**Review of infringements of linguistic rights in Belarus**

**from September 1st to December 31st 2022**

On November 5th, 2022, the Ideas Bank published a study (https://www.ideasbank.vision/projects/12), in which it analyzed the language policy in Belarus, the state of the Belarusian language, its trends and prospects. Here are some conclusions drawn by the authors of the study:

* The authors underline that the position of the Belarusian language as a means of communication is quite weak. Nevertheless, for the absolute majority of the Belarusians, it remains an important cultural value. And the dissonance between the language of value and the language of communication, on the one hand, creates a chance to widen the communication function of the Belarusian language; on the other hand, there is a risk of its value function declining.
* The slow growth of Belarusian-language book publishing and publishing of Belarusian-language newspapers, which was observed during the last decade, has stopped. In the first half of 2022, the share of Belarusian-language books decreased, both in terms of titles and circulations. The authors of the study attribute this drop primarily to political factors: publishers felt the pressure of repressions on the part of the state.
* Although the main focus of repressions after the presidential election in 2020 was not aimed specifically at Belarusian-centric public projects, they still felt these reprisals. This was due to the fact that Belarusian-speaking communities mostly sympathized with the protests and supported them. Moreover, these projects do not fit into the current ideology of the Belarusian regime, which has become Russian- and Soviet-centric and anti-Western after the 2020 election.
* Russia's war against Ukraine also played its role, increasing Moscow's suspicion of any moves in the direction of strengthening Belarus’ national identity. Therefore, the authors of the study conclude that in the foreseeable future the Belarusian state will stop playing any significant role in the expanding of the communication functions of the Belarusian language.

**Being concerned about the state of the Belarusian language in Belarus, we continue to collect cases of discrimination against the Belarusian language and to publish our overview of violations of the right to the language from September 1st, 2022, to the end of the year:**

On September 5th, 2022, the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (HUBAZiK; GUBOPiK) detained the administrator of the community "For the single state language of Belarus!" in the VKontakte social network - Uḷadzimir Bućkaviec. Before that, on August 5th, the information products of the community "For the single state language of Belarus!" were recognized as "extremist materials", and on August 18th - as an "extremist formation". On September 6th, the court sentenced Uḷadzimir to 7 days of arrest according to Article №19.11 of the Code of the Republic of Belarus on Administrative Offenses - "distribution of extremist materials". It is known that Uḷadzimir was fired from the Homiel Forestry in July 2022 for "political" reasons (https://t.me/viasna96/13836).

On September 30th, 2022, the court of the October District of Minsk recognized the contents of several international parcels as “extremist materials”. The list includes about 70 items, including: postcards, T-shirts, patches, magazines, stickers, mugs, and other souvenirs. Among other things recognized as “extremist”: the "Do not be silent in Belarusian" calendar for 2021, postcards with the text "I feel my fingers are already blue" and "Life is paradise in the country where there is freedom", the sticker "We believe! We can! We will win!", the magnet with an “avtozak” ["Sweat Box"; prisoner transport vehicle] and the text "Welcome to Belarus", the sweatshirt with a cat in a crown with a sword and a shield with a cross and the inscription "Cats For Belarus", the magazine with comics "Kazki-Kraski". It is known that after that many international parcels and envelopes began to pass customs control (https://t.me/viasna96/14353).

In October 2022, it became known that the chain of the state-run bookstores "Bielkniha" stopped its contracts with the private publishing houses "Januškievič", "Knihazbor", and "Goliaths". All these publishing houses printed their books in Belarusian. It should be noted that the authorities repeatedly suspended the licenses of the “Knihazbor” and “Goliaths” publishing houses, and the HUBAZiK searched the "Januškievič" publishing house and confiscated its books; Mr Januškievič himself was repeatedly punished by administrative arrest (https://www.facebook.com/januskevic.books/).

On October 5th, 2022, at the National Scientific and Practical Center of Oncology and Medical Radiology named after M. M. Aleksandrov, Judzin Anton Alaksandravič successfully defended his dissertation in Belarusian for the degree of a candidate of medical sciences - "Treatment of patients with cancer of the lower ampulla of the rectum with the use of neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy". One of the distinctive features of this event is that the work is in Belarusian. It is important to say that the meeting of the academic council for this defense (the chairperson conducting the meeting, the speech of the academic secretary of the council, the scientific supervisor, opponents) was held in Belarusian. This piece of news is included in our Survey because the preparation of Belarusian-language dissertation researches in medicine is rather an exception to the rule than the rule, because basically all work is done in Russian. As noted by the Institute of Linguistics: "the successful use of the national language in the mentioned scientific works is a clear confirmation that the Belarusian language is a contemporary language that can be used in all spheres of public life." (http://iml.basnet.by/naviny/10-10-2022-u-du-%E2%80%9Crespublikanski-navukova-praktycny-centr-ankalohii-i-miedycynskaj-radyjalohii)

On November 6th, 2022, Zerkalo.io was anonymously notified of an incident at the post office. When a citizen wanted to send a telegram with a text in Belarusian, the employee immediately understood that the recipient of this telegram was in a pre-trial detention center, and that was true. This case shows us that currently the Belarusian language in Belarus is associated with prison and imprisonment.

On November 15th, 2022, the “Cyber Emo Punk” Twitter account reported that while looking for a temporary job at Chef-Kebab (7 Soviet Street, Hrodna), a guy was rejected on the grounds of his language. They said that he must be able to speak Russian, communicate in Russian at the workplace, despite the fact that the nature of the work did not require employees to have any special knowledge or skills in languages (https://t.me/umovymovy/749).

On Uḷadzimir Karatkievič's birthday (November 26th), a memorial plaque was hung in his honor at secondary school №3 in Vorša, where he studied. This secondary school recently bears the name of the classic of Belarusian literature. However, the problem is that the plaque in honor of the Belarusian writer who stood for the protection of the Belarusian language is made in Russian (https://m.nashaniva.com/articles/304018/).

On December 1st, 2022, it became known that the administration of the pre-trial detention center "strongly advises" the political prisoner Anatol Ḷatuška not to write letters in Belarusian. It is reported that he is asked not to do this because the censor in the Viciebsk pre-trial detention center, where he is now, "did not study the language and does not understand it at all." It also explains the fact why letters in Belarusian are not given to the political prisoner. The political prisoner was detained at the end of January 2022. He was sentenced to six years in prison. Anatol was found guilty according to four articles of the Criminal Code: art. 342 (organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them), art. 370 (mockery of state symbols), part 2 of art. 339 (hooliganism, committed by several persons), Art. 203-1 (unlawful actions in relation to information about private life and personal data). On February 3rd, 2022, Anatol was recognized as a political prisoner (https://nashaniva.com/304414).

On December 8th, the head of Lukashenko's Administration, Igor Sirgayenko, said that the authorities would consider the topic of transliteration of the geographical names of streets and settlements with the use of the Russian language (https://nashaniva.com/304992). The pretext is the appeals of pro-state activists who do not understand the names written in Belarusian Latin alphabet (Ḷacinka).

Until now, Belarusian names of geographical objects were transliterated with Latin letters in accordance with the Instruction on transliteration of geographical names of the Republic of Belarus with letters of the Latin alphabet, which was approved by the resolution of the State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy, and Cartography back in 2000 as a legal act. It was accepted as mandatory at the state level.

At the same time, in response to the appeal of the human rights activist Ihar Sḷučak, the State Committee on Property reported that the transliteration of geographical names from the Belarusian language to Latin happens only when cartographic and other works intended for international use are created in Belarus in foreign languages (https://t.me/umovymovy/786).

On December 9th, 2022, it became known from an article in "Naša Niva" that teenagers are discussing the use of the Belarusian language at school on the Internet. Thus, a teenage girl from a district center town shares a fragment of a conversation with a school teacher. She tells the teacher that the latter cannot forbid her to answer in Belarusian because the country has two official languages. And in response she hears: "We have Russian-language education, so I will no longer give marks for Belarusian answers, only for Russian ones." In response to this, other teenagers also report that their teachers do not allow them to answer in Belarusian, to keep a diary, notebooks, and notes in Belarusian (https://nashaniva.com/305024).

On December 27th, 2022, Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin, during a meeting at the "working tea party" in the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, agreed that the year 2023 will be celebrated throughout the CIS as the year of the Russian language (https://belsat.eu/news/27-12-2022-lukashenka-damoviusya-z-putsinym-abvyastsits-2023-god-u-belarusi-godam-rasejskaj-movy).

This piece of news does not give us any reason to expect that the situation with the Belarusian language in Belarus will change soon, but we continue to closely monitor the state of the Belarusian language and make our reviews.

We remind you that if you have examples of discrimination on the basis of language, which are not included in this Survey, you can send them to us at any time to our address - naszamova@gmail.com.

*The review is prepared by the association "International Union of Belarusian Writers".*