

Chinese Workers Protests, Election Observation, Protestant Priests – Belarus Civil Society Digest

Over 200 workers from China march nearly 30 km from Dobrush to Homel in a protest against delayed wages. Competitiveness of Belarus and national identity of Belarusians discussed in Minsk. Belarusian-language advertising festival "Adnak" completed in Minsk.

Human rights organisations announce the start of election observation campaign. Freelance journalists and protestant priests under pressure in Belarus.

Civil society activities

[Conditions and Ways to Improve the Competitiveness of Belarus](#) conference took place on June 25, in Minsk. This is the 3rd economic conference, organised by the *For Freedom* Movement within the campaign *People's Program*. Based on the discussion's results the participants came to the conclusion that Belarus has a chance to get to the World Competitiveness Index. The *People Program* is public and will be offered to the candidates for the upcoming presidential election.

[Defend What is Yours: Cultural Activism and Belarusian National Identity](#) roundtable was held on June 25, in Minsk. Organised by the Assembly of NGOs, the event gathered together 20 leaders of cultural NGOs and representatives of Belarusian culture and art. Based on the results of the discussion, recommendations for the Belarusian civil sector, cultural initiatives and national culture patrons will be published. In

a longer run, it is planned to develop cultural strategy, which will be available to all activists and civil society bodies.

[The 6th annual Festival of Belarusian Advertising and Communications ADNAK](#) summed up the development of Belarusian-language advertising for a year and [awarded winners](#). The final ceremony was held on 2 July in Minsk. The festival brought together advertisers and professionals in communication to enlarge the expansion of the Belarusian-language advertising. Grand Prix and 12 diplomas went to the creative platform Art-Siadziba that introduced a fashion on *vyshymaiki* (embroidery shirts) and other products with national symbols.

[National Platform keeps going](#). On 25 June, in Minsk, a EaP CS Forum Belarusian National Platform (NP) conducted its regular conference aimed to sum up the key results of its activity, re-elect a Steering Committee and decide whether NP should exist in general. As a result, the vast majority of NP members voted for keeping it alive; the Steering Committee has been upgraded significantly with a new Head [Sviatlana Karaliova](#) (Belarusian Association of Working Women). □

[Minsk Third Age University sums up results](#). On 24 June in Minsk, the project *Third Age University: New Opportunities for Social Inclusion* summed up key results for 2-year activity. The educational project for the elderly Minskians covered more than two thousand people of 60+ years old who got new knowledge, expanded their social contacts and feel active members of society. The project implementer is the Belarusian Association of Social Workers.

"Green" Events

[Campaign to save a city water-green diameter launched in Minsk](#). The Minsk water-green diameter includes 18 parks and 650 acres of landscaped grounds, which recently are at the risk of new construction. *Green Network* together with *Urban*

Forester initiative and other CSOs are launching an information campaign to save this Minsk sight. The campaign plans to use a number of tools, like a series of interviews with experts and VIPs, a competition of Minsk's photo stories, an interactive map, and performances.

[IV Forum of Belarusian environmental NGOs](#) will take place on 24-26 July in Minsk and bring together representatives of environmental organisations and initiatives, independent experts, international environmental organisations, ministries, schools and universities, churches and the media. The Forum is held once in 2 years, and serves as a platform for communication among environmental organisations in Belarus. The Organising Committee includes APB BirdLife Belarus, Green Network, etc.

Election Observation Campaigns

[Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna launch a public campaign on observation](#). The campaign *Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections* is independent and politically unbiased and aims to carry out observation of the presidential elections in Belarus in October 2015, to assess the electoral process and observance of human rights in the course of their conduct from the viewpoint of Belarusian electoral legislation and international standards of free and democratic elections.

[The initiative Right of Choice 2015 launches a campaign on elections observation](#). The initiative consists of eight political parties, movements and independent trade unions, including Hramada, Belarusian Christian Democracy, Govori Pravdu and For Freedom movements, Belarusian Popular Front, etc. The campaign aims to prevent violations of the law at all stages of the presidential election campaign in Belarus. The campaign includes actors that have expressed support for a potential candidate Tatyana Karatkevich.

Interaction between State and Civil Society

[Chinese workers protest in Belarus](#). On 2 July the Chinese workers who are employed in the construction of a paper factory in Dobrush (Homel oblast) left their jobs and walked to Homel, attempting later to move to Minsk. The workers protested against the delay of wages by a Chinese contractor. No police force was used and the workers were shuttled back to Dobrush after a conversation with the Chinese Ambassador.

[Persecution of freelance journalists – \\$7,067 for state budget](#). Since the beginning of 2015, there were 21 administrative cases against freelance journalists who faced charges for “Illegal production and/or distribution of media products.” The total amount of fines for the first half-year amounted to 108 million Belarusian rubles (\$7,067), which is already two times the amount of fines for the entire 2014.

[Homel priests threatened with criminal charges under Article 193.1](#). The house of Siarhei Nikalayenka, pastor of the Homel-based religious community ‘Church of God Transfiguration’, as well as the apartment of his deputy Aliaksandr Chuyeu, has been searched by police officers. The raid reportedly dealt with the preliminary investigation of the criminal case under Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code (activities on behalf of unregistered organisation).□

[BHC success at Constitutional Court](#). On 2 July the Constitutional Court of Belarus ruled on an appeal submitted by the Belarus Helsinki Committee (BHC) regarding the right of witnesses in criminal trials to legal counsel. BHC challenged the lack of provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code that would require law enforcement agencies to allow legal representation of witnesses in criminal proceedings.

[The first meeting of the Public Council for Belarusians living](#)

[abroad](#) at the Foreign Ministry of Belarus will be conducted on 1 July. The meeting, headed by Minister Vladimir Makei is expected to engage 32 representatives of associations of Belarusians abroad from 18 countries, as well as representatives of the Belarusian government, CSOs and mass media. The MFA website does not specify the names of CSOs that will participate in the Council.□

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.