



Belarussian  
PEN  
Centre

# Cultural Resistance in Belarus

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*"The history of war was replaced by the history of victory," this quote from the book *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* by Svetlana Alexievich very aptly describes the ideological reality in which we've been existing for decades. The staged burning of a village, four thousand red and green balloons, veterans who are forced to attend the parade, but stripped of the single-time payments before Victory Day... We are waiting for a real victory day – it will be the victory of light and love.*

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**ЯК ДАПАМАГЧЫ ДЗЕЯЧАМ І ДЗЯЯЧКАМ КУЛЬТУРЫ**

**падтрымайце кампанію [Save Our Songs](#)**

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# 1. PERSECUTION, CONVICTIONS, CULTURAL POLICY

**Mikoła Dziadok** [Mikola Dziadok], an activist and blogger, had his file sent to the prosecutor's office, he is charged under three articles of the Criminal Code: illegal actions with explosive substances; organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order; calls for action aimed at harming the national security of Belarus via the Internet.



Photo: tut.by



Another **14 people** were convicted in Brest in the "Karahod case". For "active participation in group actions that grossly violate public order" they were sentenced to terms from 1.5 years of house arrest to 1 year of colony.



This year on May 9 at the state level not only Victory Day will be celebrated but also the Day of the state flag and coat of arms. In Brest, the authorities plan a mass event on this day, forcing schoolchildren and teachers to come to visit it, using pressure and threats.



In **Babrujsk** on May 9 schoolchildren are forced to build a living corridor, they are required to have red and green balloons with them.



In **Homel**, schoolchildren and parents are obliged to attend the Victory Day celebrations and carry red and green flags or balloons.

Before May 9, **burning of the village of Šunioŭka** by the Nazis during the Second World War was staged, initiated by the official authorities.



It should be noted that this year, before the celebration of Victory Day, the authorities plan a number of controversial events for which a large budget is spent, such as launching 4,000 red and green balloons. At the same time, all single-time payments to veterans had been canceled until the decision was changed under pressure from public.



The **Doŭnar** [Dounar] family, designers of the Honar clothing brand (which often uses Belarusian ornaments and other symbols traditional for Belarusian culture in their designs), had an inspection that wants to check the brand's clothing for compliance with state standards. It's not yet clear what it means.



**Jula Šabanava** [Yulia Shabanava], a musician, on May 6 was fined 50 basic units [EUR 471] for singing the song "Mury" (it became one of the most widely sung protest songs in Belarus) together with musicians Lizavieta Pakietava and Alaksiej Žuraŭlevič [Aliaksei Zhuraulevich] on April 22 in the underground crossing on Lenina Street in Minsk. The court considered it a picket. Lizaveta received 11 days of administrative arrest, Alaksej – 25.



Persecution of **the Union of Poles members in Belarus** and members of the Polish national minority continues. Five people remain behind bars: the chairman of the Union of Poles Anžalika Borys [Anzhalika Borys], journalist and Polish activist Andrzej Poczobut from Hrodna, Irena Biernackaja [Bernatskaya] from Lida, Maryja Ciškoŭskaja [Maria Tishkouskaya] from Vaŭkavysk and Hanna Panišava [Panishava] from Brest. The Investigative Committee of Belarus has been summoning activists of the Hrodna and Brest regional branches of the Union of Poles for interrogation. Andrej Frałoŭ [Andrei Fralou], a cameraman working for TV Polonia on Nad Niemnem program, was detained on May 4 and punished by 15 days of administrative arrest as well as a fine of 30 basic units [EUR 230].



**Mikoła Papieka** [Mikola Papeka], a poet, suspect in the "Karahod case", was denied the right to examine the case materials in Belarusian, which is a violation of the law.

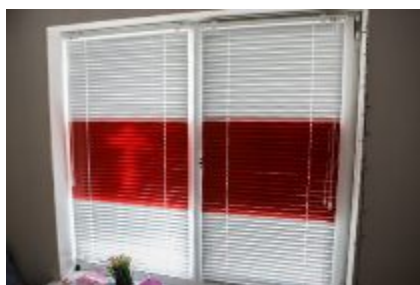


A war-themed concert was held at the **Babrujsk Theater** on May 8. Elena Lanskaja, a singer who openly supports the Lukashenka's regime, played a leading role in it. People who wanted to leave the concert earlier weren't allowed to, they were literally locked in.

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## 2. SYMBOLS

**Natalla Šepiel** [Shepel] and **Alaksandr Furs** became defendants in a criminal case for putting stickers and painting walls of public buildings in white and red.



People continue being punished with fines and administrative arrests for any items of **white-red-white** colors.



At first, a **red and green** flag was painted on the white and red smokestack of the Brest cogeneration plant, and now the flag became illuminated.



In **Orša**, students of several schools were given the task to decorate windows of their homes with the colors of official symbols or take pictures against the background of a red and green wall in clothes of the same colors and bring a photo to school.



**Natalla Slapcova** [Natallia Sliaptsova] was charged with six episodes of picketing and sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest. She drew red hearts in the elevator and highlighted "Long live Belarus" using red marker.



The court of Vicebsk sentenced **Maryja Amasovič** [Maria Amasovich] to 20 days of administrative arrest, **Lizavieta Kiryjenka** [Lizaveta Kiryienka] to 15 days, and **Maryja Ahijevič** [Maria Ahievich] to 10 days for a photo with a poster and a white-red-white flag, which they took on April 27 in Vicebsk.



**Uładzimir Pałujan** [Uladzimir Paluyan] was detained in Minsk on May 6 by representatives of the Department for Combating Economic Crimes for eight white-orange-white snowflakes in his window, and on May 7 he was sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest.



**Hanna Apanovič** [Apanovich] was detained in Minsk on May 8 when she came to lay a rose with white-red-white ribbons at the memorial to Raman Bandarenka on Peremen Square.



# 3. LIFE OF PEOPLE BEHIND BARS

Friends of **Anastasija Mironcava** [Anastasia Mirontsava], a political prisoner sentenced to two years in prison, created her page on Instagram. In one of the "posts" she writes:

*"Here I understood and realized how little I appreciated life and simple things, such as fresh air, clean water (here it's disgusting! It makes my eyebrows itch, and it's simply impossible to drink!), being able to go anywhere anytime..."*



Photo: svaboda.org

**Aleš Puškin** [Ales Pushkin] through his lawyer asked not to send him care packages to the pre-trial prison, as the trial will take place not earlier than in five months, and the money is needed to support his family, especially children.

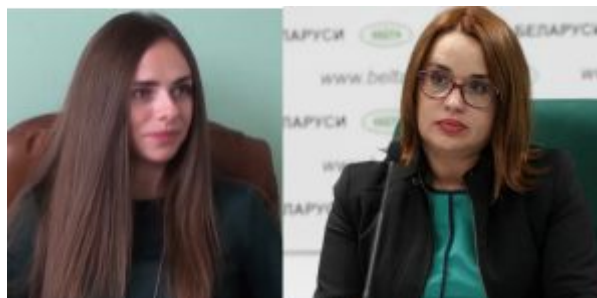


Aleh Karaban, who was inmates with **Maksim Znak**, told that Maksim helps many prisoners in writing various petitions for their cases, explains important legal nuances, etc. and he keeps his spirits up.



## 4. DISSENT AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM

**Natalla Zadzarkoŭskaja** [Natalia Zadzarkouskaya], a former employee of the Ministry of Culture who participated in drafting of the Code of Culture and other legal acts in the cultural sphere, replaced **Marharyta Laŭčuk** [Marharyta Liauchuk], an opera singer, as a person in charge of culture at the National Anti-Crisis Management of Belarus.



**Mikola Papieka** [Mikola Papeka], a poet on trial in Brest, insists that the criminal case be conducted in Belarusian and that his professional activity be marked as a poet, not as unemployed.



[NikaEmerald](#)

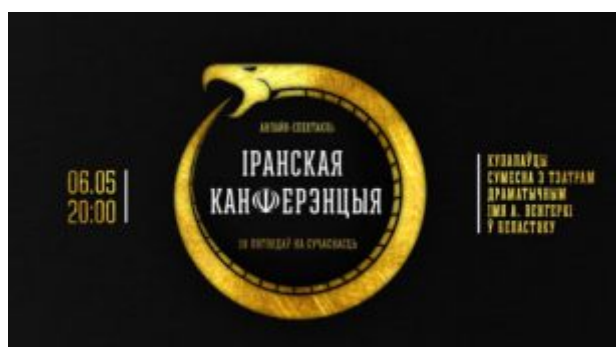


[Alesha Stupin](#)



[gera\\_more](#)

The show **Iranian Conference** was premiered by Kupalaŭcy on May 6.







**Dee Tree** band presented their new album *The Whole Autumn*, dedicated to Belarusians who "dared, those who overcame indifference and fear, those who got to know each other last summer and autumn."



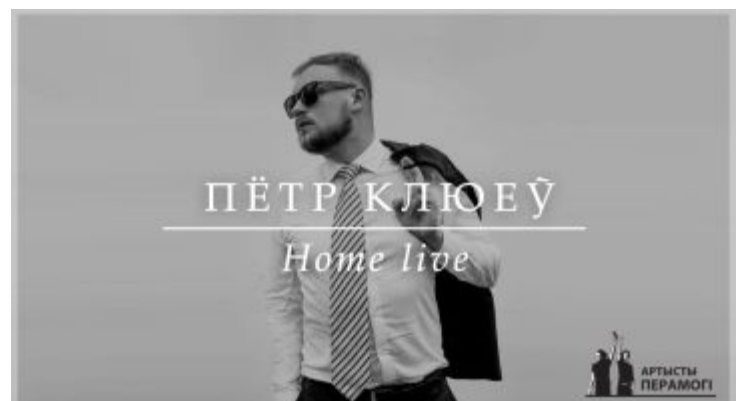
In support of the Belarusian cultural community and the project "Fairy Tales with Malyavanych", an artist **Volha Jakuboŭskaja** [Olga Yakubovskaya] donated her painting with the symbol of 2021 year and well-known kittens for the charity auction.



A mural with **DJs of Change** was restored on the legendary Peramien Square in Minsk on May 7! It had been painted over many times, and initially it was designed by Raman Bandarenka...



Victory Artists: **Piotr Klujeu's** LIVE is in support of Belarusian-language theatre project for kids, which is going to perform in Belarusian small towns. Watch and donate here





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## 5. VOICES OF BELARUSIAN CULTURE

**Natalla Zadziarkoŭskaja** [Natallia Zadziarkouskaya]:

*“Many people quit their jobs at the Ministry of Culture because they could not work with him [Minister Markevich] for various reasons. For him, human resources, experience, professionalism, in my opinion, mean little. For him, the main thing is the purity of the ranks, ideological in the first place.”*



**Paviel Haradnicki** [Pavel Haradnitsky], leader of the band Raźbitaje Serca Pacana and actor of Belarus Free Theater, who left for Kyiv after serving 15 days of administrative arrest and having no opportunities to perform in Belarus:

*“As long as you are in Minsk, tinned in your creative space, you are known only in Belarus. And moving to another place for some time is good to get to know others, show them your music. This is a great opportunity for our music, theater and film markets. They used to be on their own, but now they have outlets in Vilnius, Warsaw, Kiev, Moscow, St. Petersburg and so on. Artists establish cultural ties, leave our underground party for wider areas. And then, when we win, we can simply return to Belarus, and these ties will remain.”*



**Svetlana Alexievich:**

*“When writing the book *Second-Hand Time*, I saw how many people still linked their hopes with socialism, who didn't accept capitalism. Even 10 years ago, when I wrote that final book of my series, it seemed to me that my encyclopedia of the Red (Wo)man was complete, that different times were coming and the Red (Wo)man would change. It doesn't seem that way to me now. After what I saw and experienced in Belarus, I can't say that we said goodbye to communism, that Red (Wo)man has changed. The communist idea is still alive. I continue adding to my encyclopedia.”*



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## 6. INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

**PEN International**  
expresses concerns over the detention  
of **Aliaksandr Fiaduta**,  
Belarusian PEN Centre member.



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**Andrzej Duda**, the President of Poland  
Wrote a Letter to the Poles Imprisoned in  
Belarus. He stressed that the position of  
the persecuted activists is "evidence of the  
unity of the Poles and Belarusians that

creates a sovereign Belarus," and the Poles living in Belarus "are an integral part of the  
Belarusian society, and they are full citizens of Belarus."

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Writers, scientists and journalists around the world demand  
the release of **Alaksandr Fiaduta**.

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Polish directors **Tomasz Khatinski** and **Milos Haslowski** made the film *Uchodi* (Leave!)  
Belarusians who had to flee persecution to Poland after the election. The film also tells about  
the Belarusian diaspora in Szczecin, which has actively supported compatriots and organized  
joint political rallies in Poland.



Vice News made a video interview story with  
**Natalia Kaliada** and **Nikolai Khalezin** who run the  
Belarus Free Theatre in Minsk, Belarus, which  
puts on dissident productions critical of the  
regime of Alexander Lukashenko – referred to by  
many as the last dictator in Europe.

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## 7. REPORT ON VIOLATIONS OF CULTURAL RIGHTS



### СПРАВАЗДАЧА ЗА СТУДЗЕНЬ-САКАВІК 2021 ГОДА ПРА МАНІТОРЫНГ ПАРУШЭННЯЎ КУЛЬТУРНЫХ ПРАВОЎ І ПРАВОЎ ЧАЛАВЕКА Ў ДАЧЫНЕННІ ДА ДЗЕЯЧАЎ КУЛЬТУРЫ

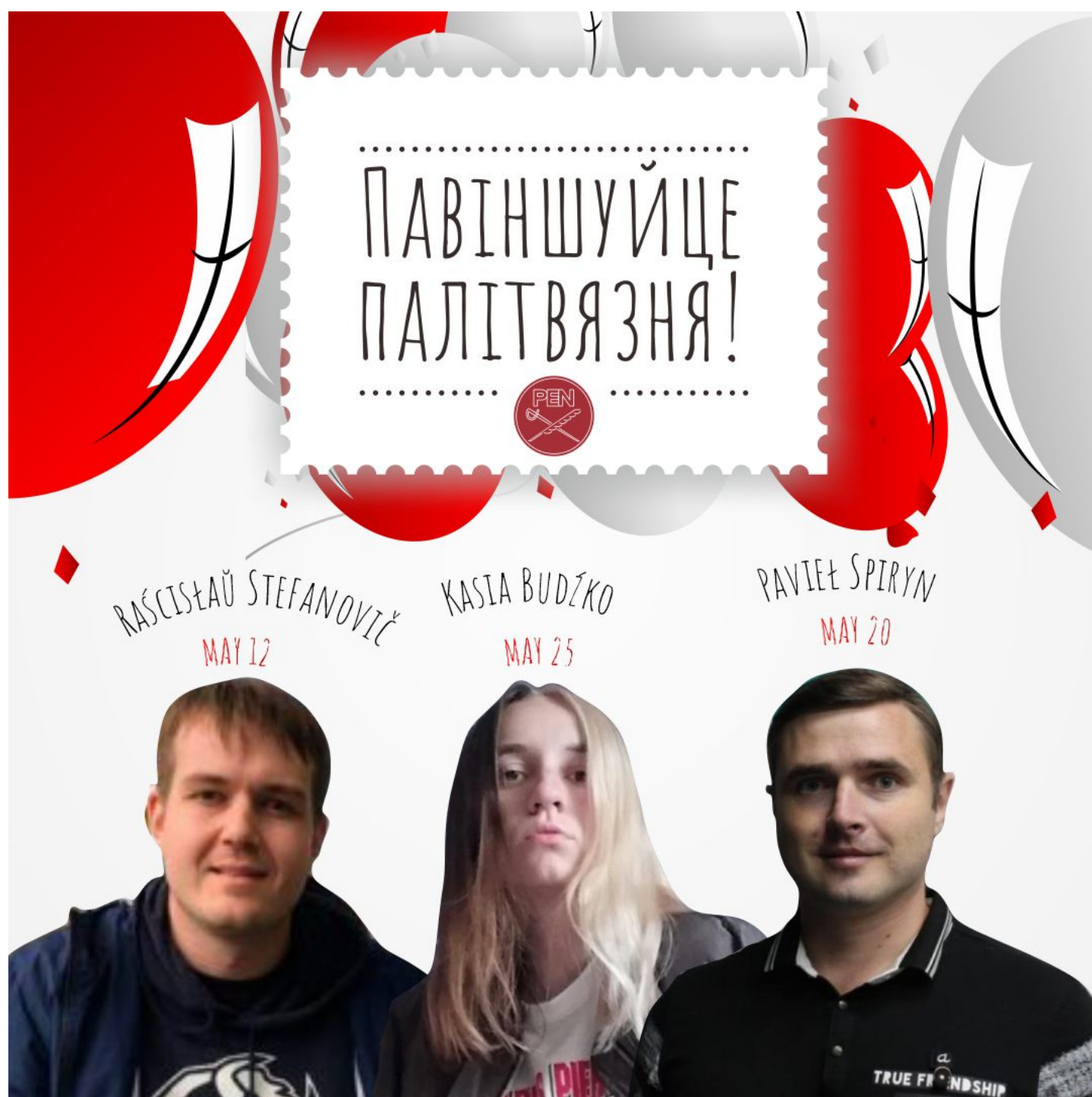
Отчёт за **январь-март 2021** **January-March 2021** report on  
года о мониторинге monitoring of human rights  
нарушений культурных прав и violations against cultural  
прав человека в отношении workers and cultural rights in  
деятелей культуры Belarus

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**PEN Belarus** has prepared a report based on the monitoring of **violations of human and cultural rights** for January-March 2020. 291 cases is nearly half of the number of cases counted in 2020. See the link for the complete report.




## 8. POLITICAL PRISONERS' BIRTHDAYS



In May, three people who are somehow involved in the process of cultural development in our country will celebrate their birthdays behind bars.

They are designer and architect **Raścistaŭ Stefanovič** [Rastislau Stefanovich] (May 12), blogger **Pavieł Spiryn** [Pavieł Spiryn] (May 20), student and artist **Kasia Budzko** [Kasia Budzko] (May 25).

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