

HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD 2021

Background document

Lilya Vlasova, Maksim Znak, Dmitry Laevski and Leanid Sudalenko

The purpose of the CCBE Human Rights Award is to highlight the work of one or more lawyers or lawyers' organisations which have demonstrated outstanding commitment and sacrifice in upholding fundamental values. The award is granted to one or more lawyers or to a lawyers' organisations which have brought honour to the legal profession by upholding the highest values of professional and personal conduct in the field of human rights.

Following the recommendation of the CCBE Human Rights Committee, the CCBE decided to grant the CCBE Human Rights Award 2021 to Belarusian lawyers Lilya Vlasova, Maksim Znak, Dmitry Laevski and Leanid Sudalenko for their courage, determination and commitment to defending citizens' fundamental rights and the rule of law in Belarus.

With this award, the CCBE also wishes to extend its support to all Belarusian lawyers who fight for the respect of the rule of law and the core values of the legal profession while risking their freedom and opportunity to practice.

Lilya Vlasova

Founder of one of the first independent law firms in Belarus in 1990, after the dismantling of the USSR, she specialised in mediation, especially constitutional mediation. In 2012, she established the Centre for Mediation and Negotiation in Minsk. Her law firm, Vlasova Mikhel & Partners, was established in 1990 as one of the first private law practice in the Republic of Belarus. The firm's achievements have previously been recognised on numerous occasions, notably by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus

On 19 August 2020, she joined the Belarusian Coordination Council, which advocates for a democratic transition of power after the elections that enabled President Lukashenko to remain in power.

The next day, Prosecutor General Konyuk initiated criminal proceedings against the Council members for attempted coup d'état and undermining national security.

Lilya Vlasova was arrested on 31 August 2020 and remains in detention to this day despite protests from international lawyers' organisations.

➤ **CCBE actions in her support:**

- [Concerns regarding the situation of lawyers in Belarus \(17/08/2020\)](#)
- [Arrest of lawyer Lilia Vlasova \(02/09/2020\)](#)

Maksim Znak

Lawyer Maksim Znak represented many clients in politically sensitive cases, including Viktor Babaryka, who ran for the President of the Republic of Belarus, but was not allowed to register as a candidate and was recognised as a political prisoner. He was also the lawyer of the former presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, on whose behalf he created the Coordination Council. As a member of the Presidium of the Coordinating Council, Maksim Znak was providing legal assistance as a lawyer.

Maksim Znak was detained on 9 September 2020, allegedly suspected of “aiming at destabilising the socio-political, economic situation and public awareness in the country, causing harm to the national security of the Republic of Belarus”. He remained in preventive detention until 6 September 2021, after which he was sentenced by the Minsk Regional Court to 10 years in prison on charges of “calls for action against national security”, “conspiracy to seize power” and “creation and administration of an extremist formation” (Art. 361, 357 and 361-1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus).

In this regard, it is believed that his long preventive detention and ongoing imprisonment are solely based on the work he has performed as a lawyer in politically sensitive cases and in the defence of citizens’ fundamental rights in Belarus.

Maksim Znak is also one of the winner of the Lawyers for Lawyers Award 2021.

➤ **CCBE actions in his support:**

- [02/08/2021: Statement on the mounting repression against Belarusian lawyers and the disbarment](#)
- [Concerns regarding the situation of lawyers in Belarus \(17/08/2020\)](#)
- [Statement in connection with the detention of Belarusian lawyers Ilya Salei and Maksim Znak](#)
- [Detention of lawyers Ilya Salei and Maksim Znak \(24/09/2020\)](#)
- [Continued detention of lawyer Maxim Znak \(25/11/2020\)](#)
- [Imprisonment of lawyer Maxim Znak \(28/09/2021\)](#)

Dmitry Laevski

Lawyer Dmitry Laevski is one of the most prominent and unique figures in the Belarusian legal community. He has on many occasion addressed about the situation of the rule of law in Belarus, the independence of the judiciary and the legal profession, the right to pursue a legal profession, and the right to defence, enhancing the level of legal culture among citizens and raising awareness of the international community about the situation in Belarus. He has also actively represented political prisoners in court, including lawyer Maksim Znak.

In 2012 he had to cease his activities as a lawyer due to pressure from the Belarusian authorities, following his defence of Ales Bialiatski. In spring 2021, he was reprimanded for publicly expressing his views on the amendments to the Law in Legal Practice.

He was then disbarred by the decision of the Minsk City Bar Association on 9 July 2021 after two disciplinary proceedings against him that took place on 8 July 2021. The first concerned the judicial appeal to the previously made decision of the disciplinary commission of the Minsk City Bar Association on reprimanding him for his Facebook post, commenting about the recent amendments to the Law on Legal Practice. The second one – as a result of which he was eventually disbarred – concerned the statement made during his client Viktor Babaryka’s hearing, which hinted at the innocence of Babaryka’s co-defendants, who pleaded guilty during the trial. The grounds for his disbarment were therefore clearly linked to lawyer Dmitry Laevski’s procedural position and the realisation of his legal defence mission.

➤ **CCBE actions in his support:**

- [02/08/2021: Statement on the mounting repression against Belarusian lawyers and the disbarment](#)
- [Concerns regarding the situation of lawyers in Belarus \(17/08/2020\)](#)

- [Disbarment of lawyers in Belarus – letter to the Chairmen of the Belarusian Regional Bar Association and of the Minsk City Bar Association \(04/08/2021\)](#)
- [Disbarment of lawyers in Belarus \(04/08/2021\)](#)

Leanid Sudalenko

Leanid Sudalenko is a human rights defender and head of the Gomel branch of the Justice Initiative, an association that provides legal assistance to victims of human rights violations and specialising in the preparation of individual complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee. He actively campaigns for the abolition of the death penalty in Belarus, the last European country to apply it.

After a search in 2015, his office was searched again on 5 January 2021 and over 300 items were seized, including his computer and bank cards. He was questioned about the cases of the human rights defenders and activists he defends. Also in 2015, he and his family received death threats, which the police refused to investigate. On 14 October 2015, Leanid Sudalenko was charged with disobeying the lawful demands of persons in the execution of their duties after searches made against him by the police.

On 18 January, Leanid Sudalenko was arrested on charges of “organising, financing, training and preparation of actions grossly violating public order and financing such activities” under parts 1 and 2 of Article 342 of the Criminal Code, and has been detained since then. The evidence used to support the accusation against Leanid Sudalenko are connected to his human rights work, particularly his online activity.

➤ **CCBE actions in his support:**

- [Concerns regarding the case of Leanid Sudalenko, a human rights lawyer \(03/12/2015\)](#)
- [Concerns regarding the situation of lawyers in Belarus \(17/08/2020\)](#)
- [Judicial harassment of lawyer Leanid Sudalenka \(20/01/2021\)](#)