



Belarussian  
PEN  
Centre

# Cultural Resistance in Belarus

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*“In May, we are all a post-memory radio. An echo of what happened not to us,”* culturologist and writer Maksim Žbankoŭ says in the new issue of his *Shocking Cult* show. *But every day we echo the memory of what actually happened to us: sometimes it’s a whisper, but more often – it’s roaring and clashing.”*

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# 1. PERSECUTION, CONVICTIONS, CULTURAL POLICY

**Alaksiej Sančuk** [Aliaksei Sanchuk], a musician, was sentenced to 6 years in a maximum security penal colony.



**Maria Kalesnikava** and **Maksim Znak** are reported to be charged under three articles of the Criminal Code: Calls for action against national security, Conspiracy to seize state power in an unconstitutional way, and Creating an extremist formation and leading it. They face up to 12 years in prison.



**Tania Kapitonava**, photographer and camerawoman, was detained on April 13 for allegedly participating in an unauthorized event – on April 12, a group of women in white clothes laid flowers near the Kamarouka market, to remember 9 months since the first women in white solidarity chain, and Tania took photos of them. She was sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest.



**Adam Bialacki** [Bialiatski] was detained by Kamennaja Horka metro station in Minsk with a poster in support of political prisoners Darja Čulcova [Darya Chultsova] and Kaciaryna Andrejeva [Ekaterina Andreeva], as well as Volha Zalatar, a mother of multiple children. He was sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest.



**Anžalika Borys** [Anzhalika Borys], arrested chairperson of Poles' Union in Belarus, is to remain in jail for another five months.



The decision to close the **Center for Urban Life** in Hrodna was made by the Economic Court on May 12. The formal reason was a painting: 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".



**Mikola Taranda**, professor, public activist, one of the founders and head of the historical and cultural club Pahodnia, preserving Belarusian traditions and expanding knowledge about them, was fired from the Hrodna Agrarian University.

**Viačasłaŭ Harbuzoŭ** [Vyacheslav Garbuzov] was appointed the new director of the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater. Since 2017, he has been the director of the drama theater in Brest. He is remembered for his order to buy toilet paper and soap for the theater at the expense of workers.



A red stripe was painted on the city name post of **Biaroza** town. The newspaper printed by the district executive committee called it a manifestation of neo-Nazism.

Lukashenka signed the law "**On preventing the rehabilitation of Nazism**", which human rights activists call "an instrument of reprisals against dissidents". The law prohibits the glorification and justification of Nazi ideology and promotion of it in any form. The meaning of the term "Nazi symbols and attributes" has also been expanded.

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## 2. SYMBOLS

**Anastasija Pieravoščykava** [Anastasia Peravoshchykava] was released on May 9 after 105 days of administrative arrest, a record administrative term for Belarus, and Anastasia received it for a white-red-white flag in a photo.



**Iryna Suryhina**, a mother of three children under eighteen, whom she takes care of, was fined \$ 2,000 for her photo with a white-red-white flag, and her family received socially dangerous status.



**Adam Špakoŭski** [Adam Shpakouski], who was detained on April 21, because his neighbors complained that he spoke Belarusian, and sentenced to 15 days in jail, was sentenced to another 12 days for "public display, manufacture, distribution of Nazi symbols or attributes."



**A company of seven people** was detained on May 11 at the Minsk Sea, where they were hanging out peacefully with a white-red-white flag. They received 5-15 days of administrative arrest.



At least **nine people** have been sentenced in the Brest region since August for "insulting the state flag" for terms from 6 months of "educational measures" for a minor up to 1 year in an open prison. Two more new cases were sent to court, the "crime" was that people took the official flag off its flagpole.



**Dzmitry Taratun** received 3 years of restraint of liberty, and **Dziana Kazak** – a year and a half of house arrest: in early February 2021 they painted a heart, a fist and a victory on the facade of the transformer booth.



High school students in **Hancavičy** are forbidden to wear white and red end of school ribbons at the school leaving party.



Detention for a white rubber band on his hand, 20 days of administrative arrest for a mask with a "wrong image", administrative arrest for a flag and a photo shoot in the woods, for a pink slipper with a white stripe, a fine for a flag in a car.

# 3. LIFE OF PEOPLE BEHIND BARS



**Aleś Puškin** [Ales Pushkin], an artist, defendant under Part 3 of Art. 130 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (incitement to hatred), while in prison founded an art community "Prison". In his letter, he said that the new art community was created for those artists who:

- 1) Have been imprisoned
- 2) Live or have made a conscious choice to return from emigration to Belarus
- 3) Speak Belarusian.



**Alexandr Fiaduta** reads a lot and promotes quality literature among his inmates.



**Zmicier Daškevič** [Zmitser Dashkevich], activist, former political prisoner, writer, who served 20 days of administrative arrest for a symbolic guard at Kurapaty, which used to be held every Friday, told about the conditions of detainees on politically-motivated charges: "They have their mattresses taken away as well as their bedding, books and pens, writing letters is not allowed. They allow you to drink a little, some things from care packages, some underwear, toothpaste and toothbrushes."



**Kasia Budzko**, student, activist of the Belarusian Students' Association charged under Art. 342 of the Criminal Code – Organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them, now has her own Instagram account, created for her by friends. In one of her letters she writes: «Will I remain a nice person after prison, how long will it take me to recover, adapt and reflect, and will our friendship pass this test ...»



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## 4. DISSENT AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM



[Andrey Tityak](#)  
Censorship.by



[Victoria Semykina](#)



[Olga Yakubovskaya](#)

**Anastasija Pieravoščykava's  
drawing she made in prison**



An artist **AnaMova** and journalist **Vera May** have released a podcast to commemorate six months since the death of **Raman Bandarenka**. In the podcast, they tell what happened in that yard, talk about the events and people involved on a deeper level.

**Maja** lives in Mahiloŭ and makes dolls – many of them are prototypes of famous people. It started after the summer of 2020, to find a creative way out of a strong emotional experience, as well to make her living: Maja’s husband quit his job during the strike in October, while the family is raising a child with autism, and for taking an active position they were stripped of the welfare which the state pays to families raising children with disabilities.



**Victory Artists: Siarhiej Baštykievič** played a gig “Where is that Answer?” in support of independent Belarusian culture.



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## 5. VOICES OF BELARUSIAN CULTURE

**Pavieł Sieviaryniec** [Pavel Sevyarynets] addressed people before the closed trial on May 12.

*"God woke Belarus up not so that it would fall asleep again. Speak Belarusian, read and know your history."*



**Uładzimir Niaklajeŭ** [Uladzimir Niaklyaeu], poet, writer, politician, about Sviatlana Cichanoŭskaja [Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya] as a leader:

*"Time shows that it wasn't by accident that she found herself in the leader's place, that it was her destiny, because the speed with which she is gaining confidence and political experience is impressive, she's doing a great job."*



Three Belarusian musicians – **Rusya**, **Nasta Špakoŭskaja** [Shpakouskaya] and **Marharyta Laŭčuk** [Marharyta Liauchuk] – have been living outside Belarus for more than six months, they shared with tut.by some of their experience.

**Marharyta Laŭčuk**, opera singer:

*"I'm grateful to Lithuania for the opportunity to live a normal life. Here we have complete freedom. We can tell the truth, sing the truth, post whatever and not be afraid to be detained and taken to Akrestsina."*



**Rusya** (Maryna Shukyrava), vocalist of the Belarusian band Shuma:

*"What can I do now? I can inspire people, I can use my media resources to tell about what is happening in Belarus. Over the past six months, we have made several documentaries about the situation in Belarus, in particular about Belarusian women, together with Siarhej Budkin we set up the Belarusian Culture Solidarity Foundation, in collaboration with Estonian colleagues – the Frida Bel Foundation, supporting women exclusively. We also made several collaborations with Kyiv-based artists at Ivan Dorn's studio."*



**Nasta Špakoŭskaja**, leader of the band Naka and former actress of the Gorky Theater:

*"The main goal of the school [online school for Belarusian children in Ukraine] is to add Belarusian subjects to the Ukrainian school curriculum: Belarusian language, literature and history of Belarus. Our school issues a state certificate, so our children, despite the "war" of adults, continue to learn the Belarusian language and get education."*



# 6. INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY



**Andrei Moiseev**, a photographer from Moscow, made a photo project. He comments on it, *"Everything that is happening to our neighbour is a shock to me. I couldn't imagine that a Person could descend so easily and with a genuine desire several steps in their development. To an extremely beastly condition. Even animals don't behave the way that a creature capable of introspection, critical thinking, and conscience does."*

**Belarusians in Brazil** are seeking support to hold a photo exhibition which highlights the incredible resistance of Belarusian women in protesting peacefully against the continuation of the country's dictatorship.



One of the leading theaters of Tallinn **Vaba Lava** on May 31 will show the play Error 403 about the tragedy which happened on August 10, 2020 in Minsk, when Alexander Taraikovsky was killed.

## 7. 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 **Paviel Spiryn** [Paviel Spiryn] (May 20), student and artist **Kasia Budźko** [Kasia Budzko] (May 25).

Address for letters:

**Kasia Budźko** and **Raścistaŭ Stefanovič**: СІЗА-1. 220030, г. Мінск, вул. Валадарскага, 2  
**Paviel Spiryn**: ПК №2. 213800, г. Бабруйск, вул. Сікорскага, 1

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