

Belarus Sentences Ex-Presidential Candidate to 17 Years in Absentia

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Valery Tsepkalo. **Valery Tsepkalo / Facebook**

A Minsk court on Friday sentenced exiled Belarusian opposition politician Valeriy Tsepkalo to 17 years in a high-security prison in absentia, the state-run news agency Belta [reported](#).

Tsepkalo, a former head of Belarus' equivalent of Silicon Valley, the High Technology Park, intended to run in Belarus' 2020 presidential election but was barred from registering as a candidate. His wife, Veronika Tsepkalo, is one of three women who led historic opposition protests in the run-up to the 2020 election.

The politician, who fled Belarus in 2020, was found guilty of violating nine articles of Belarus' criminal code, including inciting the overthrow of the government, creating of an "extremist" organization and offending the country's authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko, Belta reported.

Tsepkalo is currently based in Latvia, where he facilitates the work of a foundation helping Belarusian refugees and female victims of political repression.

In 2021, the Baltic state refused to comply with Minsk authorities' request to extradite Tsepkalov.

Tsepkalov's sentencing is part of a wide-reaching crackdown on dissent in Belarus, which is a close ally of Russia, in the wake of the widely disputed 2020 election that saw Lukashenko elected to a sixth term.

Last month, Belarusian authorities [jailed](#) two journalists from the country's largest independent news website Tut.by for 12 years, a move that was labeled by exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya as an "attempt by the regime to kill honest journalism."

Tikhanovskaya herself was sentenced to 15 years in prison in absentia on charges of high treason and "conspiracy to seize power."

And veteran Belarusian rights activist Ales Bialiatski, one of last year's Nobel Peace Prize recipients, was sentenced to 10 years in prison in what his supporters called an attempt to silence him.

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