

28 August 2018

Belarus: Human rights defenders Gennady Fedynich and Igor Komlik sentenced

On 24 August 2018, the Sovetsky District Court of Minsk city found human rights defenders **Gennady Fedynich** and **Igor Komlik** guilty of tax evasion. They were sentenced to 4 years of restriction of liberty without imprisonment, as well as a fine of 47 000 Belarusian rubles (approximately €20,000).

[Gennady Fedynich](#) and [Igor Komlik](#) are Chairman and Chief Accountant, respectively, of the **Belarusian Independent Trade Union of Radio and Electronic Industry Workers (REP)**, which works to promote labour and socio-economic rights in Belarus. The Trade Union also participated in the mobilisation of protests against Presidential Decree No. 3 “On Prevention of Social Dependency”, which established a fee on the unemployed, and provided legal assistance to participants of the protests.

On 24 August 2018, Judge Maryna Fiodarava of the Sovetsky District Court of Minsk convicted Gennady Fedynich and Igor Komlik of tax evasion and sentenced them to 4 years of restriction of liberty without imprisonment (a punishment similar to house arrest), as well as a fine of 47 000 Belarusian rubles (around 20 000 Euros) and a 5 year ban from holding managerial positions. Others who were peacefully protesting against this sentence next to the court building were arrested by police.

On 2 August 2017, Gennady Fedynich and Igor Komlik were arrested by employees of the Department of Financial Investigations and later charged under Article 243.2 of the Criminal Code for “tax evasion on a large scale” on 14 and 10 August 2017 respectively. Although Gennady Fedynich was released after interrogation on the same day he was arrested, Igor Komlik was kept in detention until 2 October 2017. The human rights defenders were accused of not declaring foreign funding which had been transferred to the Trade Union’s SEB bank account in Vilnius, Lithuania, which was allegedly withdrawn and transported back to Belarus between 2011 and 2012. The evidence used by the prosecution in this allegation has not been revealed and raises serious concerns on the case.

The use of Article 243.2 to discredit human rights organisations is a tactic that has already been used by Belarusian authorities to prosecute the Chairman of the Human Rights Centre “Viasna”, [Ales Bialiatski](#), who spent three years in prison between 2011 and 2014. Legislation abusively restricting the operation of civil society organisations remains in force to date, forcing many organisations to register abroad.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the sentence against human rights defenders Gennady Fedynich and Igor Komlik, as it believes it is linked to the legitimate and peaceful human rights work of the Independent Trade Union of Radio and Electronic Industry Workers (REP) in Belarus.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Belarus to:

1. Immediately quash the convictions against Gennady Fedynich and Igor Komlik and fully restore their liberty as it believes that they are solely in relation to their peaceful and legitimate work in the defence of human rights.

2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Belarus are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.