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monitoring

January–July 2013

Center for European Transformation

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Analytical
report

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Introduction

This paper presents the results of monitoring of processes taking place in the Belarusian civil society in the period from January to July 2013. The program monitoring is conducted by the Center for European Transformation, starting from April 2011¹, in order to track the dynamics of development of civil society organizations working in the field of democratic transitions through specific actions, advocacy-campaigns, protecting human rights, system of organizational development. The monitoring framework defines the following set of processes that have been monitored and analyzed:

- Formation and development of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.
- Development of the processes of civil society dialogue with national and local authorities.
- International cooperation and interaction with civil society in Europe, in the Eastern Partnership countries, international donors and European structures.
- Expansion of “composition” of civil society and cooperation with various types of entities.
- Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and advocacy work, realization of the rights of target groups.
- Changes in terms of civil society activity.

The presented analysis is based on monitoring of the media, analytical materials and normative documents, monitoring the terms of NGOs’ activity and law enforcement practices, as well as special analysis of civic initiatives. The results obtained allow assessing the situation in the processes in the Belarusian civil society development and setting priorities for further development.

¹ The methodology of program monitoring and its results for prior and subsequent periods can be found by following this link: <http://cet.eurobelarus.info/en/news/2012/06/01/civil-society-program-monitoring-EN.html>.

State and development of civil society in Belarus

Analytical report based on monitoring materials

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Center for European Transformation

General political conditions and circumstances

During the analyzed period, the general-political conditions and circumstances have not changed. Despite the diplomatic dalliances with the European Union, which were started in the beginning of this year, the Belarusian authorities do not undertake any actions aimed at liberalizing the situation in the country. The economic situation has also remained stable, although during the next few years (according to forecasts of economists) Belarus is going to face economic difficulties. It pushes the state to frantically search for new credits and new sources of incomes, but, at the same time, the authorities do not dare to have large-scale economic reforms.

On the threshold of a new political season (local elections in 2014 and presidential election in 2015), oppositional political forces start to form coalitions. Right now, there are two blocs: the coalition of supporters of the “People’s Referendum” (Movement “For Freedom”, Civil Campaign “Tell the Truth”, Belarusian People’s Front party) and the bloc “For Fair Elections” (United Civil Party, Belarusian Christian Democracy, the Belarusian United Left Party “A Just World”, etc.); however, their tangibility and political efficiency raises doubts. None of them has declared yet any clear purposes and offered any reasonable strategy of their achievement.

The foreign policy circumstances have not changed either. The number of diplomatic contacts of the Belarusian authorities with the EU has increased and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus has been removed from the entrance ban list, but it has not brought any progress in the mutual relations. The parties remain on the positions declared earlier; the basic obstacle to the renewal of a full-scale dialogue is the presence of political prisoners in Belarus. The development of the European dialogue on modernisation with Belarusian society² has not changed significantly and its potential remains rather frozen.

Establishment and development of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

During the considered period, the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum³ has stayed in the condition of stagnation which was caused by the not eliminated contradictions concerning its further development and the conflict between its participants that occurred because of it.

² See: **European dialogue on modernization with Belarusian society:** http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/press_corner/all_news/news/2012/european_dialogue_modernisation_en.htm. Hereinafter: European Dialogue on Modernization, EDoM.

³ The **National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** (also: the National Platform of Civil Society, the National Platform, the NP) is a public communication and coordination platform for Belarusian civil society organizations. The

In November 2012, at a conference of the National Platform, the majority of participants accepted the variant of the Concept of Development for 2012-14⁴ which considerably expanded the agenda of the National Platform and placed it on the level of the solution of national problems. However, several organizations-participants expressed their disagreement on such contents of the Concept and refused to accept it (See the description of the course of events in the previous monitoring reports⁵). As a result, it has led to some image losses of the National Platform and losses in the dynamics of its development and influence on important processes inside the country, as well as at the level of the Eastern Partnership and Belarusian-European interaction (in particular, the National Platform has not managed to occupy an influential place within the pale of the EU initiative European dialogue on modernization with Belarusian society). Still, the National Platform, nevertheless, has managed to avoid a split — in spite of the fact that two organizations, which refused to accept the confirmed variant of the Concept, namely: the Office for Democratic Belarus (Brussels) and the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS), notified the Coordinating Committee of the National Platform of their “non-participation”.

On 1 June 2013, there was another conference of the National Platform of Civil Society. This meeting of representatives of organizations-participants of the National Platform was mainly of a working character as it was organized for the solution of organizational questions⁶: the recommendation of organizations for participation in the forthcoming Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, re-election of the structure of the Coordinating Committee, modification of the procedure of reception of new participants, etc.

During the conference, a new chairperson of the Coordinating Committee of the National Platform was elected — Ulad Vialichka, the chairperson of the International Consortium “EuroBelarus”. The former chairperson of the Coordinating Committee — Uladzimir Matskevich (who is also one of the heads of the International Consortium “EuroBelarus”) — decided to leave this post because he thought that his decision to leave the ruling body of the National Platform should help to eliminate certain tensions that existed on this platform⁷. Ulad Vialichka declared

beginning of the formation of the National Platform (April 2009) was a series of conferences, public hearings, and round tables concerning the questions of European-Belarusian cooperation and participation of Belarusian civil society in the EU initiative Eastern Partnership and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF). In July 2010, participants of one of such conferences made a decision to establish the National Platform of the EaP CSF. From 80 to 100 various civil society organizations from Belarus take part in regular conferences and consultations of the National Platform. Since October 2011, the National Platform has the institution of constant membership which is given to Belarus’ civil society organizations that have signed the Memorandum on Cooperation. See: the **Memorandum on Cooperation within the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF**: http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Downloads/english/Memorandum_29.10.2011_EN.pdf.

⁴ See: **Concept of Development of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** (in Belarusian): http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/File/Concep_NP-adopted_16_11_2012-BEL.doc.

⁵ See: **Civil society program monitoring. Collection of analytical quarterly reports**: <http://cet.eurobelarus.info/en/news/2012/06/01/civil-society-program-monitoring-EN.html>.

⁶ See: **Video of the conference of the National Platform of the EaP CSF (Minsk, 1 June 2013)** (in Belarusian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2013/06/08/v-deazap-s-kanferentsy-natsyyanal-nay-platformy-fgs-up-m-nsk-1-chervenya-2013-goda.html>.

⁷ See: **Uladzimir Matskevich: I’m not going anywhere**: <http://eurobelarus.info/en/news/politics/2013/06/05/uladzimir-matskevich-i-m-not-going-anywhere.html>; **Uladzimir Matskevich: Now I am an impostor, too?** (in Russian): <http://www.belaruspartisan.org/politic/234193/>.

that being on the post of the chairperson of the Coordinating Committee he intends to concentrate, first of all, on the solution of the existing contradictions and conflicts between participants of the National Platform⁸.

It is expected that the following conference of the National Platform will take place on the eve of the fifth meeting of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership which is on 4-5 October 2013 in Chişinău.

Development of dialogue with the national and local authorities

As it has always been, the authorities do not take into consideration the most part of suggestions aimed at alleviating the conditions of activity of civil society structures, which are proposed by representatives of these structures. The Central Election Commission refused representatives of a number of Belarusian political parties and public associations to carry out a public discussion of offers concerning the introduction of amendments into the electoral legislation (January 2013). The proposals prepared by the Legal Transformation Center (Lawtrend) in September 2012 concerning the planned changes in the Law “About public associations” were rejected by the parliamentary working group with the following words, “because of their inexpediency”. With a big share of probability it is possible to expect that the similar words will be said to the proposals sent to the Belarusian Parliament by the Belarusian Association of Journalists, which concern the introduction of amendments into the Law about the mass media (January 2013), as well as the offers of a group of political structures (Movement “For Freedom”, Civil Campaign “Tell the Truth”, Belarusian United Left Party “A Just World”, Belarusian People’s Front party, Belarusian Party “The Greens”, etc.) concerning the changes and additions in the electoral legislation (February 2013).

The Belarusian authorities prefer to have contacts and even a certain sort of interaction with representatives and organizations of Belarusian civil society only concerning the questions which do not mention political subjects — the development of small and middle business, protection of animals and nature, preservation of the cultural-historical heritage, and the cultural sphere:

- The national campaign of winter account of birds started on 1 January 2013; it was organized by the NGO “APB Birdlife Belarus” (APB) and the Scientifically-Practical Bioresources Center of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus;
- In January, the International Public Society “World Association of Belarusians “Bačkaŭščyna” [Homeland] and the Mahilioŭ City Executive Committee declared the beginning of the implementation of a joint project within the bounds of the announcement of Mahilioŭ in 2013 to be the “Cultural Capital of the CIS and Belarus”. The idea is being implemented by the Public Cultural Campaign “Budźma Bielarusami” [Let’s Be Belarusians];
- On 30 January 2013, the chairperson of the National Council of the Belarusian Voluntary Society for Protection of Monuments of History and Culture, Anton Astapovič, discussed some questions of protection of historical and cultural values with Boris Svetlov, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Belarus;

⁸ See: **Ulad Vialichka: I do live in civil society** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/policy/2013/06/05/vlad-velichko-ya-plot-yu-i-krov-yu-zhivu-v-grazhdanskom-obschestve.html>.

- On 6 February 2013, public activists, who protest against the construction works on the territory near the Kurapaty Memorial near Minsk, met with the Minister of Culture Boris Svetlov and brought up a question on their participation in the working-out of a project of protection zones near Kurapaty, as well as their participation in the further public hearings on this topic. In June, in reply to the proposals of the activists of the Civil Campaign “For the preservation of the Kurapaty Memorial”, the Minsk District Executive Committee agreed to create a working group that would work with the questions concerning the preservation of this wooded area on the outskirts of Minsk in which a vast number of people were executed between 1937 and 1941 by the Soviet secret police, the NKVD;
- On 13 March 2013, in Minsk, there was the Assembly of Business Circles with participation of representatives of organizations from the business community, experts from among the tutors of profile universities, as well as public organizations, and representatives of various bodies of power, international organizations, and the diplomatic corps. The organizers of this event were the Public Association “Minsk Capital Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers” and the Union of Legal Bodies “National Confederation of Entrepreneurship”, supported by the Council to develop entrepreneurship in Belarus.

An unusual case is the situation when the Belarusian authorities made some concessions in the question of the implementation of the new requirements of the technical regulations of the Customs Union after the national strike of individual entrepreneurs, which took place in June 2013. Thus, the entrepreneurs’ requirements have been heard by the authorities; however, the entrepreneurs’ basic demands have not been satisfied — the problem situation has been frozen for a year.

The situation with public discussions, which carrying-out is regulated at the legislative level, has not had any essential changes.

International cooperation and interaction

Being guided by Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, in order to protect their rights and freedoms, Belarusian citizens (mainly public-political activists) more and more often address to the available international organizations and receive competent assistance from human rights defending centers in Belarus⁹. More often, complaints are sent to the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC). Since the late 1990s, the UNHRC has registered about 150 individual complaints from Belarusian citizens. In more than 40 of them, facts of infringements of the rights guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights were established; 70 complaints are in the process of consideration¹⁰.

During the first six months of 2013, the UNHRC has received complaints from: the head of the Human Rights Center “Legal Aid to the Population” Oleg Volchek (January and April 2013), activists from Svislač (Hrodna Region) Viktor Dziasiatsik and Anatol Valiuk (January 2013), human rights activist from Baranavičy (Brest Region) Siarhei Housha, member of the Belarusian United Left Party “A Just World” from Žlobin (Homieĺ Region) Valery Rybchanka (March 2013), ex-chairperson of the Homieĺ City Executive Committee Sviatlana Haldade (April 2013), member of

⁹ See: **Human rights activists speed up their work with the UN human rights defending mechanisms** (in Belarusian): <http://spring96.org/be/news/63835>.

¹⁰ See: **Foreign Ministry says complaints considered by UN Human Rights Committee are groundless**: <http://spring96.org/en/news/64086>.

the United Civil Party from Rečyca (Homieł Region) Natallia Shchukina (April 2013), activist of the Belarusian People's Front "Adradžeńnie" [Revival] Siarhei Niahatsin and vice-president of the Belarusian Free Trade Union Yury Novikau from Mahilioŭ (May 2013), activist of the "Young Front" from Salihorsk (Minsk Region) Andrei Tychyna (May 2013), as well as the leader of the United Civil Party Anatoly Lebedko (June 2013).

For the same period, the UNHRC has accepted for consideration the complaints submitted earlier by members of the Belarusian United Left Party "A Just World" from Źlobin (Homieł Region), including that of Valery Rybchanka (January 2013), activist of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Tatiana Sieviaryniets from Viciebsk (February 2013) and coordinator of the youth network of the Belarusian Trade Union of Workers of Radio Electronic Industry (REP) Andrei Stryzhak (April 2013). The UN Human Rights Committee has recognized as unacceptable for consideration the complaint of the member of the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian People's Front Siarhei Kavalenka from Viciebsk because the presented materials contained insufficiently full information (March 2013).

Also, the UNHRC has admitted that the Belarusian state has infringed the rights of the public activist from Viciebsk Antanina Pivanos (January 2013), activists from Navapolack (Viciebsk Region) Anton Yasinovich and Valery Shauchenka, the activist of the Movement "For Freedom" from Brest Zhana Koush (May 2013), and Andrei Aliashkevich from Homieł (June 2013).

However, according to some lawyers¹¹, in the conditions of today's Belarus, this tool cannot be considered an effective means of legal protection of citizens. First, the procedure of consideration of individual complaints can last several years and sometimes — decades (in practice, there have been cases when the consideration of complaints was stopped because the contact with applicants was lost¹²). Second, the current Belarusian authorities simply ignore the decisions of the UNHRC, as well as other structures of the United Nations, despite the international obligations of the Republic of Belarus. In June 2013, a group of citizens, whose rights were infringed by the state and recognized as such by the UNHRC, received from Belarus' Ministry of Foreign Affairs a reply to their reference in which it was said that their requirement to carry out the decisions of the UNHRC is unreasonable¹³.

During the considered period, Belarusian human rights defending organizations have continued to inform on a timely basis international institutions on the state of affairs in Belarus: representatives of the initiative "Human rights activists against tortures" sent an urgent message to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture about possible tortures against Andrei Haidukou who was in the KGB prison (January 2013); the Legal Transformation Center (Lawtrend) addressed a message to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights activists about a threat of criminal prosecution of the Director of the Private Cultural-Educational Establishment "Platform Innovation" Andrei Bandarenka (March 2013); also, the Legal Transformation Center (Lawtrend) sent the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus a message on the liquidation of the International Public Association "Good Will" (April 2013).

¹¹ See: **The appeal to the UN Human Rights Committee cannot be an effective tool of legal protection of citizens, says an expert** (in Russian): <http://belapan.com/archive/2013/05/30/627420/>.

¹² See: **Belarusians complain to the United Nations if there is nobody else to complain to** (in Russian): http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2013/03/15/ic_articles_116_181132/.

¹³ See link 10.

Structures and representatives of Belarusian civil society have also made statements and sent appeals to the EU's regulatory bodies and representatives, other international organizations, as well as the national governments and institutions of Lithuania, Russia, and Turkey:

- The former speaker of the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation Stanislau Shushkevich, the leaders of the Civil Campaign “Tell the Truth” Uladzimir Niakliayeu and the Movement “For Freedom” Aliaksandr Milinkevich, the chairperson of the Rada [Council] of the Belarusian People’s Republic Ivonka Survilla, and the ex-chairperson of the Union of Poles of Belarus Andželika Borys addressed the Prime Minister of Poland Donald Tusk with an appeal to support the Polish TV channel “Belsat” that broadcasts for Belarus (January 2013);
- The Public Association “Ecohome” made a statement in which it welcomed the fact that the District Court of Vilnius cancelled the decision to ban entrance to Lithuania for the coordinator of the Public Campaign “Astraviec Nuclear Power Plant is a Crime!” Mikola Ulasevich and expressed its hope that the coordinator of the Belarusian Anti-Nuclear Campaign Tatiana Novikova will be rehabilitated, too (January 2013);
- Participants of the international conference “Trascianiec death camp in the European memory” that took place in Minsk addressed to the authorities of Germany and Austria with a request to finance the construction of a memorial complex in the Blahaŭščyna forest near the former Trascianiec death camp (March 2013);
- Representatives of Belarusian civil society organizations acted with a joint statement concerning the prosecution of NGOs and human rights activists in the Russian Federation (March 2013);
- The Organizing Committee to create the Party “Belarusian Christian Democracy” made a statement in which it urged the EU not to cancel its visa sanctions against the Belarusian officials involved in political repressions until in Belarus all political prisoners are freed (March 2013);
- On the eve of a conference in the European Parliament, which was dedicated to the EU initiative European dialogue on modernization, the leaders of the Belarusian People’s Front party Alaksej Janukevich, the Movement “For Freedom” Aliaksandr Milinkevich, and the Civil Campaign “Tell the Truth” Uladzimir Niakliayeu made a joint statement concerning the actual situation in Belarusian-European relations (April 2013);
- The chairperson of the Liberal-Democratic Party Sergei Gaidukevich addressed to the Council of Europe, European Parliament, and a number of European structures with an appeal to immediately cancel all sanctions and restrictions against Belarus (April 2013);
- The heads of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Hramada) Iryna Veshtard, the Civil Campaign “Tell the Truth” Uladzimir Niakliayeu, the Movement “For Freedom” Aliaksandr Milinkevich, the United Civil Party Anatoly Lebedko, the Belarusian People’s Front party Alaksiej Janukievich, the Organizing Committee to create the Party “Belarusian Christian Democracy” Vital Rymasheuski, and the Belarusian United Left Party “A Just World” Sergey Kalyakin made a joint appeal to Lithuania concerning the prospects of normalization of Belarusian-European relations (April 2013);

- A group of former Belarusian lawyers who are prosecuted by the authorities sent a letter to the higher qualifying disciplinary commission of the advokatura of Ukraine with their support words to Ukrainian colleagues who happened to be in a similar situation (May 2013);
- The Public Association “Belarusian Association of Journalists” directed an electronic appeal to the mayor of the city of Voronezh, to the governor of the Voronezh Region (Russia), and the human rights commissioner of the Voronezh Region with a request to support the Human Rights House in Voronezh (June 2013);
- The Belarusian Party “The Greens” made a statement on the situation in Turkey, in which they criticized the cruelty and violence of the Turkish police in relation to demonstrators and supported the Public Initiative “Solidarity with Gezi” and the Trade Union DISK (June 2013);
- The leader of the Civil Campaign “Our House” Olga Karach addressed to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović concerning the Belarusian authorities’ prosecution of the independent mass media (June 2012);
- Activists of the Trade-Union Initiative “Organizing Committee of the Free Inter-Professional Association of Workers”, the organizing committee of the Social Movement “Razam!” [Together!], and the Belarusian Party “The Greens” sent to the Embassy of Turkey in Minsk an appeal to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in which they expressed their strong protest against the cruelty, violence, and reprisals of the Turkish authorities in relation to those protesting in the Istanbul Gezi Park (June 2013);
- The former presidential candidate Mikola Statkevich, who is in prison now, addressed to the Prime Minister of Lithuania Algirdas Butkevičius with an appeal to refuse meetings with Belarusian officials (June 2013).

During the considered period, the structures of Belarusian civil society have taken part in several international advocacy campaigns, among which there are:

- “Freedom to Bahrain!” — the action to support the President of the Bahrain Human Rights Center and the assistant to the secretary general of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) Nabeel Rajab sentenced to three years imprisonment on charges of illegal assembly by the Bahraini Lower Criminal Court (February-March 2013);
- “Earth Hour” — the global action of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which is called to popularize a solicitous attitude to the planet resources (March 2013);
- International week of solidarity with Russia’s civil society — the action organized in connection with the strengthening of the Russian authorities’ pressure and repressions in relation to NGOs and human rights activists (April-May 2013);
- International days of solidarity with the protesters in Turkey — the action of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF) and other global trade unions to protest against the police violence and attacks on democratic rights and freedoms in Turkey (June 2013).

The situation in Belarus continues to remain in the focus of steadfast attention of international human rights defending organizations that is proved by numerous statements which are, first of all, a form of expression of an attitude to the current state of affairs in the country:

- On January, 9th, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders acted with an urgent appeal to the human rights defending community calling to support Belarusian colleagues: Raman Yurhel, Viktor Sazonau, and Uladzimir Khilmanovich, who were prosecuted by the authorities for their action in support of Ales Bialiatski;
- In February, the Norwegian human rights defending organization on religious freedom “Forum 18” made a statement in which it sharply criticized the Belarusian authorities for their policy of rigid regulation of activity of religious communities;
- The leaders of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, the Confederation of Labor of Russia, and the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions acted with a joint appeal to the heads of the Union State of Belarus and Russia, in which they protested against the use of forced labor in Belarus (February 2013);
- On February, 23rd, the International NGO “Committee to Protect Journalists” addressed to the Belarusian authorities with a demand to stop the prosecution of journalist Iryna Khalip and not to force her to leave Belarus;
- On March, 5th, in their joint statement, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organization in Belarus — the Human Rights Center “Viasna” [Spring] — expressed their deep indignation concerning the mass and regular acts of pressure and reprisals against Belarusian political prisoners and the people whose freedom is limited because of political reasons;
- On March, 5th, in her speech in the UN Council on human rights, a representative of the Human Rights House Foundation called the authorities of Belarus to immediately and unconditionally free Ales Bialiatski, to dismiss all charges against him, and to completely rehabilitate him;
- On March, 15th, the International Human Rights NGO “Amnesty International” in a special statement dated to the anniversary of the execution of Uladzislau Kavaliou and Dzmitry Kanavalau, who were recognized guilty of the act of terrorism in the Minsk Metro, urged the Belarusian authorities again set a moratorium of the death penalty and then to completely cancel this kind of punishment;
- On March, 18th, the youth organizations of Europe — Young European Federalists (JEF), Young Liberals of Europe (LYMEC), European Democratic Students (EDS), European Youth Forum (EYF), Federation of Young European Green (FYEG), International Federation of Young Liberals (IFLRY), International Union of Young Socialists (IUSY), Youth of the European People’s Party (YEPP), and Young European Socialists (YES) — acted with a joint statement in which they demanded from the EU leaders to strengthen their struggle against dictatorship in Belarus, as well as to support, first of all, young Belarusians;
- On March, 19th, the International NGO “Reporters Without Borders” made a statement in which it welcomed the closing of the second criminal case on slander against Lukashenko that was started in June 2012 against journalist Andrzej Poczobut;

- On March, 22nd, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the World Organization Against Tortures (OMCT), the Belarusian Human Rights Center “Viasna”, the Egyptian Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, and the Russian Human Rights Center “Memorial” made a joint statement in support of the resolution of the UN Council on human rights which condemned the *“tendency to infringe and criminalize the activity of human rights defending NGOs by means of restriction of their right to receive financing, especially from abroad”*;
- On April, 24th, the International NGO “Committee to Protect Journalists” addressed to the Belarusian judicial authorities with an appeal to cancel the decision recognizing an extremist character of the photos from the album “Belarus Press Photo”;
- On April, 30th, the International NGO “Reporters Without Borders” condemned the detention of journalists in Belarus on the day of the carrying-out of the action of the democratic opposition “Chernobyl Path”, and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Human Rights Center “Viasna” in their joint statement demanded from the Belarusian authorities to dismiss charges from all persons detained during this action;
- On May, 2nd, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the German Human Rights NGO “Libereco”, the Swedish Initiative for Democracy “Ostgruppen”, the American NGO “Freedom House”, the Czech NGO “Civil Belarus”, the British NGO “Liberal International”, as well as EU deputies Marek Migalski, Werner Schulz, Peter Šťastný, Manuel Sarrazin, Marieluise Beck, and Caroline Szyber sent a joint letter to the International Ice Hockey Federation in which they urged it not to hold the World Ice Hockey Championship in 2014 in Belarus;
- On May, 8th, and on June, 18th, the International Human Rights NGO “Amnesty International” asked twice the authorities of Belarus to cancel the death sentence of Grigory Yuzepchuk;
- On May, 11th, the International NGO “Reporters Without Borders” condemned the arrests of journalists Aliaksandr Yarashevich and Dzmitry Halko and demanded to free them;
- On May, 16th, the head of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) Souhayr Belhassen and the Secretary General of the World Organization Against Tortures (OMCT) Gerald Staberock sent an open letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei and the Minister of Justice Oleg Slizhevsky in which they urged the Belarusian authorities to execute the decision of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions: to immediately and unconditionally release and rehabilitate Ales Bialiatski, as well as not to interfere with the process of creation and activity of public associations;
- On May, 20th, representatives of the International Human Rights Campaign “Don’t play with the dictator!” made a statement in which they expressed their disappointment because the IIHF Congress in Stockholm confirmed its decision to carry out the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championship in Minsk;
- On May, 21st, the International Human Rights NGO “Amnesty International” in the statement prepared for the 23rd session of the UN Council on human rights called the Belarusian authorities to immediately and without any conditions release all those who are detained only for the fact that they peacefully expressed their political or other points of view;

- On June, 13th, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Human Rights Center “Viasna” made a joint statement concerning the fact that the UN Council on human rights prolonged the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus.

The situation with the observance of human rights in Belarus has also been displayed in reports and speeches of international human rights defending organizations and other structures, which were in many cases prepared with participation of Belarusian experts:

- About the methods the Belarusian authorities use to control the Internet and to restrict the freedom of statements on-line — in the analytical report of the International NGO “Index on Censorship” (January 2013);
- About the observance of political rights and freedoms — in the annual report of the Human Rights NGO “Freedom House” (USA) (January 2013);
- About the situation with the freedom of the mass media — in the annual report of the International NGO “Reporters Without Borders” (January 2013);
- About the situation with human rights — in the annual report of the International Human Rights NGO “Human Rights Watch” (January 2013) and the annual report of “Amnesty International” (May 2013);
- About the infringement of NGOs’ rights on the access to financing — in the annual report of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders — a joint program of the World Organization Against Tortures (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) (February 2013);
- About the democracy level — in the index prepared by the Analytical Department of the British magazine “Economist” (March 2013) and in the report of “Freedom House” (USA) (June 2013);
- About the death penalty — in the annual report of the International Human Rights NGO “Amnesty International” (April 2013);
- About the suppression of civil society in Belarus — in the special report of “Amnesty International” (April 2013);
- About the violence level in society — in the index prepared by the international research organization “Institute for Economics and Peace” (IEP) (June 2013);
- About the way the Republic of Belarus performs the recommendations received within the framework of the universal periodic review of the United Nations — in the intermediate review of the Swiss NGO “UPR.info” (June 2013).

The documents mentioned above have been presented to the international human rights defending structures, United Nations institutions, European Commission, and European Parliament.

Special events organized by American and European NGOs have been dedicated to the discussion of the actual situation in Belarus and the conditions of Belarusian civil society’s existence:

- In January, in Vilnius, there was the discussion “To make the mission possible: how to stop the isolation of Belarus”, in which Matteo Mecacci, the head of the OSCE PA committee on democracy, human rights, and humanitarian questions, took part;
- On January, 15th, in Washington (USA), there was the expert discussion “Towards democracy in Belarus: the heritage of the Charter’77” organized by the American NGOs: National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and “Freedom House” (January 2013);
- On March, 8th, in the “Belarusan House” in Warsaw, there was a meeting with the wives of the present and former political prisoners under the motto “Belarus is a woman”. Mikala Statkevich’s wife Maryna Adamovich, Dzmitry Dashkevich’s wife Nasta Dashkevich, as well as Dzmitry Bandarenka’s wife Volha Bandarenka, took part in the meeting. This event was organized with the assistance of the office of European MP Marek Migalski;
- On March, 8th — 10th, at Lazarski University (Warsaw, Poland), there was the international conference “Revolt for the sake of freedom — the forgotten gene of Belarusians?” with participants from Belarus, Poland, the USA, Israel, Sweden, France, Lithuania, and Hungary. This event was organized with the support of the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the American National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland;
- On March, 11th, at Warsaw University (Poland), there was a conference on the death penalty problem in Belarus with participation of Liubou Kavaliou, the mother of Uladzislau Kavaliou, who was found guilty of the fulfillment of the act of terrorism in the Minsk Metro;
- On March, 20th, the director of the TV channel “Belsat” Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy was the main guest at the meeting “Television Belsat and the construction of civil society in Belarus” which was organized by the Polish Institute in Prague and the Czech NGO “Člověk v tísni” [Person in trouble];
- On March, 25th, at Georgetown University (USA), there was the discussion “American-Belarusan relations: human rights and diplomacy” in which the director of “Freedom House” David Kramer took part;
- In April, the Carnegie American Fund organized in Washington a discussion with participation of the owner of the website TUT.BY Yuri Zisser, the lawyer of the NGOs Assembly Yuri Chavusau, and the chairperson of the board of directors of the group of companies SATIO Janna Grinyuk;
- In June, in Poznan (Poland), under the aegis of the Polish Foundation “Institute of Eastern Studies”, there was a Festival of Belarusian Culture aimed at acquainting visitors of this event not only with the culture and everyday life of Belarus, but also with the political situation in the country, which discussion was an important part of the Festival.

Awards and prizes are one of the most popular forms of expressing solidarity with and symbolical support to Belarusian civil society by the international structures of civil society:

- Human rights activist Ales Bialiatski, who is in prison now, has been included in the short list of the annual award of the International NGO “Index on Censorship” in the nomination “Freedom of Expression” (January 2013); thanks to Norwegian members of parliament, he was included again in the list of nominees for the Nobel Peace Prize (January 2013), and the Polish Stefan Batory Foundation initiated the

Belarusan human rights activist's nominee promotion to receive the Václav Havel Award for Human Rights (June 2013);

- In Berlin, there was a ceremony of awarding the Willy Brandt Prize; in 2012, it was given to the former presidential candidate Mikala Statkevich, who is in prison since December 2010. The prize was given to the wife and the daughter of the political prisoner (January 2013);
- Aleś Łahviniec, a Belarusan public-political figure, received an award as the most active participant of the Belarusan segment of the free encyclopedia “Wikipedia” during the Day of Belarusan Wikipedia in Warsaw organized by the “Belarusan National Memory”, an NGO that works in Poland, and the Society “Wikimedia of Poland” (February 2013);
- Eva Neklyaeva, the director of the Finnish theatrical festival “Baltic Circle”, has been awarded the prize of the Finnish PEN Center for the freedom of expression and activity aimed at defending human rights in Belarus (February 2013);
- The winners of the Jerzy Giedroyc literary prize, founded by the Embassy of Poland in Belarus together with the Polish Institute in Minsk, Belarusan PEN Center, and the Belarusan Writers’ Union, are: Uladzimir Niakliayeu, Alhierd Bacharevich, and Adam Hlobus (March 2013);
- Andrzej Pisalnik, a journalist from Hrodna, became the winner of the Maciej Płażyński Award — the prize for journalists who write about the life of Polish Diasporas (March 2013);
- Belarusan philosopher Piotr Rudkouski has received the Lew Sapieha Prize, which is given under the honorable patronage of the President of Poland and to those who have outstanding merits in the formation and development of civil society in Belarus and in the construction of independent democratic Belarus that is oriented on Europe (April 2013);
- The Parliament of Canada awarded Ivonka Survilla, the President of the Rada [Council] of the Belarusan People’s Republic, with the Medal of the diamond anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II. Thus, the Canadian MPs valued her contribution to the democratization of Belarus (May 2013);
- European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania) have been awarded the Freedom Prize by the American organization “Atlantic Council” for strengthening the central role of the Atlantic community in the sphere of global values (May 2013);
- The documentary film “Davoli! Da Voli...” [Enough! To Freedom...] by Belarusan directors Viachaslau Rakitski and Andrei Kutsila has received a diploma at the International Film Festival in Košice (Slovakia) “for the story about the aspiration of citizens of Belarus to become free” (June 2013);
- Belarusan writer Svetlana Alexievich has become a winner of the 2013 International Peace Prize of German book sellers (June 2013);
- The feature film “Viva Belarus!” by Polish director Krzysztof Lukaszewicz with Belarusan actors, the scenario by Belarusan activist Franak Viačorka, has become the winner in the nomination “Best Scenario” at the International Brussels Film Festival (June 2013); before that, the film won the second place in the contest program of the 20th International Film Festival Febiofest in the Czech Republic (March 2013).

In the first half of the year 2013, international NGOs valued the merits of not only representatives of Belarusian civil society, but also the activity aimed at democratizing Belarus by foreign citizens and even separate state structures:

- Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy, the director of the Polish TV channel “Belsat” broadcasting for Belarus, has received the award, which winner is defined by 20 European editions of the magazine “Reader's Digest”, with the formulation, *“for the campaign in favor of freedom and democracy in Belarus”*, and first of all for the creation of the independent TV channel “Belsat” (January 2013);
- The authoritative international think-tank “European Council on International Relations” has noted the foreign policy activity of Poland aimed at rendering pressure upon Belarus for the purpose of the liberalization of the situation in the country (February 2013);
- Former ambassador of Sweden in Belarus Stefan Ericsson has been awarded the Mark Palmer International Prize for his diplomatic work in Minsk (April 2013).

International structures of civil society and their representatives have also carried out various actions and campaigns aimed at attracting attention of the public of their countries to the situation in Belarus and at supporting Belarusian civil society and political prisoners. We list the most vivid of them:

- The President of “Freedom House” (USA) David Kremer wrote a letter with the words of support to the co-chairperson of the Organizing Committee to create the Party “Belarusian Christian Democracy” Pavel Sieviaryniets (January 2013);
- The European coordinator of the International Human Rights NGO “Amnesty International” Henk Hulshof and the deputy of the Dutch parliament Harry van Bommel met with the ambassador of Belarus in The Hague (Netherlands) and gave him more than 84,000 signatures collected in support of imprisoned human rights activist Ales Bialiatski. Together with the signatures, they also presented a golden coin with the portrait of the political prisoner and the inscription “Freedom for Ales Bialiatski” (February 2013);
- In March 2013, the “Amnesty International” summed up the Marathon of writing letters to Ales Bialiatski, which was organized worldwide. In total, there have been 104,731 measures in support of the Belarusian human rights activist whom the international organization recognized as a prisoner of conscience;
- Russian oppositional politician Boris Nemtsov joined the campaign “Freedom X 2” initiated by the European deputy Marek Migalski as an action of solidarity with two Belarusian political prisoners: the former presidential candidate Mikala Statkevich and the leader of the “Young Front” Dzmitry Dashkevich (March 2013);
- Representatives of the political All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” [Freedom] party and other Ukrainian political parties carried out actions dedicated to the Belarusian Day of Freedom (March 2013);
- Famous Canadian writer Normand de Bellefeuille, as a sign of support, sent Ales Bialiatski his poetic collection “My Noise” with the author's inscription (March 2013);
- The winner of the Eurovision Song contest, Swedish singer Loreen once again expressed her solidarity with human rights activist Ales Bialiatski during a concert for participants of the international conference on safety issues of human rights activists in Stockholm (April 2013);

- Activists of the Russian branch of “Amnesty International” carried out an action against the use of the death penalty in Belarus near the Belarusian Embassy in Moscow (April 2013);
- In Warsaw, near the President’s Residence, there was the concert “Solidarni z Białorusią” organized by the Polish NGO “Inicjatywa Wolna Białoruś” (IWB) (April 2013);
- In order to inform the international public on the situation in which Belarusian civil society happens to be, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) launched a new version of the website freeales.fidh.net (April 2013);
- Swedish human rights activists and fans during the World Ice Hockey Championship in Stockholm reacted to the incident with the interdiction to use the White-Red-White flags. In solidarity with Belarusian fans and as a sign of protest against the decision of the International Ice Hockey Federation, they organized a number of actions, including those when they appeared during matches with participation of the Belarusian team with the “forbidden” Belarusian national flags (May 2013);
- The Swedish Human Rights NGO “Östgruppen”, as part of the information campaign “Don't Play with the Dictator!”, during the IIHF congress in Stockholm, carried out an action to support the cancellation of the World Ice Hockey Championship in 2014 in Belarus and to transfer it to another country (May 2013);
- Participants of the 38th Congress of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in Istanbul (Turkey) organized a rally with the requirement to free their colleagues-political prisoners: Belarusian Ales Bialiatski, FIDH vice-president, and Bahraini Nabeel Rajab, assistant to the FIDH secretary general. Ales Bialiatski was re-elected the FIDH vice-president at this Congress (May 2013);
- Participants of the female movement FEMEN carried out an action directed against the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko during his official visit to Kyiv (Ukraine) (June 2013).

During the considered period, representatives and structures of Belarusian civil society have been included in the activity of international NGOs:

- Within the scope of the project “Election Observation: Theory & Practice” (EOTP), which is implemented together by the mission “Belarus Watch”, EHU, and the Belarusian House of Human Rights in Vilnius, representatives of Belarusian NGOs, political parties, students and tutors of EHU took part in the supervision over the presidential election in the Czech Republic (January 2013) and the presidential election in Montenegro (April 2013);
- The chairperson of the Movement “For Freedom” Aliaksandr Milinkevich was invited to a meeting of the board and heads of national delegations of the European People’s Party in Athens (Greece) in March 2013;
- On May, 13th, the public association “Belarusian Association of Journalists” became an official member of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) with a possibility to participate in all votes of the EFJ and to influence its decisions.

Organizational potential and abilities to advocate, promote, and protect interests

During the analyzed period, appeals and signatures collection campaigns have remained the most popular initiatives among all types of structures of Belarusian civil society at the local and national levels.

In January-June, statements, petitions, resolutions, and appeals were accepted; open letters were written with the following contents: to protect Belarusian bogs and biological variety; against cutting down the trees in Minsk and against the building consolidation in Minsk; the protest against the construction of the Astraviec atomic power station and for the preservation of privileges for liquidators of the Chernobyl catastrophe; for the preservation of free health care system; to support Andrei Haidukou accused of espionage; to protect the Belarusian language; with an appeal to take part in the celebrating of the Day of Freedom and in the “Chernobyl Path”, and after that — with the protest against the arrests during these events; to protect the independence and economic sovereignty of Belarus and against the Russian air base in Belarus; with the protest against the prosecution of the activists of independent trade unions and the firing of tutors of Hrodna State University; to protect the photographers whose works in the album “Press Photo Belarus 2011” have been recognized as extremist; with the requirement to cancel Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic and Belarus; with the requirement to perform the decision of the UN Working Group on arbitrary detentions concerning the case of Ales Bialiatski; against the construction of the Belarusian-Chinese industrial park; with an appeal not to change the housing privatization rules, etc.

Signatures: the requirement to the Belarusian authorities to start negotiations with the EU about the simplification of the visa regime and the requirement to introduce small frontier movement with Poland; to protect Belarusian bogs; offers to rename streets, to erect monuments, as well as to protect historical and cultural objects; local residents — under the requirements against the construction of objects worsening living conditions, against cutting down trees and to improve the city infrastructure (construction of shops, polyclinics, illumination, repair of roads and bridges, etc.); against the demolition of the Maskouski Bus Station in Minsk; under the requirement to accept laws on public hearings and in protection of animals; in protection of the international public society “Good Will”, which had to be liquidated, and Andrei Haidukou accused of espionage; for increase of a minimum level of salary and pensions; with an appeal to create a Belarusian-language interface for information booths in Minsk, as well as the operating system “Android”; against the building of the Astraviec atomic power station; under the requirements to make public the data on the condition of local budgets; under the protest concerning the interdiction of the Belarusian national flag during the World Ice Hockey Championship in Stockholm, as well as to introduce the White-Red-White flag in the state list of historical and cultural values; against the construction works near the place of a mass burial of victims of Stalin repressions in Kurapaty, etc.

One more popular form of displaying solidary actions is fundraising initiatives and carrying-out of charity actions. We list some of them:

- In February, it was announced about the beginning of fundraising to reconstruct the Bychaŭ Castle;
- In February, the campaign was launched to raise funds to print a book about the participant of anti-Soviet resistance Rasciŭlau Łapicki written by well-known Belarusian historian Mikhail Charniauski who died in January;
- An initiative group of citizens declared the beginning of fundraising to digitize films with old Belarusian movies (February 2013);

- In March, the campaign was launched to raise funds to erect a gravestone monument to Halina Siemdzianava who was one of leaders of the Opposition in the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation;
- The Mahilioŭ History Museum declared a fundraising campaign to buy from foreign owners a part of the Bible published by Francysk Skaryna and the book “Apostle” published by Spiridon Sobol (March 2013);
- In Minsk, the first charity shop “KaliLaska” was opened; it will help the homeless and needy (April 2013);
- During the “Chernobyl Path”, fund raising for children with oncological diseases was organized. The collected means have been transferred in one of hospitals (April-May 2013);
- The campaign was launched to raise funds to pay to rent the office of the Belarusian Language Association (April-May 2013);
- In May, journalist Hleb Labadzienka initiated a fund raising campaign to publish a book of manuscripts of the national poet of Belarus Ryhor Baradulin;
- In May-June, there was a fund raising campaign to help the mother of disappeared Belarusian oppositional politician Jury Zacharanka.

It is necessary to separately mention the activity of the initiatives “Makes Sense” and Search and rescue team “Angel”. The former monthly raises large sums of money which are spent for charity purposes; the latter voluntarily assists in the searches for missing people.

Initiatives and actions to protect the Belarusian language are traditional for Belarus’ civil society. The year 2013 is full of anniversaries: in January — 150 years since the beginning of the 1863-64 uprising in Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus; February 2nd — 175 years since the date of birth of the leader of this uprising — Kastuś Kalinoŭski; February 18th — 120 years since the date of birth of Belarusian writer Maksim Harecki; March 25th — 95 years of the announcement of the Belarusian People’s Republic. In the first half of the year 2013, many actions to protect the Belarusian language (in particular, Belarusian dictations) were combined with the celebrating of these anniversaries. Besides, the International Day of the Native Language, which is annually celebrated on February 21st, was widely celebrated. Separately it is necessary to mention the action, which have received an international scale, — the copying by hand of the Bible in the Belarusian language, which was initiated by Uladzimir Padhol.

Many advocacy campaigns and actions of a symbolical character have been devoted to the events of the 1863-64 uprising. Oppositional political structures declared 2013 the Year of Kastuś Kalinoŭski and initiated the carrying-out of the campaign with the same name. Within the limits of this campaign, public and political activists visited various places connected with historical events: tombs of insurgents and places of battles where there were ceremonies to honor their memory. In cities there were actions in the form of waving Belarusian national flags and drawing of graffiti with patriotic contents. The Civil Historical and Cultural Campaign “1863” is to popularize the awareness of these historical events; within the framework of this campaign a collection of comics about Kastuś Kalinoŭski has been published, Henadz Kisialiou’s scientific monograph has been prepared to be published, there have been a number of events dedicated to the anniversary of the battle on the Milavidy Field — one of considerable events of the 1863-64 uprising on the territory of Belarus, and two excursion routes across memorable places of the 1863-64 uprising have been prepared.

Change of the conditions of the activity of civil society structures

Once again, it is necessary to underline that the conditions of the activity of civil society structures in Belarus have not improved, but au contraire — have become essentially worse.

On 24 January 2013, the President signed his Decree № 2 that introduced some changes in his Decree № 1 d/d 16 January 2009 “About the state registration and liquidation (activity termination) of economic operators”. Besides a number of changes concerning NGOs, this document has essentially changed the registration procedure and expanded possibilities of liquidation of such non-commercial organizations as establishments and associations (unions). Thus, according to the introduced changes, the people who are in the preventive list cannot be founders or heads of NGOs in the form of establishments or associations. In conformity with the Belarusian legislation on preventative measures against malefactions, a person who has committed administrative offense can be put in the preventive list, as well as persons in relation to whom there are grounds to assume that they can threaten national safety or the rights and freedoms of other people. A person can be put in the preventive list by law-enforcement bodies, agencies of state security, frontier service, customs bodies, and bodies of financial investigations. Thus, while registering an establishment or association, the founder should confirm that he is not in the preventive list. If the founder or the head is in the preventive list, he or she is obliged to inform the Ministry of Justice about it, or to liquidate the organization during a two-month term since the moment when he/she was put in the list. Human rights activists consider Decree № 2 to be a dangerous attempt of the Belarusian state to widen the scope of application of such a kind of punishment as “deprivation of civil rights”, which until now existed only in the system of criminal justice, as well as an unprecedented intervention in the sphere of civil and economic rights¹⁴. Decree № 2 came into force on 1 May 2013.

On April, 30th, 2013, the Council of Ministers issued Decision № 327 (on the basis of the President’s Decree № 150 d/d March, 29th, 2012) that confirmed a new list of non-commercial organizations which have privileges as for their payment of the cost of rent of premises occupied by them. In comparison with the previous list, the number of such NGOs has reduced more than twice: from 451 to 195. The majority of the organizations included in the new list are charity or sports-oriented; the new list includes two political parties of pro-Lukashenko orientation: National Party of Labor and Justice and Communist Party of Belarus. For comparison: in Belarus as of April, 1st, 2013 — 15 political parties, 37 trade unions, 2,487 public associations, 31 unions (associations) of public associations, 139 funds were registered¹⁵. According to Belarusian human rights activists, the new list has created for many non-commercial organizations a threat for their existence since the majority of NGOs has no possibility to pay the rent for offices on the same level with commercial organizations. Thus, according to today’s Belarusian legislation, the presence of the legal address for NGOs is obligatory and the legal address cannot be the place of

¹⁴ More details are here: **Elena Tonkacheva: Decree № 2 interferes with the sphere of civil and economic rights** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2013/01/30/elena-tonkacheva--dekret-2-vtorgaetsya-v-sferu-grazhdanskikh-i-ekonomicheskikh-prav.html>; **Tamara Sidorenko. Decree No.2: a new instrument of pressure on the civil society in Belarus:** <http://eurobelarus.info/en/news/society/2013/02/07/decree-no-2--a-new-instrument-of-pressure-on-the-civil-society-in-belarus.html>; **Volha Smalianka: Decree No.2 gives additional reasons to liquidate NGO:** <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/ol-ga-smolyanko-dekret-2-daet-dopolnitel-nye-osnovaniya-dlya-likvidatsii-nko.html>.

¹⁵ See: **About the state registration of public associations, funds, in the first quarter of 2013** (in Russian): http://minjust.by/ru/site_menu/news?&page=5.

residence of the founders¹⁶. Already on the eve of the signing of Decision № 327 — on April, 25th, 2013 — one of the oldest public associations of Belarus — the Belarusian Language Association, being excluded from the list providing privileges, addressed to the wide public with a call for help in connection with the sharp growth of the cost of the rent of the office (60% rise; in total it is now about 1,000 USD per month)¹⁷.

On May, 30th, 2013, the House of Representatives of the National Assembly in the first reading approved the bill “About introducing additions and changes into some laws of the Republic of Belarus concerning the activity of political parties and other public associations”. This bill is to introduce some changes in the laws “About public associations” and “About political parties”, as well as in Civil and Tax codes. Just like the work on other bills, the work on this bill was conducted non-publicly, its contents were not discussed with the interested civil society organizations. The suggestions prepared by the Legal Transformation Center (Lawtrend) in September 2012 concerning the planned changes in the Law “About public associations”¹⁸ have been rejected by the working group with the formulation, “*because of inexpediency*”. According to experts on the freedom of associations and legal regulation of NGOs, the statements of the developers of the bill that these changes, in particular, would simplify the procedure of registration of public associations and parties sound too optimistically. The system of registration of public associations and parties in Belarus will remain extremely difficult and, in order to speak about a simplification of the procedure of registration, it is necessary to change the whole procedure entirely¹⁹. Moreover, the new amendments will complicate the procedure of registration even more and will make easier the procedure of liquidation of public associations and parties: in the first case — any admitted infringements during the creation of organizations will not be considered as removable and will demand repeated organizational actions; in the second case — public organizations and parties are subject to liquidation if they do not submit the necessary information within three years. It was expected that the bill “About introducing additions and changes into some laws of the Republic of Belarus concerning the activity of political parties and other public associations” will be placed for consideration in the second reading at the third session of the House of Representatives in the autumn of the current year.

On February, 7th, 2013, during the presentation of the results of the state registration of public associations and funds in 2012 Minister of Justice Oleg Slizhevsky, making comments on the refusal cases in the registration of public associations and parties, declared that the Ministry of Justice in all cases makes decisions strictly proceeding from the existing norms of the law. “*Here there is no possibility for an official to register or refuse registration according to his/her personal wishes,*” the Minister said. “*In case of disagreement with the position of*

¹⁶ See: *Olga Smolyanko. The number of non-commercial organizations having rent privileges has decreased:* <http://www.lawtrend.org/ru/content/about/news/nko-arenda/?lawtrendorg=c48d9125c4761d081d09cbf2c4342f8c>.

¹⁷ See: **Help the Belarusian Language Association!** (in Belarusian): http://tbn-mova.by/news_509.html.

¹⁸ See: **Lawtrend suggests how to change the law on public associations** (in Russian): <http://lawtrend.org/ru/content/about/news/lawtrend-napravil-predlogeniya-po-proektu-zakona-o-policheskih-partiyah-i-objedineniyah/>.

¹⁹ See: **Volha Smalianka: There are no signs that registration of public associations got simpler:** <http://eurobelarus.info/en/news/society/2013/06/11/volha-smalianka-there-are-no-signs-that-registration-of-public-associations-got-simpler.html>.

*the Ministry of Justice, the founders can go to court and appeal against the decision of the registering body.*²⁰ The director of the Legal Transformation Center (Lawtrend) Olga Smolyanko objected that the current standards of the law do allow the Ministry of Justice to refuse registration of any public association under any pretext²¹.

In the first half of the year 2013, this state of affairs revealed itself to the full. All without exceptions attempts to receive the state registration by civil society organizations that belong to the camp of democratic opposition or whose activity is in contradiction with the interests of today's political regime have been unsuccessful. Thus, the Ministry of Justice has refused registration to the following structures of civil society:

- National Youth Public Association “Human Rights Center “Lambda”. As a reason for another refusal to register the organization Belarusian LGBT activists, the Ministry of Justice said, *“the presented Charter does not contain provisions which would testify that the Charter’s activity of this public association will be aimed at providing the social formation and all-around development of the youth”* (February 2013). Before that, not less than 60 founders of the Human Rights Center “Lambda” were called for conversations to the Militia, including, in its Drug Control Department;
- Minsk City Public Association “European Prospect”. The association of inhabitants of the capital micro-districts “Uručča” and “Uschod”, who oppose the city authorities’ plans to cut down the Sievastopal Park and to build more houses in these micro-districts, were refused registration again only because the letter that guarantees the granting of the legal address ostensibly does not make it clear who is the proprietor of the premises (March 2013);
- Human Rights Public Association “For Fair Elections”. As a reason to refuse registration, the Ministry of Justice said that the list of founders was written by the members of the organization personally instead of being typed on the computer; another reason is that the Charter says that the public association can carry out trainings and concerts (June 2013);
- National Research-Educational Public Association “Tell the Truth” (in such a form there is a third attempt to legalize the Civil Campaign “Tell the Truth”). The Ministry of Justice said that the reason for refusal in registration was the termination of the period of validity of the letter guaranteeing the legal address and ostensibly the fact that the quantitative structure of the board of the organization was not defined (June 2013);
- Youth Public Association “Young Democrats”. The youth wing of the United Civil Party was not registered as a public organization because numerous infringements were found in the presented documents and, in particular, the fact that *“the identity of the persons who were present at the constituent conference was not proved”* (June);
- Having received another refusal, the Belarusian Christian Democracy party and its organizing committee made a decision to start the process of registration of its regional structures — it was declared in January

²⁰ See: **The Ministry of Justice of Belarus has refused registration to 19 public associations in 2012** (in Russian): http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/society/Minjust-Belarusi-otkazal-v-registratsii-v-2012-godu-19-obschestvennym-objedinenijam_i_623413.html.

²¹ See: **Olga Smolyanko: The Ministry of Justice has got Cerberus functions** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2013/02/12/ol-ga-smolyanko--minyust-beret-na-sebya-tserberskie-funktsii.html>.

2013. Since the beginning of the year, the BCD activists have organized constituent congresses to create public associations: Movement of “Belarusan Christian Democrats” in Minsk (January 2013), “Young Christian Democrats of the Mahilioŭ Region” (February 2013), “Christian Democrats of the Mahilioŭ Region” (May 2013), “Christian Democrats of the Homieł Region” and “Christian Democrats of the Viciebsk Region” (June 2013). Before that, there had been constituent congresses to create a regional public organization of the BCD in the Hrodna Region and the National Youth Public Association “Young Christian Democrats”. All the initiatives, which constituent assemblies passed in 2012-2013, were refused the state registration.

It is necessary to specify that attempts to challenge through judicial instances the decisions of the Ministry of Justice that refuse registration to the organizations mentioned above have been futile. Also, during the considered period, courts have finally decided to liquidate the Informational-Educational Institution “Platform” (January 2013) and the International Public Association “Good Will” (March 2013).

Belarusan civil society organizations and initiatives frequently face the problem of reception of state registration at a preparatory stage. Thus, the Homieł city authorities created difficulties for the Homieł-based initiative “Stop drinking — start living” when this initiative was looking for a legal address, which presence is the necessary condition while submitting documents to the Ministry of Justice (January 2013); Because of the impossibility to receive a legal address in Baranavičy for the registration of the Public Association of Baranavičy-based Ukrainians “Kobzar”, local activist Mikola Charnavus was compelled to register this organization in the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine) as a branch of the All-Ukrainian Society “Prosvita” named after Taras Shevchenko (January 2013); In February 2013, the Administration of the Pieršamajski District of Minsk refused registration to the initiative group to carry out a local referendum in protection of the Sievastopał Park in Minsk.

There have also been other actions of the state structures, due to which public organizations have happened to be under the threat of liquidation. Thus, there was a resonance case of a pre-schedule cancellation by the Main economic board at the President of Belarus of the lease contract of the premises of the legal address of the National Youth Public Association “Vstrecha” [Meeting] that works in the sphere of preventing HIV/AIDS (June 2013). The management of the organization considers that they went through such a form of prosecution because their target group is the so-called group MSM (“men having sex with men”²²).

There is also a situation with the Belarusan Helsinki Committee that has been demanded to pay a considerable sum of taxes and penal sanctions (30,000 USD) for the grants of the European Commission used in 2002-2003. These grants, according to the international contracts of the Republic of Belarus, were allotted in a tax free mode; however, for some reason, the Ministry of Taxes and Tax Collection thinks that this circumstance is insignificant²³. On February, 25th, 2013, without any warning, the employees of the Ministry of Taxes and Tax Collection came to the human rights defending organization’s office and handed over the decision about arrest and property withdrawal, as well as the message on carrying out actions for revealing the property of the payer.

In June 2013, the authorities tried again to deprive the Minsk-based Religious Community of Christians of the full Gospel “Church New Life” of their building. On the basis of the statement of the ZhREO [public utility; housing repair and operational association] of the Maskoŭski District of the capital concerning this church, the Economic

²² See: **Cancellation of rent of “Meeting”:** conclusions and further actions (in Russian): <http://vstrecha.by/ru/2009-09-23-08-49-16/1247--lr.html>.

²³ More details: **Taxmen came with a warrant to seize property to the BHC office:** <http://belhelcom.org/en/node/18686>.

Court of Minsk started the execution of the legal process with the requirement to release the occupied building. However, already the next day, the Higher Economic Court suspended this process because the ZhREO withdrew its statement. According to the lawyer of the church Siarhei Lukanin, the situation is still not solved and continues to be in limbo and there are no guarantees that the authorities will not make new attempts to deprive the religious community of their building²⁴.

During the considered period, the branch of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BITU) at the “Granit” plant was actually destroyed (Mikaševičy, Brest Region); the enterprise fired the last trade-union activists: in April — Anatol Litvinko, in May — Lieanid Dubanosau. Thus, if in 2012 at the “Granit” plant there were about 300 members of the BITU, then already in the beginning of 2013, because of threats and dismissals, there were only a few people left, and by the summer of 2013 all those who did not wish to leave the independent trade union were fired.

In April 2013, a number of human rights defending organizations and independent mass media became victims of cyber-attacks — the website of the Mahilioŭ branch of the HRC “Viasna” and the website of the HRC “Viasna” itself were cracked; the website “Belarusian Partisan” was cracked as well; the web sites of the “Charter’97” and the Belarusian Association of Journalists had DDoS-attacks. It has been characterized by all suffered organizations as a planned action of prosecution from the Belarusian authorities²⁵. Earlier, in February, the Belarusian Christian Democracy website was for a while blocked for users in Belarus. The Belarusian Christian Democracy secretary Dzianis Sadouski informed that the technical experts of the web site found out that the blocking was made by the state enterprise “Beltelecom” which is the exclusive provider of external sluices in the Internet²⁶.

During the considered period, Belarusian civil society structures have had difficulties with the providing of the right on peaceful meetings and public demonstrations. There have been numerous cases when people have been refused by the state authorities to carry out rallies and all attempts to challenge these refusals in a judicial order have been unsuccessful. In Minsk, the authorities allowed to carry out the traditional processions of the democratic opposition in honor of the Day of Freedom — the anniversary of the creation in 1918 of the Belarusian People’s Republic (in 2013 the procession passed on March, 24th) and the “Chernobyl Path”, organized since 1989 on the anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe (on April, 26th). The situation is such that the permission to carrying out by the Belarusian Christian Democracy activists in Hrodna a picket in support of small frontier movement between Belarus and Poland (on March, 2nd), as well as by the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) activists and other oppositional structures a May Day demonstration in Brest (on May, 1st) has been

²⁴ See: **Siarhei Lukanin: The authorities once again checked the durability of our church** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2013/06/18/sergey-lukanin-vlasti-v-ocherednoy-raz-proverili-nashu-tserkov-na-prochnost.html>.

²⁵ See: **The site of Mahilioŭ “Viasna” is cracked** (in Belarusian): <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24946258.html>; **Human rights activists of “Viasna” commented on the crack of their site** (in Russian): <http://belapan.com/archive/2013/04/26/620754/>; **Sheremet about the crack of the site of “Belarusian Partisan”** (in Belarusian): <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24968041.html>; **The “Charter’97” website is attacked** (in Russian): <http://charter97.org/ru/news/2013/4/23/68349/>; **The BAJ website is attacked** (in Belarusian): <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24969324.html>; **Why are independent sites attacked?** (in Belarusian): <http://baj.by/be/node/20636>.

²⁶ See: **The site of the Belarusian Christian Democracy is blocked for users from Belarus** (in Russian): http://naviny.by/rubrics/computer/2013/02/25/ic_news_128_411690/.

perceived as an outstanding event. The demonstrations unapproved by the authorities were accompanied by arrests of their participants and penalties or administrative arrests. There were detentions, including preventive ones, during the authorized actions: they took place during the Day of Freedom and “Chernobyl Path”²⁷.

There have been a lot of cases of refusals in granting premises for carrying out public actions by civil society structures. Thus, for example, the administration of the Palace of Culture of the Minsk Tractor Plant refused the organizing committee to celebrate the Day of Freedom to rent premises for carrying out a solemn evening on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the declaration of the Belarusian People’s Republic in spite of the fact that there was a preliminary arrangement and the premises in this recreation center were free at this time (March 2013). The management of the Minsk Youth Variety Theater, a few days before the event, cancelled the concert to the memory of active participant of the Belarusian national revival, producer of Belarusian music, Aryna Viačorka, even though the concert had been widely advertised, the concert program had been formed, and the tickets were being sold (April 2013). Two days prior to the opening of the Forum of ecological organizations, the administration of a library in Polack (Viciebsk Region) informed the organizers on the impossibility to have the premises without a written coordination with the Polacak District Executive Committee, which was never received, despite a preliminary verbal consent (June 2013).

²⁷ More details: **Report on monitoring the public event on Freedom Day in Minsk (March 24, 2013):** <http://spring96.org/en/news/62098>; **Monitoring report on the results of supervision over the course of the mass action “Chernobyl Path-2013”** (in Russian): <http://www.belhelcom.org/ru/node/18814>.