

PRESS RELEASE

BELARUS: Swiss Court Convicts Former Security Officer of Enforced Disappearance - First Such Conviction Worldwide

(St. Gallen, Paris, Minsk, Geneva, 26 October 2026) – The Cantonal Court of St. Gallen has convicted former Special Rapid Response Unit (SOBR) member Yuri Harauski of the enforced disappearance of Anatoly Krasouski in Belarus in 1999, overturning his 2023 acquittal on appeal. The court also established his participation in the enforced disappearances of Yuri Zakharenka and Viktor Hanchar, but upheld Harauski's acquittal for legal reasons. The court reduced Harauski's sentence from eight to a two-year suspended prison term, considering his confession and public apology to the victims.

Following an appeal trial held on 22 September 2026, the Court found Yuri Harauski guilty of the enforced disappearance of well-known Belarusian businessman Anatoly Krasouski in 1999. The Court, however, upheld his acquittal in relation to the disappearances of Yuri Zakharenka and Viktor Hanchar. The former member of the SOBR was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, suspended.

Today's conviction marks the first time a member of the Belarusian security apparatus has been convicted abroad for crimes committed as part of the repression under Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime and the first time anywhere in the world that a court ruled on crimes committed in Belarus under the principle of universal jurisdiction. The case was also the first in which the crime of enforced disappearance was examined before a Swiss court.

The conviction marks a significant step towards accountability for crimes committed under Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime and an important development in Switzerland and beyond. *"I feel relieved to have received the guilty verdict"*, said **Valeriya Krasouskaya, daughter of Anatoly Krasousky**. *"After 27 years, at least one of the numerous persons involved in the abduction and murder of my father is officially recognised guilty."*

TRIAL International, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Human Rights Center Viasna, which initiated the proceedings together with relatives of two of the disappeared men in 2021, welcome the conviction as an important step towards accountability.

"For years, impunity for crimes committed under Lukashenka's regime has looked unassailable. This verdict proves it is not — investigators, prosecutors and courts now have a precedent showing that accountability for Belarusian state crimes is achievable", said **Philip Grant, TRIAL International's Executive Director**.

The significance of the judgement may extend beyond Harauski's own case: by establishing criminal responsibility for acts carried out by a member of the SOBR, it could contribute to broader efforts to examine the chain of responsibility behind the enforced disappearances, including the role of those who ordered or directed the crimes.

"The conviction of Yuri Harauski for his involvement in the enforced disappearance of Anatoly Krasouski in Belarus is, first and foremost, a victory for his family, who have finally seen justice served after many years of efforts", said **Alexis Deswaef, FIDH President**. *"We are grateful to the Swiss justice system for demonstrating that this is possible by advancing international justice based on the principles of universal jurisdiction."*

“The court’s verdict in the case against Harauski is the first real step toward investigating the politically motivated disappearances of opposition figures in Belarus in 1999”, said Valiantsin Stefanovic, human rights defender with Viasna and former FIDH Vice President. “For the entire Belarusian human rights community, this is a very important day — the day on which the first essential step toward establishing the truth and restoring justice was taken.”

While commending the efforts of the Cantonal Court to ensure adequate access to the proceedings for the victims and the public, the three partner organisations reaffirm the crucial importance of a victim-centered approach, including by guaranteeing the right of plaintiffs to be heard and by ensuring complete, adequate and accessible interpretation during the hearing.

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