

PRESS RELEASE

Accountability for Enforced Disappearances in Belarus: Appeal Against Acquittal of Former Member of Lukashenka's Hit Squad to Take Place in Switzerland

The appeal trial of Yuri Harauski, a former member of SOBR, a special police force under President Aliaksandr Lukashenka, will take place on 22 September 2026¹ in St. Gallen, Switzerland. Harauski is accused of participating in the enforced disappearances of three political opponents in Belarus in 1999, to which he confessed.

St. Gallen, Paris, Minsk, Geneva, 10 June 2026. [Yuri Harauski](#) was acquitted in first instance in September 2023, after the court found that the evidence available to it did not establish his individual participation in the crimes beyond reasonable doubt. In the appeal proceedings, the credibility of the defendant's statements will be evaluated against a fundamentally changed backdrop. *"The hearing of the defendant in the first instance trial was marred. I heard so many translation mistakes. I hope the appeal court will give the defendant and his statements the careful, due consideration they deserve,"* said **Alena Zakharenka, daughter of one of the disappeared and plaintiff in the case.**

The original criminal complaint was filed in spring 2021, by two relatives of the victims, supported by [TRIAL International](#), the International Federation for Human Rights ([FIDH](#)) and the Human Rights Center [Viasna](#). Two years prior, while residing in Switzerland, Yuri Harauski had [confessed](#) to the media that he had been involved in three disappearances in 1999, on which he provided extensive details. On 2 May 2022, Yuri Harauski was charged with the [enforced disappearances](#) of: Yury Zakharenka, former Minister of Interior; Viktor Hanchar, former Deputy Prime Minister, and Anatoly Krasouski, a businessman and close friend of Hanchar. Harauski's [trial](#) took place before the District Court of Rorschach (canton of St. Gallen, Switzerland) on 19-20 September 2023.

Despite his acquittal in first instance, the case was ground-breaking: the Court recognised that the three men had been abducted and killed, and that members of the Belarusian authorities were involved in those crimes. It was also the first time the crime of enforced disappearance was examined before a Swiss court, and the first time a court ruled on crimes committed in Belarus on the basis of the principle of [universal jurisdiction](#). *"I hope this case can become a good example in international legal practice. The phenomenon of enforced disappearances is unfortunately wide-spread, and every person who lost a loved one through this crime hopes for justice,"* said **Valeriya Krasouskaya, daughter of one of the disappeared and plaintiff in the case.**

"Consciousness needs to be raised about the scale and true nature of the crimes of the Lukashenka regime. This case is the first opportunity in more than thirty years of dictatorship to get some of the gravest crimes of the regime finally recognised before a court of law," said **Alès Bialiatski, Founder and Director of Viasna.**

For more information, [read our Q&A](#).

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¹ This press release was updated on 25 August 2026 with the new date of the trial, postponed in June.