

BelarusBrief

News from the Belarusian Diaspora in the USA, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021 aba-together.org

Repressions in 2021 were “the largest crackdown in the contemporary history of Belarus.” Installing the atmosphere of fear became the regime’s primary tool for retaining power. Repressions, including criminal persecution for any expression of dissent, escalated ahead of the February 2022 referendum, which seeks to further consolidate Aliaksandr Lukashenka’s power in Belarus (via [Viasna](#), [Human Rights Watch](#)).

BELARUS

Political prisoners: [984](#)*

*The actual number of political prisoners is likely to be higher. **At least 1,285 individuals were convicted in politically motivated criminal trials in 2021** (via [Viasna](#)). Many prisoners refuse identification as “political prisoners” because of threats to worsen detention conditions and persecution of family members (via [Viacorka](#)). Conditions of detention of political prisoners are purposefully torturous (via [Viasna](#)).

In 2021, **“around 300 NGOs were liquidated by state decisions and around 200 CSOs engaged in self-imposed dissolutions”** due to pressure from the state (via [EU’s CSO’s meter](#)).

The last months saw a wave of arbitrary dismissals of employees of factories, universities, hospitals, and other state enterprises because of past expressions of dissent (via [Viasna](#) and [Radio Svoboda](#) in Russian).

Political vlogger Siarhei Tsihanouski, the husband of pro-democracy leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, was sentenced to 18 years in prison (via [New York Times](#)).

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

In November and December 2021, the EU and US, along with several European countries, adopted additional sanctions against the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka (via [New York Times](#), [Council of the EU](#), Envoy Julie Fisher to [Belsat](#), [US Dept of State from Dec 2 and Dec 10](#), [Belsat](#)). The sanctions responded to the November escalation of the migrant crisis at the EU-Belarus border. Following efforts from EU officials, the situation was partially eased by December, as the number of migrants attempting the border crossing decreased, though many are still there (via [NBCNews](#)). Reports describe dire conditions of migrants at the border (via [UN](#), [Amnesty International](#)).

The arrival of more Russian troops in Belarus continues to raise questions about Russia’s possible invasion of Ukraine (via [Reuters](#), [ABCNews](#)).

The Russian government supports Lukashenka’s constitutional referendum, planned for February and seeking to help Lukashenka stay in power (via [TASS](#)). The **proposed changes to the constitution would also allow Russia to station conventional and nuclear forces in Belarus** (via [US Dept of State](#)).

BELARUSIAN DIASPORA

Roberto Casanueva, who was born in Cuba but spent the last 30 years in Belarus, was arrested on November 8, 2020, for participation in protests and spent over a year in the Akrestina Detention Center until his deportation from Belarus in December 2021. In an interview for DW, he [credits the Belarus Solidarity Foundation BySol and Andrey Strizhak](#), who help victims of repression in Belarus, with his safe arrival to Lithuania. See more on how you can help BySol initiatives [here](#).

Write letters to political prisoners! It is one of the only ways for political prisoners to receive communication from the outside world. Even in the prison environment that seeks to dehumanize and break one’s spirit, letters can uplift and bring support. Here is [what](#) to write. Lists of political prisoners are [here](#) or [here](#). If you like, use this free Internet resource to send [your](#) letter.

See [The New Yorker’s extended profile](#) of Belarusian pro-democracy leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and [Tsikhanouskaya’s headquarters’ report on their work](#) last year.

For weekly news on Belarus, visit [BelarusFF.org](#). You can [add your email](#) to receive weekly news summaries.

BelarusBrief NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021

In November-December 2021, the Belarusian diaspora organized traditional end-of-the-year celebrations and Day of Solidarity events. Over 15 cities commemorated the victims of the Belarusian regime and collectively wrote postcards to the political prisoners. Several communities held screenings of the documentary film "Courage" about the Belarusian protests of August 2020; the documentary is long-listed for the Academy Awards.



In **Chicago, IL**, members of the Belarusian community wrote more than 100 cards to political prisoners.



Team Tradycija are on a US tour organized by [ABA](#) to celebrate Kaliady (pictured in **Boston, MA**)



Viewers of the *Courage* documentary in **New York City** hold photos of political prisoners.



The Belarusian community in **North Carolina** hopes that their postcards reach political prisoners in Belarus.



Belarusians of **Philadelphia** call for Lukashenka's regime's immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners.



Belarusians of **Miami, FL**, were among the communities that sent more than a hundred cards.