

Human Rights Violations in Belarus 14-21/07

14th of July

► An action demanding to release opposition activists, unlawfully arrested after the blast in Minsk on 4 July, was dispersed at Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk. More than 50 people came to the square with portraits of political prisoners, and unfurled national Belarusian and EU flags. More than 100 riot policemen were thrown against the participants of the action.

The demonstrators chanted ‘Long live Belarus!’ and ‘Freedom for political prisoners!’

Forcing people out from the square, riot police officers beat brutally leader of the United Civil Party Anatol Liabedzka. The politician had to seek medical care as he had hematomas on chest, abdominal area and legs.

All attempts to break cordon were stopped by the police, who were catching the people and pushing them back. One of them beat a photo camera out of a journalist’s hands when he tried to take pictures of the event.

The crackdown of a peaceful action evoked protests of passers-by. Many of them expressed their indignation at unlawful actions of riot policemen who didn’t allow the people to express their protest.

► Pavel Nazdra, activist of the *Young Front* and the *Belarusian Christian Democracy Party*, was tried on suit of the military enlistment committee of Mazyr. Nazdra was accused of not having timely informed the military enlistment committee about his retirement from a job several years ago.

The court found Pavel guilty of violation of the rules of military regime and fined him 70 000 rubles (about \$33). However, all other persons who were tried on suits of the military authorities that day got only warnings.

15th of July

► In Polatsk the police burst into an apartment which was rented by activists of the non-registered organization *Young Front*.

According to the youth activist Mikalai Dzemidzenka, the police officers asked those who were in to open the door under the pretext of handing a writ to military enlistment committee. However, on entering the apartment the policemen started looking through books and newspapers. Besides, the police inspector Ivan Krakhotka called somebody over the phone and asked to come to the apartment.

Being asked whether they had a warrant for search, the policemen answered by a question: ‘Are you registered in this apartment?’ They refused to tell the reasons for the search.

Bear in mind that after the blast which had taken place in the morning of 4 July the law-enforcement agencies started massive searches at oppositionists’ apartments. As a result ten

persons were detained, as the police found bolts, screws and rubber gloves during the searches, which allegedly can point at implication in the crime.

► A week ago the administration of Baranavichy State University issued the order for expulsion of the student Ales Krauchenia from the fifth year of the faculty of engineering. On 14 July the activist had to take his documents away from the university.

On 25 March 2008 Ales was arrested in Baranavichy for participation in the unauthorized procession dedicated to the 90-ieth anniversary of Belarusian People's Republic. After the detention and a trial, as a result of which he was fined 350 000 rubles (about \$164), Alexander Akulau, the dean of Krauchenia's faculty warned him that he would have troubles during his summer exams.

Another reason for the expulsion can be a highly critical interview to the local newspaper *Intexpress* about the pro-governmental 'state NGO' *Belarusian Republican Youth Union* (BRSM).

The military enlistment office of Baranavichy immediately paid interest to the activist after the expulsion. On 11 July a representative of the committee came to Krauchenia's home and handed to him a writ to a medical commission, for 15 July 2008.

► Uladzimir Yurchanka, head of Mahiliou Kastychnitski district organization of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party *Hramada*, has lost his position of master builder at the construction administration of powermen *Lavsanbud*

'A policeman came to my work. He told my boss that there was something wrong with my work, though there was nothing wrong at the moment. Then he offered the administration to fire me. They were thinking it over for several days and decided not to fire me, but deprive me of the position of master builder,' said Yurchanka.

As a result of this decision the activist will lose about 100 000 rubles (\$47) a month.

'To my mind, the policeman's visit and the following actions of the administration are related to my political activities', commented the politician.

16th of July

► Members of the organizing committee of the Movement "For Freedom" filed a complaint to the Supreme Court. The founders of the non-governmental organization believe that the decision of the Ministry of Justice dated June 19th is illegal. The Ministry denied registration to the Movement claiming its members had violated the legislation of Belarus. By such a denial the Ministry restricts the constitutional right of the citizens to form associations.

The authors of the suit point out that the freedom of association is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (Article 36), and by International Pact on Civic and Political Rights (Article 22), as well as by Convention of the Commonwealth of Independent States about the Rights and Basic Freedoms of a Human Being (Article 12).

The plaintiffs ask to recognize the Ministry's decision illegal and violating the rights of citizens, and to oblige the Ministry of Justice to officially register the Movement for Freedom.

Let us remind that, on May 14th, 2008 all documents necessary for state registration of the Movement, were again submitted to the Ministry of Justice for consideration. On June 19th the founders received a letter from the Ministry which said that by the decision made on June 13th, 2008, the Movement for Freedom was denied state registration.

► The police visited the house of Tatsiana Zhalabayeva several times. Tatsiana is the daughter of Vasil Staravoitau, former chairman of Rassvet collective farm, and Hero of Socialist Labour.

“They came 8 times this week, and were asking questions about my husband Siarhei, who had earlier been convicted for illegal possession of arms. They asked where he was on July 3rd and 4th and if he was hiding any weapons or explosives”, Tatsiana said.

According to Tatsiana, after the last conversation with the police officers Zhalabaye left for Russia to visit his parents. “I see that I will never have a life here”, -- he said at parting.

Vasil Staravoitau was tried in 1998. His daughter Tatsiana and her husband were convicted together with the former chairman of Rassvet.

“Our family, once very close, is now separated. We all live by ourselves, it is very hard. I don't even have a job. I've been unemployed for three years”, Tatsiana told RFE/RL.

The police did not visit her father's house in conjunction with the explosion.

► This March Pavel Levinau, human rights defender from Vitebsk, rendered legal aid to the journalists whose homes were searched in conjunction with the Minich –Marozau-Abozau case (the case of political cartoons which allegedly insult the honor of the Belarusian president). Those days Levinau managed to help many people but was detained when trying to help journalist Vadzim Barshcheuski.

The human rights defender was accused of using foul language and disobedience to police officers. According to the police, Levinau used foul language when addressing police major Ihar Skarynovich. The police claim they had even shoot the incident with the video camera. According to Pavel, the only thing he said into the camera was: “Please record that I am not doing anything wrong”. As a result, the video was not attached to the case materials. In the beginning the law-enforcement officers referred to the fact that the video was of low quality and the image was too dark. Later it turned out that the video camera belonged to one of the police officers and it was his private business how he would like to use the materials.

Protesting against forging of documents (police reports, etc.) Pavel Levinau was on a 15-day hunger strike. During and after that he went through numerous instances demanding fair investigation of his case.

Then a number of court sessions followed. Many of them were carried out with serious violations. Then the court verdict came: 10 days of arrest and a fine of 700, 000 BYR . The judge

made the verdict in the absence of the defendant (Levinau informed her in advance about his absence), which is illegal.

Yesterday Levinau visited Vitebsk region prosecutor Henadz Dysko, trying to get the illegal verdict cancelled. The prosecutor promised to study the case. However, at the doors of the prosecutor's office he was detained by policemen who showed him the arrest warrant. Levinau tried to get to the prosecutor's office again, but was detained by special police.

Levinau felt unwell in the police station. The ambulance took him to city hospital # 2. Cardiologist on duty Valiantsina Kamoska received a phone call and... refused to hospitalize the human rights defender. Coming out of the hospital Levinau collapsed. He became conscious only in several hours in the intensive care unit.

Unfortunately, this is not the first case when Paval is denied medical help during the litigation. The first time the ambulance arrived to pick up the human rights activist to the police station on the day when he allegedly used foul language. Then the medical workers did not allow the police to put their patient behind bars. However, this time the police took Levinau right from the intensive care unit and brought him to the police station. Head of medical department of Vitebsk hospital #2 Alena Mamchur refused to answer Aleh Hulak's question, if Paval could serve the sentence in his health condition.

► KGB and police officers began to search Yuras Karetnikau's apartment at about 10.40 a.m. Karetnikau is a member of the unregistered organization "Pravy Alliance".

The police officers knocked on Karetnikau's doors for about 30 minutes. When Yuras opened the door, they entered the apartment and showed a search warrant.

► Today the husband of BAJ board member Aliona Sharamet received a phone call from the KGB department. He was invited to have a "conversation" as a witness in "you know what case we are talking about, the most known case at the moment". The KGB officer told Mikhail Sharamet he had sent several summons to his apartment and did not receive any response. That's why he had to invite him on the phone. At 1.30 Mikhail called his wife Aliona and warned her not to come home. After that the connection was interrupted. In a few hours we found out Mikhail's location: KGB officers gave a confirmation to his lawyer that Mikhail Sharamet was in the investigation department of Minsk city and Minsk region KGB. He will be detained for at least three days, tomorrow morning he will be interrogated. In the morning the KGB searched the apartment, where Mikhail Sharamet was officially registered, for four hours. Now Mikhail's 80-year-old grandmother lives there. The law-enforcement officers did not find anything suspicious but frightened the old lady.

► On July 8th, Kobryn activists Alexander Mekh received a threatening phone call. He tells his story: "At 12.11 someone called me on the cell phone. I received the call. Immediately I heard foul language, insults and threats. I interrupted the stranger and said: "I am not going to talk to you" and switched the phone off. I kept the number from which the call was made – it's +375164225659.

I found the number in the local phone book. It belongs to the public office of the incumbent member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. The next day, on July 9th, I submitted an application to Kobryn prosecutor M. I. Zaparoshchanka. I demanded to find the person who threatened me and make him accountable for that. I also met with the prosecutor and told him about my suspicions that the threats were linked to the parliamentary race as I was planning to run as a candidate. They promised to respond to my application within 10 days”

► On July 15th and 16th Centralny court of Minsk heard the complaints against detentions of Andrei Koipish and Tatsiana Pekun. The young people were detained under suspicion of organizing an explosion in Minsk.

Judges Bychko and Yesman did not find any grounds to satisfy the complaints. This way, the court recognized the fact that the pro-democratic activists are legally kept in detention without any grounds. The decision of Centralny district court will immediately be appealed in Minsk city court.

Lawyers of the other detained under the blast case will also file complaints about the actions of the police.

17th of July

► On July 12th in Kalinkavichy a local policeman knocked on the doors of Dzianis Rabianok’s apartment. Police officer E. Drabysheuski told Dzianis’s mother that he urgently needed to talk to her son. Dzianis’ mother said he was not at home. The policeman told her he wanted to come inside to make sure Dzianis was not there. His mother refused to open the door and the policeman left.

On July 15th Dzianis found a summons in his mailbox. Police officer E. Drabysheuski summoned Dzianis to come to police station next morning for interrogation as a witness. Dzianis decided to come. He came to Drabysheuski’s office in time. When Dzianis asked why he had been summoned, the police officer replies that the special services thought Dzianis looks like the composite sketch of the offender made after the blast in Minsk and ordered him to interrogate Dzianis. On the question “why did you summon me if half Kalinkavichy residents look like the composite sketch?” the policeman replied that he was just fulfilling an order and checks everyone in his area. The questioning lasted for about 15 minutes. The police officer was interested, where Dzianis had served in the Army, and if he had had to deal with the explosives during his service, if he had ever been taught about the usage of the explosives. Dzianis said he had not dealt with the explosives in the Army, and that was put in the minutes of the questioning.

Besides that, the police officer asked where Rabianok was on July 3rd. Dzianis replied that he was at home, and did not leave the city. His mother can confirm his words. That was also put into the minutes, and the conversation ended.

► Today the first political activists detained under suspicion of their relation to the 4th of July blast will be released. Viktor Liashchynski, Siarzhuk Chyslau, and several others will return home.

Let us remind the readers: on July 6th and 7th KGB officers searched the apartments of the people, who, in their mind, could have a relation to producing of a bomb. After the searches they were interrogated and detained for three days. When the term of the detention passed, it was continued to 10 days.

The investigators do not give the exact number of people detained as suspects in the criminal case. We know that there are people of different layers of society on that list – from chemistry students to “disloyal” elements.

► Nina Shydouskaya, the wife of detained Miraslau Lazouski, reported about the legal violations during detention of Siarhei Chyslau.

Nina Shydouskaya says: “The detention documents are dated by the evening of July 8th. He, just as the other three detained former activists of the Belarusian Association of Servicemen, should be released on the 10th day from the detention, which is tomorrow evening. It seems the date of Siarhei’s detention in the police documents is wrong. According to Chyslau’s relatives, he was detained late in the evening of July 7th.”

Thus, Siarhei Chyslau seemed to be nowhere for 24 hours.

► In Ashmyany the leader of the United Civil party planned to meet with representatives of the single list of candidates of oppositional political parties.

The second goal of the visit was to get across the address of would-be pro-democracy candidates to the nation. As we have informed, the address of the democrats has imprint, and no special permission is needed for its dissemination.

As said by Lyabedzka, in the police department his identification was very quick, and then he was released. But Mikalay Serhienka, an activist detained together with him, remains in the police department.

Though Lyabedzka have been identified, later he was detained for the second time. At the moment when the politician was speaking with his press-service on the phone, policemen came up to him, asked the UCP chairman to show his documents, and then he was offered to go to a police department in a police car.

On 21st of July

► Most of the oppositionists, detained in the case of 4 July blast in Minsk, have been released.

Two more detained in the criminal case Anton Koipish and Illya Bohdan – members of the Belarusian Popular Front, were set free on 29 July. They were detained on 10 July, today the 10-day term of custody has been expired (according to laws, a detained person must be either released or presented an accusation within 10 days).

Opposition activists Miraslau Lazouski, Syarhei Chyslau, Ihar Korsak, Yury Karetnikau, Mikhal Sheramet and Viktor Lyashchynski as well as activist of the Young Democrats youth organisation of the United Civil Party Alyaksandr Serhienka, member of the civil campaign European Belarus Paval Kuryanovich, leader of the unregistered Belarusian Party of Freedom Syarhei Vysotski were released.

Three more activists of the United Civil Party were arrested on 11 July allegedly for “using of obscene language in public”. Kiryl Paulouski got 10 days of arrest, Vital Strazhau and Mikhal Pashkevich were sentenced to 15 days of arrest. It is not excluded that the oppositionists are interrogated in the blast case.

It should be reminded that a criminal case over part 3 of article 339 of the Criminal Code (malicious hooliganism). According to unofficial information, from 50 to 70 people were detained in the course of investigation.

22nd of July

The court of review over **Andrei Kim, Aliaxei Bondar, Artsiom Dubski, Mikhal Kryvau, Mikhal Pashkevich, Ales Straltsou, Ales Charnysheu, Tatsiana Tyshkevich, Anton Koipish and Uladzimir Siarheyev** took place in the Minsk District Court.

On 22nd of April **Andrei Kim** (22 year youth activist) was found guilty of the crime on articles 342.1 (organization and execution of actions that violate the public order or active participation in such actions) and 364 (violence or a threat of violence towards a militiaman) of the Criminal Code of Belarus and sentenced him to 1.5 years in prison. **Aliaxei Bondar, Artsiom Dubski, Mikhal Kryvau, Mikhal Pashkevich, Ales Straltsou, Ales Charnysheu, Tatsiana Tyshkevich** were accused of the breach of article 342.1 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to 2 years of freedom restriction and 20 percent of their salaries will be deducted by the state. **Anton Koipish** and **Uladzimir Siarheyev** were charged with the breach of article 342.1 of the Criminal Code and fined with 100 “basic salaries” (\$ 1650).

The court didn't take into account any lawyers arguments and left the sentence unchanged. Andrei Kim has already spent 6 months in the prison.