



Belarussian  
PEN  
Centre

# Cultural Resistance in Belarus

**Issue 28 (41)**

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*To be a decent person, love one's country and people, develop culture and promote the highest values – humanism, respect, freedom – is not a crime but something to be proud of. And we are proud.*

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# 1. PERSECUTION, CONVICTIONS, CULTURAL POLICY

**Vadzim Hulevič** [Hulevich], a musician and programmer, is a suspect under Part 2 of Article 289 of the Criminal Code – an act of terrorism, a sentence of 8 to 20 years in prison.

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**Ivan Citoŭ** [Tsitou], choirmaster of the National Opera and Ballet Theater, was forced to leave the theater and Belarus. He used to walk around the city with national symbols, for which he was first fined and then deprived of the right to stay in Belarus because he is a Russian citizen.



Photo: bolshoibelarus.by



The Ministry of Justice is inspecting the activities of the **Union of Belarusian Writers**. The organization had to prepare a large array of documents for several years in a day. **The Belarusian Language Society** received such a request too.

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On July 14, over 20 human rights and other non-governmental organizations throughout Belarus became subjects to search and arrests – **the Belarusian School Society, the World Association of Belarusians Бацькаўшчына, the Belarusian Writers Union** among them.

**Barys Piatrovič**, poet, writer, chairperson of the Union of Belarusian Writers, had his home searched and is now under travel restrictions.



Photo: svaboda.org



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The Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus came for **PEN Belarus**, to its statutory address. As PEN Belarus has been working remotely for the last year, none of its coworkers were there. The organization working in that office had their equipment confiscated.

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**Among the activists detained on July 14 there were:**



Photo: racyja.com

**Siarhiej Sys** – poet, journalist, human rights activist, member of the Belarusian PEN Center (detained as a suspect in a criminal case, released on the same day)



Photo: Siarhej Hryc

**Aleś Bialacki** [Ales Bialiatski] – human rights activist, author of prison literature, member of the Belarusian PEN Center (detained as a suspect in a criminal case)



Photo: novychas.by

**Alena Łapcionak** [Alena Laptzionak], editor and publisher of books in the series "Prison Literature" (detained as a suspect in a criminal case, released on July 17)



**Alena (Lera) Som** – poet, bard, public activist (released after interrogation by the Investigative Committee)



Photo: novychas.by

**Viktar Sazonau** – writer, member of the Union of Belarusian Writers (a suspect in a criminal case; released under travel restrictions)



Photo: Alexander Janetzko

**Svetlana Alexievich** missed her flight on July 14 in Berlin (she was going to Wroclaw for an event with the participation of another Nobel laureate, Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk), because Ms. Alexievich allegedly "had a bomb with her", and the safety check procedure took a long time, after which she was left alone at the airport at night.

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**On July 15 and 16, searches and detentions of activists and journalists  
across Belarus continued:**



Photo: svaboda.org

**Aleh Hruzdziłovič** [Hruzdzilovich], journalist,  
author of a documentary book about the  
explosion in the Minsk metro in 2011. Detained,  
all his equipment was arrested.



**Hleb Łabadzienka** [Labadzenka], poet,  
public activist, journalist. Home searched,  
detained; released on the same day.



**Ihar Iljaš** [Iliash], journalist, co-author (together  
with Kaciaryna Andrejeva) of the book "Belarusian  
Donbass" claimed as extremist by the regime.  
Home searched, detained on criminal charges.



**Alena Anisim**, chairwoman of the  
Belarusian Language Society.  
Home searched.



**Jaŭhien Mierkis**, local historian,  
popularizer of Belarusian culture.  
Home searched.



**Pavieł Mažejka**, journalist, director of the Centre for  
Urban Life space in Hrodna, closed on the decision  
by the court. Home searched, Pavieł released after  
an interrogation.







On July 16, court sentences were imposed on defendants in the so-called **students case**. One defendant received 2 years of imprisonment in a minimum-security penal colony, and the rest – 11 – 2.6 years of imprisonment in a minimum-security penal colony, among them **Maryia Kalenik** – a student of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts, **Ksenia Syramalot** – a student of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Belarusian State University, spokeswoman for the Belarusian Students' Association, volunteer of the Human Rights Center "Viasna", poet, **Yana Arabeika** – an activist of the Belarusian Students' Association and a student of the Belarusian State Pedagogical University, artist, **Kasia Budzko** – an activist of the Belarusian Students' Association and a student of the Belarusian State Pedagogical University, artist.



**Cimur Hazizaŭ**, an event manager who was detained during the screening of the play White Rabbit, Red Rabbit in Minsk, and was to be released on July 16 after a total of 30 days of administrative arrest was instead transferred to the pre-trial detention center in Minsk, which means he is a suspect in a criminal case.

The **criminal case filed against the publishing houses** Knihazbor and Januškievič, as well as the studio Adliha and bookseller Aleś Jaŭdacha was closed. The equipment was returned to the owners, the books were not, because the results of the examination aren't ready yet.

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## 2. SYMBOLS



**Lavon Karpovič** [Liavon Karpovich], a local historian and collector from the village of Luna in the Hrodna region, has been persecuted:  
he is threatened with a criminal case if he hangs a white-red-white flag again.



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## 3. DISSENT AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM



A closed screening of the play **Para-Dox** based on the play by the genius of anti-totalitarian drama Eugene Ionesco Victims of Duty with the participation of actors from Hrodna took place at the Hrodna Center for Urban Life. It's only available in a video version for now.

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**Victory Artists:** musician and poet **Aleś Dzianisaŭ** played online in support of the political prisoner **Ihar Bancer**.



**Volha Jakuboŭskaja** (Yakubouskaya) put up her painting A Walk in Free Minsk for a charity auction. The artist would like to support projects of teaching the Belarusian language.



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## 4. VOICES OF BELARUSIAN CULTURE



**Taciana Niadbaj**, poet, deputy chair of the Belarusian PEN Center, about the inspection carried out by the Ministry of Justice:

*"We are aware that we may not have followed all the intricacies of bookkeeping, but we are always ready to correct our mistakes, and some of the shortcomings we have noticed and corrected. If the Ministry of Justice is interested in facilitating, we will be grateful for all the recommendations and correct possible shortcomings, but I suspect that the Ministry of Justice pursues a completely different purpose. Which path have we chosen? We continue our activities, and will continue working, even if they*

*seek to deprive us of legal status, because what we do, we do not for the Ministry of Justice, but for the country and society, no matter how dramatic it may sound, and we aren't going to give up on our mission."*



**Andrej Dynko**, editor-in-chief of three magazines published under the Naša Niva, detained together with other employees of the media outlet,

*"I'm sure that not only I, but also my colleagues are not guilty of anything, and it'll become obvious to everyone. In my opinion, we are just hostages in the political trade. Those who make the Our History magazine did what they had to do, did their job. Our common principle was and is: Naša Niva doesn't participate in political games, but objectively covers the processes taking place in the country and abroad."*



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**Maryja Kalesnikava** in a letter from the pre-trial detention center,

*"I sincerely admire and am proud of Belarusians. I know that many are tired, and it may seem that the war of the Belarusian authorities against their own people will never end.*

*But this is not the case. We have already won: first of all, over our indifference, and it's crucial. It's really hard to squeeze a slave out of oneself, drop by drop, but we need to do it for ourselves, for our future."*



**Aliaksej Palujan** about his film "Courage",  
*"This is an attempt to understand myself: who am I, a Belarusian? It seems to me that we do not know ourselves, we do not know our Belarusian potential, our borders, what we are really worthy of. I think this film hits hard on our national ego, because it shows that the tortures happening now to the Belarusian people and nation go very far, beyond 27 years. But this film is also a portrait of the young nation that woke up and said 'NO'."*

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## 5. INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

**Maria Kalesnikava** has been awarded the Stuttgart Peace Prize for courageous struggle against Lukashenka's autocratic regime.



**The European Writers Council** condemns the attack on the Belarusian Writers Union and PEN Belarus.

Joint call condemning the raids on Belarusian journalists and human rights activists and demanding the release of those detained.

## The Freedom to Write

A Belarusian day at the **Mountains of Literature Festival** with the participation of Svetlana Alexievich, Nasta Niakrasava, Zmicier Vajnoŭski and Andrej Chadanovič took place on July 17 in Poland.

## 6. POLITICAL PRISONERS' BIRTHDAYS



In July, 3 people who are somehow involved in the cultural development of our country, will celebrate their birthdays behind bars. They are **Mikalaj Sasieŭ**, a choreographer (July 16), **Alaksiej Sančuk**, musician (July 18) **Ivan Viarbicki**, artist and designer (July 17) and **Viktor Łosik**, copywriter (July 22).

Letters can be sent to the following addresses (but only those written in Russian or Belarusian)

**Mikalaj Sasieŭ and Alaksiej Sančuk:**

Турма №4. 212011, г. Магілёў, вул. Крупскай, 99А




**Viktor Łosik:**

СІЗА-1. 220030, г. Мінск, вул. Валадарскага, 2

**Ivan Viarbicki:**

ПК №2. 213800, г. Бабруйск, вул. Сікорскага, 1



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