

Belarus: the regime continues its repression and is hunting the 'guilty parties'

Since the beginning of the new year, the Belarusian government has continued its policy of repression against the opposition and the independent media. Searches and the confiscation of property in the offices and buildings of opposition activists are ongoing. At the same time, a propaganda campaign has been launched to demonstrate that the opposition had intensively prepared for street fighting, with support from abroad.

Legally the new arrests (the frequency of which has however decreased now) and searches are conducted as a part of the formal case that had been opened in connection with mass demonstrations which had taken place last 19 December in the centre of Minsk on the basis of Article 293 of the Criminal Code of Belarus concerning the organisation of mass public disorder. So far 31 persons (including five former candidates for president) has been officially accused on the basis of this article which provides for prison terms of to 15 years. At the same time, on 9 January, the first channel of Belarusian state TV broadcast a documentary in which the Belarusian opposition was accused of organising riots on the evening of the elections, in order to capture the seat of government and Parliament, and take over power in the country. The film also showed a spokesman for the Belarusian Border Committee speaking about the preparation of terrorist acts by nationals from neighbouring states who had allegedly been trying to infiltrate into Belarus since the end of November 2010. Everything indicates that the Belarusian authorities want to attenuate but not to abandon completely their policy of repression. Simultaneously, however, the regime is attempting to justify its action by accusing the internal opposition and foreign powers (principally Russia) of trying to bring about political destabilisation.