**Overview of violations of linguistic rights in Belarus**

**from July 1st to December 31st, 2024**

There are countries in the world that have lost their languages through wars or colonization. In Belarus, the situation is “unique” in that the Belarusan language – one of the key elements of national identity – is being suppressed and persecuted by the state itself. Starting from 2020, the Belarusan language in the country has become a marker of disloyalty to the regime, a manifestation of political dissent.

As a result of his defeat in the election, Lukashenko became strongly dependent on the Kremlin, and his support for Russia's war against Ukraine further deepened this dependence and led to a partial loss of sovereignty by our country.

The dominance of the Russian language in Belarus allows the Kremlin to keep Belarus within its sphere of influence, limiting its ability to develop national independence through its own language, culture, and identity. In this situation, the authorities purposefully declare as extremist and prohibit all manifestations of Belarusan-language culture and activities aimed at strengthening the country's sovereignty, as it weakens both regime and Russian influence in Belarus.

The International Union of Belarusan Writers association continues to closely monitor the state of the Belarusan language in Belarus and collect every case of discrimination against the Belarusan language and its speakers for subsequent protection.

During the second half of 2024, we found the following cases of discrimination in open sources of information:

On July 12, 2024, Yandex Maps released an experimental update that removed the spelling of place names in local languages in countries where the Cyrillic alphabet is widespread (Belarus, Ukraine, and Bulgaria). Now all names are displayed only in Russian. The company explained the changes by saying that for Russian users, place names in countries with Cyrillic script do not need to be duplicated in the original language, since they have almost identical spelling. The company also states that the update also complies with the principle of translocality, which the service adheres to — it adapts to the specifics of use in each country. https://nashaniva.com/346925

On July 19, 2024, the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, on the instruction of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, put into effect the “Instruction on the procedure for confiscating information products recognized as extremist materials from the library funds of the libraries of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and organizations subordinate to it”. According to this instruction, library heads or persons appointed by them must identify “extremist materials” and transfer them to the Kolas Central Scientific Library of the NAS of Belarus until the procedure for the destruction of “extremist” materials is established. Let us remind you that previously the works of Belarusan authors Vasil Bykau, Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievic, Alhierd Bacharevic, Larysa Hienijus, Uladzimir Niaklajeu, and others were recognized as extremist. https://belpol.pro/nan-belarusi-k-unichtozheniyu-knig-gotovy/

On July 23, 2024, the member of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and MP Igor Marzalyuk assured the journalist Yuri Uvarov of “Minskaya Pravda” that he supports “real bilingualism,” which does not mean the death of national identity and national culture. He believes that the Belarusan state demonstrates a considered, balanced approach, but there are some symbolic fields in which the Belarusan language should have priority. Such fields, according to Marzalyuk, could be teaching the history and geography of Belarus, as well as social studies in the Belarusan language, in order to provide language practice, in order to know the language. https://nashaniva.com/347680

On July 24, 2024, the Japanese Shunsuke Shindo, who moved to Belarus, wrote in his TikTok blog “Sukharava Shogun” that he was trying to find a Belarusan language school in Minsk that would teach foreigners the Belarusan language. However, he failed to find such a school. To date, there is no language school in Belarus that would teach the Belarusan language. https://zerkalo-brows3.site/news/cellar/74300.html?inst=7&fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAab5A3ZjdvWRXi7gZg2Saasg2nXWUJOC\_WOBKC7IDNWdhLG8EzukFsTFsv0\_aem\_wUG6W7JKs0oC922ko8p4mg

On August 8, 2024, the Hrodna-based language school “Territoria Uspekha” offered Belarusan language courses. In its advertisement, however, the school positioned Belarusan as “almost the Russian language, where people write as they hear, and don’t get a B for it.” The school equates Belarusan with Russian and Ukrainian, saying that they come from a common ancestor language - Old Russian. The advertisement for Belarusan language courses was written in Russian. https://ru.hrodna.life/articles/amal-ruskaja-mova/

On August 16, 2024, a tourist from Russia posted on her Instagram page that all names in Belarus are written in Russian. She recalls that not so long ago, Belarusan entrepreneurs designed their signs in Belarusan, and now only in Russian. The same goes for the names of streets and geographical objects. The woman calls for at least the return of Belarusan names. https://www.instagram.com/reel/C-uZUycKqjo/?igsh=dGxtMnBveTFlbWRp

On August 29, 2024, a former prisoner of Viciebsk colony No. 3, Mikalai (the name is changed for security reasons), told the Human Rights Center “Viasna” in an interview that the administration does not approve of the Belarusan language in the colony. According to Mikalai, one of the employees tore up pictures and texts written in Belarusan. The employee’s reaction to the Belarusan conversation was: “What are you talking about, have you gone crazy talking in Belarusan here?” https://spring96.org/be/news/116138

On August 30, 2024, human rights activists learned that on January 26, 2024, the Barysau District Court added a video clip and lyrics to the song “Don’t Be a Beast” by the Lyapis Trubetskoi group to the list of extremist materials. But the nuance is that the lyrics to this song are a poem by the classic of Belarusan literature Janka Kupala “Who Are You?”. It was first published on February 1, 1908 in the newspaper “Nasha Niva”. The lyrics to the songs “I Don’t Want”, “Lukashenko”, “Go Away” and their possible copies, video clips, derivative works that contain the meaning of the work were also added to the list. https://t.me/viasna96/27493

On September 3, 2024, Mediazona noticed that the Telegram chat "Belarusan-language" was added to the list of extremist materials. There are 170 people in the chat. The rules of the public prohibit speaking in any language other than Belarusan. https://mediazonaby.com/news/2024/09/03/speakers

On September 8, 2024, it became known that in Niasviz, Belarusan-language street signs were replaced with Russian-language ones. Human rights activist Ihar Slucak reported this on his Facebook page. Slucak also writes that in Luniniec, Russian-language street signs with new names will not be replaced with Belarusan ones. According to officials, this is “inexpedient” and, moreover, local residents are not against it. https://t.me/belsat/119823

On September 8, 2024, the pro-government and pro-Russian propagandist Olga Bondareva found signs of “incitement of interethnic hostility” in a textbook on Belarusan literature for fifth grade. This time, she was outraged by a paragraph about the Belarusan expression “кали ласка” (kali laska), which is not similar to the Russian “пожалуйста” (pozhaluista), but close to the Ukrainian “будь ласка” (bud laska). She believes that the authors of the textbook artificially contrast one native language of Belarusans with another, contributing to the incitement of interethnic hostility and social tension in society. https://browse-zerka1o.online/news/cellar/77911.html?inst=7&fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAaZgwIMmF9\_Ppz3m2AdsXp4VkB5zIWreYC0q3ziHhJiwV4L3zwcFI97722s\_aem\_pa4uz0SeDoJxrTY4ndYQeg

On September 8, 2024, the former political prisoner of correctional colony No. 4 in Homiel, Volha Takarcuk (released on June 16, 2022), told the TOK program that her children were told not to buy diaries in Belarusan at a Belarusan school. https://youtu.be/aHQ9a7\_FkF4?si=z6o7img-t2qy8y1e

On September 17, 2024, Ihar Slucak announced on his Facebook page that Belarusan hockey players of the State Institution “Hockey Club “Brest” are prohibited from writing their surnames on their uniforms in Belarusan during the preparation and holding of games of the championship of the Republic of Belarus. Surnames must be written in Russian.

On September 26, 2024, the former political prisoner of colony No. 15 in Mahilou, Alexei Kireev (released on August 28, 2024), told Radio Liberty that in March 2024, by order of the administration, all copies of works by modern Belarusan authors, many books on the history of Belarus, published in the early 1990s, were burned in the colony's firehouse. Under the political prisoners, the Belarusan shelf in the library was almost empty, only a few works of classics of Belarusan literature remained in it. https://www.svaboda.org/a/33136102.html

On October 7, 2024, gross errors were made in the inscriptions to the sculpture in Valozyn in Belarusan and Hebrew. The inscriptions on the plaque to the sculpture are in four languages, in order: Russian, Belarusan, Hebrew, and English. However, gross errors were made in two languages — Belarusan and Hebrew. Instead of “sculptural group” in Belarusan, they wrote “sculptural ghurt,” the word “ghurt” is not used in its proper meaning. And instead of the word “rabbin,” they wrote “ravvin.” In Hebrew, the inscription is written from left to right, although it is common knowledge that this language is written from right to left. The plaque with a brief history of the Valozyn yeshibot is made exclusively in Russian. https://t.me/movapobach/1322

On October 8, 2024, Belsat learned how Belarus is fighting extremist literature. More and more often in Belarus, works by Belarusan authors, textbooks and books on the history of Belarus are recognized as extremist. Thus, at first, librarians glued pages with unwanted works by Dunin-Marcinkievic, then it got to the point that they offered to burn the “extremist” books, but, thanks to the arguments of the librarians, it was decided to hide them in separate rooms and seal them. Only responsible people have access to this room. There are also provocations: regular readers, on the orders of the authorities, ask about extremist books, and librarians are then responsible for the distribution of extremist literature. https://ru.belsat.eu/82724489/ubirat-pryatat-vydirat-belsat-uznal-o-faktah-provokacij-protiv-bibliotekarej

On October 14, 2024, the Baranavicy District and City Court declared the popular science publication “Lastouski V. Selected Works: /Contribution, preface and commentary by Ja. Januskievic - Publ.: “Belarusan Book Collection”, 1997, 512 p. Employees of the Ministry of Information were unable to write Vaclav’s surname without an error — in their list it is “Lastowski”. https://t.me/viasna96/28142

On October 25, 2024, the publisher and writer Zmicier Visniou (head of the Goliaths publishing house, liquidated by the decision of the Ministry of Information) received a letter from the Ministry of Information stating that it is necessary to independently audit printed publications and exclude from sale printed publications whose distribution can harm the national interests of the Republic of Belarus. Among them are many historical works, such as the book by the heraldist, author of the emblems of many state bodies Viktor Lyakhor “Military History of Belarus. Heroes. Symbols. Colors”, the scientific monograph by Svetlana Kozlova “Agrarian Policy of the Nazis in Western Belarus: Planning. Provision. Implementation (1941-1944)”, the textbook by Anatoly Taras “A Short Course of the History of Belarus. IX-XXI”. Publications of fiction are also becoming “extremist”, for example, a two-volume collection of works by the Belarusan classic Vincent Dunin-Marcinkievic, published by the state-owned publishing house “Mastackaja Litaratura”. Earlier, the preface by Jazep Januskievic to Dunin-Marcinkievic’s book from the series “Belarusan Book Collection”, as well as the classic’s poems “The Winds Are Flowing” and “The Conversation of the Old Man 81” were recognized as “extremist materials”. The books of the “Belarusan Book Collection” – works by Uladzimir Niaklajeu, Larysa Hienijus, Natalla Arsiennieva and Lidzija Arabiej – were also included in the “extremist” list. At the request of the prosecutor’s office, “extremist” publications are being removed from sale and taken from libraries. https://zerkaloio-read.site/news/life/81742.html?inst=7&fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAabvscua3erSZ1oLbnX8-r2ElEksHjoKzb8fVbJ2DUTIYpB3zA4XWKL3pNI\_aem\_XE-cwqmd5mlJfDlS43XyAQ

On October 30, 2024, it became known that this year more than 22,000 first-graders entered the 1st grade in Minsk. 860 classes have been created for them. However, first-graders in 17 classes study in Belarusan. Thus, out of 860 first-graders opened in Minsk, only 17 are Belarusan-language, which is 1.97%. https://nashaniva.com/354348

On October 31, 2024, on the air of the talk show “Yes! But…” on STB, the head of the Department of International Journalism of the Faculty of Journalism of the Belarusan State University, candidate of philological sciences Tatyana Solodovnikova expressed her opinion about the Belarusan language. In her opinion, the Belarusan language is an elite product, an indicator of intellectuality, intelligence, primarily for young people, but like any elite product, it has its own rather limited and narrow target audience. Solodovnikova also believes that many bloggers switch to the Belarusan language not in order to popularize it, but to attract attention, given the lack of original content. https://nashaniva.com/354433

On October 31, 2024, the II Minsk International Conference on Eurasian Security began in Minsk. Not a single word in Belarusan was seen in the conference photo. The conference was organized in Russian and English. https://nashaniva.com/354448

On November 16, 2024, a Belarusan shared on TikTok that the announcement about the closure of one of the “Ostrov Chistoty” stores was written in Russian, English, and even Chinese, but not in Belarusan. https://t.me/mkbelarus/43698

On November 16, 2024, the general director of the STB TV channel, Alexander Asenko, while discussing the issue of the Belarusan language on the air of “Minsk-Moscow”, stated that the language problem in Belarus is far-fetched, ignoring the fact that the use of the Belarusan language in the public sphere has become a marker for repression. In his opinion, opposition forces raise the language issue using the same methodology; they are trying to divide Belarusans. He considers the defense of the Belarusan language by the opposition to be a way of working out the incoming grants. Again, he calls accounts that defend the Belarusan language extremist. https://t.me/mkbelarus/43705

On November 22, 2024, the Ministry of Information published an updated “List of printed publications containing information messages and (or) materials, the distribution of which can harm the national interests of the Republic of Belarus”. The previous day, it was approved by the Natioanl Commission for the Assessment of Symbolism, Attributes, and Information Products. The Ministry of Information warns that if facts of the distribution of prohibited printed publications included in this list are discovered, it will terminate licenses for the sale of books. A total of 35 books were included in the list. At the end of August, the list included three books by historian Igor Melnikov (convicted on September 13, 2024 under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code - promoting extremist activity to 4 years of imprisonment in a general regime colony, recognized as a political prisoner on August 30, 2024). https://www.svaboda.org/a/33211961.html

On November 22, 2024, it became known that a souvenir map for tourists is being made in Hrodna. It will be published in an edition of 6,000 pieces. All copies will be in Russian only. https://d3pt8vtj0yb2r5.cloudfront.net/2024/11/23/hrodna-karta/?utm\_source=tg&\_gl=1\*1oyctab\*\_ga\*MTM4NTQ2NTE2NC4xNzM1ODM2ODEw\*\_ga\_8N1P40VZWS\*MTczNTgzNjgxMC4xLjAuMTczNTgzNjgxMC4wLjAuMTU1OTA5Mzc5OA ..

On December 1, 2024, the Janka Kupala State Literary Museum in Minsk was to host an exhibition of paintings by Ales Susha “Good evening to good people!” The aim of the exhibition project is to present the ancient customs and rituals of Belarusans. However, after a denunciation by pro-Russian activist Olga Bondareva, in which she insults the artist, the state museum and, in one move, attacks the Ministry of Culture, the exhibition was canceled without any reason. Bondareva was also unhappy that there is not a single sign written in Russian at the museum of the Belarusan writer and poet Janka Kupala. https://nashaniva.com/356422

On December 5, 2024, it became known that a show (national project) “Blogger Factory” is being launched in Belarus. The main host will be Russian star Olga Buzova. Due to Russification, Belarusan pop culture is almost non-existent in Belarus, and Russian stars are even crowding out Russian-speaking Belarusan musicians. https://t.me/mkbelarus/43945

On December 9, 2024, it became known that 85% of all Belarusan books published in the diaspora were in the Belarusan language. During the same period, 85% of books were published in the Russian language in the Republic of Belarus. https://t.me/mkbelarus/44007

On December 10, 2024, the Russian Evelina Azayeva, known as a propagandist, writer, and Russian nationalist, visited Belarus on a tour. In Hrodna, she was dissatisfied with the service in the Belarusan language in the church, and was also outraged by the fact that some Belarusans answered her in Belarusan. https://katolik.life/bel/news/sotsium/item/5589-vyadomaya-rasijskaya-natsyyanalistka-pabyvala-grodne-zajshla-kastsjol-i-aburylasya.html

On December 27, 2024, it turned out that the propagandist Olga Bondareva appealed to Minsktrans with a demand that bus stops be announced in Russian as well. Minsktrans refused due to the fact that buses are delayed at stops for no more than a minute and at this time it is difficult to place information in two languages. https://nashaniva.com/358282

On December 27, 2024, the creator of the only pro-government Belarusan-language Telegram channel “Verashchak” Zoya Serada wrote that she was suspending her work, allegedly because she did not have time to create content, but perhaps she could not withstand the pressure from pro-Russian activists. Pro-Russian activists are hating Serada’s channel for being pro-Belarusan, which they equate with Russophobia. They also accused Zoya Serada of recognizing the Telegram channel “For the Union State of Belarus and Russia” as extremist. This channel had a clear anti-Belarusan orientation. https://nashaniva.com/358436

On December 29, 2024, an associate of Olga Bondareva and a fighter against any manifestations of Belarusanness, Yuspa M.M., sent an appeal to the Central Election Commission asking for ballots to be printed in Russian. https://nashaniva.com/358569

Lukashenko's head of administration Dmitry Krutoy said that the possibility of declaring 2025 the Year of the Belarusan Language is being considered. But the decision must be made by Alexander Lukashenko. However, in his New Year's address on December 31, 2024, Alexander Lukashenko declared the "Five-Year to be the Year of Quality", and 2025 the "Year of Improvement of Belarus". https://belsat.eu/84311035/nie-hod-bielaruskaj-movy

We will continue to closely monitor the state of the Belarusan language and conduct similar reviews at least every six months. Therefore, if you have examples of discrimination on the basis of language that were not included in this review, please send them to us at naszamova@gmail.com