

BELARUS**OSCE****(88)****(37)**

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Advisory and Monitoring Group Belarus

The Current Situation of Human Rights in Belarus

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline the current conditions in Belarus which contribute to violations of human rights and freedoms. It's intent is to explain why and how human rights violations occur in this country. This report does not discuss individual human rights cases.

Overview

Human rights and freedoms of a modern democratic state are guaranteed in writing in the Constitution of Belarus, both in the 1994 Constitution and the 1996 "operational" Constitution. However, the reality in the country shows a much different picture. Indeed there are numerous restrictions to these rights and freedoms of which one most common form is administrative harassment. The restrictions and harassment primarily are the result of the power amassed by the President of the country. However, the other bodies of government as well as government institutions and the public administration all have a role to play in the restriction and violation of human rights and freedoms. The ministers, police, and judges, for example, are all put into individual conflict with the power structure since the individual must hold onto his job as it would be extremely economically disadvantageous to be dismissed. The public administration has an obligation to advise the government which it serves; however, the administration is under pressure to advise only in a way which is in the interest of the state and thus the public writ large.

The Executive

The amendments to the 1994 Constitution which form the "operational" Constitution concentrate power with the President of the Republic. This concentration of power has deprived the other two levels of government as well as the public administration of their independence. And thus violations of human rights and freedoms occur due to the overwhelming power position of the President which he assumed on the basis of "his" constitution adopted after the referendum of 1996. The 1996 Constitution gives the President the power to issue decrees and edicts with the power of law. While in theory such decrees are only to be issued in dire situations, in reality they are issued rather often to put some aspect of society under control.

For example, in May 1997, the President issued a decree which put the lawyers' collegium under the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry now is responsible for conducting bar exams and admitting and suspending lawyers from the state collegium. With this decree all lawyers had to register with the state collegium, otherwise they could not practice law in the country. In effect, this decree has done away with private practice lawyers and made all lawyers who want to practice law subject to the state. Of the "independent" lawyers who registered with the state collegium at least two of them have since been suspended from the collegium which means that they cannot practice law for five years. Of the few "independent" lawyers left in the collegium, their status is hanging in the balance and they may be suspended at any time in

the near future. It is the "independent" lawyers who take on the cases of political detainees or other who have been arrested for their opposition to the state. The state lawyers refuse to take on such cases.

Another example, in 1994 the President issued a decree requiring that all public associations (NGOs, political parties, interest groups, etc.) had to re-register with the Ministry of Justice by mid-1995 or else their registration would be annulled and the only way they could register would be by forming an entirely new organization. The re-registration process entailed quite a lot of restrictions and harassment whereby not all organizations made it through the re-registration. Currently, organizations seeking to register are having a hard time meeting the Ministry's requirements. In addition, organizations which managed to re-register but may not be favored by the government are subject to various forms of harassment: rent hikes, excessive tax inspections, denial of meeting places, and constant observation.

The Legislature

Under the "operational" constitution, the parliament has two chambers as opposed to the one chamber Supreme Council, the 13th convocation of which is still considered by western countries to be the legitimate parliament. The 13th Supreme Council was illegally disbanded by the President following the 1996 referendum.

The "operational" parliament is made up of the upper house, the Chamber of the Republic, with 1/3 of its members appointed by the President, and the lower house, the Chamber of Representatives, which are to be directly elected; however, this first sitting was convened in part from members of the Supreme Council loyal to the President and others which the President appointed.

The legislature should be the law making body of the Republic. However, any draft law which has an impact on the Republican budget must first have the approval of the President before the parliament can consider it. Once the President gives the go ahead for a draft law, then there are several bodies involved in the drafting process, often in parallel: the relevant parliamentary committee, the National Center for Draft Legislation, and the Presidential Administration, with the latter usually playing the key role.

The Judiciary

The "operational" constitution gives the President the power to appoint and dismiss judges from the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court all the way down to lower level judges. In addition, the President appoints and dismisses the Procurator General and Ministers, such as those of the Interior and Justice. This centralization of power in the President has maintained a dependence of the judiciary. This lack of independence of the judiciary means in practice that an individual is generally presumed to be guilty and not innocent, that an individual is not guaranteed a fair trial, and that an individual is not guaranteed fair and independent legal representation (see above). Very often cases are considered in the judge's chambers, defense witnesses are not called, and the judge issues a verdict without the presence of the accused or his lawyer.

An additional aspect which feeds into the occurrence of violations of human rights and freedoms is the harshness of Belarusian laws, in particular the criminal code. The criminal code covers some offenses which in other countries would not be considered criminal. In addition, the sentences dictated by the criminal code are severe. And judges tend to issue too quickly the harshest sentence for crimes committed, especially ones considered to be against

the state. Judges are not always fully up to date and fully educated in the laws which is particularly evident when, for example, two different judges issue two entirely different verdicts for the same offense.

Individuals are restricted in their right to appeal once sentenced for a criminal offense as the court fees must be paid before the court will consider an appeal, and the fees can be hefty very often leaving the individual unable to pay to have their appeal considered.

The Procurator System

While in theory the institution of the procurator is an independent body meant to monitor and control the legal functioning of the courts, in fact the procurators' offices very often collaborate with the courts. Procurators have the power to issue arrest and search warrants (not the courts), conduct investigations into cases, present cases to the court, and perform the function of state prosecutor in criminal cases against the state. Often the procurator and the judge converse on the telephone about the case before the judge issues the verdict.

The Law Protecting Bodies

In addition to the courts, the Ministry of the Interior, i.e. primarily the police have potentially the largest role to play in human rights violations as they are the first instance which the individual encounters when trying to exercise his rights and freedoms. Whether this be by participating at a demonstration, trying to attend a meeting, discussing while walking down the street, or attempting to distribute leaflets, the police are ever present and are the first to crack down and often crack down hard. The number of police in the country is estimated to be at 300,000 or 3% of the population.

The police intervene by detaining the individual and taking him to the police station. There the chief of the police station has the power to order an administration detention, which is normally between 3-15 days, to issue a fine, which is very often excessively high, or the individual is kept in detention for up to 72 hours while the procurator's office is notified and it is determined whether the individual is criminally accountable and the term of pre-trial detention is determined. Pre-trial detention can be for six months, but a deputy procurator can extend it to twelve months, and the Procurator General can extend it to eighteen months. There is no provision in the laws of Belarus for the release of an individual on bail.

Conditions in Detention

Belarus' prisons are overcrowded. The prison system reportedly has a capacity for 30,000 prisoners but official sources have quoted the actual number of incarcerated at 35,000 to 60,000, from the latter figure of which 20,000 are reportedly in pre-trial detention. Prisoners are not provided with sufficient beds, food, water, or medical aid. Very often family and lawyers are denied access to the prisons to visit the incarcerated. Letters and gifts are often not handed on. Cases of beatings while in detention are known.

Situation of Minors

Minors, especially those affiliated with the political opposition, are very often the subject of abuse. Individuals, as young as 15, have been violently arrested, detained from 3 days to 6 months (or longer if they are over 18), beaten while in detention, and denied visits by their families or lawyers. In Belarus, a person is criminally liable from age 18, however, for a limited number of offenses one is liable from age 16. There are two juvenile detention centers in Belarus, both of which are overcrowded. Conditions are reported to also be bad in

these centers with a lack of food and clothes for the children, lack of heat in the winter, and lack of education and rehabilitation means.

Political Freedoms

The restriction of political freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, is the most violated in Belarus. As in Soviet times, the individual does not feel at liberty to express his opinion, whether it be at home, on the street, or at work for fear that his comments may be overheard, that his phone may be bugged, or that a colleague or official may feel that the individual's opinion's are against the state or worse yet against the President.

In June 1998, the lower house of parliament passed in a first reading amendments to the criminal code, the criminal procedures code and the administrative code which would make defaming the President a crime to be sentenced with up to four years in jail, two years in a labor camp, or a hefty fine. If the defamation is spread in the mass media then five years in jail may be imposed.

The right to freedom of assembly is hindered by the restrictions put on groups to schedule and carry out rallies, demonstrations, or pickets. A request for a public demonstration or the like must be given to the authorities 15 days in advance. The request must include the expected number of people to participate, the date, the time, the place, route, and purpose of the rally or demonstration. Then it is up to the authorities to grant permission for such an event. If permission is granted, the authorities often change the place, date, or time of the rally in order to discourage people from attending or lessening the impact of the event. Or permission for the event to take place is just flat out denied. When the event is organized by the opposition there is a large police presence, uniformed and non, which in 1998 has actively arrested individuals following the event, whereas last year the arrests primarily took place during the event.

Freedom of association is limited by all the restrictions and harassment put particularly on political parties and non-governmental organizations. Once an individual affiliates himself with an organization of an opposition nature, then the individual can be subject to physical attacks, harassing phone calls, dismissal from work, expulsion from school or university, arrest, and/or detention.

Media

Freedom of expression is further hampered by the state monopoly on the mass media. The local radio stations and the one local television station are nearly entirely state run or state influenced and thus there is no forum for public discussion. There is no access to electronic media for opposition figures, political or otherwise. Even state affiliated bodies, such as trade unions, wishing to express their dissatisfaction with the current situation are denied access.

As for the printed media, independent newspapers do exist, but in limited numbers and limited distribution. The functioning and existence of independent newspapers is constantly under strain from various forms of harassment or restrictions, such as availability of office space, access to information, printing houses, and distribution channels. Warning letters can be issued which lead to the closure of a newspaper. The newspapers are subject to constant observation for any minor infraction which can then be punished.

Language and Religion

Regarding language and religion freedoms, while they are not denied, they are not at the level desired. There appears to be no deliberate policy to restrict these freedoms, but if their expression goes against the norm then they are very often suppressed. However, a change in the language policy of the country has been noted from just a few months ago when there were incidents reported of individuals being arbitrarily beaten for speaking Belarusian. Most recently, the President, on the occasion of a national holiday, spoke for 45 minutes in Belarusian and stated in his speech that there would be no discrimination based on language.

Conclusion

In summary, human rights and freedoms are severely restricted in Belarus primarily due to the concentration of power in the executive and the resulting stranglehold on the other levels of government, the public administration, the justice system, the media, etc. The level of fear that has been installed in the individual, through the types of restrictions and harassment described above, is high among Belarusians. This fear manifests itself in the lack of willingness to voice one's opinion openly, to participate in public meetings or demonstrations, or to support non-governmental movements or political parties. All in all, the government has a firm hand of control on the citizens and society, and citizens and society with their history of passivity are compliant to a large extent, which is reflected in the weak public expression of discontent. Nevertheless, there are some strong individuals in the country, who despite numerous beatings, arrests, detentions, and fines continue to speak loudly against the existing repression of human rights and freedoms.

Elaine M. Conkievich

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Beatings

- 02.04.98 Sivchik, Vyacheslav, secretary BPF, severely beaten during arrest, knocked down and kicked in the head and body, had bruises on his arms, back, and chest; 03.04.98 sentenced to 10 days in administrative detention but hospitalized on the same day for brain concussion for which he spent 10 days in hospital [self]
- 02.04.98 Vasyukovich, Dmitry (15 yrs), MF, thrown to the ground, kicked, hair pulled, clothes torn during arrest; on 05.04.98 during detention Vasyukovich was faced against a wall and kicked; held for 3 days; received reprimand from juvenile delinquency commission; Procurator's office rejected complaint from his mother that he was beaten; appeal planned [self, BP]
- 02.04.98 Kulchenko, Stepan (16 yrs), MF, thrown to the ground, kicked, hair pulled, clothes torn during arrest; Kulchenko was strangled while in the car after the arrest [self]
- 15.04.98 Petkevich, Ales (26 yrs), Mironov, Dmitry (20 yrs), and Poklad, Ales (19 yrs), speaking Belarusian near Komorovsky Market, security guard approached them, accused them of nationalism and ordered them to go away; youths talked back, 10 men in uniform with dogs arrived and beat youths and set dogs on them. Petkevich received a brain concussion and was hospitalized; Mironov and Poklad had dog bites; guards called the police who took them away; reportedly police also mistreated them [press; BP]
- 01.05.98 Zavadsky, Andrei, SDP, beaten while being arrested following protest; intends to petition prosecutorial bodies for instituting criminal proceedings in connection with physical abuse [BP]

Arrests/Detentions

- 18.02.98 Moroz, Yury, BPF, arrested and sentenced to 15 days imprisonment for carrying a placard calling for Shidlovsky and Labkovich to be released; released after serving his sentence in full on 05.03.98 [BP]
- 24.02.98 Yukho, Vladimir arrested and charged with participating in an unauthorized demonstration and with resisting arrest; during arrest 2 police officers grabbed him, pushed him in a police car and seriously hurt his hand by shutting it in the car door; in the car he was grabbed by the throat and threatened with obscenities > on 09.04.98 fined 5 million rubles [BP]
- 28.02.98 Mukhin, Ales (18 yrs), Gilevich, Andrei (18 yrs), and N. (minor) arrested; spent 3 days in detention center; 31.03.98 charges brought against Mukhin and Gilevich for malicious hooliganism, N on charges of deliberately damaging property

- [wrote anti-presidential graffiti and painted red and white flags]; Mukhin and Gilevich expelled from university 23.03.98 (i.e. before trial) [BP]
- 22.03.98 Moroz, Yury, Pleshchenko, Vladimir, and Khamaida, Boris arrested for staging and unsanctioned protest and disobeying police officers' orders; 23.03.98 sentenced to 10 days of administrative detention [BP]
- 22.03.98 Skochko, Yevgeny, MF, arrested for staging an unsanctioned protest and disobeying police officers' orders; 23.03.98 sentenced to 3 days [17 others were fined or reprimanded] [BP]
- 02.04.98 Vasyukovich, Dmitry (15 yrs), MF, arrested for disorderly conduct; held for 3 days; received reprimand from juvenile delinquency commission; Procurator's office rejected complaint from his mother that he was beaten; appeal planned [self, BP]
- 02.04.98 Kulchenko, Stepan (16 yrs), MF, arrested for disorderly conduct; held for 3 days [self]
- 02.04.98 Dranchuk, Timofei (17 yrs), MF, detained for disorderly conduct but released after fined 5 minimum monthly wages [BP]
- 02.04.98 Sivchik, Vyacheslav, secretary BPF (see beatings above) and Kashilya, Aleksandr arrested and sentenced to 10 days administrative detention [self]
- 02.04.98 Abadovsky, Yas, MF, arrested and sentenced to 15 days administrative detention; applied on 21.04.98 for political asylum in Poland [see expel section] [BP]
- 02.04.98 Andrejev, Sergei, MF, arrested and fined 3 million rubles [BP]
- 23.04.98 Konopatsky, Vadim, one of the leaders of Malady Front, was detained by police after talks with officials of the Minsk city executive authorities; the reasons for the detention are still unknown, but it appears that Konopatsky was arrested for his participation in previous street protests. [BP]
- 25.04.98 Approximately 15 members of the Anti-Fascist Youth Action from Moscow and some Belarusian youths were arrested, some with the use of force, after leaving the BPF premises prior to the end of the Chernobyl march. The Russian youths were detained for 24 hours and escorted out of the country. [BP]
- 01.05.98 Statkevich, Nikolai, SDP leader, arrested after a march in Minsk; 3 days in detention; trial on 12.05.98; charges dismissed; 02.06.98 Minsk city procurator appeals dismissal of charges; 06.07.98 Minsk city court reinstitutes legal proceedings based on procurator's appeal; 10.07.98 case dismissed due to expiration of period of responsibility [BP]

- 01.05.98 other SDP members also arrested in connection with the march; also two journalists among a group of around 18 detainees; 04.05.98 10 members of SDP stood trial and were charged with violating the procedure of organising and staging street demonstration; trials continued 13.05.98 [BP]
- 01.05.98 Martselev, Sergei, Yededin, Kirill and Achapovskv, Levon, youths detained after demonstration; 15.03.98 sentenced to 3 days of administrative detention (already served); risk of being expelled from institutes; (same judge acquitted on 13.05.98 leader of Belarusian Association of Military Servicemen of charges related to participation in the demonstration) [BP]
- 01.05.98 Novikov, Alexander, MG, detained following demonstration; 18.05.98 sentenced to 3 days of administrative detention; as term had been served in pre-trial detention he was released; risk of being expelled from institute [BP]
- 01.05.98 members of SDP youth organization also detained in connection with the march; 3 sentenced on 04.05.98 to 3 days in administrative detention (which they had served by then); one reprimanded; one acquitted [BP]
- 05.05.98 several participants in an authorized street protest were detained; released the same evening with no statements made or charges pressed; one young MF member knocked over by police car while trying to run away; taken by police then hospitalized [BP]
- 14.05.98 Roman S., 13 year old, MF, detained for distributing leaflets on an authorized demonstration; taken to the police station (by a man who showed ID from the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union) where he was held for one hour and leaflets were confiscated [BP]
- 14.05.98 Valui, Lyavon and Sudilovskaya, Tamara detained following demonstration for carry posters with text deemed to defame the President ("violating the procedure of organizing and staging street demonstrations"); Sudilovskaya was released the same day and fined 5 million rubles the next day; Valui was released the following day; trial for Valui on 19.05.98 acquitted; Minsk city procurator protested; 13.07.98 court reprimanded him [self, BP]
- 02.06.98 Igor K. and Pavel S., youths detained for posting opposition leaflets in the early morning; taken to internal affairs department and held until midnight of the next day; police officers allegedly issued threats and hit one of them with a truncheon; leaflets and spray paint were seized; Igor K. charged with deliberate destruction or damage of property; his apartment was searched; Pavel S. charged with an administrative offense [BP]

- 13.06.98 Shchukin, Valery, arrested for spray painting the slogan "Freedom to Deputy Klimov" on the Ministry of Internal Affairs building; 15.06.98 sentenced to 10 days in administrative detention [BP]
- 20.06.98 7 opposition activists arrested in the town of Molodechno during a rock concert; activists were waving white-red-white flags and balloons, chanting "Long Live Belarus" and "I Love Belarus"; of the seven only one arrest protocol was made; the seven were released shortly thereafter [BP]
- 23/24.06.98 Knysh, Dmitry, and 5 others were detained and questioned in connection with anti-presidential leaflets which were posted in Drogichin (Brest region). Pressure put on Knysh by the police; threatened with expulsion from Brest State University and arrest [BP]

Excessive Pre-Trial Detention

Vinnikova, Tamara, former Chairwoman of the National Bank, arrested 14.01.97; arrested on charges of abusing official position, forgery, and embezzlement; released from jail November 1997 and put under house arrest; suffers from poor heart condition; in and out of the hospital; 16.07.98 suffered a heart attack during interrogation and taken to the hospital

Leonov, Vasily, ex-Minister for Agriculture, arrested on charges of embezzlement, arrested 11.11.97; detention extended until 11.08.98; 16.06.98 petition for release from pre-trial detention rejected by court [BP]

Starovoitov, Vasily, ex-chairman of joint stock company, arrested on embezzlement charges; since 11.11.97 in pre-trial detention (KGB detention center); suffered a minor stroke while in detention; deteriorating health; 74 years old; 10.07.98 sent to neurological clinic for examination [BP]

Klimov, Andrei, on detained on 11.02.98, detention extended until 11.08.98 (according to Article 92, Part 1 of the Criminal Practice Code provides that one may be kept in pretrial detention no longer than 2 months; the term may be extended if the investigation requires more time or there are not grounds for release); 01.06.98 went on a hunger strike; 06.06.98 stopped hunger strike [representative; BP]

Kabanchuk, Vadim, (21 yrs), MF, spent 6 months in pre-trial detention (in detention since 12.10.97) before receiving on 23.03.98 2 year probation and 3 year suspended sentence for disorderly conduct and violent resistance to police officers during opposition protests on 10.03.97 and 23.03.97 [BP]

Gushcha, Bishop, arrested on 06.03.98, accused of committing a lecherous act under Art. 118 of the Criminal code; later charge changed to malicious hooliganism under Art. 201 which entails a harsher punishment. Trial set for 18.08.98; faces prison sentence of up to 5 years. Was transferred briefly to a psychological hospital for exams but analysis was normal [representative; embassy, BP]

Severinets, Pavel, leader of Mlady Front arrested on 02.04.98; charged with malicious hooliganism; lawyer denied access (see separate note); 02.06.98 pre-trial detention extended by one month; 02.06.98 lawyer representing him has his license revoked; released on 03.06.98 pending trial, must remain in Vitebsk [family, BP]

Sentences

Zhukovets, Ruslan (28 yrs.) shot twice during arrest on 06.06.96, 6 days in hospital with operation, 6 months in prison hospital, first informed of charges during first hearing 21.01.97; charged with group robbery; five or six hearings before 10 day trial on 06.08.97 when sentenced to 10 years in jail; procurator appealed the "leniency" of the sentence, two years added for a total of 12 year sentence; probable case of mistaken identity; *victim claims complete innocence* [family]

Kudzinau (Kudzinov), deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet which was illegally suspended by the President in November 1996, arrested on 04.02.97, prosecuted for bribing a police officer and sentenced in August 1997 to seven years in prison and full confiscation of his property [ngo].

Shidlovsky, Alexei (19 yrs.) arrested 25.08.97 and Labkovich (16 yrs. old) arrested 27.08.97 for spraypainting of graffiti and replacing a red/green Belarus flag with a white/red/white one on 03.08.97. Shidlovsky has been in custody since 25.08.97; trial on 24. 02.98 sentenced Shidlovsky to 18 month prison term and Labkovich to 18 month suspended sentence and two year probation; 21.04.98 Supreme Court upheld lower court decision [BP, family]

Ivanov, Vladlen borrowed money to loan to an acquaintance and was unable to pay it back on time. 02.04.96 tried on criminal charges by first district court which did not prove his guilt and did not issue a verdict but left the case open for re-investigation. 11.07.97 second district court had the same conclusions but sentenced him to seven years in prison. Ivanov appealed to the Minsk City Court and the Supreme Court, both of which saw no reason to lodge a protest against the lower court decision. Appeal sent 25.06.98 to second district court to stay the verdict for reasons of his poor health (Ivanov is an invalid of the 3rd group; 2/3 of his stomach has been removed); 06.07.98 second district court decides not to stay decision. 03.07.98 appeal sent to Supreme Court to stay verdict and reconsider case; 10.07.98 Supreme Court decides to stay verdict until case can be reconsidered [self, family]

Teryoukevich, Oleg (33 yrs. old) 05.05.98 charged with theft and sentenced to 2 years in prison; previously spent 3 years (94-97) in prison for charges of theft; he protests imprisonment, swallowed some iron hooks and is requesting to be transferred to another prison; mother is a very active political protester and convictions may be politically motivated [family]

Expelled from School

Mukhin, Ales (18 yrs), Gilevich, Andrei (18 yrs), and N. (minor) arrested 28.02.98; spent 3 days in detention center; 31.03.98 charges brought against Mukhin and Gilevich for malicious

hooliganism, N on charges of deliberately damaging property [wrote anti-presidential graffiti and painted red and white flags]; 15.05.98 judge imposed a 1 year suspended sentence on all three; Mukhin and Gilevich expelled from university 23.03.98 (i.e. before trial) [BP]

Obodovsky, Yas (19 yrs) In early 1998, the 19-year-old Obodovsky was expelled from the Mogilyov Engineering Institute for participation in street protests. On March 22, Obodovsky was arrested for participation in a demonstration staged in Minsk on the 80th anniversary of the proclamation of the Belarusian National Republic. He was then warned and fined. On the evening of March 24, according to Obodovsky, some unknown people seized him, took him off to the country and threatened to kill him if he continues his political activities or even appears at the Belarusian Popular Front office. On April 1, Obodovsky was arrested in Mogilyov during a demonstration. On April 2, he was sentenced to 15 days in administrative detention for participation in an unauthorised demonstration staged in *Minsk* (?). He has also received summons to appear in the Court of the Tsentralny district of Mogilyov and the Court of the Sovetsky district of Minsk [see arrest section] [BP]

Korobchits, Valery, third year university student, arrested 25.04.98 after demonstration and held for five hours; later expelled from university (officially for not passing a test) [BP]

Harassment

26.03.98 letter following 17.03.98 letter from Presidential Administration prohibits official entities from making official documents available to non-state media; prohibits state bodies from placing advertisements in non-state papers; warned officials not to comment on official documents to non-state papers

Stremkovskaya, Vera, lawyer, 14.05.98 reprimanded for not agreeing to keep case details secret (legislation is inconsistent on secrecy requests)

Kulchenko, Stepan, MF, on 14.05.98 fined 5 million rubles for taking part in an unsanctioned protest; at risk to be expelled from school; 24.06.98 questioned by district prosecutor's office; criminal charges may be brought against him [BP]

Konopatsky, Vadim and Umreiko, Vitaly, MF, given official warnings by KGB in connection with their organization and participation in demonstrations – (first two individuals to be given warnings under Presidential Edict "On the Procedure of Issuing an Official Warning About Unallowableness of Illegal Activities" dated 05.09.95 which came into effect in April 1998) [BP]

Minsk Regional Court decided to evict the SDP from its office premises for non-payment of rent. 24.05.98 SDP is appealing the decision. SDP has gone into debt because 18 months ago their rent was unfoundedly raised to \$1000 per month [BP]

30.05.98 Minsk city authorities denies the SDP and Belarusian Language Society permission to organize poetry readings as were held last year [BP]

Pogonyailo, Garri, Belarusian defense lawyer, represents Severinets, on 02.06.98 had his license revoked by the Ministry of Justice; left Belarus Collegium and joined Russian Lawyers' Guild in 1997 [BP]

Zdravy Smysl, Belarus weekly, 05.06.98 received an official warning from State Press Committee regarding article "General Abacha is an Enemy of the Press" which was published [BP]

Belapan denied accreditation to cover visit of Russian PM's visit 10.06.98 [BP]

Moroz, Yuri, BPF from Vitebsk to seek political asylum in Czech Republic due to harassment [self, BP]

Electricity cut off in the BPF Minsk office on 16.06.98 for alleged non-payment of rent [BP]

23.06.98 Ministry of Justice denied registration to the organization "Belarusian Association of Prisoners of the Lukashenko Regime" reportedly because the aims, purposes and methods of activities of the association contravene the Constitution and the Law on Public Associations and because the patterns of the association's flag and emblem also run counter to the established requirements.[BP]

Confiscation

26.03.97 President Lukashenko spoke out against Domash, Syemnyen (deputy 13th Supreme Soviet) on radio and TV; 02.06.97 Committee for State Control sent a letter to the President in which is stated that property (house) purchased by Domash in 1994 was done inappropriately and thus the property does not belong to him; 03.06.97 note from the President's office states that he should vacate the premises by 01.08.97; case taken through the Procurator system and to the Supreme Court with the decision unchanged; Domash given until 01.06.98 to vacate the premises or else force could be used; Domash sent 22.04.98 his case to UN Center for Human Rights [self]

02.05.98 Belarus customs authorities on the border confiscated 900 copies of a Polish newspaper, a few hundred copies of an article entitled "Russia in the Neighboring Countries", and some other printed materials from Borshchevsky, acting BPF chairman, and Ponkov, deputy chairman BPF [BP]

Conditions in Detention

people are fed once a day or every other day; people are denied medical aid; people are awakened in the middle of the night so that they can't sleep; the cells are overcrowded and unsanitary; people are denied visits by their lawyer and/or relatives