

Belarusian Association of Journalists

**MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS
2024**

2025

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CONDITIONS FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA SECTOR ACTIVITY IN 2024

The situation of independent media sector representatives in Belarus in 2024 was determined by the continuation of repressive governmental policies, which intensified on the eve of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's election, scheduled for January 26, 2025.

In particular, the authorities continued persecution of journalists and bloggers, censorship in the media space, and propaganda activities of state-owned media, established by the Union State of Belarus and Russia. Among other, the Belarusian authorities continued the following repressive activities:

- large-scale criminal prosecution of media workers in Belarus and the announcement of sentences 'in absentia' in relation to the journalists, who were forced to flee the country,
- putting pressure on independent journalists and bloggers with the use of harassment, searches, and detention (among other, targeting the exiled journalists' relatives and arresting their private property in Belarus),
- 'struggle with extremism' to restrict freedom of expression and limit access to independent sources of information. As of September 1, 2024, there were about 14,000 blocked Internet resources in Belarus,
- further labeling of independent information sources as 'extremist groups,' and prosecution for any form of interaction with them,
- censorship that went beyond the traditional 'fight against extremism,' e.g. the Ministry of Information demanded to exclude from sale the printed publications that 'may harm national interests,'
- the propaganda endeavors of Belarusian state media expanded to the newly created online resources and a news TV channel,
- mandatory broadcasting of state TV channels by all TV program distributors, endorsed by the Ministry of Information under threat of blocking their operation for refusing to comply,
- establishment of a media company of the Union State of Russia and Belarus and the announcement of a strategy development on forming a common media space of the Union State.

Belarus ranked 167th in the [Press Freedom Index](#) published by Reporters Without Borders, falling ten positions compared to the previous year.

The position of [Belarus](#) also deteriorated in the global Internet freedom ranking compiled by the *Freedom House* human rights organization, where it got only 22 points out of 100 as a country with the unfree Internet, compared to 25 points a year before.

According to [Reporters without Borders](#), keeping 40 media workers behind bars, Belarus appeared on the 4th position among the countries with nearly a half of all detained journalists in the world. Belarus has been overpassed by only three countries in this shameful list: China (124 imprisoned media workers), Myanmar (61 imprisoned journalists), and Israel (41 journalists in jail).

45 journalists were in prison at the end of 2024, compared to 32 media workers behind bars in 2023.

The list of imprisoned Belarusian media workers included top managers of TUT.by news portal **Maryna Zolatava** and **Lyudmila Chekina**, sentenced to 12 years in prison each as well as a political scientist and the editor of 'Belarusian Yearbook' periodical publication **Valeryia Kastsiuhova**, sentenced to 10 years in prison.

At the same time, the convicted journalists Kseniya Lutskina, Andrei Tolchyn, Dzmitry Luksha and his wife Palina Palavinka were pardoned and released from custody on humanitarian grounds during the year of 2024.

The exiled independent media outlets faced an economic crisis subject to the suspension of funding for foreign media organizations by the US Presidential Administration, including the funding through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). *Reporters Without Borders* called on European governments to increase support to the negatively affected Belarusian media outlets in exile. According to the RSF [report](#) the Belarusian independent media outlets were able to adapt quickly under the new circumstances due to financial support from international donors. Thus, they shifted their focus on journalist investigations and coverage of national events, paying less attention to regional news, developed their representation on social media such as Telegram with the total number of 1.3 million subscribers in [2023](#), YouTube with the total number of 21 million views a year, as well as Instagram and TikTok.

Some imprisoned Belarusian journalists and media workers in exile were **honored with a number of awards** in 2024.

Thus, the Polish editorial of the renowned 'Newsweek' periodical edition (US) [awarded](#) the imprisoned journalist Andrej Pachobut (Andrzej Poczobut) with the Teresa Taranska Prize in the 'Figure of the Decade' category.

The Warsaw city councilors awarded him the title of honorary citizen of the Polish capital. *'In such a situation, when we cannot force the regime to release him, we can make sure that there is no silence around his case, that there is publicity, so that the Lukashenka regime cannot be calm and think that everyone has forgotten about such cases. We will stand up for Poczobut, for all prisoners of conscience in Belarus, and we will try to support their relatives and the people who are fighting for their release,'* Polish politician Robert Tyszkiewicz [said on this occasion](#).

The imprisoned editor-in-chief of TUT.BY news portal **Maryna Zolatava** was [awarded](#) the Johann-Philipp-Palm prize as a 'person of extraordinary courage and sincerity' in 2024. She was nominated by *Reporters Without Borders*.

'In the face of enormous obstacles and repressive measures by the state apparatus, Maryna Zolatava has proven herself to be a person of extraordinary courage and sincerity,' stated 'Reporters Without Borders' and the advisory board of the Palm Foundation.

Ivonka Survila, the Chairperson of the Council of the Belarusian People's Republic [signed](#) decrees on awards for meritorious service to the Belarusian people on the occasion of the 106th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of the Belarusian People's Republic. The Order of the Pursuit medal was awarded to Radio Svaboda journalist **Alena Radkevich**, who participated in the national movement of the early 1980s and contributed to the non-censored press development.

On June 27, 2024, the [Krzysztof Michalski Prize for Belarusian journalists in exile](#) was awarded for the first time in Warsaw. It was established at the end of 2023 by the Institute for Human Sciences (Vienna) and the Austrian Embassy in Poland. The awards were presented to **Fiodar Pauliuchenka**, Editor-in-chief of Reform.news in the nomination of 'Investigative Journalism', **Alena Kavalchuk** in the nomination of 'Future Talents', and **Aliaksei Martsinkevich** in the nomination of 'Analytical journalism'.

CHANGES IN LEGISLATION

Amendments to the Belarus law '[On Advertising](#)' were introduced on *January 4 and 6, 2024*. They included a wide range of issues: the procedure for placing advertisements, the duration of advertising in the media, requirements for advertising certain types of goods and services, etc. Among other things, new requirements were introduced for advertising on the Internet. Previously, it was not specified for online advertisements that they can be published only by the organizations and citizens, included in the 'State Register of Advertisers' formed by the Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade. However, the new version of the law no longer includes the exception for online advertising that affects bloggers in a negative way.

The Operations and Analysis Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus issued [Order No. 69 on April 4, 2024](#). It provides for the cancellation of domain names of Internet resources included in the National List of Extremist Materials. This function is performed by the administrator of the national domain zone. The canceled domains are added to the list and become unavailable for registration.

The [Council of Ministers](#) adopted Ordinance No. 665 on *September 11, 2024*. It outlined a new list of TV programs included in the mandatory publicly available TV program package. The recently created 'Prime News' state-owned TV channel was mentioned in it.

On December 3, 2024, a new edition of [Presidential Decree No. 630](#) 'On the Response of Officials to Critical Statements in State Mass Media' from 1997 was adopted. The new goal of the decree is stated to be *'the objective reflection of socially significant information in mass media and on Internet resources, the identification and prompt resolution of problems covered in them.'* Previously, it concerned 'strengthening executive discipline, increasing the role of state mass media in the socio-political and socio-economic public life.' This change indicates the high attention paid by the state to control the content of publications in mass media.

Governmental agencies and state organizations are still obliged to consider critical publications about them in the state-owned media, to take measures and to update the media on the outcome of their actions. (At the same time, the term for reporting after such publications in the state media was reduced from one month to 15 days). In addition, governmental agencies are now required to conduct independent monitoring of significant public information, which appears in any media and on Internet resources. (Such information is

defined in the decree as 'information on burning socio-economic and socio-political issues' as well as 'critical materials and other relevant information of public interest'). The editorial offices of state-owned media have been obliged to create Internet resources for interaction with citizens and legal entities 'for the purpose of collecting promptly the publicly significant information' and comprehensively discussing the publications with citizens and organizations.

According to the Belarus law '[On the National Budget 2025](#)' adopted on December 13, 2024, budget expenditures for state-owned mass media were slightly increased (by 5.7%). However, the increase applied only to the TV and radio broadcasting companies. Fewer funds were allocated to print media, publishing, and other activities in the mass media field in comparison with the budget allocations in 2024.

VIOLATIONS OF JOURNALISTS' AND MEDIA RIGHTS

Criminal prosecution

Criminal prosecution of journalists continued in relation to both the media workers inside the country and in exile. The so-called special proceedings with trials *in absentia* were held on the regular basis. All in all, 15 verdicts were handed down in criminal cases against journalists, 5 of them in absentia in 2024.

Aliaksandr Ziankou, a photographer from Barysau (Minsk region) was sentenced to three years in prison under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code ('participation in an extremist group') on *January 30, 2024*. Allegedly, his photos were shown on one of the Web-resources recognized as an extremist organization.

On *March 18, 2024*, **Pavel Marinich**, the head of 'Malanka Media' that continues to operate in exile as well as four other individuals involved in the case, were sentenced in absentia to 4 years of imprisonment, allegedly, for 'illegal actions to disrupt the National referendum in 2022' (Article 191 of the Criminal Code).

Andrei Tolchyn, a former freelance journalist from Homiel was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months in prison on two criminal charges, for the alleged 'slandering of the president' (Article 367 of the Criminal Code) and 'facilitating extremist activities' (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code) on *March 21, 2024*. (The media worker cooperated with Belsat TV channel in the past.)

A freelance journalist **Ihar Karney** was convicted after a court trial in Minsk for the alleged 'participation in an extremist organization' (which appeared to be the Belarusian Association of Journalists) and sentenced to three years in prison and a fine in the amount of 20,000 Belarusian rubles (Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code) on *March 22, 2024*.

On *April 2, 2024*, **Ales Marchanka**, a former employee of Belsat TV channel was sentenced to three years in prison by the Minsk City Court for the alleged 'participation in an extremist group' (Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code).

Anton Kazelski, a cameraman of Belarusian ANT TV channel was put on trial on *May 28, 2024*. The media worker was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment, reportedly, for his comments in 2020, when he was allegedly calling for protests. The sentence was handed down under two articles of the Criminal Code: Article 361 (calls for sanctions and other actions aimed at harming national security') and Article 130 (incitement of hostility or discord').

The Brest Regional Court sentenced a local journalist **Alena Tsimashchuk** to five years of imprisonment and a 46,000 Br (approx. USD 14,000) fine on *June 3, 2024*. She used [to work](#) for the regional 'Brest' TV company and collaborated earlier as a freelancer with a number of regional media.

The court found the journalist guilty under three articles of the Criminal Code: 'discrediting the Republic of Belarus' (Article 369–1 of the Criminal Code), 'inciting hostility or discord' (Part 3 of Article 130 of the Criminal Code), 'participating in an extremist group' (Part 3 of Article 361–1 of the Criminal Code).

The Minsk Regional Court pronounced verdicts in absentia to 20 people in the so-called 'Tsikhanouskaya's Analysts' case on *July 2, 2024*. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus recognized them as participants of 'Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Analysts' extremist group. The journalists of Belarusian independent media **Yury Drakakhrust** and **Hanna Liubakova** were criminally charged in absentia. Each of the media workers was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Two journalists from Mahilou **Ales Sabaleuski** and **Yauhien Hlushkou** were sentenced to 4 and 3 years in prison respectively and huge fines in the amount of 8,000 Belarusian rubles each by the Mahilou Regional Court on *July 31, 2024*. The court found the journalists guilty under two articles of the Criminal Code: 'creation of an extremist group or participation in it' (Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code) and 'participation in an armed formation or armed conflict on the territory of a foreign state, military actions, recruitment, or preparation for such participation' (Article 361-3 of the Criminal Code).

On *August 2, 2024*, a court verdict in absentia was announced to **Ales Kirkevich**, who was found guilty of 'facilitating extremist activities' (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment and a fine in the amount of 24,000 Belarusian rubles.

The case of journalist **Uladzimir Khilmanovich** was considered by the Hrodna Regional Court in accordance with the so-called special proceedings 'in absentia'. The media worker was accused of 'facilitating extremist activities' and 'taking part in an extremist group' (Articles 361-4 and 361-1 of the Criminal Code). On *August 19, 2024*, the journalist was sentenced in absentia to 5 years of imprisonment in a high security colony and fined 40,000 Belarusian rubles.

A former journalist of 'Media-Palessie' **Yauhen Nikalayeovich** was sentenced to 1.5 years in prison for the alleged 'arrangement of actions that grossly violate the public order or active participation in them' (Article 342 of the Criminal Code) by the Pinsk City and District Court on *September 26, 2024*. The journalist covered protest actions in Pinsk as a video correspondent in 2020. He was detained and beaten hard in custody later. Consequently, Yauhen Nikalayeovich fled Belarus after serving his administrative arrest. However, he returned to Belarus and was detained in early 2024.

A journalist **Volha Radzivonava** was sentenced to 4 years in prison for publications in the 'Die Tageszeitung' newspaper (Germany) that allegedly contained defamatory statements. The judge of Minsk City Court found the journalist guilty under four articles of the Criminal Code: 'libeling the president of Belarus' (Article 367), 'discrediting the Republic of Belarus' (Article 369-1), 'incitement of racial, ethnic, religious or other social hostility or discord' (Article 130), and 'insulting the president of Belarus' (Article 368).

A freelance journalist from Brest **Daniil Palianski** and the owner of s13.ru News Website from Hrodna **Siarhei Chabotska** were taken to custody in the second half year of 2024. D. Palianski was accused of 'high treason' (Article 356 of the Criminal Code).

S. Chabotska was detained on *October 23, 2024*. He was initially sentenced to three terms of 15-days' administrative arrest for the alleged 'distribution of extremist materials.' However, a criminal case was filed in relation to him under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code sometime later. The website s13.ru operated until recently, when it was labeled by the Belarusian KGB as an 'extremist group' on November 5, 2024. It is highly probable that the criminal charges might be related to the Web-site ownership.

A journalist **Ihar Ilyash** was detained and taken to custody on *October 22, 2024*. He is the husband of journalist Katsiaryna Andreyeva (Bakhvalava). Reportedly, he was arrested for being interviewed about his wife's situation in prison by the media, which were labeled as 'extremist' by Belarusian authorities as well as for cooperation with the Ukrainian colleagues.

According to updates at the beginning of February 2025, Ihar Ilyash was accused of 'discrediting the Republic of Belarus' (article 369-1 of the Criminal Code) and 'facilitating extremist activities' (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code). The Minsk City Court started considering the criminal case on February 21, 2025. On March 13, an adjournment was announced in the proceedings for examination of publications on March 13, 2025.

Reportedly, numerous criminal cases were filed against the Belarusian journalists in exile in 2024. The list of affected media workers included the Deputy Chairperson of BAJ Barys Haretski, independent journalists Zmitser Kazakevich, Iryna Charniuka, Zmitser Lupach, Ihar Kazmiarchak, Zmitser Pankavets as well as the founder and head of Belarusian Investigative Center (BIC) Stanislau Ivashkevich, the author of his video programs Siarhei Chaly, three former BIC employees Aliaksandr Yarashevich, Aliaksei Karpeka, and Volha Alkhimenka, who currently work as the journalists of 'Bureau Media', and others.

According to the BAJ sources, **the private property of 4 media workers was seized** as part of criminal prosecution in 2024. Also, reportedly, no less than 21 Belarusian journalists were included in the Russian database of 'wanted' individuals.

The authorities monitored bloggers' activity, tracking any critical expressions about the regime in power.

On 5 April 2024, the Stolin District Court announced a verdict in the criminal case against blogger **Aliaksandr Ihnatsiuk**, who was convicted under three articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus: 'arrangement of actions that grossly violate the public order or active participation in them' (Article 342-1 of the Criminal Code) with reference to protest actions in Stolin and Minsk, 'libeling the president of Belarus' (Article 367-2 of the Criminal Code), and 'blackmailing' (Article 208-2 of the Criminal Code). The blogger was sentenced to 6 years in prison and fined 8,000 Belarusian rubles. Also, he was ruled to pay 1,800 Belarusian rubles to cover property damages.

Even a pro-government blogger **Yauhen Katliarou** from Homiel was sentenced to 18 months in prison for publishing a video, condemning the actions of local authorities. He was convicted under two 'political' articles of Belarus Criminal Code: 'discreditation of Belarus' (Article 369-1) and 'insult to a government representative' (Article 369).

The exiled bloggers faced criminal prosecution 'in absentia'.

Thus, bloggers **Andrei Pavuk** and his ex-wife **Volha Pavuk** were sentenced to 12 and 8 years in prison respectively as well as huge fines under 13 and 8 articles of the Criminal Code in June 2024. Both were accused of managing their '*Rudabelskaya Pakazukha*' media project.

An opera singer Marharyta Liauchuk, a blogger Ilya Saliankou, and a musician Uladzislau Navazhylau were also sentenced to imprisonment 'in absentia' for their [participation](#) in this project.

A criminal case was filed against the blogger **Anton Matolka** in Belarus under 13 articles of Belarus Criminal Code. The case was referred to the court at the end of 2024. Among other things, the creator of 'Belarusian Hayun' Telegram channel and previously an urbanist blogger was accused of an attempt to seize power, extremism and high treason.

Following the consideration of a civil lawsuit against bloggers **Raman Pratasievich, Yan Rudzik, and Stsiapan Putsila**, who had already been convicted in a criminal case earlier (the last two defendants were convicted 'in absentia'), a court decision was announced on *May 7, 2024*. Accordingly, they were ruled to pay more than 24.5 million Belarusian rubles to cover the damages of various governmental agencies, which were allegedly caused by their calls for protests. 21 million Belarusian rubles out of this sum are to be paid out on a solidary basis with the similarly convicted consultant for the Belarusian service of Radio Svaboda **Ihar Losik** and other individuals.

The imprisoned journalists and bloggers are constantly subjected to pressure by means of isolation and aggravating conditions of detention. Among other, it is done through handing down **additional sentences, allegedly, for 'disobeying maliciously the demands of prison administration'** under article 411 of the Criminal Code of Belarus.

Reportedly, the supplementary sentence of 10 months of imprisonment was handed down to the journalist **Ihar Karnei** in addition to the initial sentence of three years in jail. The blogger **Zmitser Kazlou** was about to be released from prison. However, it didn't happen, since the additional sentence of one year and five days was announced to him. Similar supplementary criminal cases were also filed against the imprisoned journalist **Mikola Dziadok**, who was to be released from custody on April 25, 2025, and a military analyst and blogger **Yahor Lebyadok**.

Other kinds of pressure on journalists and mass media

According to the BAJ sources, **30 journalists were detained, and 66 journalists' houses as well as editorial offices were subjected to police searches** in 2024. Also, the Belarusian media workers were punished **19 times by administrative arrests** within the period under review.

As part of political purges, **Natalia Zhukouskaya**, the presenter of *Alfa Radio* broadcaster, which is part of the 'SB. Belarus Today' state-owned holding company, and **Dzmitry Kulikouski**, the *Alfa Radio* sound engineer were detained for supporting post-election protests on *February 19, 2024*. Both were most probably fired afterwards.

The law enforcement continued large-scale repressions, targeted at independent media workers. The intensified arbitrary persecution of journalists was apparently caused by the approaching presidential election in Belarus.

Reportedly, **at least seven former employees of 'Intex-press' newspaper were detained in Baranavichy** (Brest region) at the beginning of December 2024. Most probably, they were criminally charged for the alleged participation in an extremist group.

Large-scale pressure on journalists who were forced to leave Belarus and continue to work abroad was carried out through searches at their places of registration in their native country within the framework of criminal proceedings in absentia, intimidation of relatives, threats to confiscate property for the benefit of the state (including housing).

Thus, criminal investigators searched and seized the apartment, owned by **Zmitsier Kazakevich**, a journalist from Vitsiebsk, on *May 16, 2024*. Video footage was taken, depicting the employees of the Ministry of Emergency Situations breaking down the door to the journalist's private residence. The footage was later used in the broadcast of the ANT state-owned TV channel. The presenter Ihar Tur noted that the apartment would be sold, and the cash would be transferred to compensate for the damage, caused by the Western sanctions on Belarus.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists registered **26 searches** in the period of *June-July 2024*. 21 of these searches took place in the apartments of media professionals who fled Belarus and continue to work in the media in exile. In most cases, the law enforcement agents showed search warrants within criminal cases, filed against the targeted media workers.

The practice of convicting the exiled journalists for the alleged administrative offenses 'in absentia' continued in 2024. Thus, **Alena Shabunia**, associated with Belsat TV channel, was fined 2,800 Belarusian rubles in Vitsiebsk. According to the mailed protocols, she was charged with the 'dissemination of extremist materials' (Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offenses).

The exiled media workers encountered pressure on their relatives in Belarus as well as harassment in Belarusian propaganda publications. Thus, the exiled journalists [Dzmitry Lupach](#) from Hlybokaye, Vitsiebsk region and [Ihar Kazmerchak](#) from Vorsha, Vitsiebsk region were harassed with publications in the state-owned media containing insults and slander in relation to them.

The rhetoric of state propagandists was abundant in hate speech.

Thus, Kiryl Kazakou, 'Minskiy Kuryer' newspaper's Editor-in-chief called to shoot down a blogger [Mikita Melkazorau](#) without trial, referring to him as 'the animal'. The state newspaper's top manager expressed his personal readiness 'to do away' with the blogger, using dehumanizing rhetoric in relation to the media worker.

In addition, security forces wrote in their Telegram channel that searches in Melkazorau's house and interrogations of his relatives would be carried out with special treatment.

On *July 23, 2024*, the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBOPiK) representatives announced that they had filed criminal cases against two hosts of the 'Zerkalo' TikTok channel and [forced](#) their parents to record a video reel with words of condemnation against their children.

THE USE OF ANTI-EXTREMIST LEGISLATION TO RESTRICT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Persecution for disloyalty and dissent under the guise of combating extremism continued in 2024. The online space remained the main area of this fight.

In addition, the authorities organized 'preventive' talks at universities, state organizations, and enterprises, where ideological workers and representatives of law enforcement agencies dwelt upon 'external enemies,' the danger of destructive online resources and 'extremist ideology' attributed to the opposition and independent media. They kept warning the public against subscribing to Telegram channels banned by the authorities and any forms of 'extremism.'

11 independent media projects were labeled as ['extremist groupings'](#) by the Belarusian governmental authorities in 2024.

The list of affected media includes the Belarusian 'Radio Racyja' based out of Bialystok (Poland), DW Беларусь, UDF — Belarus News, 'This is Minsk, Baby' (including the blogger Usiaslau Pashkevich's (aka 'Tuteyshy Shliakhtsich') accounts on social media, ZnadNiemna.pl News Web-site, published by the Union of Poles in Belarus, which is not recognized by the Belarusian authorities, 'Why are you lying?' media project, which deals with analyzing the state propaganda techniques, s13.ru Hrodna City Web-site, as well as the media projects 'Pozirk', Orsha.eu, Media IQ, and 'The Ordinary Morning'. Moreover, the Web-resources 'We Are Not Slaves', 'The People's Reporter' (a project of ex-political prisoners and bloggers Aliaksandr Kabanau and Siarhei Piatrukhn) as well as the blogger Aleh Zhalnou's social media were labeled as extremist formations, too.

It was for the first time that the authorities applied a new practice of adding new names to the initially published lists of individuals, associated with extremist groupings. This new practice affected the 'Zerkalo' and KYKY.ORG media projects in 2024.

The Belarusian authorities continued liquidation of legal entities of organizations, previously labeled as extremist groupings.

On *March 11, 2024*, the oldest Belarusian News Agency **BelaPAN Closed Join-Stock Company** was liquidated by court as requested by the Public Prosecutor's office of Pershamayski City District of Minsk. The BelaPAN employees were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in 2022.

Ten imprisoned journalists and the imprisoned blogger Aliaksandr Ihnatsiuk were added by the authorities to the [List of citizens of Belarus, foreign citizens or stateless persons, involved in extremist activities](#) in 2024.

Also, the journalists **Yury Drakakhrust, Hanna Liubakova, and Alena Tsimashchuk** were labeled by the KGB [as related to](#) 'terrorist activities'.

The Belarusian authorities continued criminal prosecution of citizens for any interaction with the independent mass media, labeled as 'extremist groupings.'

Thus, on *April 19, 2024*, the Minsk City Court sentenced **Nastassia Matsiash**, to two years in prison on charges of the alleged 'participation in an extremist formation' for working as a language consultant for the Belsat TV channel from 2021 to 2023.

Event host and actor **Kiryl Allahverdyan** was detained on *June 2, 2024* for having been filmed in satirical videos for the Belsat TV channel wearing a police uniform.

A historian **Ihar Melnikau** was sentenced to 4 years in prison on *September 13, 2024* for being interviewed by the 'European Radio for Belarus' five months before the media outlet was declared an 'extremist grouping.'

According to [the indictment](#), he did it *'knowing in advance about the extremist activities, implemented by the members of the information resource, which is banned in Belarus, in order to develop and promote the mass media of such orientation and engage more citizens in similar activities.'*

As before, the content of independent media and personal pages of prodemocratic journalists and civil society activists was broadly recognized as extremist materials in 2024. TikTok and X accounts were often targeted by the Belarusian authorities. It was for the first time in history that an account on Threads was included in the list of extremist publications.

Also, it was registered for the first time that the content of a Web-resource on LGBTQ+ issues was included in the list of 'extremist materials.' In particular, the social media of Belarusian transgender community were banned in the country.

On *February 13, 2024*, the content of 'BAJ. Belarusian Association of Journalists' Telegram channel (t.me/bajmedia) was labeled by the regime in power as 'extremist content'. A similar 'extremist' labeling affected the baj.media pages on TikTok social media on *March 18, 2024*.

In addition to Belarusian online media, a number of foreign media appeared on the [National List of Extremist Materials](#), including 'Current Time TV' media project (6 topical editorials), two articles under the titles 'Our Pushkin' and 'Brother People' on the Web-site of Die Tageszeitung newspaper from

Germany as well as the YouTube channel of UNIAN News Agency and eight Telegram Web resources from Ukraine.

On *April 4, 2024*, the Operations and Analysis Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus published an [order](#) that provided for cancellation of domain names of Web-resources included in the National List of Extremist Materials. The national domain zone administrator was authorized to implement the order.

Reform.by and Media-Polesye.by were among the first media outlets affected by the new legal provisions.

The Belarusian people were frequently prosecuted for distributing 'extremist' media production under Article 19.11 of the Belarus Code of Administrative Offenses ('Distribution, production, storage, transportation of information products containing calls for extremist activities or promoting such activities').

Most of them were prosecuted for comments, likes, reposts of online publications and other form of online activity even in case when the original publications had been produced before the moment of time, when the original sources were labeled as 'extremist' by the Belarusian authorities.

It was for the first time in May 2024 that a criminal case was filed for 'facilitating extremist activities' due to a single repost of a news item from an 'extremist grouping' website. Previously, such cases used to be classified as administrative offenses. The Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus (GUBOPiK) [commented upon](#) the new law application practice as follows: *'It was enough to send a single message to public chats, previously published by an extremist organization, to initiate a criminal case under Art. 361-4 of the Criminal Code of Belarus. This righteous method will be further actively used from now on and such deliberate actions will be severely punished.'*

It is obvious that security forces publish such posts with the purpose of intimidating Internet users who look for unbiased information from independent media sources.

An administrative case for keeping 'extremist' books was filed in 2024.

Thus, reportedly, a resident of Kobryn (Brest region), who kept the 'banned' book by Uladzimir Arlou 'Homeland: A Story for Children. From Rahneda to Kastsushka' on a shelf was punished with 10 days of administrative arrest on

June 1, 2024. The court noted that keeping the book on the shelf is regarded as public demonstration of 'extremist materials.'

The first sentence for 'denying the genocide of the Belarusian people' (article 130-2 of the Criminal Code) was handed down to the 'Odnoklassniki' social media community administrator **Andrei Savitsky** in Minsk on *October 30, 2024*. Moreover, he was accused of insulting Aliaksandr Lukashenka and sentenced to three years of imprisonment in a penal colony.

[The criminal prosecution](#) was grounded on the publication, where the defendant allegedly *'denied the mass extermination of civilians in the village of Khatyn by soldiers of the 118th Schutzmannschaft Battalion of the Security Police and the SS Special Battalion under the command of O. Dirlewanger in the framework of a punitive operation on March 22, 1943.'*

RESTRICTION OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION BY ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES

The Ministry of Information and other governmental agencies limited access to the 'unwanted' information through censorship restrictions. The grounds for these restrictions went beyond the 'fight against extremism' and violation of Mass Media Law.

On *April 8, 2024*, basing on the ruling of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Information of Belarus **took retaliatory measures in relation to foreign media for the first time in history**. Subject to the introduction of a ban on the activities of certain Belarusian mass media outlets in **Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia**, the Belarusian governmental agency decided to restrict access to a number of media outlets from these countries on the territory of Belarus. (A list of targeted foreign media outlets wasn't provided at that).

The Ministry of Information traditionally monitored online publications, initiated blocking of Websites and issued warnings to their publishers.

On *September 20, 2024*, the recently appointed Minister of Information Marat Markau noted during the international conference on *'International Standards in the Electoral Process: Experience and Development Perspectives'* that the governmental agency under his leadership pays more and more attention to 'regulation of information space.' In particular, [he said](#) that **around 14,000 Web-resources were blocked in Belarus as of September 1, 2024**. Moreover, over 5,000 Websites were labeled as 'extremist content.' The

number of banned online resources increased almost 35 times, compared to the period between the years 2015-2020.

Thus, the Website of 'Bureau Media' investigative journalism media project – buromedia.io was blocked for public access in approximately 30 minutes after posting a [publication](#) about the Belarusian Red Cross on its pages on *January 5, 2024*.

Web-users' access to 'My Brest' regional news Web-resource www.mybrest.by was restricted subject to the 'revealed' violation of mass media law, due to the published hyperlink to the allegedly 'extremist' belsat.eu Web-site in their [online publication](#) that was posted back in 2017.

The Ministry of Information of Belarus [restricted access](#) to the Websites ***baranovich24.by*** (due to the published link to an 'extremist' media) and ***Katolik.life*** ([no reason provided](#)). The latter was previously blocked in Russia, probably since it touched upon the topic of the war in Ukraine.

On *August 2, 2024*, the '**Channel 8**' TV program editorial received a written warning from the Ministry of Information 'for violating the requirements of the national legislation on mass media' by means of dissemination of prohibited information.

Public access to the Russian 'Okko' online cinema was 'temporary suspended' in Belarus once again on *October 1, 2024*.

The media business was accused of violating Article 38 of the Belarus Law on Mass Media by means of 'posting prohibited information aimed at promoting violence and cruelty on this Web-resource.' The Ministry of Information didn't disclose the essence of claims at that.

Censorship was observed in different forms, and the circle of affected entities surpassed mass media.

The stated-owned CTV channel censored the broadcast of the European Football Championship, having taken the last-minute decision to avoid showing the matches of the Ukrainian national team to the Belarusian audience. It was done despite the fact that the matches had been [included](#) in the TV program.

The websites of state-owned media outlets ('Homelskaya Prawda,' 'Homelskiya Vedamastsi,' 'Belarus 4 Homel,' 'First City TV Channel,' as well as district newspapers) and Web-resources of local administrations in the

Gomel region introduced a kind of 'self-censorship' in May 2024. They blocked access to their pages for visitors from abroad.

The '[Belarusian N-corpus](#)' Web-resource with a collection of texts in modern Belarusian language and references to Websites in Belarusian was [affected](#) by political censorship, too. Public access to its Webpages was restored in nearly half a year since their blocking. However, the resumed version lacked nearly 90% of the originally published texts, including the publications of independent Belarusian mass media there. The revived database of Web-resources currently includes the state-owned online media, namely the 'BelTA' News Agency, the 'Zviazda' newspaper, and the Aliaksandr Lukashenka's official Website.

The Web-archive of 'Culture and Art' holding company that unites the 'Culture' daily newspaper and the 'Art' magazine was [blocked for public access](#) in *June 2024*. The Web-resource wasn't updated since 2021. However, it remained accessible for users. It contained online exhibits, representing the whole history of Belarusian art, including the informal art, since the beginning of the 21st century. Among other it contained quite a few publications about the people of culture and art, who appeared in prison or in exile, and whose works of art do not meet the current ideological requirements.

Publication of ideologically loyal pro-governmental materials about Belarusian culture on the holding company's new Website (<https://kultura-info.by>) started in the summer of 2022.

The entire management of 'Letapis' film studio, which is a division of the 'Belarusfilm' national film company, was dismissed for political reasons in 2024. The studio is responsible for producing documentaries.

Halina Adamovich, a documentary filmmaker and a prizewinner at numerous film festivals, was dismissed, too. The governmental authorities had certain questions regarding the director's films. A phonogram dedicated to Ukraine in one of her films was the last straw that led to the dismissal.

Following a range of insults and accusations in pro-government Telegram channels in *February 2024*, the 'Mila' store chain was forced to delete a post on Instagram featuring a famous presenter Yauhen Perlin, who resigned from the state TV after the 2020 presidential election.

The pressure affected bloggers from Homel, **Maksim Filipovich** and **Yauhen Katlyarou**, who were clearly loyal to the authorities. In January 2024, they were [forced](#) to delete (or make private) hundreds of their previous videos of a

critical nature. M. Filipovich did this after serving a 15-day administrative arrest, and **Yauhen Katlyarou** did this after a recording of a conversation with a local governmental manager was published. Apparently, it had some unpleasant consequences for him. Katlyarou did not manage to avoid criminal prosecution in the future.

Some Belarusian exiled media were banned both in Belarus and Russia.

On *January 26, 2024*, the Russian Ministry of Justice [labeled](#) the media outlet '[Vot Tak](#)' as a foreign agent. This is an international project of the Belsat TV channel in the Russian language, aimed at the post-Soviet audience. Since 2020, it has been operating as an online media portal, publishing news, analytics, expert opinions, reports, and interviews. The publication employs journalists from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and other countries in the region.

On *June 25, 2024*, **the Belsat TV channel was [blocked](#) for public access** in Russia (among other foreign media) in response to the blocked access to a number of Russian media in the EU.

On *September 13, 2024*, the Russian General Prosecutor's Office recognized the activities of the 'Belsat' TV channel as 'undesirable'. The department [noted](#) in its official press-release that 'one of the key tasks for the Polish 'Belsat' organization is to discredit the domestic and foreign policy of Russian authorities, create a negative image of the country, and criticize integration processes within the Union State of Russia and Belarus.'

The **Reform.news** online media outlet received a message from the 'Roskomnadzor' supervisory agency in Russia on *August 19, 2024*. The Russian governmental agency notified the media editorial about their plan to [block the Russian users' access](#) to the Web-resource, in case the Reform.news team fails to delete publications from their Web-pages within 24 hours. The online media outlet is banned in Belarus.

On *November 12, 2024*, **the Ministry of Information [urged](#) the distributors of printed production to conduct an audit of printed publications** and remove from sale those items that may '[harm national interests](#).' A specific list of publications was not provided, but it referred to those that, allegedly:

- distort historical truth and justice,
- promote non-traditional sexual relations, religious intolerance, violence, cruelty and pornography, incite hostility and hatred,
- promote subcultures that are non-traditional for Belarusian society,

- provide sexual education for children and can have a negative impact on their physical and mental development, distorting the idea of true family values.

'The List of printed publications containing messages and (or) materials, the distribution of which may harm the national interests of the Republic of Belarus' was approved at a meeting of the National Commission for the Evaluation of Symbols, Attributes, and Informational Products on *November 21, 2024*. The list consists of 35 items, including manga, novels on LGBTQ+ topics, erotic prose, and unofficial interpretations of the history of Belarus. Consequently, the Ministry of Information banned distribution of these publications on the territory of Belarus under the threat of cancelling the printed press distributors' certificates of state registration as per Article 33 of the Belarus Law 'On Publishing Activities.'

EVENTS IN THE STATE MEDIA FIELD

The propaganda activities of state media continued against the background of ongoing repressions in relation to the non-state media resources and further ideologization of different spheres of life in Belarus in 2024. These activities were also observed in the framework of the Union State of Belarus and Russia within the period under review.

In particular, a [resolution](#) on founding the Union State's media company with the purpose of creating and promoting common media narratives was signed at a meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State of Belarus and Russia in St. Petersburg on *January 29, 2024*. The idea of starting the entity had been articulated by Aliaksandr Lukashenka repeatedly for several years in a row.

[According to Maksut Shadayev](#), Russia's Minister of Digital Development, Communication and Mass Communications, the media holding will embrace the currently existing two weekly newspapers – 'Soyuznoe Veche' and 'Soyuz. Belarus – Russia' as well as the Union State's TV and Radio Company first of all. The media outlets are supposed to ensure the implementation of 'the unified and coordinated media policy'.

[One billion Russian rubles](#) (about 11 million USD) will be allocated for the launch of the media holding from the budget of the Union State. Its headquarters will be based out of Moscow, and its representative office will be located in Minsk. It is planned to establish a 'resource hub' within the holding, which will create content for distribution through electronic media.

On *November 5, 2024*, the **Union State Media Company** was established at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Union State. Also, its charter and the composition of its Supervisory Board were approved. Reportedly, [it is planned](#) that the latter will be dealing with funding the production of content about the main events and achievements of the Union of Belarus and Russia. It is suggested that the funded content will be distributed on other media platforms, too.

Moreover, **a resolution on developing a strategy for the formation of the Union State's common information space was adopted.**

The creation of media holdings in the form of joint editorial offices of local state newspapers continued in Belarus, too.

Thus, it was announced that three such newsrooms would be created in the Brest region during the meeting of Brest Regional Executive Committee on *January 25, 2024*.

Tatsiana Hahakava, the head of the Main Department of Ideological Work and Youth Affairs at Brest Regional Executive Committee noted during the meeting that 'work in the Web-space is task #1 for modern mass media.' Therefore, bloggers were recruited to work in the editorial offices of two media outlets in the region. The Minister of Information Uladzimir Piartsou attended the meeting in Brest. He [noted](#) in his speech that Belarus had developed '*an effective system of providing information.*' However, according to him, '*it needs sharpening and reformatting in some places that has been completed by 97% in the Brest region.*'

On *April 8, 2024*, the former Minister of Information Uladzimir Piartsou was appointed to the new position of Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration. At the same time, Aliaksandr Lukashenka [articulated](#) the need 'to tighten up and put in order all the mass media and ideological work' as well as to focus on the issues of propaganda and counter-propaganda.

The state authorities and mass media intensified their propaganda efforts on the eve of the most recent 'election campaign' and, particularly, the voting day during another 'election' of Aliaksandr Lukashenka on *January 26, 2025*.

The [VIDEOBEL.BY](#) multimedia Web-portal [started its operation](#) on *September 12, 2024*. It is supposed to accumulate socio-political content from leading Belarusian state media and conduct live broadcasts, in particular from events with the participation of Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

‘The First News’ state-owned TV channel [started broadcasting](#) its programs in Belarus on *September 17, 2024*. It was included in the mandatory publicly available package of TV Programs. The continuous news broadcasting for many hours is a peculiar feature of this media outlet.

The Ministry of Information officials [stated](#) on *November 14, 2024* that following the recent monitoring of the Internet, they had urged [five owners](#) of Web-resources that distribute TV production to stop violating the legal norms of Belarus Law ‘On Mass Media’ and provide general access to the mandatory public package of TV programs. The governmental agency threatened to limit access to these Web-resources in case of non-compliance with the set requirements. It had already restricted access to the ‘Okko’ online cinema from Russia for failing to meet the requirements earlier.

Propaganda activities of Belarusian state-owned media led to the introduction of additional restrictive measures in relation to them.

In *March 2024*, the Latvian National Council for Electronic Media (NEPLP) took a decision [to ban access](#) to the Websites of the state-owned ANT TV channel (ont.by) and the ‘SB. Belarus Today’ (sb.by) media holding for being related to the [dissemination](#) of aggressive Russian propaganda and hate speech.

The Ministry of Information of Belarus responded with a [statement](#), blaming the Latvian authorities of *‘impermissible actions aimed at limiting freedom of speech and purposefully depriving the Latvian citizens of their right to receive complete and unbiased information.’*

As reported in *April 2024*, the suspension of the Belarusian State TV and Radio company’s membership in the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) would be [indefinite](#) until the situation improvement in the future. It was initially set from May 2021 to July 2024. And it was motivated by the lack of objectivity, freedom and independence of the press, the continuous wave of repression against journalists as well as the broadcasting of so-called ‘repentant’ videos, equated to torture.

Against the background of international sanctions, the Ministry of Information of Belarus started to apply the mechanism of their circumvention, referring to the law that had been adopted in 2023. The legal act allows the use of objects of intellectual property without getting the consent of their copyright holders if the latter are included in the list of legal entities from the so-called ‘unfriendly’ countries. The International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) were included in this list by the ministerial decrees of [February 14th](#) and [February 19th](#) respectively. Consequently, it became possible to broadcast international football

championships in Belarus without obtaining the appropriate permissions from the non-resident copyright holders.

The state media in Belarus circumvented the imposed sanctions, violating the rules of broadcasting sports competitions.

On [June 7, 2024](#), the Ministry of Information supplemented the list of sports competitions that can be broadcast in Belarus without the rights holders' consent. These are [the Nations League matches and friendly matches](#) with the participation of the Belarusian national football team. They were allowed to be shown without UEFA's consent.

On *July 28, 2024*, the 'Belarus 5' state TV channel showed part of a swimming competition during the Olympic Games, where a Belarusian athlete participated, having no rights to broadcast it. (The video footage was neither promoted nor commented on in any way).

On *August 5, 2024*, the European Union [introduced new sanctions](#) against a number of Belarusian law-enforcement officers and propagandists, including **Iryna Akulovich**, the CEO of 'BelTA' News Agency, **Dzmitry Zhuk**, the ex-head of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's press service, and **Mikita Rachylouski**, the host of 'Senate' TV program on the CTV channel. The Ministry of Information of Belarus called these sanctions the 'grossest violation of international law' in a corresponding statement, delivered on the same day.