political Prisoners Convicted Under Belarus's 'Extremism' Law Pardoned" // Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). 7 November 2024.

[35] "Lukashenka pardons 32 Belarusian political prisoners" // Deutsche Welle (DW). 20 November 2024.

[36] "Lukashenka pardons another 29 political prisoners in Belarus" // Meduza. 9 December 2024.

2025

January 18, 2025

23 released

Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a decree pardoning 23 people convicted in Belarus of "offences of an extremist nature", the Telegram channel Pul Pervogo reported³⁸. The names of the pardoned political prisoners were not disclosed. Those released included three women and 20 men, 14 of whom have chronic illnesses. All of them "wrote petitions for pardon, admitted their guilt and repented", Lukashenka's press service claims³⁹.

January 24, 2025

15 pardoned

Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned 15 convicted persons. Five women and three men convicted of "offences of an extremist nature" were pardoned. Five of them have children and one woman is pregnant. Seven people (including three women) convicted of illegal drug trafficking were also pardoned. Six of them committed the offences while they were minors. One person convicted of an offence committed as an adult has been diagnosed with cancer⁴⁰.

May 7, 2025

42 pardoned

In the run-up to the Victory Day celebrations, Aliaksandr Lukashenka decided to pardon 42 people convicted of "offences of an extremist nature". Those pardoned include 18 women and 24 men. Of them, 13 have chronic illnesses and one has a disability. Twenty-four of the convicted persons have minor children and two have large families. Ten are over 50 and one has reached retirement age.

[37] "Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a Decree pardoning 20 persons who had committed offences of an extremist nature" // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 28 December 2024.

[38] "The President has pardoned another 23 persons who committed offences of an extremist nature" // Telegram channel Pul Pervogo. 18 January 2025.

[39] "Lukashenka pardons another 23 political prisoners" // Meduza. 18 January 2025.

[40] "Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned 15 convicted persons" // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 24 January 2025.

14

pardoned

Five of them are Belarusians, one holds dual nationality, and the others are citizens of other countries who were held in Belarusian prisons. According to the Belsat channel, those released include three Polish citizens⁴².

The pardon came after a visit to Minsk by Keith Kellogg, the special envoy of US President Donald Trump. The released political prisoners were taken to Lithuania immediately.

Those released from prison were opposition politician **Siarhei Tsikhanouski**; **Natallia Dulina**, an associate professor at Minsk State Linguistic University; the anarchist **Akihiro Haieuski-Hanada**; journalist **Ihar Karnei** (a former correspondent for the Belarusian service of Radio Svaboda); 69-year-old Swedish citizen of Belarusian origin **Halina Krasnianskaya**; **Kiryl Balakhonau**, a defendant in the case of the "Union of the Belarusian National Shield"; and businessman **Siarhei Sheleh**.



Siarhei Tsikhanouski after his release. Source: <https://spring96.org/ru/news/118173>

*Political prisoners released on 21 June 2025.
Source: https://news.zerkalo.io/life/102164.html?utm_source=editorial_block&utm_campaign=recirculation_tut&utm_medium=read_more*



[41] "Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned 42 persons convicted of offences of an extremist nature" // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 7 May 2025.

[42] "Nobody understood why we ended up in Minsk". A former political prisoner released together with Tsikhanouski describes how it happened" // Zerkalo. 21 June 2025.

July 2, 2025

Radio Svaboda journalist Ihar Karnei, who was released together with 13 other political prisoners⁴³, told Zerkalo about the details of his release and departure from the country⁴⁴.

“

"Nothing was explained to us, we were simply being driven somewhere, – the former political prisoner says. – There were 13 other people with me. Handcuffs on our wrists, bags over our heads, and guards in the seats next to us. In those conditions it was impossible to talk to the other political prisoners; we did not understand what was happening. After a while the bus picked up speed and it became clear to me that we were leaving Minsk. Not far from the border we were handed over to staff of the US Embassy."

16 pardoned

According to the website of the de facto president, ahead of Independence Day Aliaksandr Lukashenka granted the petitions for pardon of 16 convicted persons who had committed various offences, including "offences of an extremist nature".

Those pardoned include eight women and eight men. Three of them are over 50. Two have chronic illnesses and one has a disability. Nine of the convicted persons have minor children⁴⁵.

September 11, 2025

52 pardoned

“

And then that was it, the Americans' first words, they got on the bus and said: "Well then, you are all free." We laughed, clapped, were happy...

Following another visit to Minsk by US President's representative John Coale, 52 political prisoners were released in Belarus⁴⁶.

Those pardoned included 14 foreign nationals. Six of them are citizens of Lithuania, two each of Latvia, Poland and Germany, one of France and one of the United Kingdom⁴⁷.

[43] "Siarhei Tsikhanouski and 13 more political prisoners are free" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 21 June 2025.

[44] «"Nobody understood why we ended up in Minsk. A former political prisoner released together with Tsikhanouski describes how it happened" // Zerkalo. 21 June 2025.

[45] "Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned 16 convicted persons who had committed various offences" // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 2 July 2025.

[46] "52 political prisoners from Belarus are free. What do we know?" // Deutsche Welle (DW). 11 September 2025.

[47] "At the request of the US President and other heads of state, a decision has been taken to pardon a number of foreign nationals" // Telegram channel Pul Pervogo. 11 September 2025.

All of them, with the exception of the politician Mikalai Statkevich, left for Lithuania.

One of those released in this group described some of the details of the expulsion from the country:

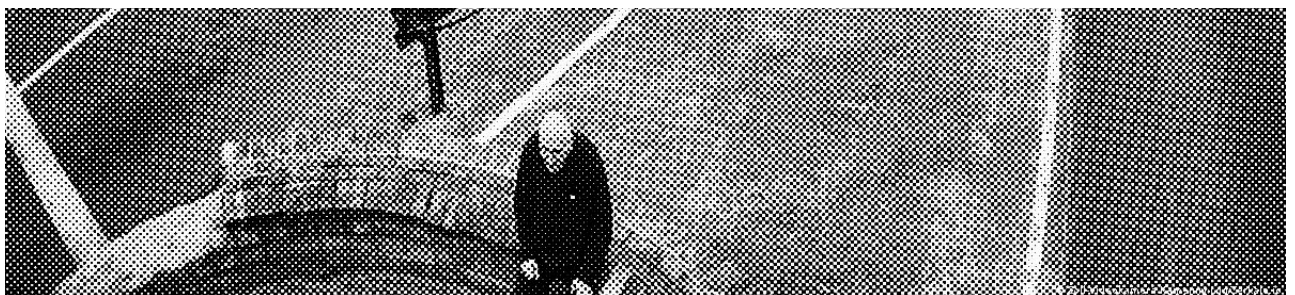
“*We drove up to those buses. There were a lot of vehicles there, that is, people were being brought in from different penal colonies – Vinahradau, Statkevich were there, I recognised a great many people, Dziadok. They loaded us all into one bus, and there was a second one standing next to it with people in it too. There was a KGB officer there. At first he was bellowing something, not letting us talk.*”

The men realised that they were being taken out of the country without their consent. At that moment many of them had deeply conflicting feelings – whether to go on or to stay at the border. The former prisoner went on to share his recollections with human rights defenders:

“*Then [Statkevich] broke off a handle in the bus, there was a bit of a commotion. By then everyone understood that they were going to take us out [of the country]. Everyone started swearing about it – why, nobody had asked us, and what was this all about anyway. That KGB man growled at us. They drove us up to the border. Just before the border Statkevich got out. <...>*

And then Statkevich got out too, that is, as soon as the KGB man got out. We drove on a couple of metres more and he kicked out the door next to the driver. He had some sort of row with the driver, the driver lunged at him, we held the driver back, and he [Statkevich] kicked out the door and got out. That was it. We drove on, and there we were met by the Americans and the Lithuanians, Lithuanian border guards by then.”

“I resisted the forced expulsion. However harsh the circumstances, a person always has a choice”, Mikalai Statkevich later said of his principles⁴⁸.



A surveillance camera recorded Mikalai Statkevich in the neutral zone between Belarus and Lithuania on 11 September 2025. Photo: Zoll-Videokamera Kamenny Log/Zerkalo.io. Source: <https://www.dw.com/ru/nikolaa-statkevica-net-ni-doma-ni-v-litve-cto-izvestno/a-73980126>

According to accounts by other former prisoners, ten people arrived in Lithuania without passports: their documents were taken from them by staff of the KGB pre-trial detention centre, where the convicted persons had been brought a day before their release⁴⁹.

“Then it turned out, once we were already at the border, it turned out that those who came from the KGB prison, from the ‘Amerikanka’, had all had their passports torn up. That is, Vinahradau, Dziadok, well, in short, all of them. There were about six of them, I think. All of them had their passports torn up. So they entered Lithuania simply on certificates issued by the Lithuanians.”

“None of the people who came via the KGB pre-trial detention centre had any documents at all. Our passports were taken from us. I realised that my passport had deliberately not been given back to me.”

Those released from the penal colonies were mainly men sentenced to between two and five years under articles covering “participation in mass riots”, “active participation in acts grossly violating public order”, “insulting representatives of the authorities” and other “extremism” articles. Some of them had only a few months left to serve.

This is how former political prisoners described it:

“...They were getting rid of people who were about to be released. Most of the bus was due for release in November, December. I myself was supposed to get out on 8 December this year. A very small part of the sentence left.”

“I was taken out, or as they put it, expelled from the prison. That was on 11 September 2025. I had a little over three months left to the end of my sentence, about four months, just under four months.”

The prisoners were not asked to consent to being taken out of the country, and were given no documents about their release. According to the witnesses interviewed, they had not written any petition for pardon.

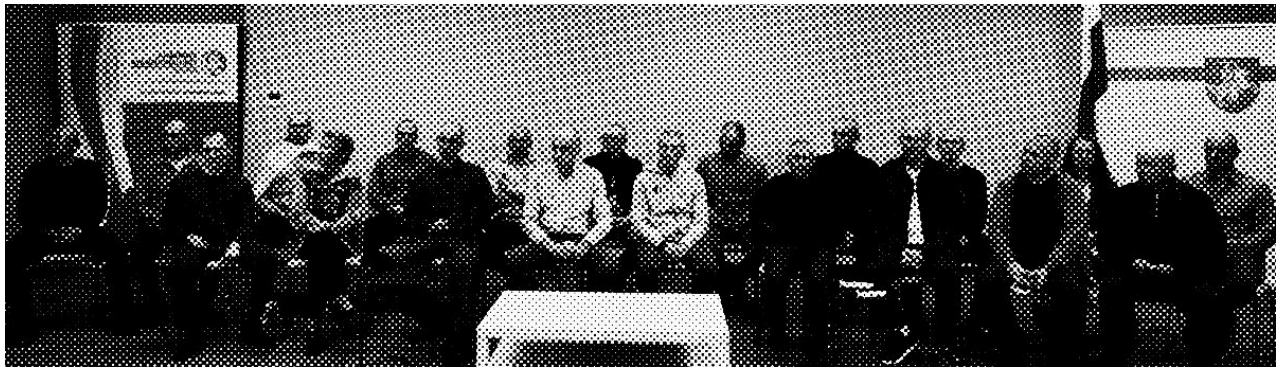
“I was thrown out of the country entirely by force and entirely against my will. On top of that, I gave no permission for it. And the most interesting thing is – nobody asked me anything about it. So it is a status of a forced, I don't know how to put it properly, exile.”

[48] «Jeder Tag ist für mich ein Geschenk» // Die Zeit. N° 34/2026. 5 августа 2026 года.

[49] “Released political prisoners in Belarus had their passports taken away” // Deutsche Welle (DW). 12 September 2025.

“I had linked my whole future life and work with Belarus, and with the fact that I have the right, naturally, to live in my own country. So I never imagined this option for myself. But let me stress – I say this all the time – that nobody explained anything to us at all, nobody asked for our consent or permission, there were no documents, nothing.”

“**...There was *no choice*, if it comes to that; nobody asked us anything.**”



Former political prisoners at a press conference about their release. Source: <https://www.dw.com/ru/byvsie-politzaklucennye-eto-bylo-vydvorenie-a-ne-osvobozdenie/a-73979917>

September 16, 2025

25 pardoned

The presidential website reports that, ahead of the Day of People's Unity, Aliaksandr Lukashenka decided to pardon 25 people convicted of, among other things, offences of an extremist nature. The corresponding decree was signed on 16 September.

Those pardoned include 12 women and 13 men; 19 of them are under 40. Many have children, and one convicted woman is a mother of a large family. One of those pardoned committed the offence while a minor. State propagandists report that all of them admitted their guilt, repented of what they had done and undertook to lead a law-abiding way of life⁵⁰.

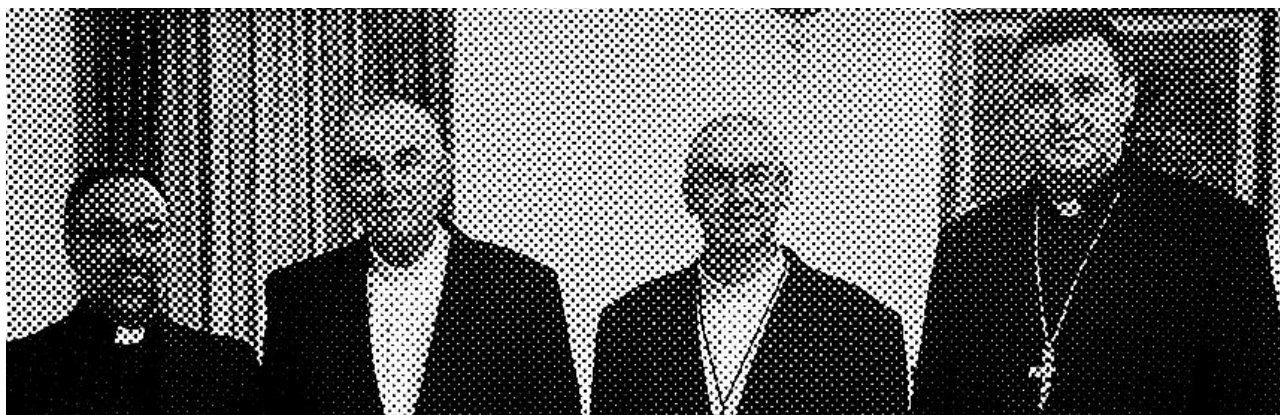
November 20, 2025

33 pardoned

Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned 31 Ukrainian citizens and two Catholic priests, Andrzej Juchniewicz and Henryk Okołotowicz.

[50] "Ahead of the Day of People's Unity, Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardoned 25 people" // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 16 September 2025.

According to the authorities, the Ukrainians were released at Kyiv's request and under arrangements with the United States, and the priests following contacts with the Vatican. Human rights defenders had recognised some of those convicted as political prisoners⁵¹.



Catholic priests after their release. In the photo, from left to right: Ignazio Ceffalia, Henryk Okołotowicz, Andrzej Juchniewicz, Józef Staniewski. Photo: catholic.by. Source: <https://news.zerkalo.io/amp/economics/113886.html>

123 pardoned

Those released include Ales Bialiatski, Viktor Babaryka, Maria Kalesnikava, Maksim Znak and Maryna Zolatava

“

I felt fear and prayed to God that I would stay alive, that is all I felt. I felt insane fear, I was shaking all over, and I kept shaking the whole time until I found myself on Ukrainian territory, just shaking like that.

“

They take you by the arm, they don't let you take off the hat [pulled down over your eyes], they take you by the arm, lead you off that bus, wrap you in tape and take you somewhere further on. Well, to me it felt like this was it, that next would be the firing squad.



Pardoned political prisoners forcibly taken to Ukraine. Source: <https://spring96.org/ru/news/119264>

[51] "Lukashenka pardoned 31 Ukrainian citizens and two Catholic priests" // Current Time. 22 November 2025.

On 13 December 2025 the Belarusian authorities announced a pardon and took 123 political prisoners to the territory of Lithuania and Ukraine, including **Ales Bialiatski** – the 2022 Nobel laureate and head of Viasna; **Uladzimir Labkovich** – a human rights defender with Viasna; **Viktar Babaryka** – a would-be candidate in the 2020 presidential election; **Maria Kalesnikava** – a member of Viktar Babaryka's campaign team, who had been held incommunicado for a long period; **Maksim Znak** – a lawyer who had also been held incommunicado for a long period; **Maryna Zolatava** – editor-in-chief of TUT.BY, the largest media holding in Belarus; **Alexander Feduta** – a political analyst; and **Pavel Seviarynets** – a politician and activist⁵².

Women and men were driven across Belarus to the border in separate buses and were only transferred into a single bus somewhere in a field far from the road.

Bags were placed over the men's heads while the vehicle was moving, making it hard for them to breathe and impossible to see their surroundings or the actions of those escorting them. The journey was long and people were badly shaken about on the way. The prisoners did not know where they were being taken or what would happen to them next.

“Some had their heads simply wrapped in tape, some were just hit on the head if they tried to take off the balaclava and see where they were going, who they were travelling with... There were no watches, your eyes were covered, complete disorientation in space, utterly complete.”

One of the released women describes how the male prisoners were beaten as they were dragged out of the bus.

“They were dragging the lads out of the vans, and right as they stepped out of the van it was: ‘Right, this way, come on, head down, bend over.’ They had to turn round backwards, and the handcuffs were taken off them there. And so the blows were struck to the legs, mainly to the head. When their hands were being wrapped, to those hands that were being taped. When the handcuffs were taken off, almost all of them had marks on their wrists where the cuffs had cut in. Just imagine how travel-sick they must have felt, being driven from Navapolatsk to Homiel with a bag over your head and handcuffs behind your back.”

Violence at the moment when the pardoned prisoners were handed over to another group of escorts was used without regard to people's age or state of health. Among them were elderly people and people with disabilities, including a man with an amputated limb.

[52] “The human rights situation in Belarus. December 2025” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 31 December 2025.

“

“...There were people there, Krauchuk with no leg, elderly, frail people – Alexander Feduta. They were shaken about, messed around and knocked about there as well, right to the last moment. Mainly they hit them on the legs, on the head, on the arms, and only then sat them down with us. That is, they understood that this was probably the last bit of abuse before throwing us out into a country where there is a war going on.”

The prisoners were escorted by men in masks without any insignia – which made it impossible to establish who exactly was escorting them and for what purpose, leaving the prisoners in constant fear and feeling completely defenceless.

“

“Because the people were completely unidentifiable, some kind of bandits in masks, in balaclavas, hiding their faces, hiding themselves, basically. You got the feeling that for them it was entertainment.”

“

“The fear was such, because you do not know, you understand that the legal default is so enormous, and you do not think that something somewhere will go according to a normal scenario, that any human rights will be respected, that your life is of infinite value.”

Some people thought they were about to be shot. Psychologically it was extremely hard: the sudden removal from the penal colony, physical violence, bags over their heads, the absence of documents and being moved in an unknown direction under the control of unidentified armed agents of the state – all of this objectively created a sense of an immediate threat to life.

“

“Because everything was without number plates, everything without identifying marks, you have no idea at all what is going on. Everyone is being beaten. Why wrap people in tape, what is it all for? That is, all the actions were so... I simply drew an analogy with the repressions of Stalin's times. And I know that history has described such moments more than once, when people were driven out and then shot in a field, and that was that...”

“

“I saw people with weapons. I was in shock and afraid. And I thought they were going to shoot us. And later we talked among ourselves, the women, and it was not just me who felt that way; many of the women had the feeling that we would simply be shot in that field. Because it was, sort of, it was so strange, it was closed in by forest on two sides.”

“A field, forest and nobody around, just us and those KGB men. And that was it. Well, that was the thought [about being shot], I don't know. A lot of people there thought about it. All the lads said so. Even Kalesnikava said it in an interview. For some reason everyone thought that.”

The pardoned prisoners were forcibly taken out of Belarus without passports or other valid identity documents. The documents were not lost by those released: according to their accounts, they were withheld by representatives of Belarusian state bodies and not returned to their owners before they crossed the border.

“...People were left without passports. Maksim Znak, Viktor Babaryka, Masha Kalesnikava, Maryna Zolatava – they were left without passports. But many were simply issued with some kind of certificate, and even that just confirms that this is the person. There were individual cases where, for example, [name surname] had her passport made by the penal colony, the money was deducted from her account and the photographs were taken, but she still left without a passport.”

“Then those who were going to Lithuania and those who had no passports were reshuffled into another bus, to make things easier at the Ukrainian-Polish border. I would say that more than 20 people were left without passports.”

Although one of the witnesses did keep her passport, it was subsequently annulled on 27 March 2026, as were the passports of all the political prisoners deported together with her. (See the section of this document on the **Annulment of former political prisoners' passports**.)

Many of the political prisoners taken out of the country had only a matter of months left to serve in the penal colonies.

“One says: I have a month left, for example. Another says: I have a month and a half left. Someone has four months left. I myself was due to be released in June, I had six months left. Someone had served 2–3 years and had a month left. Someone even had two weeks left.”

22 pardoned

Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a decree pardoning 22 convicted persons ahead of the New Year, 20 of whom had been convicted of “extremist activity”. The official announcement and details were published on the website of the President of the Republic of Belarus.

Those pardoned include 15 women and 7 men, and 11 of them have minor children. It is claimed that all these prisoners submitted petitions for pardon addressed to Lukashenka, admitted their guilt and repented of what they had done⁵³.

2026

March 5-6, 2026

18 pardoned

15 of them convicted under “extremism” articles. Most of those pardoned are women (11 people). Six of them have children, including children with disabilities who require constant medical rehabilitation.

Two married couples, a woman in the late stages of pregnancy and one convicted woman who broke the law at the age of 16 were also pardoned. All of them submitted petitions for pardon, admitted their guilt, repented of what they had done and promised to lead a “law-abiding way of life”⁵⁴.

March 19, 2026

250 pardoned

The largest wave of pardons.

Following talks with US Special Envoy John Coale, 250 political prisoners were pardoned; 15 were expelled from the country without documents and 235 remained in Belarus⁵⁵.

A photograph of those released was published by Trump's representative John Coale.

Source: <https://spring96.org/ru/news/119851>



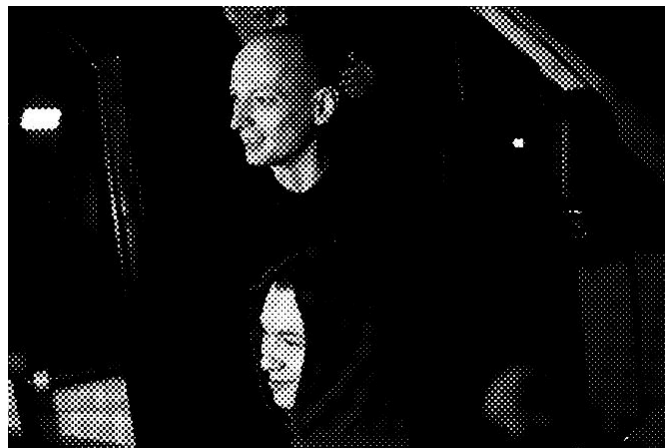
[53] “Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a decree pardoning 22 convicted persons” // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 30 December 2025.

[54] “Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a decree pardoning 18 convicted persons” // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 5 March 2026.

[55] “Pensioners, activists, parents of large families: who is on the list of 250 pardoned political prisoners” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 20 March 2026.

The list of those pardoned includes 51 women and 199 men. Among them are **Valiantsin Stefanovich**, deputy chairperson of Viasna and former vice-president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH); **Marfa Rabkova**, coordinator of Viasna's volunteer service; and **Nasta Loika**, a human rights defender with Human Constanta. Three women were expelled from the country – two human rights defenders (**Marfa Rabkova and Nasta Loika**) and one journalist (**Katsiaryna Bakhvalava (Andrejeva)**).

Twenty-one-year-old **Mikita Zalatarou** was expelled from the country. He was detained on 11 August 2020, when he was 16. Mikita has epilepsy. He reported that only three days before his release he had been on an intravenous drip, and that he was released straight from a punishment cell (SHIZO).



The released political prisoners were brought to Vilnius, 19 March 2025. Source: <https://spring96.org/ru/news/119868>

32 pardoned

According to Lukashenka's press service, 32 people were pardoned ahead of the Independence Day of the Republic of Belarus, 28 of whom had been convicted of "offences of an extremist nature"⁵⁷. Twenty women and 12 men were pardoned. The authorities claimed that the decision had been taken on the basis of the "principle of humanity" towards the convicted persons and their families. The dictator's press service claims that all of them petitioned for a pardon, admitting their guilt and repenting⁵⁸.

25 pardoned

Belarus released 25 political prisoners in exchange for the lifting of US sanctions against two Belarusian companies. The deal was brokered by US Special Envoy John Coale, who was in the capital, Minsk.

[56] "Viasna members Valiantsin Stefanovich and Marfa Rabkova are free!" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 19 March 2026.

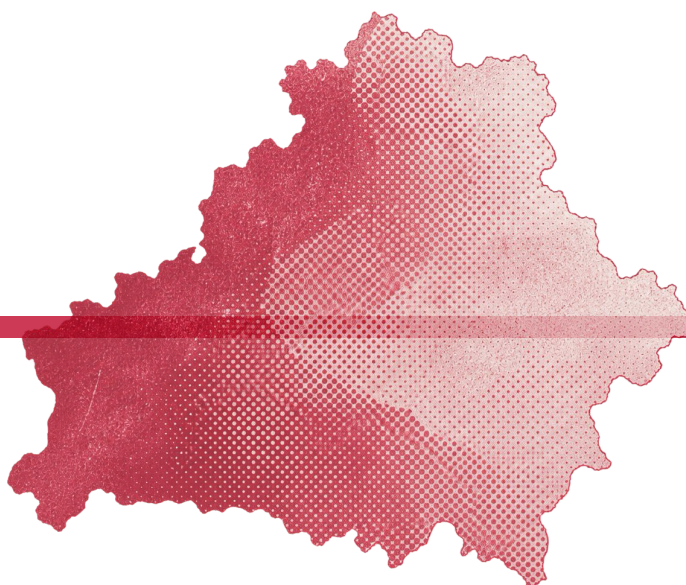
[57] "Aliaksandr Lukashenka pardons another 28 political prisoners" // Deutsche Welle. 1 July 2026.

[58] "Ahead of Independence Day the President of Belarus pardoned 32 convicted persons" // Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus. 1 July 2026.

Those released include journalists, researchers, civic activists and musicians. The list includes people who had spent several years behind bars and were serving long sentences⁵⁹.

Those released are TUT.BY CEO **Liudmila Chekina**; journalist **Andrei Aliaksandrau** and his wife **Iryna Zlobina**; **Dzmitry Navazhylau**, director of the BelaPAN news agency; **Pavel Belavus**, founder of the Symbal.by shop; political scientist **Tatsiana Kuzina**; lawyer **Anastasiya Lazarenka**; activists **Alena Lazarchyk** and **Yana Pinchuk**; Viasna volunteer **Sviatlana Yakubovich**; Tor Band musicians **Dzmitry Halavach**, **Yauhen Burlo** and **Andrei Tsialiuk**; and other prisoners⁶⁰.

Pardoned political prisoners. Photograph published by John Coale on 16 September 2026.
Source: <https://spring96.org/en/news/121179>



[59] "25 political prisoners are free: who was released under a pardon on 16 September" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 16 September 2026.

[60] "Full list of political prisoners released on 16 September 2026" // REFORM.news. 16 September 2026.

LIFE AFTER A PARDON: CONTROL AND RESTRICTIONS

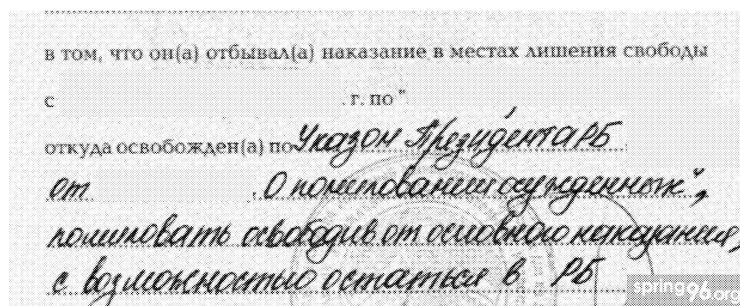
After being pardoned, former political prisoners in Belarus continue to face serious restrictions affecting virtually every aspect of daily life.

- The annulment of passports,
- placement on preventive registers,
- inclusion in the lists of persons involved in "extremist activity",
- the risk of new criminal cases being opened,
- obstacles to finding work.

All show that **a pardon does not bring an end to state control or a full restoration of rights.**

The formal release of former political prisoners is accompanied by a system of long-term restrictions, keeps the person dependent on decisions of state bodies and prevents former prisoners from returning to a normal life.

In practice, **a pardon** halts the execution of a specific punishment but **does not remove the consequences of politically motivated persecution.**



A release certificate of a former political prisoner, stating: "To pardon, releasing from the principal punishment, with the possibility of remaining in the Republic of Belarus". Source: <https://spring96.org/ru/news/120798>

Renewed criminal prosecution and wanted notices after a pardon

A pardon and the forced removal of political prisoners from Belarus do not rule out subsequent criminal prosecution for public activity after release. Many pardoned persons against whom the Belarusian security services have managed to open new criminal cases are also actively placed on wanted lists, and their names appear in the public wanted-persons database of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is closely linked to Belarus. The use of this database effectively gives the persecution a cross-border character and creates a risk of detention not only in Belarus but also in states allied with the Belarusian regime.

In many cases, the pretext for opening a new criminal case against pardoned persons is an interview with independent media outlets in which they describe the circumstances of their detention or their time in a penal colony or pre-trial detention centre. Since the resources of most independent media and human rights organisations have been designated in Belarus as “extremist materials” / “extremist formations”, any interaction with such channels, including comments or interviews, is classified by the security services as “facilitating extremist activity” under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code – the security services take the view that such interviews are given “for the purpose of supporting the activity of public destructive channels”⁶¹.

“

“By the way, a criminal case has been opened against me in Belarus. I do not know the exact article, but my mother was summoned, shown photographs from the media interview Viasna took with me, and told that a case had been opened against me.”

Human rights defenders are aware of the following cases:

CASE 01

- On 3 August 2022, **Pavel Nikitsenka** was sentenced by the Vitsebsk Regional Court under six articles of the Criminal Code to 4 years and 6 months in an enhanced-regime penal colony.
- On 11 September 2025 he was forcibly taken to Lithuania among the 52 political prisoners⁶².
- As early as 22 October 2025, a criminal case was opened against him under Article 361-4(1) of the Criminal Code over interviews with independent outlets (for example, the Viasna Human Rights Centre⁶³ and Zerkalo.io⁶⁴, both designated “extremist formations”), in which he described being taken to the border straight from the penal colony in Babruisk, beatings during his detention and in the Vitsebsk pre-trial detention centre, and pressure on political prisoners.
- On 21 May 2026 it became known that Pavel Nikitsenka had been added to the joint Belarusian-Russian wanted-persons database; the Criminal Code article is not specified⁶⁵.

[61] [“Military analyst sentenced to five years in a penal colony over an interview with an independent media outlet” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 23 December 2022.](#)

[62] [Pavel Nikitsenka – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.](#)

[63] [“‘I was released 95 days before the end of my sentence’ – a political prisoner and programmer taken to Lithuania” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 18 September 2025.](#)

[64] [“Remember this face, you b***h? The story of a programmer who ‘got in the way’ of GUBOPIK – and they came for him in person” // Zerkalo. 18 September 2025.](#)

[65] [“Former political prisoner Pavel Nikitsenka, taken to Lithuania last September, has been added to the international wanted-persons database” // Telegram channel “Vitsebskaya Viasna”. 21 May 2026.](#)

CASE 02

- On 26 July 2023, **Pavel Mazheika** was sentenced by the Hrodna Regional Court to 6 years in an enhanced-regime penal colony.
- On 11 September 2025 he was forcibly taken to Lithuania among the 52 political prisoners⁶⁶.
- On 11 May 2026 a criminal case was opened against him under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code – probably, again, over interviews with independent “extremist” media (for example, Radio Svaboda⁶⁷)⁶⁸. The opening of the criminal case led to dozens of procedural actions involving his acquaintances, friends and relatives, including searches, interrogations and informal “conversations”. Paradoxically, during such actions they enquired about Pavel’s whereabouts inside Belarus and then stated that he could supposedly return to Belarus without any trouble.

New criminal cases and subsequent international wanted notices are also known in respect of pardoned persons **Antanina Kanavalava**⁶⁹, **Yakau Shafarenka**⁷⁰, **Viachaslau Lazarau**⁷¹ and **Dzmitry Kazlou**⁷² – here too the pretext for persecution was most likely interviews with independent media^{73,74,75,76}.

Taking part in celebrations of Freedom Day (marked on 25 March, the date on which the Belarusian People’s Republic was proclaimed in 1918) and in other Belarusian political events held outside Belarus also traditionally leads to reprisals against activists’ and former political prisoners’ relatives who have remained in the country. In 2026, mass searches on these grounds began in May, ahead of the Day of the Political Prisoner, marked by the democratic forces on 21 May in memory of activist Vitold Ashurak, who died in detention.

On 21 May 2026, KGB officers carried out searches at the homes of female relatives of activists who had taken part in commemorations in Warsaw, Vilnius, Białystok and the United States. According to human rights defenders, more than 30 searches were carried out in total.

[66] [Pavel Mazheika – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases](#) // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[67] [“Released journalist Pavel Mazheika: ‘I kept dreaming of a slice of pizza’”](#) // Radio Svaboda. 11 September 2025.

[68] [“A new criminal case has been opened against former political prisoner Pavel Mazheika”](#) // Nasha Niva. 13 July 2026.

[69] [Antanina Kanavalava – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases](#) // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[70] [Yakau Shafarenka – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases](#) // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[71] [Viachaslau Lazarau – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases](#) // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[72] [Dzmitry Kazlou \(Grey Cat\) – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases](#) // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[73] [“‘You cannot walk past someone else’s misfortune’. A former political prisoner is raising six children, four of them adopted”](#) // Belsat. 29 November 2025.

[74] [“Few people know his name, but it is a portrait of thousands: an interview with former political prisoner Yakau Shafarenka”](#) // Belsat. 8 October 2025.

[75] [“Political prisoner Viachaslau Lazarau: ‘In the industrial zone I saw more accidents than in my whole life’”](#) // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 24 October 2025.

[76] [“The return of the Grey Cat: how blogger Dzmitry Kazlou survived five years in prison and was freed under the Lukashenka-Trump deal”](#) // Vot Tak. 3 October 2025.

During the searches, the security officers cited a wide variety of accusations against the activists who had left, including “treason against the state”, “facilitating extremist activity” and “discrediting the Republic of Belarus” under Articles 356, 361-4 and 369-1 of the Criminal Code. The searches also took place at the registered addresses of pardoned former political prisoners⁷⁷.

CASE 03

- On 3 March 2023, **Uladzimir Labkovich**, a human rights defender with the Viasna Human Rights Centre, was sentenced to 7 years in a general-regime penal colony.
- On 13 December 2025 he was forcibly taken to the territory of Ukraine together with 123 other political prisoners⁷⁸.
- On 21 May 2026, security officers carried out a search at his place of residence in Belarus. According to Labkovich, the search was conducted as part of a new criminal case opened over his activity after his release. Authorisation for the search had been issued by the Prosecutor General's Office as early as 8 May 2026, but was used only shortly before the Day of the Political Prisoner, which Labkovich himself saw as a kind of demonstrative “gift” from the regime to mark the day and as a signal to activists and former political prisoners that persecution continues⁷⁹.

CASE 04

- On 25 May 2021, politician **Pavel Seviarynets** was sentenced to 7 years in a strict-regime penal colony.
- On 13 December 2025 he was forcibly taken to the territory of Ukraine, after which he arrived in Lithuania⁸⁰.
- On 25 May 2026 he reported that a criminal case had been opened against him over his participation in Freedom Day and that a search had been carried out at his place of residence in Vitsebsk⁸¹.

After their release, many public figures among former political prisoners regain access to their social media accounts and begin active public work, commenting on their experience of imprisonment or continuing to speak out on matters of public importance. This activity is systematically monitored by the security services, and any post containing criticism of the authorities may subsequently become grounds for opening a new criminal case.

[77] “An ‘extremist’ university and ten thousand ‘extremist materials’” // Human Constanta. 29 July 2026.

[78] Uladzimir Labkovich – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[79] “A ‘gift’ from the regime for the Day of the Political Prisoner: what is known about the mass searches at activists’ relatives’ homes” // Zerkalo. 22 May 2026.

[80] Pavel Seviarynets – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[81] “A new criminal case has been opened against former political prisoner Seviarynets, who was taken out of the country” // Zerkalo. 25 May 2026.

CASE 05

- On 10 November 2021, anarchist activist **Mikalai Dziadok** was sentenced to five years in a strict-regime penal colony; he was due to be released on 25 April 2025, but new criminal cases were opened against him, as a result of which he ended up among the political prisoners released and expelled from the country.
- On 11 September 2025 he was forcibly taken to Lithuania⁸².
- On 29 January 2026 he reported that a criminal case had been opened against him "for extremist publications or statements" and that his parents were being summoned for questioning.
- On 19 August 2026 it became known that he had been added to the joint Belarusian-Russian wanted-persons database; as usual, the Criminal Code article is not specified⁸³.

CASE 06

- On 3 March 2023, **Ales Bialiatski**, founder of the Viasna Human Rights Centre and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment.
- On 13 December 2025 he was pardoned and forcibly taken to the territory of Lithuania⁸⁴.
- On 19 August 2026 it became known that he had been added to the joint Belarusian-Russian wanted-persons database; as usual, the Criminal Code article is not specified⁸⁵. Commenting on this news, he said that he had evidently "talked his way into another criminal case", but that he did not know the details⁸⁶.

Restrictions imposed on former political prisoners after release

The legislation of the Republic of Belarus provides for three types of regimes restricting the rights of convicted persons who have served their sentence, and these are widely applied to people convicted under "extremism" articles of the Criminal Code. These regimes may also be applied to pardoned persons: official announcements of pardons invariably state that the convicted persons are released from punishment "without expungement of the criminal record", which means that they formally continue to be regarded as having a criminal record and are subject to these regimes on general grounds.

[82] Mikalai Dziadok – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[83] "Belarusian police are searching 'under a criminal article' for Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, who was expelled from the country" // Zerkalo. 18 August 2026.

[84] Ales Bialiatski – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[85] "Belarusian police are searching 'under a criminal article' for Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, who was expelled from the country" // Zerkalo. 18 August 2026.

[86] "I found out that I am wanted from Zerkalo: Ales Bialiatski on his new criminal case and why the authorities persecute those who have left" // Zerkalo. 19 August 2026.

Preventive registration is applied to persons convicted of any offence, including “extremist” ones. It is governed by Law No. 122-Z “On the fundamentals of crime prevention activity”. Preventive registration applies to all convicted persons. The person is visited by officers of the internal affairs bodies at least once a month and is required to attend preventive events (lectures, screenings of films about offences). Registration ends once the criminal record is expunged or becomes spent.

Preventive supervision, governed by Article 81 of the Criminal Code, applies to anyone sentenced to imprisonment for an intentional offence, irrespective of its gravity; to persons convicted two or more times; and to persons convicted of grave offences (for example, “incitement to hatred”, “facilitating extremist activity”, “creating an extremist formation”) or especially grave offences (for example, “conspiracy”, “act of terrorism”, “treason against the state”). Under preventive supervision, the person must notify the Ministry of Internal Affairs of any change of residence and of trips lasting more than a month, appear when summoned and give explanations about their conduct. It remains in force until the criminal record is expunged or becomes spent.

Preventive monitoring, governed by Article 80 of the Criminal Code, applies to persons convicted of an offence committed as part of a group or criminal organisation (for example, defendants in cases concerning acts of sabotage aimed at countering Russian aggression in Ukraine⁸⁷, the “Viasna case”⁸⁸ or various cases concerning “extremist formations”⁸⁹).

This measure may also be applied to persons convicted of a grave or especially grave offence, or to persons convicted two or more times and sentenced to imprisonment for any intentional offence, where at the time of their release from the penal colony they are classified as “persistently violating the established procedure for serving a sentence” – a status often assigned to political prisoners who receive an additional conviction under Article 411 of the Criminal Code, “Persistent disobedience to the requirements of the administration of a correctional institution”⁹⁰.

This regime may also be applied to the above-mentioned groups of people if they have been held administratively liable at least twice within a year before their criminal record is expunged. Under preventive monitoring, a person is prohibited from visiting certain places, from leaving home at set times and from travelling outside their district, city or the country without permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The person may also be required to take up work or study. This regime is similar to restriction of liberty without referral to an open-type institution and is imposed for a period of between 6 months and 2 years, or until the criminal record is expunged.

[87] [All persecuted persons // dissidentby.](#)

[88] [“From 7 to 10 years in a penal colony: sentences announced for the imprisoned human rights defenders of Viasna” // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 3 March 2023.](#)

[89] [“The head of the ‘Russian Orthodox Church of the Tsarist Empire’ is to be tried for ‘extremism’” // Telegram channel “Viasna / Human Rights in Belarus”. 23 July 2026.](#)

[90] [All persecuted persons // dissidentby.](#)

Breaching preventive monitoring or preventive supervision carries a fine or detention of up to 15 days (Article 25.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences), and failure to comply with preventive registration may be treated as disobedience to an official (Article 24.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences), with the same penalty. If a person breaches preventive monitoring twice in a year, a criminal case may be opened against them under Article 421 of the Criminal Code (up to 1 year's imprisonment). Evading monitoring carries up to 2 years' imprisonment (Article 422 of the Criminal Code).

These "preventive" measures are actively applied to pardoned prisoners, who **face daily pressure and surveillance**.

On 20 March 2026, answering a question from state propagandists about the 235 pardoned people who had remained in Belarus and whether they might become agents of influence and turn into a threat to the state in future, Aliaksandr Lukashenka stated that "before they were let out, they were all placed under the control of the special services and the police", and that around 30–40 of them are considered to pose a "threat" and are "under the control of the law-enforcement agencies", thereby confirming that a pardon does not free anyone from the state's attention⁹¹.

Those released have faced compulsory regular reporting to the police, strict monitoring of compliance with the restrictions imposed, and threats of administrative liability in the form of detention and fines for breaching them. Pardoned political prisoners are also required to find work as quickly as possible⁹².

Yahor, a political prisoner released under a pardon on 3 July 2024, told the outlet Current Time that after his release the security services did not expunge his criminal record, as a result of which he was obliged to report to the police once a week. According to him, the pardon itself was granted as unconditional (*"I asked on what conditions the pardon was granted, and he said: no conditions"*), which shows that even an unconditional release entails a long period of preventive control⁹³.

The security services also carry out arbitrary searches of pardoned persons' homes and check their phones for opposition content.

[91] "Everything is under control, 2020 will not happen again.' Lukashenka on the prisoners released in Belarus" // BelTA, 20 March 2026.

[92] "The security services continue to put pressure on political prisoners released under pardons" // Telegram channel "Viasna / Human Rights in Belarus". 23 July 2026.

[93] "I asked on what conditions the pardon was granted, and he said: no conditions'. What is known about the release of dozens of political prisoners in Belarus" // Current Time, 25 September 2024.

For example, journalist **Andrei Tolchyn**, sentenced in March 2024 to 2.5 years in a penal colony and then pardoned and released in September 2024, came to the attention of the security services again as early as the end of the same year. In October his home was searched and he himself was detained. In December he was held administratively liable for “distributing extremist materials” (Article 19.11(2) of the Code of Administrative Offences) – presumably after banned subscriptions or reposts were found on his phone during an arbitrary check⁹⁴.

According to the human rights initiative dissidentby, whose information has been confirmed by former BYSOL head Andrei Stryzhak and by BYPOL⁹⁵, KGB officers are inducing former political prisoners on a mass scale to cooperate, under threat of fresh persecution and pressure on their families: they are forced to sign documents, to take part in propaganda videos and to carry out agent work against democratic structures, relief funds and human rights organisations.

The spyware programme “Kaiman”, which records conversations, geolocation and correspondence in real time, is installed on recruited people’s phones, after which the person is made to approach funds assisting victims of repression themselves, so that channels of support can be identified under KGB control. Such people are also barred from leaving the country⁹⁶.

Confiscation of property and its sale at auction

A separate aspect of the continuing repression against pardoned political prisoners is that release from serving a sentence has no effect whatsoever on the fate of their property, which the state continues to seize and sell off even after the person has been freed.

The legal explanation for this lies in Article 96 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, which governs the institution of pardon.

Under that provision, an act of pardon may release a person in full or in part from both the principal and the additional punishment, or may replace the punishment imposed with a more lenient one; however, the precise scope of such relief is determined solely by the text of the presidential pardon decree itself.

If the decree releases a person only from further imprisonment but contains no express provision cancelling additional property-related penalties (a fine, or compensation for damage awarded in a civil claim), those penalties remain fully in force.

[94] Andrei Tolchyn – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[95] “ATTENTION! The KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs are conducting a special operation!” // Telegram channel “BYPOL – Expert Bureau”. 26 September 2024.

[96] “No pardon took place, or What is happening to the people who have been released recently?” // Telegram channel dissidentby. 27 September 2024.

As a rule, two types of property-related obligations are involved, imposed by the judgment separately from imprisonment.

The first is **a fine** – a separate type of additional punishment provided for by Article 50 of the Criminal Code: the court orders the convicted person to pay a specified sum of money to the state.

The second is **compensation for damage**, recovered through a civil claim within the same criminal case (for example, in favour of the state or of representatives of the authorities as the “injured party”).

Both of these liabilities exist independently of imprisonment and are not automatically cancelled by a pardon.

Such sums are recovered through enforcement proceedings on the basis of the Law “On enforcement proceedings” of 24 October 2016, No. 439-Z. Once the judgment enters into force, its property-related part is transferred to a court enforcement officer, who establishes whether the debtor has any property and seizes it (Article 82 of the Law). The seized property is then transferred for compulsory sale (Article 91 of the Law): real estate, vehicles and other property worth 1,000 basic units (≈ \$15,250) or more must be sold through electronic auctions.

In practice, property is most often sold through the state enterprise BelYurObespecheniye, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice: it organises the seizure, valuation, storage and sale of seized property through electronic auctions, an online shop and its own retail outlets. The proceeds of sale are credited to the account of the enforcement authority and go towards paying off the fine imposed or the compensation for damage.

Formally, this process continues regardless of where the former convict is or what status they have: the fact that a person has already been pardoned and taken out of the country does nothing to stop enforcement proceedings inside Belarus.

Henryk Okołotowicz

A Catholic priest from Valozhyn, detained at the end of 2023 and sentenced to 11 years’ imprisonment in an enhanced-regime penal colony on charges of “treason against the state”, allegedly in favour of Poland and the Vatican. The judgment also ordered him to pay compensation for damage totalling about 1.7 million Belarusian roubles (≈ \$550,000)⁹⁷. On 20 November 2025 he was released under a pardon and taken to the Vatican together with the second pardoned priest, Andrzej Juchniewicz, the condition for his release being an undertaking to refrain from public statements for at least a year⁹⁸. Despite this, the authorities continue to put his property up for auction through BelYurObespecheniye, evidently towards payment of that sum: in addition to a land plot in the Baranavichy district and a car, several antique icons from the 18th to the 20th centuries have repeatedly been put up for sale, some of which are designated monuments of folk artistic culture⁹⁹. The auctions, however, systematically fail for want of buyers. At the same time, in respect of one unsold lot the creditor (which, where a fine imposed by a court judgment is being recovered, is the state itself) was offered the chance to keep the unsold icon towards repayment of the debt – that is, in effect to confiscate it without any sale or buyer at all¹⁰⁰.

Vital Tsynkel

A resident of Vaukavysk, detained in October 2024 in the "courtyard chats case". He was sentenced to two years and ten months' imprisonment in a general-regime penal colony and to a fine of 800 basic units (≈ \$9,900), and was added to the list of "extremists". He was pardoned on 19 March 2026 as part of the release of 250 political prisoners and remained in Belarus¹⁰¹. Despite this, on 21 June 2026 it became known that his 1998 Opel Vectra had been put up for sale through BelYurObespecheniye for 2,600 roubles (≈ \$800) – evidently towards payment of the fine imposed¹⁰².

Ihar Losik

A journalist detained on 25 June 2020. In December 2021 he was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on charges of "incitement to hatred" and "preparation of mass riots". On 11 September 2025 he was released under a pardon and taken to Lithuania¹⁰³.

In December 2025 a court enforcement officer contacted him by private message on Instagram, asking for his current place of residence as part of enforcement proceedings. It turned out that the property-related part of his sentence remains in force: under a civil claim by the Prosecutor General's Office, some 22–25 million Belarusian roubles are to be recovered from him (USD 7.48 million at the exchange rate of 21 December 2025)¹⁰⁴. This enormous sum represents part of the budget expenditure on suppressing the 2020 protests, in particular bonuses and additional payments to riot police (OMON) officers for overtime between 9 August and 1 December 2020, as well as consumables used by the security forces (broken handcuffs, stun grenades used). These sums are being claimed from Losik even though he was detained before the start of the period in which the expenditure was incurred¹⁰⁵.

[97] ["The authorities are selling off the property of pardoned priest Henryk Okołodowicz" // Pozirk. 12 February 2026.](#)

[98] [Henryk Okołodowicz – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.](#)

[99] ["Several more icons seized from Father Henryk Okołodowicz have been put up for sale" // Telegram channel "Christian Vision: NO TO WAR!". 24 June 2026.](#)

[100] ["Father Okołodowicz's icons could not be sold at auction. Now one of them may be taken towards the 'debt'" // Telegram channel "Christian Vision: NO TO WAR!". 14 May 2026.](#)

[101] ["Nine residents of Vaukavysk sentenced" // Telegram channel "Trials, detentions. Hrodna and the region". 3 November 2025.](#)

[102] ["A Vaukavysk resident has been pardoned, but his property is being sold off anyway" // Hrodna.life. 21 June 2026.](#)

[103] [Ihar Losik – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases // Viasna Human Rights Centre.](#)

[104] The exact amount of the claim is unknown and depends, among other things, on the court's decision. The range of 22–25 million may be explained by discrepancies or gaps in the sources available to Ihar Losik.

[105] ["Former political prisoner Ihar Losik has shown the message a court enforcement officer sent him in a private Instagram chat" // Zerkalo. 21 December 2025.](#)

Yauhen Kislou

In 2024 he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 100 basic units (≈ \$1,240) on a combination of charges under 6 "extremism" articles; on 13 December 2025 he was released and forcibly taken out of Belarus among the 123 political prisoners¹⁰⁶. Despite this, a notice appeared on the door of his flat stating that the premises had been sealed and seized. It appears that this may be the same procedure as in the cases of Tsynkel and Okołotowicz: seizure usually precedes the transfer of property for compulsory sale¹⁰⁷.

Pavel Seviarynets

On 18 August 2026 it became known that a share of the politician's flat in Vitsebsk, where he is registered as resident, had been seized¹⁰⁸. Open sources do not report that, in addition to his principal sentence, Seviarynets was fined or that a civil claim was brought against him, as was announced in the cases of the pardoned persons mentioned above. The seizure of a share of his flat in 2026 therefore appears to relate not to the old case but may be preparation for special (in absentia) proceedings against him over his participation in the Freedom Day celebrations mentioned above. In all likelihood, this may be followed by confiscation of property as "compensation for damage" caused by the "offence".

Designation of former political prisoners' social media pages as "extremist"

The courts actively designate pardoned political prisoners' accounts on various social media as "extremist materials"¹⁰⁹, which entails their inclusion in the Republican List of Extremist Materials¹¹⁰.



"The only thing I know is that some information seems to have slipped out that one of the web pages or channels of the organisation I founded, which was officially liquidated in 2021, has been designated extremist,"

[106] [Yauhen Kislou – List of political prisoners and persons convicted in criminal cases](#) // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

[107] ["Photo fact: what the flat of former political prisoner Yauhen Kislou looks like"](#) // Telegram channel "Viasna / Human Rights in Belarus". 26 May 2026.

[108] ["A share of the flat of former political prisoner Pavel Seviarynets in Vitsebsk has been seized"](#) // Mediazona Belarus. 18 August 2026.

[109] ["An 'extremist' university and ten thousand 'extremist materials'"](#) // Human Constanta. 29 July 2026.

[110] [Republican List of Extremist Materials](#) // Ministry of Information

Thus, by decisions of various district courts, the following accounts of political prisoners, among others, were designated “extremist materials” after they had been pardoned:

Facebook accounts



- account of the politician **Mikalai Statkevich**, pardoned twice, in 2025 and 2026 (decision of the Leninski District Court of Hrodna of 23 April 2026);
- account of **Siarhei Sparysh**, an activist of the Narodnaya Hramada party, pardoned on 11 September 2025 (decision of the Hlusk District Court, Mahiliou region, of 4 March 2026);
- account of the politician **Pavel Seviarynets**, pardoned on 13 December 2025 (two decisions of the Hlusk District Court, Mahiliou region, of 4 March 2026).

Threads-accounts



- account of the politician **Viktar Babaryka** and
- his associate **Maria Kalesnikava**, pardoned on 13 December 2025 (decision of the Partyzanski District Court of Minsk of 26 January 2026);
- account of the anarchist activist **Mikalai Dziadok**, pardoned on 11 September 2025 (decision of the Kastychnitski District Court of Minsk of 13 March 2026).



Instagram-page “let_nasta_be”, devoted to solidarity with the human rights defender **Nasta Loika**, pardoned on 19 March 2026 (decision of the Bykhau District Court, Mahiliou region, of 25 March 2026).



Telegram-channel of the former editor-in-chief of TUT.BY **Maryna Zolatava**, pardoned on 13 December 2025 (decision of the Loyew District Court, Homiel region, of 5 August 2026).

TikTok-accounts



- account of the blogger **Ihar Losik**, pardoned on 13 December 2025 (decision of the Cherykau District Court, Mahiliou region, of 8 April 2026);
- account of the blogger and politician **Siarhei Tsikhanouski**, pardoned on 21 June 2025 (decision of the Smaliavichy District Court, Minsk region, of 23 October 2025);
- account of **Siarhei Sparysh** (decision of the Homiel District Court, Homiel region, of 28 October 2025).

In some decisions the courts designate all existing accounts of a pardoned prisoner as “extremist materials” at once.

Thus, on 5 November 2025 the Central District Court of Minsk designated **all of Siarhei Tsikhanouski's social media and channels – his Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube and Telegram accounts – as “extremist materials”**.

Any dealings with materials included in the Republican List of Extremist Materials (distribution, storage, production, transport and other similar acts) entail administrative liability under Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences. In practice, the range of punishable acts includes forwarding “extremist” posts in group chats and private messages, liking and commenting on posts by “extremist” outlets, resharing “extremist” materials on social media, subscribing to “extremist” outlets and numerous other similar acts. The sanction under Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences is a fine of between 10 and 500 basic units (from 450 to 22,500 roubles, ≈ \$125 to \$6,250) or administrative detention of up to 15 days¹¹¹.

The authors or administrators of accounts designated as “extremist materials” face the threat of prosecution under Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences as “producers” of information products included in the Republican List of Extremist Materials. Moreover, administering channels or accounts may in itself be treated as a continuing offence, on the basis that the material remains publicly accessible regardless of any activity by its author: the security services interpret the very existence of such a resource on the internet as ongoing “production” or “storage” of information products included in the republican list. Accordingly, under Article 4.6 of the Code of Administrative Offences, the standard limitation period of two months from the date of the offence does not apply to such cases – instead, a period of two months from the date on which the unlawful activity was discovered applies.

In practice this means that as long as the account remains active and accessible online, its author or administrator may be held liable an unlimited number of times, since each new discovery of the resource by the security services formally starts a fresh two-month limitation period. The only way finally to end such a “continuing” offence is to delete the account entirely – until then its owner is in effect under a permanent threat of prosecution, including detention¹¹².

At the same time, the authors and owners of content designated as “extremist” have no opportunity whatsoever to challenge that decision.

[111] “An ‘extremist’ university and ten thousand ‘extremist materials’” // Human Constanta. 29 July 2026.

[112] “A ban on ‘Satanism’ and radio amateurs as spies: a review of the fight against ‘extremism’ in Belarus, January–March 2026” // Human Constanta. 4 May 2026.

For example, on 4 June 2026 human rights defender and former political prisoner **Leanid Sudalenka** published the response of the Maladziechna District Court to his request for a copy of the ruling by which his TikTok account had been designated “extremist materials”. The court refused, stating that “there are no grounds for issuing a copy of the decision requested, since under Articles 57 and 60 of the Code of Civil Procedure of the Republic of Belarus” he “is not among the persons entitled to receive them”. Sudalenka was not notified of the hearing of the case itself^[113].

Annulment of former political prisoners' passports

According to media reports, the Belarusian authorities have annulled the passports of at least 16 former political prisoners who were released and taken out of the country. This was reported on 31 March 2026 by Radio Svaboda, citing the accounts of those affected.

Former political prisoner Illia Dubski, who lives in Lithuania, reported that his passport had been annulled. According to him, on 30 March he checked the records in the database of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs and established that his passport, valid until 2027, had been annulled. He is also banned from entering Belarus.

Dubski stated that he knows of 16 former political prisoners in total who have found themselves in a similar situation^[114].



“You could say I have been stripped of my citizenship, – Illia observes. – I don't care what they have done. Let them do what they like. But yes, it will cause some inconvenience. Without this passport I cannot travel to another country, for example from Lithuania to Poland. If I use an invalid Belarusian passport to do so, I will face administrative liability at the very least, and perhaps even criminal liability”.

Belarusian law provides for a limited list of grounds on which a passport may be declared invalid. These include, in particular, damage to the document, a change of personal data or the loss of citizenship. The opening of a criminal case against the passport holder is not in itself a ground for annulment. Declaring former political prisoners' passports invalid therefore requires a separate legal basis, of which, according to the available accounts, their holders were not notified.

One such case concerns **Andrei** (the name has been changed for security reasons). He was released and expelled from Belarus in September 2025. While he was being transported across the border, security officers initially refused to return his documents. Andrei insisted that his passport be handed over and refused to board the bus until the document was returned to him.

[113] “A very convenient model of justice”: A Belarusian tried to find out why his account had been designated ‘extremist’ – without success” // Zerkalo. 4 June 2026.

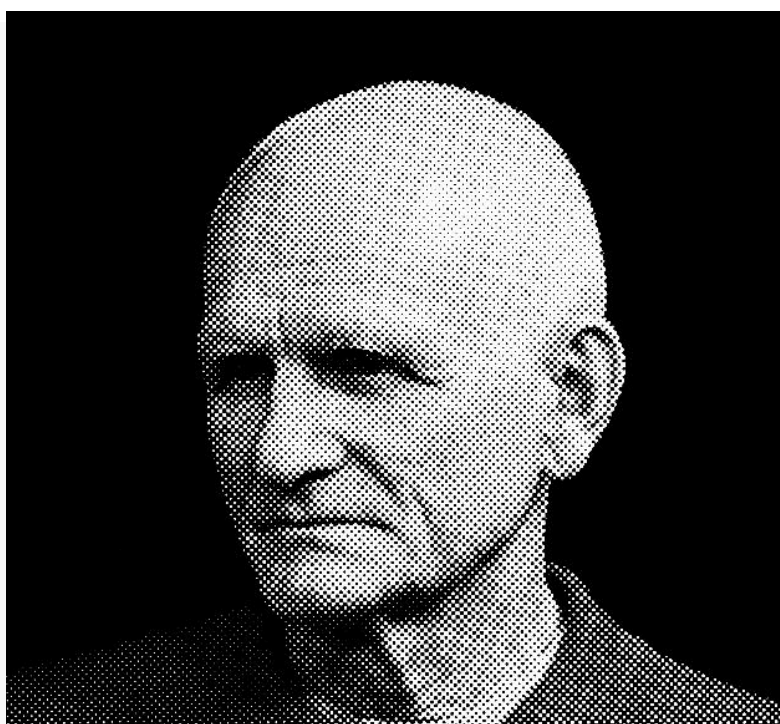
[114] “Political prisoners taken out of Belarus with their passports have had their documents annulled. We spoke to them” // Radio Svaboda. 30 March 2026.

Andrei's passport had been issued with a validity period until 2031. For several months after his expulsion it remained valid: at the end of 2025, in particular, Andrei successfully used it to complete online identification on a Belarusian internet service. In March 2026, however, a check against the Ministry of Internal Affairs database revealed that the passport had been declared invalid. At the same time, the same database contained no information indicating that Andrei was wanted by the police.

Andrei then suggested that other expelled political prisoners check the status of their documents. According to him, about ten people found themselves in a similar situation: their passports had also been annulled after their release and departure from the country¹¹⁵.

On 3 April 2026 it became known that the passport of Nobel laureate **Ales Bialiatski** had also been declared invalid. He had the document in his possession and it was due to remain valid until 2028. Bialiatski was released and forcibly taken to Lithuania on 13 December 2025.

Bialiatski himself described the annulment of his passport as a form of transnational repression aimed at complicating the lives of expelled political prisoners abroad. At that point the annulment had not yet prevented him from travelling from Lithuania to Poland and Belgium, since, according to him, foreign border services accepted the document¹¹⁶.



Ales Bialiatski after his release. Source: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/33723951.html>

The annulment of passports after forced removal deepens the legal uncertainty in which former prisoners find themselves. They lose the ability to use the principal document confirming their identity and citizenship abroad, to move freely and to apply for a range of administrative services.

[115] "‘You could say I have been stripped of my citizenship’: the Belarusian authorities have annulled the passports of many political prisoners expelled from Belarus" // Current Time. 31 March 2026.

[116] "The Belarusian authorities have annulled the passport of Nobel laureate Ales Bialiatski" // Radio Svaboda. 3 April 2026.

Combined with an entry ban, this measure not only prevents them from returning to their homeland but also entrenches the de facto exile that began under the guise of release. Where another travel document cannot be obtained in good time, this practice also increases the risk of de facto statelessness.

The absence of a valid passport substantially complicates the lives of former political prisoners abroad. Without an identity document they face obstacles in regularising their stay, finding work, renting accommodation, opening bank accounts and obtaining administrative services. Their ability to cross borders and move freely between countries is also restricted.

At the same time, the annulment of a passport makes returning to Belarus practically impossible. For several years now, Belarusian diplomatic missions have not been issuing new passports to citizens permanently residing abroad. Moreover, there have been reports of consular offices confiscating documents that were still valid¹¹⁷.

As a result, expelled political prisoners find themselves in a legal trap of sorts: they cannot obtain a valid Belarusian passport abroad, but they cannot safely return to their homeland to have one issued. Even where the country of residence provides them with temporary documents or international protection, this does not remove the violation committed by Belarus.

The annulment of passports is therefore not merely an administrative measure but a means of continuing cross-border pressure. It entrenches the consequences of forced exile, increases the expelled persons' dependence on the decisions of foreign states and restricts the practical exercise of their right to return to their own country.

[117] ["Belarus's diplomatic missions will no longer issue passports to citizens abroad" // Current Time, 5 September 2023.](#)

THE POSITION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COALITION ON THE FORCED EXPULSION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS FROM THE COUNTRY

The forced expulsion of pardoned political prisoners

The coalition of Belarusian human rights defenders has characterised the removal of pardoned political prisoners as forced expulsion that is becoming mass and systematic in nature. Human rights defenders note that those released were moved directly from places of detention under the control of the security agencies, in some cases in handcuffs and with bags over their heads, without access to legal assistance or the necessary documents. In the coalition's assessment, such actions violate the right to personal liberty and to freedom of movement, including a citizen's right to return to their own country. The coalition separately emphasises the danger of moving former prisoners to the territory of Ukraine amid the ongoing armed conflict.

Human rights defenders **have also pointed out that mass or systematic forced expulsion carried out as part of state policy may require assessment as deportation – a crime against humanity under Article 7(1)(d) of the Rome Statute¹¹⁸.**

Arbitrary annulment of passports as a form of transnational repression

In a statement of 10 April 2026, the coalition of Belarusian human rights organisations classified the declaring invalid of former political prisoners' passports as a new form of transnational repression. This concerns people who, after being released in September and December 2025, were forcibly taken out of Belarus and then deprived of the ability to use valid national documents.

[118] Statement by the human rights coalition on the forced expulsion from the Republic of Belarus of persons released under pardons, 23 December 2025 // Viasna Human Rights Centre.

Human rights defenders regard a passport not only as an administrative document but also as confirmation of the legal bond between an individual and the state. Under Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the state is obliged to guarantee its citizens protection and patronage both within the country and beyond its borders. The arbitrary annulment of a passport means that the state is in effect refusing to discharge that obligation, even though the person formally retains their citizenship.

The absence of a valid passport does not result in the loss of citizenship *de jure*, but it can place a person in a position comparable to *de facto* statelessness. They formally retain their citizenship but cannot fully enjoy the rights and protection flowing from it. This creates obstacles to confirming their identity, regularising their stay, moving, finding work, disposing of property and maintaining family ties. The coalition links this practice to violations of the right to recognition as a person before the law, freedom of movement, private and family life, equal treatment and protection of property.

What makes this measure particularly serious is its connection with the preceding forced expulsion. First the political prisoners were taken out of Belarus without any free choice as to where they would live, and then the documents they need in order to live abroad and to return home were declared invalid. These actions should be seen as consecutive elements of a single mechanism: release from detention, forcible transfer, deprivation of documents and entrenchment of the impossibility of return.

The annulment of passports complements a broader state policy of restricting citizens' access to documents. Following the adoption of Decree No. 278 of 4 September 2023¹¹⁹ Belarusian diplomatic missions stopped issuing and renewing passports abroad. As a result, a citizen whose document has expired, been confiscated or been declared invalid cannot obtain a new passport at a consulate. For politically persecuted individuals, the requirement to apply for a document inside Belarus effectively means having to return to a state where they may face renewed detention.

The arbitrary annulment of passports thus serves as a way of retaining control over a person after their release and removal abroad. It prolongs **the consequences of political persecution beyond the territory of Belarus and increases the victims' dependence on foreign states.**

The coalition has also pointed out that this practice may be regarded as part of a broader state policy of systematic persecution of the civilian population¹²⁰.

[119] On the procedure for issuing documents and performing certain acts. Decree No. 278 of 4 September 2023.

[120] Statement by the human rights coalition on the arbitrary declaring invalid of passports of citizens of the Republic of Belarus // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 10 April 2026.

ASSESSMENT OF THE FORCED EXPULSION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS FROM BELARUS AGAINST INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS



The practice of forcibly expelling political prisoners from Belarus has been assessed by international organisations. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) found that those released (without their free and informed consent) were often taken out of Belarus, deprived of the opportunity to remain in their own country and effectively faced with a choice between imprisonment and exile. PACE also pointed to the coercion of prisoners into filing petitions for pardon admitting guilt¹²¹.

UN experts, for their part, have pointed to cases of forced expulsion from Belarus and of the confiscation of people's documents, which creates a risk of statelessness. In their assessment, transnational repression has become part of the Belarusian authorities' overall repressive policy since 2020. The state uses administrative, criminal-law and passport mechanisms to retain control over its citizens even after they have left the country. The denial of consular services, the arbitrary declaring of passports as invalid and the forced expulsion of former political prisoners place people in a state of legal vulnerability and restrict their freedom of movement and their access to regularisation of status, work, medical care and family life¹²².

At the international level, the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus has also drawn attention to the problem of the forced expulsion of political prisoners from Belarus. The experts welcome the release of political prisoners but point out that the manner of their release gives rise to serious concern, since political prisoners were forcibly expelled to third countries and some were deprived of identity documents, leading to the conclusion that these measures are contrary to international human rights standards¹²³.

[121] ROJHAN, Azadeh. Situation of political prisoners in Russia and Belarus: Information Note / A. Rojhan ; Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. – Strasbourg, 2025. – 7 April. – Док. AS/Jur (2025) 12. – 7 p.

[122] "UN experts are concerned about the annulment of the passports of former political prisoners expelled from Belarus" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 6 July 2026.

[123] "Independent experts on Belarus: the authorities are conducting a systematic campaign of repression" // UN News. 12 March 2026.

Nils Muižnieks, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, also highlights the problem of expelled political prisoners, noting that they are in a legal vacuum, with no clarity as to whether they can safely return to Belarus or whether they have a criminal record¹²⁴. He also points to the continuing persecution of expelled political prisoners: new criminal cases are opened against them, special (in absentia) proceedings are used and they are placed on wanted lists.

As already noted, the forced expulsion of Belarusian political prisoners bears the hallmarks of crimes against humanity in the form of **persecution and deportation**. Crimes against humanity are especially serious violations of international criminal law and are governed by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court¹²⁵.

Under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute, one form of such crimes is **persecution** – the systematic and intentional violation of fundamental human rights in respect of a particular group of people. Persecution constitutes a crime against humanity where it is committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population¹²⁶.

Another form of crime against humanity is **deportation or forcible transfer of population** under Article 7(1)(d) of the Rome Statute. Under Article 7(2)(d), this means the forced displacement of persons by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law. Deportation involves transfer across a state border, forcible transfer within it.

The elements of this crime are:

- the perpetrator deported or forcibly transferred one or more persons to another State or location, by expulsion or other coercive acts, without grounds permitted under international law;
- such person or persons were lawfully present in the area from which they were deported or transferred;
- the perpetrator was aware of the factual circumstances that established the lawfulness of such presence;
- the conduct was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population;
- the perpetrator knew that the conduct was part of, or intended the conduct to be part of, such an attack¹²⁷.

[124] "The 'Russification and Sovietisation' of the past. The UN Special Rapporteur has issued a new report on Belarus" // Viasna Human Rights Centre. 16 June 2026.

[125] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: принят 17 июля 1998 года., вступил в силу 1 июля 2002 года. : док. ООН A/CONF.183/9. – International Criminal Court.

[126] For more detail on the elements of persecution, see the publication on incommunicado detention: "Silence as an accomplice: incommunicado detention in Belarus as torture and inhuman treatment" / International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus. – [n.d.].

[127] Elements of Crimes / International Criminal Court. – 2011. – ISBN 92-9227-232-2.

Accordingly, given their widespread or systematic character and the fact that they are directed against the civilian population, these actions of the Belarusian authorities bear the hallmarks of crimes against humanity in the form of persecution and deportation or forcible transfer of population.

The forced expulsion of political prisoners from Belarus, carried out without their free and informed consent and under threat of continued deprivation of liberty, taken together with their preceding politically motivated imprisonment, the coercion to admit guilt, the annulment of documents, criminal prosecution in absentia, wanted notices and pressure on relatives, takes on the character of continuing transnational persecution. In this case state borders do not put an end to repression; they merely change the means used to carry it out.

