

National Human Rights Index

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2021

Right to Take Part in Cultural Life:

Expert Commentary

The score: 2

Including scores by component:

- Participating in cultural life 2
- Access to cultural life 2.9
- Contribution to cultural life 1.3
- Protection of cultural diversity 1.7

The main problems in the sphere of the right to take part in cultural life are noted in the reviews for 2019-2020. At the same time, 2021 was marked, on the one hand, by a decrease in the pace of the COVID-19 pandemic and the adjustment of authorities and people to the new reality, but, on the other hand, by an increase in repression directed at civil society in general, and at national minorities in particular.

Assessing the state of the right to take part in cultural life in 2021, the experts of the Index gave lower scores than in 2020 for the following reasons:

1. liquidation of public organizations, including organizations dealing with the cultural rights of various social groups¹;
2. the human rights crisis in Belarus, in general, and the manipulation of law by the regime, the use of amendments to the legislation on freedom of peaceful assembly as a legal basis for limiting the right to participate in cultural life²;

¹ According to Lawtrend, since July 2021 the Belarusian authorities have liquidated more than 300 non-profit organizations, regardless of the nature of their activities (cultural, educational, human rights, social, charitable, etc.). The official grounds for liquidation were out-of-statute activities, receiving two warnings from the Ministry of Justice during a year, or failure to carry out business activities for 24 months. The liquidation was not applied to pro-governmental NGOs. About 200 other civil society organizations decided to liquidate themselves. <https://www.lawtrend.org/liquidation-nko>

² On May 24, 2021, Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 108-3 "On Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus" was signed, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12100108&p1=1&p5=0>



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3. repression of certain national minorities (Poles and Lithuanians) and cultural figures; and interference with the right to participate in cultural life;
4. the rewriting of history against the background of the regime's fight against dissenters, the fight against white-red-white-symbolism and the "rehabilitation of Nazism";
5. censorship and self-censorship³;
6. tacitly prohibiting cultural spaces that openly (or implicitly) express their opposition to the current regime from carrying out their activities;
7. increase in the number of arrests of cultural figures, administrative and criminal cases, and the proportion of political prisoners among them compared to 2020⁴.

The PEN Center estimates that during 2021 there were 1,455 situations of violations of cultural and human rights against cultural figures⁵.

Participating in cultural life

According to experts, 2021 demonstrated an increase in direct and/or indirect interference with the right to participate in cultural life. It is directed at certain national minorities (Polish and Lithuanian) and Belarusian-speaking citizens, despite the fact that they live in their own land and speak their own language. Repression has become an entrenched practice and a way to deal with dissidents who do not support the regime and its ideology. For example, in early 2021, the PEN Center recorded the arbitrary detention of students of Belarusian language courses in Volkovysk; convoy escorts or detention of excursionists in Polotsk, Novogrudok, Minsk; arrest of concert audience in Smolevichi.⁶

The main interference takes place in the activities of organizations that opposed the current regime. In July 2021, along with human rights and other public organizations, the state massively liquidated or forced to liquidate cultural and educational organizations⁷. Many of them worked for certain national minorities, such as Poles and Lithuanians. For example, in September 2021, A. Bogdanov (Papa Bo), founder of the cultural center KORPUS, DJ, promoter of the bands Cassiopeia, Silver Wedding, and

³ Read more here: <https://penbelarus.org/2022/08/23/podavlen%d0%b8e-%d0%b8nakomysl%d0%b8ya-skrytye-formy-repress%d0%b8j-v-gosudarstvennyh-uchrezhden%d0%b8yah-kulturny-respubl%d0%b8k%d0%b8-belarus.html>

⁴ Monitoring Cultural Rights Violations, PEN Center, 2021, <https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/16/prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2021-rus.html>

⁵ Monitoring Cultural Rights Violations, PEN Center, 2021, <https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/16/prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2021-rus.html>

⁶ Monitoring Cultural Rights Violations, PEN Center, January-March 2021, <https://penbelarus.org/2021/05/06/bel-ru-manitoryng-parushennyau-pravou-chalaveka-u-sfery-kulturny-na-pachatak-2021.html>

⁷ The updated list of liquidated and/or under liquidation Belarusian organizations, <https://www.lawtrend.org/liquidation-nko>



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Petya Pristrastiya, was detained; in 2020 he organized the "#musicweapons" action, playing music for protesters at peaceful protests against falsified presidential elections. He was accused of manufacturing, possessing and distributing extremist materials⁸. Also, in January 2021, the cultural hub "Ok-16" in Minsk was closed without prior notice, half an hour before a performance of the Contemporary Art Theatre⁹. "Ok-16" was a project of Belgazprombank and was run by Maria Kolesnikova until the end of 2020. "Ok-16" was rented by the company "Art-Corporations". The festivals "TEART" and "Listapad" were held there. In August 2021, the company Art Corporation was forcibly liquidated, and the state transferred the rights to hold the annual Listapad film festival to Belarusfilm¹⁰. These examples testify to the selective application of the law for targeted politically motivated repressions.

According to experts, this repression practice led to self-censorship in many "surviving" organizations, which were forced to adapt to the situation. However, some organizations were not subject to censorship and self-censorship due to the fact that they did not share political ideas and slogans to the current government and did not speak out about the political situation in the country, such as organizations of the Armenian national minority.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 for the state and people "came to naught". In October 2021 the mandatory mask regime was abolished¹¹, people began to actively vaccinate (but not always by choice); museums, theaters, movies adapted to the new reality.

After the presidential election of 2020, in 2021 crowds are essentially equated to picketing and unauthorized meetings. Thus, the exercise of the right to participate in cultural life leads to the real threat of being detained under the current administrative and/or criminal legislation. A vivid example is the "Round dance case".¹²

According to and information from experts, in 2021 the state has taken legislative, administrative, judicial, budgetary, promotional and other measures aimed at the full realization of the right to participate in cultural life, but the question is their effectiveness, non-discriminatory nature, territorial spread.

In the legislative sphere, compared to 2020, everything remained unchanged, except that on January 29, 2021, the State Program "Culture of Belarus" for 2021 - 2025 was adopted. It formally raises the issue of "support for the development of cultures of national minorities", plans activities and allocates a budget¹³. Also, on September 29, 2021, a draft law on amendments to the Code on Culture was

⁸ <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/09/24/nas-eshche-ne-ubili-no-ubivaiut>

⁹ <https://nash-dom.info/65226>

¹⁰ <https://reform.by/252989-vlasti-likvidirujut-art-korporejshn-organizatora-listapada-tearta-i-mnogih-vystavok>

¹¹ <https://www.dw.com/ru/minzdrav-belarusi-otmenil-objazatelnyj-masochnyj-rezhim-v-respublike/a-59585473>

¹² <https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/28/karagodnaya-sprava-horovodnoe-delo.html>

¹³ State program "Culture of Belarus" for 2021 - 2025,
https://mfa.gov.by/kcfinder/upload/files/GUMDI/progr_Kult_2025.pdf



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submitted for public discussion¹⁴. In 2022 it is expected to adopt amendments, which in most cases will negatively affect non-state organizations, organizers of concerts and exhibitions. Preferences for state organizations in the sphere of culture are assumed¹⁵. In April 2021, the Presidential Decree "On the Development of Cinematography" was signed, according to which funds from the national budget allocated to the Ministry of Culture for cinema may go towards "providing subsidies to state film organizations engaged in film production"¹⁶.

In 2021, the propaganda and educational activities were conducted on topics that benefited the current regime. The state provided airtime to events and individuals who supported the current ideology. 2021 was declared the year of national unity. On February, 2, 2021, the President's web-site published the plan "On the republican action plan for the "Year of people's unity"¹⁷, which includes only one event connected with different cultures (the Republican festival of national cultures (Hrodna)). All other events are focused on political information in schools, Belarusian culture, state ideology and patriotism, organization of military-patriotic camps for young people. It also includes development of a draft law to counteract rehabilitation of Nazism and glorification of Nazi criminals and their accomplices. Moreover, not a single nongovernmental, non-profit organization is involved as an organizer of these events. This plan of action actually shows that "people's unity" does not include civil society organizations. Such exclusion of civil society, according to experts, is an obstacle in the realization of the right of various groups to participate in cultural life.

In 2021, funding is allocated from the budget, but most of the funding goes to promote loyalist Belarusian culture, but not to support national minority cultures¹⁸.

Various forms of repression of dissenters in the sphere of cultural life take place. According to the monitoring of cultural and human rights violations against cultural workers by the Belarusian PEN Center, in 2021 there were 68 cultural workers among political prisoners¹⁹. Publishers G. Viniarski and A. Yanushkevich and book distributor A. Yevdakh were detained and interrogated. Accounts of the publishing houses "Yanushkevich" and "Knigosbor" and the online store of Belarusian books *knihi.by* were blocked. Non-admission by customs of the book "Revolution" by V.Martinovich and "Belarusian National Idea" by D. Lukashuk and M. Horyunau. Unilateral termination of contracts for sales of editions by Belsayuzdruk, among which there is press with content on the topic of culture: "Novy Chas"

¹⁴ <https://www.belta.by/culture/view/proekt-zakona-o-vnesenii-izmenenij-v-kodeks-o-kulture-vnesen-na-obsuzhdenie-462086-2021/>

¹⁵ <http://center.gov.by/v-kodeks-respubliki-belarus-o-kulture-vneseny-izmeneniya/>

¹⁶ <https://reform.by/286548-bez-kupaly-no-s-kurazhom-podvodim-itogi-goda-v-belarusskom-kino>

¹⁷ <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22100064&p1=1&p5=0>

¹⁸ See State Program "Culture of Belarus" for 2021 - 2025, budget and number of planned activities.

¹⁹ Monitoring Cultural Rights Violations, PEN Center, [2021, https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/16/prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2021-rus.html](https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/16/prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2021-rus.html)



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newspaper, “Nasha Historia” magazine²⁰. The literary magazine “Verasen” stopped coming out due to the loss of state registration by its founder “Tavarystva belaruskaj movy” (Belarusian Language Society), as well as the magazine “Abazhur” after its founder, the Belarusian Association of Journalists, was deregistered²¹. Between January and March 2021 Grodno bar and art space “The Third Place”, Gomel Red Pub, and MAF art space were forced to close. The Moving Art Festival of contemporary art was cancelled. State authorities created obstacles for the work of stores selling national symbols and clothes, some of them were forced to stop their activities fully or partially²². The Poles were widely harassed, and a “Polish case” on the “rehabilitation of Nazism” was initiated²³. In 2021, the practice of “black lists” of performers expanded: disloyal musicians were denied touring certificates for concerts. Arbitrary detentions of cultural figures, orders for interrogations, attempts to break into apartments, arrests for using historical symbols, and other cases continue.

People continue to be held administratively and/or criminally liable for white-red-white symbols²⁴, and other charges. Thus, in 2021, 63 court sentences were issued against 62 cultural figures²⁵.

The right to choose one’s own cultural identity, to belong or not to belong to a community, and to be respected by others for one’s choice, including not being subjected to any form of discrimination, social exclusion or forced assimilation is established in law, but not in practice.

As of 2021, Belarus still does not have a general anti-discrimination law, there is no judicial practice in cases involving discrimination, and it is difficult to prove discrimination in court. Legislation on culture and national minorities exists, but contains formal norms that are not implemented in practice. There is no mechanism for the implementation of such norms.

In May 2021 the Law “On prevention of rehabilitation of Nazism” was adopted. It lists as measures against the rehabilitation of Nazism the liquidation of organizations whose activities are extremist, as well as liability for the demonstration of Nazi symbols. In practice, the provisions of the law are used to repress civil society and suppress the display of historical symbols²⁶.

In 2021, the practice of purposefully discrediting cultural figures in the state media became entrenched.

²⁰ Monitoring Cultural Rights Violations, PEN Center, January-March 2021, <https://penbelarus.org/2021/05/06/bel-ru-manitoryng-parushennyau-pravou-chalaveka-u-sfery-kultury-napachatak-2021.html>

²¹ <https://baj.by/be/analytics/elektronny-byuleten-smi-u-belarusi-no4-66-2021-abmezhavanne-svabody-drukavanyh-smi>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See PEN Center analysis, Persecution for Symbolism. Belarus, 2021 r., <https://penbelarus.org/2022/04/29/rus-presledovan%b8e-za-s%b8mvol%b8ku-belarus-2021-god.html>

²⁵ Monitoring Cultural Rights Violations, PEN Center, 2021, <https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/16/prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2021-rus.html>

²⁶ https://pravo.by/upload/docs/op/H12100103_1621026000.pdf



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In January-March 2021, the PEN Center recorded 237 defamatory/slanderous statements against 89 cultural figures.²⁷

After August 2020, the Polish national minority has become a target for the current regime: Polish schools on the territory of Belarus are widely closed, criminal cases against members of the Polish diaspora are fabricated, representatives of the Polish diaspora are forcibly deported from the country²⁸. Officials and state media use hate speech against the Polish minority. On April 10, 2021, the head of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs U. Makei announced an inspection of the organizations, which organize paid language courses in Polish, and "bringing order" in this matter. As a result, commercial Polish language courses were checked by the prosecutor's office and other controlling services. Even the students' notes were checked, and the students themselves were also summoned for questioning. The regime took all possible steps to intimidate and deter the population from learning the Polish language. All of the above, according to experts, is a repressive policy against the Polish minority, the purpose of which is to use the Polish national minority in the political plans of the authorities, by putting pressure on it in violation of the right to participate in cultural life.

Access to cultural life

In 2021 the situation with the measures taken by the state to ensure proper education and proper public awareness of the right to access to cultural life, especially in rural and disadvantaged urban areas, which include, in particular, educational activities and activities to raise awareness of the need to respect cultural heritage and cultural diversity, has significantly deteriorated. This is due to the widespread repression in 2021, the formalism and ineffectiveness of measures taken by the state. For example, the gap between the rural and urban population is felt not only in the economy, but also in the abundance of cultural life. Despite the fact that 2021 was declared the year of unity, most of the national events were held in the regional capitals and the city of Minsk. As for the cultural diversity and access to such events, as it was mentioned above, the action plan of republican events includes a single event: the Republican Festival of National Cultures (Hrodna), which indicates limited access to the right to participate in cultural life for everyone and, especially, for people living in the regions. Moreover, a single event cannot give an idea of the diversity of cultures and national minorities living in Belarus.

Education and awareness is provided by representatives of state organizations and institutions, which calls into question the objectivity and impartiality of the information disseminated. Thus, according to experts, in 2021 the state took measures to popularize, but not to educate people about cultural heritage and diversity. Such events are held formally, the masses are ensured by "summoning" people loyal to the current regime there.

Due to the fact that many NGOs were liquidated after July 2021, the possibility of education and

²⁷ Monitoring Cultural Rights Violations, PEN Center, January-March 2021, <https://penbelarus.org/2021/05/06/bel-ru-manitoryng-parushennyau-pravou-chalaveka-u-sfery-kultury-napachatak-2021.html>

²⁸ For more information, see <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/17965.html>



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promotion of cultural diversity, based on objective data, decreased many times. Moreover, criminal liability was introduced for participation in the activities of an unregistered or liquidated organization, which further reduced the possibility of access to information.

In 2021, the state, through executive committees, tightens control over farmstead tourism: agri-households will have to provide lists of visitors, their areas of activity, and the purpose of the visit.

Due to changes in the legislation on peaceful assemblies and the practice of its application (permissive model), the right to participate in cultural life has been restricted, making it more difficult to exercise.

Hate speech, propaganda and the manipulation of historical facts in 2021 are even more deeply rooted in the state media and in pro-government social networks.

According to experts, the situation with school education programs deteriorated significantly in 2021. Ideological attitudes have intensified. For example, in the 2021-2022 school year, Nobel Prize laureate Svetlana Alexievich and one of the signatories of the Belovezha Agreement Stanislav Shushkevich were removed from history textbooks for the 11-th grade.²⁹ In 2021 an elective course on patriotism and spirituality was introduced in grades 5-6.³⁰ A certain ideology is imposed on schoolchildren, the manipulation of history continued in 2021. Some Polish schools were closed. The possibility of teaching in the Belarusian language is limited, the Belarusian language has established itself as the language of "opposition". In 2021 there is no possibility to receive alternative education and instruction in non-state non-profit organizations due to their liquidation. There were no consultations at the level of the Ministry of Culture in 2021. While in 2020 there were attempts to introduce a course on national minorities, in 2021 this issue was not raised in the public space.

Despite the fact that school curricula contain various basic information about different countries, religions, and cultures, experts are alarmed by the quality and professionalism of teaching such topics.

Experts positively assessed how museums, theaters, and cinema adapted to attendance in 2021 in light of COVID-19, which had a positive impact on access to such institutions and events. However, as noted above, several cultural spaces were forcibly closed (not always on justified grounds), in fact for disloyalty. Some concerts and exhibitions were cancelled under the pretext of the "epidemiological situation".

According to experts, in 2021 the situation of minorities' access to their own culture, heritage and other forms of self-expression, as well as the free exercise of their cultural identity and practices, including the right to learn about their own culture as well as the culture of others, deteriorated significantly. The Polish national minority was in the focus of repression throughout 2021.³¹ Roma people were forced to practice self-censorship, a number of Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian organizations were closed in

²⁹ <https://www.dw.com/ru/s-urokami-patriotizma-i-bez-aleksievich-cto-novogo-v-shkolah-belarusi/a-59293066>

³⁰ <https://www.dw.com/ru/s-urokami-patriotizma-i-bez-aleksievich-cto-novogo-v-shkolah-belarusi/a-59293066>

³¹ For more information, see the information provided above.



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2021. At the same time, many minorities escaped state interference in 2021 due to their apolitical nature. In 2021 the Supreme Court ruled to liquidate the Belarusian Language Society (Tavarystva belaruskaj movy). The decision to liquidate the public association is connected to the fact that it is the founder of the independent newspapers in the Belarusian language - Novy Chas and Nasha Slova.³² Thus, the current regime is biased and discriminatory towards both its own culture and language and the cultures and languages of national minorities.

According to experts, in 2021, due to adaptation to the pandemic, all residents of urban and rural areas have the physical ability to enjoy culture in full, but the question of the effectiveness of the implementation of such a right and financial resources remained open. A positive factor in 2021 is the program "Inclusive Belarus. Turn to the Museum", which aims to create a barrier-free environment for visually impaired and blind visitors, as well as visitors with locomotor disabilities.

Contribution to cultural life

The right to enjoy the freedom to create individually, in association with others, or within a community or group, without censorship is legislated, but almost unavailable in practice in 2021. The situation of censorship and self-censorship, according to experts, worsened in 2021 due to widespread repression and a general sense of insecurity. In November 2021, the National Theater named after Yakub Kolas (Vitebsk) hosted the premiere of the play "Til" based on G. Gorin's play "Til Ulenspiegel", but after the premiere all subsequent shows were cancelled. According to the theater representatives, the employees of the Ministry of Culture and the administration of Vitsebsk region who came to the premiere did not like the performance, in particular, the shouts "Zhyve Flandria!"³³ In addition to the exclusion of the play from the repertoire, the theater director A. Starykh was fired.³⁴ In December 2021 "Irdorath" band leaders Nadezhda and Uladzimir Kalach were sentenced to two years in a general regime colony,³⁵ and musicians A. Shnip, P. Marchenko and Yu. Marchenko were sentenced to a year and a half of a colony under part 1 of article 342 of the Criminal Code for playing musical instruments during protests in summer and autumn of 2020.³⁶ In October 2021 another musician of the band, D. Shimansky, was sentenced to three years of restriction of liberty under the same article.³⁷ In June 2021, actress and Coordinating Council member O. Zaretskaya, who played in the online play "White Rabbit, Red Rabbit," was detained during the premiere. Previously, authorities had already banned the offline screening of the play. After the detention the police drew up a report of administrative violation and searched her house.³⁸ In February 2021 riot police detained several dozen people who came to the

³² <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/11/08/vlasti-belarusi-likvidirovali-obshchestvo-belorusskogo-iazyka-news>

³³ <http://oteatre.info/v-belarusi-zapretili-tilya/>

³⁴ <https://euroradio.fm/ru/direktora-kolasovskogo-teatra-v-vitebske-uvolnyayut-za-frazu-zhyve-flandryya>

³⁵ <https://amp.dw.com/ru/liderov-belorusskoj-gruppy-irdorath-prigovorili-k-dvum-godam-kolonii/a-60120602>

³⁶ <https://www.currenttime.tv/amp/belarus-prigovor-idotrath/31629435.html>

³⁷ <https://www.currenttime.tv/amp/belarus-shimansky/31535850.html>

³⁸ <https://reform.by/233761-zaderzhana-chlen-osnovnogo-sostava-ks-oksana-zareckaja>



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concert of the RSP group at "Ogonyok" base. Reports were drawn up on the detainees for violation of the order of organizing or holding mass events.³⁹ In January 2021 the Ministry of Emergency Situations canceled the show #GETADEMACRAISCHEN half an hour before it started.⁴⁰ In December 2021 the art-manager of the cultural center "Korpus" A. Bogdanov and scenographer of the center M. Kruk were sentenced to three years of restriction of liberty under part 1 article 342 of the Criminal Code for DJ-sets during the protests of 2020.⁴¹ In December 2021 the Artistic Director of the Republican Theater of Belarusian Drama A. Gartsuyeu, who had been the head of the theater for almost 10 years, was dismissed. According to journalist N. Belokhvostyk, the reason for the dismissal could have been the director's political views.⁴² Minister of Culture A. Markevich said that 300 workers of culture were fired for their political views ("destructive position"), and 1600 were "optimized".⁴³ In 2021, musicians who expressed their political stance in support of the protesters were denied touring certificates. Performers included Krama, Kasta, RSP, J:MORS, etc. Theater performances and exhibitions were also censored.⁴⁴

After the presidential elections of 2020 any creative impulse is perceived as a political statement. For law enforcement authorities, this is cause for detention. In 2021, freedom of expression is restricted as much as possible when it comes to political or near-political statements, even through art form.

The right of everyone to participate freely, actively and knowingly, on a non-discriminatory basis, in any important decision-making process that may affect their way of life and their rights is, according to experts, significantly limited in 2021. This is due to state interference in the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, with restrictions on freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly. Moreover, many NGOs were liquidated in 2021, which deprived many groups of the opportunity to be represented.

Protection of cultural diversity

The state has not taken effective measures to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions and has not created the necessary conditions for all cultures to be the object of expression and dissemination. In general, the state has a strained perception of other cultures. After the events of August 2020 and the subsequent socio-political crisis, the state perceives other cultures including minority cultures as hostile. In 2021 this situation has significantly worsened, according to experts. This deterioration is due to the ineffectiveness of government measures, the elimination of most NGOs that deal with cultural issues; the repression of Poles as a national minority, the mass persecution for

³⁹ <https://people.onliner.by/2021/02/14/na-koncert-vorvalsya-omon-soobshhaetsya-o-zadrezhanii-gruppy-rsp-i-bolee-polustoni-posetitelj-meropriyatiya>

⁴⁰ <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=275072&lang=ru>

⁴¹ <https://reform.by/286448-art-menedzher-i-scenograf-korpusa-poluchili-po-3-goda-himii>

⁴² <https://www.dw.com/ru/chto-ostalos-ot-belorusskoj-kultury-posle-repressij/a-60494059>

⁴³ The interview has now been removed, a link to the web archive:
<http://web.archive.org/web/20220120164049/https://www.sb.by/articles/markevich-o-kadrakh-nikogo-ne-prizhimali-no-gde-to-sveryali-pozitsii.html>

⁴⁴ <https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/16/prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2021-rus.html>



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white-red-white symbols, and, as was emphasized above, the destruction of publishing houses that publish books in the Belarusian language; the liquidation of newspapers

In 2021, censorship of art and other forms of expression, as well as censorship of cultural diversity, has increased significantly. Self-censorship as a way to avoid punishment is flourishing. In April 2021, the Ministry of Emergency Situations suspended the exhibition "The Machine Breathes, But I Don't," dedicated to the work of medical professionals, for allegedly violating fire regulations. A few days later the organizer of the exhibition, director of the film festival Watch Docs Belarus and head of the public association Zveno T. Gatsura-Yavorskaya was detained; criminal proceedings were instituted against her under part 1 of article 342 of the Criminal Code, and her husband was deported from the country with a 10-year entry ban.⁴⁵ In July 2021, the liquidation process of the Social Cinema Workshop, which had been supporting young filmmakers, was initiated.⁴⁶ In August 2021, the Ministry of Culture ceased cooperation with Art Corporation, a private cultural institution which had been organizing the Minsk International Film Festival "Listapad" for 10 years, and the organization of the festival was handed over to the state film studio Belarusfilm. A few weeks later Art Corporation was liquidated by the decision of Minsk City Executive Committee.⁴⁷ In December 2021 a criminal case was initiated against former Minister of Culture P. Latushka for exceeding his authority when he signed an order to finance the shooting of films.⁴⁸

The current regime banned the coat of arms "Pahonya", white-red-white flag, with mass trials for such symbols in 2021. The program "Castles of Belarus" has been suspended, but in 2021 money was allocated to reconstruct the castle in Zhilichi and restore the complex of the Sapieha Palace in Ruzhany. However, according to experts, this funding is available to the Ministry of Culture because of the quotas provided in the budget, which the Ministry must implement. Thus, while previously there were many such events all over Belarus, in 2021 the number of events was reduced, and the quotas and budget were not, so this funding went to the reconstruction of castles.

In 2021 there were recorded cases of dispersal of excursions and bringing guides to administrative responsibility for unauthorized marches. The same actions (guided tours to places of Belarusian history and culture, concerts in courtyards, laying flowers, etc.) by pro-governmental and non-governmental NGOs and individuals are perceived differently by the state. Repressions are used against the latter, such as detentions for using the Belarusian language. Pro-government cultural events imitate the freedoms and cultural processes allegedly existing in the state, which are widely covered by the state controlled media.

In 2021, the Belarusian Committee of ICOMOS was forcibly liquidated.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/ru/case/arrest-woman-human-rights-defender-tanya-hatsura-yavorska>

⁴⁶ <https://reform.by/286548-bez-kupaly-no-s-kurazhom-podvodim-itogi-goda-v-belarusskom-kino>

⁴⁷ <https://reform.by/286548-bez-kupaly-no-s-kurazhom-podvodim-itogi-goda-v-belarusskom-kino>

⁴⁸ https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=370601621488335&id=104007671481066

⁴⁹ <https://penbelarus.org/2022/02/16/prava-na-kulturu-belarus-2021-rus.html>



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According to experts, in 2021 the situation with the state provision of adequate financial or other assistance to artists, public and private organizations, including academies of science, cultural associations, trade unions and other persons and institutions engaged in scientific and creative activities has significantly deteriorated. Funding was significantly reduced. Many NGOs were forcibly liquidated. There is a practice of financial support to organizations and individuals loyal to the current regime. Throughout 2021, the practice of firing the staff of theaters, museums, and educational institutions that "disagree" with the current regime was recorded⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Ibid.



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