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The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report



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Table of contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction: definition of the notion and history of the phenomenon | 3 |
| Employment ban in Belarus: a new stage | 8 |
| 1. Forms and methods of implementing the employment ban practice | 9 |
| 2. The process of deploying new practices to implement the employment ban in 2020-2022 | 12 |
| 3. The scales of the employment ban practice implementation in 2020-2022 | 16 |
| 4. Orientation towards re-Sovietization in the implementation of the employment ban | 20 |
| 5. Factors preventing the complete restoration of the Soviet practices and total control | 23 |
| 6. Systemic aftereffects of the implementation of the employment ban for Belarusian society | 25 |
| Key findings and directions for action | 27 |



Introduction: definition of the notion and history of the phenomenon

Speaking of the employment ban (from German: *Berufsverbot*, where *Beruf* is a profession, *Verbot* is a prohibition), it is necessary to distinguish between two main contexts, which this term is applied in.

Restrictions to occupy certain positions or to carry out professional activities that are part of the punishment for crimes (usually criminal ones) are sometimes called the employment ban*. Such restrictions are present in the legislation of many countries; there are similar norms in the Belarusian criminal law. They most often concern clearly defined positions or professional areas where a person is deprived of the right to work, are related to the nature of committed crimes, and are not lifelong; the terms of these restrictions are enshrined in the legislation or determined by a court decision. In any case, the procedure of imposing such restrictions is clearly expressed in the legislation.

A completely different context for the usage of the term “profession ban” arises when we talk about restrictions or obstacles in the implementation of professional activities that are related neither to qualifications and performance of professional duties, nor to economic factors and the state of the labor market, nor to punishment for crimes. In this case, the employment ban is discussed as a form of discrimination or persecution on various grounds: gender, race, nationality, language, political, ideological, etc.

Within the framework of this study, we shall speak of the employment ban as a socio-political practice that includes various hindrances to implement professional activities, which is a type of **persecution precisely for political and ideological reasons**.

For the first time, the employment ban practice on ideological grounds came into the focus of public attention and discussion in 1972. The reason for this was the adoption of the “Law On Extremism” in West Germany, the purpose of which was to combat the growth of left-radical sentiments. In accordance with this law, citizens who were disloyal to the existing constitutional order were deprived of the right to be in the civil service. About 11,000 people lost their jobs as a result of its application and, according to some estimates, more than a million went through

* E.g., the “Contemporary Economic Dictionary” defines the employment ban as “deprivation of citizens of the right to certain types of labor, certain positions in connection with crimes committed by them or professional unsuitability.” (see: [in Russian] Raizberg B.A., Lozovsky L.Sh., Starodubtseva E.B. **Contemporary Economic Dictionary**, 5th ed., revised and complemented, Moscow, 2007).



the procedure of being tested by special commissions for loyalty. However, immediately after its adoption, this law received negative assessments from human rights defenders and civil society in West Germany, and a broad socio-political campaign was launched, including at the international level, to terminate its application. Thanks to these actions, by the end of the 1970s, dismissals of people for ideological reasons had practically stopped. In the majority of the lands of West Germany, the “Law On Extremism” was canceled, and in the lands where it is still preserved, its application always causes major scandals and public protests.

Another close, although not identical, context in which the problematics of the employment ban was actively discussed in the early 1990s was the process of lustration in the countries of the former Soviet Union and the “socialist camp.” In most countries where laws on lustration or decommunization were adopted, the employment ban was one of the frequently used tools. The restrictions that were introduced during the lustration process differed in the scope of their application in various countries (in some places they concerned the civil service only and management positions only; in others they extended to a wider range of areas and professions: science and education, the mass media, etc.), procedures, systematicity and rigidity of law enforcement practices. However, in almost all cases, the employment ban concerned citizens who held leadership positions under communist regimes, as well as employees of repressive agencies or those who in one way or another collaborated with the relevant intelligence services. At the same time, the facts of cooperation had to be proven; all this could be challenged in court, as well as the imposed restrictions on the professional activities**.

In both historical precedents, we deal with legislatively formalized restrictions on the exercise of professional activity, one way or another connected with political or ideological motivation. However, the employment ban was often used and continues to be used as a mechanism of persecuting political opponents or simply dissidents without any legislative framework, procedures and, accordingly, the ability to defend one’s violated rights.

The employment ban mechanisms were actively used in the USSR, although the authorities did not appeal to a special law; on the contrary — both at the legislative and rhetorical levels the equality of everybody’s “right to work” was one of the “achievements” that communist ideologists were proud of. Simultaneously, access to certain areas of activity or, in general, to the possibility of legal work on the basis of one’s political and ideological loyalty (sometimes on the basis of one’s national-cultural or ideological self-identification) was constantly regulated at different stages of the existence of the USSR. Certain posts and positions could only be held by members of the CPSU; believers had limited access to a wide range of professions; “persons of Jewish nationality” were prohibited from obtaining certain professions, etc. Censorship and prohibition

** Such lawsuits were filed to various courts, even to the ECHR; there are known cases of decisions of the ECHR, which recognized the employment ban in relation to individuals as a disproportionate measure due to various circumstances (statutes of limitations, insignificance of facts of cooperation with secret services), without challenging the fundamental fairness of applying the employment ban within the framework of the lustration process.



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

of literary works automatically “threw out” writers and poets from their professional realization; “black lists” were practiced in relation to almost all creative professional groups.

The effectiveness of the employment ban mechanism as a means of combating dissidence in the USSR was determined not only by the variety of forms and want of possibilities to defend one’s rights in court or in public, but also by the specific organization of all social life, which was both ideologically and structurally centered on the value of labor and the primacy of the labor relations system. The ban on professional activities and dismissals from work created an extremely convenient for the authorities form of marginalization and extrusion of undesirable people from social life per se. The efficacy of such a mechanism was based on the fact that labor was not just a right, but also a duty and a “matter of honor” of a Soviet person. Without being included in the system of “socially useful labor,” people lost not only their livelihood and social status, but were also practically deprived of all rights. Since 1961, “social parasitism” in the USSR was prosecuted by law, first by expulsion from large cities, then by criminal punishment. Given the almost complete absence of the non-state sector and criminal liability for “social parasitism,” dismissals from work and being put in “black lists” became not just an effective tool of marginalizing dissidents, but often the first step towards depriving anti-Soviet people of civil rights through criminal prosecution or other repressive measures.

After the débâcle of the USSR, the period of democratic transformations in Belarus did not last long; the processes of lustration and de-Sovietization were practically not launched; therefore, after the authoritarian revanche, many Soviet practices easily returned to socio-political reality, albeit in a slightly modified form. The resumption of the employment ban practice became a form of struggle against political opposition and dissidence already at the very first stages of the formation of the Belarusian authoritarian system.

In 2012, the Center for European Transformation for the first time conducted a study of the practice of applying the employment ban in Belarus in the period of 1996-2011¹. The study recorded more than 500 publicly described cases of dismissals and deprivation of the opportunity to carry out professional activities for political and ideological reasons. Just like in the Soviet Union, in independent Belarus there were no legislative restrictions in the field of labor relations, but various legal norms were gradually introduced that made it easier to implement the employment ban. Thus, in 2004, mandatory short-term labor contracts were introduced in the country, and this gave the current political regime a free hand to easily get rid of unwanted people — it became unnecessary to look for special reasons for dismissals, you could simply wait until the end of the contract and refuse to renew it without any explanation.

¹ See: [in Russian] **Employment ban in Belarus: variety of forms, tasks, and methods**, Center for European Transformation, 12.09.2012: [https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/File/Berufsverbot-Belarus\(1\).pdf](https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/File/Berufsverbot-Belarus(1).pdf).



In 2015, the Soviet practice of control over “participation in socially useful labor” (“decree on social parasitism”^{***}) also returned.

For the period before 2020, the characteristic features of the employment ban practice in Belarus were:

- “political seasonality” of dismissals — they were carried out “preventatively” during election campaigns as a punishment for political opposition activity;
- concentration on certain professional areas: “cleansing” of law enforcement agencies and government bodies of dissidents, dismissals of civil and political activists from spheres that work with public consciousness (media, education, science), ousting of authoritative people and potential public leaders from the public space;
- professional and social marginalization and displacement into less socially protected sectors (such as NGOs, the private sector of the economy, etc.) with fewer opportunities for professional fulfillment;
- non-final, temporary nature of the employment ban, when for many victims of its application the opportunity to get a job in their specialty was restored later.

During this period, dismissals, expulsions, and “black lists” served as a form of intimidation and punishment of political opponents, depriving them of their livelihood and full professional self-realization in the country. Also, these methods served as a way to combat dissidence in government structures, demonstrating the inevitability of social marginalization of those who disagree.

Moreover, until 2020, the employment ban practice in Belarus differed from the Soviet one. First of all, this difference was based on the absence of a complete state monopoly on the sphere of labor and employment, as well as on a person’s self-realization. With the development of private business and the “third sector” (non-profit organizations and initiatives working in various fields: from animal protection to education and science), the “effectiveness” of the employment ban as a tool of suppressing dissidence decreased, since professionals forced out of government institutions had a possibility to work in the non-state sector. At some stage, the employment ban could even be considered as one of the factors in the development of the non-state sector, which was fueled by high-level professionals, despite lower levels of earnings and social protection.

However, the political crisis in 2020 radically changed the situation. The employment ban became one of the massive repressive practices aimed not only at individual citizens, participants of the protest movement, dissidents and disloyalists to the current political regime,

^{***} This is how the people immediately called Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus № 3 d/d April 2nd, 2015 “On The Prevention Of Social Dependency.”



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

but also part of the authorities' strategy to transform the social structure, norms and relations in society. To a large extent, this transformation is aimed at **restoring, using new material, the Soviet norms and patterns of organizing social and political reality.**



Employment ban in Belarus: a new stage

During the political crisis in 2020 and the subsequent period, the repressive practice of the employment ban in Belarus became one of the main tools of suppressing civil political activity and dissidence, along with the use of violence, deprivation or restriction of freedom, intimidation, expulsion from the country, etc. The application of the employment ban currently differs from the previous periods in the contemporary history of Belarus not only as for the scale, but also as for the change of forms and goals.

For a more in-depth analysis of the employment ban practice in today's Belarus and its consequences for the economy and society as a whole, the Center for European Transformation², together with the Flying University³, launched a monitoring study. This report expands on the results of the first phase of this research, covering the second half of 2020 to the first half of 2022⁴, supplemented with data for the second half of 2022, along with a description of the new identified trends.

The purpose of the study was to analyze the implementation of the employment ban practice in Belarus in 2020-2022.

The objectives of the study included:

- 1) collection of material and analysis of employment ban cases;
- 2) highlighting of the main characteristic features of the employment ban in the modern situation (grounds, goals and tactics of the authorities, strategies and tactics of the repressed);
- 3) identifying of key issues and their aftermaths for society and individuals;
- 4) identifying of directions to counteract negative consequences.

² **Center for European Transformation**, see: <https://cet.eurobelarus.info>.

³ **Flying University**, see: <https://fly-uni.org>.

⁴ See: [in Russian] **The employment ban practice in Belarus in 2020-2022**, Center for European Transformation, 08.11.2022: https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/22/DOC/2022_Berufsverbot-Belarus.pdf.



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

As an **empirical basis for the study** we used^{*1}:

- monitoring data from open sources (media, Telegram channels) from December 2020 to December 2022 (about 300 cases of dismissals or other types of the employment ban in various fields were collected);
- data from the Belarusian PEN⁵ collected during the monitoring of violations of cultural rights and human rights of cultural workers in terms of dismissals in the period of 2021-2022 in the field of culture and related areas directly linked to culture (203 cases);
- data on layoffs in the cultural sector collected by the Belarusian Council of Culture⁶ by the end of 2022 (88 cases);
- data on doctors and healthcare workers affected by repressions, collected by the Medical Solidarity Foundation of Belarus⁷ (219 cases);
- results of the online survey conducted as part of this study (the field stage was implemented in May-June 2022, 141 questionnaires were collected);
- results of in-depth interviews with representatives of various fields affected by the employment ban (1st stage: May-June 2022, 20 interviews; 2nd stage: August-September 2022, 10 interviews).

1. Forms and methods of implementing the employment ban practice

Taking into account the development of social and economic relations, the presence of various forms of ownership and types of employment, at this stage we include in the general phenomenon of the employment ban the following types of repressive actions by the authorities:

- 1) **Layoffs.** This is the most universal and widely used tool of implementing the employment ban practice used today in all areas and at all levels. In most cases, dismissals occur with the use of legal or quasi-legal grounds. First of all, it happens when a new labor contract is not concluded — since labor contracts in Belarus are mostly short-term in nature (renewed every year or every two-three years), this has become a very convenient way to get rid of unwanted employees. A

^{*1} The authors of the study are grateful to civil organizations and initiatives that, despite significant difficulties, continue to systematically and scrupulously collect information in their areas.

⁵ **Belarusian PEN**, see: <https://penbelarus.org>.

⁶ **Belarusian Council of Culture**, see: <https://byculture.org>.

⁷ **Belarusian Medical Solidarity Foundation**, see: <https://bymedsol.org>.



significant part of such dismissals occurs “by agreement of the parties,” i.e. allegedly at the initiative of the employee (they write a letter of resignation). However, this method of formalizing the severance of labor relations only masks the real pressure on workers who are forced to take such an action because of threats of dismissals “according to the article [of Labor Code]” or other influences. In addition, the practice of dismissals for far-fetched reasons is widely used, when an employee is accused of violations that they did not commit. Almost from the very beginning of the development of the employment ban practice, at the current stage, people who were serving an administrative arrest (“days”) for participating in protests began to be fired from work “for absenteeism,” although in essence this was illegal. Today this practice has been “legalized” and continues to be applied to those who are jailed for 24 hours for “distributing extremist materials” (reposts or likes in social networks) or on other politically motivated charges.

In the report on the results of the first stage of the study, based on the data from the survey of people banned from their profession, we analyzed in detail the mechanisms and tools that are used in situations of dismissals⁸, but here we outline only the main characteristics that qualitatively distinguish the new stage:

- most often, the presence of an initiative “from above” is mentioned: lists with the names of specific employees who should be fired; direct instructions from intelligence officers or senior management; instructions to fire all opposition activists or those involved in certain types of protest activity (strikes, independent trade unions), etc.;
 - absence of veiled hints and attempts to hide the real reasons for pressure and dismissals (most often, they are known to all participants in the process, including those around them and colleagues);
 - instructions for a person to quit on their own: insistent proposals to formalize the termination of the employment relationship “at their own request” or “by agreement of the parties”;
 - duration of pressure if the situation is not resolved immediately: if the employee does not make a “compromise”, the employer seeks for other forms of pressure and coercion to dismiss or looks for violations for which one can be fired “according to the article”;
 - blackmail and pressure, including threats to family members, threats to other employees or superiors.
- 2) **Deprivation of licenses or non-certification.** Regarding the deprivation of licenses in our situation, we are talking primarily about a massive process of deprivation of licenses to practice law. Deprivation of licenses of lawyers occurs in several ways: a) based on the results of certification (re-certification) by qualification commissions; b) in connection with the alleged

⁸ See: [in Russian] **The employment ban practice in Belarus in 2020-2022**, Center for European Transformation, 08.11.2022: https://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/22/DOC/2022_Berufsverbot-Belarus.pdf.



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

committing of offenses incompatible with the title of lawyer. In addition, it is common practice to exclude lawyers from bar associations by decisions of disciplinary commissions of territorial bar associations, which automatically deprives them of the opportunity to carry out professional activities.

This type of the employment ban includes dismissals that are organized through a competition or certification procedure (for university tutors and academic workers), which dissidents or those seen in opposition political activity do not pass, as well as the deprivation of accreditation of Belarusian journalists working for foreign media, which deprives them of the opportunity to carry out professional activities in the country legally.

This also includes the deprivation of licenses for certain types of activities of legal entities (publishing, medical services, etc.).

3) **Expulsions from universities and other professional educational institutions.**

Students found to be involved in protest and opposition activities, solidarity actions, or organizing independent trade unions, were immediately subject to mass expulsions under the pretext of poor performance, absenteeism, etc. We consider these actions one of the types of prohibition on the profession, because they hinder the receipt of vocational education and further professional and labor self-realization. For expulsions, there were also most often formal reasons: “absenteeism”, “violations of discipline”, failure to pass tests and exams, which can always be arranged, etc.

4) In relation to entrepreneurs, the authorities **create obstacles in doing business**: deprivation of licenses, organization of continuous inspections by inspection bodies (tax, compliance with fire safety rules, etc.) that paralyze activities, receipt of refusals to rent or purchase necessary premises, etc.

5) **“Black lists”** are unofficial orders, unspoken prohibitions on concluding creative contracts, broadcasting in the media, providing premises for performances or creative meetings. This type of the employment ban primarily concerns people in creative professions, in front of whom all doors and opportunities for professional self-realization are closed. In our situation, a specifically new way of implementing this practice was the creation of “extremist lists”, which include not only people, but also the media, organizations, books and magazines. With the help of this mechanism, people are not simply pushed out of the labor market, their activities and everything connected with them are criminalized.

6) **Liquidation of NGOs and non-state media.** The process of liquidation of public organizations of any type, which is massive, leaves their employees without work and social protection, as well as the closure or displacement of the editorial offices of national and regional non-state media from the country. The liquidation of NGOs of all forms (associations, foundations, public associations, institutions) is also carried out in compliance with the



procedural component, using courts at all levels. The grounds for liquidation are often formal or far-fetched; in addition, liquidation of NGOs on the basis of classified information provided by prosecutors or other government agencies has become a common practice (i.e. even during the trial, these grounds are not disclosed). In addition to the forced liquidation of NGOs, coercion for voluntary liquidation has also become widespread — when the leadership of organizations is directly (through calls for conversations with law enforcement agencies or executive committees) or indirectly (through endless inspections, fines and other obstacles to their activities) forced to close their organization/institution.

2. The process of deploying new practices to implement the employment ban in 2020-2022

Based on the monitoring of media reports, analysis of data collected by various public organizations, information in open and closed groups in social networks, it is possible to trace the chronology of the unfolding of the repressive practice of the employment ban as a reaction to the political events in 2020.

Reports on dismissals that had begun (in particular, for people's refusal to falsify voting results, participation in protests and spontaneous strikes) began to appear literally in the first days after the date of the presidential election. During the same period, information began to appear about the voluntary dismissals of civil servants and security forces in protest against election fraud and the revealed facts of the use of excessive violence by security forces during the crackdown of protests.

For the latter (especially for employees of law enforcement agencies), dismissals from work as a protest in a situation where the ruling political regime retains control over the country almost automatically (with rare exceptions) deprived them of the opportunity to return to the civil service. In the first weeks of the protests, there were also widespread cases when employees of government agencies and organizations were voluntarily leaving them as a sign of solidarity with dismissed colleagues. Such actions for these people were also fraught with the acquisition of a "wolf ticket", i.e. being placed in the "unreliable list" and deprived of the opportunity for further employment in their specialty.

The targeted "cleansing" of the civil service system from heads of organizations and officials who openly supported the protests or were loyal to them began in mid-August 2020, immediately after a rally organized by the authorities in Minsk in support of Alexander Lukashenko. It was from this moment that the mass media increasingly began to receive reports on dismissals of heads of cultural, medical, educational, sports, and state-run media institutions from their



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

positions, as well as dismissals of Foreign Ministry employees and deprivation of their diplomatic ranks.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing protests, active participants immediately began to be fired from their jobs everywhere, primarily those who announced the start of the strike and went on strike: workers of state-run media, industrial enterprises, university and school teachers, medical workers, etc.

Professional athletes stood out in the general row, openly speaking out against election fraud and violence — almost all of them, regardless of their sport achievements and merits, were dismissed from the national teams of their sports in the very first months after the election.

For representatives of creative professions who supported the protests, the practice of “black lists” was immediately resumed — a ban on performing concerts, performances, holding and participating in exhibitions, on being present on television and radio broadcasts of state-run media, etc.

With the beginning of the academic year, when protest activity began to unfold within the university walls (student actions, strikes, petitions and appeals on behalf of the academic community), dismissals of tutors/teachers began, the most active participants of protests and strikes among students were expelled.

Throughout this period, there was a steady deterioration of the conditions for the activities of journalists from non-state media. Accusations by the authorities against Belarusian independent and foreign media of “coordinating protests” were made on the eve of the elections, but with the actual start of mass protests, these accusations became a commonplace. On August 29th, 2020, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs revoked the accreditation of several dozen foreign media journalists (not only Western, but also Russian), a significant part of whom were citizens of Belarus. For covering protests, journalists began to be detained and brought to administrative responsibility on the same basis as protest participants; this happened on a regular basis, both in the capital and in the regions, and already in November several journalists were subjected to criminal prosecution for their professional activities and subsequently sentenced to real terms of imprisonment. Later this practice will become constant.

One of the first editorial offices of independent media (online publication Kyky.org), fearing persecution, evacuated from Belarus at the end of August 2020. Since October of the same year, there were a series of reports on regular searches, seizure of office equipment, blocking of websites, confiscations of circulations, trials, fines, detentions of managers and employees, as well as the closure of publications — both regional and national. With the tightening of the repressive legislation in the spring of 2021, the activities of independent socio-political media were essentially banned in the country — any criticism of the current authorities, coverage of the activities of their opponents and giving the floor to undesirable topics is qualified as



“extremist activity.” The peak of repressions against non-state media occurred at the end of spring — summer of 2021, when the most read Internet portal TUT.BY and the Minsk studio of the Belsat TV channel (May 2021), the editorial office of the newspaper Naša Niva and the news office of Radio Liberty (July 2021), the BelaPAN news agency (August 2021) were closed. The remaining non-arrested employees of these and a number of other media and professional journalistic organizations were forced to urgently leave the country and restore their work outside Belarus’ borders.

The repressions were intensified with the announcement of the start of the “National Strike” from October 26th, 2020, to which the regime responded by ordering to deal with all those who joined the strike. From about this moment, the practice of implementing the employment ban in a situation of political crisis acquires a total character. Mass dismissals began everywhere (as well as expulsions of students) not only of those who joined the strike, but also of “unreliable individuals” in general: people who took an active part in the election campaign on the side of independent candidates, in street protests, or who publicly condemned election fraud and the use of excessive violence in relation to the protesters, and indeed those who have long attracted attention with their oppositional sentiments. At this stage, the topic of persecution of private businesses for political reasons became relevant — many of them were forced to close and their owners — to leave the country as a result.

In October 2020, the first high-profile cases of deprivation of licenses of lawyers involved in the defense of political prisoners were noted. Since February 2021, this practice has become widespread and is still being implemented; there are cases of criminal prosecution of lawyers.

In the beginning of 2021, the first reports appeared about lists compiled by the special services of people subject to dismissal from work for “disloyalty” to the political regime, which were transferred to institutions, organizations and enterprises for mandatory execution. According to a number of media reports, first of all, such lists were compiled in relation to the actual employees and military personnel of law enforcement agencies, where “cleansing of the ranks” was carried out first and in several stages. The main body of messages about mass layoffs of people based on these lists appeared at the end of 2021.

It is known that the lists of people who had signed up to nominate independent candidates during the election campaign, the lists of independent election observers, and the lists of people who had been detained and served administrative arrest during the protests in August-December 2020 were used as the “basis” for the dismissal lists. Subsequently, these lists were updated and replenished with strike participants, activists or founders of independent trade unions, by monitoring social networks and identifying those who expressed their civic position



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

in them, and then with those who participated in protests or spoke out against Russian aggression in Ukraine, etc.^{*II}

In the summer of 2021, the mass application of another type of the employment ban began — the liquidation of non-profit organizations (public associations, institutions, foundations, initiatives, etc.). In mid-July, in the mode of a special operation, simultaneously throughout the country, searches took place in the offices of a dozen of the most influential organizations; a number of well-known activists in the sector were detained; at the same time, the Ministry of Justice announced the liquidation of several hundred NGOs. From that moment on, the practice of liquidating NGOs of various forms became systemic and permanent.

Starting since the summer of 2021, a number of legislative changes began to be introduced in order to facilitate the employment ban practice. On June 30th, 2021, the Labor Code introduced a new basis for termination of an employment contract at the initiative of the employer — absence from work due to serving an administrative arrest, if this interfered with the performance of labor duties⁹. Thus, the possibility of dismissal of any employee who was subjected to administrative arrest “for 15 days” or even just to a preliminary detention for two or three days was legalized. This measure began to be applied almost automatically in government agencies and enterprises against those who were subject to administrative punishment for political reasons.

Later, changes were made to other laws and regulations, either strengthening control over the “ideologically disloyal” people or strengthening the regulation of access to the profession in various fields of activity.

In 2022, information began to appear about cases of refusal to hire or hidden dismissals in relation to relatives of political prisoners. Independent media reported isolated cases of this type of pressure, mostly against public figures, but the practice appears to be much more widespread. The reasons for such actions were also not particularly hidden by employers (in Belarusian practice this is expressed by the phrase: “Well, you do understand everything yourself”); in some cases, employers referred to “orders from above.”

By the end of 2022, another new trend in the implementing of the employment ban practice emerged, which does not introduce fundamentally new forms and methods, but is symptomatic of the overall process. These are “personnel purges” in government agencies and enterprises, which are initiated when there is a change of leadership or simply when new “deputies of

^{*II} In the year 2023, which is not included in the period under review, information appeared that in some organizations they are compiling lists for dismissals (for non-renewal of contracts) simply on the principle of “disloyalty,” i.e. not on the basis of any specific facts, but on the basis of an assessment of this or that individual.

⁹ See: [in Russian] **Article № 42. Termination of an employment contract at the initiative of the employer.** Labor Code of the Republic of Belarus d/d July 26th 1999 № 296-3, Etalon-online: <https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=hk9900296>.



ideological work and security” are appointed. At the 2020-2021 stage, we observed that the immediate management of organizations, themselves under strict control and pressure from above, often tried to avoid dismissing their employees who were seen as “disloyal,” including because getting rid of valuable specialists could cause personnel problems, create tension in relationships within work collectives. Now, a strong impression is being created that taking office for a new manager is associated with the fulfillment of a mandatory “ritual” by getting rid of the remaining “disloyal” employees, through which one’s own loyalty is proven^{*III}.

3. The scales of the employment ban practice implementation in 2020-2022

As of today, there is no way to objectively evaluate the scales of the phenomenon and it is unclear whether this is possible at all.

First, despite the fact that the very idea of “purges” is publicly voiced in order to intimidate “disloyal” people, in practice a large number of dismissals and other types of the employment ban implementation take place in a hidden, formally veiled form. People are pressured to decide to resign on their own, so as not to “spoil the life” of themselves and others; the possibilities of non-renewal of contracts, non-certification (deprivation of licenses), failure to pass a competition (for academic workers), etc. are widely used.

Second, most cases remain non-public, and as the situation with repressions in Belarus unfolds, less and less information gets into the public space. The further you go, the more effective the attitude is that publicity can prevent you from finding a job elsewhere; moreover, publicizing the situation of dismissal for political reasons can lead not only to problems with finding a new job, but also to other even more severe types of persecution. Therefore, if in 2020 and even as early as 2021 people did not hide the fact that they were fired because of their civic position or participation in the protest movement, then today either stories of people, who left Belarus after being fired and are now safe, or anonymous cases and cases of “mass purges” that are difficult to hide, appear in the public space.

While monitoring mentions in the media, we found about 300 described cases of dismissals for political reasons between December 2020 and December 2022. We cannot say that the distribution of public mentions per area we obtained reflects the real picture; it is rather important to emphasize the diversity of areas of activity in which these cases are recorded: from

^{*III} We must say that at the end of 2022 the information appeared about the very first cases of such “cleansings”; in 2023, their number increased.

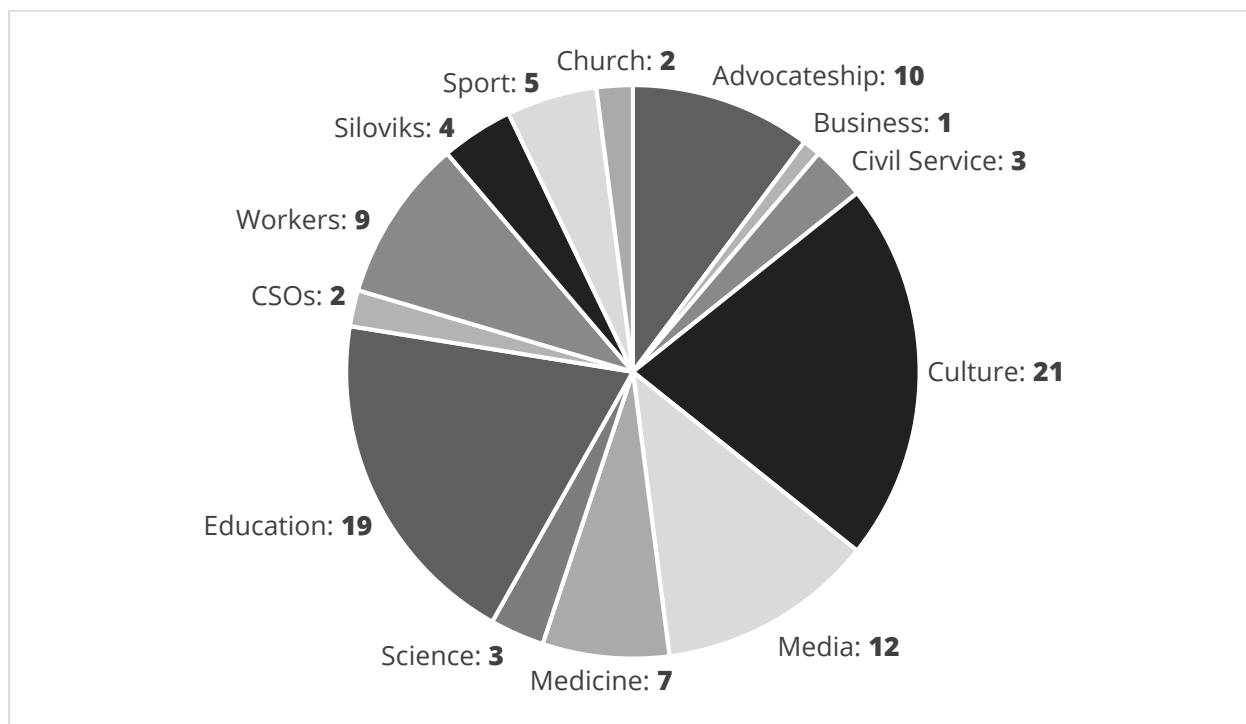


The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

the prosecutor's office to the church, from the media to medicine. Without being able to really assess the numerical scale of the problem, we can talk about its comprehensiveness.

Diagram. Mass media mentions of dismissal cases per sphere, %



In some professional fields, there are public initiatives or organizations that have tried or continue to try to collect data more or less systematically regarding the practice of professional exclusion. There are such initiatives in the legal community (the Right to Defense project¹⁰), the cultural sphere (Belarusan PEN¹¹ and the Belarusan Council of Culture¹²), the field of medicine and healthcare (Belarusan Medical Solidarity Foundation¹³), independent media (Belarusan Association of Journalists¹⁴, Media Solidarity Belarus¹⁵). Their data is based on collecting

¹⁰ **The Right to Defense project**, see: <https://www.defendersbelarus.org>.

¹¹ **Belarusan PEN**, see: <https://penbelarus.org>.

¹² **Belarusan Council of Culture**, see: <https://byculture.org>.

¹³ **Belarusan Medical Solidarity Foundation**, see: <https://bymedsol.org>.

¹⁴ **Belarusan Association of Journalists**, see: <https://baj.by>.

¹⁵ **Media Solidarity Belarus**, see: <https://sites.google.com/belarus97.pro/media>.



information from open sources, using the snowball method or by recording those who have asked for help. Other professional communities do not keep even such records^{*IV}.

Among the areas of professional activity most affected by the employment ban after the events of 2020, one can name the legal profession, the sector of non-profit organizations (NGOs) and non-state media — in the sense that these areas today within Belarus are, if not completely eliminated, then practically on the verge of extinction.

In the field of advocateship, by the end of 2022, the number of specialists ready to take on the defense of political prisoners had become critically low; in a number of regions there was none left at all (despite the fact that the number of political prisoners in the country is constantly growing). As of the end of 2022, at least 87 lawyers were deprived of the right to practice (nine of them were subject to criminal prosecution)^{*V}.

The systematic “cleansing” of the “third sector” (NGOs of various forms) began in July 2021 and continues to this day. The “third sector” occupies a small segment of the labor market, but the very type of employment in it provided opportunities for free self-expression and development and, moreover, relative independence from the current political regime. Today it is practically destroyed. According to the data of Lawtrend monitoring, by the end of 2022, the sector had lost at least 1,173 non-profit organizations (public associations, trade unions, foundations, non-governmental institutions and associations)¹⁶. 757 of them were subject to forced liquidation, 416 were forced to liquidate on their own^{*VI}.

Belarusian non-state mass media inside the country have also practically ceased to exist. Not just individual journalists, but entire professional teams were deprived of the opportunity to carry out professional activities; editorial offices and journalistic professional organizations with a long history were destroyed or forced into exile.

According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), as of July 2022, more than 400 journalists were forced to leave Belarus. Internet resources of almost all Belarusian media

^{*IV} It should be underlined that initiatives to provide assistance to those who were repressed (including those who lost their jobs) exist in other professional communities as well, but they do not focus on the systematical collecting of the information.

^{*V} As of June 2023, this figure has risen to 110.

¹⁶ See: **Monitoring the situation of freedom of association and civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus December 2022**, Lawtrend: <https://www.lawtrend.org/freedom-of-association/monitoring-the-situation-of-freedom-of-association-and-civil-society-organisations-in-the-republic-of-belarus-december-2022>.

^{*VI} By August 2023, this figure had grown up to 1,407 (900 NGOs in respect of which a decision was made on forced liquidation and 507 self-liquidated ones) (see: **Monitoring the situation of freedom of association and civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus August 2023**, Lawtrend: <https://www.lawtrend.org/english/monitoring-the-situation-of-freedom-of-association-and-civil-society-organisations-in-the-republic-of-belarus-august-2023>).



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

operating from abroad are currently declared “extremist materials” and even “extremist formations” in Belarus; people within the country are subject to administrative and criminal prosecution for subscribing to their accounts and reposting their publications. The number of independent media remaining in Belarus, not so large compared to previous years, is experiencing significant restrictions and difficulties in their activities and are under constant threat (in 2022, the BAJ recorded 43 cases of arrests of journalists and 55 searches), 33 representatives of the media sector at the end 2022 were in prison¹⁷.

Other areas that are seriously affected by layoffs and purges include medicine, education and culture. The analysis of the data collected by initiatives that work with these specific professional spheres allows us to suggest that the peak of “purges” in the field of culture, science and education occurred in October-December 2021, after which the number of recorded cases of dismissals or other forms of the employment ban decreased a tad. However, the further we go, the more difficult it is to evaluate the scale of what is happening by analyzing open sources — people who fall under repressions are increasingly avoiding publicizing their situation (at least those who remain in Belarus), while at the same time, the possibilities of human rights defending organizations and non-state mass media to monitor the situation are also steadily declining. It is also obvious that the scales of layoffs in these areas are much wider than it can be recorded by analyzing open sources or through appeals from victims^{*VII}.

Today, we can only assess the cumulative effect of the impact on these areas of the entire complex of negative factors that are a consequence of the unfolding political crisis of 2020: the employment ban, the emigration of workers from the country for political and economic reasons, the departure of people from the profession due to the prevailing psychological background and pressure, the general economic situation.

Data from the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus shows that in 2020-2021 there was a significant outflow of personnel in all three areas. In the education sector, the difference between those hired and fired was negative before 2020; however, the volume of personnel losses in 2020 increased significantly. In the field of healthcare and culture (creativity, sports, entertainment, recreation) in 2018-2019 there was a positive trend, which was replaced by sharply negative dynamics in 2020^{*VIII}.

¹⁷ See: **Mass media in Belarus in 2022**, Belarusian Association of Journalists, 04.07.2023: <https://baj.by/en/analytics/mass-media-belarus-2022>.

^{*VII} Thus, according to the data collected by the Belarusian Council of Culture, out of 88 people who were subjected to repressions in the cultural sphere, only 20 reported that they did not know the facts of other dismissals in their organization. Everyone else testified that they were not the only ones fired in their organization.

^{*VIII} It must be taken into consideration that Belarusian state statistics has a number of drawbacks that have to do with both statistical categories it uses and its methods of collecting information, so its data should be treated with some caution.



Table. Difference between those hired and fired as for the field of activity, 2018-2022¹⁸

| Sphere | Difference between those hired and fired as for the field of activity | | | | |
|---|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 |
| Education | -4956 | -7870 | -9232 | -1817 | -2691 |
| Health and Social Services | 2111 | -1851 | -2959 | +1158 | +1909 |
| Creativity, sports, entertainment, recreation | -269 | -1047 | -4784 | +405 | +244 |

If one believes official statistics, then in the healthcare sector the negative trend in 2022 was overcome; however, if we focus on the average number of employees in these sectors of the economy, the healthcare sector, compared to the “pre-crisis” 2019, decreased by at least 2% of workers, education — by 5.7%, the sector “creativity, sports, entertainment, recreation” — by 8.6%¹⁹. Even with all the assumptions about what the state statistics system takes into account and what it does not take into account, these losses can be evaluated as quite serious. The question of the decline of the quality of personnel in these areas as a result of constant “purges” is discussed quite a lot in the media, but requires additional research for an objective evaluation.

4. Orientation towards re-Sovietization in the implementation of the employment ban

We shall enumerate a number of important features that characterize the employment ban practice, which is being implemented at the current stage in Belarus, as a process of re-Sovietization, i.e. these features lead to the restoration of the Soviet norms and practices not only in labor relations, but also in social ones in general.

Total repression and control. The current stage of implementing the employment ban is unfolding in such a way as to ensure not only “punishment” for an act, action, expression of one’s position, but also to completely oust “disloyal” people from the system of labor relations. In order to ensure the controllability of the process and to deprive dismissed persons of a chance to find employment elsewhere, lists and databases are being created with the help of which HR departments (or ideological departments) are required to check all applicants. Other control instruments that claim to be complete and total are also being established, including by law.

¹⁸ Source: annual reports of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus “Number of employees, wages, labor costs of organizations of the Republic of Belarus”; the authors’ calculations.

¹⁹ Ibid.



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

Thus, from October 12th, 2021, there have been changes in the requirements for characteristics from previous places of work²⁰, which are necessary for employment in state-run organizations and institutions, as well as organizations with a 50% share of state ownership. First of all, the employer now must request such a characteristic. The requirements for the content of the employee profile have also changed; now it must include the following data:

- about their attitude towards state-run and public institutions, the constitutional system;
- about their actions taken against the authorities and public safety, the presence of anti-state manifestations of an employee in the workplace²¹.

Commenting on the introduction of these innovations, the head of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Irina Kostevich, did not hide their purpose, “At the same time, the events that took place in 2020 showed the need to take additional measures, including legislative ones, to prevent the penetration into government bodies and state-run organizations of destructive-minded citizens who openly oppose the political course of our state.”²².

Thus, the employment practice now includes a clause on political loyalty and reliability. Taking into account the wide sector of the economy with state participation, such a requirement turns itself into a “black mark” for everyone perceived as “disloyal” to the existing regime. In addition, in the context of the general background of repressions and intimidation, this clause becomes important for privately owned organizations, for which the new requirements are not imposed as mandatory, but are obviously offered as a role model and practice that can protect their own business.

The introduction of special clauses into characteristics demonstrates an attempt to technologize the process of and the focus on the total exclusion of politically disloyal persons from the labor market. This is reflected both in the consequences for individuals and in the impact of the process of mass layoffs on society as a whole.

Direct intervention by special services. Questions anent dismissals (especially based on the “black lists” sent down from above) are now very often being resolved not in the system of “employee-administration” relations, but in the relations of “the work collective (often including the manager) — repressive government agencies (KGB, ministries, executive committees)”.

²⁰ See: [in Russian] **Heads of government agencies are now required to request references from previous jobs when hiring citizens**, BelTA, 12.10.2021: <https://www.belta.by/president/view/rukovoditelej-gosorganov-objazali-pri-prieme-grazhdan-na-rabotu-zaprashivat-harakteristiki-s-464116-2021/>.

²¹ See: [in Russian] **Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus d/d October 14th, 2021 № 585 “On the form of characteristics”**, Pravo.by: <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22100585>.

²² See: [in Russian] **The Minister of Labor and Social Protection clarified when an employer is obliged to request a reference for an employee**, Economic Newspaper, 10.11.2021: <https://neg.by/novosti/otkrytj/ministr-truda-i-soczaschity-pro-harakteristiku-na-rabotnika/>.



Immediate managers often find themselves either simple executors of instructions sent from above, or in a situation “between a rock and a hard place” (when, trying to somehow defend employees, they themselves come under pressure and are fired).

In this context, the well-known facts of replacement of top and middle managers in government agencies and state-run enterprises by people who are or have been directly related to law enforcement agencies can be considered a characteristic feature. New positions of specialists or deputies “for ideological work and security”, who are entrusted with the function of political and ideological control of labor collectives, are being introduced and their powers are being expanded. In certain areas and organizations, not a single personnel decision is made without the consent of “ideological workers”; sometimes the issues of hiring and firing workers fall entirely within their competence.

Thus, we are witnessing the restoration of the Soviet practice of ideological control and control of the special services, which direct production and any activity of organizations in general is subject to.

The return of the principle of extending punishment for “disloyalty” to family members and relatives. The practice is gradually expanding — when relatives of political prisoners, publicly well-known activists, and enforced emigrants, who continue their political activity outside the country, are subject to the employment ban (as well as other types of repressions). In rare cases, such actions can be interpreted as attempts to put pressure on the activists themselves; for the most part, they have no other pragmatic goal other than the marginalization of not only opposition-minded citizens themselves, but also their family members. In this way, the authorities are trying to increase the stigmatization of disloyalty and dissidence, returning to the Soviet practice of repressions, when entire families were persecuted.

Elimination of social lacunae and niches for dissidents. In previous years, people who were banned from their profession often found opportunities for self-realization (or at least survival) in the non-state sector (NGOs and private business). Being not very broad and developed, these spheres could nevertheless co-opt those whom they tried to oust from professional activities, social life and economic relations. During the current campaign of mass political repressions, the vast majority of public organizations and non-state media in the country were demonstrably destroyed, and significant difficulties were created for the work of both individual entrepreneurs and larger private businesses. The non-state sector of the economy is shrinking; in addition, the structures that continue to function are being brought under much stricter ideological control than ever before. Regulations are being tightened and new laws are being adopted on licensing activities in areas where there was previously relative freedom. Gradually, this leads to the restoration of state control over the entire sphere of labor relations,



as it was in the Soviet times, albeit with the preservation of different forms of ownership and types of employment, the formal existence of public organizations, etc.

5. Factors preventing the complete restoration of the Soviet practices and total control

The implementation of the current authorities' intention to restore full control over society, including through the employment ban practice, is hampered by a number of factors that significantly distinguish the situation at the current stage from all previous ones. Let's look at the main ones.

Public moods and general socio-psychological background. An important part of the implementation of the employment ban is the reaction of the environment. At previous historical stages, the organization of “public shaming,” mobbing or bullying by colleagues was an important part of the employment ban practice, both in the USSR and in independent Belarus. The fundamental difference in the situation after 2020 is the increased level of solidarity and social support for people who have been subjected to certain types of repressions. The protests against the current authoritarian regime in the country were the largest ones since its establishment. The metaphorical “97%” indicated that not only did the number of people opposed to the current authorities increase, but, more importantly, they felt themselves the majority and found confirmation that their position and actions were not marginal and exclusive, but widely shared.

In the wake of the socio-political upsurge in 2020-2021, people who were banned from their professions, as a rule, remained confident in their rightness and felt support from their environment, both in the professional environment and in the circle of friends and family²³. That is, despite the objective problems, the situation had a positive psychological and moral background.

During the same period, there were frequent cases of dismissals as a sign of solidarity and protest — a phenomenon characteristic of 2020-2021. We are talking primarily about government institutions and enterprises, work in which requires taking a specific political and ideological position. Refusals to participate in criminal acts, reluctance to be part of the repressive and ideological machine, critical divergence in ethical and moral principles became the grounds for many dismissals. Vivid public cases of this kind of dismissals (from the Janka Kupala National Academic Theater, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, television and radio

²³ See: [in Russian] **The employment ban practice in Belarus in 2020-2022**, Center for European Transformation, 08.11.2022: https://cet.euobelarus.info/files/userfiles/22/DOC/2022_Berufsverbot-Belarus.pdf.



companies, universities, etc.) reinforced the confidence of people who were fired for expressing their civic position in the moral and ethical correctness of their actions.

With the intensification of repressions and the increasing “closedness” of the situation, the strengthening of the attitude to refuse to publish one’s cases of being subject to the employment ban, and the transfer of the protest activity to a semi-underground (and then completely underground) state, public support is no longer felt as massive, but it remains both in reference groups and in the wider environment.

Level of civil society development. The events of 2020 demonstrated the achieved level of civil society development in Belarus and simultaneously served as an impetus for the rapid formation of new communities, initiatives and structures. The first active responses from civil society to the use of employment ban practices against participants of the protest movement appeared already in August 2020^{*IX}, with the increase of the number of cases of dismissals for political reasons, the number of initiatives providing assistance to those affected by the employment ban increased. These are initiatives formed in professional communities (journalists, cultural figures, lawyers, doctors, teachers, scientists, athletes, workers), solidarity foundations and various human rights organizations.

As active structures of civil society were almost completely ousted from the country, their activities and capabilities are increasingly reoriented towards helping those who find themselves in forced emigration. Although these structures are most often unable to solve the main problem (to help find a new job), they provide assistance in related processes: legalization, confirmation of qualifications, learning the language of the host country, preparing the necessary documents, psychological adaptation, etc. The possibilities of such structures within Belarus are quite limited; however, for certain professional groups they continue to remain very important, especially when flexible ways of support are found (for example, internships or scholarships in foreign institutions — for scientists, journalists, cultural figures; the opportunity to continue their studies at European universities — for expelled students, etc.).

In addition, during the period of socio-political mobilization in 2020, a large number of communities and networks were formed, some of which retain established connections and relationships and today also act as mutual aid groups. These include professional groups, neighborhood communities, and networks formed according to very different criteria related to protest activities (from shared experiences of participating in protests to interaction between relatives of political prisoners). Participants in such communities and networks who are subject

*IX Already a week after the election day, the BYSOL Solidarity Foundation appeared, one of the goals of which at that time was “assistance to the citizens who have lost their jobs due to their participation in the protests against the election results in Belarus,” as well as support to civil servants and security forces who were ready to leave their posts in protest.



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

to the employment ban (as well as other types of repressions) often find support there, at least moral and material, and sometimes assistance in finding a new job, retraining, and employment.

Availability of external mobility/emigration. The relative openness of borders, assistance from the Belarusian diaspora and European countries (especially countries bordering Belarus) create relatively favorable conditions for the emigration of Belarusians who have lost their jobs and/or are subject to other persecution for political reasons. Forced emigration is always traumatic, but many perceive it as the only or most rational way out of the current situation. Most often, people who have been fired leave in search of work or simply because they understand that in present-day Belarus, opportunities for professional fulfillment are not available to them. Leaving the country is a socially approved act on the part of the reference group (other participants of the 2020 protest movement); in most cases, the authorities also do not interfere with those who decide to leave the country (voluntary emigration fits well with the implementation of the regime's goal of getting rid of the "disloyal").

The relative availability of such a way out of the situation as temporary departure from the country or emigration softens the consequences of the employment ban practice at the individual level, but leads to serious negative aftermaths for Belarusian society as a whole, including changing the balance of the bearers of democratic and authoritarian orientations within the country.

6. Systemic aftereffects of the implementation of the employment ban for Belarusian society

In general, we can identify a number of key outcomes that the unfolding of a new stage of the employment ban in Belarus brings with it in the form and on the scale that we can now observe:

1. **Personnel shortage and decline of the overall level of professional qualifications.** The employment ban practice is being implemented without any consideration of the state of production processes, the work of organizations and entire industries; the ideological interests of "purges" are placed above economic ones, above the interests of the effective functioning of the most important spheres of society's life support. In fact, there is already a significant shortage of personnel in education, medicine, culture, media and other areas. In addition to the problem of staff shortages, there is the question of the qualifications of those who remain. Often, civic activity and the presence of their own position are shown by people who are proactive, have high professional qualifications, and have certain ambitions. As a result, the most qualified specialists were fired, who often occupied leading positions and performed unique work, and were leaders of the profession and creativity. As a consequence (coupled with mass emigration),



many institutions, enterprises, and even industries lost their main human resource, as well as the opportunity to train new personnel.

2. **Changes in society's social structure.** If in the previous period, the employment ban pushed "disloyal" people into less protected sectors (informal initiatives, NGOs, private business), while creating a kind of social space for creativity, initiative, and originality, then under the given conditions all actions together are aimed at excluding any possibility of any activity not under the direct control of the authorities. This effect is created due to mass layoffs combined with the destruction of the public sector and worsening conditions for private business. It changes the very structure of society, in which there are no room for dissidents, "islands of freedom" and space for development; the social structure is gradually becoming more and more similar to the structure of totalitarian societies.
3. **Negative humanitarian consequences and effects.** First, a person who has lost their job finds themselves under the weight of uncertainty both in relation to the future and in relation to their own identity, their life, and self-realization. It has a devastating effect on one's mental well-being, even when there is support and help from family, friends and colleagues. Second, unfair dismissals of colleagues are a serious test for work teams. People find themselves faced with painful dilemmas: at the risk of their own dismissals, to speak out in defense of dismissed colleagues or to remain silent and to keep their jobs; to show solidarity and perform a civic act or to preserve the opportunity to continue their business under existing difficult conditions. Because of all this, the level of mistrust and mutual claims is growing. It affects not only the level of professionalism, but also people's self-esteem and psychological well-being.
4. **Destruction of professional communities.** The practice of implementing the employment ban in relation to active, independent and productive people sharply reduces the quality of professional communities and, in the long term, leads to their actual disappearance or degeneration. The professional environment has always served as one of the most important factors of development. Communication between colleagues, the presence of role models, and diversity of experiences create conditions for both professional growth and human development. In a situation where professional qualities are replaced by manifestations of loyalty, this environment is destroyed. In this way, conditions are created for social degradation; those minimal horizontal structures of civil society that are the supporting structure for any social transformations are destroyed: communities, groups, trade unions, etc.
5. **Change of ethical guidelines.** Considering the scales and the systematic implementation of the employment ban practice, we can say that ultimately it is aimed at the formation of "new" axiological and ethical orientations built on loyalty, lack of solidarity, and demoralization. Those who remained and those who were fired are separated not only by different life circumstances, but also by moral questions (self-esteem, feelings of betrayal, etc.). This, on the one hand, creates additional barriers in relations between people, and on the other hand, leads to the formation of a certain ethical system. Time works to strengthen it and transmit it to future generations.



Key findings and directions for action

Summing up the results of the study, it can be noted that the implemented repressive employment ban practice is unprecedented in modern Belarus. The systematicity and purposefulness of this practice is confirmed not only by the variety of forms and methods, not only by the scale and coverage of various professional groups, but also by the organizational and legislative consolidation of mechanisms of controlling and getting rid of “disloyal” workers. In the context of ongoing repressions and declining publicity in Belarus, the employment ban practice is becoming increasingly hidden, but this does not reduce its effects.

Despite the fact that, against the backdrop of other types of repressions that continue in the country, dismissals or liquidation of an organization seem to be relatively “mild” forms of persecution, the systematic employment ban practice leads to serious negative consequences both at the individual level and at the societal level in general. The overall set of actions in line with the implementation of the employment ban today is aimed at ensuring that a person not only loses their job, but at the complete marginalization of a large number of people who are opposed to the current regime in the country. In the social dimension, the negative effects are both economic (declining professional level and personnel shortage in certain areas, reducing the efficiency of organizations and enterprises) and social (increasing the atmosphere of fear, destroying professional communities, changing ethical guidelines).

It can be said that today the practice of implementing the employment ban has switched from the previous policy of a selective struggle against political opponents of the current regime to the policy of a total struggle against all “disloyal” ones in all spheres. In the employment ban practice at present, one can see the borrowing of experiences from past periods; consciously or by inertia, the regime copies many of the guidelines and control mechanisms that were implemented in Soviet society. At the moment, the state of Belarusian society and external conditions do not allow the authorities to ensure the level of total control that was achieved in the USSR, however, in the absence of positive changes in the general situation, the number of degrees of freedom for dissidents and citizens simply not showing active loyalty will decrease.

Thus, at the current stage, the employment ban should be considered as a targeted policy to change public consciousness and the social structure of Belarusian society. This policy is not based on persuasion, promotion of certain ideas, building trust in the authorities and its ideology; its main tool is to “squeeze out” citizens disloyal to the current regime out of the borders of society and the country. Conditions are created for them and their families in which they are put on the brink of survival, deprived of their means of subsistence, their social status and capital. This policy copies the Soviet practices built on such an idea of the social structure



of society, in which there were no niches for an action and a thought that was not included in the system.

Building a system to reduce the negative social aftermath of the employment ban should become the basis for an action strategy. It should be carried out in several directions:

1. **Identity, position, and belonging to the “side of good”.** The awareness of the massive nature of the employment ban, the information on this phenomenon as a targeted repressive practice can remain a source of moral and psychological support for people who are subjected to this ban. One’s belonging, if not to the majority, then to a large community of worthy people is the positive component of this situation that should be understood by a banned person. Maintaining high self-esteem and awareness of the correctness of one’s own civic position is an important element of resistance. Maintaining this topic in the public consciousness, knowledge about the scope and individual cases can act not only as an element of protecting human rights and analyzing the current situation, but also as part of the assistance and support of those who have been subjected to the employment ban. Accordingly, this topic requires widespread media coverage aimed at preserving the self-respect of those who suffered from the employment ban.
2. **Social capital and horizontal connections.** The volume of social connections and interactions (the volume of social and symbolic capital) is important for a positive way out of the situation after dismissals. It allows one to find both temporary support and new paths and opportunities. To prevent a person from finding themselves alone with their problems, it is necessary to mobilize social capital, network interactions and the help of communities in which people could find support. Here it is important to use the potential of existing horizontal connections and communities: local, professional, as well as those built on values and interests (religious, etc.).
3. **Information, models and samples.** Finding oneself in a situation of changing one’s professional sphere or format of activity, under the conditions of an extreme shortage of resources (time, moral, financial), a person should be able to quickly find high-quality information on various opportunities and steps of actions. Several parameters are critical here:
 - availability of information (many media channels should talk about this);
 - variety of models, samples and proposals for various circumstances and opportunities: from the most resource-intensive to the simplest and most temporary, from those requiring qualifications and retraining to accessible to anyone;
 - clarity of first steps and procedures (legal, organizational, financial side).
4. **Training, consulting and “our own” labor market.** Since the current political regime in the country, with the help of the employment ban, is reshaping Belarusan society, it is necessary to create sustainable structures that form an alternative sociality. We are talking about wide



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

programs of education, advanced training, and acquisition of additional professional skills. This cannot be a means of first aid, but such a system must be created to gradually include Belarusians oriented towards a new Belarus. In particular, it should include institutions, organizations and enterprises that have the opportunity to provide employment and contribute to the development and improvement of the material and social status for victims of the employment ban. The task is to create and increase the potential of Belarusian society, instead of dissolving it into the societies of other countries.



The employment ban in Belarus: returning to the Soviet practices and unique features

Research report

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