

Calendar of the most important dates for the crisis of the rule of law

May 2020 - March 2021 - Mass political demonstrations against President Alexander Lukashenko

The Belarusian protests of 2020-2021 were a series of mass political demonstrations and protests against the Belarusian government and President Alexander Lukashenko. The largest anti-government protests in Belarusian history began in the run-up to the presidential election. Despite the rejection of the election results by Svetlana Tikhanouskaya, Lukashenko's main opponent, who claimed that the election had been rigged, Lukashenko was declared the winner. Protesters faced violent persecution from the authorities

May 2021 - Lukashenka strengthens the position of the Security Council of Belarus

In May 2021, Lukashenka signed a special decree, as a result of which the Security Council received the status of a collective emergency state body that unites all higher administrative and law enforcement agencies. The Security Council of the Republic of Belarus in fact assumed the functions of the shadow government and is responsible today for the implementation of a systemic repressive policy in the Republic, including the elaboration of regulations necessary to restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens and legitimize the policy of terror.

May 2021 - Toughened measures against the opposition are introduced by the Security Council of Belarus

In May 2021, the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus, together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other institutions, tightened the measures taken against citizens who actively opposed the Lukashenka regime, as well as those who were forced to leave the country. The first step in creating repressive legislation was the toughening of the law 'On Countering Extremism'. Since then, any activity of the political opposition against the Lukashenko regime can be considered extremist.

21 May 2021 - Death of a political prisoner, Vitold Ashurak

In January 2021 Belarusian political and environmental activist who took part in 2020 anti-governmental protests was sentenced to five years in prison for “organization of actions that violate public order” and “violence against an employee of the internal affairs bodies”. Belarusian human rights organisations recognised him as a political prisoner. He died shortly after his imprisonment in suspicious circumstances, from an unidentified cause.

November 2022 - Publication of a list of “persons engaged in extremist activities”

At the end of 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs published a list of persons involved in “extremist activities”, which included 1,881 people, as well as dozens of organizations. According to the authorities, more than 6,000 “extremist crimes” were committed in 2022.

2023 - Granting new powers to the all-Belarusian People’s Assembly

The all-Belarusian People’s Assembly, which until 2023 had the status of an informal ideological, consultative assembly, was turned into a super-representative (quasi-parliamentarian) legislative branch of the state. It is made up of approximately 1200 delegates, whose term of office equals to five years. The presidium of the Assembly (whose status and functions are not defined by the constitution and other normative acts) serves as another super-government. The main task of the Assembly is to strengthen the mass support and legitimacy of Lukashenka’s government and the decisions he makes. It should be noted that the Assembly has received the exclusive right to amend the constitution.

5 January 2023 - Detention of the orthodox priest Dionisiy Korostelev

On January 5, 2023 priest Dionisiy Korostelev was arrested after being denounced to the security services by a pro-government informer because of a prayer service the priest had held for Ukrainian soldiers.

5 January 2023 - Detention of two teenagers accused of “inciting social hostility against Russian nation”

On January 5, 2023, GUBOPiK employees detained two teenagers aged 13 and 15 for criticizing Russia, accusing them of “Nazism” and “inciting social hostility against the Russian nation”.

27 February 2023 - Constitutional referendum

On 27 February 2022, a constitutional referendum ordered by President Alexander Lukashenko took place in Belarus. It aimed to consolidate the power of the Lukashenko

regime by, i.a., introducing additional electoral qualifications (restrictions) for possible presidential candidates in order to limit the possibility for representatives of the Belarusian political diaspora to run for this position.

11 July 2023 - Death of a political prisoner, Ales Pushkin

On July 11, 2023 Ales Pushkin, another political prisoner and famous Belarusian artist and cultural activist, died under unclear circumstances after having been hospitalized

Summer 2023 - Absentee court sessions during which opposition figures were sentenced to lengthy prison terms

In the summer of 2023, a series of performative absentee court sessions were held in Belarus, at which political opponents of the authorities were sentenced to long prison terms. Among them are Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Olympic champion Alexandra Gerasimena, and a number of political activists, journalists, and bloggers.

Pavel Usov

Belarusian political scientist. PhD in political science, head of the Centre for Analysis and Political Forecast. Graduated from Mogilev State University. He taught at the University in Mogilev briefly, but in 2005 resigned for political reasons. He has lived in Poland since 2006. He defended his PhD thesis at the Institute of Political Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He studies the emergence and functioning of (neo)authoritarian systems in the post-soviet area. He has written numerous scientific and media articles and books, including *Powstanie, konsolidacja i funkcjonowanie neo-autorytarnego reżimu na Białorusi 1994-2010* [The Emergence, Consolidation and Functioning of the Neo-authoritarian Regime in Belarus 1994-2010].