

Top 10 of Belarus civil society in 2017 according to Pact

Traditionally Pact highlights some of the most prominent developments in and affecting Belarus civil society.

Issue of the Year: “Social Parasite” Tax

In 2015, Lukashenko signed a decree imposing a “social parasite tax” on Belarusians without legitimate employment. The entrance of the decree into force resulted in the mass civic reaction in the form of peaceful public protest in February-March 2017. [Thousands of people](#) protested the new law, which resulted in mass detentions (described below) but also in the suspension of the decree until 2019.

Campaign of the Year: BY_Help

Having started in March 2017, the [BY_help](#) campaign (Yulia Darashkevich, Lyaksei Lyavonchyk and Andrey Stryzhak) raised \$55,000 from private and corporate sources inside and outside of Belarus to financially help Belarusians and their families who suffered as a result of the March public protests, the White Legion case and other.

Trend of the Year: Spirit of

a Dialogue

Top government officials are becoming ordinary participants at civil society events few examples of which are Minsk Dialogue conferences, Kastrychnicki Economic Forum, Global Entrepreneurship Week. [Discussion](#) of Belarus' Universal Periodic Review to the UN Human Rights Committee, [Civil Society Parallel Forum](#) on the foot of the 26 annual sessions of the OSCE PA in Minsk, and [expert consultations](#) on the national human rights plan are indicative of the dialogue spirit. Wishful thinking or reality?

Localization of the Year: Congress of Belarusian Studies

Having convened in Kaunas and Warsaw for the last seven years, the organizers of the [International Congress of Belarusian Studies](#) – Political Sphere – [announce](#) (tentatively) that the 8th congregation will take place in Minsk, Belarus. Preliminary dates are September 27-29, 2018. Main academic partner of the Congress is the National Academy of Science of Belarus. Pack your bags for Minsk!

Save of the Year: Kurapaty – Kotovka – Osmoľovka

2017 was marked by a number of victories by civic activists to protect landmark site in Minsk. Two-week defence of Kurapaty mass executions site has led to investor's [abandonment of construction works](#). A public park in the Kotovka district of Minsk was saved by local community activists [Tiananmane](#)

[square's Tank Man-style](#). Local residents of Osmolovka historical area of Minsk succeeded in the [freezing of city's demolition plans](#) for the area.

Consistency of the Year: Social Weekend

[Social Weekend](#) celebrated its 10th consecutive open national competition for social projects to get local funding from both individual philanthropists and corporations. The competition is held consistently since 2013, since which time Social Weekend raised over \$150,000 to support over 150 projects from among more than 1,400 applicants.

Media Lifeline to Civil Society of the Year: 34Mag

[34mag.net](#) youth online magazine lead public communication to aid grassroots activism in 2017: simple-language articles helped local leaders break down [public communication](#), guided them through [how to organize](#) a public event or an [educational intervention](#), and showcased [successful](#) student initiatives in Belarus. Read up!

Civic Transport of the Year: Bicycle for Everyone!

Cycling activists were among most organized and visible civic actors in 2017, while the number of bicycles in Minsk [is approaching](#) the number of cars. [Viva Rovar! Carnival](#) gathered together over 15,000 bicycle enthusiasts, while the [II](#)

[International Cycling Festival](#) and [PraRovar Forum](#) raised the cycling agenda to the public spotlight further. Belarusian regions were also active: more than 700 cyclists joined the [Susedzi 2017 bike marathon](#) in Grodno and Brest held its Vezdevelom international [bike festival](#). Get on a bike when in Belarus, even if it is [made of wood](#)!

Scare of the Year: Zapad-2017

Circumstances and media brought anxiety to Belarus ahead of the joint Russian-Belarus military exercise called Zapad-2017. Civil society played an important role in providing [civic monitoring](#), alternative view points and analysis of [possible scenarios](#). Despite the scare, Belarus wasn't occupied.

And Now for Something Completely Different of the Year

The government of Belarus was the main – yet controversial – newsmaker of the year. Having opened up its borders and having [cancelled visas](#) for nationals of over 80 countries, GoB used force to disperse mass peaceful protests in the country detaining [over 900 people](#). Authorities eventually [closed](#) the notorious White Legion case, although [the trial](#) of three Regnum authors continues. Minsk hosted the [26th session](#) of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly while suspending reforms-related talks with the IMF. Lukashenko [legalized cryptocurrencies](#) and approved a decree to arguably further [ease doing business](#) in Belarus, while the social parasite tax legislation is still [on the table](#).

Pact Belarus Team