



Photo Source: Babariko.vision

EVIDENCE DEFENCE TEAM WAS INTIMIDATED IN BELARUSIAN POLITICIAN'S TRIAL

This statement can be attributed to a spokesperson for the Clooney Foundation for Justice. For further inquiries, please contact media@cfj.org.

CHARGES

“Legalization (“laundering”) of material assets acquired by criminal means” and “taking a bribe”

MAX SENTENCE

Up to 15 years’ imprisonment

OUTCOME

Sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment

EXPERT REVIEWER

Covington & Burling LLP

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A powerful challenger to President Lukashenko has been sentenced to 14 years’ in prison. Belarusian opposition leader, Viktor Babariko, considered Lukashenko’s main rival, was arrested last year before he even had a chance to run in the elections. A court in Minsk found him guilty of bribery and money laundering while he was head of a major Belarusian bank.

Mr. Babariko is not the only opposition figure to be prosecuted in the context of the 2020 presidential election. [Sergei Tikhanovsky, the husband of current opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, is currently being tried behind closed doors, following his arrest in May, 2020,](#) and faces up to 15 years in prison. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya was herself forced to flee the country after the August 2020 election.

Babariko’s former campaign manager, [Maria Kolesnikova, is also awaiting trial.](#) She has been charged with “conspiracy to seize power by unconstitutional means,” “creation and leadership of an extremist organization” and “calls for action aimed at causing harm to national security” and faces up to 12 years in prison.

TrialWatch, a Clooney Foundation for Justice initiative, has been monitoring the Babariko trial and is working with Covington & Burling LLP to assess the fairness of the trial and assign it a grade in line with international and regional standards.

“The monitoring reports and other sources indicate that local authorities failed to adhere to several applicable human rights and fair trial standards. Among other things, Mr. Babariko was presented to the court in a metal cage, there are indications that members of his defence team were subject to intimidation and harassment, and the team was repeatedly blocked from questioning prosecution witnesses. We will address these and other issues in our forthcoming report,” said the Covington Team.

BACKGROUND

Viktor Babariko is the former head of Belgazprombank, a major bank in Belarus and an affiliate of the Russian Gazprom Bank. In May 2020, he announced his decision to challenge President Lukashenko for the presidency. [He was considered to be Lukashenko's main rival, and by the registration deadline, Babariko and his team had collected a record number of signatures supporting his candidacy.](#) On June 11, the Belarusian authorities opened an investigation into Babariko for various alleged financial crimes and arrested members of his staff. Subsequently, the electoral commission of Belarus rejected his candidacy due to the criminal investigation. On June 18, Mr. Babariko, his son Eduard, who was his campaign manager, were arrested, as well as several other Belgazprombank employees and campaign aides.

A full TrialWatch Fairness Report will be made available shortly at www.trialwatch.com.

ABOUT THE CLOONEY FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE'S TRIALWATCH INITIATIVE



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JUSTICE THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

TrialWatch is an initiative of the Clooney Foundation for Justice. Its mission is to expose injustice, help to free those unjustly detained and promote the rule of law around the world. TrialWatch monitors criminal trials globally against those who are most vulnerable — including journalists, protesters, women, LGBTQ+ persons and minorities — and advocates for the rights of the unfairly convicted. Over time, TrialWatch will use the data it gathers to publish a Global Justice Ranking exposing countries' performance and use it to support advocacy for systemic change.