

Independent News Outlet Staff Go on Trial in Belarus

By [AFP](#)

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Tut.by news portal editor-in-chief Marina Zolotova. **Natalia Fedosenko / TASS**

Five employees of what used to be authoritarian Belarus's largest independent news outlet went on trial Monday in Minsk, facing several charges including tax evasion and "inciting enmity," a rights group said.

The outlet Tut.by covered large-scale protests in 2020 that erupted after President Alexander Lukashenko claimed a sixth term in office in a contested election.

The new source's editor-in-chief Marina Zolotova and its general director Lyudmila Chekina have been in pre-trial detention since May 2021.

Three other defendants in the case left Belarus before the trial started, according to rights group Viasna.

A photo from court published by opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya showed Zolotova

and Chekina sitting inside a cage for defendants.

"We must support all journalists who fight for the truth!" Tikhanovskaya wrote on Twitter on Monday at the start of the closed-door trial.

Embed:

Today, the political trial against media portal <https://t.co/W6L5BPwPka> starts in Minsk. In 2021, the regime detained 14 <https://t.co/W6L5BPwPka> employees, Maryna Zolatava & Ludmila Chekina have now been held for 19 months. We must support all journalists who fight for the truth! <pic.twitter.com/z1pTHk2JxP>

— Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (@Tsihanouskaya) [January 9, 2023](#)

The media outlet was designated "extremist" in 2021. Some of its employees now work from abroad for a successor publication called Zerkalo.

Zerkalo said in a statement the case against their former colleagues "was fabricated from start to finish and appeared only because the regime is afraid of journalists."

Following the historic anti-regime protests in 2020, Belarus has sought to wipe out remaining pockets of dissent, jailing journalists, activists and forcing many others into exile.

Related article: [Trial of Belarusian Nobel Prize Winner Ales Bialiatski Opens in Minsk](#)

According to Viasna, there are over 1,400 political prisoners in Belarus.

In a high-profile case last week, Viasna founder Ales Bialiatski, who was co-awarded last year's Nobel Peace Prize, went on trial in Belarus with several of his associates.

They face between seven and 12 years in prison.

Tikhanovskaya, who claimed victory in Belarus's disputed 2020 presidential election, will face trial in absentia on Jan. 17 on charges including high treason and conspiracy to seize power.

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