



THE STATE OF BELARUSIAN ACADEMIA

IN

Belarusian Students' Association
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INTRODUCTION

This report, prepared by the Belarusian Students' Association, provides an overview of the state of Belarusian academia in 2024.

Amid ongoing political repression against the academic community, including violations of the rights of students and faculty members, BSA has compiled facts from open sources documenting systematic persecution in several key areas: politically motivated repression against individuals within student and faculty communities, as well as organizations engaged in activities related to education and academia in various forms; the ideologization and militarization of Belarusian education, along with the political indoctrination of students; the situation regarding mandatory job placement; and the state of Belarusian students abroad. Additionally, the report contains conclusions and recommendations for international actors and institutions. This report covers events that took place from January to December 2024, with some exceptions (for instance, events that took place in the lead-up to the 2025 presidential elections in Belarus).

For the purpose of safety, not all known cases of repression against Belarusian students and faculty members have been included in this report. It is also important to remember that not all instances of repression make it into the media or receive enough attention to be noticed. In many cases, such silence is maintained at the initiative of the repressed individuals themselves to avoid further persecution.

This document does not aim to serve as a complete record of all instances of persecution but is intended to highlight the scale of repression against the academic community, raise awareness of the situation regarding academic rights and freedoms in Belarus, and shed light on the conditions of Belarusian students abroad.

It is important to note that this document was prepared by an organization that has been designated as an extremist entity in Belarus. Any interaction with this document may carry the risk of political persecution within Belarus.



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SECTION 1. THE STATE OF BELARUSIAN STUDENTS AND ACADEMIA WITHIN THE COUNTRY

1.1 Repression Against Students

In 2024, politically motivated repression remained one of the main trends in Belarusian domestic politics. This also affected members of the Belarusian student body and academia. In this and the following subsection, we will list publicly known cases of political persecution of these groups.

At the beginning of the year, two laboratory assistants were detained at the Faculty of Biology at BSU. According to reports, the incident occurred at the Department of Botany. One of the women had a white-red-white manicure, and the other had a toy with white-red-white wings and a Ukrainian flag on her desk.

Belarusian television announced the possibility of recognizing the European Humanities University (EHU) as an extremist organization, calling the university a «destructive NGO». As of now, there has been no official decision regarding such recognition.

The educational initiative «Free Belarusian University» has been included in the list of «extremist formations» by a decision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Any interaction with it may now lead to criminal prosecution within Belarus.

On January 26, 2024, Sofia Kazhamiakina, a 5th-year university student, was sentenced in Minsk under Part 1 of Article 342 of the Criminal Code («Organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them») for her involvement in protests. The court sentenced Sofia to two years and six months of restricted liberty without being sent to an open-type correctional facility. She was accused of participating in protests in August and September 2020.

Law enforcement detained a student from the Faculty of Physics at BSU, along with his mother and school-age sister. The woman is accused of participating in the 2020 protests with her children. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) report, as of March 2024, students and faculty members at the Belarusian National Technical University (BNTU) ranked first in the number of individuals «involved in extremist activities». Since 2020, more than 130 people have been recognized as such. In second place is BSUIR (89 people), and in third place is MSLU (65 people), followed by BSU with 56. In addition, the MIA list includes over 200

students from other educational institutions.

In Mahiliou, during «information hours», students were informed about the list of «extremist resources», the viewing of which could lead to arrest. Similar events were held at Mahiliou State University of Food and Chemical Technologies and Horki Agricultural Academy.

Several students from BNTU were reportedly detained for «collaboration with Ukrainian intelligence services». The detainees were labeled as a «terrorist cell» in an announcement on ANT (a state TV channel).

One of the segments on ANT also covers the arrest of 19-year-old Daniil Herasim. He was detained in April, and in the fall, it became known that the Mahiliou Regional Court had started reviewing a criminal case against Daniil. Among other charges, he is accused of «treason against the state».

Law enforcement detained a 20-year-old third-year student from the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics. He was accused of texting in the chatbot of the «Voice» project, attending protests, and distributing «extremist» materials.

In Viciebsk, student Kiryl Kandracieu was sentenced to one year in a penal colony with a deferment for evading military service. In addition to the punishment, the student is required to pay the state a compensation of 2,000 rubles. Kiryl explained that he received call-up papers but did not appear at the military registration office because he went to continue his studies.

In May 2024, a court in Minsk reviewed the case against Belarusian State Pedagogical University (BSPU) student Herman Lebiadzieu, who was accused of insulting Alyaksandr Lukashenka and inciting hostility (Articles 368 and 130 of the Criminal Code, respectively). He was reportedly detained for administering a nationalist chat where footage of «harsh treatment of Russian soldiers» was shared. Back in 2023, before the case reached court, he had been convicted several times under administrative articles for distributing «extremist» materials, spending a month in detention. The student was also included in lists of individuals «associated with extremist activity» and «associated with terrorist activity». It is known that



the student was released in August 2024.

In Hrodna, law enforcement conducted a «preventive conversation» with a 17-year-old student from the Hrodna State Electrical Engineering College, who had sewn a white-red-white patch for himself.

In Belarusian universities and secondary specialized educational institutions, «Methodological Associations of Curators and Educators» have been created to exercise additional ideological control over the youth. These associations typically include the vice-rector for educational work, deans' deputies for ideological work, group curators, dormitory supervisors, and others.

The website, social media accounts, and logo of the «Youth Block» initiative, founded by a group of youth activists in 2019, have been recognized as «extremist materials».

Law enforcement detained a 4th-year student from Hrodna State University, who was allegedly endorsing the actions of a resident of Mahiliou, «associated with extremist activity», who is also accused of attempting to murder police officers.

The KGB recognized the educational initiative «Leadership School» as an «extremist organization.» In addition to the school, the educational project «Girl Power Bel» was also added to the list.

A student from the College of Business and Law was detained for allegedly subscribing to «extremists», «insulting government officials», and «calling for the killing of Russians».

A 21-year-old cadet from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) academy was detained and sentenced to 15 years in a high-security prison. He was charged under Article 361-3 of the Criminal Code («Participation or preparation of a citizen of the Republic of Belarus in military actions abroad without state authorization») and Article 356 of the Criminal Code («Treason against the state»). The cadet is also required to pay a fine of 600 base values (24,000 BYN). On September 6, 2024, he was added to the list of Belarusian citizens, foreign nationals, and stateless persons linked to «extremist activities».

Former political prisoner Vitaly Prokharau, sentenced for his participation in the 2020 protests, shared that there was a branch of a college in the

prison where he served his sentence. However, the young man, who was 17 at the time, was prohibited from studying, with officials stating, «With your charge, it's not allowed».

1.2 Repressions against teachers and staff of educational institutions

The authorities fined Ludmila Kapusta, the deputy director for educational and production work at Vidzausk State Vocational College for «extremism» on social media. In her personal profile, she kept materials from the media outlet «Radio Free Europe Belarus», which is included in the national list of «extremist» sources.

Law enforcement detained a master from a Minsk college for a comment about a police officer. A criminal case was initiated against him under Article 364 of the Criminal Code («violence or threat of violence against employees of internal affairs bodies»).

Staff of Belarusian State University (BSU) who travel abroad, except to Russia, will now be required to fill out a 37-question questionnaire. The document, signed by the BSU vice-rector, includes questions about contacts, relatives, work experience abroad, as well as the possession of foreign citizenship, a Polish Card, etc.

A lecturer from the military faculty of Brest State University was sentenced to a long prison term for «treason». 42-year-old Dmitry Paznyakou, a former military officer and lecturer, was convicted at the end of 2023. He was charged with a crime related to his official position. Under the article, the sentence ranges from 10 to 20 years in prison. The exact length of the sentence is unknown.

Sergey Horlau, a Belarusian musician and translator, was arrested on February 1, 2024. His last place of employment was the Sakharov Institute in Minsk. He was charged with four articles of the Criminal Code: «Calls for actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of the Republic of Belarus» (Article 361 CC), insulting Alyaksandr Lukashenka (Article 368 CC), «Incitement of hostility» (Article 130 CC), and «Assisting extremist activities» (Article 361-4 CC). His trial began on November 1, 2024, at the Minsk City Court, and the outcome remains unknown.

At Belarusian State University (BSU), special committees were established to check the loyalty of new employees to the authorities. According to



political scientist and former BSU lecturer Roza Turarbekova, this new measure represents the institutionalization of repression. The decision on hiring is now made by a commission, which includes the dean and the deputy dean for ideological work.

The rector of Belarusian State Medical University (BSMU), Sergey Rubnikovich, has **banned** university staff from participating in conferences, courses, and seminars that are not included in the Ministry of Health's approved plan. To attend such events, they are required to obtain a «special permit». This rector's order contradicts Belarusian law, as internal regulations cannot restrict the personal freedom of employees outside their work duties.

A lecturer from the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics at Belarusian State University (BSU), Aлег Nasan, was **detained**. According to a report from a Telegram channel affiliated with security forces, he is accused of subscribing to channels deemed «extremist» and «supporting the opposition».

Ihar Hubarevich, a lecturer at Yanka Kupala State University of Hrodna, is being tried under a criminal article for allegedly financing «extremist» activities (part 1 of article 361-2 of the Criminal Code). His name has already been removed from the university's website.

1.3. The Belarusian National Youth Council «RADA» – «extremist formation»

On September 16, 2024, the KGB **added** the Belarusian National Youth Council «RADA» to the list of «extremist formations», with the BSA being a member organization. According to Belarusian legislation, any interaction with this organization may lead to criminal prosecution for «assisting extremist activities».

1.4. Ideologization of Belarusian Education

In 2024, the systemic trend of the ideologization of Belarusian academia continued. Universities systematically held events aimed at so-called «patriotic education» of youth, during which the administration tried to increase support for the Belarusian regime among students. There were known cases where students were forced to participate in «patriotic» lessons, flashmobs, and **meetings** with representatives of ideological structures, including officials, security forces, and pro-government public figures. Social media

accounts of students were checked for «extremist» channels (with the threat of expulsion), and some were summoned for talks with the police. For example, in February 2024, a police officer **spoke** at Pushkin Brest State University Pushkin, discussing «crimes of an extremist nature». These «crimes» included cases such as «financing extremist activities» or «inciting hostility». These articles are used for the political persecution of Belarusians.

Administrations of some Belarusian universities **organize trips to Russia** for joint events with Russian students within the framework of the «Union State» concept. These events emphasize the «brotherhood» of the two states, sometimes incorporating a militaristic context.

In 2024, the Belarusian State University Lyceum was also **renamed** in honor of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the leader of the Red Terror in the Soviet Union.

Several other important trends related to the ideologisation of the Belarusian academy are discussed in this report below.

1.5. Closure of Private Universities in Belarus

The Belarusian authorities **continued** their policy of eliminating private higher education institutions, leading to the closure of the Belarusian Institute of Law and the Institute of Entrepreneurial Activity. The Institute of Parliamentarism and Entrepreneurship will **no longer admit** new students, as the Ministry of Education refused to approve further enrollments. Several thousand students from the closed institutions were redistributed to state universities, sometimes without regard for their fields of study. Many faculty members lost their jobs, with some forced to leave the country.

Additionally, the International Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship **was sold** to two Chinese citizens, each owning a 50% share.

1.6. New History Textbooks Mentioning the Events of 2020

The 2020 protests remain one of the main topics subjected to ideological pressure by the authorities. They are even **mentioned** in the new Belarusian history textbooks for 11th-grade students. According to Minister of Education Andrei Ivanets, the events of 2020 are presented as a «coup d'état» and are discussed alongside the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, a



quasi-parliamentary structure created by the Belarusian authorities. Ivanets also stated that the textbook contains not only factual information but also evaluations of the events.

1.7. Court Trials Within the Walls of Universities and Colleges

One of the mechanisms of educational ideologization in 2024 continues to be court trials, including those under political criminal charges, conducted directly within university premises in front of students. This practice serves as an additional means of pressure on students in the context of political repression. In several cases, court hearings were accompanied by demonstrative lectures for students about legal responsibility, including for so-called «extremist» offenses.

For instance, at the Belarusian State Agricultural Technical University (BSATU), an on-site court session was held in the presence of students to consider a criminal case related to participation in protests. In Hrodna, in front of college students, authorities publicly detained young women who had burned the official red-green flag of Belarus. One of them was a student of that college.

There was also a known case of the public detention of a college student from Pruzhany, who was suspected of drug distribution. This took place at the Baranavichy Technological College.

Additionally, the Lenin District Court of Hrodna sentenced two women born in 2001 to one year in prison each for «desecration of state symbols» (Article 370 of the Criminal Code). The criminal case was heard in an on-site court session at the Faculty of Law of Yanka Kupala State University of Hrodna, in front of students of the institution.

It also became known that at the end of 2023, an on-site court session was held at the Belarusian State Agrarian Technical University in the case of a 33-year-old man. He was found guilty under Article 342 of the Criminal Code for participating in the 2020 protests. After the trial, the judge gave a speech to students on the topic of responsibility for violating «public order and public morality».

Additionally, a graduate of a college who had studied on a state-funded basis but did not fulfill his mandatory work placement was ordered by the court to reimburse the cost of his education. The case was heard in the college building in front of students.

For participating in the 2020 protest marches, Uladzimir Karol was put on trial. The proceedings took place in front of students at the Belarusian State Economic University.

1.8. Vice-Rectors for Security at Universities

Following the 2020 protests, several Belarusian universities introduced the position of vice-rector for security. It is known that in at least nine universities, this position is held by individuals associated with the State Security Committee (KGB).

At Polack State University, the vice-rector for security is responsible for monitoring the behavior of students and staff, as well as summoning them for discussions. At Yanka Kupala State University of Hrodna, the vice-rector for security conducts «reliability» checks on staff. Reports indicate that, following the 2020 protests, dismissals of faculty members began at Hrodna University. One dismissed professor, a candidate of pedagogical sciences, stated that the dean who informed her of the contract termination referred to the decision of the vice-rector for security and even asked whether she intended to lead students in strikes or protests.

At Belarusian State University, the vice-rector for security is actively seeking new staff and checking their loyalty to the authorities during the hiring process. One of the university's professors revealed that the vice-rector for security called in colleagues who had participated in the 2020 protests for discussions. Analyst Roza Turarbekova noted that, by August 2023, at least 35 professors and 60 associate professors had been dismissed from the university.

1.9. Trips Involving Belarusian Students to the Territories of Ukraine Occupied by the Russian Federation

It is known about at least a few cases where Belarusian students were centrally transported to Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine to participate in various events. For example, students from BSUCA, Homel Medical University, BSAA, Palesky State University, Viciebsk Medical University, and others were centrally taken to the event «Union State: The Art of Being Together», which took place in Crimea in September 2024. It was also noted that as early as summer, there was information about an organized trip for BSUIR



students to the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.

It is also known that at Brest State Technical University, two groups of students were taken to the «Russian House in Brest» building for a presentation of the exhibition «Sense of Homeland», dedicated to the 10th anniversary of Crimea's annexation by Russia.

1.10. Militarization of Belarusian Education and Academia

As a response to the 2020 protests and the participation of young people in them, Belarusian authorities have increasingly focused on patriotic education in recent years. This is most often understood as loyalty to the homeland and readiness to defend it from external threats. In this context, in 2024, Belarusian education and academia underwent a process of militarization.

Starting from September 2024, all Belarusian university students undergo military training. The program includes «basic tactical medicine skills and the ability to handle chemical toxic substances». Schools have introduced positions for «military-patriotic education» curators, as well as an elective course for senior classes within the English language curriculum, which assesses students' ability to translate «conversations or interrogations of prisoners of war».

As early as 2021, so-called «military-patriotic clubs» emerged, affiliated with army units or other security forces, as well as «military-patriotic groups» within schools. As of 2024, there are at least several dozen such organizations, teaching children shooting skills, first aid, and more. Belarusian Minister of Education Andrey Ivanets has called for the creation of such groups in every school.

In September 2024, Alyaksandr Lukashenka met with students from technical universities. During the meeting, he requested their assistance in developing a «high-precision and interference-resistant missile», and the rector of the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR) announced that work on the project was already underway. This case demonstrates that even science and academia are undergoing gradual militarization.

It is also known that some instructors from Belarusian military universities are undergoing

training with soldiers of the Wagner Mercenary Group.

1.11. Mandatory Job Placement System: Potential Extension of Term and Expansion to All Students

Belarus continues to enforce the mandatory job placement system, a practice where graduates are obligated to work at a designated location for two years after completing their studies. Currently, this applies only to graduates who studied at the expense of the state budget. However, as early as 2023, Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Minister of Education Andrey Ivanets declared the necessity of extending this system to include fee-paying students as well. While the plan was initially set for implementation in 2024, it remains a future consideration at this stage.

It is important to note that many students specifically choose fee-paying education to avoid mandatory job placement. Negative experiences among young Belarusian specialists often include being assigned to small towns, frequently against their will, even when they have prior agreements with other companies or organizations.

Additionally, Minister of Education Andrey Ivanets has proposed a significant increase in the financial compensation that a young specialist must pay to the state if they refuse to fulfill their mandatory job placement after completing state-funded education. «After graduating from university, you must become a specialist, and for that, you need to work for at least two years in your profession», the minister stated. He also reiterated the proposal to extend the job placement period for certain specialties.

1.12. The Situation in Belarusian Academia Before and During the 2024 Parliamentary Elections

This subsection of the report is based on the BSA and Youth Bloc report «Belarusian Academia During the 2024 Elections».

The 2024 parliamentary elections in Belarus took place under conditions of politically motivated repression against the opposition and civil society, government and pro-regime party dominance in the political and media landscape, the absence of independent observers and a lack of conditions for a fair vote count, among other issues. The elections were not recognized by the OSCE and several European and other countries.



The Belarusian student and academic communities faced threats and violations of their rights during the parliamentary campaign. Pre-election campaigning in several Belarusian universities began as early as the fall of 2023. So-called «open dialogues» were held with students, focusing heavily on «patriotic education of the youth». At the same time, these events were used to instill fear in students, faculty, and even schoolchildren, warning them of potential consequences for involvement in «extremist and terrorist activities». The authorities often broadly interpret these definitions to encompass opposition activities. For example, students from Brest State University (BrSU) were taken on a tour of the Brest Region Investigative Committee, where they were lectured on the dissemination of «extremist» information. Similar warnings about «extremism» were given to students at other universities as well.

The administration of the Horki Agricultural Academy forced students to sign in support of the candidacy of Natallia Hlushakova, a teacher and dean of the Faculty of Business and Law at the Academy, for the parliamentary elections.

During the campaign, the chairman of the Hrodna Regional Executive Committee, Uladzimir Karanik, visited Hrodna State Medical University, where he tried to convince faculty and students of the necessity of the planned elections. He emphasized that changes in the country should be ensured through participation in elections rather than through street protests. Later, Uladzimir Karanik held similar meetings in other higher education institutions in the Hrodna region. Yury Karayeu, the former Minister of Internal Affairs of Belarus and one of the key figures in the crackdown on protests against election fraud in 2020, also participated in such meetings.

Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Henadz Kazakevich spoke before the students of BNTU. He talked about «opposing extremism» and warned young people against «being drawn into events organized by Western intelligence services». The speech took place as part of the preparations for the parliamentary elections.

1.13. The Situation in Belarusian Academia Before and During the 2025 Presidential Elections

Belarusian students faced violations of their rights during the presidential campaign, which took place in late 2024 and early 2025. There were known

cases where students were forced to sign in support of nominating Alyaksandr Lukashenka as a presidential candidate. At the Belarusian State Economic University (BSEU), the dean's office of one faculty stated that BSEU supports Lukashenka, and therefore, the dean's office was collecting signatures for his nomination. At the same university, a group supervisor summoned students living in one of the dormitories and told them to sign in support of Lukashenka's nomination. Those who refused were threatened with being summoned for further discussions to explain their decision.

Students of the Mahiliou Trade College were sent to participate in the Minsk forum «*Youth of Consumer Cooperation – for a Strong and Prosperous Belarus*». During the event, young people were told about the significance of the achievements made over the past 30 years under the leadership of Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

In a shopping center in Hrodna, local activists of the pro-government BRSM held a flashmob in support of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's election campaign under the slogan «*Batska [Lukashenka] is cool!*»

During a meeting with students of the Viciebsk State Academy of Veterinary Medicine, Deputy Chairman of the Viciebsk City Executive Committee Viktor Hlushyn stated that «*Lukashenka had collected more than 2 million signatures for his nomination, which means that the election campaign is predictable. This is good; it should proceed calmly, without shaking the country, without destabilizing our society. It also signifies trust in the current head of state and the course Belarus is following*».

Before the elections in Mahiliou, the police visited colleges and lyceums, warning students about the responsibility for «*participation in unauthorized mass events*». For instance, at the Mahiliou Social and Humanitarian College under the Mahiliou State University named after A. Kuliashou, a «*preventive informational meetings*» were held. An inspector from the Leninski District Department of Internal Affairs led the session, cautioning students about the criminal and administrative liability for participating in mass events related to the elections and for crimes of an «*extremist nature*». Additionally, in Mahiliou universities, agitational meetings were held with Alyaksandr Lukyanau, Lukashenka's trusted representative and First Secretary of the Central Committee of BRSM, who is included in the EU sanctions list.



In the Naroulia State College, a representative of the prosecutor's office gave a speech, stating that before the elections, «there is an increase in the threat of recruitment of young men and women», adding that «extremist formations show the greatest activity during important political events, especially during the presidential elections, which we are now approaching».

Media reports also indicate that students were forced to participate in voting. For example, students at one of the universities in a regional center were told that voting was mandatory, despite the fact that, according to the Belarusian law, it is voluntary. Those who refused to vote were threatened with problems during exams and mandatory job placement. Students living in dormitories were not only forced to vote but also required to report whether their roommates had done the same.

The presidential elections in Belarus were neither free, fair, nor democratic, and they did not meet the standards of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

1.14. Other

Over the past year, Belarusian State University (BSU) has dropped several hundred positions in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025. Last year, BSU was ranked in the 1201-1500 group, but it has now fallen into the 1501+ category. Additionally, eight other Belarusian universities are candidates for inclusion in the ranking, with two of them receiving this status this year.



2.1. Continuation of the Decree Restricting Passport Issuance and Other Services Abroad

On September 5, 2023, Alyaksandr Lukashenka signed a **decree** restricting a range of services provided by Belarusian embassies and consulates abroad. According to the decree, Belarusian citizens living abroad can only apply for or renew their passports within Belarus. Diplomatic missions and consular offices no longer provide these services.

In 2024, this decree continues to be in effect, imposing significant restrictions on Belarusians abroad in general and students in particular. An expired passport prevents border crossing, affecting student mobility. The decree also creates obstacles to obtaining legal residency status in the host country, potentially exposing individuals to legal proceedings or deportation. Additionally, the new regulations impose restrictions on students' ability to obtain documents necessary for studying abroad and affect their legal status throughout their studies.

The Belarusian Students' Association considers the decree an act of the state's refusal to fulfill its obligations and ensure the rights of its citizens. It is an attempt to extend repression against Belarusians beyond the country's borders. The decree also violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a party. The measures taken appear to be repressive actions against individuals who criticize the regime and are in exile. Those forced to return to Belarus to obtain necessary documents face an immediate threat of arrest and political persecution.

2.2. Problems of Belarusian Students with Admission to Polish Universities Due to Diploma Recognition; Rejections of Polish Student Visas

In 2022, Belarus **withdrew** from the intergovernmental agreement with Poland on the mutual recognition of higher education diplomas. This led to difficulties for Belarusian students applying to Polish universities, and these issues remain relevant in 2024.

Starting in November 2023, Belarusian applicants to some Polish universities were required to provide not only a diploma with an apostille – which can only be obtained in Belarus – but also a document confirming the diploma's legitimacy. Previously, such a document could be obtained from the Belarusian Ministry of Education. However, since

May 2024, reports have emerged that the Department of Quality Control in Education of the Ministry has been **refusing** to issue these documents, creating further obstacles for applicants.

In the summer of 2024, Poland introduced **amendments** allowing diploma recognition without the involvement of the Belarusian Ministry of Education in nostrification. However, the issue remains relevant. In some cases, Polish institutions responsible for diploma recognition (Kuratorium Oświaty) began **requiring** applicants to provide certificates of Belarusian centralized exams no older than two years. This creates obstacles, particularly for Belarusians who took these exams more than two years before applying to a university and cannot return to Belarus for political reasons. The situation is further complicated by the lack of clear requirements regarding which documents must be submitted for nostrification, leading to inconsistencies in recognition procedures across different regions of Poland and causing additional confusion.

Moreover, in 2024, Belarusian applicants to universities, such as Jagiellonian University, were additionally **required** to have a valid student visa for the nostrification process. Normally, this visa can only be obtained right before the start of studies, creating a risk of not completing the diploma recognition process in time and ultimately not being admitted to the university. At least 20 applicants to Jagiellonian University alone **faced** these difficulties.

In 2024, the issue of Belarusian applicants in Poland facing non-recognition of their diplomas became widespread. One known **case** involved a Belarusian applicant to the University of Warsaw who was denied diploma recognition because their high school diploma and centralized exam certificates were issued in 2019. Issues with nostrification arose not only for university applicants but also for those studying in post-secondary **professional education schools**. In another case, an applicant to the University of Warsaw was **refused** even a review of her documents for diploma recognition due to the absence of centralized exam certificates and a certificate verifying the legality of her diploma. Additionally, Belarusian applicants faced difficulties **booking appointments** at the Kuratorium Oświaty through the online system, with waiting times sometimes extending up to two months.



Despite individual cases of successful nostrification of Belarusian applicants in various cities of Poland and efforts by Belarusian NGOs to address this issue, no universal solution was found by the beginning of the academic year. In early January 2025, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met with the Polish Minister of National Education, Barbara Nowacka, Prime Minister Donald Tusk, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski. Among the topics discussed were simplifying visa procedures for Belarusians, recognizing Belarusian diplomas on par with Polish ones, and standardizing the document requirements for Belarusian applicants to Polish universities. It is still unclear whether this will lead to any changes in the policy regarding Belarusian applicants.

Also, on January 7, 2025, a bill was submitted to the Polish parliament, proposing the introduction of a separate process for verifying education and obtaining the right to higher education. The analysis of the document by youth activist Lizaveta Prakopchyk can be read via the [provided link](#).

Another issue faced by Belarusian students in Poland in 2024 was obtaining visas. Over the course of the year, Belarusians submitted 3433 applications for student visas to Poland, with 26% of cases resulting in rejection. Many students who had passed exams and been admitted to universities were unable to come for their studies. One of the reasons for the visa refusals was the lack of recognition of diplomas, which could only be processed within Poland. Another common reason for denials was insufficient justification of the purpose of stay in Poland, even when all necessary documents from universities were provided. At least some of the negative decisions were made at the level of Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than consulates.

2.3. Difficulties faced by Belarusian applicants related to obtaining certain types of documents in Belarus necessary for studying abroad

In 2024, the process of obtaining apostilles for educational documents for those wishing to continue their studies abroad became significantly more complicated. The Ministry of Education of Belarus introduced new bureaucratic barriers, making the procedure longer and less predictable. As previously mentioned, requests for certificates confirming the legality of diplomas were temporarily suspended. These documents are required for admission to some foreign universities.

Additionally, problems arose with obtaining certificates that detail the program and subjects studied by the applicant in secondary school. This document must be provided by the Belarusian school. The absence of such a certificate can lead to difficulties with admission not only in Poland but also in other countries.

2.4. Problems faced by Belarusians with obtaining immigrant's passports in Norway

Three cases of refusals to issue immigrant's passports Belarusians are known, one of which involves a student of a Norwegian university. 24-year-old Vitaly, in 2020, «participated in protests, experienced interrogations, arrests, searches, and threats from the State Security Committee», left Belarus due to the risk of political persecution, and arrived in Norway on a student program. Due to the inability to obtain a new passport at Belarusian consulates abroad and the imminent expiration of his old one, Vitaly applied for an immigrant's passport but was refused. Now, the student is left without a valid passport or any other document, which is necessary for, for example, moving to another country or continuing his legalization process in Norway after completing his studies. Vitaly cannot return to Belarus due to the risk of being subjected to repression for his political views.

The UDI, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, justified its refusal by stating that *«there is insufficient documentation or it is unlikely that the person tried to obtain a travel document <...> in their home country»*.

2.5. Brain Drain: Increasing Number of Students and Professionals Abroad

According to independent research, the number of Belarusian students studying abroad, including in EU countries, increased in 2024. According to estimates by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's advisor on youth policy and student affairs, Margaryta Vorykhava, approximately 10% of Belarusian applicants planned to study abroad in 2024.

It is also worth noting that the number of students leaving for Russia is growing. It is known that in the 2023/2024 academic year, around 18,000 Belarusians were studying at European universities, while about 10,000 were enrolled in Russian institutions.

At the same time, enrollment has decreased at one of the most popular foreign universities among



Belarusians – the European Humanities University. In 2024, only 302 students enrolled in all higher education programs, which is 337 students (or 52.7%) fewer than in 2023.

The Belarusian authorities are attempting to hinder students from going abroad by restricting the issuance of documents required for admission to foreign universities, as well as increasing pressure on those considering studying abroad.

2.6. Status of the Kalinowski Scholarship Program in Poland and EU4Belarus, Including Scholarship Increases and Payment Delays

In 2024, the amount of the monthly scholarship provided under the Kalinowski Program in Poland was revised. Belarusian students, NGOs, and other stakeholders had highlighted the necessity of this adjustment. As a result, the scholarship was increased from 1,250 to 1,800 zlotys, surpassing the then-social minimum of 1,744.9 zlotys for the fourth quarter of 2023. However, by the third quarter of 2024, the scholarship once again fell below the social minimum for adults, which had risen to 1,850 zlotys.

The process of increasing the scholarships revealed several other issues. For instance, the program has two groups of scholarship recipients, but the criteria for belonging to one group or the other are not disclosed. Some students have also pointed out a lack of clarity and transparency in the selection process for the program.

Some scholarship recipients noted delays in scholarship payments during the 2023/2024 academic year, which caused financial difficulties for them. By the start of the 2024/2025 academic year, payments had finally been stabilized, and no further delays were observed. However, the issue of transparency in the selection and distribution of scholarships remains relevant. A more detailed analysis of the problems within the Kalinowski Program can be found in the analytical document prepared by BSA, available via the [provided link](#).

Attention should also be drawn to the significant delays in payments under the EU4Belarus scholarship program (available to Belarusian students studying in universities in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and the Czech Republic). Although the program is supposed to provide monthly payments, delays reached a peak during the 2023/2024 academic year. Specifically, funds for the first year of participation in the program were only

disbursed after the academic year had ended – in mid-July 2024. This situation came as a surprise to program participants. The scholarship program administration repeatedly postponed its own promised deadlines and systematically failed to meet payment schedules throughout the year.

This issue was particularly critical because, for many young people, the monthly EU4Belarus scholarship was their primary or even sole source of income at the time. Such payment delays placed students in difficult financial situations, especially in the absence of additional material resources. This, in turn, negatively affected their physical and psychological well-being, as well as the quality of their education.

2.7. Restrictions for Belarusian Applicants in Lithuania

Vilnius University has introduced restrictions on Belarusian applicants for certain programs. For instance, Belarusian citizens are not allowed to apply for programs such as [Bioinformatics](#) and [Software Engineering](#) without any explanation for these limitations. This can be considered a discrimination based on nationality.

2.8 Other

Belarusian students studying at the European Humanities University in Vilnius have received [threatening messages](#) from anonymous Telegram accounts. Alleged information about students with homosexual orientation has been published in an open anonymous Telegram group, with numerous homophobic and chauvinistic comments appearing under the posts.

The European Humanities University provides, among others, a grant for politically repressed students; however, it has been reported that throughout 2024, this support was not provided due to a lack of funding.

EPAM is [ending](#) its partnership with EHU on the «EPAM School of Digital Engineering» project. Students are being offered the option to continue their education in the «Informatics» program or transfer to other universities.

In addition to existing programs for Belarusian applicants in Russia (such as «Rossotrudnichestvo»), the country has other initiatives aimed at transferring current students from Belarusian universities to Russian institutions.



For example, the Faculty of International Relations at BSU selects up to ten of its first-year students annually to continue their studies at MGIMO. According to BSA, before beginning their studies at MGIMO, these students, in addition to writing selection essays, also underwent psychological testing and an interview with representatives of the KGB. Upon graduation from MGIMO, these students are required to work for 5 years at the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



SECTION 3. OTHER

In June 2024, the European Union adopted its 14th package of sanctions against the Russian Federation and Belarus. Among those sanctioned was the pro-regime Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM), an organization that young Belarusians and students are often pressured to join, along with the First Secretary of the BRSM Central Committee, Alyaksandr Lukyanau.

«The Belarusian Republican Youth Union is an organisation in Belarus and is one of the main actors involved in the deportation of Ukrainian children from the illegally occupied territories of Ukraine to Belarus. The Belarusian Republican Youth Union has been involved in subjecting children to re-education and political indoctrination, as well as coordinating practical aspects such as the housing of children within Belarus. Therefore, the Belarusian Republican Youth Union is supporting materially actions which undermine and threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine», the sanctions explanation stated.



SECTION 4.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Belarusian students and educators continue to face political repression. Belarusian authorities persecute members of these groups for their participation in the 2020 protests, support for Ukraine, critical comments about the government, and assistance to independent initiatives labeled as «extremist». At the same time, the authorities designate youth organizations as «extremist formations», imposing restrictions on their activities. In 2023, the Belarusian Student Association (BSA) was given this status, followed by the Belarusian National Youth Council «RADA» in 2024.

Students face significant pressure due to the increasing ideological control and militarization of education. Private universities in Belarus are being shut down; students are forced to attend meetings with representatives of law enforcement and are threatened with consequences for having «extremist materials» in their social media. History textbooks have been revised to depict the events of 2020 as a «coup attempt». Universities have introduced vice-rectors responsible for security, tasked with monitoring staff loyalty, and even hold court sessions on political cases within their institutions.

Additionally, Belarusian students faced ideological pressure and violations of their rights during the

2024 and 2025 elections. Students were forced to sign for the nomination of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, voting in the elections, and attending meetings with pro-government figures as well as law enforcement representatives.

Belarusian students abroad continue to experience the consequences of Lukashenka's decree, which stipulates that a new passport can only be obtained in Belarus. This creates bureaucratic obstacles for individuals who cannot return to the country. Belarusian applicants in Poland face difficulties in applying for Polish student visas, obtaining the necessary admission documents from the Belarusian Ministry of Education, and undergoing the procedure for recognizing their diplomas. Some students have encountered significant delays in receiving their Kalinouski and EU4Belarus scholarships, leading to financial hardships. Despite these challenges, the number of Belarusian students studying abroad continues to grow.

All the trends and issues described above in Belarusian higher education – from repression and political indoctrination of students to «brain drain» and pressure on students abroad – continue to have a significant negative impact on the Belarusian academic sphere. Unfortunately, there are no signs that the Belarusian authorities are interested in improving the state of academia.

TAKING EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT, BSA CALLS ON:

The Kastus Kalinouski Scholarship Program Office to:

- 1) Introduce a mechanism for indexing the scholarship in line with inflation and ensure payments for 12 months per year;
- 2) Include representatives of Belarusian youth or human rights organizations in the admissions committee with observer rights (without voting rights) and the right to provide recommendations;
- 3) Develop a publicly accessible list of criteria for assessing the degree of repression or political pressure on applicants, along with a transparent points-based distribution system. More detailed recommendations are available in the BSA analytical document.

National migration services and other relevant institutions, particularly the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, to:

- 1) Improve legislative and procedural frameworks for issuing alien passports to Belarusians and/or recognizing expired Belarusian passports, considering the specific needs and challenges faced by those affected by the decree on embassies;
- 2) Ensure that Belarusians who receive an alien passport have access to the labor market and the opportunity to study;
- 3) Update existing data on Belarus in accordance with reports from the UN Human Rights Council and the Belarusian human rights center «Viasna» and make decisions on issuing alien passports to Belarusians only after an individual case assessment.



the Ministry of National Education of Poland to:

develop a clear and transparent mechanism for recognizing Belarusian high school diplomas and other educational documents, ensuring the right to continue education for Belarusian applicants. It is crucial to take into account the bureaucratic obstacles applicants face in Belarus and to create alternative recognition mechanisms, particularly for those who cannot return to Belarus due to the risk of political persecution. Such measures will ensure access to quality education for Belarusians.

foreign universities to:

- 1) Consider the possibility of scholarship support for repressed Belarusian students.
- 2) Provide alternative mechanisms for the recognition of academic documents for applicants who, due to objective reasons related to the risk of political persecution, cannot return to Belarus and, as a result, are unable to obtain certain types of documents, such as an apostille.

The Lithuanian National Union of Students to:

advocate for the cancellation of territorial restrictions on Belarusian applicants for the designated programs at Vilnius University.

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland and Polish consular departments in Belarus to:

- 1) Create a concrete list of required documents for obtaining a student visa, taking into account the bureaucratic obstacles faced by Belarusian applicants and the necessity of diploma recognition procedures in Poland before starting studies;
- 2) Ensure transparent explanations for visa refusals.

Vilnius University to:

cancel the territorial restrictions on Belarusian applicants for the specified programs as a discriminatory practice and/or publicly explain the reasons for these restrictions.

National Student Unions to:

- 1) Inform national universities about possible bureaucratic issues related to the academic documents of Belarusian students.
- 2) Advocate at local and national levels for the creation of scholarship programs for Belarusians; the improvement of admission and academic document recognition procedures for Belarusian applicants, considering the bureaucratic obstacles imposed by the Belarusian authorities; the enhancement of legal procedures for issuing immigrant's passports to Belarusians and/or the continued recognition of expired passports in cases where individuals cannot visit Belarus due to objective reasons related to the risk of political persecution.



ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

BSA Research: «The State of Academic Freedoms and Their Perception by Belarusian Students in Universities in Belarus and Poland».

Analytical document by a BSA representative on improving the Kastus Kalinouski Scholarship Program in Poland.

BSA & Youth Bloc Report: «Belarusian Academia During the 2024 Elections».

BSA Report on the State of Belarusian Academia in 2023.

Briefing: «Belarusian Students in Exile – Challenges and Solutions for Advocacy».



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BNTU – Belarusian National Technical University

BRSM – Belarusian Republican Youth Union

BrSU – Brest State University

BSA – Belarusian Students' Association

BSAA – Belarusian State Academy of Arts

BSATU – Belarusian State Agricultural Technical University

BSEU – Belarusian State Economic University

BSPU – Belarusian State Pedagogical University

BSMU – Belarusian State Medical University

BSU – Belarusian State University

BSUCA – Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts

BSUIR – Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics

CC – Criminal codex

EHU – European Humanities University

KGB – State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus

MGIMO – Moscow State Institute of International Relations

MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs

MSLU – Minsk State Linguistic University

NAWA – Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange

NGO – Non-governmental organization

NZS – Polish Independent Students' Association

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

