

NEWSLETTER #1

OCTOBER 13, 2020

CULTURAL RESISTANCE IN BELARUS



BELARUSIAN CULTURE SOLIDARITY FOUNDATION
BELARUSIAN PEN CENTRE



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Members of the arts and cultural community have been at the forefront of the resistance movement in Belarus. They've lost their jobs and faced persecution, charges, imprisonment, and torture for expressing their views and exercising their rights.

The government won't listen, and the pressure on the arts and cultural community keeps growing, but the creatives and art workers stand together in this battle for justice, human ideals, and freedom of expression.

1. OPEN LETTER FROM BELARUSIAN ARTS AND CULTURE COMMUNITY

Over the five days, **1,300** Belarusian creatives signed a public appeal condemning falsification of the election results, violence against civilians by police and militia, and other violations of Belarusian law, and demanding an end to the repression against Belarusian citizens in general and the Belarusian cultural community in particular.

Among those who signed the letter are

- **Pavel Latushka**, former General Director of the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theater, Minister of Culture of Belarus, and Permanent Representative of Belarus to UNESCO,
- **Olga Shparaga**, philosopher, lecturer at European College of Liberal Arts in Minsk, Belarus,
- **Zoya Belakhvostik**, actress of the Yanka Kupala Theatre, People's Artist of Belarus,
- **Ksenya Sitnik**, singer, winner of the Junior Eurovision Song Contest 2005,
- **Nikolai Khalezin**, art director of the Belarusian Free Theater,
- **Taciana Niadbaj**, poet and Vice President of PEN Belarus,
- **Maxim Shved**, documentary filmmaker,
- **Lyavon Volsky**, musician, poet, artist,
- **Valzhyna Mort**, poet,
- **Uladzimir Arlou**, writer.

For the original letter with signatories list see [the link](#).



АДКРЫТЫ ЛІСТ

2. BELARUSIAN CULTURE SOLIDARITY FOUNDATION

#BY_CULTURE



БЕЛАРУСКІ ФОНД КУЛЬТУРНАЙ САЛІДАРНАСЦІ

THE
BELARUSIAN CULTURE
SOLIDARITY FOUNDATION
WAS SET UP TO SUPPORT
REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE BELARUSIAN ARTS
AND CULTURE COMMUNITY
WHO HAVE SUFFERED FOR
THEIR CIVIL
POSITION.

The foundation is run by the art manager and producer **Siarhei Budkin** and singer and activist **Maryna Shukiurava (Russia)**.

For the information about the *Belarusian Culture Solidarity Foundation* see [the link](#)

3. ARREST, FINES, DISCRIMINATION, AND JOB DISMISSAL

ARRESTS

Alyksandr Tykun and **Andrei Kanoika**, screenwriters and players of “KVN”, a Russian TV show featuring humor competition, were detained at the peaceful march against Lukashenka regime on Kalvaryiskaya Street on October 4 and sentenced to twelve and eight days imprisonment, respectively.

Olga Shparaga, philosopher, professor, and member of the Coordination Council and her husband **Alexander Adamiants**, Director of European College of Liberal Arts in Belarus, were arrested in Minsk.

They were released the following day to attend a court hearing later, and in an interview with *Radio Liberty*, Professor Shparaga had this to say about her arrest: *“They want to seem scary, but even in prison they wear balaclavas, and this, of course, creates an impression that they are more afraid than we are. Obviously, they make you hold hands behind your back and move at a certain pace. They want to make us feel as if we were terrible criminals who need to be treated harshly. They don’t beat you, but treat you like criminals. At the same time, you see how they keep wearing balaclavas. My fear is dispelled”.*



On October 9, Professor Shparaga was arrested again, and on October 12 she was sentenced to 15 days of arrest.



Mikalai Yankoits, a music journalist, was arrested and fined 15 basic units (132 EUR).

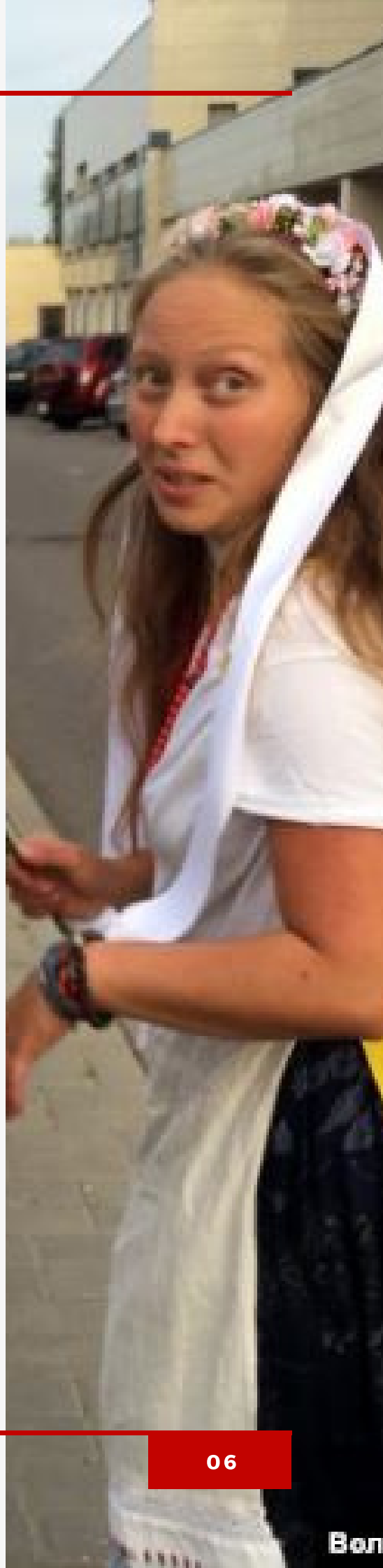
Volha Semchanka (on photo right), head of the Literary and Drama Department of the Mahileu Theater, and manager of the Belarusian Folk Dance Club was sentenced to seven days in jail on October 5 for participating in an “unauthorized demonstration.”

Theatre actors, folk dance club members, as well as colleagues and friends came to court to call for her immediate release but their pleas went unheeded.

On October 9, Ms. Semchanka was released, with another report against her, driven to the vicinity of her home and pushed out onto the street. She believes the regime will continue the persecution, and she fears for her life.

On October 9, the **students** organized a small concert and a tea party in the yard of the student village, but riot police arrived. At least one student was arrested, the musicians had their personal information collected.

Ilia Yasinski, an actor of the Republican Theatre of Belarusian Drama, was arrested on October 11 at a peaceful march and released on October 12. The court hearing is to take place on October 19.



FINES

Dzianis Dudzinski, TV presenter and journalist, was fined 25 basic units (220 EUR) for participating in an “unauthorized picket” near the Belteleradiocompany building on August 13.

Earlier in August Mr. Dudzinski lost his job at Belteleradiocompany for a critical post on his social media and spent 11 days in Akrestsina prison for participating in an “unauthorized event”.

DISCRIMINATION

Zhenya Vialko, a transgender musician, journalist and LGBTQ activist, was arrested on September 26 during a women's march.

“I was told several times they intended to give me a “proper strip-search.” They said that they would examine me in a “special way,” and then repeated several times that “a piece of shit like me should not live”, so I should be taken out into the yard and shot.”



PRESSURE AND DISMISSAL

Zoya Belakhvostik, an actress of the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theater in the third generation is a People's Artist of Belarus.

Ms. Belakhvostik taught acting at the Academy of Arts. In August, she quit the Kupala Theatre together with 57 other workers to protest against the dismissal of its director Pavel Latushka, and on September 4 she learned that her contract at the Academy of Arts, where she taught for 20 years, had been terminated.



Uladzimir Sadouski (on photo), is an engineer, writer and local history expert. On August 17 and 18, he participated in protests against the fraudulent election and the subsequent beatings and the arrests of thousands of peaceful protestors.

On August 18, he and his colleagues went to the Minsk Tractor Works to support the strikers there. At his job at Belenergosetkaproekt (a company which designs electrical networks) Sadouski was pressured to cease his peaceful activism and deprived of a substantial bonus that he'd earned, and he and eleven colleagues were forced out of their jobs.

Valeria Valadzko, a singer, soloist of the band *Harotnitsa*, was a grade-school voice teacher.

Ms. Valadzko refused to participate in "obligatory" rallies for Lukashenka and refused to bring her students to sing at a polling place in support of the August 9 elections. She was reported as an "oppositionist" and a "fascist" by the mother of one of a first-grader and was fired from the school.

4. VOICES OF BELARUSIAN CULTURE

Pavel Latushka was the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Belarus from 2009 to 2012. In an interview with **Siarhei Budkin**, former Minister Latushka spoke about the creation of a shadowy blacklist to suppress the works of Belarusian, Russian, and international musicians, actors, and writers who had been critical of the regime.

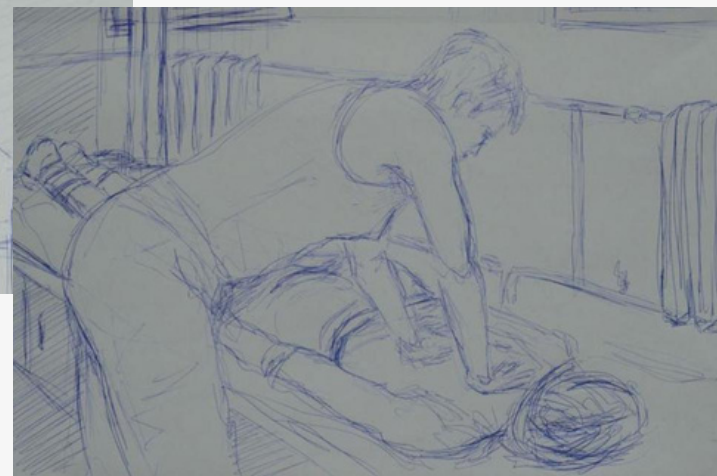


Minister Latushka revealed that the author of the blacklist was **Iryna Dryha** (on photo), who worked in the regime's Main Ideological Department as the Head of Social and Cultural Policy and was later promoted to First Deputy Minister of Culture.

Rock musician **Aliaksandr Pamidorau** (on photo left), who, together with a legendary leader of the rock metal band Gods Tower **Lesley Knife (Uladzislau Navazhylau)**, was arrested for "participation in an unauthorized event" after playing a small concert in the Zavadski district of Minsk, spoke to Komsomolskaya Pravda about dealing with his eight days in the Akrestsina detention centre. *"There is a very clear scheme working there: don't trust, don't be afraid, don't ask for anything. What happened, happened, so put it in perspective and stay human, stay yourself."*



Nadya Sayapina, a contemporary artist, who was arrested on August 7 and spent 15 days in the Akrestsina prison for a performance about Belgazprombank's art collection which was seized by the state in June, has created sketches of the young women who had been imprisoned with her by the regime.



Three Belarusian filmmakers document personal stories of people caught up in the political turmoil.

Filmmaker **Maksim Shved** was arrested, imprisoned and then released while the protests around him swelled.

Meanwhile, **Ekaterina Markavets** observes the psychological burden of her fellow citizens and worked with professional psychologists to set up a volunteer support service for people affected by current events.

Andrei Kutsila followed a celebrated Belarusian broadcast journalist who worked for State TV for nearly 40 years, now in hospital recovering from injuries she sustained while at a protest. All three filmmakers wonder what the future holds for their country and fellow citizens.

[Read the Q&A with the filmmakers.](#)

5. CULTURE RESISTANCE

THE YANKA KUPALA NATIONAL ACADEMIC THEATER, TURNED ONE HUNDRED YEARS OLD IN SEPTEMBER. THIS YEAR, FIFTY-EIGHT WORKERS QUIT THE THEATER IN A PROTEST AGAINST ARTISTIC REPRESSION.



But on October 6, in honor of the Kupala Theatre's centennial, these former Kupala members staged *"Tuteishyia"* (Belarusian for "locals"), the most anticipated play of 2020, in an "underground" venue.

"Tuteishyia," first staged in the Kupala Theatre in 1990 by Mikalai Pinihin, became a cult classic and a symbol of the era. This legendary play had disappeared from the Kupala Theatre's repertoire for long periods, the last performances having taken place in July 2007.

Pavel Kharlanchuk, who plays *"Tuteishyia's"* main character, Mikita Znosak, was fined 15 basic units (132 EUR) for participating in the August 11 protest. The new production has neither bright scenery nor bright costumes. The actors wear mostly black. The mood is set by sparse patches of white and red. In the finale, drops of blood flow on a screen, and the image of the Kupala Theatre building is marked with a red cross.

"What do you think the ending will be?" – asks actor **Pavel Astravukh** from the stage. The viewers respond with a "Victoria" sign. And the actors link their arms.

[Watch it online in Belarusian](#)

DAILY GIGS, PERFORMANCES, AND SIMPLE GATHERINGS OF LOCALS TAKE PLACE DURING THE WEEK IN BELARUSIAN CITIES, TOWNS, AND NEIGHBORHOODS. NEIGHBORS MEET UP IN THE YARDS, DECORATE THEM WITH NATIONAL SYMBOLS, DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS THEY CAN SOLVE AS COMMUNITIES, AND INVITE MUSICIANS, PERFORMERS, AND LECTURERS.



This newsletter was prepared in cooperation by



BELARUSIAN CULTURE SOLIDARITY FOUNDATION



BELARUSIAN PEN CENTRE

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CONTACT US

E-mail: BFKS2020@protonmail.com

Telegram: [@bel_culture](https://www.telegram.com/@bel_culture)

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