

Top 10 of Belarus civil society in 2016

On the eve of the winter holidays, the NGO 'Pact' usually takes a look at the most prominent events to affect Belarusian civil society over the past year.

Here we present our take on the top ten developments of 2016 (categories are in alphabetical order).

Our categories may vary from year to year as it is not our goal to track trends, but rather to highlight major events taking place in Belarus each year.

Civic start ups of the year: Press Club Belarus and Aleksievich's intellectual club

In March 2016, [Press Club Belarus](#) officially opened in Minsk. The Press Club's goal is to organise numerous visible activities which serve as a professional platform for the exchange of ideas and opinions between journalists, politicians, experts, and opinion leaders.

Pact also wishes to acknowledge a civic initiative by the first Belarusian Nobel laureate: in December, [Svetlana Alexievich](#) launched her [Intellectual Club](#) in Minsk to 'to deeply discuss the important things'. 600 people registered to attend the first meeting but only 200 were admitted.

Grassroots of the year: The City Urban Show

The [City](#) has become the first reality show in Belarus to offer an attractive format for civic activism. It aims to motivate a wider audience to be more active in community life. The entire process, starting from training leaders and ending in the implementation of their ideas on the ground was recorded in [11 video episodes](#). Next year, the Centre for Cultural Management, which designed and implemented the project, will launch the 2nd season of The City.

Event(s) of the year: Minsk Dialogue Track-II platform

In 2016 [Minsk Dialogue](#), a permanent Track-II (non-governmental) expert platform, organised a series of events to address the most challenging issues and foster international cooperation across dividing lines. Experts reviewed the [Minsk agreements](#) on the situation in Ukraine, [Pan-European integration](#), [post-Soviet protracted conflicts](#), [25 years without the USSR](#), and more. The events were attended by high-ranking officials, experts and diplomats such as Belarus' MFA Head, the Minister of the Eurasian Economic Commission, the Head of EU Delegation to Belarus et al.

Local fundraising of the year: *Imena* magazine

Launched in April 2016, The [Imena](#) (or names) online magazine has become the first Belarusian public media platform entirely financed by readers, without state or business support. The

magazine's stories about people in need led to a wide public reaction and motivated many readers to donate. Collecting money through the Talaka.by platform, *Imena* set two crowdfunding records – it raised over \$20K for its [own activities](#) and \$34,6K for the [Children's boarding](#).

Political event of the year: two opposition MPs in the parliament

For the first time in 12 years, [two representatives of the opposition](#) made it into the Belarusian Parliament: [Hanna Kanapackaja](#) of the United Civic party and [Aliena Anisim](#) of the Belarusian Language Society. They won seats in the 110-member House of Representatives following the elections in September. [According to critics](#), Aliaksandr Lukashenka only permitted the appointment of two independent deputies because of pressure from the West.

State 'fundraising' of the year: fines for activists

According to the human rights centre [Viasna](#)'s website, in 2016 the Belarusian courts imposed 415 fines to activists and journalists, amounting to [\\$148K](#): 3.5 times more than last year. Such a sharp increase in fines could be related to the Belarusian authorities fine-tuning their tactics. Instead of arrests, they are using financial persecution against participants of protest actions and independent journalists, thus avoiding a harsh reaction from the West.

Think tank of the year: BEROC

In 2016, the Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre ([BEROC](#)) topped the [Belarus Think Tanks Rating](#). Organised by the Belarus Research Council (BRC), the Rating measures Belarusian think tanks according to their levels of institutional capacity, information outreach, and analytical and research activities. BEROC's high position is primarily due to their well-elaborated and extensive educational and research programme.

Trend of the year: intensification of contacts between state and civil society

In 2016, public events organised by CSOs were attended by top-level officials: the Belarusian Prime Minister opened the [Belarusian Forum](#) co-organised by BISS; the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration and First Deputy Minister of Economy attended the 4th Kastryčnicki Economic Forum, [KEF](#), etc. A number of inter-sectoral consultations and events were held on human right issues ([the abolition of the death penalty](#), [police monitoring](#), [adoption of national plan](#)). CSO representatives had personal meetings with the Heads of the [MFA](#) and [Information Ministry](#).

Volunteer initiative of the

year: environmental action Zrobim!

On 9 April 2016, an environmental action to clean illegal dumps, [Zrobim!](#) (*Let's Do It!*), attracted a record number of people – around [22,700 volunteers](#) from 43 Belarusian cities and villages removed dumps and cleaned recreational areas in cities, forests, and beaches. The action has been held in Belarus since 2012 and is organised by the Green Network, the Centre for Environmental Solutions, Interaction Fund, Minsk Cycling Society, and several government ministries.

And for something completely different of the year: the first ever Belarusian billionaire

The business assets of the 39-year-old Belarusian who founded the company Wargaming, [Viktar Kisly](#), are estimated at \$1.5 billion (by the Bloomberg Agency). The personal wealth of the billionaire is more than \$1 billion. Wargaming, along with its signature product World of Tanks, is one of the most successful companies in the field of online games.

Pact Belarus Team