

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	116
Land:	Belarus (Hviderusland)
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch.
Titel:	World Report 2011.
Udgivet:	24. januar 2011
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	20. juni 2011

[EN](#) | [DE](#)

- **Source:**
HRW - Human Rights Watch
- **Title:**
World Report 2011
- **Publication date:**
24 January 2011
- **ecoi.net summary:** Annual report on human rights situation in 2010 [ID 153296]
- **Countries:**
Belarus
- **Original link** <http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2011/belarus>

Recommended citation:

HRW - Human Rights Watch: World Report 2011, 24 January 2011 (available at ecoi.net)
http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/153296/255590_en.html (accessed 12 April 2011)



World Report 2011

Events of 2010

The situation for civil society and independent media remains dismal, with Belarusian authorities continuing pressure and threats ahead of the December 2010 presidential elections. Journalists and civil society activists face harassment in the form of interrogations, detentions, arrests, and seizure of personal property. NGOs struggle with registration procedures, and media outlets have been threatened with closure.

Elections

In September the Belarusian parliament scheduled presidential elections for December 2010. President Aleksandr Lukashenka will run for a fourth term. First elected in 1994, Lukashenka was re-elected in 2001 and 2006 despite protests of election fraud from activists, international NGOs, and concerned governments, such as those of the United States and most European Union member states. Government crackdowns on civil society and independent media preceded previous presidential elections, and activists reported continued punitive measures in the run up to the December elections.

Some positive amendments, including eliminating the need for candidates to obtain permission for public events, were made to the electoral code in January, and more candidates were allowed to register in the April 2010 local elections. However, electoral code violations and lack of transparency marred the April elections. In the Maladziechna district, four members of the Divisional Electoral Commission ran for the Council of Deputies, in violation of electoral law. Belarus refused long-term election monitoring proposed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The only long-term election-monitoring presence was provided by local observers, who were forced to maintain a distance of 3 to 10 meters from ballot counting.

Freedom of Association

Independent civil society groups report government pressure, but many remain active in Belarus. Four activists-Zmicier Dashkevich, Yauhien Afnahiel, Artur Finkievich, and Uladzimir Lemiesh-from the youth opposition movements Young Front, Young Belarus, and European Belarus, were kidnapped in public in November and December 2009. Assailants in civilian clothes pulled the men into waiting cars, and dumped them outside the city limits. The kidnappers warned three of the men to cease political activities before releasing them.

In May authorities in more than 20 cities raided apartments and confiscated computer equipment from activists for the "Speak the Truth Campaign," founded in February 2010 to encourage public discussion about social problems. Leaders of the movement were detained for three days on suspicion of disseminating false information. The campaign's founder, Uladzimir Niaklayau, has voiced interest in running for president.

In March 2010 the Ministry of Justice refused for the third time to register the Belarusian Assembly of Pro-democratic NGOs, citing procedural violations in its creation, and alleging that the organization's name does not

describe its activities. The assembly serves as an unofficial umbrella organization for more than 250 Belarusian NGOs and provides legal guidance and conducts advocacy on their behalf.

Freedom of Assembly

Activists are required to apply for demonstration permits, but the onerous application process restricts the right to hold peaceful assemblies. Civil society activists are frequently arrested, fined, and detained for participating in unsanctioned assemblies. In January 2010, 43 activists and leaders of the unofficial Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB) were detained while en route to an assembly to re-elect Teresa Sobol as chairperson of the Ivenets Polish House, a culture and education center for the Ivenets region. In February authorities arrested 40 UPB activists for an unsanctioned protest over Sobol's closed trial, in which the court ordered her to hand over control of the Polish House building to the officially-sanctioned Union of Poles in Belarus.

Authorities used force to disburse three unsanctioned democratic opposition demonstrations in February, and detained several participants in an unsanctioned Minsk parade supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights in May. When authorities do sanction opposition rallies, they grant permission for locations far from public view.

Media Freedom

The government tightened its control on media through stricter internet controls, harassing and detaining independent journalists, and issuing warnings to publications.

In July 2010 a presidential edict restricting the internet came into force. It requires registration of online resources, identification of users at internet cafes and storage of their internet history for a year, and restricts access to "banned" information on the internet.

Independent news sources -the *Charter97* news website, and *Narodnaya Vola* and *Novaya Gazeta* newspapers -were all investigated for criminal defamation against the former head of the Homel Region KGB Department in 2010. Authorities repeatedly interrogated editors and staff, searched their apartments, and confiscated their electronic equipment. In March police forcibly broke into *Charter97*'s editorial office, injuring web-site editor Natalia Radzina. In September 2010 Aleh Biabienin, founder of *Charter97*, was found hanged in his dacha. Bebenin's colleagues and international NGOs have called for a criminal investigation of his death, which was officially ruled a suicide. In an unprecedented development, the authorities have allowed the OSCE to send two forensic experts to participate in the investigation. Death threats against other *Charter97* journalists have been posted anonymously to the website since Bebenin's death.

In a positive development, the majority of news publications were able to register under a 2009 law requiring them to re-register, and 107 new publications were registered in the first half of 2010. However, authorities denied registration to at least eight independent newspapers, citing insufficient qualifications of the editors or improper premises for the editorial offices. Additionally, the number of official warnings against news outlets increased in 2010. Under the 2009 law, two official warnings constitute sufficient grounds to close a media outlet. Independent newspapers *Narodnaya Vola* and *Nasha Niva* have already received three warnings, and dozens of other papers, including *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus*, *Va-Bank*, *Novy Chas*, and *Tovarishch*, have received at least one warning.

Political Prisoners

Two activists arrested on politically-motivated charges in 2009 were sentenced to prison in May 2010.

The court sentenced civil activist Mikalaj Autukhovich to five years and two months in a maximum security prison for illegal possession and transportation of five shotgun shells and a hunting rifle, despite claims that witness testimony was obtained through intimidation. Autukhovich went on a hunger strike in June to protest prison conditions and demand dental treatment, which he has not received as of this writing.

His co-defendant, Uladzimir Asipienka, received a three-year prison sentence for possessing and transporting firearms and explosives. The men's convictions appear connected with their civil society activism. Asipienka had previously been imprisoned for involvement in an entrepreneurs' movement, while Autukhovich attempted to unite veterans in an opposition organization and ran in parliamentary elections as an independent candidate.

Siariiej Kavalenka, a Conservative Christian party activist, was sentenced to three years of house arrest for displaying a white-red-white Belarusian flag, a symbol of protest against the Lukashenka administration.

Death Penalty

Belarus remains the only country in Europe that still allows the death penalty. In March 2010 Belarusian authorities executed Andrej Zhuk and Vasilii Yuzepchuk for murder, even though their cases were pending before the United Nations Human Rights Committee. In May, the Hrodna Regional Court sentenced Aleh Hryshkaucou and Andrej Burdyka to death for murder. The executions and sentences occurred after the Belarus National Assembly established a task force to explore a possible death penalty moratorium-a stipulation for full suspension of EU and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe sanctions. In 2010, the Ministry of Justice reported that 321 people had been sentenced to death between 1990 and 2009, with the number of sentences declining in the last decade from its peak of 47 in 1998. The ministry did not provide information on the number of actual executions.

Palliative Care

Belarus' low consumption of morphine and other opioid medicines, reported annually to the International Narcotics Control Board, indicates that access to medicine for pain treatment is available to less than 20 percent of its terminal cancer patients.

Key International Actors

Belarus' relations with both Europe and Russia deteriorated in 2010, and foreign governments failed to hold Belarus accountable for its domestic human rights situation.

Belarus came up for Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2010. The resulting report offered recommendations on freedom of speech, association, and assembly, as well as a moratorium on the death penalty, but Belarus rejected any commitment to implement them. Belarus accepted the recommendations to absolutely prohibit torture and introduce a definition in line with the Convention Against Torture in its legislation, but failed to recognize flaws in investigating complaints of torture.

In October 2010 the EU called on Belarus "to fully cooperate" with the presidential election monitoring of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (part of OSCE). The EU also extended its existing travel restrictions against high-level officials, but simultaneously suspended restrictions through October 2011.

US President Barack Obama extended existing travel restrictions against high-level Belarusian officials until June 2011 due to concerns about detentions, disappearances, and political repression.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) suspended high-level contact with Belarus in April, declaring the lack of international observers at the April elections, state discrimination against the country's Polish minority, and the execution of Zhuk and Yuzepchuk as "concrete steps backwards." PACE also withdrew its earlier recommendation that the Council of Europe restore Belarus's "special guest status," initially suspended in 1997 over human rights concerns.

In June Belarus signed a customs agreement with Russia and Kazakhstan that removes trade barriers between the three countries. Despite their economic cooperation, Belarus distanced itself from Russia in August after Russia cut oil and gas subsidies to the country.