

HYBRID PROPAGANDA ATTACKS AGAINST DEMOCRATIC ACTIVISTS FROM BELARUS

The role of the Nasha Niva outlet in discrediting people and spreading false accusations, information manipulation, de-anonymisation and the creation of security threats for citizens of Belarus

19 October 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on an analysis of the entire body of publications by the online outlet Nasha Niva about participants in Belarus's democratic movement in exile in 2020–2026, as well as court, administrative and other documents. The cases examined do not exhaust the list of people and organisations against whom the outlet has conducted targeted discrediting campaigns.

Nasha Niva is registered in Lithuania as a non-profit public institution rather than as a mass medium, and it uses the brand of a historical early-20th-century newspaper without being its legal successor. Unlike the domains of other non-state media, which were liquidated by the Belarusian authorities, the outlet's domain nn.by continues to operate, and until 2021 its advertising partners included companies with state capital.

Key findings

The monitoring identified a consistent editorial practice of systematically discrediting participants in the democratic movement. The same techniques have been applied for years to the same circle of people:

- publication of grave accusations, including criminal ones — of links to the Belarusian and Russian security services, fraud, or preparation of crimes — citing anonymous or interested sources and without independent verification;
- political marginalisation through persistent labels (“conspiracy theorist”, “provocateur”, “radical critic”, “Tsikhanouskaya's opponent”) and the pathologisation of political dissent;
- guilt by association, whereby a person is defined through links with already stigmatised figures or a Russian context;
- manipulative headlines that distort the content of the articles themselves;
- disclosure of personal, family, medical and geolocation data;
- turning assumptions into “established facts” that then circulate in other media and in official documents.

The deliberate nature of this practice is confirmed by its asymmetric standards. When accusations concern people close to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office, the editors demand evidence, carry out their own verification and label the claims as “fake” or “conspiracy theory”. When comparable or graver accusations target other participants in the democratic movement, they are published without such verification, and errors are not corrected. The outlet has also systematically ridiculed and discredited campaigns by participants in the democratic movement aimed at freeing political prisoners, as well as their other initiatives.

A large share of those targeted have one thing in common: they are opponents of the Lukashenko regime who have not signed non-disclosure agreements with Tsikhanouskaya's Office and do not receive grants through structures linked to it. Such agreements exist, and participants are subject to financial penalties for breaching them. The outlet's editorial practice reproduces the methods of Belarus's state media: just as criticism of Lukashenko is excluded there and the formula “who if not Lukashenko” is imposed, criticism of Tsikhanouskaya is effectively excluded here and the formula “who if not Tsikhanouskaya” is imposed. Dissenters are portrayed as marginal figures, “provocateurs” and mentally unstable people.

With rare exceptions, in none of the cases cited did the outlet approach the people it wrote about for comment or clarification. This violates basic principles of professional ethics. The International Federation of Journalists' Global Charter of Ethics requires facts to be separated from comment and classifies slander, defamation and unfounded accusations as serious professional misconduct; the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics requires that the subjects of coverage be given the opportunity to respond to criticism and allegations. Where these criteria are not met, the outlet cannot be called independent journalism. In practice it acts as an analogue of propaganda and uses the same techniques as the Lukashenko regime: it brands and insults opponents, denies them a voice and presents its own opinion as fact. Such a working model is a clear hallmark of the tabloid press.

The comments section on the outlet's website deserves particular attention. According to the authors' observations, abusive comments are published under articles, including comments posted in the name of well-known people, while the subjects of the articles themselves, including persons mentioned in this report, are portrayed in a humiliating light and become targets of insults and defamation. According to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, which is binding on Council of Europe member states including Lithuania, a professional news portal that invites readers to comment on its content may be held liable for clearly unlawful comments if it does not remove them without delay (*Delfi AS v. Estonia*, Grand Chamber, 2015) [202, 203]. Given the systematic nature of such comments, there are grounds to believe that the editors may be complicit in their publication; these comments further shape a negative image of the people the outlet writes about.

Consequences

The outlet's publications reach beyond the media space. Through reprints, English-language retellings and private transmission they reach international structures and state bodies and are used in administrative, migration and judicial proceedings. Cases have been documented in which, following such false publications, people lost their accreditation, became subject to proceedings to strip them of refugee status and to designate them as a threat to national security, while the disclosure of their place of residence and work, family and medical information created threats to them and to their relatives in Belarus.

The outlet receives funding from Western countries: according to financial statements filed with the Lithuanian Register of Legal Entities, VšĮ "Nasha Niva Fund" received about EUR 3.7 million in 2022–2025 alone. No public information could be found on open competitive procedures through which this funding was awarded. In the authors' assessment, the funding is secured through lobbying by Tsikhanouskaya's Office. As a result, journalists become politically dependent on the Office and are compelled to follow its requests and recommendations, which in itself creates an element of censorship; resources are distributed without competition, and the quality of journalism declines significantly. Western taxpayers' money intended for the democratisation of Belarus is in effect being used to split the democratic movement. This discredits the institutions of the European Union and of national governments in the eyes of the broad Belarusian public.

Recommendations

In view of the above, an international audit of this case is warranted in order to stop the further discrediting of Belarus's democratic community at the expense of Western donors. The authors proceed from the position that censorship of the media is unacceptable and propose no measures restricting freedom of expression. The aim is to end the systematic discrediting, propaganda and dissemination of false information that strengthen Lukashenko's authoritarian regime. Accordingly, the authors recommend:

- to donors: suspend funding of Nasha Niva until a full international audit, involving the donors that provided funds, has been completed in order to establish the facts of discrediting;
- to the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Lithuania, where the outlet is registered: open proceedings to examine all instances of the outlet's funding and the intended use of the funds allocated;
- to donors and international partners: ensure open competitive procedures for awarding media grants that exclude political lobbying.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Nasha Niva: legal status, historical brand and position in Belarus

Nasha Niva is not a registered mass medium. The outlet is registered in Lithuania as a public institution (VšĮ) “Nasha Niva Fund” — a non-profit organisation with legal entity code 305965367, headed by Nastassia Rouda [164]. According to the organisation’s financial statements filed with the Lithuanian Register of Legal Entities, VšĮ “Nasha Niva Fund” received about EUR 3.7 million in 2022–2025 [204].

The current outlet was founded in 1991 and presents itself as the legal successor of the newspaper Nasha Niva of 1906–1915, which played a key role in the Belarusian national revival [188–190]. There is no organisational or legal continuity between them: today’s editorial team merely uses the historical name, and its claim to succession, given the editorial practice described in this report, misleads readers, donors and international partners [189, 191–193].

After 2021 the Belarusian authorities liquidated the domains of non-state media — TUT.BY, Reform.by, Euroradio and others [143–152]. Nasha Niva’s domain (nn.by), despite the outlet’s resources having been designated “extremist materials”, has been preserved and is still active, redirecting readers to nashaniva.com [153–155]. As early as 2020, when the domain was put up for auction for non-payment, it was returned to its owner without bidding, according to industry media, with the assistance of the Operational and Analytical Center under the President of Belarus (OAC) [156–158]. The OAC is one of the key structures of Lukashenko’s repressive apparatus: it controls the Belarusian internet and the .by domain zone, provides technical surveillance and takes part in the persecution of regime opponents; in terms of influence in the information sphere, the OAC surpasses the KGB [199].

For a long time, up to 2020–2021, the outlet’s advertising partners were the country’s largest companies, including companies with state capital. For example, the special project “Galoŭnyja mecenyaty Bielarusi” (“Belarus’s Leading Patrons”) was produced with the support of Belgazprombank, then owned by Russia’s state-controlled Gazprom and Gazprombank [159, 160]; the outlet also published joint content with the mobile operator velcom [198]. In Belarusian conditions such cooperation was possible only with the tacit or agreed permission of state structures, including the security services. By comparison, the TV channel Belsat did not even have accreditation in Belarus, while Charter 97 and Belarusian Partisan were blocked and could not carry advertising from companies operating in the country [161–163, 186, 187].

1.2. Subject of the monitoring

A presidential election was held in Belarus in 2020. The main alternative candidates, who together collected more than half a million signatures — Viktor Babaryka, Valery Tsepkalo and Siarhei Tsikhanouski (on whose behalf his wife submitted the documents) — were removed from the race: Babaryka and Tsikhanouski were arrested, Tsepkalo was refused registration and left the country [208]. Their campaign teams united and backed Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya — the only person from this circle whom the authorities allowed to stand. The election was not recognised by the international community and triggered mass protests. Immediately afterwards, Tsikhanouskaya was taken to the Lithuanian border accompanied by the head of the OAC, Andrei Pavlyuchenko, and received EUR 15,000 from him; she concealed this fact for five years and confirmed it only in 2025 [205, 206, 209]. “Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s Office” was set up in Vilnius, staffed by people who had not taken part in the events of 2020, as was the Coordination Council. The only objective indicator of Tsikhanouskaya’s current support is the Coordination Council election of May 2026: about 2,000 people responded to her call to take part [210]. This result is to a large extent a consequence of the systematic discrediting of participants in the democratic movement, including by outlets that ended up in exile. Alongside these structures, other politicians, parties and initiatives are active in exile; they are not part of these structures and often criticise them.

After 2020 all non-state socio-political media in Belarus were liquidated: their websites were blocked, newsrooms raided or designated “extremist”, and journalists arrested or forced to leave the country. By early 2022 alone, more than 50 media websites had been blocked and at least 400 media workers had left Belarus [207]. Zerkalo (formerly TUT.BY), Charter 97, Pozirk, Nasha Niva and other outlets now work from exile — without an advertising market or

subscriptions, mainly on donor funding — while the population inside the country is subjected to massive state and Russian propaganda.

Under these conditions, access to funding has become the decisive factor in a media outlet's survival. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office regularly calls on donors and governments to support Belarusian media and itself names the organisations it recommends supporting [207]. The lack of transparency in the distribution of funds has made journalists and bloggers dependent on a single political centre. One of the conditions for receiving resources has been the signing of agreements prohibiting criticism of Tsikhanouskaya's Office for 10 years under threat of a EUR 30,000 fine [61, 196, 197]. Such media adjust their editorial policy to the interests of that centre, do not allow criticism of it and discredit its opponents. Correcting the situation requires a review of current practice in supporting Belarusian media.

The subject of this monitoring is Nasha Niva's publications about participants in Belarus's democratic movement, as well as examples of propaganda and manipulation in those publications.

Each case is examined according to the same structure: what exactly the editors published; what in the publication was distorted, unverified or amplified; what evidence supports this; and what legal, reputational and other consequences followed for the person concerned.

With rare exceptions, in none of the cases cited did the outlet approach the people it wrote about for comment or clarification.

The subject of the analysis is not criticism as such — which remains a legitimate part of public debate — but recurring techniques by which unverified claims acquire the status of journalistically confirmed facts. These techniques are described in the next section.

1.3. Sources and method

The monitoring is based exclusively on open sources and on court, administrative and other documents that are referenced. The entire body of Nasha Niva's publications about the persons and structures named in the report for 2020–2026 was reviewed; only a small share of them is included in the report as examples. The editorial practice was assessed against international standards of journalistic ethics [200, 201]. Since the analysis concerns material already published, the editors' position is reflected in that material itself, and no separate comment was requested from them.

The authors of the report are themselves among the people mentioned in it. For this reason, every statement in the report is accompanied by a reference to a primary source — a publication, court decision or other document — and in preparing the text the authors sought to be as objective as possible.

2. MECHANISMS FOR DISCREDITING PARTICIPANTS IN BELARUS'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

The categories below describe not a legal qualification but a documented mechanism of harm. A single episode may fall into several categories at once.

Cross-cutting mechanism – lending an appearance of credibility. Once published by a professional media outlet, a rumour, unreliable information or an assumption acquires a new status: it becomes quotable, translatable, archivable and usable by other media, political actors, donors, international organisations or European state bodies.

Code	Category	Mechanism	What it covers
D	Discrediting	Reputational damage	Unproven or distorting accusations; a “Russian trail”; links with hostile security services or GUBOPiK; radicalism; disloyalty; guilt by association.
S	Stigmatisation and marginalisation	Pushing a participant out of the legitimate civic field	Portraying critics as “marginal”, “provocateurs”, “conspiracy theorists”, “mad”; pathologising constructive and well-founded criticism as “fixation”, “hate”, “unhealthy criticism”; systematically defining independent participants primarily as

Code	Category	Mechanism	What it covers
			“Tsikhanouskaya’s opponents” rather than as actors with their own agenda.
M	Manipulation	Distortion of meaning	Taking things out of context; selective presentation; substitution of the subject; turning an assumption into a fact; a headline that significantly amplifies or radically changes the meaning of the original information.
A	Amplification	Scaling up someone else’s accusation	An unverified grave accusation gains an audience, repetition, search visibility and further circulation through Nasha Niva.
L	Dangerous disclosure of information	Increased physical or digital vulnerability	Publication of names, roles, connections, documents, location and other information that may create a risk for a person, their family or network.
P	Violation of privacy / de-anonymisation	Intrusion into the private sphere	Nasha Niva collects and publishes addresses, information about family, pregnancy and health, personal documents, and data making it possible to identify people who may have needed protection and who did not consent to the collection and dissemination of their personal data.
R	Subsequent institutional use	The media narrative leaves the media space	A publication or the narrative it created later appears in administrative, judicial, migration, security or other state proceedings and can affect a person’s situation, including creating risks of deportation to Belarus or new criminal prosecution.

Each episode was checked step by step: what exactly has been proven, what the source — including an anonymous one — claims, and what the editors themselves add to it.

Particular attention is paid to “fact X → therefore Y” transitions, where a limited fact, an indirect indicator or an association turns into a categorical accusation, a political label or a claim of links with security services without a sufficient evidentiary basis.

It is comparison that reveals the asymmetric standard of proof: in some cases Nasha Niva’s editors carefully check, verify and qualify their conclusions, while in others — with comparable or graver accusations — they systematically fail to apply a comparable standard of verification and restraint.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN CASES

The table groups individual publications into the main documented cases. Several articles about one person or one persistent discrediting narrative are treated as a single case. The detailed chronology, sources and evidence are given below.

The cases presented in this monitoring are far from a complete list of the people and organisations against whom Nasha Niva has conducted targeted harassment campaigns.

Participant	Code	What the outlet does	Result
Anatoly Kotov, diplomat	D + M	Guilt by association through family and connections; the “staged disappearance” version is kept alongside evidence of abduction	The negative frame persists even after the investigation into Kotov’s abduction by the Russian security services
Veronika Tsepkalo, politician	D + S + M + A	Reduced to a conflict with Tsikhanouskaya; linked to a “Russian World adept” who had left the organisation years before she joined	A persistent pro-Russian association; neutral publications about her show the selectivity of the coverage
Vitaly Kondratenko, blogger	P + L	Combining his city, workplace and working hours	De-anonymisation and geolocation, risk of transnational repression
Dzmitry Bolkunets, political scientist	S + D + M + A	False biography, linking to Russia, ridiculing initiatives	Image of a “provocateur” with a “dubious reputation”
Dzmitry Skinderev, entrepreneur	D + S + M + P + L + R	The label “cooperation with GUBOPiK”, family data, information from closed databases	A negative dossier; later — “subject of the investigation” in migration proceedings

Participant	Code	What the outlet does	Result
Yevgeny Vilsky, politician, Narodnaya Hramada	D + M + A	A platform for unconfirmed accusations of links with security services; described through his attitude to Tsikhanouskaya	Private accusations become a quoted media narrative
Zianon Pazniak, politician	S + D + M	Framed through conflict with Tsikhanouskaya and the “mainstream” opposition	His historical role is displaced by the role of “opponent” and “marginal figure”
Oleg Borshchevsky, journalist	D + M + R	The threat of deportation called “complete nonsense”, although he had been ordered to leave Lithuania	Official and court data confirmed his real legal vulnerability
Volha Karach, human rights defender	D + S + M + A + P + R	Accusation of involvement in preparing Stryzhak’s murder, a “Russian trail”, “wants to unseat Tsikhanouskaya”, private life, guilt by association	Image of a “toxic” figure, later used in proceedings against her in Lithuania
Olga Semashko, journalist	P + L + M	Digital footprint turned into public identification as an “informant”; a version about her husband being an “agent”	A technical indicator turns into an accusation that affects the family
Siarhei Sparysh, politician, former political prisoner	S + M + A	After release — from hero to “marginal figure” defined by criticism of the Office	Political independence is replaced by labels
Pavel Kulazhenko, fighter of the Kalinouski Regiment	D + A	Unproven accusation of preparing an attempt on Stryzhak’s life	An interested source’s version becomes a public narrative
Pavel Usov, political scientist	S + D + M + A	Criticism labelled “unhealthy”, “hate”, “fixation”	Image of an “obsessed” critic instead of an expert
Siarhei Tsikhanouski, politician, former political prisoner	S + D + M + A + P	Labels “Lukashenko 2.0”, “Trojan horse”, “random person”, “dim-witted”	Image of a traumatised and immature politician, despite his programme and activities
Sviatlana Haluza, journalist	D + A + R	A conflicted source’s accusations of links with the KGB	Freedom House → Lithuanian MFA → loss of accreditation, threat of deportation
Narodnaya Hramada, party	D + M	Infiltration by a KGB agent presented as a characteristic of the party itself	A KGB operation turns into compromising material against the victim
Independent experts	S + M	Division into “for” and “against” Tsikhanouskaya	Expertise is replaced by a scale of loyalty
Yevgeny Karaulov, member of the Coordination Council	M + S	The quote “I said ‘yes’” put in the headline without the context of pressure	Impression of voluntary consent to cooperate with the KGB
Valery Tsepkalo, 2020 presidential candidate	D + S + M + A	A frame of the “Russian World” and conflict with Tsikhanouskaya based on Stryzhak’s assessments	Any action is interpreted in advance as destructive
Ruslan Khazin, entrepreneur	D + S + M + A	An unverified story about Nevzlin’s money presented as fact	Unequal status of conflicting versions
Anatoly Fedorov, politician, BPF	S + M + P	News of his stroke framed with the label “radical opponent”	A political label reduces sympathy for the person
Vladimir Neklyayev, poet, 2010 presidential candidate	D + A	“Phantasmagorical concept”, “gibberish” in the headline	A derogatory assessment gets maximum visibility
Denis Lavnikovich, journalist	D + A	Conclusion about a “network of fake experts” based on unverified data	A grave accusation without the right of reply
Anatoly Bondarchuk, entrepreneur	D + M + A	An old commercial project linked to Tsepkalo’s foundation without evidence	A past connection is given contrived significance

4. CASE ANALYSIS

In this section publications are grouped not by individual article but by the main subject of a persistent narrative. Several episodes concerning one person are treated as a single cumulative case; this makes it possible to see the dynamics and repetition of the editorial frame rather than a scatter of isolated articles.

4.1. Anatoly Kotov

Disappearance, a Russian security context and the competing “staged disappearance” version

Mechanisms — M + D. Associative discrediting and false symmetry between an evidence-based and a speculative version

Anatoly Kotov is a diplomat, political analyst and former senior state official who served as Secretary General of the National Olympic Committee of Belarus and worked at the Belarusian Embassy in Poland and in the Presidential Property Management Directorate. After the 2020 presidential election he condemned violence against protesters, left the civil service, emigrated to Poland and joined the democratic movement, cooperating among others with the Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation. The Belarusian authorities sentenced him in absentia to 12 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 600,000 Belarusian roubles (about EUR 170,000) on charges of allegedly preparing the violent overthrow of state power. On 21 August 2025 Kotov disappeared during a trip to Turkey; according to the Belarusian Investigative Center, Deutsche Welle and OCCRP, he fell victim to an operation by the Russian security services, but his whereabouts and fate have still not been reliably established. [134, 136, 137]

Early editorial frame. On 29 August 2025 the outlet built its explanation of Kotov’s disappearance around his family, an unsubstantiated link with certain KGB officers, an alleged acquaintance with a former high-ranking Belarusian intelligence officer, and his criticism of the opposition and supposed circle of contacts. The text contains phrases about the “pettiness of his current activities”, his high self-regard, and the suggestion that “Lukashenko’s people could hardly have considered him a dangerous leader”, which belittles Anatoly Kotov as a person and his actions, presenting him as an “insignificant figure”. At the same time the article itself acknowledges the limits of what is proven: regarding certain actions of his circle it states plainly that it is not known whether Kotov was personally involved. [44]

New evidence. A joint investigation by the Belarusian Investigative Center, OCCRP and Deutsche Welle, published in June 2026, found signs of a pre-planned operation by the Russian security services (FSB) to forcibly abduct Anatoly Kotov. According to the investigators, the yacht carrying Kotov was intercepted off Abkhazia; sources reported that Kotov was taken off the yacht onto a patrol vessel, and satellite data show a Russian coast guard boat leaving the area of an FSB base shortly before the alleged interception. Russia’s coast guard is part of the FSB. The investigators concluded that Kotov was forcibly handed over to the Russian security services. [69–71]

Strength of the version. Taken together, the data provide serious and documented grounds to regard Kotov’s disappearance as the result of a planned operation by the Russian security services and a forcible abduction by the Russian FSB. At the same time, his current whereabouts, his route after being taken off the yacht and the final recipient remain publicly unestablished; the monitoring therefore does not state as proven that he was taken specifically to Russia. Where Anatoly Kotov is and what happened to him remains unknown.

Publication after the investigation. On 18 June 2026 the editors themselves reported that the investigators believe Kotov was handed over to FSB officers, yet they ended the headline with the question “But abduction or staging?” and in the introduction placed two versions side by side — the abduction of a politician and a staged operation to “extract an agent”. [72]

Manipulation. Once a concrete chain of evidence had emerged — a pre-planned voyage, a specially selected crew, a change of course, an area of Russian military/border infrastructure, testimony that Anatoly Kotov was taken away by Russian border guards, and the satellite track of an FSB vessel — the version of a voluntary staging remains far more speculative, unproven and conspiratorial. Placing it in the headline on the same level as the forcible abduction version creates a false symmetry of evidence.

Guilt by association. In the August article, Anatoly Kotov’s cooperation with Volha Karach and Veronika Tsepkalo in the Belarus Democratic Forum is woven into a broader intelligence narrative, although the article simultaneously acknowledges that some political alliances were situational. Against the background of the subsequent evidence of an FSB operation, the effort to explain the victim’s disappearance by his biography and political connections — rather than giving priority to the version of an external repressive operation and calling for an independent investigation into Anatoly Kotov’s disappearance — is particularly evident. Publications of this kind significantly reduce the chances of

international attention to Anatoly Kotov's case and effectively hinder independent international investigations into his disappearance.

4.2. Veronika Tsepkalo

The “Russian World” through an association broken in time

Veronika Tsepkalo is a 2020 Sakharov Prize laureate, a member of the women's trio alongside Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Maria Kalesnikava, and head of the Belarusian Women's Foundation. After the 2020 election she was forced to leave Belarus because of political persecution. In 2024 the Belarusian authorities sentenced her in absentia to 12 years' imprisonment in a case in which Anatoly Kotov and Volha Karach were also prosecuted — for allegedly preparing the violent overthrow of state power.

Mechanisms — D + S + M + A. Guilt by association, linking to Russia and reducing an independent political actor to a conflict with the dominant political centre.

On 19 January 2024 Nasha Niva republished a Zerkalo article under the headline “Veronika Tsepkalo heads an organisation founded by an adept of the ‘Russian World’”. The headline directly links an active political figure with an ideologically toxic characterisation of a person who founded the predecessor structure more than ten years earlier and has long been inactive there. [92]

The key problem is evident from the text of the publication itself. Vyacheslav Dianov was the first chairman of “Integration Bridge” but left its leadership in 2015; former board members reported that the organisation had effectively not been operating. In January 2021 the structure was renamed the “Belarusian Democratic Foundation”, its board was replaced and Veronika Tsepkalo became chair. Dianov himself stated plainly that since 2015 he has had nothing to do with the organisation and has no influence on its decisions. [92]

Vyacheslav Dianov was also connected with administrators of Telegram channels affiliated with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, in particular Siarhei Besspalov. According to our information, Nasha Niva's editors were aware of these links but chose not to mention them in their publications. Such selective presentation requires separate analysis, since omitting material circumstances from public coverage may have given readers an incomplete and distorted picture of Dianov's connections with other participants in the Belarusian democratic movement.

Thus the factually established chain is as follows: Dianov is associated with the organisation in 2012–2015 → after the annexation of Crimea he becomes a supporter of the “Russian World” → about six years after his departure, Veronika Tsepkalo joins a completely renewed leadership. The headline collapses this temporal and organisational distance into a direct association: “Tsepkalo → organisation → adept of the Russian World”. This does not prove that Veronika Tsepkalo holds pro-Russian views and does not show any organisational link with Dianov after 2015, but it creates a false associative link in the minds of Nasha Niva's readers. [92]

This episode is particularly significant in comparison with other articles in the corpus, where participants independent of Tsikhanouskaya's Office are consistently placed next to Russia, Russian media, the “Russian World” or security-service themes. In Veronika Tsepkalo's case, the Russian association is built not on her own statement or action but on the biography of a former head of the organisation who left it long before she joined.

There are also articles of the opposite tone. In May 2024 Nasha Niva headlined Alexander Knyrovich's positive assessment that Veronika Tsepkalo has “great potential”, comparable to Tsikhanouskaya's. [94] In August 2022 the outlet also described the project of an alternative National Council neutrally, calling Tsepkalo, Karach and Bolkunets politicians who plan elections and seek support from the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe and European Parliament. [95]

The context of real state vulnerability also cannot be excluded from the assessment of harm. Nasha Niva itself published photographs of the Tsepkalo family home ransacked by security forces in 2022 [93], reported on special proceedings in absentia against Veronika Tsepkalo in 2024 [56] and covered in detail the confiscation and sale of family property, including property to which, according to Tsepkalo, her minor children had rights. [96] These articles

show that the target of the Russian-associative negative framing is at the same time subject to real persecution and threats from the Lukashenko regime.

Case assessment

In Veronika Tsepkalo's case, the strongest point is not a claim of constantly negative tone but a documented asymmetry of framing. The editors are capable of describing her neutrally and even publishing positive assessments. However, in politically contentious stories Veronika Tsepkalo's independent agency is systematically reduced to her relationship with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and regularly devalued, and in the most telling article Russian toxicity is transferred onto her through the biography of a man who left the organisation years before she joined. This is a classic mechanism of guilt by association, reinforced by the deliberate removal of the time gap in the headline.

4.3. Valery Tsepkalo

From an independent politician to a persistent frame of the “Russian World”, manipulation and attacks on Tsikhanouskaya

Mechanisms — D + S + M + A

Valery Tsepkalo is a diplomat, former Belarusian Ambassador to the United States and founder of the Hi-Tech Park in Minsk. In 2020 he stood as a candidate in the presidential election but was not registered by the Central Election Commission, after which he left Belarus and continued his political activity in exile.

On 7 April 2023 the Minsk Regional Court sentenced Valery Tsepkalo in absentia to 17 years' imprisonment on charges that included alleged calls to seize power, creating and financing an “extremist formation”, discrediting Belarus and a number of other articles of the Criminal Code. [138]

In the 2022–2026 body of publications, Valery Tsepkalo is increasingly defined not by his own political programme, diplomatic and managerial experience or the substance of specific initiatives, but by his conflict with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, a supposed and unproven orientation towards Moscow, doubts about financial transparency and the personal assessments of Andrei Stryzhak, at that time head of the BYSOL foundation affiliated with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Some publications have a genuine news peg and contain verifiable quotes from Tsepkalo, but their cumulative combination creates a persistent negative image of a pro-Russian, manipulative and politically destructive actor. [123–129]

Political centring on Tsikhanouskaya. In an interview with Franak Viačorka of 31 July 2022, Valery Tsepkalo is included among the “increasingly active critics” of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. The publication gives Viačorka a broad platform for the version of an “organised campaign” whose participants allegedly act on the orders of the security services or out of personal ambition or grievance. Nasha Niva's article offers no direct evidence that Valery Tsepkalo's well-founded criticism was part of any coordinated campaign or carried out “on the orders of the security services”. [123]

The “Russian World” frame through a recurring source. In January 2024 Nasha Niva headlined the words of Andrei Stryzhak, co-founder of the Tsikhanouskaya-affiliated BYSOL foundation, that Valery Tsepkalo “lives in the ideologemes of the Russian World” and has a “strong orientation towards Moscow”. This is marked as Stryzhak's opinion, but it is his assessment that becomes the politician's headline identity in Nasha Niva. The same series of publications presents Andrei Stryzhak as an all-purpose commentator on Valery Tsepkalo's political biography, finances, motives and personal qualities, although Stryzhak is a party to an open political conflict with him and has never met him in person. [124, 128]

Repeated personal disqualification. On 28 July 2024 the editors again built a separate article around the claim by Andrei Stryzhak, co-founder of the Tsikhanouskaya-affiliated BYSOL foundation, that Valery Tsepkalo is one of his “main haters”. As an explanation of the conflict, the story of a BBC chart and several million euros allegedly raised by Valery Tsepkalo's foundation was repeated. The article provides no evidence that money was raised. Stryzhak himself noted that “most likely there was no money” and that theft was not at issue. The headline formula “It's Valery

Tsepkalo” and the language of “haters” turn a dispute about verifiable financial claims into a negative personal characterisation. [128]

Labelling his statements as conspiracy theory. On 23 May 2025 an article about Valery Tsepkalo’s statements on bot farms opens with the editorial formulas “continues his stubborn struggle with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya” and “hints conspiratorially”. The absence of evidence presented by Valery Tsepkalo allowed the editors to assess his statement critically, but this was not done; the problem lies in moving from checking a specific claim by a politician to repeating a persistent personal frame of his supposed struggle with Tsikhanouskaya. [125]

Ironic and confrontational packaging. A publication about a solidarity marathon uses the verb “spat on”, although inside it reports Valery Tsepkalo’s substantive, if sharp, political disagreement with the format of assistance and his demand to seek an arrest warrant for Lukashenko. In 2026 an appeal by Valery Tsepkalo and Dzmitry Bolkunets to Lithuanian authorities is described with the verb “attacked”, and the subheading links the article to allegedly “anti-EU” resources. Nasha Niva provides no evidence of a link to “anti-EU resources”. Both formulas set a negative assessment of an action in advance, before its substance and evidence are considered. [126, 127]

A commercial associative frame. A 2022 article links Valery Tsepkalo and entrepreneur Anatoly Bondarchuk through the “Belarus of the Future” foundation and a failed premium vodka project of the early 2000s, i.e. more than 20 years earlier. The text gives specific information about the domain, the company Vuador and a trademark dispute, as well as Bondarchuk’s response and the earlier position of Valery Tsepkalo’s press secretary. The fact of an old business contact itself therefore cannot be considered fabricated. However, its current political relevance for assessing the foundation and Valery Tsepkalo’s activities has not been separately demonstrated; the composition creates a reputational proximity between a current political project, a commercial failure twenty years old and the figure of Bondarchuk. [129]

Case assessment. Nasha Niva uses a cumulative negative editorial mechanism. Valery Tsepkalo consistently appears as a critic of Tsikhanouskaya, a participant in a supposed campaign, a bearer of “Russian World ideologemes”, a “hater” of Andrei Stryzhak, the author of “conspiratorial” hints, a man who “spat on” a solidarity marathon and “attacked” a Lithuanian politician with some “anti-EU resources”. The repetition of these labels forms a persistent negative personal frame within which new actions are interpreted in advance according to the same template. [123–129]

4.4. Vitaly Kondratenko

From locating his city to behavioural geolocation and an exact address

Mechanisms — P + L. De-anonymisation, aggregation of identifying data and escalation of geolocation information

Vitaly Kondratenko is a political blogger and activist, a participant in Siarhei Tsikhanouski’s “A Country for Life” movement and in the 2020 presidential campaign. He was a member of Tsikhanouski’s initiative group and, after Tsikhanouski was barred from the election, took part in Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s campaign: he organised signature collection, coordinated work in several districts of Minsk and travelled with the team to towns across Belarus. Their cooperation is confirmed by campaign materials and interviews, including some published by Nasha Niva itself in 2021.

After the political events of 2020 Kondratenko moved to Ukraine, where, according to available information, he became one of the few Belarusian activists to receive political asylum. According to preliminary data, fewer than ten Belarusian citizens have received such status since 2020.

Publication. In an article about Vitaly “Virus” Kondratenko, the editors reported that he lives in Ukraine, “most likely in relatively peaceful Uzhhorod”. In March 2026 Nasha Niva was already stating categorically that Kondratenko had “eventually settled in Uzhhorod”, and also reported on his work in delivery, his income and working hours, recalling that he had previously worked at a specific car repair shop “on the outskirts of Uzhhorod” (the name is not reproduced in this monitoring). The publications thus combine his city of residence with behavioural and professional details that

significantly narrow down the search for the person and increase the risk of transnational repression against him. [35, 36]

Aggregation of data as a security risk in itself. The danger is created not by a single sensitive detail alone. Successively combining the city of residence, occupation, previous workplace and daily working routine creates cumulative geolocation vulnerability. The monitoring finds that the totality of the identifying information published could make it easier to locate the person and to plan violent action against him by the Belarusian security services.

Further escalation. Later, in a civil lawsuit against Kondratenko whose factual background includes the *Nasha Niva* publication, his full home address in Ukraine appeared. The lawsuit itself states the defendant's exact address and builds international jurisdiction specifically on the fact that Kondratenko lives in Ukraine. The exact address is not reproduced in the public version of this monitoring. [37]

Risk assessment. In the context of transnational repression, moving from general identification of a political émigré to city-level and behavioural geolocation, and then to an exact home address, represents a risk in its own right to the physical safety of a Belarusian activist and blogger. This risk cannot be regarded as abstract. In August 2021 the Belarusian activist Vitaly Shyshov, head of the Belarusian House in Ukraine, was found dead in Kyiv. His body was discovered in a park near his home; Ukrainian police opened proceedings under the article on premeditated murder and stated plainly that they were also examining the version of a murder disguised as suicide. Although those responsible and any possible link between his death and the Belarusian security services have not been established by a court, this case shows why publishing information that makes it possible to locate a politically active Belarusian in exile must be assessed against a heightened security standard.

In this context, publishing a person's city of residence, workplace, working routine and other behavioural details is not harmless biographical information: taken together, it may significantly facilitate the physical location of a person belonging to a high-risk group.

4.5. Dzmitry Bolkunets

From political scientist to “provocateur” and marginal critic of Tsikhanouskaya

Dzmitry Bolkunets is a political scientist and economist who previously worked at the Higher School of Economics (HSE), author of a YouTube channel and the analytical resource Bolkunets.org, and one of the initiators of the Belarus Democratic Forum together with Valery Tsepkalo and Anatoly Kotov. On 25 May 2026 the Minsk City Court sentenced him in absentia to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 base units (225,000 Belarusian roubles, about EUR 70,000) [135].

Mechanisms — S + D + M + A. Status diminishment, a Russian associative frame, psychologising political criticism and systematic ironic belittling.

False biography. *Nasha Niva* presented Bolkunets as a doctoral student of the Russian political scientist Andrei Suzdaltsev — a proponent of pro-Kremlin narratives and the “Russian World” ideology, deported from Belarus in 2006 and convicted in Russia in 2025 of defaming Lukashenko [81, 165, 166, 174]. This is false: Bolkunets never studied under Suzdaltsev. The only confirmed fact is that both worked at HSE, which employs about 7,000 teaching and research staff and has about 50,000 students [194, 195]. The fabricated link transfers someone else's characteristics onto Bolkunets.

The editors' opinion presented as a general view. The editors write: “In émigré circles of the Belarusian opposition, Bolkunets has a dubious reputation. His actions reveal endless attempts to sink Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's team” [81]. This assessment is not supported by any surveys or research: the editors' private opinion is passed off as the position of “émigré circles”, and criticism of Tsikhanouskaya becomes the person's defining characteristic.

Ridiculing initiatives. An action on the Polish–Belarusian border to free political prisoners, agreed with the Polish authorities, is headlined “Bolkunets will handcuff himself to the railway. Well, almost”, and the blockade itself is called “nominal” [82, 83]. A court ruling on his complaint is presented as “Vilnius court gives Bolkunets the brush-off”, although the court of first instance had partly sided with the applicants [86]. The same technique recurs in other

stories [84, 85]. At the same time, Bolkunets — one of the outlet’s most frequent targets — has never given it any comments.

Silence on the substance. The complaint by Bolkunets and Ruslan Khazin concerned a massive data leak from the “Belarusian Hajun” project, after which arrests of informants began in Belarus; the project’s founder admitted the mistake and closed it [182, 183]. Nasha Niva offered no critical assessment of Hajun, nor of the consequences of the “Peramoha” plan and the “Black Book of Belarus” [182–185].

Accumulating labels. The headline “Lebedko explained why he considers Bolkunets a populist and a provocateur”, an author’s formula that “only a fool or a provocateur steps on the same rake twice” [87, 88], and the framing of an interview with a Russian opposition project as a conversation with “Russian media” about “Tsikhanouskaya’s absolute failure” [75] add up to an image of a frivolous, vain and provocative politician.

A telling contrast. In 2021–2024 Nasha Niva itself reported neutrally on the criminal case against Bolkunets for “insulting Lukashenko”, on the KGB adding him to a list of persecuted persons, and summarised his interview with Deutsche Welle [89–91]. The editors know how to write about him without labels — and chose not to.

Case assessment

In Bolkunets’s case, what is recorded is not a single disputed accusation but constant belittling: a political scientist and independent politician is turned into “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponent” with a “dubious reputation” and a Russian trail, and his initiatives into an occasion for mockery (“well, almost”, “nominal blockade”, “brush-off”).

4.6. Dzmitry Skinderev

From a political conflict to a personal dossier and an institutional label

Mechanisms — D + S + M + P + L + R. Discrediting, marginalisation, manipulation, intrusion into the private sphere, dangerous disclosure of information and subsequent institutional use.

Dzmitry Skinderev is an entrepreneur from Vitebsk, a civic activist and political émigré living in Lithuania. For more than twenty years he was engaged in business in Belarus, including trade, real estate, restaurants and investment projects. In 2020 he appeared publicly on Siarhei Tsikhanouski’s YouTube channel “A Country for Life”, speaking about alleged violations of his rights and problems in the Belarusian judicial system; during the presidential campaign he hosted Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Maria Kalesnikava and Veronika Tsepkalo in his restaurant.

After emigrating to Lithuania he received political refugee status and took part in public and political discussions in the Belarusian diaspora. He later became a public critic of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s Office and of certain representatives of the democratic movement. In 2026 he found himself at the centre of a conflict with the Lithuanian migration authorities: the authorities were considering stripping him of refugee status on national security grounds, while Dzmitry Skinderev himself linked what was happening to his criticism of the Belarusian opposition leadership.

On 5 April 2026 Nasha Niva published an article titled “Who is Dzmitry Skinderev, who declared war on Tsikhanouskaya? Cooperation with GUBOPiK, debts in Belarus, debts in Lithuania”. The headline and lead already impose a ready-made interpretation: Skinderev is defined first and foremost as a man who “declared war on Tsikhanouskaya”, “pounced” on her adviser and is useful to state propaganda; the editors explicitly promise to give “a clear answer as to why he behaves this way”. [116]

Some of the factual material is indeed of public interest and requires critical analysis. In particular, the article itself quotes Dzmitry Skinderev’s account that in 2020 he reported on his own initiative to GUBOP an offer to kill a business partner, tried on the officers’ advice to record the conversation, and later wrote to the KGB chairman. Nasha Niva’s editorial formula “cooperation with GUBOPiK” in the headline compresses a complex, context-dependent episode into a persistent security-service label that then follows Dzmitry Skinderev in subsequent publications. [116]

The key problem in this case is the scale of the personal dossier. To characterise a political critic, the editors go far beyond his public actions and collect personal data about his relatives, which may expose them to transnational repression: they name his parents, report his mother’s workplace, describe in detail his father’s biography, property

and business activities, publish photographs of his parents, and name his wife and her maiden name, disclosing her involvement in commercial entities. The article explicitly justifies the intrusion into the family sphere with the formula: Skinderev “never talks ... about his family. And that is unfair.” [116] This logic in effect turns a public figure’s refusal to disclose information about relatives into grounds for journalists to disclose their private information themselves, even though disclosing the details of relatives in Belarus of opposition figures in exile can lead to their arrest and searches of their homes, i.e. it creates risks of transnational repression.

An even more sensitive level is the use of data described as anonymous, unverifiable information from BelPol, the “Passport” automated information system and the “Passenger Flow” database. Information about law-enforcement checks, specific border-crossing dates and travel routes is published. For example, citing “Passenger Flow”, the article gives the exact dates of his departures from Belarus, returns and flights (not reproduced in this monitoring); citing the “Passport” system, it reports an economic inspection opened against him. [116] The origin of these data sets and the legal basis for the editors’ access to them cannot be established from the publication itself, but there is a clear breach of the principles of data minimisation, necessity and proportionality. [117]

Two and a half months later comes a transition to category R that is especially important for this monitoring. On 20 June Nasha Niva published an article headlined “Lithuania has recognised Skinderev, the subject of a Nasha Niva investigation, as a threat to national security and intends to strip him of refugee status”. Yet the text itself refers to a notice Skinderev received from the Migration Department of its intention to revoke his status and to five days to submit a defence. [118] In other words, the headline presents an already established status — “Lithuania has recognised ... as a threat” — whereas the procedure described still allowed for objections at that point.

The same label of a “threat to national security” continues to circulate later. In an August article about a rally in Vilnius, Skinderev is already called “a character recognised as a threat to Lithuania’s national security, including for cooperating with GUBOPiK”, although further down the same publication openly admits: “there is no information yet on a final decision by the Lithuanian authorities in this matter”. [119] This internal contradiction is particularly telling: a preliminary administrative assessment becomes a ready-made public identity and is then transferred onto Belarusian political prisoners who merely supported some of Dzmitry Skinderev’s statements.

The case thus extends beyond Dzmitry Skinderev himself. In an article about former political prisoner Alena Dedyulya, her criticism of Tsikhanouskaya’s Office is linked to her having shared information about Skinderev’s press conference; this sits next to a reminder of his “cooperation with GUBOPiK” and his status as a threat to national security. [119] Here a label that has acquired an appearance of credibility begins to operate as guilt by association against third parties and against the community of former Belarusian political prisoners in Lithuania, creating legal risks and a chilling effect for former political prisoners in Lithuania.

A separate publication of 18 August about the debts of UAB Bovaja continues the cumulative personal narrative: the company’s financial figures are again combined in the headline with the formula “whom Lithuania is stripping of asylum”, and the text includes the speculation that “perhaps it is essentially a shell company” without any evidence of such a function. [120] Actual financial statements are in themselves a legitimate subject for journalism; the problem identified by the monitoring is the compositional combination of verifiable financial data with a migration and security label and a speculative conclusion, unsupported by facts or evidence. The manipulative nature of the publication is reinforced by other techniques. It reports that the company’s new registered address coincides with the address of one of the services of the Russian Embassy, with the caveat that this is “no more than a coincidence”: the caveat itself does not remove but rather fixes the association with Russia in the reader’s mind. At the end, an old criminal conviction and a characterisation of Skinderev through actions “aimed at splitting” the diaspora are repeated. Taken together, this is not financial analysis but another element of a discrediting campaign [120].

Case assessment

Dzmitry Skinderev’s case shows the full cycle of lending an appearance of credibility: a political conflict with Tsikhanouskaya’s Office → a large personal profile with a security-service label → disclosure of family and sensitive personal data, creating risks for his relatives → use of information from restricted databases, the lawfulness of whose acquisition by the editors is in no way substantiated and is contested in a complaint to the Lithuanian State

Data Protection Inspectorate [117] → subsequent entrenchment of the formula “threat to national security” in the media narrative → transfer of this label onto critics associated with him. The editors themselves link the subsequent administrative process to their investigation, calling Dzmitry Skinderev its “subject”, and a preliminary procedural status is turned in later publications into a persistent negative statement about the person.

4.7. Oleg Borshchevsky

“Complete nonsense” against the background of a real risk of losing status, threats of deportation and forced departure from Lithuania

Mechanisms — M + D + R. Categorical dismissal of a real legal threat and a personalising angle

Oleg Borshchevsky is an independent journalist, editor and human rights activist, a member of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), former editor of the independent newspaper Vitebsky Kurier and editor of the information resource nash-dom.info, linked to the human rights organisation Our House. His professional and civic work is directly connected with independent journalism, documenting human rights violations and covering political repression in Belarus.

Oleg Borshchevsky is the husband of the well-known Belarusian human rights defender Volha Karach, head of the Our House International Centre for Civic Initiatives. His journalistic work and professional biography reflect the Belarusian regime’s repression against the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Vitebsky Kurier, Our House’s information resources and Volha Karach’s human rights work.

A particularly significant circumstance is the death of both of Oleg Borshchevsky’s parents on 15 December 2022. Vadim and Alena Borshchevsky were found dead in their own flat in Belarus. The Belarusian police refused to conduct a full investigation into the circumstances of their death, and the death certificate gave the cause as “not established”.

Vadim Borshchevsky, Oleg’s father, was a well-known independent journalist, chairman of the Vitebsk branch of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, a Radio Liberty journalist, and editor of Vitebsky Kurier and a number of other independent and opposition media. His many years of professional work were directly linked to the development of independent journalism in Belarus.

Alena Borshchevskaya, Oleg’s mother, was engaged in independent trade union activity and worked at Vitebsky Kurier, likewise belonging to the professional community of independent journalists and civic activists.

The simultaneous death of two people connected with independent journalism and the trade union movement, with no established cause of death and, reportedly, no proper investigation, raises serious questions about what happened. In these circumstances the possibility of a violent death, including in connection with their civic and journalistic activities, cannot be ruled out.

Circumstances. After being refused asylum and exhausting judicial appeals, Borshchevsky received a notice from the Migration Department on 25 March 2024 that he had to leave Lithuania. According to his documented account, refusing to leave voluntarily carried the risk of a forced procedure and deportation to Belarus. On 29 March he refused in writing to return voluntarily to Belarus, citing the threat of imprisonment and torture because of his journalistic work and his family tie to Volha Karach. On the same day that he filed documents for a new residence permit, an administrative report was drawn up against him for illegal stay in Lithuania.

Publication. On 27 March 2024 the outlet published an article titled “Will Volha Karach’s husband be deported to Belarus? No, complete nonsense”. At that time the Migration Department had not yet given the editors a substantive personal comment, citing personal data protection. Despite this, the editors did not limit themselves to the accurate formula “a forced deportation procedure has not yet been confirmed” but stated categorically that the report “cannot be true”. [54]

Official comment. On 31 March the director of the Migration Department confirmed that Borshchevsky had indeed been told that “formally he must leave Lithuania”. She also explained the general mechanism: if a person does not agree to leave voluntarily, their data are usually passed to the border service to enforce departure and subsequent

deportation to Belarus. At the same time, the official specified that in Borshchevsky's particular case a decision on forced removal had not yet been taken and the department was not planning to expel him from Lithuania at that point. [55]

The misleading formula “complete nonsense”. It erases the difference between two statements. The first — “a formal decision on forced removal to Belarus has already been taken” — was indeed not confirmed. The second — “after being refused asylum, Borshchevsky was left without a stable status, he was ordered to leave Lithuania and, if he refused, there was a risk of further forced departure and deportation to Belarus” — had a real administrative basis. A correct fact-check would therefore have clarified the stage of the procedure rather than declaring the concern and the threats themselves a fabrication and “nonsense”.

An additional personalising frame. In the second publication Nasha Niva reproduced the department director's words about an “attempt to make noise”, an “inadequate” reaction and a refusal to cooperate. These were the official's words, not an independent editorial conclusion. However, without comparable disclosure of Borshchevsky's reasons for refusing to return to Belarus, the quote shifted the focus of the article from the journalist's legal and physical vulnerability to the supposed inappropriateness of his behaviour. [55]

Subsequent court developments are important for assessing the original framing: on 13 June 2024 the court of first instance annulled the administrative report on Borshchevsky's illegal stay. According to the materials submitted by Borshchevsky, the court found significant breaches in the procedure for drawing up the report and problems with the cancellation of his asylum-seeker document; the court also took into account his steps to regularise his status. This shows that his migration situation was a genuine legal dispute with the Lithuanian migration authorities, not “complete nonsense”.

Case assessment. The outlet turned a dispute about the degree of an already existing threat to deport a Belarusian editor and journalist to Belarus into a binary fact-check of “true / complete nonsense”, although official and later court data confirm an intermediate but extremely serious situation — an official obligation to leave the country, no stable status, administrative proceedings for allegedly illegal stay (the report was later annulled by the court), a threat of deportation and a real need to prove that returning to Belarus was impossible.

4.8. Volha Karach

From accusations of preparing a murder to ridiculing human rights work

Volha Karach is a human rights defender and journalist, head of the Our House International Centre for Civic Initiatives, who for more than 25 years has defended politically persecuted citizens, independent journalists, women, children and conscientious objectors; she runs the YouTube channel Our House TV with more than 43 million views. In 2021 the KGB added her to the “list of persons involved in terrorist activity”, the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the list of persons “involved in extremist activity”, and her social media pages were designated “extremist materials” [60, 64, 65]; by mid-September 2026 the authorities had taken 32 such decisions concerning her and resources linked to her. On 8 July 2024 the Brest Regional Court sentenced her in absentia to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine of 600,000 Belarusian roubles (about EUR 170,000) in the Belarus Democratic Forum case [58, 134].

Mechanisms — D + S + M + A + P + R. Grave accusations citing a conflicted source, guilt by association, attribution of intentions, intrusion into private life and ridiculing human rights work.

Accusation of involvement in preparing the murder of Andrei Stryzhak

On 29 May 2022 Nasha Niva published an interview with former security officer Igor Makar, in which Karach was linked to the security services and to an alleged plan to murder or poison Andrei Stryzhak [11]. The article itself shows only that Makar and Pavel Kulazhenko discussed the possibility of making contact with Karach; it contains no evidence that she knew them, discussed Stryzhak or gave any instructions. Moreover, the source openly called his statements revenge against Karach, and had earlier admitted himself that in the summer of 2020 he offered the Belarusian Embassy in Vilnius to gather information for money [11, 12, 21].

Makar's version was then used repeatedly by the outlet to attribute to Karach connections that she denies and that are not substantiated in any way [11, 14]. Nasha Niva published no retraction, withdrawal of the accusation or apology: the article remains in search results as a journalistically "confirmed" link between a human rights defender and the preparation of a serious crime.

"Karach's guarantees" for Zenkovich: a version refuted by those involved

In 2021–2023 the outlet repeatedly reproduced Makar's version that Yuras Zenkovich went to Moscow "under Volha Karach's security guarantees", weaving it into a narrative about a "Russian trail" and the FSB. After his release in May 2025, Zenkovich himself told Nasha Niva that Karach "had nothing to do with it"; Alexander Feduta confirmed the same [15, 16]. However, the refutation was published under the headline "Of course I would not have gone to Moscow under Volha Karach's guarantees", which again put the refuted formula at the centre, and there was no correction of earlier publications or apology [16].

Intrusion into private life

Politically and reputationally charged publications included information about Volha Karach's family, pregnancy and health, which she had not consented to publish. For a human rights defender persecuted by the regime, this is both an intrusion into private life and an additional risk for her loved ones.

Mantas Danielius: a victim of espionage presented as a spy's "acquaintance"

Lithuanian lawyer Mantas Danielius, who had provided legal assistance to Our House, was sentenced in 2024 by the Vilnius Regional Court to 9 years for espionage on behalf of Belarus: he gathered information about Belarusian organisations and passed it to Ksenia Lebedeva, a propagandist at Belarus 1 [24, 139]. Karach and Natalia Kolegova, by contrast, publicly exposed him and reported him to Lithuanian law enforcement, including at a press conference on 7 October 2022 [23, 26, 27].

Nevertheless, as early as 2022 Nasha Niva gave a platform to Danielius's own claim that Karach knew about him passing on information [22], and on 11 July 2026, after his conviction, it ran the headline "From the spy convicted of espionage, an acquaintance of Volha Karach..." [25]. A victim of espionage and one of those who exposed the spy is presented in the headline as the spy's "acquaintance" — thus suspicion is transferred from the convicted person to his victim.

"Chief anarchist" and anti-war work as a "myth"

On 18 April 2024 the outlet published an article titled "Belarusian anarchists complain that Volha Karach is trying to become the country's chief anarchist" [48]. It contains no statement by Karach about any such intention; in fact the story concerned cooperation between Western anti-militarists and Our House in defending conscientious objectors. The text reproduces anonymous claims about a "myth of a mass deserter movement", alongside a phrase about "fraudsters interested in the financial side of the issue" [48]. Yet draft evasion is a verifiable phenomenon: 375 people were convicted of evasion in 2022 and 266 in 2023, and the departure of men of conscription age rose sharply after February 2022 [49].

On 5 October 2024, reporting on the German Ludwig Baumann Prize awarded to Karach for her contribution to the struggle against war, the outlet stated categorically that Our House claims to help deserters "but there are no real cases", and presented the award through another laureate — a Ukrainian pacifist accused of justifying Russian aggression [63]. Our House regularly publishes the cases of the objectors it works with, which refutes this claim [49].

Attributed intentions and comparisons

On 13 March 2021 the outlet published an article titled "Who is Volha Karach, who wants to unseat Tsikhanouskaya?", built on anonymous assessments of her motives and on a link with Natalia Kolegova, described as a fraudster [50]. In 2023 an article about Karach's press conference on the position of the Lithuanian State Security Department and the refusal of asylum ran under a headline saying she had "compared herself to Merkel and Bialiatski". Karach made no such comparisons: they were constructed by the editors [51].

Selective biography and “pro-Russian views”

In a 2021 article Karach’s education is given as “teacher of Russian language and literature”, followed by a section “Karach and Russia” stating that she “has never hidden her pro-Russian views”. Her full qualification — Russian and Belarusian language and literature, as well as a master’s degree in political science — was given by Nasha Niva itself only in 2025 [50, 66]. The outlet did not cite a single example of pro-Russian statements by Karach.

Other examples of the same technique

The headline “Volha Karach boasted of her new job. It is linked to nuclear weapons” conceals that the job is with ICAN — a coalition for the abolition of nuclear weapons [66]. In November 2025 an assessment by a single Lithuanian agency was turned into the formula “recognised by Lithuanians as a threat to national security”, supplemented by the remark that Karach’s broadcast “was watched by exactly one person” [67]. In February 2026 her webinars on climate and women’s rights were presented with irony about a change in her “line of business” and a hint at grant-driven motives [68]. Even when reporting on the criminal case in absentia against Karach, the outlet describes her as a participant in a Forum “conceived as a counterweight” to Tsikhanouskaya’s Office, and her and the other defendants as “figures” [56–58].

Case assessment

For years the outlet has applied the full set of techniques against Volha Karach: grave accusations citing a conflicted source, guilt by association with a spy, attributed intentions and comparisons, intrusion into private life and ridicule of human rights work. None of the refuted claims has been corrected, and no apology has followed.

4.9. Olga Semashko

De-anonymising a supposed source through a digital footprint

Mechanisms — P + L + M. De-anonymisation, disclosure of information and turning an inference into fact

Olga (Volha) Semashko is a journalist, media manager and civic figure with more than twenty years of experience in journalism. Until 2020 she worked at the state broadcaster Belteleradiocompany, including in the press pool of Belarusian Radio’s First Channel covering the government. After the events of 2020 she took a stand against the regime, left Belarus and became head of the Belarusian service of the Polish radio station Wnet — Radio Unet, becoming one of the prominent representatives of independent Belarusian journalism in exile.

Semashko also took part in drafting the new Code of Ethics for Independent Belarusian Journalists in 2024, worked with independent media initiatives and participated in the audit of funds distributed by the Solidarity Marathon for Belarusian political prisoners, in particular reviewing the activities of the Lithuanian foundation Razam.

Publication. On 9 May 2025 the outlet published an article headlined “Provocateur blogger Virus accidentally gave away his informant. He published a screenshot taken by Olga Semashko”. The editors identified Semashko by the avatar and interface traces in the screenshot and presented her as one of the informants of Virus’s channel. At the same time the publication itself contained a significant caveat: Semashko acknowledged that she had taken and forwarded screenshots but said that she had sent them to another person, not to Kondratenko, and did not know where they later appeared. [41]

From inference to identification. A digital footprint can confirm where a screenshot came from but does not by itself establish the final recipient or the direct channel of transmission. The formula “his informant” is therefore a stronger conclusion than the interface traces directly prove, given that the woman identified points to an intermediate recipient.

De-anonymising an intermediate link in the information chain. A technical detail of an interface was turned into public identification of a supposed source. The publication then linked Semashko to a separate unconfirmed accusatory narrative about her family.

The editors turn an indicator into an established status. The article reported that Semashko’s husband allegedly holds “a cover document in another name, which means he is an agent of Lukashenko’s security services”, while noting

that Semashko herself denies this. The unproven existence of a cover document is the initial fact/indicator, whereas the status of “agent” is a separate conclusion that Nasha Niva forms in its readers’ minds.

Nasha Niva’s publication raised extremely serious suspicions against Fyodor Gorbachev, the husband of journalist Olga Semashko: possession of a second passport issued in another name and a possible link with the Belarusian security services. Such claims affect not only a person’s professional reputation but also his safety, especially in political exile, where accusations of cooperating with security services can lead to social isolation, loss of trust and professional consequences.

Yet the publication examined did not present sufficient verifiable evidence for the suspicions raised by the editors to be treated as proven facts. The supposed existence of a second passport does not in itself confirm cooperation with the security services, and an alleged link with them requires a separate and considerably more serious evidentiary basis.

Despite the absence of publicly presented convincing evidence, the publication has already created a persistent negative reputational trail around Gorbachev and his wife. In public perception a suspicion can gradually lose its original tentative character and come to be perceived as an established fact, even if it has not been independently confirmed.

Particularly problematic is the extension of suspicion to Olga Semashko through her family tie to Gorbachev. Marriage in itself cannot serve as evidence of awareness of a spouse’s alleged actions, participation in them or any link with the security services.

This case therefore demonstrates the risk of reputational stigmatisation through the publication of grave but insufficiently substantiated suspicions. Even without a direct accusatory statement, editorial framing can create long-lasting negative associations whose consequences persist regardless of whether the original suspicions are ever confirmed. [41]

4.10. Pavel Usov

The formula about “Polish services”

Mechanisms — D + A

Pavel Usov is a Belarusian political scientist, political analyst and public figure, holder of a doctorate in political science, and founder and head of the Center for Political Analysis and Forecast in Warsaw. He specialises in the study of authoritarian regimes, Belarus’s political system, Belarusian–Russian relations, national security issues and the prospects for democratic transformation.

After the 2020 presidential election he became an active participant in public and political debates in the Belarusian diaspora. Usov regularly appears in independent Belarusian and international media, commenting on political repression, Belarus’s relations with Russia and the West, threats to Belarusian sovereignty and the activities of opposition structures in exile.

Publication. On 11 January 2026 Nasha Niva published an article headlined “Sources: Usov and Kravtsov were struck off by the Polish services”. Citing unnamed anonymous sources, it claimed that Pavel Usov had been on the “Belarusian list of proposals” for a reception with the President of Poland but had been removed by the Polish side — “the Polish services”. The very mention of the security services moved an ordinary dispute about an invitation to a public event into the realm of suspicions about security and loyalty. [20]

Problem. A reference to the security services carries great reputational weight. If a media outlet does not show the precise documentary basis, the source and the limits of what has been reliably established, the reader gets the impression of a fact where there may be only someone’s interpretation or an unconfirmed report.

The mechanism of lending an appearance of credibility. An unnamed version about the actions of “Polish services” gains weight not because the reader is shown a document or a decision by a specific body, but because a well-known media outlet publishes it. The fact of publication alone can turn a source’s unconfirmed claim into something perceived as a verified fact.

Key formula. The claim that Usov was allegedly “struck off by the Polish services”, i.e. the security services.

Confirmation. Nasha Niva’s original publication of 11.01.2026 directly contains the formula “they were struck off by the Polish services” and does not name the document, decision or specific agency on which this claim is based. [20]

Consequences. Reputational damage and heightened suspicion of links with the Belarusian security services around a researcher, political scientist and public figure.

The gradual transformation of a respected political scientist and independent actor into a “critic of Tsikhanouskaya”

The publications make it possible to trace how the frame changed over time. In 2021 Pavel Usov is published in Nasha Niva as a respected political scientist offering his own analysis of constitutional reform; in January 2023 — as head of the Center for Political Analysis and Forecast, taking part with Pazniak in political contacts in Ukraine. In January 2024 he is already being compared with Tsikhanouskaya by the number of posts “about Lukashenko” and “about the opposition”; in February he becomes “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponent”, then the subject of a headline about “unhealthy criticism” and “fixation”; in July 2025 an editorial lead states that he has “devoted himself to criticising the work of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her associates”. [74–76, 78, 79]

It is the chronological sequence that makes this body of material stronger than any single disputed headline. Each publication on its own may have an understandable news peg. But the series shows a gradual reduction of identity: his expert work and his own political projects play an ever smaller role, while the conflict with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya becomes a persistent personal characteristic.

From independent political scientist to a fixed identity as “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponent”

Mechanisms — D + M. Narrowing of status and political categorisation through his attitude to a single politician

Evolution of the coverage. In December 2021 Nasha Niva presented Pavel Usov as a political scientist and carried his independent analysis of the draft Constitution. In January 2023, describing Zianon Pazniak’s trip to Ukraine, the outlet called Usov head of the Center for Political Analysis and Forecast and a member of the delegation discussing cooperation with the Kalinouski Regiment. In 2024–2025 publications, however, his public identity is increasingly narrowed down to his attitude to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya: “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponent”, a man who “has devoted himself to criticising the work of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her associates”, or a figure whose actions are explained primarily by his conflict with the Office. [74–76, 79]

Problem. Political criticism is in itself a legitimate part of the democratic process. A manipulative effect arises when a person’s professional, research and organisational identity is gradually replaced by a single dominant characteristic — their attitude to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and their (dis)loyalty to her. As a result, an independent political actor with his own professional qualities, experience and expertise ceases to be described through his own projects, expertise and programme and begins to exist in Nasha Niva’s media narrative as a derivative of the “dominant” political actor.

Assessment. This case reinforces the already identified mechanism of political marginalisation in Nasha Niva. The issue is not a ban on the editors naming a real conflict, but a cumulative narrowing of status: political scientist / head of an analytical centre / participant in international political contacts → “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponent” → a man who has “devoted himself to criticism”, a “hater” with an “unhealthy fixation”. [75, 78]

“Unhealthy criticism” and “fixation”: pathologising political disagreement

Mechanisms — D + M + A. Psychologising and amplifying personal assessments instead of a debate on substance

Sequence of articles. On 13 January 2024 Nasha Niva republished an author’s post under the headline “What hurts Usov, Pazniak and Tsikhanouskaya?”, in which Usov’s and Pazniak’s activity was reduced quantitatively mainly to criticism of the opposition, while Tsikhanouskaya’s achievements were listed separately by way of contrast. On 26 February 2024 the editors headlined the words of Franak Viačorka, senior adviser to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya: “This is unhealthy criticism, he has a fixation on Tsikhanouskaya’s Office”. In July 2025 the outlet’s own editorial lead describes Usov as a politician who “has devoted himself to criticising the work of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her associates”. [74, 76, 78]

Assessment. This is a documented shift from political debate to explaining a critic through his supposed psychological disposition. Instead of the question “are the specific critical arguments well-founded?”, readers are offered another question: “why is this man so obsessed with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya?” This change in the level of political analysis lowers the status of criticism as a substantive political position. [76, 78]

Russia, Lukashenko and Putin as an associative frame around Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s critics

Mechanisms — D + M + A. Foreign-policy toxification through compositional proximity

On 17 February 2024 Nasha Niva headlined an article “Bolkunets and Usov told Russian media about Tsikhanouskaya’s absolute failure on all fronts”. Although it concerned the Russian liberal opposition project Sotaproject, the word “Russian” was placed in the headline as the event’s defining feature, and Usov and Bolkunets are defined in the very first paragraph as “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponents”. In the same article the editors do not confine themselves to summarising the arguments but interpret their “main essential grievance” as being “that it was not they themselves who became opposition leaders”, and the proposal for a new representative body as an intention to “wrest power from Tsikhanouskaya’s hands”. [75]

On 31 May 2024, in an article about Usov’s dispute with Anatoly Lebedko, a Belarusian politician and the United Transitional Cabinet’s representative for constitutional reform, Nasha Niva reproduces Lebedko’s accusation that challenging Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s legitimacy puts Pavel Usov “on the same side as Lukashenko and Putin”. Notably, the article also quotes Pavel Usov’s direct response: he calls such logic absurd and states the problem precisely — if any well-founded criticism is automatically equated with the position of Lukashenko or Putin, substantive political debate becomes impossible. [77]

Assessment. The Russian affiliation of a platform, the names of Lukashenko and Putin and the status of “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponent” systematically appear in the immediate semantic surroundings of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s critics. Together with the accusations against other participants of a “Russian trail” and links with security services already described in this monitoring, this supports Nasha Niva’s broader mechanism of political toxification through semantic association.

4.11. Siarhei Tsikhanouski

From independent political agency to personal discrediting

Mechanisms — S + D + M + A + P. Political marginalisation, personalisation of the conflict, amplification of assessments by conflicted sources, psychologising, and the intrusion of a family-biographical angle into a political story.

Siarhei Tsikhanouski is a Belarusian politician, entrepreneur, video blogger and founder of the popular YouTube project “A Country for Life”, which became one of the prominent platforms for public criticism of Alexander Lukashenko’s regime. In 2020 he announced his intention to run in the presidential election, but after his arrest the initiative group was headed by his wife Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who later became the joint candidate of part of the democratic forces.

On 29 May 2020 Siarhei Tsikhanouski was detained during an election picket in Hrodna. On 14 December 2021 a Belarusian court sentenced him to 18 years’ imprisonment in a politically motivated criminal case. His sentence was later increased to 19 years and 6 months. [141] His imprisonment was accompanied by prolonged isolation, torture and restrictions on correspondence and contact with his family and lawyers.

On 21 June 2025 Siarhei Tsikhanouski was released from prison together with a group of other political prisoners as a result of negotiations involving the United States and was taken out of Belarus. After his release he continued his public activity, speaking on political repression, the situation of Belarusian political prisoners and the future of the democratic movement.

After his release in 2025, Siarhei Tsikhanouski returned to public politics not only as a former political prisoner and a symbol of 2020 but as an independent political actor. He sets out his own strategy, calls at Yale for a “complete reboot” of the opposition abroad and the creation of a “real political force”, speaks in the US Congress, builds his own team

and states plainly: “I want to be, and will be, independent and self-reliant.” Nasha Niva is capable of conveying these positions in detail and neutrally. [97, 101, 102, 113]

In parallel, however, another editorial contour is taking shape, in which the substance of his political proposals increasingly gives way to discussion of his personality, psychological state, family relationships and his acceptable place in the political hierarchy of the Belarusian opposition in exile.

A particular role in this contour is played by his former press secretary Siarhei Bepalov, who was already in open personal and professional conflict with Tsikhanouski and connected through professional and personal ties with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s adviser Franak Viačorka. His assessments — “inflated ego”, “boorish behaviour”, “Lukashenko 2.0”, “Trojan horse” — receive a broad media platform in Nasha Niva. The gravest version — that the Belarusian security services allegedly released Tsikhanouski deliberately, knowing he would become a “Trojan horse” for the democratic forces — is put directly into the headline. Yet this is the speculation of a conflicted source, not an established fact. [98, 99]

The political nature of the conflict is evident from the very questions asked. Nasha Niva asks Bepalov whether Tsikhanouski is ready to “wage war against his own wife”; the conflict with Franak Viačorka and Dzianis Kuchynski is described as a struggle for influence and leadership. In Bepalov’s account, the team used Tsikhanouski’s suffering in prison as political capital but after his release wanted to leave him a decorative role, while he himself claimed independent leadership. [99]

The next step is a shift from criticism of specific actions to the question of whether Tsikhanouski has any right to remain an independent political actor at all. Nasha Niva headlines the words of Fyodor Pavlyuchenko, editor-in-chief of Reform.news: “Such people have no place in Belarusian politics.” The text says that such behaviour “must be fought” and that Tsikhanouski must be “restrained” from representing the interests of Belarusians; Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is held up as the example of a legitimate political mandate. [103]

The same hierarchy is reproduced in a column by Iryna Sidorskaya, a media and communications expert and gender researcher: “not he, but Sviatlana is now the central figure”. Siarhei’s independent dissent is interpreted as “tunnel vision”, an inability to accept the new reality and a need for psychological, political and communications advisers. A selection of comments on the conflict repeats the same status-diminishing language: Siarhei “does not understand his place”, “has not outgrown the level of a blogger”, and his political prospects are constantly and without evidence presented as exhausted. Nasha Niva’s editorial selection creates the impression of an already formed public consensus about his political unfitness, while alternative voices are not given the opportunity to speak. [114, 115]

Psychologising the political conflict

A separate mechanism is to explain Tsikhanouski’s political independence and his struggle for his own political agency as consequences of his imprisonment. The outlet publishes Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s words that after his release he “psychologically remained in 2020” and must “find his place”. Yulia Mitskevich, deputy representative for social policy in the United Transitional Cabinet, describes his behaviour in terms of “manipulation”, “emotional blackmail” and the formula “Prison makes no one better, only worse”. [110, 111]

The problem is not the right of these people to criticise Tsikhanouski. The problem lies in the cumulative effect: political disagreement is increasingly explained not by the substance of his position and his struggle for political agency, but by trauma, ego, a psychological inability to adapt or to accept his own “place” in the “hierarchy”.

Tellingly, this frame drew a public objection from another former political prisoner, Siarhei Hun. In an article published by Nasha Niva itself, he criticised the portrayal of former political prisoners as traumatised and unstable people who should be pitied but not listened to, since such an approach deprives survivors of repression of their agency. [112]

The contrast is especially significant because Tsikhanouski himself acknowledged certain mistakes in the first months after his release, while describing specific political activity: building a team, working with former political prisoners, international meetings and his own strategy. His formula “I want to be, and will be, independent and self-reliant” makes it possible to define the subject of the conflict more precisely: it is not that he lacks political agency, but that he claims agency outside an already established political hierarchy. [113]

Family and private life as an instrument of political framing

The political conflict also extends into the family sphere. After Bepalov claimed that Tsikhanouski was allegedly leaving for the US for a year, leaving his wife and children in Lithuania, this version became a separate media story. The very next day Tsikhanouski categorically denied it and asked people “not to spread gossip”. Later Nasha Niva published information about the children’s whereabouts, citing the director and playwright Andrei Kureichyk, even though Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya declines to comment on the children precisely for security reasons. [98, 100, 104]

Here private information ceases to be merely a biographical detail: it is incorporated into a political portrait and supports a broader narrative about a family conflict, personal irresponsibility and Siarhei Tsikhanouski’s struggle against his own wife’s political role.

A financial-domestic frame humiliating Siarhei Tsikhanouski

A similar mechanism can be seen in the article “Tsikhanouski celebrated his birthday in style in Los Angeles”. The semantics of the headline create the impression of an expensive, ostentatious celebration, whereas facts later published by the editors themselves show Tsikhanouski’s personal expenses of \$130 (about EUR 115), help from friends with the venue and food, and about 50 guests. The editors also reported nearly \$40,000 (about EUR 35,000) in YouTube advertising revenue accrued as far back as 2020. [105, 106]

The problem here is therefore not proven “squandering of money” but the gap between the status-and-money semantics of the headline and the factual basis of the story itself.

Maximally humiliating personalisation also appears in a headlined phrase by blogger Volha Tokarchuk that Tsikhanouski “screwed up here” and therefore “disappeared”. Tokarchuk later apologised for another of her claims about his prison experience, admitting that she should not have spoken about something she could not have known. [107, 108]

Mikalai Statkevich, for his part, explicitly called what was happening “an online campaign against Siarhei Tsikhanouski” and separately asked Nasha Niva not to stoop to expressions such as “rubbish” about a man who had endured years of imprisonment. This confirms the perception of the cumulative nature of Nasha Niva’s attacks against participants within the Belarusian democratic field. [109]

The original episode of editorial asymmetry

Particularly telling is the article of 4 August 2025 “Is Siarhei Tsikhanouski moving to the US? No, it’s a lie.” Nasha Niva categorically called Virus’s report fake, since participants in a particular meeting denied discussing a move. Later the editors themselves reported on Tsikhanouski’s prolonged stay in the US. [38, 39]

This episode shows an important difference between the professionally cautious formula “at the time of verification no confirmation was found” and the categorical statement “No, it’s a lie”. When the factual picture changes or becomes clearer, the latter requires a more visible retrospective clarification than a passing mention.

Case assessment

The strongest point of this case is not that criticism of Siarhei Tsikhanouski is unacceptable or unfounded. The corpus shows something else: once he developed his own political line, Nasha Niva immediately built up around him a system of mutually reinforcing frames — conflicted sources, “inflated ego”, psychological trauma, family conflict, financial and domestic ridicule, “Lukashenko 2.0”, “Trojan horse”, “does not understand his place” and, finally, “such people have no place in Belarusian politics”.

At the same time, Nasha Niva itself publishes material confirming that Tsikhanouski has his own team, international contacts and a specific political programme. The central contradiction of the corpus is therefore this: Tsikhanouski’s independent political agency demonstrably exists, but a significant part of Nasha Niva’s personalised media narrative shifts the debate from his programme to the question of his personality, psychological fitness, relationship with his wife and his very right to occupy an independent place in the political field.

This is where the mechanism of status diminishment becomes apparent: criticism is directed not only at what a political actor says and does, but gradually his very right to be an independent political actor — and indeed to exist politically — is called into question.

4.12. Sviatlana Haluza

From a conflicted accusation to international and state circulation

Mechanisms — D + A + R

Sviatlana Haluza is a Belarusian journalist, animal rights activist and civic and political activist. After the events of 2020 she was forced to leave Belarus and moved to Lithuania with the help of the human rights organisation Freedom House; there she worked for some time as an assistant to Andrei Stryzhak, head of the BYSOL solidarity foundation, which is linked to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's democratic structures.

Haluza later continued her journalistic, civic and animal-protection work in exile, including taking part in the journalist support programme of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) in Germany. In 2025 she joined the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada, linked to Mikalai Statkevich's political movement.

Sviatlana Haluza has also faced serious health problems: according to available information, she has been diagnosed with a severe oncological illness for which she is undergoing treatment. This circumstance further increases her vulnerability and must be taken into account when assessing the possible consequences of public accusations, reputational attacks and psychological pressure.

Publication. On 17 February 2022 Nasha Niva published an article based on Andrei Stryzhak's unsubstantiated accusations. Haluza was linked to an alleged leak of internal information, possible consequences for Leanid Sudalenka, Vasil Palyakou and Andrei Aliaksandrau, and to Illia Behun and her alleged links with the KGB. The article was translated into English and further disseminated, including among Lithuanian state bodies and international organisations. [1, 5]

Problem. Stryzhak was not an independent outside source: Haluza had previously worked at BYSOL, including as his personal assistant, then left and criticised the organisation for internal problems, including large-scale corruption. The grave accusations of an interested source received a broad media platform and then institutional use as confirmation. [2, 3]

The mechanism of lending an appearance of credibility. Before publication these were the accusations of Stryzhak — Haluza's former boss and a party to the conflict. After Nasha Niva's publication they became media material cited by Motolko, translated into English and then entering the chain Freedom House → Lithuanian MFA → VSD. A journalistic publication became the bridge between a private accusation and institutional consequences for a Belarusian journalist. [1–6, 31–34]

In 2024 Stryzhak considerably softened his own version: he said he did not regard the story as “purely an intelligence matter”, called it rather a personal story and pointed to other possible ways the security forces could have accessed the data. The appeal materials also record that, when questioned as a witness, he was unable to name the sources and evidence on which he based his assumption that Sviatlana Haluza was linked to the arrests of three people and worked for the KGB. [9, 10]

Content of the 2022 publication. The primary copy of Nasha Niva's article shows that the editorial angle was considerably harsher than a neutral account of other people's suspicions. The headline already calls Haluza a former journalist of “SB” “suspected of leaking information from BYSOL”, while the lead claimed that she had obtained asylum and a scholarship in Germany “under the guise of a repressed journalist” and became “persona non grata” after Andrei Aliaksandrau's arrest. The article went on to call her “an unknown, unverified person”, suggested a link with Illia Behun, a former BYSOL employee, and wrote without evidence that foundations with which Behun had no connection had supposedly received information from Haluza. At the end the editors noted the absence of

“explanations” and “apologies for involvement in ‘Onoshko’s HQ’” on her part — in other words, the wording of the text already presupposed involvement, although the article provided no evidence of such involvement. [1, 31]

From supposition to categorical accusation. On the same day the Telegram channel “MotolkoHelp”, explicitly citing Nasha Niva (“The outlet @nashaniva reports...”), turned the article’s cautious formula into a categorical statement: “In the end Haluza leaked information to Lukashenko’s security services.” The same post linked to an English translation and asked readers to send it to acquaintances and journalists in Germany. The original article thus not only gained an additional audience but was transformed into a graver accusation of working for the KGB and deliberately taken into the international arena. It was this English-language republication that later featured in Freedom House’s letter to the Lithuanian MFA. Importantly, the categorical formula about “leaking to the security services” was written by Motolko, not Nasha Niva; but it was presented as a summary of Nasha Niva’s publication and grew directly out of the narrative it created. [2–4, 31, 32]

Negative visual framing. The article was accompanied by a still of Haluza from Belarusian state television, with no date of filming in the caption. In her complaint of 8 March 2022 Haluza stated that the still dated from 15 February 2019 — more than a year before the 2020 protests — and considered this visual juxtaposition manipulative, since it reinforced the impression of a current link with state television. [31, 33]

Independent verification of the key accusations. Additional court materials significantly weaken the two central links underlying the public narrative. Witnesses questioned in the case confirmed that Haluza had not communicated with Illia Behun or could have met him only occasionally at public events; the founders and administrators of the Telegram channel “Onoshko’s HQ” confirmed that Behun did not create the channel and that Haluza was neither its founder nor a content creator. The appeal materials also state specifically that the evidence and witness testimony presented did not allow a well-founded claim that the human rights defenders Leanid Sudalenka and Vasil Palyakou, or the journalist Andrei Aliaksandrau, were arrested as a result of information allegedly passed on by Haluza. This shows that the most important elements of Stryzhak’s version were the subject of serious factual rebuttal. [28, 29]

How quickly the media narrative became a Lithuanian state decision. On 30 March 2022 the MFA received Freedom House’s letter, and on 31 March it already suspended journalist Sviatlana Haluza’s accreditation — pending a new request to the VSD, which was sent only on 7 April. By comparison, during the initial vetting in June 2021 the VSD had officially stated that it had no information preventing her accreditation. This chronology makes the quality of the original media material particularly important: a grave accusation from the public sphere did not remain a journalistic dispute but almost immediately triggered a state procedure to strip the journalist of her legal status, creating the risk of her deportation to a Belarusian prison. [28]

Confirmation. Nasha Niva → Motolko’s English-language republication → a link to that republication in Freedom House’s letter of 30.03.2022 → Lithuanian MFA → VSD → withdrawal of accreditation. The case file explicitly records the use of public publications as a significant part of the MFA’s evidentiary basis. At the same time, the initial state trigger was Freedom House’s letter: the day after it was received, the accreditation was suspended, and then the same core information was passed to the VSD for assessment. For the purposes of this monitoring, it is therefore important to record the proven chain in which material derived from Nasha Niva became part of the transition from a private accusation to a state procedure to strip a journalist in a vulnerable situation of her status. [2–6, 28]

Sviatlana Haluza’s reaction was not recorded only retrospectively in the court dispute. On 8 March 2022 she filed a defamation complaint in which she specifically contested the claims of her involvement in the arrests of Aliaksandrau, Sudalenka and Palyakou, the link with Behun, and Motolko’s claim that she had passed data to the security services. On 29 March 2022 the Vilnius Regional Prosecutor’s Office formally forwarded this complaint to the police to clarify the circumstances and take a procedural decision. This confirms that the accusations were formally contested almost immediately after publication, before the subsequent administrative decision by the MFA. [33, 34]

Republication of the accusations in 2025. On 25 April 2025 Nasha Niva returned to the Haluza case in connection with her joining Narodnaya Hramada. The headline itself reminded readers of the journalist who allegedly “leaked

Stryzhak’s private correspondence”, and the subheading claimed that publication of the correspondence “led to arrests in Belarus”. In the text the editors again stated that many people mentioned in the correspondence were “eventually” arrested and received long sentences, and repeated the version that Sudalenka and Palyakou were detained after Haluza’s livestream. Yet the article did not mention her early formal challenge to the accusations, the witness testimony and appeal materials weakening the causal link between Haluza’s actions and the arrests, or Stryzhak’s own subsequent softening of his version. [122]

Significance. A new news peg — joining a political party — was used to reactivate a grave accusatory narrative three years old. The formula that publication of the correspondence “led to arrests” presents a disputed causal link as an established result and adds to the cumulative reputational harm. This is not merely an archived article: the 2025 publication shows that the original narrative continues to be reproduced even after material refuting the original version has emerged. [122]

Consequences. The withdrawal of accreditation created professional and migration risks for Sviatlana Haluza. On 28 June 2022 she was diagnosed with cancer; around 13 July the diagnosis was specified as stage IVB classical Hodgkin lymphoma. From July to October 2022 she underwent intensive chemotherapy. The disease later relapsed and in February 2025 required an autologous haematopoietic stem cell transplant. For a Belarusian refugee who faced persecution if deported to Belarus, the loss of legal and professional status against the background of a serious illness represented not merely administrative harm but a real threat to life because of the possible interruption of specialised treatment. The documents confirm the severity of her medical vulnerability. [7, 8, 30]

4.13. Yevgeny Vilsky

Associative linking with the security services and description through his attitude to Tsikhanouskaya

Mechanisms — D + M + A. Guilt by association, conflation of levels of evidence and amplification.

Yevgeny Vilsky is first deputy chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada, led by Mikalai Statkevich; after Statkevich’s arrest he served as acting party chairman. He took part in the “Tell the Truth” campaign, in 2020 coordinated Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s initiative group in the Vitebsk region and was detained. In exile he takes part in the Belarus Democratic Forum. On 8 July 2024 the Brest Regional Court sentenced him in absentia to 12 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 480,000 Belarusian roubles (about EUR 135,000) in a case in which Volha Karach, Veronika Tsepkalo, Anatoly Kotov and Vadim Dmitrenok were also convicted; Viasna recognises this prosecution as politically motivated, and in 2025 his flat in Navapolatsk was put up for auction [134].

Associative linking with the security services

Nasha Niva consistently places Vilsky’s name in a single chain with cases of differing evidential weight. In May 2024 the outlet ran the headline “At least two members of Narodnaya Hramada wrote denunciations to the KGB”, although the article itself allowed that the submissions in their names might have been sent by other people. In February 2025, reporting on accusations against Yevgeny Dudkin, who later publicly admitted that in 2009–2016 he had been a secret KGB collaborator, the editors linked him to the coalition of the former Narodnaya Hramada led by Vilsky and placed on Vilsky’s name a hyperlink leading to Dudkin’s confession.

The result is a chain: Dudkin → cooperation with the KGB → coalition → Narodnaya Hramada → Vilsky. In Dudkin’s case there is his own confession; in the case of the two party members, disputed database entries; in the case of Vilsky himself, neither confessions nor documents. A proven fact about one person is transferred in the reader’s mind onto people politically linked to him.

Description through his attitude to Tsikhanouskaya

In an article about an internal party conflict, the editors write in their own voice: “For several years now Vilsky has been trying to build a movement of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s opponents.” An independent politician is defined not by his programme, goals or role in the party but by his attitude to a single political centre — after his name had already been placed in the context of the KGB and “informers”.

Case assessment

Vilsky's case combines two techniques: guilt by association with another person's proven cooperation with the KGB, and defining an independent politician through his attitude to Tsikhanouskaya. The outlet provides no evidence of Vilsky himself cooperating with the security services.

4.14. Siarhei Sparysh

From political prisoner and party politician to “radical critic”

Mechanisms — **S + M + A.** Status substitution, description through his attitude to Tsikhanouskaya and radicalising framing.

Siarhei Sparysh is general secretary of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada, an associate of Mikalai Statkevich and a member of the human rights organisation Our House. He was detained on 25 June 2020 and on 7 May 2021 the Minsk Regional Court sentenced him to six years in a penal colony in the case concerning the Telegram channel “Army with the People”; Viasna recognised him as a political prisoner [140, 142]. In prison he was held in a punishment cell, and in 2022 the KGB added him to its list of persons “involved in terrorist activity”. On 11 September 2025 he was released and forcibly removed to Lithuania, and on 1 September 2026 the KGB added him to its list of members of the “extremist formation” Our House.

Until 2025: political prisoner and associate of Statkevich

In 2020–2024 Nasha Niva described Sparysh through his own biography: activist and press secretary of Narodnaya Hramada, “associate of Mikalai Statkevich”, political prisoner, deputy party chairman. Its articles reported in detail on his detention, trial, prison conditions and health. The same formula — “associate of Mikalai Statkevich” — was still used in September and November 2025, immediately after his release.

2026: “radicals”, “smashing Tsikhanouskaya” and a “coalition with Karach”

Once Sparysh returned to public politics, the frame changed. An article of 28 March 2026 appeared under the headline “Sparysh went to Lithuanian radicals to smash Tsikhanouskaya”. In the next article the editors, in their own voice, wrote that Sparysh had “joined a current that radically criticises Tsikhanouskaya’s Office” and “entered into a coalition with Volha Karach”.

His position as party general secretary and his membership of Our House disappear from the description. In their place appears a vague “current” defined solely by its attitude to the Office, and the sequence “radically criticises” → “Lithuanian radicals” → “smash Tsikhanouskaya”. The outlet does not show which of Sparysh's positions or actions justify the “radical” label. Membership of an organisation is replaced by a “coalition” with its head, and the editors did not seek comment from Sparysh himself.

Case assessment

The same person is described differently depending on his political position: while he was a political prisoner — as Statkevich's associate and a party politician; after returning to independent politics — through his attitude to Tsikhanouskaya, “radicals” and a “coalition with Karach”. What changes is not the tone of individual articles but the very principle by which the outlet defines his political identity.

4.15. Yevgeny Karaulov

Reducing a situation of coercion to the formula “I said ‘yes’”

Mechanisms — **M + S.** Manipulative headlines and status diminishment

Yevgeny Karaulov is a Belarusian political and civic figure, an activist of the democratic movement, a delegate to the Coordination Council of Belarus from the “Offensive” faction, and former acting secretary of the Coordination Council. He previously took part in the “Tell the Truth” civic campaign and in public and political initiatives related to democratic change in Belarus.

In September 2026 Karaulov publicly reported an attempt by Belarusian KGB officers to recruit him and systematic pressure on his relatives who remained in Belarus. According to him, on 25 June 2026 representatives of the security service contacted him using his grandmother's phone, offered cooperation and used threats against his family. Karaulov said that his relatives' homes had previously been searched several times, and that the pressure continued after the contact with the KGB.

Karaulov openly reported what had happened to members of his faction and to human rights defenders. His case became the subject of public discussion of transnational repression, the use of political émigrés' relatives to exert pressure, and attempts to recruit Belarusian opposition figures abroad.

Publication. On 16 September 2026 Nasha Niva published an article headlined: "Yevgeny Karaulov of the CC: 'I was offered cooperation with the KGB. And I said "yes"'. [121] Yet the subheading already reports that the KGB has been terrorising Karaulov's family in Belarus for three months.

The full text of the publication describes a considerably more complex situation. According to Karaulov, KGB officers repeatedly searched his relatives' homes, used family members' phones to contact him and made him continue the conversation after the phrase: "If your family matters to you, you will call." Karaulov himself explains plainly that he perceived this as a threat.

When he was offered cooperation with the KGB, Karaulov at first tried to avoid giving a clear answer. Then, as Nasha Niva itself reproduces verbatim, "under pressure, fearing for his family" he said "yes". When he was asked for an SMS code to access his Telegram account, Karaulov refused to hand over anything and ended the conversation.

The subsequent account further confirms the context of coercion. According to Karaulov, his mother was taken away by security officers, his grandmother's phone was confiscated, his mother was later detained again at her workplace, and attempts to contact Karaulov himself continued through his relatives' phones. At the end of the article Karaulov urges others not to engage in conversation with the KGB, to block such contacts immediately and to turn to human rights defenders.

The content of the publication itself thus gives no grounds for reducing what happened to Karaulov's simple voluntary consent to cooperate with the KGB. On the contrary, the account published by the editors contains a sequence: pressure on relatives → perceived threat to the family → coerced answer → attempt to obtain access to Telegram → refusal to hand over data → end of contact.

The autonomous impact of the headline

It is particularly significant that the headline functions as an independent unit of information. It appears separately from the full text on social networks, in messengers, search results, news aggregators, link previews and in further republication. It therefore cannot be assumed that everyone who sees the headline will necessarily open the article and read the circumstances of coercion contained in it.

In this case the headline offers the following abbreviated sequence of meaning:

offered cooperation with the KGB → said "yes".

Whereas the full text of the publication contains a fundamentally more complex sequence:

pressure on relatives → threat to the family → answer given under duress → demand for access to Telegram → refusal to hand over data → end of contact.

It is precisely the circumstances absent from the headline that are crucial to interpreting Karaulov's words.

The potentially manipulative effect is therefore not removed by the fact that the necessary explanations appear further down in the article. For a reader who sees only the headline or a preview of the publication, these explanations are absent. The formula "I was offered cooperation with the KGB. And I said 'yes'" can by itself create an association with consent to cooperate with a security service, whereas the full article describes an answer given under pressure and out of fear for a family subjected to persecution, followed by a refusal to hand over the requested data.

Key point of the episode. A manipulative effect can be created not only by publishing an untrue statement but also by selectively lifting a factually accurate quote out of context, when circumstances essential to understanding its meaning are left out of the headline. In Karaulov’s case the editors have the full context of coercion and publish it within the article, but for the headline they choose the most reputationally sensitive element of the account — “offered cooperation with the KGB — said ‘yes’”.

4.16. Belarus Democratic Forum

Belarus Democratic Forum

Mechanisms — S + D + M

The Belarus Democratic Forum was founded in 2021 by Valery Tsepkalo, Dzmitry Bolkunets and Anatoly Kotov as a public platform open to all for generating ideas and developing proposals on Belarus’s social, economic and political development [175, 176]. In 2022 the Forum held two major meetings: on 16–17 May in Warsaw and on 11–12 July in Berlin [175, 177]. Topics included recognising Belarus as an occupied state, criteria for recognising political prisoners, the legal status of Belarusians in exile and cases of discrimination against them abroad [175].

All politicians of the democratic forces without exception, including Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Pavel Latushka, were invited to the events to discuss joint action. However, they did not attend [178, 179]. Two former speakers of the Belarusian parliament took part in the Forum, including Siamion Sharetski, chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet, as well as several former presidential candidates [180, 181].

Nasha Niva interpreted the Forum as an attempt to take “power and leadership” away from Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. The Forum was described as conceived as a “counterweight” to a conference held by Tsikhanouskaya’s Office [57], and its organisers as people for whom “there was no place” in the current line-up matching their ambitions [181]. Such an interpretation is entirely groundless: one cannot take away what does not exist. The democratic forces in exile hold no state power that could be “seized”, and the Forum openly invited everyone, including Tsikhanouskaya herself, to work together.

Participants in the Forum were subjected to insults and demeaning characterisations in Nasha Niva’s publications: the Forum was presented as a gathering of “second-tier political emigration”, and Dzmitry Bolkunets was called a “Russian political scientist” [179]. This is another example of an independent political platform being defined not by its agenda but by its relationship to Tsikhanouskaya, and its participants by dismissive labels.

The editors openly ridiculed the “Ultimatum” campaign itself, organised by a group of people including Anatoly Kotov, Dzmitry Bolkunets, Ruslan Khazin, Anatoly Fedorov and others and aimed at the release of political prisoners. During the “Ultimatum” action on 4 July 2024, according to the organisers, the Polish government closed rail and road traffic at the Polish–Belarusian border [82, 83]. The announced ultimatum coincided with the beginning of the first wave of releases of political prisoners: on 2 July 2024 Lukashenko announced the release of seriously ill political prisoners, on 3 July Ryhor Kastusiu was freed, and in July as a whole at least 18 people were released [167, 168]. The organisers regard the campaign’s pressure as one of the factors that led to this first wave of releases. Instead of analysing this connection, Nasha Niva reduced the campaign to the formulas “well, almost” and “nominal blockade”.

Also ridiculed or passed over in silence were four open appeals by Nobel laureates, prepared with the participation of the Belarus Democratic Forum, which were of exceptional importance in launching the process of releasing political prisoners. In total they were supported by 75 Nobel Prize laureates: on 20 March 2024 — an appeal to EU leaders calling for concrete measures to free political prisoners; on 17 July 2024 — an appeal to Alexander Lukashenko, the UN Secretary-General and the leadership of Poland and other countries in support of a political amnesty; on 17 February 2025 — an appeal to US President Donald Trump and world leaders; on 19 August 2025 — a further appeal to Trump, delivered to him personally [169]. Reuters reported on the last of these: 19 Nobel laureates urged Trump to keep up the pressure to free up to 1,300 political prisoners [170].

Likewise ridiculed were the appeal to President Trump of 15 August 2025 on behalf of the Belarus Democratic Forum and the first telephone conversation between a US president and Lukashenko on the release of political prisoners that

followed [169]. Reuters confirmed both Trump’s call to Lukashenko and the fact that it took place a few hours after a letter that Dzmitry Bolkunets sent to Trump on behalf of the Forum asking him to raise the issue of Belarusian political prisoners; Trump cited the same number of political prisoners as given in the letter [170]. The subsequent releases of political prisoners were also covered by Sky News [171]. Nasha Niva responded with mockery. Even before any verifiable result had emerged, the editors stated that Bolkunets “is already preparing the ground to claim credit for their release”, and quipped: “One must suppose it was precisely after receiving this letter that Trump immediately dialled Lukashenko’s number” [85, 172]. This is the outlet itself directly attributing an inner motive, not quoting an opponent. Subsequent events — the release of a group of political prisoners on 11 September 2025 during a visit to Minsk by Trump’s special envoy John Coale [173] — showed that this was not “claiming credit” but a real mechanism of pressure that the editors chose to ridicule.

4.17. Other episodes

This section brings together episodes for which the report presents less material but which show the same techniques as the main cases.

Narodnaya Hramada: blaming the victim for being infiltrated by the security services

Mechanisms — D + M. Discrediting the victim through the fact of infiltration by the security services

Mechanism. The presence of a recruited agent inside an opposition organisation is evidence first and foremost of a security-service operation against that organisation and of hostile services’ interest in the activities of the political opposition in exile. Using the fact of successful infiltration as a compromising characteristic of the organisation itself reverses responsibility: the target of a special operation is confronted, as compromising material, with the fact that the security services operated against it successfully. [40]

Assessment. This framing amounts to blaming the victim through the fact of infiltration by the security services. For journalistic assessment it is essential to distinguish between evidence that an organisation cooperated with the security services and evidence that the security services managed to plant an agent in it. Nasha Niva did not make this distinction.

Alena Dedyulya: association with Skinderev and GUBOPiK

Mechanisms — D + M

Alena (Yelena) Dedyulya is a Belarusian civic activist, former political prisoner, participant in the 2020 protest movement and member of the former political prisoners’ community RE:Belarus in Lithuania. Before her political persecution she was a foster mother: alongside her own children she raised two girls taken into the family.

On 2 September 2021 Dedyulya was detained in the so-called “bales case” — a criminal case against a group of Belarusians who had painted protest symbols on white-wrapped silage bales next to the M1 highway. On 31 January 2022 the court sentenced her to one year’s imprisonment for hooliganism. The Viasna Human Rights Centre recognised her as a political prisoner. Having served her full sentence, she was released on 10 May 2022.

After her release Dedyulya moved to Lithuania, where she continued her civic work, took part in solidarity actions with Belarusian political prisoners, helped Belarusian migrants and spoke about the situation of women in Belarusian penal colonies. In interviews with human rights defenders she stressed that she considers it her duty to speak about the fate of women political prisoners who remain behind bars in Belarus.

In August 2026 Alena Dedyulya became the subject of a Nasha Niva article after a protest in Vilnius during which she tried symbolically to hand Dzianis Kuchynski, a representative of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s Office, a plate of noodles, expressing dissatisfaction with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s performance as a politician.

Publication. The publication links Dedyulya with other political figures in exile and with a GUBOPiK context, creating suspicion and a negative reputation by association. [13]

Problem. Readers may transfer a negative characterisation of a third party or structure onto the subject of the article, even where there is no evidence of a direct link, joint action or responsibility.

***The mechanism of lending an appearance of credibility.** The editorial publication fixes the accusatory association in readers' minds as a socially significant connection, although the mere proximity of names, figures or contexts in an article does not prove any direct relationship of the person to GUBOPiK or to the actions of third parties. [13]*

Consequences. Reputational risk and discrediting through “guilt by association”.

In the following episodes, the monitoring reproduces disputed information precisely as accusations and versions published by Nasha Niva, not as established facts. Their defamatory effect arises from categorical presentation, the absence of independent verification, the unequal status given to the response, and the combination of the accusation with a mocking or politically labelling characterisation of the person.

Ruslan Khazin: an unverified accusation about Nevzlin's money and social belittling

Mechanisms — D + S + M + A

Ruslan Khazin is an entrepreneur and opposition activist, a former employee of the Hrodna Azot plant who later worked on construction and electrical installation projects in Russia and Poland. He led construction crews of 20 to 120 people involved in major infrastructure projects. In exile he continued his civic and political activity, including helping to organise the “Ultimatum” action on the Belarusian–Polish border on 4 July 2024.

In August 2025 Ruslan Khazin found himself at the centre of a public conflict with Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Nasha Niva's editors. It was triggered by an offer from Khazin and another Belarusian activist, Viachaslau Yepishko, to provide Siarhei Tsikhanouski with EUR 200,000 in exchange for an audit of the funding of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office and the activities of her entourage.

On 12 August 2025 Nasha Niva reported as established that the money offered to Siarhei Tsikhanouski “actually” belonged to Leonid Nevzlin. The only stated basis was an alleged account by Siarhei Tsikhanouski himself of a private conversation with Ruslan Khazin. The text reproduces an even more specific unverified accusation: Leonid Nevzlin allegedly handed over the money and a money-counting machine for a video shoot. Nasha Niva cites no documents, no confirmation from Nevzlin, no movement of funds and no independent witness. Ruslan Khazin's position was absent from the first article. [130]

However, Leonid Nevzlin publicly denied knowing Khazin and Yepishko and stated that he had not offered them any money. Ruslan Khazin himself also denied receiving funds from Nevzlin. The claim that Nevzlin financed the offer was thus publicly disputed, and no convincing independent evidence of the origin of the money was presented in the Nasha Niva publications examined.

Despite this, the denial was packaged under the headline “Electrician Khazin...”, the verb “boasted” and the subheading “the activist took offence”. The original version acquired the status of fact, while the response of the person concerned acquired the status of an emotional reaction by a socially belittled character. This is a classic defamatory mechanism: an unverified accusation is published in categorical form, and the subsequent denial is discredited by the very manner of its presentation. [130, 131]

An additional element of the editorial presentation was the social belittling of Khazin's public status. Instead of a neutral description of his professional experience, Nasha Niva emphasised his work as an electrician, a supposed shortage of orders and limited financial means. In the publication of 13 August 2025 this characterisation was put directly into the headline.

Working as an electrician is not in itself a negative characteristic and does not call into question a person's civic activity. But combined with claims of financial insolvency, the activist's obscurity and his supposed dependence on a Russian millionaire, such an editorial composition can create the image of a person without independent resources acting in someone else's interests.

In this case the subject of the monitoring is the combination of two techniques: spreading a serious but unproven claim about the origin of funds, and a discrediting contextual presentation of the activist's professional status.

Anatoly Fedorov: political marginalisation in a report on an activist's grave health condition

Mechanisms — S + M + P

Anatoly Fedorov (Anatol Fiadarau) is a Belarusian political and civic figure, a long-standing participant in the national-democratic movement, former deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and head of its Mahilyou regional organisation. He took part in the dissident movement in Soviet times and, after Belarus regained independence, continued his political activity, advocating democratic change and the country's national revival.

In 2020 Fedorov took part in protests against the presidential election results and was placed under administrative arrest. After emigrating, he created the civic and political initiative "National Democratic Platform", supported Dzmitry Bolkunets's political initiatives, including the "Ultimatum to Lukashenko", and publicly criticised the activities of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office.

On 23 January 2026, during a live broadcast by blogger Siarhei Petrukhin, Anatoly Fedorov suffered a stroke, after which he was hospitalised.

Publication. On 2 February 2026 Nasha Niva reported the stroke suffered by 72-year-old Anatoly Fedorov, former deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF). The defamatory element is that already in the subheading the stroke victim is identified as a "radical opponent of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya" and Dzmitry Bolkunets's colleague in the "Ultimatum" action. [132]

The subheading reads: "The activist is known on Facebook as Bolyaslau Volat — a radical opponent of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Dzmitry Bolkunets's colleague in his 'Ultimatums'" [132]. Combining news of a stroke with a political label in this way gives the reader the impression that the illness was a kind of "karmic" retribution for a political position.

Vladimir Neklyayev: amplifying a derogatory assessment in a historical debate

Mechanisms — D + A

Vladimir Neklyayev (Uladzimir Niakliaeyu) is a well-known Belarusian poet, writer and civic and political figure, former chairman of the Union of Belarusian Writers, founder of the "Tell the Truth!" civic campaign and a candidate in the 2010 Belarusian presidential election. He is one of the best-known representatives of the Belarusian national intelligentsia, who for decades has defended the Belarusian language, culture, democratic freedoms and the country's independence.

On 19 December 2010, presidential election day, Neklyayev was brutally beaten by security forces while heading with members of his campaign to a protest in Minsk. He was subsequently detained in hospital and taken into custody in a criminal case connected with the mass protests against the election results. In May 2011 the court sentenced him to two years' imprisonment, suspended. After his release Vladimir Neklyayev continued his literary, civic and political work, took part in democratic initiatives and was repeatedly detained and subjected to administrative prosecution.

On 19 August 2024 Nasha Niva published Siarhei Navumchyk's response to a historical essay by Vladimir Neklyayev, poet and former 2010 presidential candidate. The headline carried the assessment "a phantasmagorical concept of history", and the text opened by saying that Neklyayev's notes could be called "gibberish". Authorship is formally indicated, but the editorial choice of precisely these derogatory formulas for the headline and the first paragraph gives them maximum visibility. A substantive historical debate is packaged as the public disqualification of the author, which causes reputational harm in its own right, regardless of how convincing Siarhei Navumchyk's subsequent arguments are. [133]

5. SYSTEMATIC DISCREDITING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Taken together, the cases examined go beyond explanations in terms of isolated journalistic errors, unfortunate headlines or accidental lapses in Nasha Niva's editorial balance. The monitoring reveals a recurring, selective and

cumulative editorial practice whose objective result is the discrediting, marginalisation and erosion of the political and public legitimacy of a particular circle of participants in Belarusian civil society in exile.

This conclusion is based not on a political assessment of the content of the publications but on the repetition of specific editorial operations. The same defamation mechanisms recur with respect to different people and in different years: grave accusations without an evidentiary basis; use of interested or conflicted sources; guilt by association; supposed security-service and pro-Russian contexts; psychologising and personal disqualification of critics; disclosure of private, family and geolocation information; turning assumptions and preliminary administrative signals into persistent public statuses; and systematic repetition of negative characterisations until a cumulative negative dossier is formed.

These mechanisms also include visual framing. In discrediting articles a negative image can be formed not only by the text and headline but also by the editorial choice of a photograph, still or preview: an unflattering angle, an unfavourable facial expression, a random frame from a video or an image that visually makes the subject less attractive, ridiculous, aggressive or unstable. A single unfortunate frame does not in itself prove editorial intent. But when such images are used repeatedly and selectively in negative articles about the same actors in Belarusian civil society in exile, the visual choice becomes part of a cumulative negative framing and must be analysed together with the headline, vocabulary and composition of the publication.

5.1. Selectivity: some are criticised, others promoted

It is particularly significant that this practice is selective. A large share of the participants examined are united not by a common biography, profession or ideology but by their independence from the dominant political centre of the Belarusian democratic opposition, their public criticism of its representatives, or their attempt to preserve their own political and civic agency. At the same time, examples of correct coverage show that the editors are capable of applying a much more careful journalistic standard — separating fact from opinion, correcting errors, conveying a position neutrally and limiting conclusions to the available evidence — when the people concerned are close to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's political centre. Explaining the body of material identified solely by chance or professional negligence is therefore unconvincing.

A recurring frame describes independent politicians, experts and civic actors primarily through their attitude to a single political centre: “Tsikhanouskaya's opponent”, “adversary”, “counterweight”, “analyst against Tsikhanouskaya”. As a result, the critic is not analysed through the substance of his argument; instead, the argument is redefined through the critic's status in relation to the political centre.

Another cross-cutting technique in the corpus concerns not only how different political and civic actors are described but also which elements of their activity receive independent news visibility.

Many of the participants examined in this monitoring carry out independent civic, human rights, expert or political work, take part in international events, interact with foreign institutions, run their own projects and receive international awards. Yet these elements of their biography and activity are passed over and ignored and do not in practice become a stable basis of their media portrait. Even when a positive news event is covered, it is immediately reframed through a conflict or discrediting lens if the participant is not controlled by or close to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's political centre.

A different model can be seen in the coverage of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her circle. Her international meetings, speeches, visits, briefings, conference appearances, minor episodes and contacts with foreign political leaders regularly receive the status of stand-alone news. At the same time her obvious failures and setbacks are hardly covered and are passed over in silence. As a result, Nasha Niva not only reports on Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's political centre but constantly reproduces its institutional significance by accumulating a large volume of small reports on its day-to-day activity.

Analytically, this matters as an agenda-setting effect. Political and public significance is shaped not only by positive or negative characterisations. It is also created by the number and type of news events to which the editors give independent visibility. Frequent neutral or positive documentation of one political actor's meetings, speeches and international contacts reinforces its status as the natural centre of the political field. At the same time, limited visibility

of comparable activity by other participants, or placing it mainly in a conflict context, can create the impression that their activity consists mainly of criticising that centre.

The mechanism of political centring identified by the monitoring therefore consists of two complementary operations: heightened visibility for the activity of the political centre, and reducing independent participants to their attitude towards that centre. As a result, readers are systematically shown what Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya does while her mistakes and failures are passed over, whereas with regard to her critics and actors independent of her Office they are far more often shown what these people say about Tsikhanouskaya, whom they are in conflict with and why they are considered her “opponents”.

5.2. How assumptions become “established facts”

The most significant finding of the monitoring is the cumulative nature of the harm. An individual publication may look like a stand-alone news event, but a series of publications gradually fixes a set of mutually reinforcing negative markers on a person. The harm is caused not by a single formula or publication but by the constant publication of unverified information, its accumulation and the mutual reinforcement of frames.

The cumulative effect also works in reverse: constant coverage of one political centre’s international meetings, speeches and institutional contacts builds a cumulative positive dossier of political significance, while other participants’ achievements receive less visibility or are included mainly in conflict and reputational stories.

The central mechanism of this system is lending an appearance of credibility. A private accusation, a conflicted version, an assumption or an association changes its informational status once published by a professional media outlet. It becomes indexed, quotable, reproducible and usable for further political and institutional purposes. With repeated repetition the original degree of uncertainty gradually disappears, and a disputed version begins to function as part of the person’s public biography.

Several cases show the sequence: an assumption or a limited fact → a media narrative that has acquired an appearance of credibility → a repeated label → an institutional-sounding status → a characterisation of the person. A similar methodological risk arises when a digital indicator turns into the status of “agent” and an unnamed version into a claim about the actions of security services.

The structure of Nasha Niva’s publications identified by the monitoring is therefore as follows:

a weak, disputed, conspiratorial or conflicted initial claim → an appearance of credibility through publication → repeated repetition and amplification → a cumulative negative dossier on the participant → a persistent public status → institutional circulation → potential political, legal, reputational or physical harm.

5.3. The graver the accusation, the stricter the verification must be

The KGB, the FSB, GUBOPiK, informants, preparation of murder, fraud and a threat to national security — these are grave accusations with maximum reputational and institutional potential. They therefore require a heightened standard of verification, of signalling uncertainty and of the right to subsequent correction. The corpus shows the opposite in Nasha Niva: the most destructive claims rest on conspiracy theories, anonymous, conflicted or interested sources, rumours, unverified information, associations and editorial inferences, whereas in other stories the editors demonstrate much more rigorous fact-checking. The monitoring’s main yardstick is the gap between the gravity of the conclusion and the strength of the evidence shown to the reader.

5.4. Summary table of recurring techniques

Cross-cutting technique	Where it recurs
Security services / association with the security apparatus	Volha Karach, Sviatlana Haluza, Yevgeny Vilsky, Pavel Usov, Dzmitry Skinderev, Olga Semashko
Political marginalisation	Volha Karach, Pavel Usov, Dzmitry Bolkunets, Zianon Pazniak, Veronika Tsepalo, Valery Tsepalo, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Ruslan Khazin, Anatoly Fedorov

Guilt by association	Volha Karach – Mantas Danielius, Volha Karach – Nikolai Petrushenko, Veronika Tsepkalo, Anatoly Kotov, Dzmitry Skinderev – Alena Dedyulya
Psychologising / personal disqualification	Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Pavel Usov, Volha Karach, Dzmitry Bolkunets, Valery Tsepkalo, Ruslan Khazin, Vladimir Neklyayev
Privacy / family sphere	Volha Karach, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Dzmitry Skinderev, Olga Semashko, Anatoly Fedorov
Turning an assumption into a status	Dzmitry Skinderev, Olga Semashko, Pavel Usov, Volha Karach
Institutional circulation	Sviatlana Haluza, Volha Karach, Oleg Borshchevsky, Dzmitry Skinderev

5.5. Double standards in verifying accusations

The corpus reveals a recurring asymmetry. When grave accusations come from Vitaly Kondratenko and concern people or structures the editors are protective of, Nasha Niva demands evidence, stresses its absence, uses the categories “fake”, “conspiracy theory” and “provocation” and carries out its own verification. This can be seen in particular in the publications about Tsikhanouski and in the editors’ persistent labelling of Virus himself as a “conspiracy-theorist blogger” and “provocateur blogger”. [35, 38]

When comparable or substantially graver claims target Volha Karach, Pavel Kulazhenko or other participants in the democratic movement, however, the editors are willing to give the accusation a journalistic platform on a far weaker evidentiary basis. Particularly telling is the accusation that Karach was involved in the alleged preparation of Andrei Stryzhak’s murder: the gravity of the accusation is as high as it gets, while the published article shows no evidence whatsoever that Volha Karach ordered or organised such a crime. [11, 12]

This is not a demand that all of blogger Virus’s claims be treated as credible. On the contrary, the question is one of consistency in the editorial standard. If a lack of evidence is grounds for harshly labelling one source’s version as fake or conspiracy theory, a comparable standard of verification, caveats and subsequent correction must also apply to grave accusations against Volha Karach, Pavel Kulazhenko and other subjects of Nasha Niva’s publications.

The cases examined confirm this asymmetry. The editors show that they can correct factual errors and publish opposing views (the case of the Coordination Council organising committee, the Ihar Tur case, the interview with Veronika Tsepkalo), yet with respect to Volha Karach they simultaneously use far more categorical formulas — “wants to unseat Tsikhanouskaya”, “complete nonsense”, “there are no real cases” — and recurring, persistent associations with external accusations, ideologically toxic figures and political rivals. This makes the difference in the level of evidence and the degree of categorical editorial conclusions a subject of the monitoring. [50–63]

The outlet condemns “guilt by association” — and uses it itself

In its publication about Vitaly Kondratenko, Nasha Niva itself explains why inferences based on family ties are unsound: the editors criticise attempts to transfer relatives’ characteristics onto the Belarusian public figures Valery Kavaleuski and Aliaksei Leonchyk and stress the absence of evidence. Yet immediately afterwards the article introduces into its portrait of Vitaly Kondratenko himself, in detail, his father’s Russian education and state-military biography and his mother’s Russian origin. The publication contains no formal statement that this makes Kondratenko an agent, but compositionally Nasha Niva reproduces the very mechanism of accusatory association that it presented a few paragraphs earlier as methodologically unsound. [35]

A second example of “guilt by kinship” is the publication about Anatoly Kotov. The article builds a significant part of its biographical frame around the formulas “son of KGB officers and brother of a KGB man” and a separate subheading about his parents as KGB officers. Yet in another passage of the same article the editors are able to add a precise caveat: Kotov’s circle allegedly manipulated Virus, “but it is not known whether he himself was involved”. The combination of these two techniques shows that the editors know how to mark the limits of what is proven but do not do so in all elements of a suspicious biographical portrait. [44] The later BIC/OCCRP/DW investigation in June 2026 provided a much stronger external evidentiary picture: Kotov’s pre-planned forcible transfer to the area of Abkhazia and his removal from the yacht by the Russian coast guard/FSB. This reinforces the need to separate a victim’s biographical associations from evidence of the operation against him. [69–72]

How the editors verified accusations concerning Pavel Latushka

The article on the alleged hacking of Pavel Latushka's email shows that the editors know how to verify digital accusations: they check whether passwords were current and examine interface elements, compare avatars and features of the message, note the absence of an external-recipient marker, and explicitly do not treat the screenshot as proof of access. At the same time the editors leave open a separate question — whether the security services could have obtained access previously held by Anzhalika Melnikava. [42]

The significance of this example is that the difference in standards cannot be explained by the editors lacking the professional tools to verify grave digital accusations carefully. The editors demonstrate their ability to separate the established from the assumed and to leave open a question for which there is insufficient evidence.

This means that Nasha Niva deliberately discredits and defames independent actors in Belarusian civil society in exile.

The label comes before the facts

In an article about the “Gathering of the Concerned”, the event is defined already in the headline as “an event of Tsikhanouskaya's opponents”. Even before the content of the meeting is discussed, participants are described by who reposted the invitation, after which the editors write that “it was obvious” that yet another meeting of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's opponents was being prepared. The groups' weak electoral result and information about agents and informers are then introduced. This sequence sets a political frame before the main factual material is presented. For the monitoring it is important to distinguish between reporting a verifiable action — for example, criticism of Tsikhanouskaya — and assigning a persistent political identity as an “opponent”. [43]

The same article shows persistent associative labelling: a participant is described through past links with figures already labelled negatively, even when such a link is not needed to understand the current event. In the publication, Anton Malkin is defined by his earlier participation in a campaign headquarters together with Mikhail Kucherov, Volha Karach and Valery Tsepkalo; a similar technique is already visible in the “Danielius – Karach” case. Repeating such pairings can turn an association into a persistent characteristic of a person. [43]

A particular form of manipulative headline framing is taking things out of context: a formally accurate quote can be put in a headline which, without the circumstances in which it was said, acquires a substantially different meaning. The case of Yevgeny Karaulov is telling: the formula “I was offered cooperation with the KGB. And I said ‘yes’” becomes the headline, while the article itself states plainly that the answer was given “under pressure, fearing for his family”, after which Karaulov refused to hand over the requested data and ended the contact. The significance of this choice is amplified by the autonomy of the headline as a unit of information: audiences may encounter it in a feed, search results, a messenger or a republication without reading the full article and therefore without the circumstances that fundamentally change the interpretation of the quote.

From individual publications to a persistent practice

The monitoring shows that the episodes identified are hard to explain solely as a collection of independent journalistic errors, unfortunate headlines or isolated lapses in editorial balance. With respect to a number of the same participants, Nasha Niva reproduces a similar sequence of operations: choosing conflicted or interested sources; amplifying the gravest assessments in headlines; turning assumptions and associations into persistent characteristics; falsely linking political opponents to Russia, security services, security threats or questionable loyalty; personalising political disagreements; using family, psychological, financial or other non-political information; and repeating the status thus formed in subsequent publications.

These cases show a persistent, selective editorial technique whose objective result is hybrid information attacks in a context of transnational repression, systematic discrediting and the erosion of the legitimacy of certain political and civic participants in Belarusian civil society in exile.

The existence of such a persistent and selective technique makes it possible to raise the question of the deliberate nature of the editorial practice — namely, that chance becomes an increasingly unconvincing explanation.

5.6. How the outlet pushes dissenters out of the democratic field

Participants in the democratic movement who operate outside the political orbit of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office and the NAM are often defined by Nasha Niva first and foremost through their attitude to Tsikhanouskaya. The formula "criticises Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya" would describe a verifiable action; the formulas "adversary" and "Tsikhanouskaya's opponent" already assign a person a persistent political identity in which the point of reference is not his programme or his attitude to the Lukashenko regime but his attitude to a single centre of émigré politics. In an article about a round table, the question of trust in Tsikhanouskaya and Latushka is called a topic that "gives no rest to opponents of the Office and the NAM", and the participants people who are "known for criticising" these structures [43].

Labels attached to people

The clearest example is Vitaly Kondratenko. In different publications his name is systematically accompanied by "conspiracy-theorist blogger", "provocateur blogger", "generator of lies, insults and aggression"; his "paltry" audience is emphasised, and he allegedly "insults and criticises the Belarusian democratic movement every day" [35, 38, 41]. These labels persist even in neutral news and become part of the person's name, while the critical blogger is compositionally placed next to "propagandists".

Generic designations instead of a specific status

The word "figure" is in itself neutral. The problem lies in its selective use: the outlet often refers to human rights defenders, former political prisoners and heads of organisations generically as "figures", "opponents" or "adversaries", whereas participants politically close to the Office are referred to by their specific positions and titles. Combined with the labels "conspiracy theorist" and "provocateur", this asymmetry depersonalises a person and erases their real public role [57, 58].

Criticism of Tsikhanouskaya as a deviation from the norm

Support for Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is in effect treated as the norm, and criticism as a deviation that requires explanation. In biographical articles the editors establish when a person's views "diverged" from the Office's and describe his connections through the question "who are his friends and who are his enemies" [35]. A participant's political position is replaced by a system of loyalties.

How a label is built

A label is built from several recurring elements: political categorisation ("Tsikhanouskaya's opponent"); intellectual disqualification ("conspiracy theorist", "provocateur", "fakes"); association with a hostile environment (Russian media, "propagandists"); hints of links with security services (KGB, FSB, "informers"); social belittling (a "paltry" audience, a weak electoral result); defining a person through links with people the outlet has already portrayed negatively; replacing discussion of a person's position with an account of what "suspicious type" he supposedly belongs to; and generic designations instead of a specific status. Each word on its own may be harmless, but together they push a person out of the legitimate political field.

Conclusion

The result is a binary picture: Tsikhanouskaya, the Office, the NAM and related structures are presented as "the democratic forces", while their critics are presented as "opponents", "adversaries", "conspiracy theorists" and "provocateurs", and in some cases as figures close to a Russian or security-service context. Independent participants in the democratic movement are thereby symbolically excluded from it.

5.7. An interested source of accusations: Andrei Stryzhak

Andrei Stryzhak is a co-founder and, until 2025, head of the BYSOL foundation, which helps Belarusians affected by repression. In 2025 the foundation's internal commission found 12 cases of sexual harassment on his part, including towards women receiving assistance, to be systematic and recommended ending all cooperation with him, after which he left the foundation's leadership [17, 18]. An investigation by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee also found a data leak and problems with financial reporting at the BY_help initiative associated with him [19].

Despite this, Nasha Niva regularly uses Stryzhak as an expert who explains other people. His accusations formed the basis of the 17 February 2022 article about Sviatlana Haluza — his former assistant, who had left BYSOL and criticised the foundation [1, 2]. On 27 January 2024 the outlet published an article titled “What is Volha Karach’s tragedy. Andrei Stryzhak explains”, in which he speculated about her motives: Karach was allegedly losing “leverage and significance” and was therefore trying to “draw attention to herself” [45]. The editors were aware of Karach’s conflict with BYSOL, but the headline “Andrei Stryzhak explains” gave an interested party’s version the weight of an expert explanation.

As a result, a man with a history of misconduct confirmed by a commission and a direct conflict with the people he talks about acts in Nasha Niva as a regular interpreter of their motives, while information undermining his reliability as a source is not given to readers alongside his assessments [46, 47].

5.8. Consequences: from publications to transnational repression

The authors do not claim that the editors act on the orders of Belarusian, Russian or other security services: such a conclusion would require a separate investigation. But the absence of proven coordination does not remove the problem. The persistent asymmetry of standards, the repetition of the same techniques against the same people and the refusal to make corrections show that the discrediting is the result of a deliberate editorial choice.

A further independent investigation should answer two questions: whether the editorial policy depends on a single political centre — Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s structures — including through funding; and whether there is documentary evidence that individual publications were initiated or directed by security services.

No coordination is needed to cause harm. It is enough that the narratives created or amplified by the outlet can be used by propaganda, political rivals, administrative bodies and security services. By citing a media publication, they obtain “external confirmation” of their own accusations, while the origin of the information becomes less visible. In the cases examined, such characterisations have already passed into international, administrative and judicial circulation.

For political émigrés, journalists, human rights defenders and former political prisoners the consequences are especially severe. Accusations of links with security services or of posing a security threat affect migration status, access to funding, public trust and physical safety, and can become a pretext for transnational repression.

The central point of this report is not that Nasha Niva publishes criticism: criticism is a normal function of journalism. The problem is that, with regard to a particular circle of people, the standard of proof is systematically lowered and unverified claims are turned into “facts” suitable for political, administrative and repressive use. This is no longer a matter of editorial ethics but a matter of security and human rights protection, which requires independent scrutiny of the publications, the ways they are disseminated and their influence on the decisions of state and other institutions.

6. EXAMPLES OF ADHERENCE TO EDITORIAL STANDARDS

The articles below show that Nasha Niva’s editors are capable of correcting their own mistakes, conveying the words of the people they write about accurately and describing the political field neutrally. This is precisely why the absence of the same standards in the publications examined in this report cannot be explained by a lack of professional skills.

6.1. Correcting an error in an article about propagandist Ihar Tur

On 31 August 2024 Nasha Niva published an investigative piece showing that ONT propagandist Ihar Tur had for a long time been reading and posting in opposition Telegram chats. The editors themselves describe this as an opportunity to trace narratives of Lukashenko’s propaganda aimed at an opposition audience. [62]

The editorial correction is also significant: Nasha Niva separately corrected its original claim about the technical recovery of deleted messages, acknowledging that the bot had found Tur’s phrases in other chats. This is an example of retrospective correction of a technical error. [62]

This case shows that the editors are capable of publicly correcting their own factual errors, and also that opposition chats and networks can indeed be the target of covert presence by propagandists. Yet Nasha Niva, having corrected an

error in an article about a Lukashenko propagandist, has not corrected its errors or apologised for defaming the participants in the democratic movement examined in this report.

6.2. A justified political headline: Volha Karach on Zianon Pazniak and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

On 17 December 2024 Nasha Niva published an article headlined “Volha Karach: Pazniak should represent Belarus at peace talks. And Tsikhanouskaya is weak”. Unlike a number of other disputed headlines, the main elements of this formula rest on Karach’s own direct quotes: she did call Pazniak a necessary member of a possible delegation and answered directly that Tsikhanouskaya and the related structures are “weak”. [73]

This example shows that the report does not regard every sharp or politically confrontational headline as manipulation: where a headline is directly supported by the words of the person concerned and does not attribute hidden motives to them, there are no grounds for criticism.

6.3. Neutral description of a pluralistic political field

In January 2023 an article about Zianon Pazniak’s visit to Ukraine neutrally reports on the delegation of Pazniak, Pavel Usov and Dzmitry Shchyhelski, a meeting with the Kalinouski Regiment and a discussion of political cooperation. In January 2024 a publication about a reception hosted by Polish President Andrzej Duda refers to “the whole elite of the Belarusian opposition” and lists representatives of the Office and the Cabinet as well as Pazniak, Usov, Kravtsov and representatives of the diaspora. The editors thus know how to describe a pluralistic political field without reducing participants to “Tsikhanouskaya’s opponents”. [79, 80]

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BelPol — association of former officers of the Belarusian security forces who have gone over to the side of the democratic forces.

BIC — Belarusian Investigative Center, an independent Belarusian investigative outlet.

BYSOL — solidarity foundation providing assistance to Belarusians affected by repression.

DW — Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster.

ECPMF — European Centre for Press and Media Freedom.

ICAN — International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, 2017 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

LRT — Lithuanian National Radio and Television.

NDA — non-disclosure agreement.

OCCRP — Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, an international network of investigative journalists.

VSD — State Security Department of Lithuania.

VšĮ — public institution, a non-profit legal form in Lithuania.

“Passport” AIS — automated information system of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs containing citizens' passport data.

BAJ — Belarusian Association of Journalists.

BPF — Belarusian Popular Front, a political party founded in 1988.

GUBOPiK — Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs, one of the main units carrying out political persecution.

KGB — State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

CC — Coordination Council (Kaardynacyjnaja Rada), a representative body of the Belarusian democratic forces.

NAM — National Anti-Crisis Management, a structure of the democratic forces led by Pavel Latushka.

HSE — National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow).

OAC — Operational and Analytical Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus, one of the key structures of the repressive apparatus, controlling the Belarusian internet and the .by domain zone.

ONT — “National Television”, a Belarusian state TV channel.

Tsikhanouskaya's Office — Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, a 2020 Belarusian presidential candidate; the structure representing her in exile.

SBU — Security Service of Ukraine.

FSB — Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.