



Belarussian
PEN
Centre

Cultural Resistance in Belarus

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There are things that art can't do. It can't release political prisoners, force the regime to stop violence against Belarusians and hold fair elections. But what art can, though, is not let people get used to the injustice, because we can't afford calming down and reconciling.

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1. PERSECUTION, CONVICTIONS, CULTURAL POLICY

Alaksandr Fiaduta

and three other detainees in the alleged coup plot have been charged with conspiracy to seize power in an unconstitutional way.



The trial over **Alaksiej Sančuk** [Aliaksei Sanchuk], started on April 15. He was detained in November together with several drummers from the band "Trebujem Razoitsis" (they became a symbol of the protest in the summer and autumn 2020, having played at neighbours communities events and having "set the rhythm" on Sunday marches). Some of the musicians were fined, others served administrative arrests, but Alaksiej, not even a professional musician who just loved music and was learning to play it, is facing criminal charges.



Adam Špakoŭski [Adam Shpakouski], a 65-year-old pensioner, was detained in Minsk on April 22 because his neighbors complained that "they were sick of his Belarusian language."



On April 21, the Investigative Committee came to **Lesley Knife** (Uładzistaŭ Navažyłaŭ [Uladzislau Navazhylau]), leader of the rock metal band Gods Tower. According to preliminary information, he may face criminal charges for an insulting comment on Facebook. He was also sent for a psychological examination. In October 2020 Lesley Knife served eight days of administrative arrest for playing at a neighbours gathering in Minsk.

The car in which **Illa Malinoŭski** [Ilya Malinowski], musician, and Maksim Harčanok [Maksim Harchanok], journalist, were driving, was stopped on their way to Pinsk. Eight hours later both were released, their equipment and telephones not given back to them. Illa told that during the detention he was insulted for speaking in Belarusian and was demanded to speak in Russian.



Zmicier Daškievič [Zmitser Dashkevich], a writer, activist, former political prisoner, along with several other activists was detained on April 23 near the restaurant «Поедем, поедим» in Minsk. Zmicier was on duty, just like every Friday since 2018, to protest the opening of this restaurant near the People's Memorial Kurapaty. Zmicier was sentenced to 20 days of administrative arrest on April 26.

A letter from the Department of Trade and Services of the local executive committee came to the store **Admietnaść** (selling goods with national symbols) located in Hrodna. The officials ask to provide written explanations about the sale of “goods with unregistered white-red-white symbols, including what they call “pro-Nazi protest white-red-white flags”. The store owners responded that “the store has never sold and will not sell any products related to Nazism or other extremist anti-human ideologies.”

In January 2021, the police came to the store, **Siarhiej Vieramiejenka**, its owner and activist, was said to have an administrative proceeding underway. In March 2021, Siarhiej had a search.





The decision to liquidate **the Polish school** was made by Brest Economic Court on April 19. This is justified by “protection of state and public interests.” The deadline for liquidation is July 19. The decision has not yet entered into force and can be appealed.

Cultural and educational institution **Center of Urban Life** in Hrodna is also under threat of liquidation. This institution has been operating in Hrodna for almost five years and during this time has become a hub for creative people, having hosted more than 250 cultural and educational events, 35 exhibitions, over a hundred presentations, workshops, several major festivals, scientific conferences, concerts, book presentations and meetings with writers. On March 19, 2021, an exhibition of artist **Aleś Puškin** opened there, among the works there was a painting which, according to the authorities, violates the law "On Countering Extremism."



The National Opera and Ballet Theater did not extend the contract with **Kaciaryna Hałoŭleva** [Ekaterina Golovleva], a singer. Kaciaryna is also a wife of the former theater director Mikhail Pandzhavidze, who was fired in 2019 under ambiguous circumstances.

Hrodna resident **Luboŭ Sarłaj** [Liuyubou Sarlai] (who was detained for white-red-white stripes on her trousers in January 2021) was fired from the post-office, where she had worked since 2008 and had no complaints about her work.





Concerts of the Belarusian band **J: Mopc** in Hrodna region have been canceled. Uładzimir Puhač [Vladimir Pugach], leader of the band, was told it was for "Technical reasons" and "coronavirus". Uładzimir Puhač is a member of the Coordination Council. On December 23, 2020, he was summoned to the Investigative Committee.



The **cancellation of concerts** may be linked to the "**blacklists**" of musicians who've criticized the authorities after the 2020 election, and now they can't get their tour license, without them no concert or show can be held in Belarus.

Here is an approximate list of artists – some of them refused to perform in Belarus under Lukashenka, but most aren't issued the license.



The **tent festival Rasa** (an analogue of the American Burning Man in the Nevada desert), which the Belarusians planned to hold at the airfield near Ščučyn from June 29 to July 4, will not take place because the city authorities have abandoned the previous agreements. Organizers are looking for other locations.



illustrative photo
Edward Paterson @suh5pence, unsplash.com



The play **White Rabbit Red Rabbit**, which the HomoCosmos Theater has scheduled for April 20-22, has been canceled. At first, the Beton space refused to provide the site "for security reasons", and a few hours before the scheduled show, the touring license was revoked – "for epidemiological reasons."



The play based on **Sasha Filipenko's** play **Former Son** was not allowed to be shown in Belarus, the premiere will take place in Kyiv. The novel was written on Belarusian material, and Filipenko himself has repeatedly criticized the regime of Lukashenka's.



Siarhiej Piatruchin [Siarhei Piatrukhin], a blogger serving his politically-motivated term in Mahiloŭ prison №4, is denied to receive the **Novy Chas** newspaper (the only independent newspaper which prisoners can get), on the grounds that it is "extremist", although no decision was made to recognize the media as extremist.



If interesting and worthy places aren't closed for openly political reasons, they have to close, for example, because of raising rent, as it happened with the private **Interesting Museum** in Hrodna. The museum was not profitable, even in the best of times it reached a maximum of self-sufficiency, but through a six-fold increase in rent and other expenses, which its owner Aleh Jorš [Oleg Yorsh] considers unreasonably high, had to be closed. This is a loss for the city.

2. SYMBOLS



In Hrodna, huge strips of red and green cloth were hung on top of the trolleybus administration building, despite the fact that they covered the windows of the building.

Valer Judzin [Valery Yudin], a freelance photographer, was detained in Hrodna. Most likely, the reason was the small white-red-white flag in his car. On April 23 he was released from the detention center, the court hearing is scheduled for April 28.



Administrative arrests and fines for symbols have become our daily routine, and these cases are so absurd that we still refuse to believe that this is actually happening, so we won't list them this time, but will note that the situation is not improving.

A company of 20 people was detained on April 24 in Žodzina at a private meeting, and reports were drawn up against them for "picketing". Many of them had been through detentions before. It is known that they didn't have any symbols with them, but in the photos of the police there is a big white-red-white flag on the floor.



3. LIFE OF PEOPLE BEHIND BARS

Eduard Babaryka, cultural manager, son of Viktor Babaryka, has been kept in the KGB pre-trial detention center since June 18. He is charged under part 2 of Art. 243 of the Criminal Code, "Tax evasion in a particularly large amount".

According to his girlfriend Alaksandra,

Eduard is in a good mood and makes the most of his time: meditates, practices yoga, reads a lot, learns to draw by books – over ten months he learned to draw a person. The conditions in the pre-trial detention center are as follows:

"Prisoners aren't taken for walks, they aren't given letters, with rare exceptions: the "list of allowed ones" includes mostly acquaintances and friends, and there is rarely some "outsider". Prisoners can take a shower once a week. They are taken to the bathroom twice a day. There are four people in the cell. Some of them smoke. Ventilation practically doesn't work. The light is very dim."



Anastasija Pieravoščykava [Anastasia Perevoshchikova], who designed the flag of Navabelicky district of Homel, has been in prison since the end of January 2021, she is a political prisoner. Anastasija was tried 7 times in a row, each time sentenced to 15 days of arrests, a total of 105 days, she is to be released on May 9.

Anastasija's mother said that her daughter had been transferred from Homel to Buda-Kašaloŭ and the conditions worsened. She can have her writing and drawing tools only for a limited time, and she can't read and draw like before.



Pavieł Sieviaryniec [Pavel Seviarynets] has been in prison for more than 10 months, during this time his mother Taciana received 75 letters from him. Pavieł stays positive: he writes a book, fasts and preaches to his inmates. His wife Volha informed on April 26 that Pavieł had been transported to Mahiloŭ.





Natalla Chierše [Natalia Hershe] is a Swiss citizen of Belarusian origin, she flew to Belarus in autumn 2020 to see with her own eyes what was happening, and was detained at a women's march in Minsk on September 19. Natalla was sentenced to 2.5 years in prison for taking off a balaclava from a riot policeman. She is also an artist.

Now Natalla is serving her sentence in a Homel penal colony, where she sews clothes, now for civilian matters, but soon the order will be fulfilled, and the workers will be obliged to sew uniform for the law enforcement agencies. Natalla through her brother turned to enterprises and companies in need of overalls for their workers. She asks them to order tailoring from the colony, otherwise she will have to refuse to sew, and then she may be deprived of correspondence, parcels or meetings with relatives.



Alaxandr Fiaduta has been in prison since April 12. His lawyer signed a non-disclosure agreement. What is known for now: Alaxandr has issues with blood pressure, letters are not passed on to him, and he asked to send him more paper – for letters and work.



Aleś Puškin [Ales Pushkin], an artist, faces up to 12 years in prison for his painting.

He is being held in the Hrodna pre-trial detention center. Meetings with his relatives are not allowed, letters sent to him by people are returned with a note that the addressee is not there.

Here is what Aleś's wife, Janina, says:

“They want to make a show trial, so that the others would be scared. They think of making a show trial over Puškin, but in fact Puškin will make this trial over the artist for the whole world to see, to disgrace them in front of the whole world. So we’ll see who’ll be more scared. Actually, we all know anyway who the fascists are here.”



The Belarusian Culture Solidarity Foundation is raising funds to support the artist. See the [link](#) for the ways to support Aleś.



Relatives of people serving administrative arrests report that if **books** are accepted with care packages – which in itself is a miracle – the prisoners’ reading time is limited, for example, to 30 minutes a day.

4. DISSENT AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM



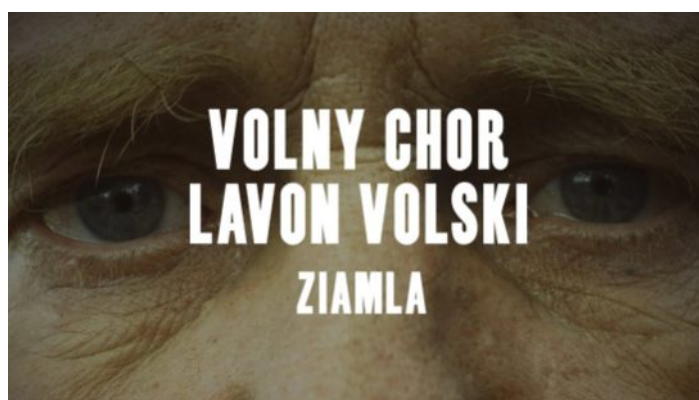
In many cities and towns of Belarus, streets have been named after the Soviet era persons or other realities, and often these names have nothing to do with Belarus.

Maksim Žukaŭ, a resident of Vicebsk, suggested naming three new streets in the Čaromuški district in memory of prominent artists

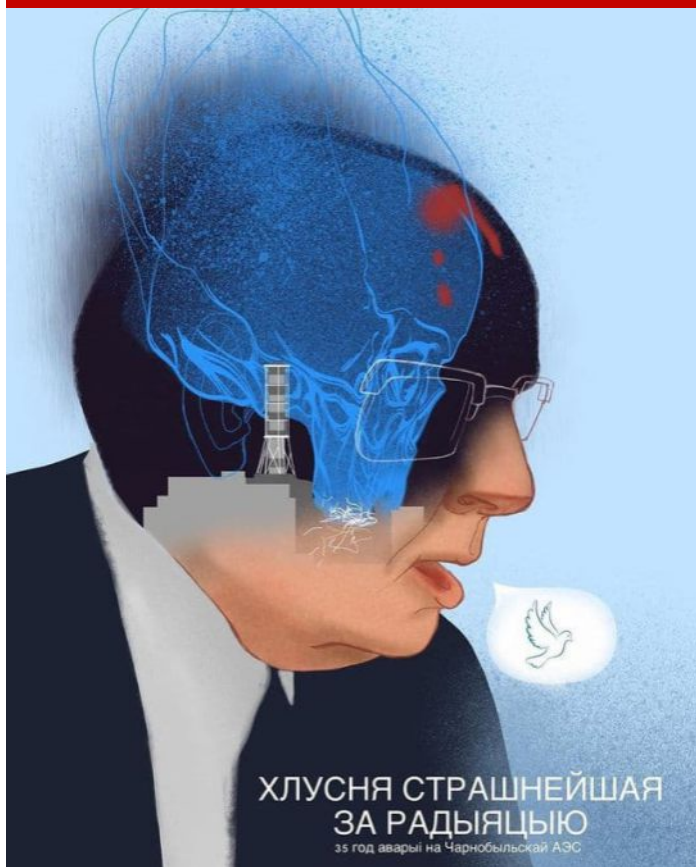
El Lissitzky, Kazimir Malevič [Kazimir Malevich], Yehuda Pen or writers Vasil Bykaŭ [Vasil Bykau], Michaś Łyńkoŭ [Mikhas Lynkou], Lazar Lagin or scientists Zhores Alferov, Alaksiej Sapunoŭ [Alexei Sapunov], Ivan Salarcinski [Sollertinsky], because the lives of these people were connected with Vicebsk region, and their activities glorified this land.



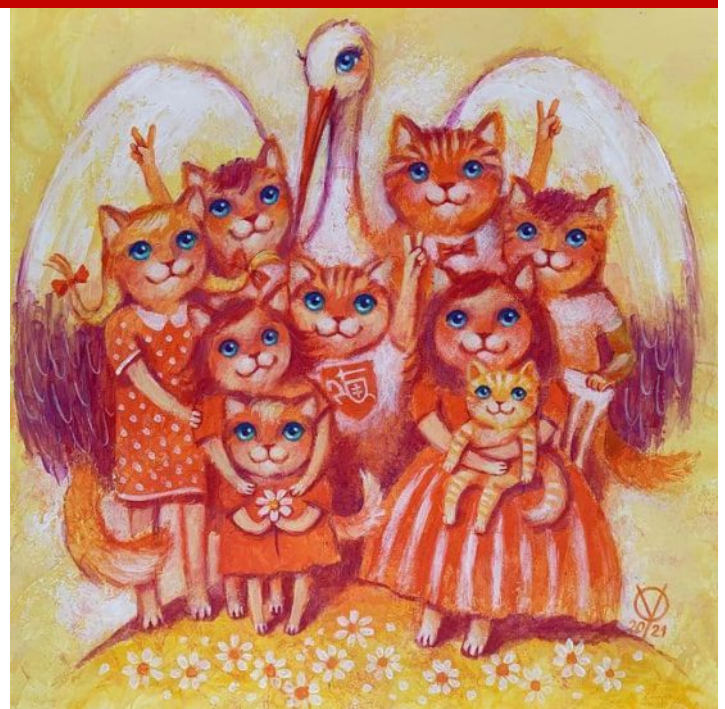
«**Volny Chor** together with the legend of Belarusian music **Lavon Volski** and **Free Orchestra** presented a video for the song Ziamla (land). This is the first work in a series of video collaborations of the public campaign in which the well-known and loved songs of legendary Belarusian musicians and modern popular bands will be performed by a choir with an orchestra.



Online concerts from the series **Victory Artists** in support of Belarusian musicians continue. On April 24, the band Točka K. performed.



Hanna Murajda,
Lies are worse than radiation.
35th anniversary
of the Chernobyl disaster



Volha Jakuboŭskaja,
Family under White Wings



Vladimir Tsesler,
Maria Kalesnikava's Birthday



An exhibition of works by artist **Siarhiej Kazak** [Sergei Kazak] is on display at Brest Athletics Arena. Among the various topics one can see a series dedicated to Belarusian athletes, in one of the paintings you can recognize **Alaksandra Hierasimienia**, the head of the Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation.

Photo project Stolen People
by Šura Filipovič-Suščyc
[Shura Pilipovich-Sushchyts]:
how the families of political prisoners live.



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The Belarusian Language Society in Hrodna
spoke in support of the Center for Urban Life.

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The Belarusian Culture Solidarity Foundation
has launched a charity auction
in support of repressed cultural figures and the family of the 18-year-
old political prisoner **Cichan Klukač** [Tsikhan Kliukach].

5. VOICES OF BELARUSIAN CULTURE

Ksienija Łuckina [Ksenia Lutskina], a former BelTeleradiocompany journalist who resigned after the election 2020 and was about to set up her own alternative channel but was detained on December 22 on charges of large-scale tax evasion. She has made many historical programs on BT, and now writes in her letters to her father:



“We traveled all over Belarus, we wanted to show to Belarusians what a wonderful country we live in, what a rich nature and history! I have always been convinced that to love your country deeply, you need to experience it. That's why I worked for BT for 15 years.”

Uładzimir Puhač [Vladimir Pugach]

comments on cancellation of J:Mopc concerts:

“We will try to play for you at the first opportunity. It is important to believe that this is our country now, today. We have lived and will live here. If we don't believe in it ourselves, we won't be able to convince anyone. Sooner or later we will win.”



Andrej Chadanovič [Andrei Khadanovich], poet, translator, member of the Board of the Belarusian PEN Center.

“I think poets feel at best, people who are used to writing just for themselves today can write blogs. Poets, publicists, columnists, freelancers of all kinds, individual free shooters. Theater directors or conductors of symphony orchestras or monumental sculptors are in more difficult circumstances. I think that their work is directly related to the general situation of freedom and lack of control, lack of censorship in the state.”



Photo: tut.by

Raman Abramčuk [Raman Abramchuk], a songwriter, publicist and tour guide who served 10 days of administrative arrest in October 2020, felt personal danger some time ago and decided to leave Belarus for some time.

“I remain in them [Belarusian events] with my head and heart. I follow the events every day and I care a lot. At the same time, yes, some stress has subsided. The fear that they will come for you, it is gone. But there are many other worries. So I can't say that I changed something bad for something good. Let's say, I changed something bad for something less bad.”



Paviel Arakielan [Pavel Arakelian], musician who was detained in November 2020 and served a 15-day administrative arrest for the concert:
“I haven't touched the instrument since I recorded the song 'Tomorrow'. And I haven't picked up a saxophone since almost August last year. So far I feel like I've said everything I could. The situation in the country is such that I can't think about any kind of creative work yet.”

6. INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Statement by the **International Association of Humanities** in connection with the detention of its member Alaksandr Fiaduta.



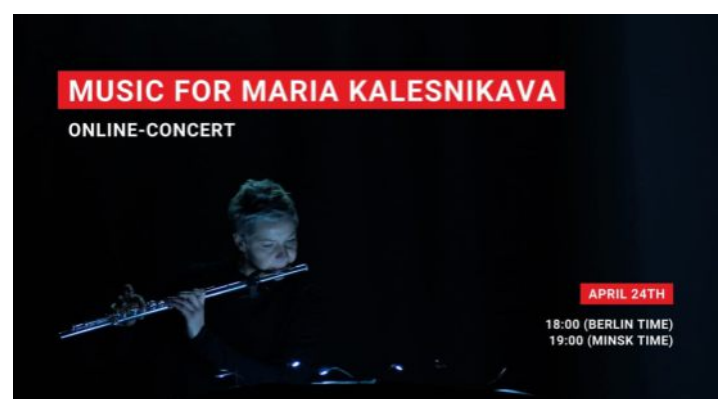
PEN America called for the immediate release of Belarusian PEN Center member Aliaksandr Fiaduta.

Groennfell Meadery from the US state of Vermont has developed a new STARY OLSA MEAD in collab with the Belarusian folk band.



The film **Mury** (the Walls) by Andrej Kuciła [Andrei Kutsila], which was shot near the exit of the remand prison in Akrestsina, where protesters detained after the election began to be released en masse on the night of August 13-14, has entered the national competition of the Krakow Film Festival 2021 from May 30 to June 6.

An online concert of **classical music** for Maria Kalesnikava's birthday took place on April 24. Musicians from Germany, Russia, Belarus, Brazil and Spain performed to congratulate Maria.

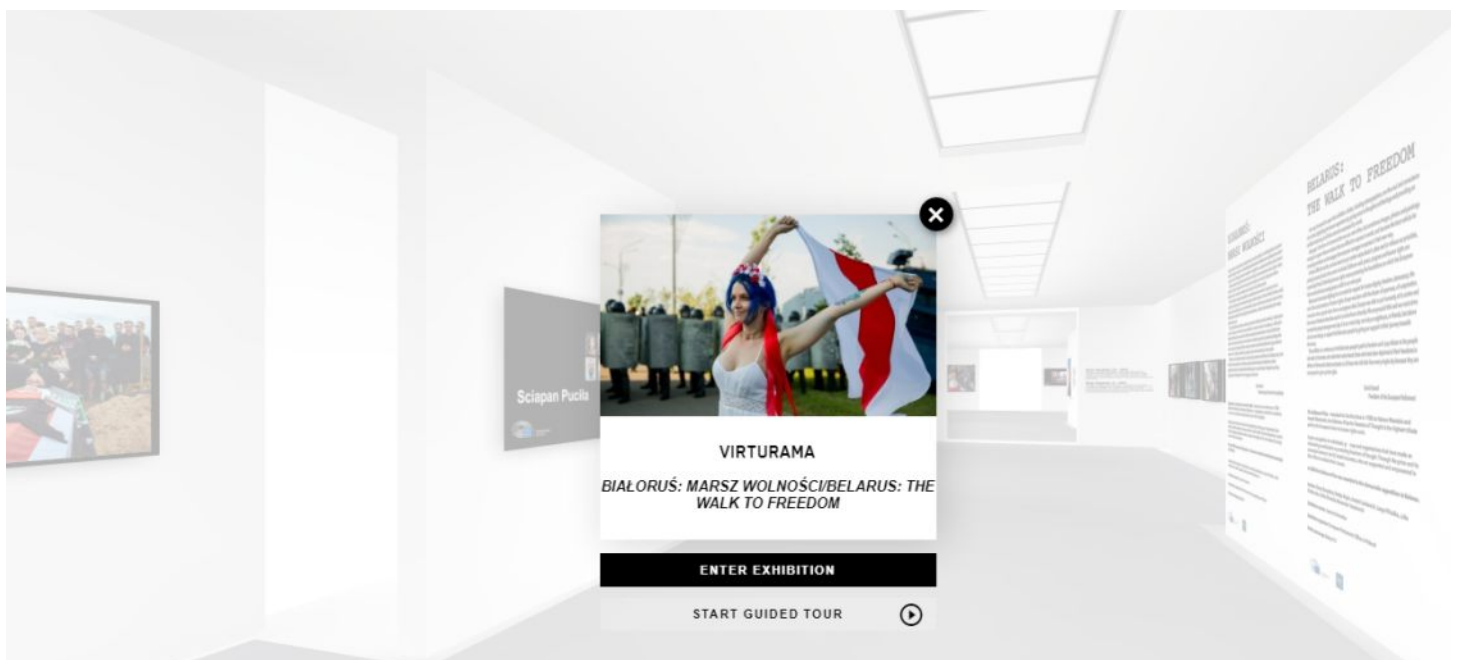


Last year, **PEN America** began preparing its annual **Freedom to Write Index**. This is a report aimed at informing the public about threats and risks faced by writers around the world. This document shows which countries are most dangerous for writers, intellectuals and activists.

Belarus, which was not even mentioned in the 2019 Index, now ranks fifth among the countries with the largest number of imprisoned writers, cultural workers and public activists.



The exhibition "**Belarus: March of Freedom**" opened in Virturama, a virtual gallery.



7. POLITICAL PRISONERS' BIRTHDAYS



Four Belarusians we can refer to as cultural workers – Maryja Kalešnikava [Maryja Kalesnikava], Andrej Pačobut [Andrzej Poczobut], Dźmitryj Kazłoŭ [Dzmitry Kazlou] and Ivan Kaniavieha [Ivan Kaniaveha] – celebrate their birthdays behind bars in April. You can congratulate them by sending a letter at the following addresses (written in Russian to make sure they'll be delivered):

СИЗО-1. 220030, г. Минск, ул. Володарского, 2, Беларусь


Maryja Kalešnikava – Колесникова Мария Александровна

Andrej Pačobut – Почобут Андрей Станиславович

Тюрьма №4. 212011, г. Могилёв, ул. Крупской, 99А

Dźmitryj Kazłoŭ – Козлов Дмитрий Олегович

Ivan Kaniavieha – Коневега Иван Викторович

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