

**“They turned
my grandson into
a piece of meat...”**

Political killings and deaths perpetrated by the regime
Information and Analytical Review



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Abbreviations

SIZO — pre-trial detention center

TDF — Temporary Detention Facility

OIC — Offenders' Isolation Center

RUVD — District Department of Internal Affairs

ROVD — District Office of Internal Affairs

m/u — military unit

SHIZO — punishment cell

OMON — special police squad

CAO — Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Belarus

KGB — State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus

ICC — International Criminal Court

Introduction and Methodology

The human rights situation in Belarus has rapidly deteriorated since the presidential election in August 2020 due to the regime's fierce response to public protests.

Dissenters have been brutally beaten during arrest, tortured in places of detention, and subjected to unbearable inhuman conditions in penal colonies and prisons. At least two people have been blatantly shot dead on city streets and one in his own apartment. Political prisoners are under severe pressure from penal system officials, and some die in prison due to lack of proper medical care.

Political killings and deaths perpetrated by the regime have become a systemic issue in Belarus. These are suspicious deaths allegedly caused by the regime, either through action or omission/inaction.

First, these are situations when:

1. death may have been caused by acts or omissions of the State, its bodies or employees of those bodies, or may otherwise be attributable to the State in breach of its duty to protect the right to life;
2. death occurred when the person was arrested or detained by the state, its bodies, or officials.

The authors sought to collect information on the known cases of politically motivated deaths and briefly analyze this issue in Belarus. The document includes 1) protest-related deaths during the 2020 events and 2) deaths of political prisoners and detainees in custody (RUVDs, ROVDs, TDFs, prisons and penal colonies). It is important to note that prosecuting people under administrative, and in some cases criminal, charges for expressing opinions, peaceful assemblies or on other political grounds is an inadmissible action, and the regime's officials are entirely responsible for this.

This paper reports on 16 individuals who have died for political reasons since 2020 to date, the stories of their deaths and their alleged perpetrators (if identified). Each case is concluded with legal analyses and the role/involvement of the regime in the incident.

The list of deaths does not include all those who died during the period, as the lack of open criminal cases makes it difficult to understand the true cause of a person's death. In any case, the regime denies that people died at the hands of the security forces or through their fault. No criminal cases have been launched in relation to deaths or violence by security forces associated with the protests in Belarus since August 2020, except for the currently suspended case of the murder of Raman Bandarenka. At the same time, there are thousands of politically motivated criminal cases, including those related to the dissemination of information about deaths at the hands of the regime.

Based on the above categorization of deaths in this paper, the authors refer to the international standards that require the State to respect and ensure the right to life and to provide effective remedies and reparations to all victims of violations of the right to life (see [Right to Life. International standards](#)). The paper also discusses standards of behavior for law enforcement officers, including members of the armed forces, mandated to carry out law enforcement duties. These standards have been designed primarily to prevent the arbitrary deprivation of life during peaceful assemblies by potentially lethal force. The authors also refer to instruments that emphasize the State's heightened obligation to take all necessary measures to protect the lives of persons deprived of their liberty.

Section [Right to Life and Right to Health Protection. National Database of Legal and Regulatory Acts of the Republic of Belarus](#) focuses on law enforcement acts regulating the actions of law enforcers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Security Committee and other security agencies, as well as the main international, general and special obligations of the Republic of Belarus under domestic law.

The authors of the review could not but refer to the cases of deaths of political opponents of Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Between 1996 and 2020, at least nine regime opponents were abducted or died unnatural deaths (see [Extrajudicial Killings and Murders of Political Opponents of the Regime](#)).

Section [Deaths and Murders after 2020](#) contains a list of deaths directly related to the protests (eight cases), and section [Deaths in Custody since 2020](#) contains information on eight politically motivated deaths in detention centres, penal colonies and prisons.

The main causes of the cases of deaths at the hands of the State described in the document are State actions or omissions, such as inadequate legal protection of the right to life, arbitrary use of lethal weapons by security forces, improper or insufficient medical care for persons in custody, poor monitoring of the psychological state of persons in custody and unlawful pressure on detainees leading to suicide, as well as failure to properly investigate cases involving deprivation of liberty. Readers can find more detailed

conclusions and a list of senior officials responsible for these violations in [Conclusions](#).

This review is not intended to be exhaustive in content and conclusions. In particular, the authors did not analyze media coverage of deaths in 2020-2023 where no *direct or obvious connection to the regime's actions* could be seen (this applies primarily to suicides and deaths that may be not politically motivated, as well as those described by anonymous sources or in relation to anonymous victims). It is quite possible that some deaths caused by the regime are still unknown to the public.

The safety of the witnesses who provided the information was the primary concern of our work. Many of them fear persecution by the regime. For this reason, the paper does not include photos of posthumous documents (death certificates, epicrisises, extracts from medical records, etc.). The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus has these documents at its disposal to be used by lawyers and human rights activists to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Right to Life. International Standards

The basic document of international law, which globally defines the rights of all human beings is the 1948 **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN General Assembly. Article 3 of the Declaration formulates the fundamental right of every person — the right to life: “*Everyone has the right to life, to liberty and security of person .*”

All subsequent international instruments have, to varying degrees, elaborated and specified the concept of the “right to life” and substantiated the role of the State in its protection.

Thus, **the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** of 1966 (ICCPR) states that the right to life is an inherent right of every person and this right shall be protected by law (Article 6). This norm serves as the basis for international standards that establish both *negative* and *positive* obligations of the State to protect and ensure the right to life. Article 6 of the ICCPR provides the basis for the obligation of States parties to respect and ensure the right to life, to implement it through legislative and other measures, and to provide effective remedies and reparation to all victims of violations of the right to life¹. In its **General Comment No. 36**², the UN Human Rights Committee points out that the right to life is a right which should not be interpreted narrowly, It concerns the entitlement of individuals to be free from acts and omissions that are intended or may be expected to cause their unnatural or premature death, as well as to enjoy a life with dignity (clause 3).

Article 17 of the Covenant states that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honor and reputation. Every person has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

General Comment No. 36 states that *the use of potentially lethal force for law enforcement purposes is an extreme measure*, which should be resorted to only when strictly necessary to protect life or prevent serious injury from an imminent threat. The intentional taking of life by any means is permissible only if it is strictly necessary to protect life from an imminent threat (clause 12). States parties are expected to take all necessary measures intended to prevent arbitrary deprivations of life by their law enforcement officials, including soldiers charged with law enforcement missions. These measures include appropriate legislation controlling the use of lethal force by law enforcement officials, procedures designed to ensure that law enforcement actions are adequately planned in a manner consistent with the need to minimize the risk they pose to human life, mandatory reporting, review, and investigation of lethal incidents and other life-threatening incidents, and the supplying of forces responsible for crowd control with effective “less-lethal” means and adequate protective equipment in order to obviate their need to resort to lethal force. All operations of law enforcement officials should comply with relevant international standards, including the **Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials** and the **Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials**, and law enforcement officials should undergo appropriate training designed to inculcate these standards so as to ensure, in all circumstances, the fullest respect for the right to life (clause 13).

During mass assemblies, according to General Comment No. 37, where the presence of law enforcement officials is required, their role should focus on the objective of enabling the assembly to take place as intended, and with a view to minimizing the potential for injury to any person and damage to property (clause 76).

Firearms are not an appropriate tactical tool for the policing of assemblies.³ To ensure that the use of firearms by law enforcement officials when policing assemblies is consistent with international law, all such cases should be limited to use against specific individuals in circumstances where it is strictly necessary to counter an imminent threat of death or serious injury.⁴ Given the threat that such weapons pose to life, this minimum threshold should also apply to shooting rubber bullets with a metal core.⁵ If law enforcement officers are preparing to use force or if violent action is believed likely, the authorities should also ensure that appropriate medical facilities are available.

States have an obligation to effectively, impartially and promptly investigate any allegations or reasonable suspicions of unlawful use or abuse of force by law enforcement officials, including sexual or gender-

1 https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/pactpol.shtml, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16/12/1966

2 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/261/17/PDF/G1926117.pdf?OpenElement>, General Comment No. 36, CCPR/C/GC/36

3 African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Guidelines on Policing Assemblies in Africa, para. 21.2.4., CCPR/C/GC/37, para 88

4 CCPR/C/GC/36, clause 12; and Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Principles 9 and 14

5 The United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement, paras 7.5.8

based violence, in the context of assemblies.⁶

The State is responsible under international law for the actions and omissions of its law enforcement agencies.⁷

States parties also have a heightened duty of care to take any necessary measures to protect the lives of *individuals deprived of their liberty by the State*, since by arresting, detaining, imprisoning or otherwise depriving individuals of their liberty, States parties assume the responsibility to care for their lives and bodily integrity, and they may not rely on lack of financial resources or other logistical problems to reduce this responsibility.

The duty to protect the life of all detained individuals includes:

- providing them with the necessary medical care
- appropriate regular monitoring of their health
- shielding them from inter-prisoner violence
- preventing suicides
- providing reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

We should also mention **Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners**⁸ (hereinafter referred to as the Rules). It specifies the minimum standards that penitentiary institutions must meet in providing prisoners (including remand prisoners) with medical care (availability of qualified medical staff, possibility of urgent treatment of convicts in civil hospitals, provision of special equipment and medicines, and actions of the head of the institution to ensure the medical treatment of prisoners) (paragraphs 22-26 of the Rules)

Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment⁹ establishes that a proper medical examination shall be offered to a detained or imprisoned person as promptly as possible after his admission to the place of detention or imprisonment, and thereafter medical care and treatment shall be provided whenever necessary (*Principle 24*).

Basic principles for the Treatment of Prisoners¹⁰ reaffirms the need for prisoners to have access to medical services available in the country without discrimination due to their legal status.

The Nelson Mandela Rules¹¹ essentially repeat the standards enshrined in the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

In addition, the standard for providing medical care to prisoners is contained in **the Principles of Medical Ethics**,¹² relevant to the Role of Health Personnel, particularly Physicians, in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Principle 1 states that health personnel, particularly physicians, charged with the medical care of prisoners and detainees have a duty to provide them with protection of their physical and mental health and treatment of disease of the same quality and standard as is afforded to those who are not imprisoned or detained. This document also establishes cases where the behavior of health personnel towards prisoners or detainees is an absolute violation of ethics.

The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Deaths (2016) provides guidelines for conducting investigations into potentially unlawful deaths caused by private citizens, even if the state cannot be held liable for failure to prevent such deaths.¹³

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance¹⁴ is the first universal, legally binding human rights treaty dealing with enforced disappearances. It provides that enforced disappearances constitute crimes against humanity, obliges States Parties to ensure that enforced disappearance constitutes an offence under its criminal law, and obliges States Parties to search for missing persons, investigate their disappearances, and ensure victims' access to justice and effective remedies.¹⁵

6 CCPR/C/KOR/CO/4, paras. 43–44; and CCPR/C/BHR/CO/1, para 36

7 CCPR/C/GC/37, para 89

8 Adopted by the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in 1955.

9 Adopted by the UN in 1988.

10 Adopted by the UN in 1990.

11 Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.

12 Adopted by the UN in 1982.

13 <https://www.ohchr.org/ru/special-procedures/sr-executions/minnesota-protocol>

14 The Republic of Belarus has not ratified this Convention.

15 <https://www.ohchr.org/ru/treaty-bodies/ced/background-international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced-disappearance>

Legal definition of State responsibility in relation to “unlawful deaths”

Based on their nature, the state's obligations to respect human rights are divided into *negative* and *positive* ones.

Negative obligation refers to the obligation of state bodies (officials and agents whose actions can be attributed to state action) to refrain from actions that violate or restrict human rights and freedoms.

Positive obligation is an obligation of the relevant state bodies (officials) to take certain proactive measures to protect a right belonging to a person from infringements by private persons or other state bodies (officials).

International law equally considers non-compliance with both negative and positive obligations to be a breach of a State's human rights obligations.

Positive obligations compel a State to take positive steps to protect human life within its jurisdiction (enact legislation to protect against arbitrary deprivation of life and ensure its effective implementation). Procedural obligations, which can be described as positive, involve the conduct of an effective official enquiry into deaths.

Negative obligations require the state to refrain from unlawful deprivation of life.

The right to life in places of detention (i.e., persons under the care and custody of the state) implies positive obligations to create conditions to prevent the arbitrary deprivation of life of prisoners by training prison staff in human rights law, providing medical care, conducting investigations in the event of death, and taking other steps necessary to preserve the life of persons in custody.

Thus, State authorities must take appropriate measures to bring perpetrators of unlawful deprivation of life to justice. To do so, the State must not only ensure the possibility to lodge complaints freely and provide access to the investigation procedure, but also ensure an effective system of criminal law.

Right to Life and Right to Health Protection. National legal framework of the Republic of Belarus

Let us outline the main legal framework of the Republic of Belarus, which establishes obligations to protect and (or) defend the right to life and responsibility for violation of this right as an inherent right of every human being.

The legislation of the Republic of Belarus on the right to life and health can be divided into 2 clusters: 1) international obligations under domestic law and 2) the general and special obligations under domestic law.

International obligations under domestic law

Belarus is a member of the United Nations and a party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice; therefore, it is bound by the provisions of the Statute of the International Court of Justice (Article 93 of the UN Charter).

Under Article 8 of the **Constitution of the Republic of Belarus** (hereinafter — the Constitution), the Republic of Belarus recognizes the priority of universally recognized principles of international law and ensures that its legislation is consistent with them. In accordance with the norms of international law, the Republic of Belarus may voluntarily join and withdraw from inter-State bodies. International treaties that contradict the Constitution shall not be concluded. Hence, the Republic of Belarus is obliged to fulfil its obligations under international treaties.

Article 21 (3) of the Constitution stipulates that the State guarantees the rights and freedoms of Belarusian citizens as enshrined in the Constitution, the laws and international obligations of the State.

According to Article 36 of the **Law of the Republic of Belarus of 23 July 2008 No. 421-Z “On International Treaties of the Republic of Belarus”**, international treaties of the Republic of Belarus shall be faithfully implemented by the Republic of Belarus in accordance with international law.

Regarding the right to life and health of prisoners, the following international treaties have been ratified by the Republic of Belarus:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Convention against Torture
- Convention against Discrimination
- Optional Protocol to the Convention against Discrimination
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

It should be noted that the Republic of Belarus denounced the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by Law No. 217-Z of 27 October 2022.

General and specific obligations under domestic law

The right to life is enshrined in Article 24 **of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus**: *Everyone has the right to life. The State shall protect the life of the individual against any illegal infringements.*

Article 25 of the Constitution establishes that the state shall safeguard personal freedom, integrity, and dignity. Restriction or deprivation of personal freedom is possible in the instances cases and under the procedure specified by law. A person who has been taken into custody shall be entitled to a judicial investigation into the legality of his detention or arrest. No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or undignified treatment or punishment, or be subjected to medical or other experiments without his consent.

Article 45 of the Constitution guarantees citizens of the Republic of Belarus *the right to health care*, including free treatment at the expense of public funds under the procedure prescribed by law. The state creates conditions for accessible medical care for all citizens.

Given the topic of the study, the authors consider it necessary to highlight some law enforcement acts regulating the actions of officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Security Committee and other security agencies.

Thus, the **Law of the Republic of Belarus of 10.07.2012 No. 390-Z “On State Security Bodies of the Republic of Belarus”** stipulates that the use of physical force, special means, military and special equipment and weapons must be preceded by a clearly expressed and obvious to the person against whom they may be used, a warning of the intention to use them with the provision of sufficient time to fulfil the lawful requirements, except in cases where delay in their use would create an immediate danger to the life of a member of the state security bodies of the Republic of Belarus or other citizens, or could lead to other grave consequences (art. 10, part 2).

In all cases of use of physical force, special means, military and special equipment, use and application of weapons, an officer of state security bodies shall act with the aim of causing the least harm to the life, health, honor and dignity of citizens, property of citizens and organizations, state property, and shall also be obliged to take measures to provide immediate medical and other necessary assistance to the victims (art. 10, part 3).

In addition, the **Law of the Republic of Belarus of 17.07.2007 No. 263-Z “On the Bodies of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus”** provides an exhaustive list of cases in which law enforcement agencies have the right to use combat and special equipment, in particular:

- defense of citizens against an attack that threatens their life or health, unless it is impossible to suppress the attack in any other way;
- release of hostages;
- repelling a group or armed attack, including with the use of vehicles, on guarded facilities, settlements, buildings, premises, structures and (or) vehicles regardless of their ownership, or for the release of captured facilities;
- Suppressing the resistance of armed persons who refuse to comply with the lawful demands of an internal affairs officer to cease unlawful acts and surrender weapons, ammunition, explosives, explosive devices and combat equipment in their possession;
- suppressing mass riots (paragraph introduced by Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 106-Z of 17.05.2021);
- ensuring state of emergency and martial law rules;
- in other cases determined by the president of the Republic of Belarus.

The remarkable thing here is that the president of the Republic of Belarus has the power to decide on any instances for the application of such equipment. The legislation does not provide for any restrictions or criteria for the president to make such decisions. It is noteworthy that crowd control cases were introduced to the above list only in 2021, i.e., after the mass protests of 2020, where peaceful civilians were violently dispersed with the use of special and combat means.

The protection of the right to life of such a vulnerable group as *detainees or prisoners* is regulated by several legal acts in Belarus, and the key ones are discussed below.

The **Criminal Correctional Code of the Republic of Belarus** contains basic guarantees for persons in custody aimed at protecting and defending life, and its practice should be guided by strict observance of the guarantees of protection against torture, violence and other cruel or degrading treatment of convicts.

According to the Code, convicted persons have *the right to health care*. Medical assistance to convicts may be provided in outpatient, inpatient conditions, in a day care unit, as well as outside health care organizations in accordance with the procedure established by the legislation of the Republic of Belarus.

Despite the fact that legislation currently provides for the possibility of changing the preventive measure of remand in custody to a milder one, as well as the release from punishment, including imprisonment, in respect of suspects, accused and convicted persons, respectively, *who have been diagnosed with a serious illness*, the current rules of law and existing procedures are far from perfect and do not fully ensure the preservation of the lives of these persons.

Article 92 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Belarus and **Resolution No. 54/15** of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus of 16 February 2011

“On Approval of the Guidelines on the Procedure of Medical Examination of Convicted Persons and Establishment of the List of Diseases Preventing Further Serving of Sentence” are the regulatory framework for changing the measure of restraint in the form of remand in custody to a milder one in respect of suspects and accused persons suffering from serious illnesses, that establish the **List of Diseases Preventing from Further Serving of Sentence**.

Since serious illnesses are life-threatening and require constant care and special treatment, keeping critically ill patients in strict isolation may (and regrettably often does) lead to the patient’s death. The reasons for this are both less comfortable conditions in custody and the difficulty, and often impossibility, of:

- involving highly specialized physicians in their treatment,
- use of special medical equipment,
- providing the patient with expensive medications,

which may amount to *torture* for the person in custody.

Internal regulations of correctional institutions¹⁶ establish the procedure for serving a sentence of imprisonment and specify the issues of the activities of correctional institutions, including the procedure for providing medical care to convicts. To provide emergency and specialized medical care, in the absence of such in medical and preventive treatment facilities of places of detention, convicts shall be sent to State health care organizations under the established procedure, with necessary measures to ensure their safekeeping.

Law of the Republic of Belarus of 18 June 1993 No. 2435-XII “On Health Care” establishes that persons under investigation, serving sentences of arrest, restriction of freedom, imprisonment, life imprisonment and those sentenced to death are guaranteed the necessary medical care. Upon admission to penal institutions of the criminal-correctional system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, every convicted person is subject to mandatory medical examination (Article 14, part 12).

Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 215-Z of 16 June 2003 “On the procedure and conditions for the detention of persons in custody” provides that detention is based on the principles of lawfulness, humanism, equality of all citizens before the law, respect for human dignity and must not be accompanied by cruel or inhuman treatment that may harm the physical or mental health of the detainee (Article 2).

The law emphasizes (Article 8 part 1)) that detainees needing medical assistance shall be placed in state health-care institutions.

The **Internal Regulations for pretrial detention centers of the criminal-correctional system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs**¹⁷ determine the procedure for the provision of medical care and the dispensing of medicines to detainees (paras. 172 and 173).

The **Instruction on medical care for persons held in penal institutions of the criminal correctional system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus**¹⁸ defines the procedure for organizing medical care for special groups and a range of sanitary and anti-epidemic, therapeutic, diagnostic, rehabilitation, health-improving and other measures in order to provide affordable medical care, preserve and strengthen the health of special groups (paras. 4 and 5).

In the absence of the possibility to provide emergency and planned medical care (primarily specialized medical care — oncological, cardiological, phthisiatric, etc.) in penal institutions, the necessary therapeutic and diagnostic measures shall be carried out by the relevant health care organizations. Medical care, including the provision of medicines as prescribed by a doctor, is provided free of charge to the special groups.

The current conditions for those convicted, especially on political grounds, are rather punitive, sometimes bordering on the level of torture. However, **Article 3 part 7 of the Criminal Code** establishes that punishment and other measures of criminal liability are not intended to cause physical suffering or humiliation of human dignity.¹⁹

¹⁶ Internal Regulations of Correctional Institutions, approved by Resolution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus No. 174 of 20.10.2000.

¹⁷ Internal regulations for pretrial detention centers of the criminal correctional system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, approved by Resolution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus No. 3 of 13.01.2004.

¹⁸ Resolution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus dated August 27, 2003, N 202/39 “On approval of the Instructions for medical support for persons held in institutions of the penal system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus”

¹⁹ Code of the Republic of Belarus of 09.07.1999 N 275-Z “Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus”

Article 145 of the **Criminal Code** provides for liability for incitement to suicide for up to five years if committed by a person who the victim depended on in one way or another.

Improper performance of professional duties resulting in the death of a patient through negligence is stipulated in **Article 162, part 2 of the Criminal Code** and refers in this context to health-care workers in correctional institutions.

Article 128 of the Criminal Code criminalizes acts falling under the category of crimes against the security of mankind. These include unlawful detention, mass or systematic extrajudicial killings, abductions followed by disappearances, torture or acts of cruelty committed because of the race, nationality, ethnicity, *political convictions*, and religion of the civilian population.

According to article 85 of the Criminal Code, the statute of limitations rules do not apply to the prosecution of persons who have committed a criminal offence under article 128 of the Criminal Code.

Extrajudicial killings and murders of political opponents of the regime before 2020

The story of Alexander Lukashenka's presidency is fraught with facts of violent deaths and disappearances of his opponents and other dissenters. From 1996 to 2020, at least nine opponents of the regime were kidnapped or died unnatural deaths.

On **12 November 1996**, on his way back from a conference in the early morning, journalist and well-known Belarusian political expert, president of the National Centre for Strategic Initiatives "East-West" **Anatol Maisenia** got in a car accident. As a result of the head-on collision with a truck, he was seriously injured and died on the way to hospital.

According to the official version, Maisenia fell asleep, "failed to control" the vehicle and caused the accident. The unofficial version is that the death was not accidental: the crash could have been organized. Former Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Zakharanka, who arrived at the scene immediately after the accident, described Maisenia's death as a murder. No criminal case was opened into the death of Anatol Maisenia.

The same year, the car with **Henadz Karpenka**,²⁰ vice-speaker of the Supreme Soviet and mayor of Maladechna, was shot up right in the center of Minsk. This happened immediately after Karpenka was announced to head the shadow government. A criminal case was opened, but subsequently closed later.

Three years later, on **April 6, 1999**, Henadz Karpenka dies unexpectedly. Everyone who saw him on the last day before the incident stated that he was lively, healthy, cheerful and showed no signs of illness. Although medical records show that he had a bout of hypertension, his blood pressure was over 200. Shortly before this, Henadz Karpenka claimed there had been an attempt to poison him. No criminal case was initiated under the "poisoning" version. No forensic examination of the politician's body was conducted after his death.

On **24 April 1999**, **Arnold Piacherski**, chairman of the "Sadruzhnasts" trade union, died in a car crash. At that time, he was busy organizing an all-Belarusian protest scheduled for 1 May. He was a proxy of presidential candidate Mikhail Chyhir and was actively involved in the presidential race scheduled for 16 May. According to the medical findings, death was caused by a fracture of the skull vault and cerebral contusion. The driver was not injured in the accident. He claimed he and the passenger fell asleep, and the car crashed into a ZIL standing on the road on the side where Arnold was sitting. A few months before his death, Piacherski mentioned that he was under surveillance. No criminal case was opened into the death of Arnold Piacherski.

On **7 May 1999**, former Minister of Internal Affairs General **Yury Zakharanka** was kidnapped on his way home. Zakharanka also claimed that he was constantly being followed. The criminal case on the abduction of the former minister was opened only on 16 September, after the disappearance of Viktor Hanchar and Anatol Krasouski.

On **September 16, 1999**, three days before the publication of the document on Lukashenka's removal from power for serious violations of the Constitution, the vice-speaker of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus **Viktar Hanchar** and his friend businessman **Anatol Krasouski** were kidnapped in the city center.

On **7 July 2000** **Dzmitry Zavadski**, a cameraman of the Belarusian branch of ORT, disappeared on his way to Minsk-2 airport to meet his friend and colleague Pavel Sharamet. Pavel found an empty car in the airport parking lot. Since then, nothing has been known about Dzmitry's fate. A criminal case was initiated, two years later the court handed down a guilty verdict against Valery Ignatovich's group, which was found guilty of committing a number of serious crimes, including the kidnapping of Dzmitry Zavadski. Dzmitry's body has never been found.

In **December 2001** **Andrei Zaitsau**, a Homel activist of the youth opposition movement Zubr, committed suicide. A KGB officer blackmailed him with the threat of imprisonment. No criminal case was opened into the death.

On **3 September 2010**, on the eve of the next presidential election, **Aleh Biabenin**, an opposition journalist, founder of the "Charter'97" website and campaign manager of presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau, was found hanged in his country house. According to colleagues, friends, family, and journalists, Aleh

²⁰ Henadz Karpenka, Dr. of Technical Sciences, Corresponding Member of the National Academy, member of three branch and international academies, State Prize laureate, and author of 50 patents. At that time he was the first and only real opposition candidate in the presidential race.

had no reason to end his life, and he could not have hanged himself without someone's help.²¹

For 24 years, the state agencies have shown no attempts to effectively investigate the 1999–2000 disappearances of political opponents of the regime — former Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Zakharanka, former vice-speaker of the Supreme Soviet Viktor Hanchar, businessman Anatol Krasouski, and journalist Dzmitry Zavadski. They failed to investigate these cases, despite numerous testimonies and evidence linking the regime's top officials to them.

EU sanctions have been imposed on four representatives of security agencies suspected of the crime — Uladzimir Navumau (former Minister of Internal Affairs), Viktor Sheiman (former head of the Presidential Administration), Yury Sivakou (head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs at the time of the disappearance of the politicians) and Dzmitry Paulichenka (commander of the special forces brigade of the MIA internal troops) since 2015.²²

On 18 December 2019, the suspended preliminary investigation in the criminal case of Y. Zakharanka, V. Hanchar and A. Krasouski was resumed in connection with the Deutsche Welle²³ interview of former special unit fighter Yury Harauski published on 16 December 2019. On 18 March 2020, the resumed preliminary investigation in these criminal cases was suspended due to the failure to identify the person to be charged. As of October 2023, the families and the public do not know the status of the disappearance cases.

At the same time, in September 2023, the criminal case against Yury Harauski on the enforced disappearances of Yury Zakharanka, Viktor Hanchar and Anatoliy Krasouski, was considered in Switzerland within the framework of universal jurisdiction. The former security officer stated that he witnessed the kidnappings and murders of the above-mentioned politicians. The court acquitted the former Belarusian special forces officer.²⁴

21 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1499061>

22 <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/abroad/belorussia/es-na-chetyre-mesyaca-zamorazhivaet-sankcii-protiv-belarusi-69259290>

23 <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus-lukashenko-murder/30328487.html>

24 <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/c98dlv0lnvxo>

Deaths and Murders after August 2020

*“They turned my grandson into a piece of meat.
They must be held accountable for this.. “*

Grandmother speaks at the funeral of her grandson
who died in the police station.

The authors of the paper analyzed the cases of 16 deaths at the hands of the regime that occurred during and after the protests in August 2020.

In the case of these deaths, violations of the State's obligations can be classified as follows.

Breach of negative obligations (*prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of life*):

1. Unjustified and/or disproportionate use of force during protests:

- use of firearms;
- the use of “non-lethal” weapons and special equipment;
- enforced disappearances and subsequent possible extrajudicial killings.

2. Torture and ill-treatment in the penitentiary institutions (deaths in custody).

Breach of positive obligations (*duty to protect life*):

1. Failure to take effective measures to prevent/stop violence by private persons (during protests, in the penitentiary system, etc.).

2. Failure to provide timely and qualified medical care (negligence, inaction, purposeful bringing to a critical state of health).

3. Failure to effectively investigate and/or prosecute perpetrators, including failure to inform family members and the public of the progress and outcome of the investigation (impunity for those responsible for the deaths).

4. Denial of reparations to the families of victims.

Notably, since 2020, politically motivated sentences have become one of the main instruments for dealing with regime opponents and dissenters, up to the point of their physical elimination. In October 2020, the then Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Karayev spoke about Siarhei Tsikhanouski at a meeting of law enforcers: *“Should there be no article to charge him, we must invent one and lock him up for a long time. Let him do his time! Let him drop dead there!”*²⁵ .

As a rule, investigations into political murders and politically motivated deaths end in a refusal to prosecute. In carrying out such checks, law enforcement officials falsify forensic reports, distort, or destroy evidence, and put pressure on witnesses to these crimes. Family members only receive notifications of refusals to prosecute, while in most cases they do not receive the decisions not to prosecute. The possibility of appeal is limited because families are not allowed to familiarize themselves with the decisions and other material relating to the examination.

Investigations into prisoners' deaths drag on for years; the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus repeatedly refuses to initiate criminal proceedings against law enforcement officials, and the perpetrators go unpunished.

What all these incidents have in common is that no criminal cases have been opened over the deaths, and the regime denies its culpability in them.

Deaths and killings of protest participants

In all the cases described above, the deaths were caused by the regime's political repression coupled with violence — gunshot wounds to protesters, beatings during arrests at rallies and in police stations, and psychological abuse by law enforcement officers.

Two men were shot by armed "law enforcers" during peaceful actions in Minsk ([Aliaksandr Taraikouski](#)) and in Brest ([Henadz Shutau](#)). Under pressure from representatives of the Investigative Committee, 18-year-old [Dzmitry Stakhouski](#) committed suicide by jumping from the 16th floor of a student dormitory in the city of Minsk.

The most notorious in this series of deaths were the murders of [Raman Bandarenka](#),²⁶ who went out to defend his courtyard from vandals, and [Andrei Zeltser](#), an IT specialist who defended his home and family in his own apartment from unknown attackers in civilian clothes. Both crimes involved law enforcement officers of special units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the KGB of the Republic of Belarus.

Separately, there have been suspicious cases of "suicides" by hanging of people who were directly involved in the protests or who were prominent figures in the overall picture of mass dissent after the rigged elections. A member of the electoral commission, [Kanstantsin Shyshmakou](#), who refused to sign the final electoral protocol, was found dead; an activist of the trade union "Naftan", [Uladzimir Kryسیونak](#), committed suicide after three days of "treatment" by security officers in a police station; an active protester from Maladechna, [Mikita Kryutsou](#), was found hanged in the forest.

These facts are very illustrative in this context and can be seen as acts of revenge and intimidation on the part of the regime.

1. Aliaksandr Taraikouski

Background: 34 years old, lived in Minsk, and raised a young daughter in a common-law marriage.

Date of death: August 10, 2020 (around 23:00)

Place of death: Minsk, Prytytski Str., next to the "Pushkinskaya" metro station.

Circumstances of the incident

His partner Alena Herman told TUT.by, on August 10, 2020 at about 20:00 Alexander "went to his father's flat, which was located about 300 meters from the "Pushkinskaya" metro station (which he helped his father to renovate). He left "empty-handed" — in shorts and a T-shirt, taking his phone, a packet of cigarettes, money, and bank cards. At around 22:20 she called him and he told her that he was on Pushkinskaya Square, that "it was "horrible out there", and that he was on his way home. Then at two o'clock in the morning she called his mobile phone, it rang but there was no answer. She said she searched for him for two days, and it was only towards the end of the second day that an investigator contacted Aliaksander's father and informed him of his son's death."²⁷

According to the official statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus, "On August 10, around 23:00, during mass riots in Minsk on Prytytski street, the crowd was building barricades to block traffic. During the confrontation with special forces who arrived to unblock the square, one of the protesters tried to throw an unidentified explosive device in the direction of law enforcers. It exploded in his hand, leaving him "incapable of surviving".²⁸

However, the witnesses of the incident claim that Taraikouski was shot dead by law enforcement officers.²⁹

Photographs and videos of the incident published by independent media in the following days conclusively refuted the MIA's version, showing no evidence of an explosion.³⁰ Three different videos, shot from different angles, clearly show a man in a white T-shirt and shorts walking alone towards a line of police officers with empty hands, which he raises as he moves, demonstrating his peaceful intentions. The officers saw that the man was not committing any violent acts and did not pose any threat to them. Nevertheless, one of them fires a shot in Aliaksandr's direction. The video then shows the man staggering. A large red stain appears on his T-shirt near his chest, and he falls to the ground.

26 The statement of the Belarusian human rights organizations regarding the death of Raman Bandarenka. November 16, 2020 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/100435>

27 <https://web.archive.org/web/20201127213614/https://news.tut.by/society/696350.html>

28 <https://t.me/pressmvd/1891>

29 <https://web.archive.org/web/20201129100217/https://news.tut.by/society/696236.html>

30 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HyPpsR200Y>, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_wGVaOxKxk

An open source investigation by the Conflict Intelligence Team (a group of Russian independent bloggers investigating armed conflicts through open sources) confirmed the location of the incident, identified the weapon used, and determined that the fatal shot was fired by an officer of one of the special forces: "Alpha" (KGB) or "Almaz" (MIA).³¹ Later, another independent investigation conducted under the auspices of the Belarusian People's Tribunal, citing insider information, named the Almaz fighter who allegedly fired the fatal shot.³²

Although the regime representatives eventually publicly acknowledged that Taraikouski had been shot with a "non-lethal" weapon,³³ they argued that force had been used on him lawfully because he had allegedly provoked the security officers.³⁴

One of the independent investigations³⁵ found that the fatal shot was fired by Mikita Karovin, a member of the Interior Ministry's special anti-terrorist unit "Almaz". The detachment commander at the time of the events was Colonel Viktor Zuraeu. However, this version has been seriously criticized as unproven.

Official cause of death

According to the medical death certificate, Taraikouski's death was caused by an open chest wound and massive blood loss. The medico-legal expert who observed the post-mortem examination of Taraikouski's body confirmed that the cause of his death was a rubber bullet fired at close range into the heart area.³⁶

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): senior investigator of the investigative department V. Hancharuk.³⁷

Official response/investigation (stage)

On 10 February 2021 the Minsk City Directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus decided to refuse to institute criminal proceedings on the death of Aliaksandr Taraikouski "for lack of corpus delicti".³⁸

The chairman of the Investigative Committee Ivan Naskevich commented that at the time of the incident Taraikouski "was in a state of strong alcoholic intoxication" and "provoked law enforcement officers" with his actions, while "they perceived him as a real threat to the life and health of both the officers and the protesters themselves", therefore law enforcers used non-lethal weapons against him "from the safe distance that excluded lethal outcome". However, "due to the coincidence of a number of tragic circumstances, one of the wounds turned out to be penetrating, resulting in Taraikouski's death at the site of the accident."³⁹ According to the investigation, "in these conditions and in a similar environment, law enforcement officers were entitled to use non-lethal weapons to prevent more serious consequences."⁴⁰

KGB chief Ivan Tertel had his own way of explaining the reason for using weapons against a peaceful citizen: "He comes out and brazenly stands in front of the police, and he does it purposefully." He made this statement at a meeting with the employees of Hrodna Azot on 17 December 2020.⁴¹

In April 2021, the Investigative Committee refused to allow the family of Taraikouski and their lawyer, Alvina Mingazava, to review the materials of the preliminary examination (including the forensic medical findings) and to receive a copy of the refusal to institute criminal proceedings, citing part 2 of Article 178 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, under which "the right to review the materials of the examination of a complaint or report of an offence shall be vested in the claimant and the person in respect of whom a decision not to institute criminal proceedings has been taken" (an examination of Taraikouski's death was initiated based on a report by an official of the city emergency station).⁴²

31 <https://citeam-ru.medium.com/к-убийству-протестующего-в-минске-могут-быть-причастны-бойцы-спецназа-2ecf73674393>

32 <http://web.archive.org/web/20220604010522/https://narodny-tribunal.info/ru/investigation#tag5>

33 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210125224108/https://news.tut.by/economics/696888.html> (interview with former Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Karaev, 16.08.2020)

34 <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=265466> (transcript of the speech by KGB Chairman Ivan Tertel, 17.12.2020)

35 <http://web.archive.org/web/20220604010522/https://narodny-tribunal.info/ru/investigation#tag5>

36 <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-59306484>

37 <https://euroradio.fm/ru/pravovaya-iniciativa-sledstvie-priostanovilo-proverku-po-delu-taraykovskogo>

38 Sixth periodic report submitted by Belarus to the UN Committee against Torture under Article 19 of the CAT (CAT/C/BLR/6), paragraph 131, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FBLR%2F6&Lang=ru

39 <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/noskevich-rasskazal-podrobnosti-proverki-po-faktu-smerti-taraykovskogo-429444-2021/>

40 <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/noskevich-rasskazal-podrobnosti-proverki-po-faktu-smerti-taraykovskogo-429444-2021/>

41 <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=265467&lang=ru>

42 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210421032343/https://news.tut.by/society/725334.html>

A witness to the murder, who was willing to give official testimony, was forced to leave Belarus in September 2020 after unknown persons broke into his flat.⁴³

In June 2021, Alena Herman, Aliaksandr Taraikouski's widow and mother of his 4-year-old daughter, informed the media that the tax inspectorate had demanded that she pay a tax of more than 11,000 BYN on voluntary donations that she had received after her partner's death.⁴⁴

During an examination into the death of A. Taraikouski, it was established that the police officers used weapons and special means against the latter lawfully, and therefore, on 10 February 2021, the criminal case was dismissed for lack of corpus delicti.⁴⁵

Conclusion

In the case of A. Taraikouski's death, the state failed to fulfil its obligations (*prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of life*). During a peaceful mass assembly, armed units deployed against citizens and unjustifiably used weapons against an unarmed civilian who was standing with his hands in the air, showing no signs of aggression, threats, or resistance.

Thus, the state violated international standards concerning the procedure for holding mass events, the role and functions of law enforcement agencies therein, the admissibility of the use of force during peaceful assemblies, and the prohibition on the use of firearms, including rubber bullets with a metal core. Furthermore, the State failed to effectively investigate and/or prosecute the perpetrators and failed to inform family members and the public of the progress and outcome of the investigation. The victim's family received no material compensation from the state.

2. Andrei Zeltser

Background: 31 years old, lived with his wife and 8-year-old son in Minsk, was an IT manager at EPAM Systems; posted two photographs with white-red-white symbols on his Instagram, at the bottom of one of the photos, published on August 16, 2020, he called on people to unite and "go to the end".⁴⁶

Date of death: September 28, 2021

Place of death: own apartment on Yakubouski street in Minsk.

Circumstances of the incident

According to the report of the State Security Committee (hereinafter — KGB), on 28 September 2021, law enforcement officers carried out special measures to check addresses where persons involved in terrorist activities could be found.

The video,⁴⁷ published by the state media, shows edited footage of the incident at the victim's apartment in Minsk. The video shows people in civilian clothes demanding that the owners open the door. These people claim to be police officers only once, and then immediately break the door open with a bolt cutter and a crowbar and burst in. Other footage, taken indoors, shows a man with a hunting rifle. A shootout begins. One of the intruders falls, and blood can be seen. At the 26th second of the video, footage from inside the flat appears — it shows Andrei Zeltzer with a shotgun. One can see Maria Uspenskaya, Andrei's wife, in the room filming the incident on her phone.

According to a report on the KGB website, 'in the course of special activities to check addresses where people involved in terrorist activities might be found, a particularly dangerous criminal fired a shotgun at law enforcement officers in one of the apartments of a residential building, fatally wounding an employee of the State Security Committee. The perpetrator was eliminated by return fire. The employee died from his wounds. The Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus initiated a criminal case under part 2 of article 139 (murder of a person in connection with his official activity).⁴⁸

BYPOL reported that KGB Group A officer Dzmitry Yurievich Fedasiuk, born in 1990, whose mother, Tatyana N. Fedasiuk, is the head of a department of the KGB central apparatus, took part in the break-in

43 <https://www.svaboda.org/a/30862276.html>

44 <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-protester--widow-donations-taxed/31311168.html>, <https://gazetaby.media/post/vdove-tarajkovskogo-nalogovaya-vystavila-schet-poc/177033/>

45 Sixth periodic report submitted by Belarus under article 19 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to the Committee against Torture under the simplified reporting procedure, due in 2022, CAT/C/BLR/6.

46 <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-58762762>

47 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEP5PvY4SY&rco=1>

48 <http://kgb.by/ru/news-ru/view/v-xode-provedenija-spetsialnyx-meroprijatij-po-otrabotke-adresov-v-kotoryx-mogli-naxoditsja-litsa-prichastnye-199/>

at Andrei Zeltser's apartment and was killed.⁴⁹

Official cause of death: shot in crossfire by a KGB officer.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): law enforcement officers who took part in the raid on A. Zeltser's home, KGB chief Ivan Tertel.

Official response/investigation (stage)

The Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus initiated a criminal case under Article 139, Part 2 ("murder of a person related to his official activity"). Maria Uspenskaya, the wife of Andrei Zeltser, was arrested on suspicion of complicity in the murder of a KGB officer. Later she was diagnosed with a mental disorder. She was tried as "a person who committed a socially dangerous act in a state of insanity". The Minsk City Court, with Judge Valiantsina Ziankevich on the bench, ordered Maria to undergo compulsory treatment in a psychiatric hospital until recovery. In addition, the court recovered from the defendant material compensation for moral harm in the amount of 100,000 BYN in favor of Dzmitry Fedasiuk's wife, which will be donated to orphanage No. 5 of the city of Minsk. Currently, Maria is placed in the National Scientific and Practical Center for Mental Health in Navinki.⁵⁰

According to the Human Rights Centre "Viasna", "at least 124 people were detained for comments, reposts and publications in social networks in connection with the Zeltser case. Human rights activists know the results of the trials of 103 people, while the results of a further 11 cases are still being searched for. Three people were sentenced to restriction of freedom, another 99 people received time in penal colonies. The KGB included at least 35 people involved in the "Zeltser case", including four women, in the "List of Persons Engaged in Terrorist Activities".⁵¹

Henadz Mazheika, reporter of Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi, wrote a piece dedicated to Andrei Zeltser, who died during the shooting, where he presented opinions of people who knew the deceased, including the one of his classmates. On 23 March 2023 Judge of Minsk City Court Tatsiana Falkouskaya found Henadz Mazheika guilty of insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus (part 1 of Article 368 of the Criminal Code), and of deliberate actions aimed at inciting other social enmity and discord on the grounds of other social affiliation (part 1 of Article 130 of the Criminal Code).⁵² The state prosecutor in this trial was Prosecutor of the State Prosecution Department of the Prosecutor General's Office of Belarus Tatsiana Harkun.⁵³ Henadz Mazheika was given punishment in the form of imprisonment for a term of three years to be served in a low security penal colony⁵⁴. On 11 September 2023, Human Rights Center "Viasna" reported that Henadz was transferred to the Vitba-3 correctional colony.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The KGB officers carried out their special operation to suppress the activities of persons involved in terrorist acts in flagrant violation of human rights and departmental regulations, rules and procedures governing such operations.

The security officers, who were unmarked and in civilian clothes, broke down the door of the citizen's apartment using special equipment. However, they failed to introduce themselves or state the reasons for the raid. At that time, Andrei Zeltser and his wife were in fear and called the police twice, asking for help and describing the situation. The staff of the police duty service, who received calls from the victims, did not give any explanations to the family, nor did they instruct them on the actions to be taken. In defense of his home and his family, Andrei Zeltser, in self-defense, not knowing the true reasons for the intrusion, fired his hunting rifle at the armed men who had entered his home. In response to this, he was immediately shot dead by the security agents.

Thus, the state violated the basic international standards and national norms for the protection of human life, which resulted in the death of Andrei Zeltser: violation of the right to inviolability of the home, and the unlawful use of firearms. The government failed to conduct a proper investigation into the incident. The family of the deceased did not receive financial compensation for the loss of a breadwinner. The wife of the deceased was admitted for compulsory treatment for an indefinite period in a psychiatric clinic, which is a punitive body under repressive regime and may be used to avenge her husband's actions.

49 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/29-09-2021-bypol-nazval-imya-sotrudnika-kgb-ubitogo-vchera-v-minske>

50 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/110804>

51 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/110804>

52 <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/henadz-mazheika>

53 <https://sputnik.by/20230323/zhurnalists-kp-v-belarusi-mozheyko-prigovoren-k-3-godam-lisheniya-svobody-1073549155.html>

54 <https://t.me/supremecourtofbelarus/783>

55 <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/henadz-mazheika>

3. Henadz Shutau

Background: 44 years old, lived in Brest with his partner and daughter.

Date of death: August 19, 2020 (at 10:20). Was wounded on August 11, 2020.

Place of death: military hospital in Minsk.

Circumstances of the incident

Shutau's daughter Anastasia Baranchuk told the media that on the evening of 11 August 2020, her father called her and said he was going home. Since then, the family could not trace him for about two days. His phone was out of service. Finally, they found him in Brest Regional Hospital, in a coma diagnosed with "open penetrating gunshot wound to the skull, contusion — crushing injury to the brain, multifocal fracture of the skull vault with transition to the base".⁵⁶ On 13 August in critical condition, he was helicoptered to the hospital of the Ministry of Defense in Minsk, where he died in the morning of 19 August.⁵⁷

On 19 August 2020, in a statement on Shutau's death, the Investigative Committee said that on the evening of 11 August, two men "attacked the persons who were performing duties to protect public order", they "inflicted blows using a metal pipe, and also attempted to take possession of a firearm".⁵⁸ One of the law enforcement officers, "perceiving the actions of the suspects as a real threat to life and health and aiming to stop the attempts to seize a service weapon, used a weapon against the attacker, shooting in the direction of the shoulder", but "due to the ongoing active resistance of the man, he unintentionally wounded him in the head area".

Video footage of the incident taken by witnesses and CCTV cameras, which has been released to the media, has cast serious doubt on the official version of events. The footage shows three people in civilian clothes approaching Shutau and his friend Kardziukou who were standing near a bench. Apparently, there was a brief conflict between them, which resulted in Kardziukou attempting to flee and one of the officers chasing him. It was at this point that three shots were fired, one of which wounded Shutau.⁵⁹

Official cause of death

Shutau's death certificate states the cause of death was traumatic cerebral oedema. The "external cause of death" column shows ICD code Y22 (stands for "Handgun discharge, undetermined intent").

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): Captain Raman Haurylau, commander of the reconnaissance group of the 1st special purpose detachment of the 5th separate special purpose brigade of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus (military unit 89417). The order to involve armed special forces in the protection of law and order was given by commander of the Special Operations Forces of Belarus, Major-General Vadzim Dzenisenka.

Official response/investigation (stage)

Since the incident, the authorities claimed that Shutau and his friend Aliaksandr Kardziukou attacked the law enforcers, who had to use self-defense. On 12 August 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that the previous evening police officers in Brest "were attacked by a group of aggressive citizens with a rebar in their hands", "warning shots upwards did not stop them" and "in order to protect the life and health of the officers, weapons were used to defeat them", one of the attackers was wounded.⁶⁰

On 3 September 2020, the Investigative Committee refused to investigate Shutau's killing, citing that "a legal assessment of the actions of those involved in causing bodily harm to Henadz Shutau will be given during the investigation of the criminal case "opened on 12 August against Shutau and Kardziukou for attacking law enforcement officers.⁶¹

During the trial, held in February 2021, it was revealed that Shutau was shot dead by Captain Raman Haurylau of the 5th Special Purpose Military Brigade. Together with a warrant officer of the same brigade, Arseni Halitsyn, he was ordered to assist OMON in policing the protests in Brest, mingling with the crowd in civilian clothes but carrying a service weapon. Haurylau explained the need to use weapons by the fact that he "felt unwell" and the attackers were behaving aggressively.⁶²

56 <https://mediazona.by/article/2020/09/03/shutov/>, <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/vystrely-v-tishi-ranenyj-v-breste-protestyushnij-skonchalsya-versii-ochevidtsev-i-mvd-rashodyatsya>, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus-shutov-killings/30821707.html>

57 <https://t.me/supremecourtofbelarus/783>

58 <https://t.me/skgovby/2960>

59 <https://mediazona.by/article/2020/09/21/shutov-cctv>, <https://t.me/nashaniva/11487>, <https://t.me/belsat/13974>

60 <https://t.me/pressmvd/1895>

61 <https://people.onliner.by/2020/12/12/kak-idut-proverki-po-delam-pogibshix-vo-vremya-protestov>

62 <https://mediazona.by/article/2021/02/25/kordukov>, <https://www.dw.com/ru/kak-sud-v-breste-sudil-ubitogo-uchastnika-protestov-v-belarusi-i-ego-druga/a-56693683>

On 25 February 2021, Brest Regional Court, represented by Judge Sviatlana Kremeneuskaya, posthumously found Shutau guilty of “resisting another person in the performance of his duties to protect public order, associated with the use of violence” without imposing punishment, and the key witness to his killing, Kardziukou, was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment.⁶³ The state prosecutor in this process was prosecutor Henadz Bury.⁶⁴ Kardziukou and Shutau’s relatives appealed the sentence, but it was upheld by the Supreme Court on 14 May 2021.⁶⁵ Belarusian human rights defenders recognized the charges against both men and their sentence as politically motivated.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Servicemen of the special-purpose detachment of the 5th special-purpose brigade of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus unlawfully used their service weapons against a peaceful citizen who was not resisting, seriously injuring him. He died because of severe injuries. Regime officials deny the unlawful use of weapons and hide all evidence, while accusing the victim and a witness of an attack on security forces.

Thus, the state violated international standards concerning the procedure for holding mass events, the role and functions of law enforcement agencies while policing such events, the admissibility of the use of force during peaceful assemblies, and the prohibition on the use of firearms. The government failed to conduct an effective investigation into the death. No material compensation was paid to the victim’s family.

4. Dzmitry Stakhouski

Background: 18 years old, orphan since birth, lived in Minsk; became a defendant in a criminal case under Part 2 of Article 293 of the Criminal Code (on “mass riots”) after employees of the dormitory where he lived pointed to him as a participant in the August 9-10 protests.

Date of death: May 26, 2021

Place of death: K. Turauski Street in Minsk.

Circumstances of the incident

According to the Minsk Criminal Investigation Directorate, on 26 May 2021 at about 01:45 the body of an 18-year-old Minsk resident with signs of a fall from a height was found on K. Turauski Street. The investigative and operational team examined the scene of the incident, and forensic medical and postmortem psychological and psychiatric examinations were ordered from the State Forensic Examination Committee. According to the experts, the concentration of alcohol in the young man’s blood was 2.4 ppm.⁶⁷

It turned out that Dzmitry Stakhouski committed suicide by jumping from a 16-storey building. On the morning of 26 May, a message was posted on his account on the VKontakte social network, blaming the Investigative Committee for his suicide.

Dzmitry’s friend pointed out that the deceased could not stand the deception on the part of the investigator. Thus, Stakhouski was promised that the charge would be changed and Article 293 (“Mass riots”) would be replaced by the milder Article 342 (“Participation in actions that grossly violate public order”). “He was reassured and promised a reduced charge in exchange for a confession. And he didn’t consult with any of his friends and wrote this confession. He told me later that the investigator was nice and promised that if he confessed to taking part in the riots near the Riga shopping center, other accounts, such as participation in other marches, would not even be considered. And he did as he was told, confessed that he had rolled some coils, and put up a grate in the area of the Riga shopping center”. On 25 May 2021, Dzmitry went for another interrogation together with his lawyer, and spent five or six hours there, until 21:00. There he learned that he had been misled by the promise of a change in the charges. He was informed that the investigator had requested the change, but that the prosecutor had rejected the request.⁶⁸

Friends of the deceased say he had repeatedly said he did not want to go to prison and that his way out would be to commit suicide. According to his friends, after interrogation, on May 25, 2021, he went to the Uruchcha area and climbed onto the roof of a 16-story building. It was from there that he wrote to his

63 <https://mediazona.by/article/2021/02/25/kordukov>.

64 <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/aljaksandr-kardzjukou>, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/102140>

65 <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/verhovnyj-sud-ostavil-bez-izmenenija-prigovor-kordjukovu-441267-2021/>

66 <https://spring96.org/en/news/103303>

67 <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/sk-ustanavlivaet-obstojatelstva-smertelnogo-travmirovanija-18-letnego-parnja-v-minske-443118-2021/>

68 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/09-06-2021-v-nashej-zhizni-teper-pustota-o-parne-kotoryj-prygnul-s-16-etazha-iz-zadavleniya-sk-rasskazali-druzya-i-italyanskaya-semya>

friends “that he could no longer live like this and asked them to forgive him”. He said he wanted to get drunk because he was scared and did not want to commit such an act, but he did not want to go to jail”.⁶⁹

Official cause of death: suicide.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): investigator who conducted investigative actions against Dzmitry Stakhouski under Article 293 part 2 of the Criminal Code.

Official response/investigation (stage)

Pershamaiski District Department of the Investigative Committee of Minsk carried out examination of the case.

On 14 June 2021, the Telegram channel of the Prosecutor General’s Office posted a statement by the information service of the Minsk City Prosecutor’s Office regarding numerous electronic requests received by the Minsk City Prosecutor’s Office to initiate criminal proceedings over the death of Dzmitry Stakhouski. It explained that, under articles 138 and 139 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Belarus, it is the participants in criminal proceedings who are entitled to appeal against the actions and decisions of the body conducting the criminal proceedings by filing a complaint orally or in writing, as well as other individuals and legal entities, if procedural actions and decisions affect their interests. The law on criminal procedure does not provide for electronic filing of complaints. Petitions submitted by persons not vested with the respective right are not subject to consideration on the merits.⁷⁰

In refusing to initiate criminal proceedings for the fact of incitement suicide, the regime cynically referred to the legal norm that decisions of the body can only be appealed by participants in criminal proceedings or other persons whose interests are affected. The prosecutor’s office knows for a fact that the deceased was an orphan and had no family members to file an appeal in this case.

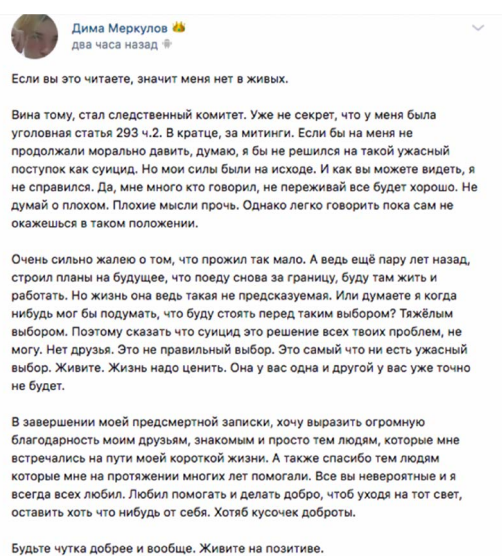
Conclusion

Despite the unconditional right of citizens to freedom of opinion and the right to participate in peaceful protests, the regime brutally persecutes them, imprisoning them for long periods of time.

In the case of Dzmitry Stakhouski, a young man with immature mentality, without family support and assistance, in violation of Article 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the investigator forced him to confess to committing several acts, as a result of which his legal position in the case deteriorated. For a long time, he was repeatedly summoned for interrogation, psychologically pressured, threatened with long terms of imprisonment, forced to confess to crimes, and humiliated, which corresponds to the offence of “Incitement to suicide” (Article 145 of the Criminal Code).

In this case, the state violated international standards of citizens’ electoral rights, the right of citizens to peaceful assembly, the right to a fair trial, and the right to life. The government failed to conduct an effective investigation into the death of Dzmitry Stakhouski.

Availability of documents: Stakhouski’s pre-suicide message on his “VKontakte” social network account.



69 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/26-05-2021-zakonchil-kursy-programmirovaniya-horoshho-zarabatyval-chto-izvestno-o-parne-kotoryj-vybrosilsya-s-16-go-etazha-iz-za-presledovaniya-sk>
70 <https://t.me/prokuraturlbelarus/1037>

5. Kanstantsin Shyshmakou

Background: 29 years old, worked as director of the Military History Museum in Vaukavysk; was a member of the election commission at polling station No. 16 in the 2nd secondary school of Vaukavysk.

Date of death: August 15, 2020

Place of death: forest area one kilometer away from the town of Masty.

Circumstances of the incident

Kanstantsin's parents, Sviatlana and Andrei Shyshmakou, describe the last days of their son's life as follows: "When the election campaign started, Kanstantsin did not want to join the election commission. But he was ordered to take part. On August 9, witnessing the falsifications, he and his colleague refused to sign the final election protocol".⁷¹

Yanina Taraneuskaya, chair of the election commission at polling station #16, denied Kanstantsin's refusal to sign the final protocol.⁷²

Around 23:00 on August 9, the mother received a text message: "I am home, everything ok. They are beating people in Vaukavysk." Sviatlana called him. In a telephone conversation, Kanstantsin told his mother that after the vote count members of the election commission had been given a ride home. But he and his colleague left the polling station on foot since they had nothing to be ashamed of. Kanstantsin also told his parents that on August 9 at around 17-18.00 he was told to travel out of town, he was given a stack of ballot papers and told to bring them to the election commission. Outside the city, some people handed Kanstantsin the ballots and told him to take them to the election commission. But he realized that these were fake ballots and refused to throw them into the ballot boxes.⁷³

On the evening of August 15, 2020, Kanstantsin called his wife and said: "I won't work here anymore, I'm going home."⁷⁴ However, he never showed up at home. Three days later, on August 18, 2020, the body of Kanstantsin Shyshmakou was found by the Angel rescue team in a forest belt near the town of Masty (about 30 kilometers from Vaukavysk), hanged.

The mother of the deceased, Sviatlana, said that next to her son's body there was a camping chair, which he usually had in his car, his feet were touching the ground. Also, Sviatlana mentioned that people in Masty said her son was found absolutely wet, even though it was very dry at the time. Sviatlana says the investigator who examined the case strongly recommended not to open the bag of clothes Kanstantsin was wearing. But when the relatives finally unwrapped the package, his clothes — trousers, and underwear — everything was absolutely clean. Kanstantsin's father pointed out that his son was found to have bruises and scratches on his body, but the postmortem report states that this was not the cause of death. The question of where they came from was not even raised. There was also a mark on the arm, as if the hand had been tied to the ankle. Apart from the strange situation with his clothes, which couldn't have been perfectly clean in such a situation, there were certain ambiguities about his phone. It was locked with a password; the investigator in Vaukavysk tried to unlock it several times but failed. So, in order not to lock the phone completely, he said he would have the phone taken care of by a specialist. The phone was sent to Minsk, where they tried to crack it for two months, later reporting that they found the phone reset to factory settings. But factory settings mean there shouldn't have been a password.⁷⁵

Official cause of death: suicide.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): unidentified.

Official response/investigation (stage)

On August 19, 2020, official representative of the Investigative Committee of Hrodna voblast Inna Pazniak told RIA Novosti that the Investigative Committee of Belarus is conducting a check-up in connection with the death of the director of the military history museum in Vaukavysk, who refused to sign the protocol of the vote count. It has been previously established that it is not of a criminal nature.⁷⁶

On November 27, 2020, the criminal case on the suicide of the director of the Vaukavysk Military-Patriotic

⁷¹ <https://people.onliner.by/2020/08/20/pogib-direktor-muzeya>

⁷² <https://people.onliner.by/2020/08/20/pogib-direktor-muzeya>

⁷³ <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/09-03-2021-ya-ne-veryu-v-suitsid-roditeli-pogibshogo-direktora-volkovysskogo-muzeya-rasskazali-o-syne>

⁷⁴ <https://ru.stranafund.org/blog/istorii-geroev/konstantin-shishmakov-6-zhertva-avgusta-2020>

⁷⁵ <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/09-03-2021-ya-ne-veryu-v-suitsid-roditeli-pogibshogo-direktora-volkovysskogo-muzeya-rasskazali-o-syne>

⁷⁶ <https://ria.ru/20200819/1575976168.html>

Museum K. Shyshmakou, was declined.⁷⁷

Conclusions

Kanstantsin Shyshmakou was a member of the election commission, who refused to participate in falsifying the election results, and did not sign the final protocol of the vote count. As a consequence, he was subjected to strong psychological pressure by representatives of the state (the leadership of the election commission). These facts make it reasonable to classify this death as one in which the state may be involved. In such cases, it is the law enforcement officials who have a vested interest in a thorough and impartial investigation to relieve the state from responsibility for the death.

In the case of this death, the state failed to conduct an effective investigation and did not communicate its results to the family of the deceased. In this incident, the options of incitement to suicide (Article 145 of the Criminal Code) or murder with staged suicide (Article 139 of the Criminal Code) seem potentially possible.

6. Mikita Kryutsou

Background: 28 years old, lived in Zhodzina with his wife and young daughter; was an active soccer fan, had been an FC Maladechna fan since college and, according to a friend, had long been involved in the national fan movement, participating in cultural and political activities. He had the following tattoos: a portrait of poet Yakub Kolas on his leg, Maladechna coat of arms and the slogan “Only Maladechna” on his chest, and a portrait of poet Maxim Bahdanovich under it;⁷⁸ he spoke only in the Belarusian language with his friend lately.

Date of death: August 22, 2020 — the date the body was discovered, indicated on the death certificate. August 12, 2020 – the date he went missing, can be seen on the grave.

Place of death: the body was found in a forest belt near Parnikovaya Street in Minsk.

Circumstances of the incident

On August 9, 2020, Mikita took part in a peaceful protest against the falsification of the presidential elections on Maladechna square. A video⁷⁹ shows him standing alone a few meters in front of a row of security officers, holding a national white-red-white flag in his hands, with a crowd of protesters behind him. The video shows that Mikita has no mask on his face.⁸⁰

Nasha Niva journalists reconstructed the following chain of events in Mikita’s last days. “After participating in the protest in Maladechna on August 9, 2020, Mikita told a friend after midnight that he was in Zhodzina. On August 10, 2020, Mikita told his friend by phone that he was in Minsk and almost got caught by OMON at Niamiha. He said that he managed to escape. At the time of the call, he was on his way back to Zhodzina. On August 11, Mikita called his friend at around 10 a.m. They discussed the rumors that protesters were getting sentences of 8 to 15 years. In the morning of August 12, 2020, Mikita’s mobile phone was no longer reachable.”⁸¹

Onliner cited his wife and brother as saying that “on the morning of 11 August, Mikita came home and told his wife that they wanted to charge him with organising mass riots. He picked up a few things and left. He was supposed to be at work in Karaliou Stan near Minsk at lunchtime on the 12th, but he never showed up there.”⁸²

According to the investigators, “ On 11 August 2020, Kryutsou met two men in one of Minsk bars. After drinking alcohol together, the men went to the home of one of them, where they continued consuming alcohol. On the morning of August 12, Kryutsou left the apartment in an unknown direction. Both men were identified and interviewed. They say they did not see any bodily injuries on Mikita’s body; they did not see him fall. The young people also mentioned that Kryutsou repeatedly expressed his fear that he could be prosecuted for organizing and participating in unauthorized rallies in Maladechna.

⁷⁷ Sixth periodic report submitted by Belarus to the UN Committee against Torture under Article 19 of the CAT (CAT/C/BLR/6), paragraph 131, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FBLR%2F6&Lang=ru

⁷⁸ Since August 2020, the presence of tattoos on the body, especially of pro-Belarus content, is treated by law enforcement agencies as extremism, a reason for prosecution, up to criminal punishment in the form of imprisonment. When detained, such citizens are beaten and subjected to the most brutal punishment in places of detention.

⁷⁹ <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=259077&lang=ru>

⁸⁰ <https://t.me/molovTG/572>

⁸¹ <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=259077&lang=ru>

⁸² <https://people.onliner.by/2020/09/02/brat-najdennogo-mertvym-nikity-krivcova-rasskazyvaet-podrobnosti-ego-propazhi>

In addition, investigators found video footage that shows Kryutsou walking alone at around 7.00 on 12 August 2020 towards the forest, where his body was later found. The video footage also shows that he did not have any injuries.”⁸³

According to the brother of the deceased, there is a witness who claims that he saw Mikita on the MKAD Road and gave him a lift to Parnikovaya Street. Mikita had been beaten and told him about his arrest on August 12, 2020.⁸⁴ The family also has several sources who claimed to have seen Nikita at Akrestsina TDF, one witness even claimed to have seen his neck twisted. However, there is no evidence to confirm this, as the witnesses did not disclose their identities.⁸⁵ .

Kryutsou’s phone was last located at the Neurology and Neurosurgery Hospital of Minsk⁸⁶. As Pavel Kukhto, the brother of the deceased, explained: “...there was information that his phone was switched on at the Hospital of Neurosurgery. However, the signal accuracy can range between 100 and 500 meters. It is unclear where exactly Mikita’s mobile phone was switched on. Interestingly enough, there is a Department of Internal Affairs of the Minsk District Executive Committee in this neighborhood.”⁸⁷

On the evening of 22 August 2022, Mikita’s body was discovered by the watchman of a nearby dacha cooperative. The photo taken by the watchman shows Mikita standing on the ground. The watchman said there was a tree stump lying next to the body, but the investigators did not pay attention to it and did not collect it as physical evidence. “There was a passport sticking out of his shorts pocket and a phone case lying next to his body. Mikita’s friends and mother claim that the case did not belong to him, although the investigator returned it to his mother at the end of the investigation. But his friends claim that Mikita never had the case.”⁸⁸



Photo: Nasha Niva website

83 <https://minsknews.by/usk-po-g-minsku-prinyato-reshenie-po-materialu-proverki-po-faktu-smerti-28-letnego-nikity-krivczova/>

84 <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=259077&lang=ru>

85 <https://nashaniva.com/ru/317599>

86 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/ne-boyalsya-pokazat-svoi-vzglyady-v-molodechno-proshhayutsya-s-protestuyushhim-kotorogo-nashli-poveshennym-v-minske>

87 <https://people.onliner.by/2020/09/02/brat-najdennogo-mertvym-nikity-krivcova-rasskazyvaet-podrobnosti-ego-propazhi>

88 <https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=259077&lang=ru>

Mikita's mother, Anzhelika Kukhto, says that the officers told her ex-husband, Mikita's father: "If you open this coffin and look, you will [face] up to criminal liability."⁸⁹

Official cause of death: suicide.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): unidentified.

Official response/investigation (stage)

On 23 August 2020, the Investigative Committee published the following in its Telegram channel: "Yesterday, 22 August, the body of a 28-year-old man without signs of life was found in a forest belt near one of the buildings on Parnikovaya Street in Minsk. An investigative and operational team arrived at the scene of the incident. According to preliminary data, the death is not criminal in nature, there are no visible injuries on the body. An investigation into this fact is being carried out; forensic medical examination to find out the causes of death will be carried out by a specialist from the State Committee for Forensic Examinations."⁹⁰

In March 2021 the head of the division of the Minsk Investigation Directorate of the Investigation Committee Viktor Hramovich⁹¹ reported that "following the results of the examination of Mikita Kryutsou's death carried out by the Minsk Directorate, it was decided not to start criminal proceedings for lack of corpus delicti in anyone's actions. The conclusion about M. Kryutsou's suicide was made on the basis of the circumstances documented at the site where the corpse was found: the absence of traces of struggle and dragging both at the scene and on the body, the conclusions of the forensic medical examination about the causes and time of death, as well as other materials of the examination. It should be noted that, according to the expert's report, in addition to the ligature marks on the neck, which could have been formed when the noose was tightened under its own weight, the body had haemorrhages in the soft tissues of the right and left shins. In the course of the examination, the investigators concluded that, given the close proximity of his body to the trunk of the tree, Kryutsou could have received these injuries during the stage of expiratory dyspnoea, which, as a rule, is accompanied by drastic convulsive body movements. No other traumatic lifetime injuries were found on the man's corpse."⁹²

Mikita Kryutsou's family members were not familiarized with the materials of the examination and were not given a copy of the decision not to institute criminal proceedings, even though the applicant was the wife of the deceased.

The investigative examination did not identify neither the persons responsible for the death of Mikita Kryutsou, who, according to the officials, had committed suicide, nor the persons who induced him to commit it. On 22 February 2021, a decision was made to refuse to institute criminal proceedings for lack of corpus delicti.⁹³

Conclusion

Information from official sources is highly questionable, as it diverges from the statements of family members, witnesses, and various evidence. A screenshot from the video which investigators claim to show Mikita heading towards the forest on 12 August 2020, by himself, does not allow to establish the identity of the person depicted in the video.

In the period from August 2020, protesters with tattoos, and even more so with Belarusian symbols, were beaten with special zeal. The Internet has a lot of evidence of Mikita's active participation in the protests. In one of the videos, Mikita, keeping his face uncovered, walks along the police line with the national flag on his back. These facts may indicate that Mikita may have been detained and beaten, and several witnesses point to this. In addition, witnesses state that Mikita himself seriously feared persecution and arrest for his participation in the rallies.

Given the State's failure to conduct an effective investigation and to communicate its findings to the victim's family, it is not possible to reliably assert what other obligations (other than the investigation itself) the State has breached. The possible options are murder (article 139 of the Criminal Code) or intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm that caused death by negligence (article 147, part 3, of the Criminal Code).

⁸⁹ <https://nashaniva.com/ru/317599>

⁹⁰ <https://t.me/skgovby/2971>

⁹¹ <https://www.the-village.me/village/city/news-city/287671-krivtsov-result>

⁹² <https://minsknews.by/usk-po-g-minsku-prinyato-reshenie-po-materialu-proverki-po-faktu-smerti-28-letnego-nikity-krivczova/>

⁹³ Sixth periodic report submitted by Belarus to the UN Committee against Torture under Article 19 of the CAT (CAT/C/BLR/6), paragraph 131, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FBLR%2F6&Lang=ru

7. Raman Bandarenka

Background: 31 years old, lived in Minsk. After the 2020 election, he supported protest activism in his neighborhood.

Date of death: November 12, 2020

Place of death: intensive care unit of emergency hospital in Minsk.

Circumstances of the incident

On 11 November 2020, late at night, a group of unknown people (later identified as members of Lukashenka's inner circle) appeared in the courtyard of the apartment building at 58 Charviakova Street in Minsk (also known as the "Square of Changes", a popular protest site). Among them were Natalia Eismant (press secretary of the President of Belarus), Dzmitry Baskau (chairman of the Belarusian Ice Hockey Federation), people associated with law enforcement agencies, Dzmitry Shakuta (special training instructor of the special forces of the Internal Troops (SOBR) in the military units No. 3214 and 3032), Yauhen Tsimanouski (senior warrant officer of the SOBR) and others). The group began to cut off the white-red-white ribbons decorating the courtyard. A scuffle broke out between them and local residents. Raman Bandarenka intervened.

The video, shot by eyewitnesses and CCTV cameras, clearly shows unknown persons dragging Bandarenka into a van and driving away.⁹⁴

Raman Bandarenka was brought to the Centralny police department of Minsk in critical condition. Two hours later, an ambulance took Raman, who was in a coma, to the intensive care unit of the emergency hospital. Raman was admitted to hospital with brain swelling, closed cranial trauma and numerous haematomas. He underwent a complex multi-hour brain surgery. On 12 November, Bandarenka died of his injuries without regaining consciousness.⁹⁵

Journalistic investigations conducted by TUT.by, "Mediazona" and ByPol group reconstructed the chronology of events in the evening of 11 November. They refuted the official version, as well as identified those involved in the incident, collaborating it with cellular billing data and "leaked" audio recordings of wiretapped phone conversations.⁹⁶

Official cause of death: Code S06.5 ("traumatic subdural hemorrhage") is listed in the "cause of death" column on the death certificate.

The alleged perpetrators: Dzmitry Baskau (chairman of the Ice Hockey Federation of Belarus), Dzmitry Shakuta (special training instructor in military units #3214 and 3032 (SOBR) of the Interior Forces), Yauhen Tsimanouski (senior warrant officer of SOBR, MMA fighter⁹⁷), Siarhei Sarman (SOBR team leader) and a group of SOBR fighters (military unit #3032, Minsk), Aliaksei Babkou (deputy head of the Minsk Centralny RUVD, duty officer from 11 to 12 November 2020), Dzmitry Balaba (commander of the Minsk OMON).

Official response/investigation (stage): The authorities tried to mislead the public from the very beginning by stating that Raman was in a state of alcohol intoxication.⁹⁸ Laboratory blood tests did not confirm this.⁹⁹ Subsequently, the arrests were made of TUT.by reporter Katsiaryna Barysevich, who reported that there was no alcohol in Raman Bandarenka's blood at the time of his death, and doctor Artsiom Sarokin, who presented the results of Raman Bandarenka's medical examination. On 2 March 2021, Judge Sviatlana Bandarenka of Minsk Maskouski District Court sentenced Barysevich to six months' imprisonment and fined her 100 basic values (2,900 BYN). Later the General Prosecutor's Office protested the judgement deeming it too "soft".¹⁰⁰ Sarokin received a one-year suspended sentence of two years' imprisonment and a fine of 50 basic values (1,450 BYN). The role of the state prosecutor in this case was played by Ludmila Ivanenka.¹⁰¹

The intelligence services tapped the phones of Raman's family members and put them under

94 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdNmCK15wFQ> , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NX82Lb_i9QQ

95 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210501220456/https://news.tut.by/society/707678.html>

96 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210217093838/https://news.tut.by/society/707698.html>, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210127183226/https://news.tut.by/society/710991.html>, <https://mediazona.by/article/2020/11/16/bondarenko>, <https://bypol.org/rassledovaniye-smerti-bondarenko/>

97 Mixed martial arts (ultimate fighting).

98 <https://t.me/skgovby/3395>, <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-poruchil-vzjat-pod-serjeznejshij-kontrol-rassledovanie-obstoitelstv-smerti-romana-415578-2020/>

99 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210517160937/https://news.tut.by/society/707715.html>

100 <https://press-club.pro/underpressure/katerina-borisevich>

101 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/102226>, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/kacjaryna-barysevicz>

surveillance.¹⁰²

On 13 November 2020, Lukashenka stated during an interview with several Belarusian and international media outlets that he had instructed the Prosecutor General of Belarus to investigate the circumstances of Bandarenka's death and bring it under "the most serious scrutiny".¹⁰³

On 18 February 2021, it was officially announced that a criminal case had been opened over Bandarenka's death under Part 3 of Article 147 of the Criminal Code (intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm resulting in negligent homicide). However, despite all the available evidence, the Prosecutor General's Office stated that the involvement of internal affairs officers in the incident "has not been established".¹⁰⁴ On 17 September 2021, the investigation was suspended for an indefinite period of time "due to the failure to identify the person to be charged".¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

During the protest actions in Belarus, those supporting Lukashenka's regime were given full freedom and a guarantee of impunity for all actions in the fight against any manifestations of civil activity. Pro-government activists came to destroy national symbols and decorations placed by the residents under the cover of security forces. They severely beat Raman Bandarenka and drove him to the Centralny police department of Minsk with a reference to alcoholic intoxication. As a result of severe injuries inflicted by security forces, he died in the hospital.

The state violated international standards for the protection of the right to life, national norms for law enforcement (unlawful use of force, failure to provide medical assistance). Subsequently, senior officials disseminated information defaming Raman and containing not only personal but also untruthful information about him. No effective investigation was carried out by the regime, the results of the investigation are hidden from family members, the true perpetrators of Raman Bandarenka's death went unpunished, despite multiple evidence of the crime. No material compensation has been paid to the family of the deceased.

8. Uladzimir Krysonak

Background: 41 years old, had a wife and two daughters, former employee of the Naftan plant in Navapolatsk; in the fall of 2020 he joined the national strike, in 2021 he ran for the position of chairman of the independent trade union of Naftan employees.

Date of death: May 30, 2022

Place of death: the body was found at his mother's summer house in the village of Hlinishcha

Circumstances of the incident

On 24 May 2022, Uladzimir Krysonak was arrested and released in 72 hours on his own recognizance not to leave the country. Uladzimir's friends told human rights activists that "the reason for the arrest could have been the recent publication of a video clip¹⁰⁶ showing the deplorable technical condition of the facility where Uladzimir used to work". During interrogation, police forced him to testify against his former colleagues and threatened him with 12 years in prison.¹⁰⁷

Uladzimir Krysonak was found hanged one day after his release. The body was discovered on 30 May 2022 at his mother's country house in the village of Hlinishcha and buried on 1 June 2022. Uladzimir Krysonak was 41 years old. Two daughters, one of them a minor, lost their father.¹⁰⁸

Official cause of death: suicide.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): the investigator, the interrogators.

Official response/investigation (stage): unknown

102 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/vlasti-okazyvayut-davlenie-na-semyu-romana-bondarenko>, <https://t.me/motolkohelp/17504>

103 <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-poruchil-vzjat-pod-serjeznejshij-kontrol-rassledovanie-obstojatelstv-smerti-romana-415578-2020/>

104 <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/genprokuratura-vozbudila-ugolovnoe-delo-po-faktu-smerti-romana-bondarenko-429194-2021/>, <https://t.me/prokuraturabelarus/718>

105 <https://t.me/prokuraturabelarus/1340>

106 <https://t.me/belsat/75600>

107 <https://t.me/viasna96/11685>

108 <https://hashaniva.com/ru/292730>

Conclusions

Uladzimir Krysonak was an active member of the independent trade union, stood as a candidate for the chairmanship, and joined the nationwide strike, i.e., he can be considered an opponent of the current regime.

In such cases, it is the state's interest to ensure a thorough and impartial investigation into the death of a citizen to exclude the possibility of the state being responsible for the death.

During his arrest, the police officers exerted psychological pressure on Uladzimir, unreasonably threatening him with criminal prosecution and long sentences, humiliated his human dignity, and demanded that he provide data on his co-workers, thereby effectively exposing them to the risk of criminal prosecution. Such actions of the law enforcement agencies, coupled with severe psychological pressure, may constitute an offence under Article 145 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus “ Incitement to Suicide”.

In the case of this death, the state failed to conduct an effective investigation and did not communicate its results to the family of the deceased. No material compensation was paid to the family.

Deaths of prisoners since 2020

It is extremely difficult to research conditions of detention, as well as information on the provision of medical care, deaths, and suicides in custody, due to the lack of access to penitentiary facilities and other places of detention. Official sources do not publish this kind of data. The main sources of information on deaths in custody are publications in independent media or information provided by family members and fellow inmates.

Practically since the beginning of 2023, political prisoners in have been held *incommunicado*.¹⁰⁹ They are denied correspondence, visits with relatives and lawyers, and are held in an information vacuum. This is seen both as the regime's desire to psychologically break political prisoners and to deprive the public of any information about what is happening behind bars.

Political prisoners,¹¹⁰ especially in penal colonies and prisons, are among the highest risk groups in terms of health and loss of life. Some of them belong to vulnerable social groups due to their age and health status. As a result of direct orders from their superiors, correctional officers create cruel inhuman conditions for them, placing them in punishment cells and ward-type rooms. The conditions of stay there can be equated to torture:¹¹¹ a prisoner is kept in a very cold and damp cell for multiple days without warm clothes and shoes, proper lighting and food, without bedding, in a difficult psychological state due to constant threats, beating and laddering of far-fetched rule breaches, and without the necessary medical care. All this often leads to death.

In recent years alone, at least three well-known political prisoners — civil activist [Vitold Ashurak](#)¹¹², human rights activist [Mikalai Klimovich](#)¹¹³, and artist [Ales Pushkin](#)¹¹⁴ — have died in penal colonies for these very reasons.

The management of prisons and colonies uses employees and other convicts to deliberately create difficult psychological conditions for political prisoners.

People with psychological issues, depressed for a long time without proper mental and psychiatric support, could attempt suicide in such circumstances ([Dzmitry Dudoits](#)).

There are also known cases where detainees died after severe beatings in police stations, during arrest or in places of detention ([Aliakandr Vikhor](#), [Dzmitry Sarokin](#)).

COVID-19 is another cause of deaths of those administratively arrested for political reasons and serving their arrests in the Offenders Isolation Center at Akrestsina or in other facilities. The staff of isolation centres deliberately create harsh conditions for political prisoners, which exacerbated the Covid situation. Overcrowding of cells, exceeding the norms by 4-10 times (a four-bed cell could hold 20-30 people), low temperature and cutting off heating, failure to dispense medicines and hygiene products, insufficient or disabled ventilation, and failure to provide medical care led to irreversible consequences for sick detainees.¹¹⁵ In particular, pensioners [Alena Amelina](#) and [Siarhei Shchatsinka](#) died immediately after their release from the Offenders Isolation Center from the effects of Covid-19.

The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus has repeatedly emphasized this problem in its documents: *“By purposefully keeping people in overcrowded cells at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the staff of the OIC jeopardized their health and lives. The sick and those in need of constant medication, as well as the traumatized and injured, did not receive any urgent medical care, which resulted in severe health consequences for many of them.”*¹¹⁶

A similar situation was observed not only at Akrestsina, but also in the isolation centers of Baranavichy, Zhodzina and Mahiliou. The detainees reported that entire cells, 14 people or so, were sick with Covid in the Baranavichy TDF. They did not receive medical care for several days.

109 International human rights mechanisms rank it alongside enforced disappearances as one of the most serious human rights violations.

110 Those recognised as political prisoners by the Belarusian human rights community. <https://spring96.org/ru/news/100870> (Guidelines on the definition of a political prisoner).

111 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/110574>

112 Joint statement of the Belarusian human rights community. 21.01.2021 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/101555>

113 Statement by human rights defenders on the recognition of 20 new political prisoners. 15.03.2023 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/111071>

114 Statement on recognizing artist Ales Pushkin as a political prisoner. 06.04./2021 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/102799>

115 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/21-10-2021-u-vas-bylo-vremya-begat-s-flagami-a-u-menya-sejchas-vremeni-net-kak-v-izolyatorah-otnosyatsya-k-bolnym-covid-19>

116 “You will rot here.” Akrestsina prisoners testify.” Public inquiry into cases of mass torture in the Offenders Isolation Center in Minsk on August 9–14, 2020. https://torturesbelarus2020.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/okrest%D0%B8na_rus.pdf

Despite the fact that these people did not die in detention centers, but in medical institutions and at home after release, experts attribute these incidents to deaths caused by the regime, due to inadequate conditions of detention of administrative detainees and lack of medical care in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It should be noted that such conditions were created in the OIC deliberately following the instructions of the superior — the deputy head of the Department of Internal Affairs of Minsk Regional Executive Committee Maksimovich, who demanded to create “comfortable conditions for detainees, with a U-turn”.¹¹⁷

This paper describes two cases of death from COVID-19 after serving administrative arrest. However, the number of deaths among those infected with COVID-19 may be higher.

On the basis of our analysis, we present a list of correctional institutions of the penitentiary system and bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, where detainees and prisoners died in the period from August 2020 to September 2023. In all these cases, the alleged perpetrators are the direct supervisors of correctional institutions and ROVDs, as well as the heads of medical units. All their actions/inactions require thorough investigation and prosecution.

No.	Name of the deceased	Date of death	Institution	Head of the institution	Head of the medical unit	Cause of death
1.	Aliaksandr Vikhor	12.08.2020	Chyhunachny ROVD of Homel	Ihar Tsimashenka	No such position	“Closed cranial injury in question” and “third-degree coma,” heart problems.
2.	Vitold Ashurak	21.05.2021	IK-17, Shklou	Aliaksandr Karniyenka	Head of the medical unit, Major of the Internal Service Natalya Dobradzeravets	Code R99 — Ill-defined and unknown cause of mortality
3.	Dzmitry Dudoits	05.01.2022	Open correctional facility No. 43, Mahiliou	Taranko Siarhei Yurievich	No such position	Suicide while serving a sentence
4.	Alena Amelina	October 2021	Akrestsina OIC	Shapetska Yauhen Andreevich	No data	Death from the consequences of coronavirus infection
5.	Siarhei Shchatsinka	11.12.2020	Asipovichy TDF	Anikeyeu Aliaksandr Mikhailavich	No such position	Death from the consequences of coronavirus infection
6.	Mikalai Klimovich	05.05.2023	IK-3, Vitsba, Vitebsk district	Aliaksei Staravoitau	Valery Ramanau	Disability, group II, due to cardiovascular disease, suffered a stroke and a complex heart surgery. Death from inadequate medical care in a penal colony.
7.	Ales Pushkin	11.07.2023	Prison No. 1, Hrodna	Pavel Kazakou	Viktar Luttsau	Died in a city hospital from the consequences of neglected peritonitis as a result of a perforated gastric ulcer
8.	Dzmitry Sarokin	01.06.2023	Lida ROVD	Siarhei Sytsevich	No such position	Heart problems

1. Aliaksandr Vikhor

Background: 25 years old, lived in Homel with his parents, was an athlete, a candidate master of sports in swimming.

Date of death: August 12, 2020 (03:35).

Place of death: intensive care unit of the Homel Regional Tuberculosis Clinical Hospital.

Circumstances of the incident

According to Vikhor’s mother Sviatlana, on the evening of 9 August 2020, Aliaksandr was on his way to a

¹¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywnnLKrJ844>

date with his girlfriend and had to make a transfer at Lenin Square in Homel, the venue of the protest at the time. When his mother called him, he said: “Three riot policemen grabbed me and pushed me into a van, I don’t know where they are taking me.” After that, his phone became unreachable. His mother last spoke to him at around 5am on 10 August, when he called her from a stranger’s phone from the Chyhunachny ROVD and told her that he had had his “fingerprints and statements taken”. After that, the family could not find him anywhere for two days.¹¹⁸

On August 11, the Chyhunachny District Court of Homel sentenced Vikhor to 10 days of arrest. After the trial he was taken to the Chyhunachny ROVD of Homel¹¹⁹.

A witness told the Onliner journalists that Aliaksandr had a nervous breakdown in the gym of the police station: he began to behave inadequately and did not obey the policemen. In response, they beat him with batons. No medical care was rendered to him. After that Vikhor was transferred to Homel pre-trial detention centre in a narrow compartment inside a police vehicle, where they were sitting very tightly together with the witness, lacking air and unable to move. They spent about an hour in such conditions. The witness said that Aliaksandr became delirious, he did not understand where he was, he called his relatives and demanded to be let out. In response, the policemen sprayed some pepper spray into their section. After all the detainees got off the paddy wagon, Vikhor was left inside and the guards were asked to “teach him a lesson” as, according to them, he was a drug addict.¹²⁰ Aliaksandr Vikhor was brutally beaten in the police vehicle.

Two or three hours later, Aliaksandr was brought to a psychiatric hospital, but the hospital authorities refused to admit him. An ambulance was then called there, whose staff recorded that “the patient was lying on the floor, had no complaints, and was in a state of coma”. An ambulance transported Vikhor to the regional tuberculosis hospital (the closest health care facility with an intensive care unit), where he was diagnosed with “closed craniocerebral trauma under question” and “third-degree coma”. Despite the best efforts to save him, he passed away on the morning of 12 August 2020 at 03.35.¹²¹

The investigator initially told the family that Aliaksandr allegedly died of a drug overdose,¹²² which was later disproved by forensic results.¹²³

Official cause of death: acute circulatory failure developed due to sudden exacerbation of existing diseases of the cardiovascular system.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): the police officers who beat him in the paddy wagon, and the head of the Chyhunachny District Department of Internal Affairs of Homel, police colonel Ihar Mikalayevich Tsimashenka.

Official response/investigation (stage)

On 16 February 2021, the Investigative Committee refused to open a criminal investigation into Vikhor’s death for lack of corpus delicti.¹²⁴ Head of the Investigative Committee of Homel region Siarhei Udovikau stated that his death “occurred as a result of acute circulatory failure, which developed due to the existing diseases of the cardiovascular system” and that “the mental disorder developed by Aliaksandr Vikhor masked the clinical manifestations of his heart disease”.¹²⁵

Vikhor’s mother confirmed that her son had a heart condition, but it did not prevent him from living a normal life, even doing sports. According to medical personnel, Aliaksandr was delivered to the intensive care unit already in a state of clinical death with brain oedema.¹²⁶ When the mother collected her son’s body, she noticed that his ribs and sternum were broken, which, according to the Investigative Committee’s version, allegedly happened during resuscitation measures — indirect cardiac massage. The relatives were not given access to the full text of the forensic report, some pages were missing.¹²⁷

Sviatlana Vikhor appealed to the Prosecutor’s Office questioning the legality of the refusal to initiate criminal proceedings by the Investigative Committee, but both the Prosecutor’s Office of Homel Region and the Prosecutor General’s Office considered this refusal to be lawful and justified and did not see any

118 <https://web.archive.org/web/20200812211711/https://news.tutby.news/society/696437.html>

119 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/102625>

120 <https://people.onliner.by/2020/08/16/kto-to-bryznul-v-nash-otsek-avtozaka-iz-percovogo-ballonchika-ochevidec-rasskazyvaet-kak-oboshlis-s-aleksandrom-vixorom>

121 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/102625>

122 <https://web.archive.org/web/20201219012123/https://news.tut.by/society/696515.html>

123 <https://people.onliner.by/2020/12/12/kak-idut-proverki-po-delam-pogibshix-vo-vremya-protestov>

124 CAT/C/BLR/6, para. 149;

125 <https://belta.by/incident/view/usk-gomelchanin-aleksandr-vihor-umer-iz-za-vnezapno-obostrivshih-sja-zabolevanij-428881-2021/>, <https://gp.by/novosti/obshchestvo/news230627.html>

126 <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus-rally-vikhor/30815466.html>

127 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210105133004/https://news.tut.by/society/707317.html>

grounds to initiate the proceedings.

The law enforcement officials threatened to charge one of the witnesses of Vikhor's arrest, who saw police beat him with batons, with "spreading unreliable information".¹²⁸

Conclusion

The law enforcement officers brutally beat up Aliaksandr Vikhor in the premises of Chyhunachny District Department of Internal Affairs. Then they placed him in a cramped compartment in a paddy wagon, which caused him to panic. However, instead of providing medical assistance, the police continued violent actions against Vikhor: they sprayed pepper spray into the compartment, left him in the paddy wagon and beat him there to a critical state, after which he went into a coma.

Thus, the State committed the following violations of international standards and legal requirements that led to the death of Aliaksandr Vikhor: arbitrary detention, unlawful use of force by police officers, failure to provide medical assistance, and failure to conduct an effective investigation. No material compensation was paid to the victim's family.

2. Vitold Ashurak

Background: 50 years old, lived in Biarozauka, Lida district, Hrodna region, was a political and environmental activist — a member of the Belarusian Popular Front party, one of the coordinators of the Movement "For Freedom" and the organizer of protests in the Lida district in 2020.

Date of death: May 21, 2021

Place of death: penal colony No. 17 in the city of Shklou, Mahiliou region.

Circumstances of the incident

Vitold Ashurak was arrested in September 2020 in Lida and sentenced in a closed court hearing on 18 January 2021 to five years' imprisonment on charges of organizing group actions that grossly violate public order (Article 342 of the Criminal Code) and violence against an employee of the internal affairs bodies (Article 346 of the Criminal Code). Belarusian human rights defenders recognized these charges and the sentence as politically motivated.¹²⁹

On 22 April 2021, after the rejection of the appeal against the sentence, Ashurak was transferred to penal colony No. 17 in Shklou, Mahiliou region, to serve his sentence.

In the evening of 21 May 2021, a representative of the Investigative Committee called Ashurak's wife and informed her of her husband's death in the colony, presumably because of cardiac arrest. On 25 May, his body with a bandaged head was handed over to his family. They were told that the body allegedly fell out of the morgue's refrigerator.¹³⁰ The preliminary medical report they received said "to be clarified" in the "official cause of death" column.¹³¹

On the same day, the Department of the Investigative Committee for Mahiliou region published a video, edited from several fragments, which shows a man in a prisoner's uniform (presumably Vitold) first falling and hitting his head in the cell while trying to go to the toilet, then his head is bandaged, and later he falls again.¹³²

Representatives of the Investigative Committee claimed that Ashurak was found in his cell in an unconscious state after the second fall. The colony's medical unit and ambulance staff were called in to provide him with qualified assistance, but despite the resuscitation measures carried out by the paramedics, it was not possible to save his life. According to the colony staff, "the convict, upon smashing his head, did not complain about his state of health, and refused from help and hospitalization".¹³³

Vitold's family and friends claim that he had no previous health problems. When he was last seen in February-March 2021, before being sent to the colony, he also looked quite healthy and cheerful. When Vitold's body was handed over, it looked extremely thin and emaciated, he seemed to have lost at least 15-20kg. As his relatives learned, after his arrival in Shklou, Ashurak was never assigned to one of the colony's units — he spent all his days there in isolation, first in quarantine and then in the punishment

¹²⁸ <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/usk-gomelchanin-aleksandr-vihor-umer-iz-za-vnezapno-obostrivshih-sja-zabolevanij-428881-2021/>

¹²⁹ <https://spring96.org/ru/news/101555>, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/vitold-ashurak>

¹³⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-57642388>

¹³¹ <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/31-03-2022-prichiny-smerti-vitolda-ashurka-zaklyucheniya-nezavisimyh-ekspertov>

¹³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weCCKcNh3OU>

¹³³ <https://sk.gov.by/ru/news-usk-mogilev-ru/view/sledovатели-ustanavlivajut-obstojatelstva-smerti-osuzhdennogo-v-kolonii-v-shklove-10022>

cell. Former prisoners who served their sentences in the same colony told the media that Vitold could have been beaten and abused there.¹³⁴

In his letters to his relatives, Ashurak mentioned that he kept a diary, but this diary was not found among his personal belongings handed over to his relatives after his death. They hoped that the diary might shed some light on what happened to Vitold in detention, but their attempts to find it were unsuccessful, which may indicate an attempt by the security forces to cover up torture.¹³⁵

An independent investigation conducted by the “Alliance of Investigators of Belarus”, published in January 2022, concludes that Vitold Ashurak was not provided with proper medical care and the colony administration is guilty of causing his death by negligence.¹³⁶

Official cause of death: ICD code R99 (“Other ill-defined and unspecified causes of mortality”) is listed in the “cause of death” column on his death certificate.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): Head of IK-17 Aliaksandr Karniyenka, Head of the regime department of IK-17 Siarhei Karcheuskii, Head of the medical unit of IK-17 Natalya Dobradzeravets, IK-17 psychiatrist-narcologist Ihar Kandratsenkau, IK-17 medical unit doctor Tatsiana Razviankova, duty Assistant Head of IK-17 Dzianis Sazonau, Judge of the Lida District Court Maksim Filatau,¹³⁷ secretary of the court session (secretary of Judge Filatau) Nadzeya Papova,¹³⁸ investigator (death examination) Pavel Starykau.¹³⁹

Official response/investigation (stage)

Vitold’s brother Andrei Ashurak submitted two requests to the Investigative Committee to see the forensic report and other materials of the preliminary examination of his death (in September and November 2021), but in both cases he was refused: the first time — with reference to the fact that the additional forensic examination ordered as part of the examination had not been completed,¹⁴⁰ and the second — to the fact that his brother is not the legal representative of the interests of the deceased.¹⁴¹ At the time of writing this report, October 2023, there is still no information on either the official cause of Ashurak’s death or the opening of a criminal case on the matter.

The examination of Ashurak’s death was carried out by the senior investigator of the Mahiliou region Investigative Committee, Major of Justice Pavel Starykau.¹⁴²

Andrei Ashurak repeatedly tried to get at least some information about its results and return his brother’s personal belongings. The Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor General’s Office ignored his appeals.

In December 2021 Andrei Ashurak and Vitold’s friend Siarhei Pantus learned about the risk of their criminal prosecution in the case of “hooliganism” (for shouting “Shame!” in the courtroom after the announcement of Vitold’s sentence).¹⁴³ Both of them had to urgently leave Belarus.

Conclusion

Staff of Colony No. 17 placed the emaciated and weakened Vitold Ashurak in a punishment cell and deliberately tortured him with the conditions of detention. The cause of death and the events preceding it cannot be ascertained at present, but the blame for the death of the prisoner rests entirely with the management and staff of the colony, whose duty is to ensure the safety and protection of the health and lives of the prisoners.

The investigation into the case has been delayed at all stages and kept secret.

Thus, the State committed violations of international standards of detention and treatment of prisoners and of national laws, which subsequently led to the death of Vitold Ashurak: arbitrary detention, failure to hold a fair trial, torture, failure to provide medical care, and refusal to conduct an effective investigation and to compensate the family of the person who died in custody.

134 <https://svaboda.org/a/32145796.html>, <https://svaboda.org/a/32153349.html>

135 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/31-03-2022-prichiny-smerti-vitolda-ashurka-zaklyucheniya-nezavisimyh-ekspertov/>

136 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/31-03-2022-prichiny-smerti-vitolda-ashurka-zaklyucheniya-nezavisimyh-ekspertov/>

137 <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/vitold-ashurak>

138 https://be-tarask.wikipedia.org/wiki/Лідзкі_ПАУС#cite_note-5

139 <https://www.svaboda.org/a/31860041.html>

140 <https://web.archive.org/web/20211023075715/https://naviny.online/new/20211021/1634832093-sk-provodit-dopolnitel-nuyu-sudmedekspertizu-prichin-smerti-vitolda-ashurka>

141 <https://spring96.org/ru/news/107754>

142 https://t.me/allians_belarus/13

143 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/16-12-2021-prokuratura-vozbudila-ugolovnoe-delo-za-skandirovanie-pozor-posle-prigovora-vitoldu-ashurku>

3. Dzmitry Dudoits

Background: 43 years old, lived in Smarhon; was sentenced to two years in open type facility on charges of insulting an official for posting a comment on Odnoklassniki social network, where, according to the investigation materials, even before the election, he “used obscene language to characterize the head of Hantsavichy District Department of Internal Affairs Vitaly Kuleshou, captioning his photo: ‘bald bastard, our time will soon come...’”.¹⁴⁴ From 29 December 2021, he served his sentence in the open-type correctional facility No. 43.¹⁴⁵

Date of death: January 5, 2022

Place of death: Mahiliou, Chaluskintsau Street.

Circumstances of the incident

On the day of the incident, the convicts were taken to the clinic for a medical examination. Returning from the clinic, Dzmitry Dudoyts ran away from his escort. At about 11 o'clock, Mahiliou residents noticed a man lying on the road under the bridge.¹⁴⁶ Dzmitry jumped from the bridge onto the roadway.¹⁴⁷

According to his close friends,¹⁴⁸ the man left to serve his sentence with an injury — on 3 September he tore a ligament in his left knee joint. Before the trial, his family collected all the medical certificates and tried to prove that Dzmitry used crutches and could not do physical work. The court did not take Dzmitry's health condition into account.

His mental state was difficult, too. Leaving home and being separated from his loved ones took a heavy toll on him. His psychological state was very bad. His relationship with people in the facility did not work out for him — the man told his friends that [he was surrounded by] “a hundred people and no one says hello”. It is likely that other inmates were forbidden by the facility staff to communicate with Dzmitry.

Official cause of death: suicide.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): Head of Mahiliou open-type penitentiary facility No. 43 Taranko, Siarhei Yuryevich, judge — Siarhei Bolandz.¹⁴⁹

Official response/investigation (stage)

The Investigative Committee states¹⁵⁰ that Dudoyts (his last name is not mentioned in the message) arrived in Mahiliou open-type correctional facility to serve his sentence on 29 December 2021. On Wednesday morning, accompanied by a member of the administration, a group of convicts visited a polyclinic for a physical examination. It is alleged that the political prisoner “later ... independently left it” heading towards Chaluskintsau Street, where he jumped off the bridge onto the motorway and was fatally injured. Eyewitnesses reported the incident to law enforcement officers.¹⁵¹

The Investigative Committee carried out investigative actions, witnesses were interviewed, and examinations were appointed. Video of Dudoits's death was published.¹⁵²

Conclusion

Initially, Judge Siarhei Bolandz sentenced Dzmitry Dudoits with no consideration for his physical state of health, despite the presence of relevant medical documents. The corrections officers created unbearably difficult conditions for the political prisoner in the facility, exerted the strongest psychological pressure on him, including through other inmates, as noted by Dzmitry himself. He was not provided with psychological support or help in adapting to the conditions of confinement. Such treatment by the security staff of the correctional facility can be considered an offence under Article 145 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (“Incitement to Suicide”).

Thus, the state failed to take measures to preserve the life of Dzmitry Dudoits, did not create acceptable conditions for serving his sentence, including by organizing psychological assistance and medical care, thus violating international standards for the treatment of prisoners. No effective investigation into his

144 <https://hashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=282654&lang=ru&ysclid=lk9mwf978y147447312>

145 <https://t.me/viasna96/8810>

146 <https://motolko.help/ru-news/zaklyuchyonnyj-dmitrij-dudojt-sovershil-suicid-v-mogilyove/>

147 <https://t.me/zamkadomy/11433>

148 <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/8192.html>

149 <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/dzmitryi-dudoic>

150 <https://t.me/skgovby/6212>

151 <https://euroradio.fm/ru/sledstvennyy-komitet-o-samoubiystve-politzaklyuchennogo-v-mogileve>

152 <https://euroradio.fm/ru/sledstvennyy-komitet-o-samoubiystve-politzaklyuchennogo-v-mogileve?ysclid=lk9n3hus-sy505463813>

death was carried out. The family of the deceased did not receive material compensation.

4. Alena Amelina

Background: 53 years old, lived in Minsk; in April 2021 she was convicted for the first time and served an administrative arrest for driving with white-red-white flags. She was detained for the second time in early September 2021 and sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest for reposting an article from an “extremist” source.

Date of death: October 2021

Place of death: Minsk clinical hospital

Circumstances of the incident

Minsk resident Alena Amelina died at the age of 53 (born in 1968) from the consequences of coronavirus infection.¹⁵³ She became infected at Akrestsina OIC, where she was serving her administrative arrest in September 2021.

The conditions in the cell were very difficult: the cell was overcrowded, women had to sleep even on the floor, and it was freezing cold. Alena’s cellmates said that almost everyone in their cell was sick. Alena suffered from the infection very badly. She practically did not eat and could not get up.¹⁵⁴ No sufficient medical care was provided to those who fell ill in the cell. Alena was “...only occasionally given furacilin, paracetamol, and when it was very bad — some antibiotics”¹⁵⁵

After serving a 15-day arrest and returning home, Alena Amelina was taken to the hospital, where she was immediately placed on a ventilator. She went into a coma. For over two weeks, doctors fought for her life, to no avail.

Official cause of death: consequences of coronavirus infection.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): Yauhen Shapetska, head of the Akrestsina OIC.

Official response/investigation (stage): unknown

Conclusion

All independent media in Belarus have been recognized as extremist by the regime, which makes it possible to prosecute citizens for subscription to and reposts from independent media.

The purposeful deterioration of the conditions of detention of administratively arrested persons was ordered by the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs after 8 October 2020. It was then that the “political” detainees were again put in 4-8 times overcrowded cells, the windows in the cells were kept open when it was already cold outside, no bedding or hygiene products were provided, and it was forbidden to lie on the beds during the day. All of this led to COVID-19 outbreaks among the arrestees.

There was no proper medical care available; many people who fell ill, even with high fever, were not allowed to lie down during the day. Basketball player Alena Leuchanka, who served an administrative arrest under a political charge from 30 September 2020, said in a media interview that Yauhen Shapetska confirmed the deliberate deterioration of the conditions of detention: “Here I am responsible for the conditions of your detention. This is done so that you don’t want to come back here.”¹⁵⁶

As a result of these deliberate actions to create cruel and inhumane conditions of detention that endangered her health and life, Alena Amelina fell ill and died.

Thus, the State committed the following violations, which subsequently led to the death of Alena Amelina: arbitrary detention, lack of a fair trial, inadequate sanitary and epidemiological conditions of detention, violation of standards for the treatment of persons in places of detention, including standards for the provision of medical care to such persons, and denial of an effective investigation.

5. Siarhei Shchatsinka

Background: 57 years old, lived in Asipovichy, was detained on November 12, 2020, and sentenced to 10

153 <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/13-10-2021-chi-smerti-v-2021-godu-svyazany-s-politikoj-gosudarstvennogo-terrora-v-belarusi>

154 <https://d3rebrwqa7u6ai.cloudfront.net/?c=ar&i=279124>

155 <https://reform.by/266439-umerla-minchanka-zabolevshaja-kovidom-na-okrestina>

156 <https://meduza.io/feature/2020/10/29/sdelali-iz-hleba-figurki-dlya-shashek-i-igrali>

days of administrative arrest for participation in an unauthorized event.¹⁵⁷

Date of death: December 11, 2020

Place of death: Asipovichy.

Circumstances of the incident

The police first arrested Siarhei and his wife Ala in October — they received a verbal warning. On 12 November 2020, the Shchatsinkas held a political flash mob and took pictures, for which they were arrested again. Siarhei was sentenced to 10 days of arrest. He was placed in the Asipovichy temporary detention center. Siarhei was released on November 22.

While he was in custody, a man with a high fever was placed in his cell. Siarhei felt the symptoms of the disease already upon his release.

After serving his sentence, Siarhei's health deteriorated significantly, and he repeatedly called for an ambulance. He did a test to find out he had COVID-19. The man had been home sick for two weeks, had a high fever and a bad cough. Three days before he was due to see the doctor again, he died.¹⁵⁸

Official cause of death: consequences of coronavirus infection.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): Head of the Asipovichy District Department of Internal Affairs TDF Aliaksandr Anikeyeu.¹⁵⁹

Official response/investigation (stage): unknown

Conclusion

The deliberate deterioration of detention conditions on the orders of the MIA leadership after 8 October 2020 led to COVID-19 outbreaks among administrative detainees. No proper medical care was provided. Siarhei Shchatsinka fell ill and died as a result of the TDF staff actions to create cruel and inhuman detention conditions that endangered his health and life.

Thus, the State committed the following violations, which subsequently led to the death of Siarhei Shchatsinka: arbitrary detention, lack of a fair trial, inadequate sanitary and epidemiological conditions of detention, violation of standards for the treatment of persons in places of detention, including standards for the provision of medical care to such persons, and denial of an effective investigation.

6. Mikalai Klimovich

Background: 61 years old, lived in Pinsk, activist, and blogger, had a disability of group II due to a cardiovascular system disease, suffered a stroke and complex heart surgery. In December 2022, he was detained and in February 2023 convicted of insulting the president for a caricature of Lukashenka published on social networks.¹⁶⁰

Date of death: May 5, 2023

Place of death: IK No. 3 "Vitsba" in the Vitebsk region.

Circumstances of the incident

Despite Mikalai Klimovich's illness and in the presence of alternative punishments not involving imprisonment, the judge of Pinsk district and Pinsk city court Andrei Bychylo sentenced the seriously ill man to one year of imprisonment, while Brest Regional Court upheld the verdict of the court of first instance. The prosecutor in the case was Ilya Huzarevich.¹⁶¹

Pending consideration of the appeal, Mikalai was held for two months in pre-trial detention center No. 6 in Baranavichy. He was sent to serve his sentence to penal colony No. 3 "Vitsba", where he spent two weeks.

Nikolai himself, his family and his lawyer have repeatedly expressed concern about the state of his health. Due to his diagnosis, he had to be under the constant cardiologist's supervision and take the necessary

¹⁵⁷ <https://belsat.eu/news/29-09-2021-pamyor-yashche-adzin-vyazen-yaki-zaraziusya-koronavirusam-na-akrestsina>

¹⁵⁸ <https://people.onliner.by/2020/12/18/muzhchina-otsidel-v-ivs-i-zarazilsya-koronavirusom>

¹⁵⁹ <https://osipovichy-region.by/osipovichy/2020/04/odno-iz-samyh-zakrytyh-podrazdelenij-miliczii-ivs/>

¹⁶⁰ <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/mikalai-klimovicz>

¹⁶¹ <https://spring96.org/ru/news/111634>

medication. Mikalai Klimovich died at the age of 61.¹⁶²

Official cause of death: medical condition.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): Judge of Pinsk district Andrei Bychylo, assistant of Pinsk inter-district prosecutor Ilya Huzarevich, head of penal colony No. 3 “Vitsba” Aliaksei Staravoitau, and head of the medical unit V.E. Ramanau.¹⁶³

Official authorities’ response/investigation (stage): relatives were informed about the examination of the death in the penal colony,¹⁶⁴ no perpetrators were identified.

Conclusions

The judge, who was aware of Mikalai’s illnesses and disabilities, imposed a prison sentence when alternative sentences were available. This led to health complications for Mikalai in IK-3. The officials of IK-3 failed to provide timely medical assistance to Mikalai, which led to his death.

Thus, the following violations were committed by the state, which subsequently led to Mikalai Klimovich’s death: arbitrary detention, lack of fair trial, disproportionate and inhuman punishment that did not take into account Mikalai’s state of health, torture and violation of international standards for people in places of detention, failure to provide medical care. There was no effective investigation into the death. No material compensation has been paid to the family.

7. Ales Pushkin

Background: 57 years old, resident of the town of Bobr, Minsk Region, well-known Belarusian nonconformist and performance artist. He has suffered repeated political persecution over the years, was involved in the 2020 protests and returned to Belarus on principle when criminal charges were brought against him; on 30 March 2022, in a closed trial, he was sentenced to 5 years’ imprisonment in a high security prison for “desecration of state symbols” and “incitement to social enmity or discord”.

Date of death: July 11, 2023

Place of death: emergency hospital in Hrodna (prison No. 1 of Hrodna).

Circumstances of the incident

Initially Ales was serving his sentence in penal colony No. 22 in Ivatsevichy district (“Wolf’s holes”). Later, the administration of this facility punished him with five months of imprisonment in a ward-type room.¹⁶⁵

On 22 November 2022, Ales Pushkin was transferred to Hrodna Prison No. 1, with harsher conditions, where Ales spent six months. During this time, he lost 20 kilograms and complained to his family about pain in his kidneys.¹⁶⁶ He developed a perforated ulcer in prison but did not receive timely medical attention. For several days he was given only painkillers.

On 10 July, around 11am, the political prisoner, already unconscious and practically dying, was taken to the hospital where he was operated on. He had peritonitis, sepsis, multi-organ failure and even a damaged diaphragm. This suggests that the acute phase of the disease probably lasted several days.¹⁶⁷ The perforated ulcer could have been caused by prison food and lack of necessary medications.¹⁶⁸

On the night of July 10-11, he died in intensive care. Ales Pushkin was 57 years old.

Official Cause of Death: The autopsy report states that the cause of death is unknown.¹⁶⁹

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known)¹⁷⁰: Head of prison No 1 of Hrodna, Pavel Kazakou; head of medical unit of prison No 1 Viktor Luttsau, judge Alena Shylko,¹⁷¹ and prosecutor Aliaksandr Karol.

Official response/investigation (stage): unknown

¹⁶² <https://spring96.org/ru/news/111644>

¹⁶³ https://vk.com/club69844158?z=photo-69844158_457239068%2Fwall-69844158_1381

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.racyja.com/hramadstva/zavyarshylasya-praverka-pa-faktse-smertsj/>

¹⁶⁵ <https://nashaniva.com/321392?lang=ru>

¹⁶⁶ <https://spring96.org/ru/news/112175>

¹⁶⁷ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/43584.html?c>

¹⁶⁸ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/44591.html?c>

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32500527.html>

¹⁷⁰ <https://nashaniva.com/ru/321642>

¹⁷¹ <https://spring96.org/ru/news/107231>

Conclusion

The conditions of detention and biased attitude towards Ales Pushkin as a political prisoner in penal colony No. 22 and then in Hrodna prison No. 1 led to serious health issues.

During his stay in prison No. 1, he lost about 20 kg. The reasons for this dramatic weight loss have not been explored by health officials. Thus, due to poor nutrition and cruel conditions of detention, Ales Pushkin suffered a perforated ulcer, he was in terrible pain, but the prison medical staff failed to act and did not provide him with qualified medical care. In a critical condition and unconscious, he was rushed to the civil hospital where doctors could not save his life.

The state violated international standards and national norms, which subsequently led to Ales Pushkin's death: arbitrary detention, lack of a fair trial, torture and ill-treatment, and failure to provide medical care. The government failed to conduct an effective investigation into his death. No material compensation has been paid to the family of the victim.

8. Dzmitry Sarokin

Background: 37 years old, lived in Lida, poet and participant of contemporary art festivals.¹⁷² According to Dzmitry's friends, law enforcement officers had previously detained him and filmed a "confession" video with him; information about the reasons for the detention is contradictory: one of the friends claims that the last detention "was not related to politics, there were domestic reasons" and Dzmitry died because of heart problems,¹⁷³ while another friend believes that his health condition could not be the cause of death.

Date of death: June 1, 2023

Place of death: Lida District Department of Internal Affairs.

Circumstances of the incident

There is no information about the causes of death, or reasons for arrest and delivery to the police department. The duty officer of the Lida police department confirmed Dzmitry Sarokin's death there.¹⁷⁴

Official cause of death: unknown.

Allegedly responsible for the death (if known): Siarhei Sytsevich, Head of the Lida District Department of Internal Affairs.

Official response/investigation (stage): unknown

Conclusions

Dzmitry Sarokin died while being held directly within the walls of the Lida ROVD, which makes it possible to assert that the state committed the following violations that subsequently led to his death: violation of standards for the treatment of detainees, including standards for the provision of medical care to detainees, as well as the failure to conduct an effective investigation.

¹⁷² <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/05-06-2023-by-l-molod-i-bodr-pravozashhitnik-nazval-dosadnoj-smert-poeta-v-lidskom-rovd-kak-prykraj>

¹⁷³ <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32445519.html>

¹⁷⁴ <https://news.zerkalo.io/accidents/40704.html>

Conclusions

The political repression in Belarus, which escalated dramatically after the fraudulent presidential elections of 9 August 2020 and has not ceased to this day, has led to a state of lawlessness and made the functioning of democracy impossible.

Three years after the elections, we can say with full confidence that society has become highly politically polarized and that trust in the country's leadership and state institutions has been completely destroyed by the mass repression and crimes against humanity that continue to this day.

The State fails to fulfil the functions of protecting human rights that are entrusted to it by international obligations, the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, and the norms of national law. Thus, the state does not fulfil its obligations to ensure the protection of life and health of its citizens, including persons deprived of liberty and in isolation.

The highest level of disregard for human rights is the de facto refusal to protect the lives and health of its citizens, as well as the direct killing of citizens by state security forces with total impunity and without any grounds.

Cases of torture, beatings, ill-treatment, denial of medical care or untimely/inadequate medical care to political prisoners or detainees are widespread and, in some cases, a direct cause of their death.

All the above actions are taking place with the tacit approval of the leadership and top officials of the regime.

Civil society and human rights organizations do not have access to places of deprivation of liberty for the purpose of review and monitoring of detention conditions.¹⁷⁵

Based on the survey data, information received from relatives and friends of individuals who died after 2020 for political reasons, the authors have reached the following conclusions regarding the deaths in Belarus caused by the regime.

1. The government has not taken measures to protect the right to life of the citizens identified in this review and its actions are subject to assessment under applicable international criminal law.
2. The regime does not conduct effective official investigations into the deaths of citizens in places of detention or into actions committed by members of the security forces that led to the deaths of citizens. It fails to ensure accountability for the perpetrators and does not eliminate the root causes of violations of the right to life, which leads to impunity for perpetrators and the recurrence of crimes against the life and health of citizens.
3. The regime's failure to fully investigate all potentially unlawful deaths caused by private individuals is also a violation of the right to life by the state, even though it cannot prevent such deaths.
4. The country's security forces violated international standards and the law on the necessity and proportionality of the use of force and firearms in suppressing peaceful protests in 2020.
5. The regime's judicial system is set up to cruelly punish citizens with politically motivated charges, ignores their state of health and does not use alternative measures of punishment. It does not apply exemption from punishment to seriously ill or disabled people, which leads to the use of criminal responsibility as a punishment for disagreement with the current regime and violation of the right to life of persecuted citizens.
6. The regime misinforms the public about the true situation and state of health of prisoners and the causes of deaths in custody. Some political prisoners are held incommunicado (complete isolation from contacts with relatives, lawyers, prohibition of calls, visits, correspondence), which is one of the signals of torture and ill-treatment.
7. The regime has failed to take measures to improve the system of medical and psychological care in the country's penitentiary institutions for many years now. It has failed to equip medical units with modern medical equipment and to provide patients with vital medicines. All this leads to a serious deterioration in the health of prisoners, which affects their quality of life even after they have served their sentence. The most serious consequence of the state's failure to fulfil its obligations is the death of prisoners due to lack of medical care or untimely or ineffective medical

¹⁷⁵ It should be taken into account that all human rights organizations have been deprived of registration in Belarus, and their members were forced to leave the country as a result of persecution by the regime.

care, and the number of such deaths in places of detention is steadily increasing.

8. The regime does not provide training for prison staff, as required by international standards for the treatment of prisoners.

Thus, the regime provides insufficient legal protection of the right to life, allows and encourages the arbitrary use of lethal weapons by security forces, provides improper and/or insufficient medical and psychological care in places of detention, intimidates suspects (defendants) in the course of investigation, drives dissenting citizens into a state of fear and despair, which in some cases results in suicide, and fails to properly investigate cases of deprivation of life.

All of the above acts or omissions by the regime constitute a violation not only of the human right to life, but also of other international obligations under international standards.

In addition to those named in this report as perpetrators of crimes against life and responsible for deaths resulting from political persecution or execution, we consider the following regime officials to be responsible.

1. Alexander Lukashenka, illegitimate president of the Republic of Belarus, the person who expropriated power in the country. Alleged crimes: depriving citizens of their inalienable rights on discriminatory grounds based on their political opinions and beliefs, organizing and encouraging a system of repression against dissidents, organizing and participating in crimes against humanity.

2. Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus: Minister **Yury Karaev** (from 11.06.2019 to 29.10.2020), Minister **Ivan Kubrakou** (since 29.10.2020) — torture and ill-treatment in places of isolation and in places of detention (TDFs, OICs, SIZOs, RUVd, etc.), failure to fulfil obligations to ensure the protection of life and health of persons deprived of their liberty and in custody. **Law enforcement officials** at all levels involved in the killing, torture and persecution of citizens for political reasons.

3. Department of Corrections of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus: Head **Aleh Matkin** — torture and ill-treatment in places of detention (penal institutions and prisons), holding political prisoners incommunicado, failure to fulfil obligations to ensure protection of life and health of persons in detention. **Heads of penitentiary institutions, heads of medical units** — creation of cruel inhuman conditions of detention, psychological pressure on political prisoners, failure to provide effective medical care, incommunicado confinement for political prisoners.

4. State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus: Chairman **Ivan Tertel** (since 03.09.2020) — organizing and running a system of total control and repression, direct orders to use firearms in organizing measures against dissidents, torture and ill-treatment.

5. Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Belarus: Minister **Viktar Khrenin** (since 20.01.2020) — direct order to use firearms and disproportionate force in dispersing peaceful protests in 2020. **The top leadership of the Ministry of Defense, the leadership of the military structures** involved in the violent dispersal of peaceful protests with the use of firearms and traumatic weapons.

6. Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus: Chairman **Ivan Naskevich** (from 10.11.2015 to 11.03.2021), Chairman **Dzmitry Hara** (since 11.03.2021) — refusal to initiate criminal cases on facts of torture and murder of peaceful protesters, refusal to investigate deaths in places of detention. **Investigators at all levels** involved in politically motivated persecution of citizens and failing to properly investigate citizens' complaints about torture and ill-treatment, abuse of power by officials, and deaths caused by the state.

7. Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus: Prosecutor General **Aliaksandr Kaniuk** (from 22.04.2013 to 09.09.2020), Prosecutor General **Andrei Shved** (since 09.09. 2020) — failure to use prosecutor's intervention measures to stop apparently disproportionate actions of police officers, failure to exercise objective and impartial oversight over the actions of investigators to consider allegations of torture and to investigate killings of peaceful protesters, failure to effectively investigate politically motivated killings and deaths, persecution of citizens on political grounds, upholding politically motivated charges in court and demanding the imposition of disproportionate punishment in politically motivated cases. **Prosecutors at all levels** involved in politically motivated persecution of citizens.

8. Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus: Chairman **Valiantsin Sukala** (since 1997), **chairmen of all courts of general jurisdiction and judges who passed sentences and decisions in politically motivated cases** — issuing deliberately unfair sentences, imposing harsh punishments that ignore the state of health of the defendants, as well as disregard for the obvious fabrication of cases by the security forces and investigating authorities.