

## **Aleksandr Milinkevich**

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Political prisoners and political repression are hot topics for Belarus. During the last year, the practice of preventive detentions has become popular before civic and political. For instance, the police did not detain any participants of the European March in October. However, according to human rights defenders, 50 people were detained and received fines and short jail sentences 30 days before the rally. This figure does not include the people who were detained up to three hours. It is not always easy to collect all information about such cases, but we know about more than 100 of such cases. Mainly, pro-democratic activists are charged with disorderly conduct and participation in unauthorized gatherings. Most often police officers testify as witnesses in such trials, or verdicts are made without any testimonial evidence. It is not always possible to provide legal assistance to them. Attention to such cases is insufficient; as of today the solution to the problem of preventive detentions has not been found.

People who we continue to talk about as political prisoners:

Mikalai Autokhovich was sentenced to 3 years and 6 months of imprisonment for an economic crime;

Dzmitry Dashkevich was sentenced to 1.5 years of imprisonment for participation in an unregistered organization. Less than a month ago, Dzmitry Dashkevich was tried again. The authorities charged him with refusal to provide testimonial evidence. This time he was punished with a fine, but the trial deprived him of the hope for early release or amnesty;

Alexander Kazulin was sentenced to 5.5 years of imprisonment for malicious hooliganism and participation in actions that breach public order;

Andrei Klimau was sentenced to 2.5 years for an article on the internet, which, in the opinion of the authorities, called for the overthrow of the constitutional system. The trial over Andrei Klimau was held in a complete information blackout -- his family was simply concerned about Andrei's life. Klimau had a stroke during the investigation. A month ago he was transferred to Mazyr prison, and his family did not receive his letters for a long time. Klimau is the first political prisoner in Belarus, who was given a sentence in a medium security prison;

Yury Liavonau was sentenced together with Mikalai Autokhovich for 3.5 years of imprisonment on charges of an economic crime.

Artur Finkevich was sentenced to 2 years of restricted liberty for political graffiti. Less than two months ago, Artur Finkevich was charged with violation of the prison regime. The case has already been sent to court. Artur faces a new sentence of up to 3 years of imprisonment.

Release of all political prisoners is a necessary demand to be made to the regime. However, at present, the European Union has active communication with our authorities, and does not insist on this condition.

In the end, I want to speak about solidarity. Solidarity and support of every repressed citizen and every civic activist destroys fear. We are doing that inside the country, but international campaigns of solidarity are also very important. This creates both the international response and much needed support to Belarusian democratic activists.