JANUARY – APRIL 2026

TRENDS.BELHELCOM.ORG

# HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS: THE MAIN TRENDS OF PUBLIC POLICY

GENERAL MEASURES | LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE | KEY REACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURES

The Belarusian authorities have designated the BHC and a number of other human rights organisations as so-called «extremist formations».

Storing or disseminating the organisation's materials carries risks for individuals in Belarus or planning to travel there. Please bear this in mind when handling this material.

The reviews «Human Rights in Belarus: Key Trends in Public Policy» are published with the support of the European Union.
Their content reflects the views and opinions of the authors only and does not necessarily represent the official position of the European Union

Co-funded by
the European Union

© Belarusian Helsinki Committee, 2026

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

SUMMARY 6

I. GENERAL MEASURES: LEGISLATION, STRATEGIES AND POLICIES THAT SHAPE THE CONDITIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COUNTRY 9

Changes to the regulation of the law-making process 9

Changes to the system of crime prevention 11

Institutionalisation of the «fight against extremism» 13

Strengthening of mobilisation controls as part of the militarisation policy 14

II. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE: CIVIL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS 16

Another mass release of political prisoners: the overwhelming majority remained in the country 16

Expansion of the toolkit of transnational repression, including in connection with forcible transfer abroad 17

Consolidation of the trend of collective responsibility of relatives of the «politically tainted» individuals 18

Intensification of designations as extremist organisations / formations 19

III. KEY CHANGES IN THE REACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CONCERNING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS 21

Launch of an international criminal court investigation into the lithuania/belarus situation 21

# INTRODUCTION

The human rights situation in Belarus remains the subject of monitoring and analysis by both Belarusian and international NGOs and international organisations. Since 2012, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus has been in place. Civil society's alternative reports to treaty bodies overseeing the implementation of the core UN human rights conventions, as well as in the reports of these bodies themselves, also provide reviews. In response to the unjustified use of force, torture against peaceful protesters contesting the 2020 rigged elections, and the subsequent repressions, a special Mandate on the human rights situation in Belarus was established under the auspices of the OHCHR in March 2021. In 2024, it was changed to a group of independent experts, which means more autonomy and independence for this mechanism.

Since 2019, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee has been calculating the Belarus Human Rights Index, within which more than 40 Belarusian experts assess changes in each specific human right. Belarusian NGOs regularly conduct targeted human rights situation monitoring based on their areas of expertise.[1]

The events of 2020, followed by the war in Ukraine and Belarus' complicity in Russia's aggression, have significantly altered the situation in the country, including its policies and practices in the realm of human rights. The situation is continually deteriorating, with daily updates on legislative changes, government initiatives,[2] specific violations, etc. Amidst this influx of information, **maintaining focus** and distinguishing between essential and minor aspects **becomes challenging.**

To ensure that significant events are not overlooked and to gain a better understanding of the situation in Belarus regarding the rule of law and human rights, we track **the most significant and qualitative changes in the main trends of state policy in the field of human rights.**

For this purpose, since July 2023, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee has been issuing a periodic review. Its aim is to present our expert assessments of **the most significant and qualitative changes in the trends of Belarusian state policy** in the field of human rights and the international community's reactions to it over the reporting period in three areas:

- *general measures:* systemic issues – legislation, strategies, and policies that generally shape the conditions and prerequisites for the fulfilment of human rights in the country;

[1] *See, in particular, Analytical reviews of the situation with human rights prepared by Human Rights Center «Viasna»: https://spring96.org/ru/publications;*
*Monitoring the situation of freedom of association and civil society organizations in the Republic of Belarus by Lawtrend: https://www.lawtrend.org/english;*
*Electronic bulletins of mass media in Belarus by the Belarusian Association of Journalists: https://baj.media/en/aglyady_category/baj-monitors/ and others.*

- *law enforcement practices:* trends in violations of civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights;
- *key decisions and reactions of international institutions* related to the human rights situation in Belarus.

Our analytics will contribute to a better understanding of human rights trends in Belarus, aid international partners in navigating the Belarusian agenda, facilitate monitoring of systemic and qualitative changes in the situation, expand the human rights focus of analytics in related areas (political, economic, social, etc.), and serve as a useful resource for developing strategies and positions.

The review has been published since 2023. In 2023, two issues were released (covering each half of the year). In 2024 and 2025, the review has been issued on a trimester basis (covering each four-month period). Previous issues and consolidated annual overviews are available here.

**You can subscribe to our review here.**

SUBSCRIBE TO THE NEXT
ISSUE OF TRENDS

TRENDS.BELHELCOM.ORG

# SUMMARY

- The regulation of the law-making process has been amended (changes were introduced to the Law «On Law-Making Activities») as a result of the wide-ranging revision of legislation carried out in 2024-2025. Despite a number of positive elements, including the elimination of duplicative and redundant provisions, the changes have reinforced the centralisation of the law-making process and increased the administrative burden. A new procedure has been introduced — the preparation of urgent draft legal acts — which appears to provide a more convenient formal basis for arbitrary and voluntarist decisions by the executive.

- The system of crime prevention has been reformed. The boundaries of control are being extended: the categories of persons subject to mandatory preventive registration have been expanded (now including individuals who have returned from compulsory rehabilitation centres and those who have failed to pay administrative fines); the preventive registration regime has been tightened (the obligations of registered persons have been broadened and administrative liability for non-compliance has been introduced); and mandatory employment of at least six months has been established as a condition for removal from the register for certain categories of persons, formalising preventive registration as one of the instruments used against so-called «social parasites». At the same time, a positive development is the lowering of the threshold for placing individuals on the preventive register in cases of domestic violence.

- Mobilisation controls are being strengthened as part of the militarisation policy. **An element of military oversight is being incorporated** into basic civilian administrative procedures. Men aged 18 to 27 are now required to include a certificate of military service status in the document package for obtaining or renewing a passport, identity card or driving licence.

- In April, administrative liability was introduced for «propaganda of homosexual relationships, gender transition, and childlessness». We analysed these amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences at the draft stage in our May–August 2025 issue and produced a separate detailed analysis. It bears recalling that this represents a significant, qualitative shift in the formalisation of discrimination: **liability is effectively being introduced for identity and expressions of private life**. The new offence of «propaganda» is defined by reference to the evaluative concept of «forming in citizens **the impression of**

**the attractiveness** of homosexual relations, gender transition, childlessness, or of the acceptability of paedophilia». The scope of the restrictions in practice will depend critically on how the provision is applied by law enforcement.

- The trend of **«collateral repression»** (acceptable collateral damage in the course of repression) is consolidating. In a drive to make life yet more difficult for the «politically unreliable» persons, the measures adopted at the level of policy and practice directly affect, restrict their rights, or expose to the risk of repression a wide range of people — including those with no political record whatsoever. The first harbinger of «collateral repression» was the so-called «passport decree», which affected all Belarusian citizens living abroad without exception. In the period from January to April 2026: (a) as a further means of pressure on the relatives of political prisoners, 22 chat groups in which people exchanged information to assist their family members during pre-trial detention or the serving of a sentence were designated as extremist formations. The majority of participants in these chats are relatives of ordinary prisoners, who are now also at risk of prosecution; (b) the European Humanities University (EHU) was designated an extremist organisation, automatically rendering vulnerable a vast number of people — beyond its current students and staff — who at any point studied, taught, or were in any way connected with the EHU.

- The trend of **collective responsibility of relatives** of «politically tainted» and «unreliable» individuals is consolidating: (a) the designation as extremist materials of chat groups used to exchange information in support of prisoners places relatives of political prisoners at risk of prosecution; (b) it has become known that there is a practice of dismissing — or pressuring into resignation — individuals whose relatives live in «unfriendly states».

- Throughout January-April 2026, the release of political prisoners continued: 250 individuals were released as part of negotiations with the United States administration, and — in contrast to previous releases — the overwhelming majority of them remained in the country (235). In addition, a further 17 individuals were released on the initiative of the authorities themselves.

- At the same time, the toolkit of transnational repression is expanding, including in connection with the forcible transfer of individuals abroad. Many of the forcibly transferred political prisoners (at least 16) have learned that their passports have been declared invalid by the authorities (see the statement by human rights defenders addressed to the Belarusian authorities and

international partners). It has also become known that individuals currently at the appeal stage prior to being sent to serve restriction of liberty without referral to a correctional institution are being compelled to sign a document stating that, in the event of a further violation of the Criminal Code, they may be expelled from the country.

- The practice of designating organisations and groups as extremist has intensified. First, the European Humanities University was designated an extremist organisation. This is the first instance in which extremist organisation status has entailed consequences of such scale for people who have no «political portfolio». It significantly expands the spheres of life now covered by the risk of prosecution — including academic publications, payment of tuition fees, and so forth. Second, during the reporting period there was a marked quantitative surge in the designation of civic organisations, initiatives and communities as extremist formations or organisations (37 in total), with the peak (23) falling in April. Within a single month, three human rights organisations were simultaneously designated as extremist formations: Belarusian PEN, Human Constanta, and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (see the statement by the human rights coalition on this matter). Furthermore, all candidate lists standing for election to the Coordination Council were likewise designated as extremist formations.
- On 12 March 2026, it became known that the International Criminal Court had opened an investigation into the Lithuania/Belarus situation, referred to the ICC by Lithuania in September 2024. The investigation covers only transnational crimes committed from 1 May 2020 onwards in Belarus, on condition that at least one element of the offence was carried out on Lithuanian territory. The crimes under investigation are crimes against humanity — including deportation, and persecution through deportation of any identifiable group or community on political grounds, allegedly committed by the Belarusian authorities.

# I. GENERAL MEASURES: LEGISLATION, STRATEGIES, POLICIES, THAT SHAPE THE CONDITIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COUNTRY

KEY POINTS:

- Mobilisation controls have been strengthened as part of the militarisation policy, with an element of military oversight being incorporated into basic civilian administrative procedures;
- The centralisation of the law-making process and the executive hierarchy within that process have been reinforced, and a procedure for the urgent preparation of legal acts has been introduced;
- The system of crime prevention has been tightened;

## CHANGES TO THE REGULATION OF THE LAW-MAKING PROCESS

In 2024-2025, a wide-ranging revision of legislation was carried out in Belarus. Its principal aim was to «clean up» the body of regulatory material: eliminating duplicative and redundant provisions and bringing legislation up to date. As a result, the total number of legal acts was reduced by 45%. A significant outcome of the reform was the adoption in April 2026 of the Law «On Amendments to Laws on Law-Making Activities» (which amends the current 2018 law) and two presidential decrees: No. 130 of 16 April 2026 «On Law-Making Activities» and No. 131 of 16 April 2026 «On Criminological Expert Assessment».

The key changes to the principal law are as follows:

- state bodies are required to conduct systematic inventories of the legal acts they have adopted, in order to identify outdated, duplicative and non-functioning provisions – at intervals of every five, three or one year, depending on the level of the act and the adopting body;

- parliamentary oversight of the implementation of laws is strengthened: the functions of the House of Representatives are extended to include oversight of «the preparation and adoption of legal acts in accordance with the concluding provisions of laws». The relevant state body responsible for bringing legislation into conformity with an adopted law is now required to submit to the House of Representatives both a plan of the measures it intends to take and a subsequent report on the measures taken;

- the re-delegation of law-making powers downwards through the hierarchy is prohibited where those powers have been conferred by law (the Council of Ministers may not delegate to a subordinate body where the Council of Ministers itself has been designated as the responsible authority by law), as is delegation between bodies at the same level;

- personal accountability of officials is introduced: heads of state bodies responsible for the preparation of draft legal acts and for conducting expert assessments and approvals of legal acts now bear personal responsibility for the quality and timeliness of such preparation and for decisions taken in the course of expert assessment and approval;

- the package principle for the preparation of legal acts is expanded: acts included in a package are to be developed prior to the submission of the principal legislative act to the law-making body and, where revision of that act proves necessary, are to be revised alongside it;

- a new procedure is introduced — the preparation of urgent draft legal acts — together with a corresponding new Article 42-1, «Organisation of the Preparation of Urgent Draft Legal Acts». Such preparation may be carried out «on matters requiring prompt regulation» by decision of the president, the head of the Presidential Administration, the prime minister, or their first deputies. Urgent preparation, including all approvals and expert assessments, must take no more than ten working days unless a shorter period is set by the persons mentioned above. The article further specifies that mandatory expert assessments of a draft legal act must be completed no later than the working day following receipt of the draft, and that this deadline may not be extended.

According to officials, the amendments to the law «lay a systemic foundation for addressing the problem of excessive regulation, while guaranteeing the timely updating of provisions and a qualitatively new standard for the law-making process».

An analysis of the rationale and key changes suggests that a number of them do represent a genuine attempt to address existing shortcomings in the law-making process. At the same time, the changes plainly **reinforce the centralisation of that process and the executive hierarchy within it, and increase the administrative burden — including by requiring parliament to perform functions that are not properly its own**. The introduction of the procedure for the urgent preparation of draft legal acts, meanwhile, appears to provide a more convenient formal basis for arbitrary and voluntarist decisions by the executive.

The changes further illustrate the crisis of the state governance system: even where real problems are genuinely acknowledged and there is a sincere desire to address them, the primary remedy remains the reinforcement of centralisation and the managerial hierarchy. This crisis is further compounded by the repressive modus operandi of the state since 2020 and the use of legislation to institutionalise political repression. Since the system is compelled to balance some degree of development — which the times demand — against the preservation of the overall repressive climate, we observe a duality and contradictory character in its actions.

## CHANGES TO THE SYSTEM OF CRIME PREVENTION

In January 2026, a draft Law «On Amendments to Laws on Crime Prevention» was passed at first reading. It amends the current Law «On the Fundamentals of Crime Prevention Activities» of 2014 and the Code of Administrative Offences. The planned changes alter the existing system and model of crime prevention:

- The categories of persons subject to mandatory preventive registration have been expanded. Added to the list are individuals who have returned from compulsory rehabilitation centres and individuals against whom a fine has been imposed and enforcement proceedings have been initiated due to non-payment. The provision concerning persons who have committed domestic violence has also been amended. The threshold for placing such persons on the preventive register has been lowered: registration is now triggered where there have been two or more incidents within a single year and the person has, in connection with those incidents, been subjected to administrative liability for the intentional infliction of bodily harm or other violent acts, or for breach of a protective order. Also included are persons in respect of whom a court has decided to discontinue administrative proceedings on the grounds of reconciliation with the victim.

- The preventive registration regime has been tightened. The range of obligations imposed on a registered person has been expanded. These now include: the obligation to appear within a set period at the employment service or at negotiations with a prospective employer (where registration is aimed at securing employment); the obligation to appear within a set period at a healthcare institution for a medical examination in accordance with occupational health standards, where a referral has been issued by an employer; and the obligation to appear within a set period for compulsory treatment where such treatment has been ordered pursuant to Article 107 of the Criminal Code, and to comply with the measures prescribed in the context of dispensary supervision during such treatment.

  Administrative liability for failure to comply with these obligations has been established. Amendments have been introduced to Article 25.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences, the title of which has been changed from «Non-compliance with the Requirements of Preventive Supervision or Preventive Monitoring» to «Non-compliance with the Requirements of Preventive Supervision, the Obligations of Preventive Monitoring, or Preventive Registration».

- The grounds for termination of preventive registration have been amended. First, the possibility of early termination of preventive registration for persons who have committed administrative offences, including domestic violence, has been introduced. The question of removal from the register may now be considered after six months (rather than one year) by the head of the internal affairs body or their deputy, subject to a combination of conditions being met: the person must have been employed or studying in a manner qualifying as employment under employment legislation for at least six months, must have completed a correction programme, and must not have committed domestic violence during the period of preventive registration; and an adult victim of domestic violence must have given written consent to the termination of preventive registration. Second, for persons who have committed administrative offences and for persons who have been in compulsory rehabilitation centres, employment of at least six months in accordance with employment legislation is introduced as a mandatory condition for removal from the preventive register.

All new obligations will also apply to those already on the preventive register at the time the law enters into force. However, different transitional arrangements are established for the three new categories of persons subject to preventive registration. Persons who are in compulsory rehabilitation centres, or in respect of whom an unexecuted court decision exists, at the time the new law enters into force are subject to preventive registration under the new provisions. By contrast, persons who committed administrative offences in the context of domestic violence or breached a protective order prior to the law's entry into force, as well as persons who failed to pay an imposed fine in the course of enforcement proceedings prior to that date, are not subject to preventive registration under the new requirements.

Overall, the crime prevention system is thus extending the boundaries of control, further marginalising certain groups – such as those who have undergone treatment in compulsory rehabilitation centres – and is being formalised as one of the instruments used against so-called «social parasites». This further transforms it into an instrument of pressure and punishment rather than of crime prevention.

At the same time, it is important to note, as a positive development, the lowering of the threshold for placing persons on the preventive register in cases of domestic violence: a prior official warning is no longer required, reconciliation with the victim is no longer a bar to registration, and the grounds for administrative liability are no longer limited to three specific articles. Nevertheless, the condition of repeated offending remains (a single incident is insufficient), and the provision therefore still cannot be regarded as a fully effective instrument of protection against domestic violence.

## INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE «FIGHT AGAINST EXTREMISM»

By a decision of the Minsk city authorities of 19 March 2026, a Minsk City Commission for the Assessment of Symbols, Attributes and Information Products was established. Its remit encompasses the analysis and assessment of symbols, attributes and information products identified on the territory of the city of Minsk for the presence (or absence) of indicators of extremism. Previously, such commissions existed only at the republican level (which also covered the city of Minsk) and at the regional level. It is notable that the decision to expand the list of such commissions and to establish a separate one at the level of the city of Minsk was taken as early as 2023 and enshrined in the updated Regulation on the Procedure for Assessing Symbols, Attributes and Information Products.

Since 2020, the arbitrary application of counter-extremism legislation has formed part of the system of political repression. The conclusions of the Republican Commission for the Assessment of Symbols, Attributes and Information Products for the presence (or absence) of indicators of «extremism» constitute the primary — and in practice virtually the sole — evidence on which courts rely when deciding whether to include particular material or products in the «extremist lists».

According to the authorities, by the end of February 2026 the list of extremist materials contained more than 9,000 entries. By way of comparison, prior to 2020 the Republican List of Extremist Materials comprised several hundred items. Given the volume of work involved, a more extensive institutional structure capable of relieving some of the burden on the Republican Commission is, naturally, required

## STRENGTHENING OF MOBILISATION CONTROLS AS PART OF THE MILITARISATION POLICY

On 9 January 2026, Decree No. 5 was signed, introducing amendments to the regulation of administrative procedures. The amendments reduce the list of required documents and the timeframes for a number of procedures. Among other things, **a new procedure is introduced for the issuance of a certificate of military service status** (para. 20.5-1). The certificate is issued by the military commissariat or the state security authority and is valid for six months. To obtain it, the holder must present a military identity document (conscript's identity card) or other military registration document, or, in the absence of such documents, a passport or other identity document.

Accordingly, this certificate now appears in the expanded list of documents required for certain administrative procedures for male Belarusian citizens aged 18 to 27 — that is, those of conscription age — with the exception of those who have formalised departure for permanent residence abroad and/or are permanently registered with a consular authority. The procedures in question are:

- obtaining or renewing a passport (both regular and biometric);
- obtaining or renewing an identity card, including the new ID card;
- obtaining or renewing a driving licence, including restoration of the right to drive upon expiry of a period of disqualification and return of the driving licence;

- obtaining a permit to acquire, store and carry civilian weapons, and renewing such permits.

In addition to reinforcing general administrative oversight of the individual, this change effectively militarises civilian administrative procedures, introducing an element of military control into the most basic of them — obtaining or replacing the primary identity document, the passport, and obtaining a driving licence. Any man of conscription age is thus now required to «appear in the system» periodically. This plainly signals the construction of a surveillance and registration infrastructure as a key element of the mobilisation system.

# II. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICE: CIVIL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

KEY POINTS:

- A further 250 political prisoners have been released, 235 of whom remained in the country;
- The trend of «collateral repression» is consolidating: the widest possible range of individuals is being affected;
- The trend of collective responsibility of relatives of the «politically tainted» is consolidating;
- The designation of organisations and formations as extremist has intensified.

## ANOTHER MASS RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS: THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY REMAINED IN THE COUNTRY

In March 2026, another sizeable release of political prisoners took place as part of the ongoing negotiation process between the Belarusian authorities and the United States administration. A total of 250 individuals were released. In contrast to previous waves of such releases, the overwhelming majority of them (235) were not forcibly expelled and remained in the country. Fifteen individuals were forcibly transferred abroad, among them prominent human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers. It is important to note that as a result of this release, all human rights defenders who had remained in detention — both members of Viasna and those from other organisations — were freed.

In addition to those released as part of the negotiations with the United States, a further 17 individuals were released during the first trimester of 2026 on the

initiative of the authorities themselves. On 19 February, Mikalai Statkevich was freed – he had been among the 52 individuals whom the authorities attempted to transfer out of the country on 11 September 2025 as part of the second release under the American track. At that time, he refused to leave Belarus and was returned to the penal colony. Following his return, Statkevich suffered a stroke and was subsequently released; he remains in Belarus. Natallia Levaya, who had become pregnant while in detention, was also released. On 5 March, a further 15 individuals were freed..

## EXPANSION OF THE TOOLKIT OF TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION, INCLUDING IN CONNECTION WITH FORCIBLE TRANSFER ABROAD

**First**, in late March 2026 it became known that the authorities had declared the passports of certain former political prisoners invalid, including those who had recently been forcibly transferred out of the country. As of the end of March 2026, at least 16 such cases were known. On 10 April 2026, a coalition of Belarusian human rights organisations issued a statement in this connection addressed to the Belarusian authorities and international partners.

Although the absence of a valid passport does not, *de jure*, entail the loss of citizenship, it creates a situation of *de facto* statelessness, affects the individual's dignity and impedes the exercise of many fundamental rights. In this connection, it is also necessary to recall the «passport decree» (Decree No. 278 «On the Procedure for the Issuance of Documents and the Performance of Actions» of 4 September 2023). As a result of the continuing operation of this decree, thousands of Belarusian citizens – including their newborn children – remain without a basic identity document and, consequently, without the possibility of full participation in social life or the exercise of a number of rights. The state is thus deliberately and consciously continuing its policy of withholding protection from its own citizens as part of its transnational repression.

**Second**, in April Viasna reported that it had learned of cases in which individuals currently at the appeal stage prior to being sent to serve restriction of liberty without referral to a correctional institution are being compelled to sign a document stating that, in the event of a further violation of the Criminal Code, they may be expelled from the country. Such cases are not isolated.

## CONSOLIDATION OF THE TREND OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF RELATIVES OF THE «POLITICALLY TAINTED» INDIVIDUALS

**First**, the authorities have begun designating as extremist formations chat groups in which, among others, relatives of political prisoners participate in order to exchange useful information. On 19 March, the largest chat group for relatives of individuals held in pre-trial – Detention Centre Kaliadzichy – was designated an extremist formation. It had approximately 1,800 members, who were relatives not only of political prisoners but of ordinary prisoners as well. Such chat groups are an invaluable resource for relatives of prisoners from other cities, including relatives of political prisoners, many of whom live abroad and are unable to make prompt enquiries at the detention centre itself. The groups were used to discuss the procedure for sending parcels, queuing arrangements, and so forth. A further 10 Telegram chats, nine Viber chats and three VKontakte groups – uniting relatives of individuals held in remand prisons and penal colonies – received the same designation.

The conditions of detention of political prisoners already violate every conceivable standard, including the denial of meaningful access to information for relatives. The designation of such a chat group as an extremist formation, first, creates a further obstacle to obtaining information needed to assist a loved one, thereby also impeding the provision of such assistance. Second, it exposes the relatives themselves to the risk of prosecution.

A practice of additional pressure has also been observed: an unknown individual is added to the chat and introduces a bot, to which administrator functions are transferred. The bot then publishes the sender's ID after each message, making it clear to participants that they are not anonymous.

It is important to note that relatives of ordinary prisoners – who make up a significantly larger proportion of these chat groups than relatives of political prisoners – are equally exposed to the risk of prosecution, and face the same obstacles to assisting their loved ones. This practice illustrates an approach that may be characterised as «collateral repression», in which «*collateral damage*» – to borrow a military term – is treated as acceptable: in their drive to make life yet more difficult for the «politically tainted», the authorities subject everyone in the vicinity – including those with no political record whatsoever – to direct pressure, deprivation of rights, or the risk of repression.

**Second**, in February 2026 it became known that individuals whose relatives live in «unfriendly countries» are being dismissed from their jobs. According to information obtained by journalists, one individual was dismissed from a defence industry enterprise. There is also information about similar cases at other enterprises unconnected with the defence industry, where the practice takes the form of non-renewal of contracts or pressure to resign voluntarily, affecting individuals in managerial positions.

This practice is a natural continuation of the policy of singling out, as a separate group subject to deprivation of rights, individuals who have a legal link with a foreign state – a trend whose emergence we first identified in our analysis covering the period from July to December 2023.

## INTENSIFICATION OF DESIGNATIONS AS EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS / FORMATIONS

During the first trimester of 2026, the practice of designating organisations and formations as extremist intensified.

**First**, on 14 April it became known that the Supreme Court had designated the European Humanities University an «extremist organisation». The authorities accused the university of providing «methodological, financial and other» assistance to «representatives of radically politicised groupings and destructive foreign non-governmental organisations».

This is the first instance of an entire university being designated an extremist formation – and accordingly the first instance of consequences on such a scale. Extremist formation status means that the mere fact of holding an EHU diploma (including all graduates of any programme) may become grounds for prosecution. Equally, any public association with the EHU – including guest public lectures or employer-student meetings at careers fairs – may become grounds for prosecution. This naturally creates direct risks for current students and academic staff, as well as for parents paying for their children's education, many of whom are not living in exile and travelled to Belarus regularly or live there. Payment of tuition fees may now be characterised as financing extremist activity. Those who are not living in exile now face a choice between returning to Belarus and living under the constant risk of prosecution, or being compelled to emigrate. This in turn gives rise to a range of legalisation difficulties for students who are beginning to withdraw from the university out of fear of prosecution – all of whom had been legalised through the student track.

The designation of the EHU as an extremist organisation is also part of the consolidating trend of «collateral repression», whereby centralised and systemic measures expose the widest possible range of people to the risk of prosecution.

**Second**, during the reporting period there was a marked quantitative surge in the designation of civic organisations, initiatives and communities as extremist formations or organisations — 37 in total — with the peak falling in April (23). Within a single month, three human rights organisations were simultaneously designated as extremist formations: Belarusian PEN, Human Constanta and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (see the statement by the human rights coalition on this matter).

Three Belarusian independent publishing houses operating in exile — Kamunikat.org, Lohvinau Publishing House and Andrei Yanushkevich Publishing — were simultaneously designated a «coalition extremist formation».

All candidate lists standing for election to the Coordination Council were likewise designated as extremist formations

.

# III. KEY CHANGES IN THE REACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CONCERNING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

## LAUNCH OF AN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT INVESTIGATION INTO THE LITHUANIA/BELARUS SITUATION

On 12 March 2026, it became known that the International Criminal Court had opened an investigation into the Lithuania/Belarus situation, referred to the ICC by Lithuania in September 2024. The Office of the Prosecutor determined that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the coercive actions of the Belarusian authorities that led to deportation constituted conduct directed against actual or perceived opponents of the Belarusian government and carried out in accordance with or in furtherance of state policy. The Office of the Prosecutor concluded that the alleged crimes committed by the authorities were encouraged or condoned at the highest level.

The investigation covers only transnational crimes — any past and ongoing crimes committed from 1 May 2020 onwards in Belarus, on condition that at least one element of the offence was carried out on Lithuanian territory. The crimes under investigation are crimes against humanity — including deportation, and persecution through deportation of any identifiable group or community on political grounds — allegedly committed by the Belarusian authorities.

**WE WILL BE GRATEFUL**

**FOR YOUR FEEDBACK**

EMAIL US OFFICE@BELHELCOM.ORG