



**“Right to Choose”**  
**Election Monitoring Campaign of 2015 Presidential Elections**  
*Interim Report #2*

August 24, 2015.

*“Right to Choose-2015” campaign conducts long-term monitoring of the election campaign in all regions of Belarus through its regional representatives. This report is the second document on the findings of long-term monitoring that covers the period of signature collection conducted by the initiative groups from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July to the 21<sup>st</sup> of August. By the Election Day scheduled for the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, the campaign will distribute four more reports on findings of long-term observation \*.*

**General Conclusions**

1. The stage of collection of signatures by the initiative groups for the nomination of candidates for the presidency was marked by the inequality of conditions: oppositional nominees have faced obstacles in their work, while the initiative group of Alexander Lukashenko has operated in the more favorable conditions. Respective state bodies have demonstrated no reaction to the reports of violations conducted by acting President’s initiative group.
2. Cases of violent attacks against members of the initiative groups of opposition, the suspension of legal pickets for collection of signatures by the police, illegal pressure applied by the territorial election commissions (TECs) and the administration of public enterprises on the members of initiative groups nominating candidates of the opposition, as well as other examples of interfering with their activities concerning collection of signatures were recorded.
3. There were numerous violations on the part of the initiative group nominating the incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko as a presidential candidate, in particular: participation of the administration of public enterprises and institutions in the process of collecting signatures, as well as other ways of using administrative resources in order to lay citizens under the necessity of putting their signatures in support of nomination of this candidate, collection of signatures by persons who were not members of the initiative group, collection of signatures in prohibited places, violations of the procedure for filling out the signature lists, distribution of newspapers and other violations.
4. The Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus on Holding Elections and Republican Referenda (CEC) and the TECs did not conduct fair investigation of numerous complaints on violations committed by the initiative group of A. Lukashenko: observers have not recorded a single case where the commission would recognize the fact of violation on the part of this initiative group (in spite of abundant proof of violations revealed in photo content and attestation of eyewitnesses).

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\* *“Right to Choose-2015” is an election monitoring campaign founded to counter, record and react at violations of election law at all stages of Presidential electoral campaign. The campaign will strive to minimize election fraud at each polling place where its observers will be deployed. It intends to deploy not less than 1,500 observers in all regions of Belarus. The campaign unites eight political forces: Belarusian People’s Front (BPF), Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD), Belarusian Social-Democratic Party “Gramada” (BSDP-G), “For Freedom” Movement, “Tell the Truth!” Civic Campaign, “The Greens” party, organizing committee of Party of Freedom and Progress (PFP), Belarusian Trade Union of Radio-Electronic Industry (REP). Its members have experience of monitoring Parliamentary elections of 2008 and 2012, 2010 Presidential elections and local elections of 2014.*



**1. Socio-political situation in the country during the period of collection of signatures**

**New political prisoners in Belarus.** On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, 2015, officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs detained five youth activists: Maxim Pekarskiy, Vadim Zharomskiy, Vyacheslav Kasinerov Yaroslav Ul'yanenkov and a Russian citizen Pavel (his last name is unknown). The latter two were later released on their own recognizance not to leave town. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, Maxim Pekarskiy and Vadim Zharomskiy were accused of painting a political graffiti on the fence near the building located on Olshevskogo lane and on the building situated on Lyn'kova street under Part 2 of Article 339 of the Criminal Code (“Hooliganism committed by a group of persons”) and destruction of property owned by an individual entrepreneur (a billboard featuring police officers) and located on Goretского street in Minsk under Article 341 of the Criminal Code (“Desecration of facilities and property damage”). According to the human rights center “Viasna”, the existence of political motives in the actions of public authorities aimed at strengthening the authority of the subject of power, allows qualifying M. Pekarskiy, V. Zharomskiy, V. Kasinerov as political prisoners.

**The release of six political prisoners does not change the nature of the political regime and does not have a fundamental effect on the conditions of holding presidential election.** On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August it has become known that the president has pardoned six prisoners: M. Dziadok, Yu. Rubtsou, A. Prakapenka I. Alinevich, Ja. Vaskovich, and especially 2010 Presidential candidate M. Statkevich. However, the nature of the discharge in the form of a pardon means that the political prisoners were released on non-rehabilitating grounds. Terms and conditions of legal status of the released politicians (including those related to having a criminal record as well as other restrictions on rights) are still unknown as of the date of writing this report. Release of political prisoners took place a day after the collection of signatures had finished, while a number of initiative groups of the opposition spoke for the need to release the political prisoners. There was an attempt to register the initiative group for nominating Statkevich as a presidential candidate prior to the start of procedure of collection of signatures, but the CEC has refused to register it.

**Refusals to register political parties and coercion of their members.** In July 2015 the founders of the Belarusian Christian Democracy applied for registration of their party for the fifth time. However, the Ministry of Justice has refused to register BCD once again, while in the course of examination of registration documents there were documented attempts aimed at forcing the founders of the party to renounce their membership in the opposition alliance (in the cities of Klichev and Verkhnedvinsk). The absence of registration deprives a number of parties and associations of the opportunity to participate in the electoral process including the nomination of their representatives and appointment of observers to the election commissions. Moreover, any activity within the framework of non-registered parties or associations is prohibited and qualified as a criminal offense, which results in punishment by imprisonment for up to two years under Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code.

**Freedom of assembly remains limited even during the collection of signatures.** Despite the fact that the initiative groups have been able to organize pickets in any of the non-prohibited places during the collection of signatures without prior notice, the rest of public actions remain under a de facto ban: state authorities do not give the required permission. For example, the initiative group of Tatiana Korotkevich was banned from making a bike ride on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July in Minsk because of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of proclamation of the Declaration of Sovereignty of Belarus: officials of the Executive Committee of Minsk have informed the politician that such bike ride will be interpreted as an ineligible mass event and its participants will be brought to administrative responsibility.



**Coercion of independent journalists has not stopped with the beginning of the stage of signature collection.** Harassment of journalists, who cooperate with the foreign media and do not have the accreditation of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, continues. Journalists Alexander Levchuk, Konstantin Zhukovskiy and Natalia Krivoshei were sentenced to pay an administrative fine in the first week of July, journalist Dmitry Lupach was fined on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, journalist Tatiana Smotkina was fined on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July. Same as before, it was not the content of the information materials, but the fact of their appearance in the foreign media that formed the basis for the application of sanctions against journalists under Part 2 of Article 22.9 of the Code of Administrative Offences. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August in the town of Berezovka (Grodno oblast) policemen wearing civilian clothes conducted a search of dwelling house of the journalist Yuriy Deshuk who is a member of the BPF Party. The police officers have ransacked his house and took away a computer and an old non-operational printer.

## **2. The legal environment of collecting signatures**

According to the requirements of the Electoral Code, the collection of signatures was held between July 23 and August 21. Eight registered initiative groups nominating their candidates for the presidency had to collect at least 100,000 signatures of voters. Each voter had the right to put a signature in support of several candidates, but no more than one signature in favor of the nomination of each supported candidate.

Determination of places prohibited for picketing in order to collect voters' signatures was completed according to the schedule of the electoral campaign before the 17<sup>th</sup> of July. According to findings of observers-members of "Right to Choose-2015" campaign, the local authorities did not establish excessive restrictions for initiative groups when determining the places prohibited for collection of signatures in most cases. However, in some cities the list of places, in which the collection of signatures is prohibited, includes the most populous areas. Local authorities were not guided by the unified principles when determining the places prohibited for collection of signatures; criteria for determining prohibited places were different in each city.

The participation of the administration in the process of collecting signatures, as well as coercion to collect signatures and rewards for voters' signatures are prohibited. Initiative groups are banned from involving inferiors or otherwise subordinated employees in activities aimed at promoting nomination of a candidate. Failure to do so may provide grounds for issuing a warning or refusal of registration of a presidential candidate.

## **3. Activities of initiative groups and coercion of their members**

The CEC has adopted a decision to register 8 initiative groups representing the following presidential candidates: Alexander Lukashenko (president in office), Sergei Kalyakin (Belarusian Left Party "Fair World"), Sergei Haidukevich (Liberal Democratic Party), Tatiana Korotkevich (member of the Belarusian Social Democratic party (Hramada), whose nomination is supported by the "Tell the Truth" campaign and the BPF Party), Anatoly Lebedko (United Civic Party), Victor Tereshchenko (non-partisan), Zhanna Romanovskaya (non-partisan) and Nikolai Ulakhovich (Belarusian Patriotic Party).



*Table 1. Quantitative composition of initiative groups and number of collected signatures*

No.	Name of the person nominated as a candidate	Number of members in the initiative group	Number of collected signatures (according to the CEC)
1	Aleksandr Lukashenko	10,577	1,761,145
2	Sergei Haidukevich	2,481	140,735
3	Tatiana Korotkevich	1,993	107,299
4	Sergei Kalyakin	1,510	48
5	Nikolai Ulakhovich	1,426	159,805
6	Anatoliy Lebedko	977	-
7	Victor Tereshchenko	946	130,404
8	Zhanna Romanovskaya	110	780

Initiative groups of Anatoliy Lebedko and Sergei Kalyakin have stated that they were unable to collect hundred thousand signatures required for nomination of their candidates. According to the initiative group of Sergei Kalyakin, only 64 thousand signatures have been collected in favor of their candidate. Observers-members of “Right to Choose-2015” campaign have reported that all initiative groups were collecting signatures by means of picketing. There were only a few pickets of initiative groups of Nikolai Ulakhovich and Zhanna Romanovskaya recorded.

**Thematic pickets.** Some members of initiative groups are actively using the election campaign to draw attention to political issues. On 11<sup>th</sup> of August in the city of Bobruisk, members of initiative groups of Anatoliy Lebedko and Tatiana Korotkevich wore t-shirts featuring the photo of political prisoner Mikola Statkevich. They also placed his photo on their stands and provided information about the personality of this political prisoner of Belarus during the conversations with the citizens. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, the initiative group of Anatoliy Lebedko conducted a picket in the city of Minsk dedicated to the theme of disappearance of opposition politicians; on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August this initiative group held a picket on the theme of political prisoners and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August it held a thematic picket “There are no fair elections without the freedom of speech”. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, the initiative group of Tatiana Korotkevich has held a picket on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of the Declaration of Sovereignty of Belarus on the Independence avenue in Minsk; on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August the initiative group has held a thematic picket “The prospect of the national flag”. Thematic pickets conducted by the opposition faced resistance from the state authorities and TECs: during the picket, which was conducted on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, the TEC has issued a verbal warning (it was not based on the rule of law) to Anatoliy Lebedko, while on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August the picket of Tatiana Korotkevich was not held on the preannounced bridge, because this bridge was suddenly closed for repairs.



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On the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, members of the initiative group of Anatoliy Lebedko organized a picket opposite the main building of KGB in Minsk, where they distributed party literature and demanded the release of political prisoners. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, the municipal TEC in the city of Minsk has requested the head of Anatoliy Lebedko's initiative group Viktor Kornienko to stop violating the law and refrain from distributing campaign materials.

Evidence of interference with the activities of the initiative groups collecting signatures for nomination was provided by the observers, members of the initiative groups and political parties.

**Arrests of members of the initiative group.** On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, Valentin Tishkov, who is a member of the initiative group of Tatiana Karatkevich, was arrested by police patrol and taken to the police department in the city of Molodechno. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, members of the BPF Party Alexander Shevtsov and Valentina Schetnikova, who are also members of the initiative group for nominating Tatiana Korotkevich as a presidential candidate, were detained in the city of Mogilev. The BPF Party activist was collecting signatures under white-red-white flag at the Vilnius market in the administrative center of the Mogilev oblast. According to the chairman of the Mogilev city branch of the party organization Valentina Schetnikova, three officers of the Special Designation Police Detachment tried to take the flag away from Alexander Shevtsov, but the activist was protecting this symbol. Eventually, they took both him and the flag to the police station.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, the activist of the United Civic Party Alina Litvinchuk was detained directly at the train station in the city of Brest right after her arrival from Minsk, while she was carrying the accreditations of members of the initiative group of the leader of the United Civic Party Anatoliy Lebedko. Consequently, the initiative group for nominating Anatoliy Lebedko as a presidential candidate in Brest was forced to delay the beginning of collection of signatures due to the absence of accreditations.

**Interference with collection of signatures on the part of the administrations of enterprises.** Observers from Gomel oblast reported that employees of the "Belorusneft" company have refused to put signatures for opposition candidates on the grounds that the company's administration threatened them with dismissal for such an act. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, member of the initiative group of Anatoly Lebedko was not allowed to collect signatures for the nomination of the leader of the United Civic Party as a presidential candidate by security guards of Zhdanovichi market in Minsk rayon.

**Attacks on pickets.** On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, a hooligan attack on the pickets in support of Tatiana Korotkevich took place in the city of Novopolotsk. As a result of the incident, a report was filed to the police department and the municipal commission on elections. Similar acts of hooliganism were committed during pickets against activists collecting signatures in favor of Anatoliy Lebedko in the city of Grodno on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August. Unidentified men tried to prevent the collection of signatures by the initiative group of Tatiana Korotkevich on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August in the city of Brest on Sovetskaya Street during the celebration of the City Day.

**Searches of premises.** On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, search of apartment of member of BPF party and member of Tatiana Korotkevich's initiative group Witold Ashurkov, was conducted in the town of Berezovka in Grodno oblast. Employees of the investigative committee have seized the computer, printer and flash card that belonged to the party activist. According to Witold Ashurkov, this search resulted from the flash mob, which was recently staged by unknown persons near the transport checkpoint of glass wool production plant "Neman". Later on, searches were conducted in the apartments of seven more



residents of Berezovka, including the apartments of members of the BPF Party and members of the initiative group of Tatiana Korotkevich.

#### **4. Violations on the part of the initiative group of Alexander Lukashenko**

According to Article 61 of the Electoral Code, participation of administrations of organizations and companies in the process of collecting signatures, as well as coercion in the process of collecting signatures and giving rewards to the voters for signatures are not allowed. Failure to do so may provide grounds for refusal of registration of a presidential candidate. This provision of the legislation was violated by the initiative group for nominating Alexander Lukashenko on the whole territory of Belarus.

**The use of public funding for the purpose of collecting signatures.** The signatures for nominating Alexander Lukashenko were collected in pickets decorated by the emblems of Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM). These organizations are being funded directly by the state using national and local budgets: for example, 43 billion rubles were allocated in the national budget-2014 for funding the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. Moreover, these organizations enjoy preferential rates when renting premises of state property.

**Participation of administration in the process of organization of collection of signatures.** According to reports of the “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” campaign, members of staff of secondary school No. 5 in Krichev, “Krichevsky State Vocational College of Agronomy”, “Krichevsky plant of rubber products” were ordered to bring their passports and put their signatures in support of A.Lukashenko. Similar actions were performed by the administration of the affiliated branch of OJSC “BelAZ” – “Mogilev S.M.Kirov Autoworks”, “Mogilev Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Center” and others. The administration of Electromechanical Plant in Brest organized collection of signatures among employees in favor of A. Lukashenko during the working time. According to employees of the “Mogilevkhimvolokno” company (Mogilev), the administration of the enterprise has been organizing collection of signatures in favor of A. Lukashenko during the working time starting from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July; moreover, the signatures were not collected by the authorized members of the initiative group. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, the physician of municipal polyclinic No. 6 in the city of Grodno during her visit to the patient tried to convince the latter to sign up for the nomination of A.Lukashenko. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, journalists and human rights activist Victor Odinochenko have identified 12 persons in the secondary school No. 27 in the city of Homel who were sitting near the director's office and holding their passports in their hands. They explained that they came here “to elect the President”. Member of staff of employment center in the city of Soligorsk has demanded in a commanding tone that the visitors should sign up for nomination of A.Lukashenko. In the town of Mikoshevichi participation of administration in the process of collecting signatures in favor of A. Lukashenko was recorded in the district hospital and “Granite” enterprise. In the town of Berezovka in Lidskiy district, the Head of section in Housing Maintaining Service ordered his subordinates (who were not members of the initiative group) to collect at least one signature each and 16 signatures in total in favor of for A.Lukashenko. In Minsk, the administration of the “Atlas” plant for production of refrigerators has organized collection of signatures for nomination of Alexander Lukashenko with the involvement of masters of workshops.

**Coercion to put signatures in favor of A.Lukashenko.** Many enterprises in the country were pressuring their employees to put signatures in support of A. Lukashenko during working hours. In particular, this was the case with the workshops of the Gomel branch of the Belarusian Railway,



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Dobrush Porcelain Factory, Dobrush paper mill and Dobrush bread production plant. Representatives of the administration of BelAZ Company (Zhodino), “Naftan” oil refining plant (Novopolotsk), “Polesyeelectromash” enterprise (Luninets) were collecting signatures during working hours. Signature collectors including representatives of the administrations sometimes had signature sheets where personal data column had already been filled out. If employees flatly refused to put their signatures, signature collectors nevertheless tried to persuade them by referring to an approved plan for collecting signatures. Similar cases were also recorded in the city of Bobruisk, Mogilev, Krichev, “Smolevicheskaya Broiler Poultry Farm” company etc.

According to observers, the head of the post office No.15 in the city of Polotsk, Mrs. Borodich, was collecting signatures in favor of A. Lukashenko at the workplace during working hours. According to information provided by the employee of OJSC “Belaruskaliy”, one of the heads of the unit in this company had given the order to all employees of subordinate unit to bring their passports and put their signatures in favor of the President in office. His secretary went directly to the mines and collected signatures. According to the military servants, officers and warrant officers of the 38th brigade located in Brest received an army order to attend the meetings with the initiative group of A. Lukashenko, which were organized and held at the end of July; officers present at these meetings were “advised” to sign up in support of the Supreme Commander, who was also the presidential candidate at the same time.

Collection of signatures in support of nomination of a candidate for President Alexander Lukashenko was conducted on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August in branch No. 1 of central municipal polyclinic in the city of Gomel. According to medical officer, healthcare workers of municipal polyclinic were told to come to the assembly hall of polyclinic with their passports on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August between 12.00 and 14.00. The woman who was present in the assembly hall introduced herself as member of the initiative group for nominating presidential candidate Alexander Lukashenko, and then she collected signatures. On condition of anonymity, residents of Gomel city informed that signatures in support of A. Lukashenko were collected in Gomel regional clinical hospital. Moreover, all the medical officers were told to sign up for A. Lukashenko in a mandatory manner in order “not to have any problems afterwards”. The office of the director of the school No. 27 in the city of Gomel was used during working hours as a place for collecting signatures of technical staff in support of the incumbent president. Residents of Gomel also reported that the signatures in favor for A. Lukashenko were collected at the railway-car repair plant and concrete products plant. The participants of “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” campaign have been informed that on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July the administration of “Gomelkabel” company has forcibly collected signatures in favor of Alexander Lukashenko during working hours. Moreover, the administration of “Gomelkabel” threatened employees with dismissal, should they refuse to sign up for A. Lukashenko, since there is a contract system of employment at the enterprise. As a result, a large number of employees of “Gomelkabel” took an extract from their passport at the personnel department and went to the entrance control post to put their signatures.

Initiative group of A. Lebedko has lodged complaints to the CEC concerning the facts of involuntary collection of signatures in favor of A. Lukashenko at the enterprises “Comintern” and “Gomselmash” in the city of Gomel.

**Collection of signatures using blank signature sheets by persons who are not members of the initiative group.** In the city of Zhodino a case was recorded when collectors of signatures in favor of A. Lukashenko allowed the voters to put their signatures on behalf of other voters. There were some cases recorded in the city Minsk when collectors of signatures for nominating Alexander Lukashenko offered voters to sign letters that did not contain any information about the person that collected signatures while the information about the person nominated as a presidential candidate was incomplete. Employees of “Amkodor” reported that the person in charge of ideology in



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the holding company has chosen one employee in every structural unit of the company and has given them all blank signature sheets, so that they could begin collecting signatures in support of Alexander Lukashenko.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, a member of the initiative group V.Astapuk was absent from the picket in the city of Brest at 13.00, while another person not authorized to collect signatures was doing the job instead of him: “assistant to a member of the initiative group of A.Lukashenko” M.Morozova collected the signature of the Lyudmila Korotych in front of an observer. The observer has noted that the members of the above-mentioned initiative group are using a book “Handbook of the assistant to a member of the initiative group” issued for mass circulation without imprint data. According to a member of A.Lukashenko’s initiative group Anna Pishchik, she received this handbook from the head of the ideology department of the Moscow district in the city of Brest.

In the city Minsk there were some cases recorded when pickets for collecting signatures in favor of A. Lukashenko were conducted in places prohibited for this purpose (for example, in the underground crosswalks), while members of other initiative groups were forbidden to collect signatures in these places.

According to one of the members of the initiative group of T.Korotkevich, during the process of collecting signatures in the city of Krichev citizens have told Tatiana Korotkevich that the Head of Economy Department of the municipal Executive Committee I.Prudnikova explained to the voters that they are not allowed to put their signatures in favor of other candidates, if they have already signed up for the nomination of Alexander Lukashenko.

**The abuse of mass media to publicize the collection of signatures for the incumbent.** State-owned media in their publications pay special attention to the pickets collecting signatures in favor of A. Lukashenko and describe them only in a positive way. The collection of signatures in favor of other candidates is rarely reported and is described in a neutral or negative way. TV program “Yak èsts” and its anchorman Alexei Mihalchenko, broadcasted on state TV channel ANT, is one of such examples. The program dedicated airtime on TV to Anatoly Lebedko and harshly criticized his work. Publications on the official website of the Minsk city executive committee cover the events related to collection of signatures with the predominant use of information dedicated to the pickets working in favor of A. Lukashenko. The corresponding complaints concerning these facts, lodged to the CEC by the initiative group of A. Lebedko, were not satisfied.

Representatives of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front appealed to the CEC with the complaint, in which they demanded to issue a warning to the initiative group of A. Lukashenko: the initiative group of A. Lukashenko composed of the members of the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus distributed printing publications in favor of its nominee near the supermarket “Centralniy” in Minsk where initiative groups of other candidates are collecting signatures by picketing with the assumption that distribution of any printed materials to voters is prohibited during the stage of collecting signatures. However, despite the fact that the act of violation was confirmed by the explanations of members of the initiative group of A. Lukashenko, the CEC still refused to sustain this appeal.