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REPUBLIC OF BELARUS
VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

I knew that one step to the right, one step to the left and I would be expelled from the university
Belarusian student

PREFACE: ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This report examines restrictions on academic inquiry and academic life in Belarus that violate internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Many of the violations stem from a revival of discredited authoritarian policies and practices of the Soviet era. In the field of history, there has been a literal return to Soviet-era policies, with suppression of research into Belarusian independence movements, restrictions on the use of the Belarusian language, and pressure to present a sanitized account of historical relations with Russia. Institutionally, there has been increasing centralization of academic decision-making, as well as resuscitation of institutional forms characteristic of the Soviet era. Most notable in this regard is the ban on political activity on campus accompanied by the emergence of the ostensibly apolitical but manifestly pro-Presidential Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth as an omnipresent feature of campus life.[1] These developments have been accompanied by a systematic crackdown on expressions of political dissent on campus and, indeed, any form of intellectual inquiry that strays from government-approved orthodoxy. Outspoken students and lecturers are routinely targeted. Pressures to toe the line, moreover, are present not only in state universities but increasingly in private institutions and academies as well, and opposition groups of all kinds, including civic organizations that attempt to conduct seminars in democracy and human rights, have been harassed, denied facilities, and shut down.

The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that "every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for [human rights]." To this end, the declaration specifically provides for the right to education, mandates that access to educational institutions and to the cultural and scientific resources of society shall be available to all, and provides that "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." Human Rights Watch believes that educational institutions cannot fulfil their mission of strengthening respect for human rights when the basic rights of educators and students themselves are not respected. Objective criticism is the basis of social progress; it is difficult to imagine how that progress can be achieved without uninhibited research and dialogue.

The freedom to pursue research and scholarship unfettered by censorship and persecution cannot be separated from freedom to exercise basic civil and political rights as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). As a human rights organization, it is not our intention to support or dispute the opinions, ideas, or research findings of the academics and students whose cases we discuss. It is, however, a central feature of our mandate to defend their right to express their views and to study, research, teach, and publish without interference.

As set forth in article 19 of the ICCPR, freedom of expression "shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers." This freedom is essential to academic excellence. A university fulfills its mission when academics are not forced to support an official line, an economic agenda, or a political ideology, but rather are free to use their talents to advance human knowledge and understanding. Freedom of expression is also a core civil and political right essential to citizen autonomy. There can be no liberty and no meaningful citizenship where individuals are denied the basic right to ask questions and seek information about what is going on in society, and to share their ideas and views with others. To date, international attention to this basic right has understandably emphasized artistic freedom and freedom of the press, essential attributes of a free society. Relatively little attention, however, has been paid to the crucial role played by academic institutions, dedicated to inquiry, information, and ideas, in preserving and giving meaning to the right.

In principle, the university is an institution open to all on the basis of merit, and should serve as an important intellectual resource not only to governments and industry, but also to individuals and interests independent of the state. In practice, attacks on campus-based critics and politically motivated government interventions often threaten to turn the university into an institution that exclusively serves the interests of state power holders. Because the great majority

[1] In Russian, *Belarusskii Patrioticheskii Soyuz Molodezhi*.

of universities around the world are public institutions or are dependent on government funding, and because such institutions typically are viewed by governments as "prime instruments of national purpose," governments have considerable power to influence what takes place on campus and an incentive to wield that power.

A wide range of governments abuse their power. In Belarus under President Aleksandr Lukashenka, politically motivated attacks on dissident faculty and students have been accompanied by damaging ideological and institutional constraints. Political assaults on the academic community thus not only claim individual victims, they also serve as a crucial component in broader government efforts to limit citizens' basic rights and as an important barrier to the development of independent institutions and a dynamic civil society.

There is another reason why we have chosen to focus on the academic community: Compared to other professional groups, including doctors, scientists, journalists, writers, and lawyers, academics worldwide have been slow to campaign against human rights abuses, and slow to take action aimed at addressing the plight of colleagues overseas. Higher education is fast becoming a global concern. As barriers fall, there is increasing opportunity to assist those who have been arbitrarily targeted by their governments, and increasing need to articulate principles for the defense of academic freedom worldwide. By visiting or attempting to visit students and scholars in prison, keeping in touch with their families, colleagues, and unions, raising money for their legal defense and medical needs, and expressing concern over their cases with governments and international organizations, academics ensure that their colleagues are not forgotten. By speaking out when students and scholars are censored, constrained in their exercise of basic rights as citizens, or targeted for imprisonment and torture, academics fulfill an important part of their mission as educators.

SUMMARY

Under President Lukashenka a pervasive state campaign of political control of the universities has severely limited academic freedom and given rise to a climate of fear and suspicion on Belarusian campuses. This campaign has curtailed freedom of expression, association, and assembly on and off campus, in consonance with state policies that have circumscribed civil society in every sector. Government constraints on academic freedom intersect with those imposed on nongovernmental organizations, the independent media, independent lawyers, and opposition political parties and organizations of all kinds. Students and faculty alike who peacefully exercise their legitimate right to freedom of assembly at opposition demonstrations, who join opposition political parties, or who express their views freely on campus or off, are punished with warnings, reprimands, expulsion, demotion, or dismissal. Ironically, in 1998 the government introduced human rights, along with Belarusian history, culture, philosophy, and ethics as part of a compulsory block of subjects for students. The government's purposeful restriction of academic freedom makes a mockery of this initiative, and has grave implications for the creative and intellectual development of Belarus, plunging the country back into the stifling mire of Soviet-era restrictions.

History has become an extremely politicized topic in post-Soviet, post-1994 Belarus. President Lukashenka has made his own historical interpretation the central theme of his administration: integration with Russia. In so doing, he has pushed the teaching of Belarusian history in high schools and universities to the forefront of an increasingly sharp battle for the presentation of the "true" history of Belarus. The free rein given historians to research and publish on issues, formerly taboo, such as Stalinist atrocities during the perestroika period (1985-1991) and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has gradually been restricted. Historians who have researched Belarus' national past or Stalinist atrocities are viewed as having directly challenged the government's policy of integration and now face restrictions in their work. Historians and researchers who publish or organize conferences on such themes are attacked in polemics in the state press and refused access to the media to publish their responses. High school and university history textbooks written and published in the post-Soviet period have gradually been removed from the classroom and replaced with standard Soviet-era editions by order of the government. Independent historians are today viewed in the same light as oppositionist politicians and, in contrast to those historians who support the current policies of the president, find themselves in an increasingly precarious situation.

Institutionally, the Belarusian state system of university education has increasingly been subordinated to President Lukashenka himself through new provisions for the direct presidential appointment of university rectors and deans. Rectors of state universities are now appointed and allegedly dismissed by the president, opening the door to replacement of academic criteria by political criteria in such decisions. Critics allege that presidential selection of rectors has made political loyalty a consideration in selection of academic leaders, undermining the independence of state universities. Without exception, all the rectors a Human Rights Watch researcher contacted who had allegedly been dismissed for political reasons declined to give interviews, even under strict guarantee of anonymity out of fear of reprisal. Although the state bars independent political organizations from campus, it funds and provides campus facilities for the vigorously pro-presidential and blatantly political Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth (commonly known by the acronym BPSM), actively promoting membership in the organization as necessary for those who want to get ahead. Formed on the initiative of the president, and with representative offices in every state university and institution of higher education in Belarus, the BPSM represents a heavy-handed attempt to politically indoctrinate current and future generations of young people into the ranks of the president's supporters, to actively counter newly formed independent and opposition party youth groups, and to provide a presidential check on academic life at every level. BPSM representatives now sit alongside the committees that administer oral examinations to all applicants for admission to state universities. Whereas BPSM members receive privileges and discounts on campus and in stores, students who occupy prominent positions in the youth wings of opposition political organizations face warnings, fines, imprisonment, and expulsion from their place of study because of their political activity.

Since coming to office, President Lukashenka has sought systematically to control every sector of civil society. As part of this state-sponsored campaign, authorities have turned to universities to suppress dissent. In its efforts to control student life, the state curtails and restricts students' political activity. Politically active university students face a variety

of measures from state university authorities and the state itself to achieve this end. State university authorities threaten politically active students with reprimands, warnings, lower grades, and expulsion, while governmental authorities target such students, especially those who attend opposition demonstrations, for administrative and criminal sanctions. Similarly, politically active lecturers, independent historians, and university employees who challenge the status quo are subject to a wide variety of repressive measures from university authorities. These measures, typically in the form of reprimands or warnings, serve to ensure that university staff know that political nonconformity, let alone active participation in the political opposition, will threaten their livelihood. Research into politically sensitive issues, such as the Belarusian independence movement during the Soviet era, is seen to challenge the state's policy of integration with Russia and is actively dissuaded by senior faculty, even where it has not yet drawn attention from the government. Significantly, a large number of lecturers have moved from state institutions to non-state institutions.

The government perceives private education to be a threat to its control and influence over the education of students, particularly on politically sensitive subjects such as history and law, and has posed significant obstacles to the development and operation of the private universities and other private educational initiatives that have emerged in Belarus since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The new institutions have taken the form of private, commercially run universities, along with smaller establishments providing night or weekend classes for adults and young people. Regrettably, these private universities and schools are the object of a range of actions which, while in some cases represented as measures to ensure the quality of education offered, have been misused to induce conformity. Local authorities, in turn, persistently harass smaller, extra-university programs by denying them access to premises, doing so on an entirely arbitrary basis, or by applying continuing restrictions on the holding of unauthorized meetings to ban or close premises to seminars and other private teaching initiatives. Following a seminar on legal education in Smargon held in the editorial offices of an independent newspaper by a regional council of youth organizations named Rada 23, KGB officers interviewed all the organizers asking them who held it, what was said, and with what funds. On one occasion in Pruzhany, members of a legal rights education group from Brest ─ the Belarusian Association of Women Lawyers ─ were told by local authorities at the last minute that they were forbidden from holding their seminar on February 16, 1998 due to an "epidemic" in the town. For the private universities, in the present politically charged atmosphere in Belarus, the standard process of periodic licence renewal by the Ministry of Education becomes a moment of apprehension as these universities' record of political activity on campus comes under scrutiny. As a result, private universities mostly steer well clear of politically sensitive subjects. In a telling example of the reach and influence of the state in the non-state university sector, lecturers with whom a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke who had made the switch from state sector to private, expressed fear of retribution by the state should they be known to have discussed the academic freedom issue. Some declined to meet, while others asked that their names be withheld. One senior lecturer anxiously sought guarantees that a casual conversation with a Human Rights Watch researcher on the general condition of academic freedom in Belarus would go no further.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Human Rights Watch respectfully submits the following recommendations:

The Government of Belarus should:

- Immediately cease its campaign of repression against politically active students, reinstate those students expelled for their political beliefs and activities, including Denis Bobikov and Anatol' Britsen formerly of the Gorky Academy of Agriculture, Evgenny Skochko, formerly of the Belarusian State Technical University, and Ales' Mukhin formerly of SISRU State Information System and Radioelectronics University and others;
- Ensure a prompt and impartial process for students to appeal expulsions;
- Institute procedures to ensure that academic decisions, including selection of rectors and other university administrators, is made according to academic criteria and not partisan political considerations;
- End the practice of pressuring rectors in the non-state sector on the composition of their faculty and content of their curricula. Such issues must be decided on academic merit alone in order to preserve the freedom of expression necessary to guarantee academic integrity;
- Allow the publication of history textbooks that depart from Soviet-era texts and encourage academic researchers to research and publish on issues of their choice;
- Immediately cease measures intended to deny the access of private education initiatives, such as the Peoples' University and the Belarusian Association of Women Lawyers', to facilities in which to hold classes or civic education seminars;
- Work with legislators to repeal the overly restrictive Law on Gatherings, Meetings, Street Marches, Demonstrations, and Pickets, which, in addition to violating Belarusian citizens' right to freedom of assembly, is abused by local authorities to deny permission to private educational initiatives to hold educational seminars;
- Repeal article 12 of the 1992 Law on Education which prohibits the formation and/or activities of political parties or groups linked with political parties on campus; and
- Repeal article 16 of the Law on the Police which provides police the right to inform a detainee's place of work or study about the fact of their detention.

The Government of the Russian Federation should:

- Use its considerable power and influence with the Belarusian government to press for the lifting of constraints on academic freedom, and freedoms of expression and assembly identified in this report; and
- Convey its extreme disapproval of repression in Belarusian academia, pointing out the comparatively open environment in the Russian education system that has developed in the post-Soviet period.

The European Union should:

- Publicly condemn violations of academic freedom, freedom of expression, association, and assembly in Belarus;
- Continue to support the development of human rights and democracy in Belarus and to include programs promoting respect for academic freedom in such work; and
- Extend financial support to private universities and other education initiatives and develop programs to support independent research and publications.

The Council of Europe should:

- Maintain suspension of Belarus' membership application until such time as Belarus has made demonstrable progress in restoring the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly.

The Advisory and Monitoring Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Minsk should:

- Continue to actively monitor and report publicly on human rights abuses in Belarus, placing special emphasis on monitoring and engaging the government on violations of academic freedom;

- Sponsor an international conference in Minsk on academic freedom in Belarus and invite international experts to give their assessment, along with representatives of the state and independent educational sectors and relevant government officials; and
- Meet with students and faculty members who have been expelled or fired, or threatened with such, for politically motivated reasons, and raise such cases with the Belarusian government.

The Government of the United States should:

- Continue to support the development of civil society in Belarus and place particular emphasis on respect for academic freedom; and
- Continue to monitor human rights violations and pay particular attention to:
  - politically motivated harassment and expulsion of students;
  - politically motivated harassment and dismissal of lecturers;
  - incidents of de facto censorship of the academic community.

Academic institutions and governments that sponsor international academic exchanges and international educational foundations should:

- consider excluding faculty and administrators from Belarus found to have engaged in violations of academic freedom from such exchanges;
- Consider rescinding grants and awards made to Belarusian state universities that abuse academic freedom or make future financial support contingent on tangible improvements in respect for academic freedom; and
- Sponsor seminars in Belarus and elsewhere on academic freedom restrictions in Belarus and invite international experts to give their assessments.

BACKGROUND

The past decade in Belarus has witnessed great changes: the collapse of the Soviet Union; the birth of democracy; and the emergence of President Aleksandr Lukashenka as a neo-authoritarian leader. The fall of the Soviet Union was accompanied by an explosion of private universities as the state monopoly on higher education was broken. However, all of the sectors of civil society that emerged in the Soviet Union's wake, including the education sector, have been under attack since President Lukashenka's election in July 1994. Independent newspapers have faced a withering state-sponsored campaign of vilification, intimidation, and legal action for publishing articles critical of the government. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are persistently threatened with closure, harassed by new requests for registration, or are hounded out of their premises. Opposition political parties exist, but are currently in their third year of a state media blackout, greatly limiting their access to the Belarusian people. Opposition leaders are continually harassed. President Lukashenka has introduced legislation that has granted him sweeping authoritarian powers while also greatly restricting citizens' right to hold public meetings.

Educational Structure

Belarus boasts some forty-two state universities, academies, and institutes, and thirteen private, fee-based universities, institutes, and academies.[2] Of the state universities, by far the largest are the Minsk-based Belarusian State University (BGU), with approximately 15,000 students; the Belarusian State Polytechnic Academy, with some 16,000 students; the Belarusian State Economic University, with 11,000 students; and the Belarusian Teacher Training College, with 13,000 students. The BGU is the best known and most prestigious of the state universities and offers courses in all major academic subjects. Of the private enterprises, the Minsk-based European Humanities University enjoys a solid reputation, offering among other subjects courses in law, economics and social sciences. Other private institutions focus mainly on "newer" subjects, such as the market economy, business, and management.

Although the Belarusian language shares many similarities with Russian, it is a separate language in its own right. The 1994 constitution established Belarusian as the official language of the country, reflecting the country's newfound independence, while the November 1996 referendum on constitutional amendments, on paper, established parity between Belarusian and Russian. However, since this referendum, Russian has become the preferred and predominant language of government officials with the president, for example, rarely if at all speaking in Belarusian in public. Similarly, the state media operates almost exclusively in Russian. A large number of independent newspapers and organizations use Belarusian, which has served to highlight not just the difference between state and non-state structures, but led to the politicizing of the language question.

A feature of the immediate post-Soviet period was the resurgence of interest in Belarusian language, history, culture, and national symbols. Free of Soviet restrictions, previously forbidden subjects were reintroduced into public life in 1991, when schools and universities nationwide began to teach in the Belarusian language for the first time and academics poured over Soviet archives and began to publish their findings. New textbooks appeared in Belarusian, while history classes for the first time began to feature discussion of issues such as the Belarusian independence movement, including repression of the same under the Soviet Union. President Lukashenka has since reversed almost all of these initiatives: Russian language now eclipses Belarusian in almost every sphere; the Soviet version of history is now taught in schools and universities; research into themes such as Stalinist repression is discouraged, not funded, and pulled from publication lists; and politically active or outspoken lecturers and students are pressured, fired, or expelled.

The November 1996 Referendum

[2]There are also an unspecified number of military educational establishments, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this report.

President Lukashenka's grip on power was consolidated through a November 1996 nationwide referendum on amendments to the 1994 constitution. The referendum was called following a dispute between President Lukashenka and the elected parliament, the Thirteenth Supreme Soviet, over the president's proposal to amend the constitution to extend his term of office from five to seven years, create a second legislative chamber whose members would be appointed by the president, and limit the power of the Constitutional Court. Following the Supreme Soviet's refusal to agree, the president called a nationwide referendum on November 24, 1996. Officially, the public voted in favor of the amendments by a wide majority, although many countries, including European Union member states and the United States sharply criticized the conditions under which the referendum was held and refused to recognize its results. The referendum resulted in the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet, which was replaced by a new, bicameral parliament. The president handpicked the members of the lower chamber and gained substantial influence over the upper chamber. The net result was the effective removal of all representatives of opposition parties from government.

In response to the president's extension of his term of office, which under the 1994 constitution had been due to expire on July 20, 1999, opposition parties in Belarus organized an alternative presidential election on May 16, 1999. Two candidates were fielded: the leader in exile of the opposition Belarusian People's Front, Zenon Pazniak, and former Prime Minister, Mikhail Chygir. Their efforts were marred by the arrest of the organizers, the arrest of Chygir on embezzlement charges, warnings issued to independent newspapers for advertising the elections, and the "disappearance" of two prominent opponents of the president: Tamara Vinnikova, former chair of the National Bank, who disappeared from under KGB house arrest on April 7, and Yury Zakharenka, former interior minister, who was last seen on May 7 being bundled into a car by five men in plain clothes. As of this writing, there has been no further news or confirmation of their whereabouts, while Chygir remains in jail, awaiting trial. Human Rights Watch takes no position on the legitimacy of the November 1996 referendum or the length of President Lukashenka's term of office; our concern lies with the government's use of the amended constitution that continues to undercut human rights in Belarus.

Demonstrations

With other avenues for the public expression of opposition sentiment closed under Lukashenka, street demonstrations have emerged as an important means of expressing dissent. As students often participated in opposition demonstrations in large numbers, they often have faced the brunt of the state's violent suppression of public dissent. Since 1996, the government has sought to intimidate and dissuade opposition activists from protesting through a variety of means, including threats to these demonstrators' physical well-being and threats at the work place or place of study. Arbitrary and violent arrests of demonstrators, without regard to age or infirmity, have become commonplace during peaceful protests in Belarus. In violation of the terms of both the Belarusian constitution and international instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Belarus is a state party, Lukashenka issued a draconian decree in March 1997, codified into law later that year, which severely limits the right to citizens to demonstrate, regulating the even the types of symbols, flags, and banners participants may use.[3]

Belarus and the International Community

President Lukashenka has persistently flouted domestic and international law, and Belarus has largely been isolated by the international community. The governments of the European Union and the United States have strictly limited ties and economic aid to Belarus as a direct response to deepening authoritarianism in that country. These governments, however, continue to support civil society projects that include, for example, financial support and training programs for the independent media and the sponsoring of seminars on democracy and respect for human rights. A notable exception from Belarus' isolation is the Russian Federation (Russia), which on one level enthusiastically embraces President Lukashenka and his pro-integration foreign policy and, on another, touts the policy

[3] For a detailed analysis of this decree, originally known as Decree No. 5 on Gatherings, Meetings, Street Marches, Demonstrations and Picketing, please see *Belarus: Crushing Civil Society*, a Human Rights Watch short report, New York, August 1997.

of integration with Belarus as a means to appeal to the electorate's nostalgia for the Soviet Union. While numerous integration agreements between Belarus and Russia have been signed, there has been little effort at implementation. Disturbingly, Russian president Boris Yeltsin, presumably for fear of upsetting Russia's largely pro-integration electorate, has resolutely declined to use his country's power and influence over Belarus to improve that country's poor human rights record.

To its credit, the Lukashenka administration permitted the opening of an office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Minsk in February 1998. Yet despite the adoption by the Monitoring Group in 1999 of a more public and sharply critical stance of the Belarusian government than it had in 1998, there has been no evident policy change in response from President Lukashenka's administration. Rather, in the run-up to the so-called "alternative" presidential elections of May 16, 1999, abuses against opposition figures in the form of harassment, intimidation, arrest, and even "disappearance" increased in both intensity and severity.

REVIVING SOVIET HISTORY

This regime is not quite Soviet, but it treats the Soviet period as though it were a lost paradise.
Belarusian historian

History has become an extremely politicized topic in post-1994 Belarus. President Lukashenka has pushed historical interpretation to the forefront of his policies with regard to the central theme of his administration: integration with Russia. Historians who have unearthed and dared to write about Stalinist atrocities are seen to directly challenge this policy and subsequently face restrictions in their work.[4] This is especially significant as such work uncovers and invites analysis of the effects of the atmosphere of intimidation, fear, and compliance with authority of the Soviet-era, aspects that apparently are being recreated in Belarus under President Lukashenka.

In the wake of the perestroika period and the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Belarusian historians were given free rein to conduct research in twentieth century historical archives and to publish their findings for the first time. Unsurprisingly, a number of these historians chose to research Stalinist repression and movements for Belarusian independence — themes that were anathema to the Soviet idea of harmonious unity between the constituent republics and had hitherto been banned. Academics and teachers enthusiastically embraced newly published high school and university textbooks on Belarusian history that for the first time spoke of the Belarusian independence movement, the struggle against Russian domination, and the programs and policies of Belarus' russification. However, following Aleksandr Lukashenka's election as president in July 1994, these historians gradually began to feel their freedom to research, publish, and discuss their findings and ideas being curtailed, although access to historical archives remained open. Similarly, Belarusian history classes in high schools and universities were suddenly on the front line of an increasingly sharp battle for the presentation of the "true" history of Belarus. In 1995, the Lukashenka administration attempted to rid high schools and universities of the new post-Soviet history textbooks and issued a directive, which it later denied issuing, ordering the removal of all such textbooks and their replacement with Soviet editions, a move that led to the resignation of two deputy ministers of education (see below). The state press began to be used to unleash harsh polemics against historians, notably those who researched Stalinist repression and the Belarusian independence movement, and occasionally demanded criminal sanctions for such work — or even for holding seminars on the topic. Researchers felt increasing resistance from their departments in seeking approval for research on such politically sensitive topics. Many of the new historians speak of a need to uncover and publicize the "real" history or the "historical truth" about Belarus. Naturally, history is subject to a multitude of interpretations, and even the most free and democratic societies are full of vigorous and impassioned debate on a variety of historical topics. But in Belarus today, it is clear that this debate has grown increasingly one-sided in favor of those historians who support the current policies of the president, while those that counter such a view find themselves in an increasingly precarious situation.

Obstructing Research

Nina Stuzhinskaya (see below) is a Ph.D. student at the History Institute of the State National Academy of Sciences in Minsk. She described some of the difficulties faced by historians today:

[4] Zenon Pazniak, the exiled leader of the most visible opposition party, the Belarusian People's Front (BNF), is credited with the discovery in the mid-1980s of a mass grave in the Kurupaty forest outside of Minsk. Here, he alleges, Soviet interior ministry troops, the notorious NKVD, executed some 200,000 Belarusian citizens in the 1930s. An official investigation into Pazniak's allegations, commenced following President Lukashenka's election to office, refuted his findings, alleging that the number of victims was far smaller and that they were in fact Jews of different nationalities executed by the Nazis during World War II.

> We have come to work in very complicated conditions because our ideas and our weapon in the fight for a better life, for a normal life, is just the historical word, the historical truth. We first had the opportunity to research the real history of our native country when, during the perestroika and post-perestroika periods, we were able to gain access to the archives. Although for a great many people this experience fundamentally changed their perception [of twentieth century history], we had very little time to bring this knowledge to a wide stratum of society. That time wasn't quite enough, and now I see that official authorities and the most conservative pro-communist circles are waging an active battle against us, namely so that we fall silent and no longer tell people the truth about the history of our country.[5]

Stuzhinskaya is currently writing her thesis, entitled, "The Anti-Soviet Movement in Belarus, 1917-1929," a subject that senior members of the institute were reluctant to approve. Stuzhinskaya told Human Rights Watch:

> It was mainly the senior historians who tried to persuade me [not to take up the theme], those who are around seventy years of age. Not because they don't like me, just that they understand how the situation has changed. They wish me well, in their own way. They know my possibilities and would like me to complete my Ph.D., but I . . . want to defend a thesis on that theme. They are honest and respectable people, but they understand that the state of affairs has very seriously changed and that learning is now controlled by bureaucrats who are very far removed from academia.[6]

Ivan Saverchenko is the director of the independent Minsk-based Institute of Statehood and Democracy and also runs academic programs in the humanities department at the National Academy of Sciences. Saverchenko maintains that the state now controls research irrespective of its academic merit:

> A scholar, professor, or researcher, especially in the humanities, is currently unable to formulate the priorities of his or her academic research. The issue is that he does not select the theme. The theme of the research is formulated not from below from a scholarly, scientific body, but from above. It's all put in place the wrong way round. We are waging a war in that sphere and in the field of guaranteeing freedom of academic research.[7]

Saverchenko contrasts the current restrictions on academic research with the immediate post-Soviet period:

> In the period when we had relative freedom, before President Lukashenka, the question was brought up thus. For example, I, the senior research associate of the academic institute, said that for the next two years I will be undertaking research on such and such an issue. For example, the problem of Belarusian political history or the problem of research into such and such a historical event. I wrote about that, and wrote that it is very important and they told me: "OK!" Others did more or less the same. The process went as follows: they received funding, this was confirmed, they did some kind of rough estimate. They undertook the research and published books.
>
> Now they say to me: "No," the priorities are now this. The rector comes and assembles the heads of department and says, "Today we will research this and that." The head of the department goes to the department and says, "Guys, freedom is over, we will research this and that but not problems of an uprising against Russia." For example, one could propose research on friendship and cooperation between the Belarusian and Russian peoples. If someone says that he doesn't want to write on that subject, they answer that, well "all right, but you won't receive any money and we don't need you. Go out and gather firewood."[8]

[5] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 30, 1998.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, November 3, 1998.
[8] Ibid.

The State-controlled Press as a Medium of Intimidation

The government uses its monopoly on the press to further intimidate independent-minded academics through the publishing of polemics in state newspapers while denying such academics the opportunity to respond. The following example is illustrative of the pressures that can be brought to bear.

On February 27-28, 1998, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC) held a conference on "Political Repression in Belarus in the Twentieth Century" at a Minsk hotel. A wide variety of Belarusian and Russian historians and human rights activists attended. They included historians Nina Stuzhinskaya, Igor Kuznetsov, and V. Karbalevich, who also wrote articles the Belarusian Helsinki Committee later published in a collection entitled *Politychnya represii na Belarusi v XX stagoddzi: Materyyaly navukova-praktychnai kanferentsyii* (Political repression in Belarus in the Twentieth Century: Materials from the Conference).

In October 1998, the state newspaper, *Slavyansky Nabat* (The Slavic Alarm Bell), published an article encouraging criminal charges against the conference organizers and the authors of the articles in the book. The article cited a letter from a variety of "leaders of patriotic parties and movements, famous cultural and academic figures" that it said demanded that the "General Procurator of the Republic bring a criminal case in response to the publication of the book with material from the so-called conference, held by the Helsinki Committee . . . [and] to bring to account its organizers and participants who are guilty of humiliating the honor and dignity of the President of the Republic of Belarus."[9] The accused academics were denied the opportunity to respond to the article in *Slavyansky Nabat.* Indeed, one of the accused, Igor Kuznetsov, told Human Rights Watch that despite his repeated attempts, every state newspaper that he approached, including *Slavyansky Nabat*, refused to print his response to the accusations. Although Kuznetsov confirmed to Human Rights Watch that he is able to freely publish in the independent press, due to restrictive government policies the circulation of these independent newspapers is minimal. This lack of an opportunity to respond in the state press leaves such academics helpless in the face of the well-publicized campaign against them. The abuse of the media to perpetuate a state policy of repression against academics is symptomatic of the wider problem of the lack of media freedom in Belarus as a whole.[10]

Censorship

[9] "Za chest i dostoynstvo prezidenta" (For the Honor and Dignity of the President), *Slavyansky Nabat*, no. 40, Minsk, October 22-28, 1998. The article cited the authors as: chair of the Belarusian Patriotic Party, A. Barankevich; chair of the Council of Veteran's Associations of Belarus, A. Novikov; chair of the Belarusian Union of Officers, D. Ivanov; national artist of the USSR and academic, M. Savitskii; chair of the Belarusian Republican Association "Historical Knowledge"; doctor of history, Professor A. Zalesskii; and member of the Military-Academic Society Council, V. Sadovnichenko. In June 1998, the Council of Ministers passed a draft law criminalizing "insulting the honor and dignity of the president" for which offenders may be imprisoned for up to four years. The draft law supplements a December 1997 law that punishes publications for insulting the honor and dignity of government officials. As of this writing, the law had yet to be formally adopted.

[10] For more information on the press in Belarus, see "Crushing Civil Society," a Human Rights Watch short report, New York, August 1997.

The government, through its use of warnings against the independent press for the publication of critical articles, has taken on the role of censor. This is apparent with regard to articles on academic themes such as history. Here, there is no academic debate, simply a message to toe the government line on history or face closure.

Nasha Niva

Nasha Niva (Our Land) is a humanitarian foundation that has a newspaper and publishing house that works to promote Belarusian language and culture. While the newspaper has had to fight for the right to publish in Belarusian,[11] the newspaper became the target of a further official warning for publishing an article challenging the Soviet version of history. The case illustrates the administration's efforts to suppress academic enquiry into matters of history that conflict with the current policy toward integration with Russia. Oleg Dernovich, the executive director of the Nasha Niva humanitarian foundation explained to Human Rights Watch what happened:

> [W]e published in [March] 1997 in the newspaper . . . the recollections of people from the Slominsky district [Grodno region], who related how Soviet partisans from 1943-1944 wiped out the peaceful population. Here there was clearly an ideological side which we didn't lay much emphasis on, but it was evident: after the war these people [Soviet partisans] were, shall we say, heroes; Soviet propaganda used them for its own aims. In actual fact these people committed war crimes: they wiped out peaceful people, committed robbery, settled personal scores with different people. We published these recollections and literally a month later we received an official warning from the General Procurator.[12]

The General Procurator warned the newspaper on May 23, 1997, whereupon a public campaign on behalf of Nasha Niva began. Dernovich told Human Rights Watch:

> In June [1997] we received notarized documents from people who . . . officially confirmed that all their recollections published in our newspaper took place. We appealed the warning to the procurator's office. Our appeal was ignored. Then the quantity of facts became greater and I turned to the General Procurator and demanded [an investigation] into these mass crimes.
>
> In the end, after a few months [on June 30, 1998] the procurator replied. There was the following phrase: " . . . There are no grounds for revoking the warning as far as the article's concludes that all [partisans] of the Great Patriotic War were bandits. Concerning concrete cases, committed on the territory of Slonimsky district, of crimes against the peaceful population by people, indicated in the article, they have been verified by the Belarusian KGB as directed by the Belarusian Procurator General." Can you believe the reply?! We appealed and asked them to examine recorded testimony and they replied that the KGB had already examined the case and that there is nothing to investigate further — that's it.[13]

Human Rights Watch takes no position on the veracity or otherwise of the account of Soviet partisans published by Nasha Niva. The warning issued by the General Procurator, however, clearly constitutes a serious threat to freedom of speech: its potential to chill freedom of expression is considerable, insofar as the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media, after two such two warnings have been issued, provides for the closure of a newspaper.

Banning Belarusian History Textbooks

[11] In 1998, the newspaper successfully challenged a warning from the State Committee on the Press issued on the grounds that the newspaper used Belarusian orthography outlawed by Soviet authorities in the 1930s.

[12] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, November 3, 1999.

[13] Ibid.

The Belarusian government under President Lukashenka has attempted to reinstate Soviet era history text books and to prevent new work by alternative historians from reaching the classroom or lecture hall. The obvious aim of this exercise is to promote an ideology that stresses the unity of the Belarusian and Russian peoples.

In 1995 the government created a Commission on the Preparation of New Humanities and Social Sciences Textbooks under the Council of Ministers. The commission's chair is currently Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Zametalin, with Minister of Education, Vasily Strazhev as his deputy. The commission's purported goal is to vet and authorize new publications for use in schools and institutes of higher education. However, a number of lecturers and historians with whom a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke alleged that the commission performs the role of censor, filtering out politically sensitive historical texts. For example, Ivan Saverchenko, senior research associate and director of the Institute of Statehood and Democracy, told Human Rights Watch: "This structure selects, orders, and creates the authors' collectives and they, having prepared the manuscripts, present them to Uladzimir Zametalin at that commission." In Saverchenko's view, the preparation and assignment of textbooks should be decided at university level: "The rector or the academic council decides which textbooks need to be published, how many by which authors' collectives . . . And the right to publish textbooks needs to be given to the lecturers' academic council."[14]

In August 1995, the Lukashenka administration stepped up its campaign against independent historians. It issued a Council of Ministers directive ordering the removal of all high-school history textbooks produced in the post-Soviet period and their replacement by Soviet editions. Although this directive was later withdrawn and expunged from the record, high-school teachers and university lecturers told Human Rights Watch that, with few exceptions, post-Soviet history textbooks have largely been replaced by Soviet-era texts.[15] Notably, the post-Soviet textbooks were published in Belarusian while the Soviet-era textbooks are in Russian.

The issuing of the Council of Ministers' directive prompted the resignation of two deputy ministers of education. One of these deputy ministers, Tatiana Galko, told Human Rights Watch that her decision to resign was in protest at the directive, and that her decision was based on practical — there were not sufficient funds available to implement the directive — as well as ideological reasons. While opposed to the return to Soviet-era texts, she acknowledges that the new history textbooks had been developed hastily and were in need of further revision.[16]

Vladimir Orlov is a writer, historian, and vice-president of the Minsk-based Belarusian PEN Center, which is part of the international PEN organization. Since 1994, two books by Orlov on Belarusian history have been effectively banned. In 1993, the Ministry of Education told Orlov that it would publish a high-school teachers' textbook that he was writing on Belarusian history. Orlov claims that the ministry at the time promised to publish 100,000 copies of the book in order to make it available in classrooms throughout the country.[17] Orlov explained to Human Rights Watch the purpose of the book, entitled *Otkud' Nash Rod* (Where We are From):

> [M]y book . . . is a book of stories on the history of Belarus for young schoolchildren. The emphasis in the book is on the insufficient coverage in textbooks, in the earlier editions for children, of facts, namely those

[14] Ibid.

[15] Russian media and the U.S. State Department Country Practices report for 1995 noted the issuing of the directive. See, for example, the Russian newspaper *Segodnya* (Today)—"Nostalgiya Po Sytomu Proshlomu" (Nostalgia for the Good Old Days), August 17, 1995. Former deputy minister of education Tatiana Galko also confirmed the decree's existence in an interview with a Human Rights Watch researcher. However, all ministry of education officials and representatives with whom a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke, including a representative from the State Documentation Center, either stated that the decree had never existed or that such a decree "could not exist" due to its implementation being impractical. The 1995 U.S. State Department Country Practices report on Belarus states that "After educators and intelligentsia strongly objected to the move, President Lukashenko denied having signed the decree."

[16] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 12, 1999.

[17] Orlov explained to Human Rights Watch that, before Lukashenka came to power, he enjoyed a very cordial relationship with the Ministry of Education, and, although he was not formally commissioned by the ministry to write the book, his decision to write it stemmed from great interest from teachers, researchers, and the ministry in his proposal.

> which were covered up with ideological stereotypes which predominated during the Soviet Union. [Then] the history of Belarus was presented as a history of friendship, brotherhood, and striving toward union with the brotherly Russian people, which absolutely does not correspond with reality . . . Belarusians have a thousand-year-old tradition of their own statehood, starting from the Polish kingdom, then the Great Lithuanian kingdom united several peoples and Belarus [was a state] in this kingdom. This kingdom fought long and hard against the Moscow state.[18]

Orlov's book contains a chapter setting out the historical roots of the pre-Soviet national symbols of Belarus that were reinstated in 1991 but that subsequently were banned and replaced by Lukashenka with Soviet-era symbols in 1995: the *Pagonya*, a knight depicted on horseback, sword in hand, and the white-red-white horizontally-striped flag. Orlov explained the role he believes this chapter played in the publishing house's decision not to publish the book:

[18] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, November 2, 1998.

> [T]he book should have been published by the state publishing house "Belarus," but following the 1995 referendum, when by unconstitutional means, as I'm convinced, the national symbols of our country were changed, the publishing house became very afraid of that chapter. Evidently, that chapter became one of the main reasons why the publishing house was alerted and then told me that they would not publish [the book].[19]

Orlov subsequently sought and received funding from the Belarusian Soros Foundation, which enabled the book to be published in 1996 by the *Batkovshchina* (Fatherland) publishing house. Orlov explained the book's reception:

> The book received a few reviews, some which were overly praiseworthy, including a review published in the Ministry of Education newspaper ─ *Nastavnitskaya gazeta* [The Teachers' Newspaper]. The author of the review recommended the book as a teaching aid, particularly because each story comes with questions and exercises. A few days later *Nastavnitskaya gazeta* published a statement in the first column about the publishing house *Batkovshchina* [Fatherland], which published the illustrated book by Orlov, which was not submitted for consideration at the [Commission on the Preparation of New Humanities and Social Sciences Textbooks] . . . The Ministry of Education "does not have permission for its use in schools, although the publishers recommended it for study in junior schools. The author of this work sets forth views that do not correspond with reality on separate questions of Belarusian history. The Ministry of Education considers such literature impermissible for use in the education process, since it is not conducive to pupils' development of a civil position and draws them into the examination of politicized and ideological questions."[20]

In early 1997, authorities seized the remaining copies of the book at the *Batkovshchina* publishing house and held them in damp conditions for a year. Orlov explained how the book was eventually released:

> [A] year later, the book's publishers managed to free the book from seizure, but state bookshops refuse to stock it, that is the book is sold with fear and risk by only a few private bookstores. After publication, when the presidential administration became interested, state shops refused to stock it.[21]

A similar situation occurred with a second book that Orlov prepared at the same time as *Otkud' Nash Rod* with colleague and fellow historian Gennady Saganovich, entitled *Desyat' vekov beloruskoi istorii: Sobytiya, daty, illiustratsii* (Ten Centuries of Belarusian History: Events, Dates, and Illustrations). Orlov told Human Rights Watch that the book was already prepared for publication by the state publishing house *Mastatskaya Literatura* when it was suddenly sent for review to the History Institute at the Academy of Sciences. Orlov maintains that the institute came to a "very positive conclusion," but that despite this the publishing house refused to publish the book:

> [T]he publishing house, *Mastatskaya Literatura* received a letter [from the State Press Committee] deleting it from the list of books financed from the state budget. Here's the motive: "Because firstly, it was almost wholly published in a journal . . . and is already known to readers, and similarly because it contains many factual inaccuracies, editorial shortcomings, was written in a tendentious, russophobic manner, and because it violates the law of a readers' right to objective information." Since that time, we have been searching for a sponsor for the publication of that book for two years, having written applications for a grant, hoping possibly with the help of a fund to publish it.[22]

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

Orlov later learned that his work as a historical writer would have personal consequences when he was dismissed in 1997 from the state publishing house in which he worked publishing books on Belarusian culture and history:

> At that time I was still working in the publishing house *Mastatskaya Literatura*. I felt that the atmosphere around me was thickening, and one fine day the new director of the publishing house, Georgy Marchuk, a protégé of the president, summoned me and told me that in connection with staff cut-backs I was going to be fired and our editorial offices would be broken up: the editorial office that took care of the publication of historical literature, literature linked with cultural heritage . . . It looked like some kind of farce or stupid joke, but it was a very powerful blow to the program of returning to Belarusian history . . . A few days later, an official from the [State] Press Committee brought me a photocopy of a document with Zametalin's resolution, [who was] at that time chair of the State Press Committee "Decide once and for all the question concerning employees of the publishing house who publish questionable historical and other literature. Report back by April 10 [1997]."[23]

[23] Ibid.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTROLS

Since coming to power in 1994, Lukashenka has assumed direct control of the institutional levers of Belarusian state universities. By law, university rectors, who had been elected by the democratic vote of university academic councils from 1991-1994, are now appointed and subject to dismissal by decision of Lukashenka. Lukashenka also has actively nurtured and supported the emergence of the Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth (BPSM) as the single most powerful student organization on campuses throughout the country. Although ostensibly politically neutral, the centralization of appointments of rectors and the increasingly institutionalized position occupied by the BPSM in student life have created a campus environment conducive to propagation of political orthodoxy and the squelching of independent views rather than one conducive to the open-ended inquiry and expression essential to academic excellence.

Rectors Appointed by Presidential Decree

The Belarusian state university education system has systematically been made subordinate to the president through the direct presidential appointment of university rectors and deans. This practice goes beyond the appointment system in place during the Soviet Union era in which university rectors were appointed following nomination from communist party structures. Although Human Rights Watch does not take a position on the precise manner in which university administrators should be selected, it does believe that any appointment system that is respectful of academic freedom should, at a minimum, ensure that academic decision-making and campus governance be insulated from partisan political considerations. The evidence below suggests that the Belarusian system fails to live up to that minimum standard. Experience in other countries has shown, moreover, that the assertion of centralized control over university administration by political authorities, as has occurred in Belarus, is often followed by more direct assaults on academic freedom and the autonomy of students and faculty members.[24] Regrettably, although a number of rectors of universities in Belarus have been fired for allegedly political reasons under the new system, none would agree to talk to a Human Rights Watch representative despite a guarantee of anonymity.

The current procedure for selection of rectors, instituted following Aleksandr Lukashenka's election as president in 1994, replaces a system put in place at the time of Belarus' independence in 1991 under which rectors were appointed by democratic vote of university academic councils.

In a meeting with Human Rights Watch, Sergei Vetokhin, Vice-rector of the National Institute for Higher Education, and Valery Dobryanskii, Ministry of Education representative and Head of the Chief Administration of Academic and Secondary Specialized Education, claimed that Lukashenka makes appointment decisions only after broad consultation with the academic community. When asked if that meant that Lukashenka's role was merely a formality, Vetokhin told Human Rights Watch:

> I would not say that it is just a formality, inasmuch as both the personnel of the presidential administration and the president personally are highly concerned with and investigate the question in great detail. Therefore, you can not consider that the president simply rubber-stamps the decision but, nevertheless, he never takes

[24]Similar control was asserted by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in his 1998 crackdown on Serbian academics, and made use of by Indonesian President Soeharto in his crackdowns on Indonesian campuses in the 1970s. See Human Rights Watch, "Deepening Authoritarianism in Serbia: The Purge of the Universities," *A Human Rights Watch Report*, vol. 11, no. 2(D), January 1999, pp. 9-13; Human Rights Watch, *Academic Freedom in Indonesia: Dismantling Soeharto-Era Barriers* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998), pp. 16-21.

the decision if up till that point there was no consultation and if the academic community does not support that nomination.[25]

Vethokhin justified the new system as follows:

[25] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, June 11, 1999.

> In the Soviet Union, a rector was appointed also by order of a minister, but to all intents and purposes his confirmation went through the party apparatus. Party membership was compulsory. I am afraid that there was not a single rector at that time who was not a member of the KPSS [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. They gathered various information from the police and the KGB on different candidates, all of which the party apparatus analyzed. The decision was also taken at an extremely high level. I know for sure that several rectors were personally considered by Masherovich, who was the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. In around 1990, a new system was introduced, when rectors were selected by the academic council of the university. That period was short-lived and was altogether ineffective. The system we have today seems to me to be more correct. You can look at it as the [presidential] administration interfering in the affairs of the university, but in actual fact it seems to me that the authority of the rector is only increased by the fact that he goes through the confirmation process and personally converses with the president.[26]

Critics of the new system of appointments are concerned precisely with how rectors will use the increased authority that Vetokhin says accompanies appointment directly by Lukashenka. A number of university lecturers interviewed by Human Rights Watch emphasized that the very fact of presidential appointments makes rectors accountable to political authorities and chills free expression on campus. Maria Volkova (not her real name), who has long been employed as a lecturer at the Belarusian State University (BGU), described the change in the appointments system following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as follows:

> In later years, when Belarus gained its independence, when the Soviet Union was destroyed, Belarus wanted to go along the path of democratic freedom. It wanted to get closer to the best, civilized countries of the world and to feel like it was a European country. And of course, we knew the experience of other countries, where the lecturers' collective elects the rector and therefore we had that experience at the BGU, that was probably in 1993. For the first time in my life I voted for a rector on a large academic council. There were several candidates, and we all very consciously elected a Doctor of Science, *Chlen-Korrespondent*[27] and chemist, Fedor Nikolaevich Kaputsky. He was an efficient, literate person, but importantly, he was erudite. He had published books, monographs.[28]

Volkova contrasts this "window of democracy" with the coming to power of Aleksandr Lukashenka:

> But when Lukashenka came along, fate had decided that our university would become the president's university . . . that by some unclear means, a new rector was appointed [in 1996], a very young rector. His biggest advantage was that he was young. Then he was about forty years of age. Now he's forty-three, Aleksandr Vladislavovich Kazulin . . . He is very energetic, very active, a very vigorous person and probably has great potential ability, but at that moment he was not even a doctor of science. He was just a senior lecturer. People who were not professors never became rectors, that's nonsense. [His appointment] was pushed very hard on the university.[29]

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[26] Ibid.

[27] *Chlen-Korrespondent*, literally "corresponding member," an academic title given to a person before he or she becomes a member of the Academy.

[28] Human Rights Watch interview, name withheld upon request, Minsk, February 9, 1999.

[29] Ibid.

Volkova observed that while university funding and staff salary levels improved after Kazulin's appointment, active obstruction of political expression increased as well, with the new administration introducing measures to limit attendance at student demonstrations, including the initiation of classes on Saturday, a day commonly used by students for demonstrations.[30]

Mikola Antipovich, a senior lecturer at the Belarusian State Polytechnic Academy, described similar problems with academic appointments by presidential decree:

> The appointment system? I believe that it is a very negative moment . . . [when] the rector is appointed . . . It is rumored that the deputy head of the department will be appointed. It will be a power structure of the president. It's for the stability of the personnel, so that the eyes and ears of the president are in these structures.[31]

The Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth

Article 12 of the 1992 law on education forbids the formation of political parties on campus in Belarus.[32] Authorities passed the law ostensibly in the name of democracy in an attempt to rid universities of communist party structures and the Komsomol, the party youth organization established under Soviet auspices. While not specifically proscribed by law, in both state and non-state institutes and universities, open political discussion and activity outside the classroom is not a feature of campus life. The vice rector of the independent European Humanities University (EHU), Vladimir Dounaev explained to Human Rights Watch:

> We have a requirement at the university which bans political or missionary activities from campus. We do not want the university to be an arena for politics or missionary activity. [We say to students] take part in any party wherever, but do not form a political organization on campus. As it happens, [the university ban] is in accordance with our constitution [sic], which forbids the forming of political groups on campus.[33]

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[30] Ibid. The scheduling of additional classes to coincide with opposition demonstrations was a common practice, in particular during the large-scale, and violent, demonstrations in 1996. Student Dmitri Markushevsky told Human Rights Watch: "The lecturers themselves do not talk students out of attending demonstrations. . .that is done by the deputies of educational work, the deans. They sometimes set additional classes at a special time when there might be a mass demonstration, like, for example, the Chernobyl Path. In schools they without fail have additional classes, and missing classes at that time results in strict reprimands for the pupils." Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 29, 1998.

[31] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 9, 1999.

[32] Law On Education in the Republic of Belarus, October 1991, includes changes and additions from May 3, 1996: Article 12 Education and Political Activity. "The activities of political party structures or other public associations that have political goals, including children's, teenagers' or youth associations that act exclusively on the basis of the statute of such parties or associations, are banned from educational institutions in the Republic."

[33] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 12, 1999.

In practice, the law is not applied in state universities to exclude the Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth (BPSM) — an ostensibly apolitical group that supports President Lukashenka's policies and enjoys substantial state funding — which today has representative offices in every state university and institute of higher education and maintains a less uniform, although increasing, presence in the independent sector.[34]

The period of Aleksandr Lukashenka's presidency has been marked by the appearance and growth of a variety of youth groups. In some cases these groups exist as affiliates of existing opposition parties, for example, the Youth Front and the Youth Council (described below), while others are creations of the state. President Lukashenka formed the BPSM as a national organization to unite young people into working for the common interest of the country. In effect, however, the BPSM's formation marked a bold attempt by the president to politically indoctrinate current and future generations of young people into the ranks of his supporters and to actively counter opposition party youth groups. The BPSM's omnipresence on state university campuses has been an important element in government efforts to enforce political orthodoxy on campus.

[34] Ibid. In at least one case, however, the law banning political groups from campus, while restrictive, has helped to keep the BPSM at bay. Tatiana Galko, former deputy minister of education and current advisor to the EHU rector, told Human Rights Watch that the ban on political groups "helped us not to create a youth organization [BPSM], which they tried to foist on us from above. They passed the law to prevent the communist party and the Komsomol from being active in all organizations."

The BPSM is a state-funded organization that vigorously supports the president and his policies. Officially formed in May 1997, the organization currently boasts some 140,000 members across the country and has official representatives in almost every state university and school. A BPSM member now sits alongside the entrance examination committee in each state university. Membership is optional, although students in state universities are strongly encouraged to join by university administrators.[35] Members, who range in age from fourteen to thirty-five, are offered a variety of benefits, such as discounts at selected stores, free discotheque tickets, and, it is alleged, fast-track entry into government jobs.

Known in its first incarnation in 1997 as Pryamoe Destviye (Direct Action), the group distributed promotional literature advocating violence against its "opponents."[36] This literature gave rise to speculation that the group was behind several targeted beatings of opposition figures and beatings of opposition demonstrators in 1997 and 1998, although there has not been any conclusive evidence that this is the case.[37] The same people who organized Direct Action are behind its transformation into the BPSM. Although there have not been any credible reports of BPSM involvement in assaults against opposition party members or activists, the BPSM has yet to disavow itself from its predecessor's openly stated violent ambitions. Current BPSM leader Vsevolod Yanchevsky told Human Rights Watch:

> [A] large part, the constituent part, shall we say, of Direct Action formed the structure of the BPSM and, to all intents and purposes, it dissolved into our new organization. Some part [of Direct Action] refused to switch, as far as I know they still exist, but frankly there has been nothing heard of them recently. To all intents and purposes that organization has ceased to exist, although probably their legal existence is still in effect. I think that they have only a few people. The majority of those whom I know went into the BPSM and are doing a lot so it prospers and develops.[38]

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[35] Mikola Antipovich, a senior lecturer at the Belarusian State Polytechnic Academy told Human Rights Watch: "The first year students upon enrollment are gathered together on September 1 with bodyguards and security in a stadium. . .the rector and deans speak and. . .they agitate for [the students] to enroll in the BPSM. The first year students have yet to get their bearings. . .and they come out of there signed up in the president's ranks. It's all pressed on them very strongly." Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 9, 1999.

[36] See "Belarus: Crushing Civil Society," A Human Rights Watch Report, New York, August 1997.

[37] Young, athletic men in plain clothes have arrested and assaulted demonstrators on innumerable occasions, likely acting as part of a state security structure. It can not be ruled out that Direct Action members were collaborators of such plainclothes agencies.

[38] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 30, 1998.

Local human rights activists and opposition figures have dubbed the BPSM the "Lukamol," a derisory reference to both Lukashenka's cult of personality and the Soviet-era youth organization, the Komsomol.[39] Yanchevsky denies that there is any comparison between the BPSM and the Komsomol. He told Human Rights Watch:

[39] The Komsomol ─ *Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodezhy* (The Union of Communist Youth) ─ was a state-funded, militaristic youth organization in the Soviet Union of young people, aged fourteen to twenty-eight. Membership of the organization was nominally voluntary but in fact compulsory. Founded in 1918, the Komsomol ostensibly stood for strict values such as honor, study, hard work, and discipline ─ the values espoused by its founder, Vladimir Lenin. However, in reality its primary function was to serve as an instrument of control and propaganda to ensure that young people did not dissent from the Communist Party doctrine. Expulsion from the organization automatically meant expulsion from university, along with social stigmatization and isolation. It served as the "senior" youth organization, following on from compulsory membership in the *Oktyabristy* (The Octobrists) and the *Pionery* (The Pioneers), groups directed at children aged from seven to fourteen years of age. A select few Komsomol members would go on to become members of the Communist Party. Unlike the Pioneers, which characteristically undertook work such as aiding the elderly, invalids, and war veterans, Komsomol members played an active role in *Subbotniki* (voluntary work days) which typically meant cleaning streets or undertaking other such community work.

> Some are saying that President Lukashenka has recreated the Komsomol in Belarus. This is absolutely not true . . . President Lukashenka helped to create a powerful patriotic youth organization, our organization, which enjoys large state support, the support of the president.[40]

Yanchevsky's statement is undermined by the large-scale celebrations organized by the BPSM to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the Komsomol, held throughout Belarus in October 1998.

Clearly there are differences between the Soviet-era Komsomol and the BPSM: BPSM membership is not compulsory and the BPSM is less militaristic. However, the two organizations evidently share a similar and disturbing characteristic: suppression of dissent.

The BPSM is a structure designed to recruit future government employees, and appears geared to ensure a continuing bedrock of support for President Lukashenka. The scale of state financial support for the organization and the blatantly political way in which independent initiatives have been dismantled and replaced by structures of the BPSM underscore its political role as a pillar of the regime. For example, in 1998 the BPSM boasted an annual budget from state coffers of approximately U.S.$1 million, an enormous sum in Belarus where average monthly income is currently estimated to be from U.S.$20 to $40.[41] In September 1996, the government shut down the independent Belarusian-language radio station, Radio 101.2, on the pretext that the station interfered with government communications. The frequency was subsequently given to the BPSM and another state-funded youth organization, the Belarusian Union of Youth (BUY). A Russian-language station, operated by the BPSM and the BUY, named *Radio Stil'* (Style Radio) opened in June 1998 and broadcasts daily pieces on the BPSM's activities. On April 4, 1998, a popular Minsk university youth club run by Youth Front members, Reservatsiya (The Reservation), was closed down by city authorities and later reopened as a BPSM club named Alternativa (The Alternative) (see below).[42]

Another point of comparison between the Komsomol and the BPSM is the organization's role as a recruitment ground for government positions. During the Soviet era, membership of the Komsomol was the only way to guarantee entry into the Communist Party structure. While President Lukashenka has stated publicly that membership in the BPSM would "never be" mandatory for appointment to government positions, it is clear that BPSM membership in this regard is advantageous. In November 1997, the Interfax news agency filed this report:

> President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has said he supports preparing young people for rising to senior official positions. Lukashenka said he was confident that he would work as the president "for more years to come." It is therefore important to have "a personnel base," he added. The Belarusian Patriotic Union of Young People

[40] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 30, 1998.

[41] Human Rights Watch interview with Dmitri Shitko, head specialist on student matters, Central Committee, BPSM, Minsk, October 30, 1998. Shitko gave the figure for the budget as 100 billion Belarusian rubles in 1998. Given the Belarusian ruble's steady decline in value against the dollar throughout that year, a precise U.S. dollar equivalent is hard to ascertain. We estimate the average exchange rate of the Belarusian ruble against the U.S. dollar in 1998 to have been approximately 100,000, hence the U.S.$1m figure. Average wages in Belarus have plummeted, most notably following the August 17, 1998 financial crisis in neighboring Russia. Pre-crisis average monthly income was estimated to have been approximately U.S.$100.

[42] Belarusian Helsinki Committee press release, June 16, 1998, and Human Rights Watch interview with Dmitri Markushevsky, Minsk, October 28, 1998.

[sic] will play a significant role in the preparation of such a base, Lukashenka said . . . he implied that representatives of the organization might be appointed to senior official positions in the future.[43]

[43] Interfax news agency, Moscow, November 24, 1997, cited in World News Connection, an electronic news service.

Admission to state university in Belarus is achieved by passing an oral entrance exam in front of an entrance exam committee. Although in the past these committees consisted only of staff members, a BPSM representative has now become a de facto part on these committees. The BPSM has its own Public Control Committee the purpose of which, as stated in its 1998 report, is "not so much to control, as to assist the university entrant with solving social problems and to render them psychological help and support."[44] A member of the control committee now sits alongside the entrance exam committee throughout Belarusian state universities and is able to exert considerable influence on the entrance exam committee's decision. Several students and university lecturers a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke to expressed the belief that BPSM members present during the entrance exam are used to filter out both those students whose preferred first language is Belarusian and opposition activists through the canvassing of these applicants' political opinion. One politically active lecturer from Grodno alleged that his daughter's grades in her entrance exam were lowered by the BPSM Public Control Committee member due to his reputation as an opposition political activist.

[44] *The BPSM — One Year,* BPSM, Minsk, 1998.

STUDENTS

The state and higher education authorities in Belarus strictly control student life, curtailing and restricting students' political activity and promoting and sustaining a climate of fear and unease. Politically active university students face a variety of measures from both university authorities and the state: reprimands, warnings, lower grades, and expulsions from university authorities and administrative and criminal sanctions from state authorities. As discussed above, the state heavily promotes student membership in the pro-presidential Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth. Students who occupy prominent positions in opposition political organizations are targeted for harsher measures than those who are simply members of an opposition political group.

The crackdown on free expression and association in the university sector has also extended to students' participation in demonstrations and public assemblies that challenge President Lukashenka's policies. Students are admonished not to attend demonstrations by university administrators and face suspension or expulsion for doing so. University staff commonly gather students before a demonstration and warn them not to attend, threatening them with reprisals if they are arrested or merely caught on film attending the demonstration. Some students and local human rights activists claim that universities deliberately schedule extra classes to coincide with opposition demonstrations. This tactic, they claim, reduces attendance at the demonstrations, while lists of students not attending these classes identify them as suspected demonstrators for investigation.

State security authorities work closely with university administrators in measures to suppress and punish student participation in dissident public assemblies. Video surveillance of demonstrations by law enforcement agencies is routinely used to later identify, arrest, fine, or imprison demonstrators, violent or nonviolent. Tapes are shared with university administrators to identify student participants in demonstrations who may face administrative punishments at their places of study. These are typically in the form of warnings or strict reprimands, but on occasion, in particular if they have warned a student once before, the punishment can amount to suspension or ultimately lead to the student's expulsion.

Student Clubs

The Western tradition of students' clubs in higher education institutes, ranging across the spectrum from the serious to the ridiculous, is absent from Belarus. Clubs that are permitted in state universities are innocuous and center mainly on sporting or strictly politically neutral activities. Alexei Gerasimov, a fifth year student at the international relations faculty at BGU, told Human Rights Watch about a debating club at his university:

> We have a club at our faculty where they hold debates in English, but there are few clubs. As far as I know, they do not discuss political questions. That is they talk about culture or about something else, but there were a great many problems in the organization of that club, because, as far as I know, it was opened only this year [1998]. Two years ago even, one of my friends wanted to open such a club. He went to the dean who told him, "Just try to do something like that and you'll be straight out of university." That was in BGU in the international relations faculty. They have probably convinced the dean that there will be nothing anti-presidential mentioned in the club.[45]

[45] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 28, 1998.

In 1998, students of the Minsk State Information System and Radio-electronics University (SISRU)[46] rented and renovated a room from the university in one of the student dormitories and set up a student club, called Reservatsiya (The Reservation). On June 16, 1998, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee reported in a press release that the newspaper, *Narodonaya Gazeta* (The People's Newspaper) had published an open letter from a certain Mikhail Gulaev calling for the police to investigate the club. The day following publication of the letter, the club was closed down, and its premises were handed over to the BPSM. SISRU student Dmitri Markushevsky explained to Human Rights Watch what happened:

> The club Reservatsiya was closed. It was an alternative youth club where they organized parties, discos etc. It was a club which they designed for young people with a modest income. Somehow in the state press a letter appeared from someone who wrote that everything in that club was bad. The next day the police came and closed the club down. They closed it and in its place a BPSM club appeared. Previously it was just a student club organized by SISRU students.
>
> Before the club's closure, the Youth Front had held a few discos and parties there. It is possible that these served as the basis for the unofficial reason for the club's closure. These were discos, but there were no kind of provocative actions, just music and dancing.
>
> The BPSM club is not as popular. They now hold BPSM parties there and changed the name. It's now called Alternativa.[47]

While it is hard to confirm the reasons for Reservatsiya's closure, the use of the venue by the Youth Front and subsequent handover to the BPSM suggests a political motive.

Student Newspapers

The Belarusian Students' Association is an independent Minsk-based nongovernmental organization that was founded in 1989. The organization professes to be apolitical ─ dedicated only to advancing the cause of Belarusian language and culture and protection of the rights of students. In addition to its Minsk office, it boasts representative offices throughout the country. The central office produces its own Belarusian-language student newspaper ─ *Studencheskaya dumka* [Student Thought] ─ while representative offices in the cities of Orsha, Novolpolotsk, Vitebsk, Baranovich, and Gorky each produce Belarusian-language student newspapers of their own. These newspapers steer clear of sensitive subjects such as current political affairs to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities, focusing more on youth related issues and humor and keep their circulation restricted to 299 copies to avoid the need to register with the State Press Committee.[48] All of these newspapers, with the exception of the publication in Gorky ─ *Akademicheskaya Punya* [The Academic Pit] ─ profess to enjoy cordial relations with their respective universities, whether state or non-state. The case of *Akademicheskaya Punya*, however, is indicative of the lengths an educational institution will go to restrict the independent activity of its students.

Akademicheskaya Punya

In early 1998, Denis Bobikov, then a first-year student at the Belarusian Agricultural Academy in the town of Gorky, Mogilev region, set up a representative office of the Belarusian Students' Association. Bobikov explained to Human Rights Watch what the group wanted to do:

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[46] This university was previously called the Radio-Technical Electronics Institute.

[47] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 29, 1998.

[48] According to the Law on the Press, all publications with a circulation of over 299 copies must register with the State Press Committee. Such registered publications can then be warned for violating the press law and, following the accumulation of two or more warnings, can be closed down. For more information on the Law on the Press and the case of *Svaboda* [Freedom] newspaper (a newspaper closed down in 1997 by such restrictions), please see "Turning Back the Clock," a Human Rights Watch Short Report, New York, July 1998.

> Our aim was to work with young people. We wanted to hold various concerts, for example, a concert of Belarusian rock groups; that is, rock groups that sing in Belarusian. There are not many in Belarus and in Gorky only a few. We also wanted to promote the Belarusian language among students because everyone in general speaks in Russian.
>
> And, of course, we published an independent newspaper, which is called *Akademicheskaya Punya* [The Academic Pit]. The paper is apolitical, we tried not to get into politics. But in our country the fact of a publication in Belarusian means that it is already considered political. There is the paper *Sovetskii student* [The Soviet Student], which was published during the period of the Soviet Union and to this day is written in the same genre ─ "Dear comrades etc." Students don't like it and so we published *Akademicheskaya Punya.*[49]

Bobikov explained to Human Rights Watch the contents of the first issue, published in March 1998:

> First of all we wrote "How to pass an exam." We were first-year students ourselves and wanted to give our friends some kind of help in passing exams. And on the first page there was a somewhat historical article. Do you know about the uprising in Kalinovskii in 1863? On April 26, 1863, students seized power, that is they threw out the administration, and took over power in the town.[50]

According to Bobikov, the rector of the Academy reacted by contacting the KGB for help in locating the responsible students. In subsequent days, Bobikov reported KGB officer's would come up to students who had been involved with the paper and say "Good day, please come and let's have a talk."[51] On one of these occasions, in April 1998, Bobikov was questioned by both an Academy vice-rector, Vasily Nevdokh, and a KGB officer. Bobikov told Human Rights Watch how the KGB officer asked him why he had joined the Belarusian Association of Students and not the BPSM, and why he was writing for *Akademicheskaya Punya* and not *Sovetstkii student*. Bobikov explained to Human Rights Watch the direct link made by both the KGB officer and vice-rector Nevdokh between continuing his studies and his activities in the Belarusian Students' Association and publishing *Akademicheskaya Punya.* Bobikov said that the KGB officer told him that:

> "If you are going to be very active, then you may have problems with your studies." He said that to me bluntly, but it was one-on-one. I said to him that I understand that but I am not afraid.
>
> That's how we published the paper . . . I was warned not just by a KGB officer. We had similar conversations with V.I. Nevdokh, he also said to us that we shouldn't get too carried away with independent activities, since we will have problems. He said that to us bluntly.[52]

Bobikov continued to be active in the Belarusian Students' Association and produce the newspaper on a monthly basis. On January 5, 1999 Bobikov, along with first year student Anatol' Britsen, who had recently began writing for the newspaper, went out to buy cigarettes from a street seller. They told Human Rights Watch that as they approached the cigarette seller, some other youths started to create a commotion, and an altercation ensued. Bobikov recounted what happened next:

> There was no fight, but there was screaming. The police arrived. The guys [who had created the commotion] saw the police and started to run, but we didn't run since we hadn't done anything bad. Police officers ran up to us and grabbed us, we said that we weren't guilty of anything, but they answered, "Let's go, we'll sort it out

[49] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, June 9, 1999.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

at the police station." They brought us there and immediately wrote out a report sheet as though we were the ones who were making a noise ─ and that was all. We spent the whole night in the police station.

In the morning, we were fined. The fine they gave me, for example, was really small ─ 250,000 rubles [U.S.$0.60] . . . For hooliganism, can you believe it?! We had allegedly violated some kind of administrative rule. We had "violated" article 156 [of the administrative code] ─ "petty hooliganism."[53]

On January 19, 1999, academy authorities expelled Bobikov and Britsen from school for "systematic appearance in an intoxicated state in a public place and actions of hooliganism." The charge of intoxication in a public place apparently relates to an incident in which Bobikov celebrated a friend's birthday in student halls in January 1998. Bobikov told Human Rights Watch that the academy dean found out about the party the following day and had demanded a written account of the evening, which Bobikov supplied. This, along with his arrest for "hooliganism," formed the formal basis for his expulsion. The case of Britsen appears to be completely arbitrary, since his alleged "hooliganism" on January 5, 1999 forms the sole pretext for his expulsion.

Links between Universities and Law Enforcement Agencies

[53] Ibid.

Law enforcement agencies maintain direct links with university administration staff in actions to seek out politically active students and to administer punishment. These agencies range from regular police officers to agents of the State Security Committee (KGB). Ostensibly a preventative measure, the Law on the Police provides police with the right to inform persons at a detainee's place of work or study of the fact of, and reason for, their detention, which, in the case of a student being detained, invariably leads to the student being punished.[54] As such, these links serve as a powerful deterrent to student political activity. Students interviewed by Human Rights Watch related numerous incidences of collaboration between the police and the university administration which resulted in sanctions against students by police and university alike. Students who are arrested by police are often punished by their university before the case has been heard in court and, on occasion, the academic punishment is upheld despite the student's eventual acquittal.

Students told Human Rights Watch that they feel that their conversations in lectures are monitored, either electronically or by members of the BPSM or state security agents present in the classroom. While this supposition cannot be proved, the BPSM's presence in every state higher education institution coupled with the frequency with which KGB officers are tasked with investigations into opposition activity by students gives credence to these feelings and promote unease among politically active student body. A student, who requested anonymity, gave Human Rights Watch this example of the atmosphere on campus:

> In lectures, in principle, the atmosphere is ok, free and at ease, but pressure is permanently felt, partially in the form of jokes . . . For example, during a lecture on human rights . . . on the theme "Are human rights violated in today's Belarus?" We divide up into the opposition, people from the presidential administration, the OSCE, and the general public. When a supposed representative from the opposition speaks and gives his point of view, using his arguments against those of the representative of the presidential administration people start to laugh in the classroom. People say "Sasha, turn on the microphone, turn on the recording equipment," and the students turn round and say that "in any case, they're recording us, there's no need to be afraid, say what you want." As they say, there's never a truer word spoken than in jest.[55]

Dmitri Markushevsky is a fourth year student at the Belarusian State Information System and Radioelectronics University (SISRU) in Minsk and is also the observer coordinator at the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC). These observers, who are mostly composed of students, attend demonstrations and court hearings and submit written reports back to the BHC. Despite wearing large, clearly visible identity cards confirming their role as observers, law enforcement agents frequently detain them at demonstrations along with other demonstrators, although after a few hours' detention they usually are released without charge. Dmitri described a typical encounter:

[54] Law on the Police, Part 4, Article 16: The Rights of the Police: "The police, for the fulfilling of their incumbent duties are permitted: 6) with the aim of having a preventive influence to inform state bodies, public associations, labor collectives and persons at the place of work, study or residence about the facts of a crime or administrative violation by a member of that collective."

[55] Human Rights Watch interview with anonymous student, Grodno, February 10, 1999.

> Officers in plain clothes . . . often drive up to you on the street. Cars with darkened windows without identifying markings, without markings showing that they are from the Belarusian Interior Ministry, draw up sharply onto the sidewalk. People in plain clothes jump out, sometimes they say "Stop! Police!" That is actually good in that you know that it's possible that these people are police officers. Sometimes it happens that they say absolutely nothing and you can think anything whatsoever, right up to thinking they are some kind of group of bandits.[56]

Markushevsky himself had been arrested in 1998. Following his arrest, police contacted him at his place of study, even though he had never been formally charged with an offense. He told Human Rights Watch:

> In September [1998] they detained me without charge and, because I did not break any law, there was no written record of my detention . . . all the same the organs of the Interior Ministry sent a written statement to my place of study. It said that I take part in illegal demonstrations, although I am an employee of a human rights organization and observe proceedings at demonstrations. For now, there have been no especially negative repercussions. I continue to study.[57]

Arbitrary Expulsions

Arbitrary expulsions for political reasons have become more frequent since 1994. Universities are often reluctant to expel their students and tend to undertake this measure after they have administered other punishments. In several cases, it is clear government law enforcement agencies, including the KGB, pressure university authorities to undertake the measure. According to a March 1997 order of the Ministry of Education entitled "On the Expulsion of Students," a student can be dismissed from an institute of higher education:

- on his own volition
- linked with a transfer to another institute of higher education
- according to his health on the basis of a certificate from a Medical Advisory Board
- for poor academic progress
- for the systematic [two or more] violation of educational discipline and the internal rules of the institute of higher education
- linked with discovery of intentionally inaccurate information.[58]

Although each university in Belarus has its own statute which sets out the conditions for expulsion, the Ministry of Education order sets out the minimum conditions under which a student may be expelled. Under the definition of "systematic," as stipulated in the Ministry of Education order, a university may expel a student for two or more violations of "educational discipline and internal rules," or for a single egregious violation.

Sergei Martselev

Sergei Martselev is the chair of the *Maladaya Gramada* (The Youth Council), the youth organization of the *Narodnaya Gramada* (The People's Council). In 1996, as a student at the international relations faculty of BGU, he and other members of the Youth Council first began to have problems with their studies because of their political activity. Like his fellow Youth Council members, Martselev was given a warning following the December 10, 1996 demonstration. He explained to Human Rights Watch what happened following the next protest in which he participated:

[56] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 29, 1998.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Order of the Ministry of Education, March 14, 1997, no. 146.

> After a while, on March 20, 1997, we held the next large-scale action — a student protest against the compulsory assignment of students to the Chernobyl zone . . . I was sentenced to ten days of imprisonment and went on a dry hunger strike. I [was beaten] and suffered bruised ribs. And as a result of that demonstration, I was expelled from the university.
>
> I passed the summer semester [but] was expelled on the formal grounds of failing to pass an exam on a second-level subject, medical preparation. The real reason for my expulsion was explained to me orally by the dean of the faculty. Together with me, the former vice-president of the Youth Council and a student in the same year, Nikolai Privarnikov, was expelled. They expelled us for exactly the same reason and at the same time. Now he is in Kiev, because he started to have problems with the Belarusian secret police.[59]

Martselev subsequently moved to Moscow and commenced studies at the Russian State Humanities University. However, he said that the difference between the programs in Moscow and in Minsk coupled with his election as Youth Council head in February 1998 led him to return to Minsk and attempt to gain readmittance to BGU. He told Human Rights Watch what happened in September 1998:

> I went to the dean of the international relations faculty of BGU, from which I was expelled, but he said that in my public statements I had given an inaccurate account of my expulsion and that he was not going to reinstate me. However, he agreed to reinstate me as a paid student for a large sum of money [U.S.$1,200] although I previously had studied free of charge.[60]

Martselev also spoke of the former chair of the Youth Council, Pavel Karnazitsky, who was expelled from university for his political activity in 1996. Martselev recalled:

> Pavel Karnazitsky was a very active participant in all political actions, including organizing the December 10 [1996] picket. On May 30, 1996, after a student demonstration, they expelled him from the second year of the journalism faculty of BGU. At the moment, he, like Privarnikov, is in Kiev, because he also had problems with the KGB. He went to Kiev [Ukraine] in April of this year [1998].[61]

Ales' Mukhin and Andrei Gilevich

Ales' Mukhin and Andrei Gilevich, both aged eighteen, and Sergei Murashko, aged seventeen, were all first-year students at the Minsk Information and Radio-Technical Institute (now known as the State Information System and Radioelectronics University) and members of Youth Front. On February 28, 1998, police arrested the three teenagers for allegedly spray-painting "Zhiyvie Belarus" (Long live Belarus) and other slogans, including phrases of a political nature, along with painting a picture of a white-red-white flag (the former national flag of Belarus now associated with the opposition movement) on a bus-stop shelter after attending a rock concert. The three had allegedly been drinking beer. Police released Murashko soon after, but held Mukhin and Gilevich until March 3, for seventy-two hours. They charged all three with hooliganism under article 201 (1) of the criminal code, which carries a maximum sentence of one year of imprisonment or one year in a labor camp and/or a fine.

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[59] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 28, 1998. Since 1997, students from state universities in Belarus, mainly teachers and doctors, have been posted to jobs in areas of the country still contaminated by radiation from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power station catastrophe. Martselev alleges that students are faced with little choice but to accept these postings as refusal, he claims, would result in not being awarded a degree. Martselev further alleges that the unpopularity of these postings has resulted in the practice of bribing university officials to gain more favorable postings.

[60] Ibid. U.S.$1,200 is an extremely large sum of money in Belarus today. Free places at state universities are awarded on a meritocractic basis, e.g., a student who scores low marks in an entrance exam may well only be offered a place as a fee-paying student.

[61] Ibid.

On March 23, before their trial had even begun, Mukhin and Gilevich received a letter from the rector of the university, V. M. Ilyin, explaining that they were being expelled. The letter cited information received from the Central Region Police Station on the pair's alleged activities. An independent human rights activist, Liubov Lunyova, who was at the time working for Spring 96, a human rights NGO, worked on the case. She told Human Rights Watch what happened when she went to the university to complain:

> [I]t turned out that [the rector] was ill and the deputy rector was in some kind of conference. We went to the deputy rector of student administration, Nikolai Kolinkovich. He said to us that yes, we expelled them, because they disgraced the Belarusian people and the honor of our university. I said that there hadn't yet been the court hearing and that the court could acquit them. He replied "They won't be acquitted. They'll be sentenced to jail. They are criminals, and there is no place here for criminals." Then we asked how they knew that they had done something. "You don't know that they are guilty, the investigation is still ongoing." He told us that the dean went to the police, the investigator showed him all the documents [related to the case], showed him the accusation sheet, showed him the evidence . . . A lawyer wouldn't be allowed to see any of that! It's a so-called "secret of the investigation." . . . The investigator grossly violated the law, he revealed confidential information. Moreover, now that they have now been expelled from the university, [it's] none other than pressure on the investigation and pressure on the court. They have already named them criminals . . . .[62]

Under the institute's charter, students may be expelled for "violating norms of conduct in a public place." Deputy Rector Kolinkovich told Human Rights Watch merely that students were expelled "all the time" for infractions in student dormitories or for poor academic performance.[63]

On May 27, 1998, Judge Brogin at the Central district court sentenced Mukhin, Gilevich, and Murashko to one year of imprisonment suspended for one year under Article 201 (1) of the criminal code. Mukhin subsequently moved to Poland to continue his studies while Gilevich successfully applied to be reinstated at the State Information System and Radioelectronics University. Murashko has continued his studies otherwise uninterrupted.

Evgeny Skochko

Evgeny Skochko is an active member of the Youth Front. In June 1997 he was expelled from the university for what he believes are political reasons. A student of the Belarusian State Technical University (BGTU), Skochko was a regular participant in opposition demonstrations and was regularly subjected to various forms of pressure and threats from the university authorities over his political activities. Skochko told Human Rights Watch:

> The lecturers scolded and shouted at me that I was a BPFer, but there wasn't any particularly direct pressure. They didn't say that they were going to expel me or give me a bad mark, [but] they would lower [my] exam grades. We have such lecturers.
>
> [T]he deputy dean came all the time before opposition demonstrations . . . during lectures he went around the classrooms, especially to our group. Once he warned me personally not to attend [a demonstration] or I would be expelled. I stuck to the tactics that you need to stand up for your rights, for your views, and then they won't bother you.[64]

On March 10, 1997, Skochko took part in a demonstration which turned violent. Authorities later accused him of assaulting a police officer, a charge that he vigorously denies, and opened a criminal case against him. Skochko subsequently went into hiding for a month. Law enforcement officers frequented the BSTU and reportedly stood guard at his hall of residence. The case was later closed for lack of evidence and, a month later, Skochko reemerged and

[62] Human Rights Watch interview with Liubov Lunyova, Minsk, April 7, 1998.
[63] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Nikolai Kolinkovich, June 26, 1998.
[64] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 11, 1999.

continued to study. Skochko alleges that the university dean told him that "Everything is all right. Continue to study. The case is closed."[65] However, university officials later refused to allow him to take the summer exams and expelled him. Skochko explained to Human Rights Watch:

[65] Ibid.

> I returned to study on April 10 and until May everything was all right, I didn't hear anything. After that the [new] term began and because of my academic absences (the month when I was hiding) they refused to allow me to take the exams: "You didn't attend lectures for a month and you want to take an exam?" They were not interested in my arguments that the police were after me because of my opposition activities. They did not allow me to take the exams and when I didn't sit the exams I was thrown out for poor progress . . . .It's a very simple system.[66]

Skochko noted that he had attempted to be reinstated, but without success. He explained:

> I tried to gain readmission, but they simply didn't take me . . . The rector told me that they would not take me as a day student. He said that I had worn him out. He showed me telegrams from the police about my participation in demonstrations. According to the internal university rules, you can be expelled for such a document from the police.[67]

Threats of Expulsion and Repression against Politically Active Students

Law enforcement agencies, including the KGB, commonly use threats of expulsion from the university against politically active students, especially those detained at demonstrations. This sends a clear message to students: do not get involved in opposition politics and do not attend opposition demonstrations.

Pavel Severinets

Pavel Severinets, a fourth year student at the geography faculty of the Belarusian State University (BGU), is the leader of the youth wing of the Belarusian Popular Front, the Malady Front (Youth Front). As a result of his political activity, he has faced repercussions at university, and the authorities have intimidated his immediate family members as a means to pressure him. Severinets told Human Rights Watch of the first time he suffered such repercussions as a result of his political activity:

> Problems which are linked with my studies started two years ago in 1997 . . . On February 14, we organized a street carnival — "Belarus into Europe." We went around to international organizations and embassies and delivered petitions with the demand "Belarus into Europe" and with the request to the governments of those embassies . . . to put pressure on the [Belarusian] regime to reduce repression against young people. After we had finished the march, they detained a large number of young people — I wasn't among them — since I personally went around to the embassies and shook the ambassadors by the hand. Because of that they didn't detain me. Yet at my place of study they told me: "Once more and you can say farewell to university." The dean of the faculty at BGU said that to me.[68]

Despite the warning, Severinets continued actively to organize and participate in opposition demonstrations. This activity led to his effective suspension from university for over a year. He told Human Rights Watch:

[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Human Rights Watch interview with Pavel Severinets, Minsk, February 11, 1999.

> Exactly a month later [March 1997], we organized another such march, which they suppressed from the outset. We gathered on the square and [the police] started to arrest us. They arrested a few hundred young people. I was one of the first to be arrested; they held me for twenty-four hours in the district police station, then for forty-eight hours in a temporary holding facility [*priemnik-raspredelitel'*], then they let me go. I was fined, and they immediately told me at the university that if I wanted to stay at BGU I would have to take a leave of absence.[69] That meant returning home to Vitebsk for a whole year to live with my parents and not returning to Minsk. At that time I had no other choice. I completed formalities for a leave of absence and for a whole year — from 1997 to 1998 — I was on leave. With that, ostensibly for health reasons, I succeeded in avoiding sitting in prison on Volodarsky street. It was in April, May, the beginning of June 1997. After that I reappeared and started to actively demand to return to BGU, inasmuch as academic leave isn't a reason to expel a student from university; [such] a student must be readmitted. They insisted on a range of conditions in writing . . . I must not speak publicly at any rallies; I must not participate in any unsanctioned demonstrations at all, and they advised me to reduce my political activities . . . .
>
> I spoke with the rector [Alexander Kazulin] of BGU. We had many conversations — six or seven. The issue wasn't resolved in just an hour. When I turned up for lectures, the [lecturers] immediately told me that I didn't have the right to study. I went straight to the rector. The rector said that I needed to "wait a little." Then the very same rector said that "we need to settle a few issues" and because of that I didn't study for two or three months. However, I went to lectures even though they did not reinstate me — they didn't pay me my stipend or give me a place in student halls. Still, after I started to demand this, after journalists became aware, they gave me a place in halls, even without payment as they were scared of the consequences. Then they processed my return from academic leave and since last November [1998] I have attended lectures as a student. But I repeat, I cannot appear at a single street demonstration, otherwise I will be expelled.[70]

During Severinets' leave of absence, authorities threatened his sister in an apparent attempt to pressure him to curtail his activities following his arrest during an April 2, 1998, counter demonstration. That day, Severinets, along with a group of approximately fifty members of the Youth Front and the BPF, had attended a government-sponsored fair at the central Yakub Kolas square in Minsk to mark the signing of the Belarus-Russia Union Charter in 1997. Independent reports state that this group collectively sang pro-independence songs together and later peacefully dispersed.[71] Men in plainclothes subsequently emerged from parked cars and beat and detained up to forty BPF and Youth Front members, including Severinets, who was later charged with "malicious hooliganism," under article 201 (2) of the criminal code, which carries a maximum sentence of five years of imprisonment. Authorities released Severinets on his own recognizance on June 3, 1998, ultimately dropping charges against him in December that year. However, BGU authorities then threatened not to admit his sister, Anna, to post-graduate study. Severinets explained to Human Rights Watch:

> [Anna] was a fifth year student at that time and was transferring to a postgraduate course. They said to her "Choose: either your brother behaves himself the way we want him to, or you won't go on to postgraduate study." That was how they asked her. However, as that statement was immediately publicized, they ceased to impose those conditions and she was admitted to postgraduate study . . . at the philology faculty at BGU.[72]

[69] A "leave of absence" is usually granted to those students who are suffering from illness and as such may only be obtained with a certificate of ill health from a doctor. For male students, this is especially important as it precludes conscription into the army, a requirement deferred by university study.

[70] Human Rights Watch interview with Pavel Severinets, Minsk, February 11, 1999.

[71] Television coverage by the Russian NTV network on April 2 depicted a group, including Severinets, singing, but showed no evidence of violence at the fair. One eyewitness, who declined to be identified, told Human Rights Watch that Severinets attempted to sing using a microphone, but that it had been switched off.

[72] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 11, 1999.

As of this writing, Severinets remains a student at BGU and continues to be politically active, but has observed the condition that he not participate in or speak at demonstrations.

Alexei Gerasimov

Alexei Gerasimov is a fifth-year student at the international relations faculty at BGU. He is also a member of the presidium and treasurer of the Maladaya Gramada [Youth Council] and has described continual problems with the university administration resulting from his political activity and that of other members of the Youth Council. In particular, problems arose when a number of Youth Council members were arrested following a December 10, 1996 demonstration to commemorate Human Rights Day:

> Concerning persecution, I was fortunate following the December 10 demonstration in that they did not arrest me. But of course I had problems because I am an active member of the organization. The problems resulted in our being continually called to the dean of the faculty who warned us that we must not participate in those or any demonstrations and threatened us that if we did, that we would be expelled from university. He did the same, not just calling us, the active young people, but [publicly]; that is, he called a general assembly before every meeting, every demonstration, and said that the faculty administration will not tolerate a student even being noticed at a given demonstration.[73]

Despite the threat of expulsion, Gerasimov continued his political activities, including participating in opposition demonstrations, which culminated in his arrest. He explained:

> Serious problems arose at the faculty after the May 1, 1998 demonstration, when eight members of our organization, including myself, were arrested and accused of "participation in an illegal demonstration." I spent seventy-two hours in SIZO [pre-trial detention facility] before the court hearing after which the judge sentenced me to seventy-two hours [of imprisonment] for participation in an illegal demonstration. A judge in a different district acquitted the leader of the party, Statkevich, the organizer of the march, and announced the verdict that the march was legal. In principle, it's absolutely absurd. After that at the faculty I was given a strict reprimand, and the dean of the faculty, Aleksandr Sharapov, said that in the event that I'm noticed [at a demonstration] or if I'm arrested once more during a demonstration that it would be a 100 percent reason for my expulsion and that I would be expelled from BGU. He said that in mid-May [1998]. I have to say that I'm lucky, because since May 1 everything has been ok.[74]

Alexei Pimenov

Alexei Pimenov is a fifth-year student of the Belarusian Pedagogical State University (BPGU) in the applied psychology faculty. Pimenov is also a member of the Youth Council. He confirmed to Human Rights Watch the same pattern of events following the December 10, 1996 demonstration:

> The main pressure against me occurred after events of December 10, 1996 when after a picket on human rights day they detained us. They put us in a cell. They detained everybody. They took us from the police station to court. Many were fined, and I received an administrative warning. Subsequently, before every meeting, as far as I understand, the rector of the university received some kind of order from the presidential administration, because they continually called me to the dean's office. Even if I didn't attend lectures, the dean personally called me at home. The dean warned that if I took part in a meeting or picket, that I would have serious problems . . . That was how they exerted pressure: I knew that one step to the right, one step to the left and I would be expelled from the university.[75]

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[73] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 28, 1998.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 28, 1998.

Pimenov maintains that because of his problems, students steer clear of the Youth Council and refrain from participating in opposition demonstrations:

> [S]eeing my problems, a great many students were afraid to join our organization. People are afraid, moreover, because they warn everyone that if they take part in a meeting, that they will expel them. People are very interested in our affairs and in principle support us, but they are afraid to join. The problem is always there, although I go to pickets and demonstrations but I know that if I'm detained one more time, that I'll be threatened with expulsion. I fully understand that I'm walking on a razor's edge.[76]

Dmitri Knish

Dmitri Knish is a student at Brest State University. Following the posting of anti-Lukashenka leaflets around the city of Brest on the night of June 22, 1998, law enforcement agents, including the KGB, reportedly detained six people on June 23 and 24, including Knish, for questioning. Knish later recounted to the Minsk-based human rights organization, Spring 96, that during his questioning the head of the local KGB threatened him with expulsion from university and used this among other threats to force Knish to confess to the posting of the leaflets.[77]

Sergei Alchakov

On May 1, 1998, Sergei Alchakov, a first-year student at the mathematics faculty at Brest State University, took part in an opposition demonstration commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Belarusian National Republic.[78] Alchakov reportedly distributed leaflets about the anniversary and was warned by police to desist. Alchakov reportedly ignored the warning and was subsequently detained for violating the presidential decree on "Gatherings, Meetings, Street Marches, Demonstrations and Pickets in the Republic of Belarus." He was later released without charge. On May 31, Alchakov received a warning from the rector of the university, Stepanovich, a copy of which is in the possession of Human Rights Watch, that stated "a repeat violation would result in expulsion from the university."[79]

Ina Pimenava

Ina Pimenava is a twenty-year-old student and the ex-wife of Alexei Shidlovsky, a Youth Front activist who was arrested in August 1997 following the appearance of anti-Lukashenka graffiti on government buildings in the town of Stolbsty, south of Minsk.[80] Following Shidlovsky's arrest, Pimenava was subject to numerous "visits" at home and at the university by KGB officials who repeatedly questioned her and coerced her into making a false rape allegation against a leading opposition figure.[81] Pimenava told Human Rights Watch that on December 5, 1997 she was summoned to her university, the BGU journalism faculty, where she was told that she was "one step away" from being

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Belapan news agency, Minsk, June 25, 1998.

[78] The Belarusian National Republic was an independent state founded in 1918 that was later subsumed into the USSR.

[79] Information supplied by Spring 96.

[80] For more information on the Shidlovsky case, see "Turning Back the Clock," a Human Rights Watch short report, New York, July 1998.

[81] For more information on the Pimenova case, see "Turning Back the Clock," a Human Rights Watch short report, New York, July 1998.

expelled, ostensibly for missing class. The real motive, however, appears to have been her personal affiliation to Shidlovsky and the harassment of the KGB.[82] As of this writing, Pimenava has continued her studies without further hindrance or harassment.

[82] Human Rights Watch and Memorial, a Moscow based human rights non-governmental organization, interview with Ina Pimenava, Minsk, December 6, 1997.

LECTURERS

Politically active lecturers, historians, and university employees who challenge the status quo are subject to a wide variety of measures from university authorities to curtail their political activities or limit the focus of academic inquiry. These measures, usually in the form of reprimands or warnings, serve to ensure that state university lecturers know that active participation in the political opposition threatens their livelihood and their position. Subsequently, a significant number of lecturers have moved from state to non-state institutions, either through the firing of the employee from the state institution or on the employee's own initiative. Nevertheless, while non-state institutions may be free from government interference in their day-to-day running, the private universities are under no illusion that they are autonomous entities. Non-state universities avoid politically sensitive subjects and, for example, actively dissuade their students from publishing a student newspaper for fear of attracting the attention of the state security services. In a telling example of the reach and influence of the state in the non-state university sector, several lecturers with whom a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke who had made the switch from state sector to private declined to give interviews, even under a guarantee of anonymity for fear of negative repercussions. One senior lecturer anxiously sought guarantees that a casual conversation with a Human Rights Watch researcher on the general condition of academic freedom in Belarus would go no further.

Politically active lecturers on fixed-term contracts in state universities a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke to expressed the fear that their political activity may result in their contracts not being renewed. Politically active tenured senior lecturers, who are reelected to their posts by their colleagues every five years expressed similar fears that their activity would negatively influence their reelection. Although this election is by secret ballot among staff, university staff with whom a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke made it clear that university authorities pressure them to influence the outcome against politically active members. One senior lecturer told Human Rights Watch that his full housing allocation — a privilege of the job — had been denied him because of his active opposition political activity. Privileges are clearly an easy tool with which to pressure faculty into conformity. Rectors in non-state universities are pressured by telephone by the government to ensure their staff conform and steer clear of opposition politics or to dismiss or demote particularly active or well-known lecturers.

Politically Motivated Dismissals

Liubov Lunyova

Liubov Lunyova is an independent human rights activist and correspondent for the Belarusian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.[83] She co-founded Minsk Spring 96, a nongovernmental human rights organization, where she worked until January 1999. From 1992 to 1998 she was a lecturer on a fixed-term contract in ancient history and the middle ages at Belarusian State University (BGU) in Minsk. She lost her job there in 1998 and has essentially been barred from teaching, most likely, as described below, for her activism, in particular, for organizing demonstrations.

In early January 1998, worried that her contract was soon to expire, Lunyova approached the dean of the university who reassured her that her contract would be renewed. However, within weeks Lunyova lost her job and subsequently was unable to gain employment in the education sector. She explained what she believes were the political motives behind this:

[83] See also, "Turning Back the Clock," a Human Rights Watch short report, New York, July 1998.

> [T]he history department is very politically active, and a large number of students go to demonstrations. Since I am a human rights activist, all the students who are summoned to the dean's office came to me in the history department for advice. I also attend all of these demonstrations and walk in the front row, and moreover, I organized a couple of demonstrations, for example on December 10 — International Human Rights Day — which was shown on TV, and naturally when I went to work everyone commented that I was so open in expressing myself and that I have no fear. A journalist from the [London] *Times* said to me "Strange that you are involved in such actions and you haven't been fired." I said, "well, yes," and a month later I was.[84]

When she approached the dean of BGU to demand an explanation, Lunyova recalled:

> He said that he couldn't do anything, there was "no work" although he had a good relationship with me. The personnel department told me that there was money to fund two positions. Many lecturers came to me when I said that I was leaving, took me by the hand, and said that they sympathized. The men said that they admired me but they were afraid themselves, they have families, children.[85]

Lunyova later learned that despite being told there was no work, the department has since hired a number of new lecturers. She explained that her dismissal was not just the end of her employment at BGU, but that in effect her career in education could be over.

> Our female students were working in school number 156 on Yanki-Mavra street and they called and asked me to come. I went to the school and they said to me, "We'll take you first thing tomorrow, we need someone." I went to meet the director of the school. The director said "If I give you a job, then I'll be fired within half an hour." He apologized for a long time and said that he has no political opinion and . . . said that he would call me, but didn't, because I think he is afraid. I understood that the education system is a closed road for me.[86]

Myacheslav Grib

Following the dissolution of the Thirteenth Supreme Soviet in November 1996, Myacheslav Grib, former chair of that body, worked as a lawyer until he was banned from doing so by the government in July 1997.[87] He is currently secretary of the Central Committee of the Social-Democratic Party, Narodnaya Gramada (People's Assembly), and head of its international relations department. On October 1, 1997, he started work as a lecturer in law at the Institute of Law, teaching criminal law and criminal procedure to second- and third-year students. A semester passed without incident, but at the end of 1997 the rector of the Institute of Law called Grib to his office and told him, "We need to decide something, because they are making my life impossible." Grib remembered:

> In the beginning there were no problems, because I hadn't advertised the fact that I was teaching at an institute, but it was impossible to keep that secret because the students studying there talked about who was teaching them. Then there was talk and this reached the presidential administration. [The Institute] received inspection after inspection, from the tax inspectorate, from the Ministry of Education . . . In the end [the government] said to the rectorate, "If you continue to employ [Grib], we will close down the institute." I

[84] Human Rights Watch interview with Liubov Lunyova, Minsk, April 7, 1998.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] See also, "Turning Back the Clock," a Human Rights Watch short report, New York, July 1998.

didn't want to put my interests above the interests of the institute, so that the students and lecturers would suffer. I said that I understood, gathered my papers . . . and left.[88]

The education sector is closed to Grib, who is now unemployed:

[88] Human Rights Watch interview with Myacheslav Grib, Minsk, April 6, 1998.

> I am not working at the moment, because I can't find a job . . . In principle I could work as a lecturer . . . when I started to teach, other institutes found out, and I received three or four invitations to work in my spare time . . . But as soon as I started to teach — inspections, inspections and blunt conversation . . . As soon as I was dismissed, all the invitations evaporated.[89]

Political Harassment

Mikhail Pastukhov is a lecturer in law at a private higher education institute in Minsk and a vocal critic of the government. He is the director of the Law Center for Media Protection at the Belarusian Association of Journalists in Minsk. Following his dismissal as constitutional court judge by the president in November 1996, Pastukhov was invited to head the department of theory, history of the state, and law. Upon acceptance of the post, Pastukhov was told by the rector that "we know your political convictions, and the only thing we ask is that you do not openly express them in front of the students or the lecturers of the institute."[90] Pastukhov subsequently taught a general legal theory course from January 1997.

Pastukhov then wrote a critical article, published in the independent newspaper *Svaboda* (Freedom) on the third anniversary of the 1994 constitution.[91] He told Human Rights Watch that "after the publication of that article, the presidential administration rang the dean of the institute. The dean of the legal faculty had a conversation with me along the lines that it isn't worth speaking out that harshly, so I would take this into account in my activities. It was said to me in the form of a warning."[92]

Pastukhov later accepted an invitation to join the legal department of the opposition National Executive Committee (NEC). In April 1997, the independent newspaper, *Narodnaya Volya* (The People's Will), published a full-page article on the NEC which included photographs of its members, including Pastukhov, and short biographies. Pastukhov said the repercussions were immediate:

> Literally the next day after publication of the article, the dean summoned me and we had a conversation. He said that the presidential administration had called and they strongly disapproved of the article and of the fact that I had agreed to it. That article in the press resulted in my being asked by the professors of the department to give up my direction of the department to become simply a lecturer. That was in April 1997. I agreed and started to work as a lecturer in the department. Subsequently, the rector and dean asked that I did not show myself in political activities, write any sharply critical observations about the current authorities and, thank God, since then there have not been any further consequences for me.[93]

Pastukhov said rectors of non-state or private universities are subject to regular calls from state authorities demanding that the political activities of staff be controlled or suppressed:

> Although non-state institutions of higher education are not subject directly to the organs of authority, nevertheless the authorities have a real mechanism of influence on the leadership of those institutes. The rector receives all the calls which are made from the organs of authority concerning our lecturers. These calls

[89] Ibid.

[90] Human Rights Watch interview, Mikhail Pastukhov, Minsk, October 28, 1998.

[91] Following *Svaboda's* closure by the government in November 1997, it recommenced publishing in February 1998 under the name *Naviny* (The News).

[92] Human Rights Watch interview, Mikhail Pastukhov, Minsk, October 28, 1998.

[93] Ibid.

may compel the rector to modify lecturer's assignments or to pressure lecturers to change the way they associate themselves with colleagues and with students. I try not to touch political questions or express my political convictions.[94]

[94] Human Rights Watch interview, October 28, 1998.

Leonarda Mukhina is the mother of student Aleksandr Mukhin and is politically active in the BPF.[95] She is also a teacher at high school number 37, the last remaining Belarusian language school in Minsk's Central district. According to her account, on March 13, 1998, just under two weeks following the arrest of her son for writing political graffiti, Mukhina became aware of a letter, allegedly from the parents of the pupils she taught, complaining that she was using her lessons to indoctrinate their children with her political viewpoints. Shortly thereafter, Mukhina was reportedly told by the school's director and by the director of studies that "the parents" no longer wanted her to teach their children. Mukhina told Human Rights Watch that the parents later came to her defense, and said "that I was absolutely satisfactory, that they were happy with the level of education that their children were getting, therefore they are categorically against my being fired."[96]

At a subsequent meeting, which a senior school administrator attended, a group of parents demanded to see the letter parents had purportedly written complaining about Mukhina's teaching, which he failed to do. Mukhina later brought a civil suit against the school's directors for slander and in defense of her professional honor and dignity. On April 23, 1998, Judge Zlobich rejected her claim, and on May 28 the Minsk City Court upheld his decision. As of this writing, Mukhina continues to teach at school number 37.

Mikola Antipovich is a senior lecturer in philosophy at the Belarusian State Polytechnic Academy in Minsk. On May 16, 1997 he co-organized an opposition meeting on the central Yakub Kolas square in Minsk. According to Antipovich, the meeting took place peacefully, without incident and concluded on time. However, some young participants of the meeting subsequently left the square en masse and walked on the sidewalk toward the presidential administration building, an incident for which authorities later tried and convicted Antipovich. He gave the following account of what happened:

> [The demonstration] was on a Friday . . . on the Monday I went to work, I had classes. I went to the fourth floor and by the auditorium I noticed that there were some unfamiliar people standing there who were older than the students. After I went through to the auditorium, they came over and one showed me some documents of the Presidential Administration Guard. He said to me "You must come with us." I said, "You do not have permission from the procurator. I have classes to teach, I can't go, I am at work." They then said, "All right, we will wait until the break." Literally fifteen minutes later, a laboratory assistant from our department came and said "Nikolai Vasilevich, the police have come for you." Then uniformed police came: a captain and two sergeants. "We are arresting you." "What for?" "For the meeting which you organized and for an illegal march." "There were no problems with the meeting." "No, we are arresting you." They took me away. It was in view of the students in the auditorium. It was a seminar, there were approximately eighteen students. I took my briefcase and left. They took me to the police station and flung me in a cell. It was at about 9:00 a.m., I sat there until 1:00 p.m., whereupon I was put in a different cell with different drunkards. Around 3:00 p.m. myself and the other organizer who had been arrested earlier were tried at the Soviet district court and fined 25 million rubles [approximately U.S.$962]. That's an enormous fine. At that time, a senior lecturer earned 2.5 million a month [U.S.$96]. The most interesting thing is how the university reacted to it all.[97]

On May 21, 1997, Antipovich received a strict reprimand for "violation of academic discipline" for leaving his class in the auditorium when police arrested him. Antipovich told Human Rights Watch that the rector told him that he was obliged to inform the rector the reason for his absence at the time of his arrest, something he claims he was clearly unable to do. In addition to the fine levied by the court, the university fined Antipovich 1 million rubles [U.S.$38] for absenting himself from his duties. A December 24, 1997 appeal court hearing acquitted Antipovich and rescinded the

[95] See also, "Turning Back the Clock," a Human Rights Watch short report, New York, July 1998.
[96] Human Rights Watch interview with Leonarda Mukhina, Minsk, April 7, 1998.
[97] Human Rights Watch interview with Mikola Antipovich, Minsk, February 9, 1999.

25 million ruble fine. However, the university refused to rescind either the reprimand or 1 million ruble fine. When asked of further negative consequences resulting from the reprimand, Antipovich told Human Rights Watch:

> You feel the after-effects every minute. That does not mean that you will be fired by order, they do not do that. The quiet Soviet mechanism is at work here — continual pressure, that you distinctly feel all the time . . . The consequences of that demonstration influenced my passing through the reelection process — there were a huge number of votes against me, a member of the academic council. It has created a poor general opinion of me. It has developed to the point that when work assignments are distributed . . . the dean can consider that "better not to give it to him." There's that variant. You can be left practically without any work, they just don't want you. There is always the moral pressure. Here there is a very subtle calculation that such pressure and such insecurity will demoralize a person. It's worse than a reprimand.[98]

Ivan Saverchenko, a senior research associate who runs academic programs at the Academy of Sciences and director of the independent Institute of Statehood and Democracy echoes Antipovich's fears of quietly being denied work opportunities as a result of his political activities and opposition to state policy on academic research. He told Human Rights Watch:

> If I continue in a similar vein, saying that I disagree with the policies in the fields of education and knowledge then I believe that I will just not be included in the next project. They will say that the projects are not priorities and I, as a participant am not needed. The level of qualification does not matter. I could be left without a penny to live on altogether.[99]

[98] Ibid.

[99] Human Rights Watch interview with Ivan Saverchenko, Minsk, November 3, 1998.

OBSTRUCTION OF PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The current government perceives private education as a threat to its control and influence over the education of students, particularly on politically sensitive subjects such as history and law. The development of private education emerged in Belarus as one of many consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union. The new institutions included private, commercially-run universities, smaller operations providing night or weekend classes for adults and young people, and organizations running civic education programs . While the quality of education offered by some of these institutions has been called into question, others are recognized for the high standard of education they provide. Regrettably, these private universities and related initiatives have been the target of blanket harassment and obstruction.

Government actions range from threats to introduce a new type of diploma for graduates of non-state universities, a move that critics believe is designed to deter students from attending private universities, to the uniform denial by local authorities of access to premises by smaller private schools. Senior staff members of non-state universities that a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke to claimed that government inspections and checks of their facilities routinely went beyond that which would be necessary to control the quality of education. Through such measures, the government appears to be reminding private universities and academies of their subordination to the state.

Private Universities

Private universities have come under fire from the government and are now largely subordinate to it.[100] Private higher education institutions require a licence from the government to operate that must be renewed every five years, a requirement that is of itself unobjectionable, but which the Lukashenka administration exploits to bring these institutions to heel. Additionally, the Ministry of Education must approve the degrees and diplomas awarded by private universities, a power that critics claim has been misused. Recently, government officials have suggested that they will soon start issuing a new degree certificate to distinguish graduates of non-state institutions from graduates of state institutions, something that staff at non-state institutions claim sends a signal to their students that they will face discrimination after graduation and thus serves as a disincentive to enrollment in the private sector schools.

The president does not appoint the rectors of private institutions, yet the government applies pressure on these institutions in other ways. Staff of private universities described the licensing process as an initial obstacle to the creation of private educational establishments, and expressed fears that a system of frequent and intrusive inspections of functioning schools provides authorities with a ready made pretext for the potential closure of institutions that are politically out of line. A university lecturer observed that "multiple checks are at work. The checks come one after another, they are searching for defects in order to have a reason to strip the licence from the non-state institute of higher education."[101] These pressures, according to the same source, have led some private institutions to proscribe criticism of the government:

> All criticism of the current authorities is excluded by oral directives. In our institute we . . . have a request from the institute's leadership: do not criticize the current government.[102]

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[100] Since their inception in the post-Soviet period, private universities have experienced a number of practical difficulties. While state universities offer higher education free of charge, private universities survive through the levying of tuition fees. Following the Russian economic crisis of August 1998, reflected in an economic downturn in Belarus as well, private universities have faced economic hardship. Large numbers of students can no longer afford to study in such institutions and have turned to the state sector.

[101] Name withheld. Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, October 28, 1998.

[102] Ibid.

Several lecturers from non-state universities and institutes with whom a Human Rights Watch researcher spoke repeatedly expressed fears that their students and institutions would be discriminated against through the issuing of separate, non-state university degree certificates. At a meeting with Sergei Vetokhin, Vice-rector of the National Institute for Higher Education, and Valery Dobryanskii, Ministry of Education representative and Head of the Chief Administration of Academic and Secondary Specialized Education, Vetokhin told Human Rights Watch that the only difference between the state and non-state degree certificates would be the words "state" and "non-state." Although this difference appears innocuous, staff of non-state education institutions expressed the fear that graduates of these institutions will face discrimination in the work place, in particular from state institutions, and that prospective students will choose to study at state institutions out of fear of such discrimination. Lecturer Mikhail Pastukhov told Human Rights Watch:

> The decision has practically already been made that students at non-state higher education institutes, now in their final year of study will not receive a state diploma, but of a different type. And they will not accept graduates with those diplomas in state establishments. It's as though they are becoming second class graduates and students. Naturally this kills the desire of people to get an education in a non-state institute of higher education.[103]

A former deputy minister of education, Tatiana Galko, who is currently working at the independent European Humanities University (EHU) in Minsk, believes that not all private universities were of a sufficiently high standard to be recognized as such and believes some were deservedly closed by the government.[104] Yet she criticized the blanket measures taken against private universities in general, in particular the repeated threats to issue graduates of such institutions a different type of certificate.

Private Initiatives

Smaller scale educational initiatives are constantly harassed by local authorities who try to prevent organizers of the initiatives from holding their classes by denying them access to premises. The fact that identical measures employed by local authorities throughout Belarus suggests a central government instruction. To their credit, many of these initiatives have survived, often relying on the ingenuity of their organizers to overcome politically motivated obstacles. These obstacles range from the sublime to the ridiculous, with authorities often equating a seminar in closed premises with a public rally, thus requiring the permission of the local authorities. Human Rights Watch believes that, consistent with internationally recognized guarantees of free expression and free assembly, classes and seminars should not be banned or obstructed regardless of whether the instruction is strictly educational in nature or carries a political message.

The Belarusian Helsinki Committee gave a Human Rights Watch researcher a copy of a local government order denying the organization's request for permission to hold a seminar. The order from the Grodno City Executive Committee reads:

> Decision Number 164 from February 17, 1999
>
> On the Written Request to Hold a Meeting
>
> Having examined the written request of Tatiana Protko, chair of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, on the carrying out of an educational economic seminar within the framework of the project "The Right to a Decent Standard of Living" in the conference hall of the hotel "Turist" on February 25-26, 1999 and taking into

[103] Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Pastukhov, Minsk, October 28, 1998.

[104] The four non-state universities which lost their licences to operate are: The Economic-Linguistic University, Minsk; The Humanitarian University, Brest; The European Institute of Culture, Minsk; and the East European Institute of Business and Law, Minsk.

account that the contents of the written request do not meet in full the demands of article 6 of the Law "On gatherings, meetings, street marches, demonstrations and pickets," the city executive committed DECIDED:

To refuse the Belarusian Helsinki Committee in the holding of the applied for activities on February 25-26, 1999.
Chair of the Executive Committee A.M. Pashkevich
Executive Committee Manager V.P. Nikolaichik[105]

While the Belarusian Helsinki Committee is not solely an educational organization, the above example is typical of the arbitrary obstacles put in place by local authorities that appear to be motivated by political considerations.

Belarusian Association of Women Lawyers and the Brest Association of Legal Advice Centers

Galina Drebezova is a lawyer and the president of the Belarusian Association of Women Lawyers from the southern city of Brest. Since late 1996, together with the Brest Association of Legal Advice Centers, she has organized and presented lectures on human rights in Brest and in other cities throughout Belarus. In addition to lectures for adults on human rights, Drebezova runs a Sunday school for children, teaching and training older children who then go on to teach younger children. The program she runs concentrates on teaching people about their rights as enshrined in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as domestic instruments such as the Belarusian constitution.[106] Drebezova described her approach to teaching about the rights under the constitution adopted following a controversial referendum in November 1996:

> We take the section "The individual and society." We say to people, "this is what you voted for but it is not adhered to." We took a while to come to that, we didn't know how it would [turn out]. Concerning the 1994 constitution — we couldn't teach about that, they would just prevent us from [talking to] people. So we use the 1996 constitution and say to people, "In the referendum you voted for this, take a look at what it says. Is it adhered to?" It's not adhered to, it's violated . . . I understood that it was the best that we can do in the current situation.[107]

While Drebezova's human rights education program continues, local municipal authorities reportedly try to ban or disrupt its lectures. Drebezova illustrated this:

> I must admit that we encounter resistance from the authorities. Quite recently we wanted to give lectures in Kamenets [Brest oblast]. We placed an announcement in the newspaper and appeared on local television announcing that we will be conducting lectures, that we have professional people working with us . . . People showed a great desire to come . . . but they banned us from having the meeting on the eve of our arrival. We should have been there January 30 and 31 [1999]. We had planned to give lectures there as we had already had an agreement with the director of a school. It's an excellent school, the children really wanted to meet us and we had planned two further meetings. We had just invited citizens of that town to the cinema — one meeting we had planned for children and the other for adults. Regretfully, all three of those meetings were canceled and we were unable to meet on January 30 and 31. The chair of the District Executive Committee, Vladimir Aleksandrovich Martsuk banned us. He said "What, you've got it into your heads to come here? We've elections now and you're planning on coming here, to campaign for somebody?" I'm afraid that our trips in the near future will be restricted.[108]

[105] Article 6 of the Law on Demonstrations reads: "Gatherings, meetings, street marches, demonstrations and pickets are forbidden if the goal of these meetings is the forced change of constitutional order or propaganda for war, or social, national, religious, or racial enmity."

[106] The opposition movement disputes the legality of the 1996 amendments to the constitution.

[107] Human Rights Watch interview with Galina Drebezova, Minsk, February 9, 1999.

[108] Ibid. Local municipal elections took place throughout Belarus on April 4, 1999.

Although Drebezova and her colleagues have been able to lecture in other towns, obstruction from the authorities is something she encounters all too often. Drebezova stated that they have been banned so often, she can barely recall all the instances:

> [We've been banned] a great many times . . . We were in Bobruisk in April 1998 where we were also banned, they wouldn't give us premises. We looked for a very long time, we went from one end to the other and in the end we hired a cafe. We had sixty people and we wandered around the city for a long time.
>
> We had just such an occurrence in Gansavichy [Brest oblast] . . . on May 16, 1998, they also banned us from reading lectures. I held talks for a long time, however the district executive committee chair banned us, but near the city there's a collective farm and the collective farm chair gave us permission to hold the lecture there.
>
> On February 16, 1998, in Pruzhany, it was a really interesting situation. We arrived at a school and at that moment a telegram arrived on which was written that "in connection with the epidemic, all public meetings are forbidden." Altogether it was incomprehensible. What epidemic?![109]

In addition to restrictions on her lecture program, Drebezova herself has been personally targeted. In August 1998 the procurator's office brought a civil suit against her claiming that money she received for her work as a lawyer was in fact for work as an "oppositionist." On October 28, 1998, a Brest court ruled in her favor.

Rada 23 and VIT

Igor Kuzminich is the training center director of the organization VIT, a regional association of young intellectuals based in the city of Grodno which works in partnership with Rada 23, a regional council of youth organizations in Grodno region, southwest Belarus. The organizations were founded in 1995 to support young researchers in the field of human rights, history, cultural studies, sociology, and politics. The organizations are currently jointly engaged in holding seminars for young people aged between fifteen and twenty-five on civic and legal education. Rada 23 and VIT have faced delays and obstruction from the Grodno city authorities in obtaining premises, a problem, however, that was ultimately resolved in Grodno, if not in other cities. Kuzminich alleges that this was due to suspicions from the authorities that Rada 23 and VIT are an opposition political group, an allegation which he denies. Problems persist for the groups in obtaining premises for their seminars. These seminars are held mainly in Grodno region but on occasion the group travels across Belarus. Kuzminich explained to Human Rights Watch the problem:

> We have only indirect pressure. Greater pressure is put on those people with whom we work, for example in the districts, when we hold seminars . . . we are within the boundaries of the law and we don't do anything illegal . . . They hamper us, for example, simply in the organization of conferences. They refuse us premises, or put us off until the last moment and then on the last day say that there are no premises and everything can simply fall through.
>
> A year or so ago, we had a seminar in Baranovichy [Brest region]. It was in May 1998. The organizers had received permission for three different premises in the city and at the last moment they were turned down for all three. We sorted everything out [with a last minute alternative] fifteen minutes before the seminar was due to begin.
>
> The last instance was when we held a seminar on legal education in Smargon [Grodno region] at the editorial offices of a newspaper. This is what happened: we simply didn't apply for permission because it was the editorial office of a pro-democracy newspaper, therefore we didn't need to get permission from somebody to hold the seminar. However, when we held the seminar . . . a representative from the administration came. After the seminar, over the course of two weeks, everyone who was involved in the organization of the

[109] Ibid.

seminar was summoned to the KGB so they knew exactly who had held the seminar, what was said, and how we were able to hold it.

We held a conference entitled "Active methods of teaching legal disciplines." What could be political in that? Someone from the city Executive Committee came and sat and recorded everything that was said and then handed in a report. That was in the beginning of November [1998].[110]

The People's University

During the Soviet era, pro-democracy and human rights activists in Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Bloc, and Warsaw Pact countered restrictions on educational materials by engaging in underground educational initiatives. In countries of Eastern Europe, such as Czechoslovakia and Poland, these were named, "Flying Universities." These universities were essentially groups of professors who traveled across the country teaching subjects that were otherwise banned by the authorities. Tellingly, human rights and democracy activists in Belarus have come to adopt the concept in response to the authoritarian rule of President Lukashenka.

In 1995, a group of activists from the Belarusian People's Front (BPF) created a research center called "The Belarusian Perspective." The center conducts lectures and short political education seminars. However, the organizers felt that the format of short seminars was inadequate for an educational program and decided to return to an earlier format under which they had worked from 1989-1991, called "The People's University" (PU). The PU's vice-rector, Yury Khodyko, explained to Human Rights Watch the reason for the revival and the conditions under which the university worked in its first incarnation:

In the beginning, they held lectures on political education, mainly in the form of short-term seminars . . . it was worth doing while the 12th and 13th Supreme Soviets were still working; there were comparatively liberal conditions. Those lectures and seminars were held all over Belarus. Experience has shown that a single two-day seminar with around ten hours of work is not very effective, because there is not much information and it turns out to be fragmented. Therefore, in the autumn of 1997, we decided to return to the idea of the PU which we tried at the beginning of democratization. In Minsk the PU worked for three years — 1989 to 1991. Then, its true, the program was more narrow but conditions were splendid. There were no problems with premises: we rented large halls and usually several hundred people attended the lectures. Then it became harder . . . .[111]

The latest incarnation of the Belarusian People's University has been operating since November 1997. Since that time, the university has been teaching weekend classes on a variety of subjects, including four core subjects of economics, politics, Belarusian history, and history of Belarusian culture, along with optional courses concerning issues such as freedom of the press, human rights, trade union activity, and youth organizations. However, the university has operated in the face of a constant pattern of obstruction from local government authorities, largely through the denial of access to premises in which to hold classes. The near monopoly of state ownership of building space has facilitated this policy of state obstruction, while private landlords are easily intimidated by authorities. This in turn has led the People's University to conclude rental agreements through a third party, to use private apartments to hold classes, and to arrange alternative venues. The university's head, Valentin Golubev, described the situation:

It is very difficult for any public organization to remain in the same place for more than a year. The difficulties are with the renting of premises. Even if we pay money, even if we pay a lot of money, then those who rent us the premises are given specific terms. They are simply warned [by the authorities]: get rid of

[110] Human Rights Watch interview, Grodno, February 10, 1999.
[111] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 9, 1999.

these people. [The landlords] then come to us and say "we like and respect you, it was very pleasant having you, you paid us the rent properly and on time, but we cannot fight with the authorities."[112]

[112] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, November 4, 1998.

Additionally, Golubev alleges that city authorities threaten the landlords with tax inspections, a tool of harassment familiar to independent newspapers.[113]

The People's University's academic secretary, Vladimir Antsulevich, clearly sees official involvement in the People's University's difficulties in obtaining premises. He told Human Rights Watch:

> We always come into conflict with the same thing: we have to get the permission of the local authorities. And in every region, there is a regional authority order stating that lectures are "public meetings" [and thus subject to laws requiring prior permission of the authorities].[114] We have to get such permission; otherwise not a single proprietor will allow us [to hold classes].[115]

The People's University's activities have attracted the attention of the president with the organization feeling an immediate effect. In a March 17, 1998 speech, President Lukashenka insinuated that the West was funding an insurrection campaign in Belarus, and pointed to the Peoples' University in particular:

> I received some information very recently: Do you remember how everyone dismissed reports about $32 million being given to the opposition. But their programs in the regions are already being financed now! All those *people's universities* [emphasis added] have started working, and the opposition has brought in those who march in the streets to teach there. They have given themselves very decent salaries. Why do you think they shout at those opposition rallies? I have watched attentively the tape of the latest opposition rally that has been given to me. I understand perfectly well who shouts and how much they were paid to shout. Moreover, 5 million ECU — you can work out how much it is in dollars, about $7 million — was recently sent to Belarus for the sole purpose of funding the opposition — the opposition press, opposition journalists, and researchers. They select our students opposed to the Lukashenka regime, and they are willing to educate them in the West for this money. They are fleeing to Western universities to study there. This is a whole mighty program.[116]

Antsulevich described the immediate effect of the president's comments on the work of the Peoples' University:

> Last year, in one of President Lukashenka's speeches, he said that in different cities in Belarus the People's University is springing up, in which well-known oppositionists are working. Instantly, the local authority organs reacted and we were to all intents and purposes thrown out of all the premises which we had rented.
>
> The proprietors of the halls used any pretext to refuse to rent us the premises . . . I can only say that in almost every city something has happened. This year we had such an occurrence in Pinsk. We rented a library, but after the first day of classes they refused to rent it to us. It was clear that the ban had come from the city executive committee.[117]

The People's University, according to Antsulevich, has subsequently been able to secure a written rental agreement only through a third party. He explained:

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[113] See "Turning Back the Clock," A Human Rights Watch short report, New York, July 1998.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Human Rights Watch interview, Minsk, February 9, 1999.
[116] Minsk Radio, Minsk, March 17, 1998, cited in World News Connection.
[117] Human Rights Watch interview with Vladimir Antsulevich, Minsk, February 9, 1999.

> In a few cities, we've succeeded in concluding a rental agreement in the name of another organization, which also by its statute has the right to undertake educational work and they work it out so that they officially invite our specialists [to give lectures]. That's how we give lectures undercover. There are difficulties, but the problem is that we don't have any documents anywhere that show that our rights are being violated, that we have been refused something. The authorities have learned to [violate our rights] through a telephone call and oral command.[118]

Antsulevich said they have been forced to think up alternative arrangements in order to thwart moves by local authorities to obstruct their activities:

> In some cities the matter goes as far as a complete conspiracy. For example, in Bobruisk we rent a cafe, a regular cafe, which is open in the evenings as a cafe and in the first half of the day we push the tables together and hold classes. It often happens that the cafe is busy and those days there are four alternate locations where we can hold the classes. And no one even among those attending the classes knows on each occasion where the classes will be held. People come to the cafe and then with our leaders move to the other room . . . otherwise, if we announce in advance that in such a place the lectures will be held, then we can arrive and find the place locked because the fire-service discovered some kind of fire-safety violation and closed the room. We're so used to petty meanness that we don't even pay attention to it . . . we find a solution in each city and the lectures continue.[119]

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

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Human Rights Watch assumes full responsibility for the contents of the report.

* * *

Perina, Josh Sherwin, and Natasha Zaretsky are associates. Peter Osnos is the chair of the advisory committee and Alice Henkin is vice chair.

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