

E-NEWSLETTER

# 1 (26) 2012

# MASS MEDIA in Belarus

January–March 2012



BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS  
[www.baj.by](http://www.baj.by)

**“The Ministry implements strict control over the mass media activity ... Not only does it concern those two newspapers that are treated as oppositional and constantly reminded of!”**

*Министр информации Республики Беларусь Олег Пролесковский*

[http://www.belta.by/ru/all\\_news/society/Mininform-v-2011-godu-vynes-83-pismennyx-preduprezhdenija-67-SMI\\_i\\_589573.html](http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/society/Mininform-v-2011-godu-vynes-83-pismennyx-preduprezhdenija-67-SMI_i_589573.html)

**“As regards freedom of the media, the Assembly:**

**5.1. notes with grave concern that independent newspapers and other independent media organisations continue to be harassed and targeted through the use of fines and intimidation of potential advertisers;**

**5.2. condemns the practice of “warnings” issued by the Belarusian authorities against a number of journalists and human rights organisations and considers that they constitute a violation of internationally recognised human rights standards...”**

*PACE Resolution #1857 (2012) of 25.01.2012*

<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta12/ERES1857.html>

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It is obligatory to refer to the Belarussian Association of Journalists, when using the E-NEWSLETTER: MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS materials.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF SITUATION IN THE BELARUSIAN MEDIA FIELD

In January – March 2012, the Belarusian official authorities continued to put pressure on independent journalists and mass media against the background of general worsening of situation with civil and political rights in Belarus.

***The main events in the Belarusian media field within the period of January – March 2012 included:***

- ***the issuance of official warnings to independent media outlets and, particularly, to the journalists, who cooperate with foreign media;***
- ***the ungrounded restrictions on some journalists' as well as political and civil figures' rights to leave the country;***
- ***the smear campaign, unleashed against the Belarusian Association of Journalists.***

On **February 24, 2012**, the Ministry of Information of Belarus issued an official warning to the 'Inform-Progulka' newspaper (Luninets, Brest region). The ministerial officials accused the newspaper editorial of publishing the allegedly 'inaccurate' information about the number of workers at a local large enterprise, who left the official trade union.

It was also in February 2012 that the Ministry of Information of Belarus published the statistics of official warnings, issued in 2011.

Accordingly, 67 media outlets received 83 official warnings from the Ministry during the year of 2011.

"The Ministry implements strict control over the mass media activity", stated the Minister of Information Aleh Praliaskouski at the ministry board.

**It is worth mentioning that mass media can be closed down by court decisions on getting two official warnings for any cause within a year's course.**

The KGB and public prosecution bodies reinforced their control over journalistic activities within the period under review. No less than 13 journalists from Minsk, Hrodna, Polatsk, and Brest have received official oral and written warnings from the abovementioned official structures since the year start. The media workers were blamed for contributing to foreign media outlets without valid press credentials. The most severe pressure was put on journalists from Minsk and Hrodna, where the written warnings were received by five and four media workers correspondingly.

Most often, the journalists were accused of cooperation with the 'Radio Racyja' (Poland) and the 'BelSat' satellite TV channel that broadcasts programs from the territory of Poland.

The efforts of official authorities to tighten control over international distribution of information about events in Belarus are confirmed by detentions of TV3 (Estonia) and SVT (Sweden) TV crews with official accreditations as well as by illegal foreign travel bans, imposed on a number of journalists, politicians, and civil activists.

Thus, among other, the BAJ Chairperson Zhanna Litvina, the BelSat TV channel representative Mikhail Yanchuk, and the 'Nasha Niva' newspaper's Chief Editor Andrei Dynko were deprived of their right to leave Belarus in March 2012.

The reinforced pressure on journalists and independent media coincided in time with a smear campaign against the Belarusian Association of Journalists and its leaders, started on the Belarusian state TV ("Dirty Money to BAJ" ("Бащ на БАЖ") defamation movie, created on the base of anonymous letters and KGB operation videos; several editions of 'The Editors' Clubs' TV-show etc.).

## RATING LISTS / EVENTS

### THE PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2011

**Belarus is holding the 168<sup>th</sup> position of 179 possible ones in the Press Freedom Index 2011**, compiled and published by the *Reporters without Borders* international organization. The country worsened its positions in comparison with the previous year, *BelaPAN* reports. The downward shift was particularly caused by severe suppression of mass protest actions after the Presidential election in December 2010. The annual rating list is led by Finland and Norway, where situation with freedom of speech is the best. The countries are followed by Estonia, the Netherlands, Austria,

Iceland, and Luxemburg. Poland keeps the 24<sup>th</sup> position. Lithuania and Latvia occupy the 30<sup>th</sup> and the 50<sup>th</sup> positions correspondingly. Moldova holds the 77<sup>th</sup> position. Georgia has the 104<sup>th</sup> position. Ukraine and Russia keep the 116<sup>th</sup> and the 142<sup>th</sup> positions correspondingly. Turkmenistan, North Korea, and Eritrea hold the worst 177<sup>th</sup>-179<sup>th</sup> positions on the list.

## THE BELARUSIANS SAY LOCAL MASS MEDIA AREN'T FREE

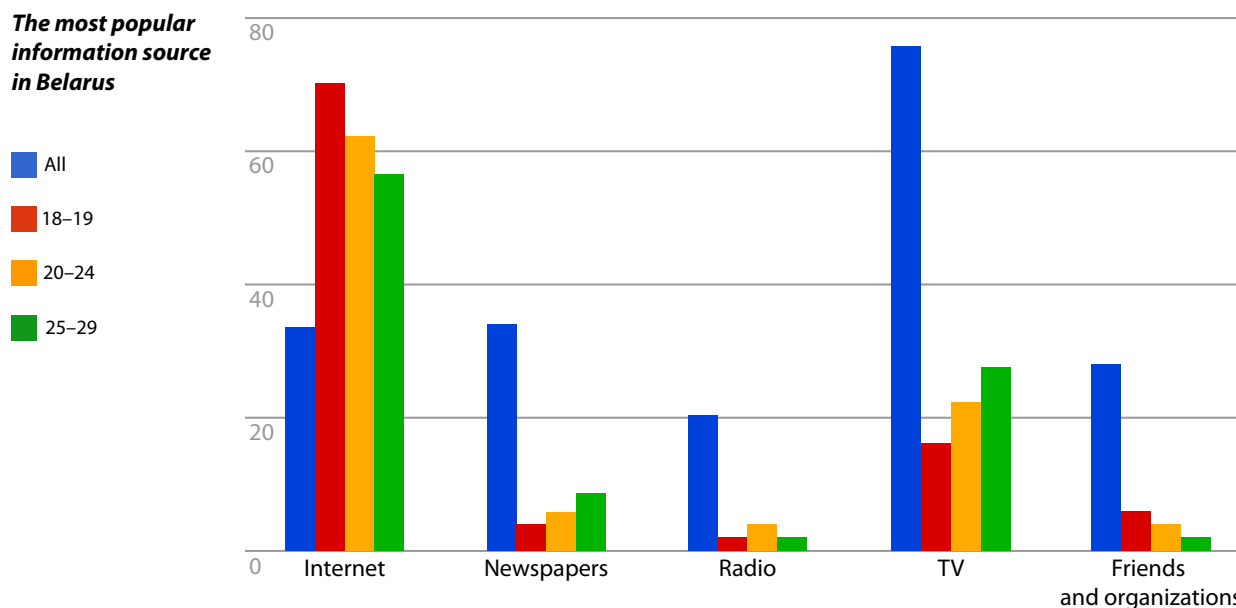
According to the *Gallup Institute* survey outcome ([Gallup.com](http://Gallup.com)), there are only 23% of Belarusian citizens, who say that media are free in their country. Belarus took the lowest 133<sup>rd</sup> position among 133 countries and regions, where the survey was implemented. On average 65% of respondents agreed that there were free media to be found in their country. The largest quantity of positive answers to the question was received in Finland (97%).

## TELEVISION REMAINS TO BE THE MAIN INFORMATION SOURCE FOR BELARUSIANS. HOWEVER, THE YOUTH PREFERS THE INTERNET TO TV

According to the Independent Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Studie (<http://www.iiseps.org/about.html>), only 16% of young Belarusians watch TV and no more than 4% of youngsters read newspapers. The Internet has become the main information source for 2/3 of young respondents in Belarus.

Nevertheless, TV remains to be the most popular information source in Belarus nowadays. 72.5% of respondents marked it, replying to the question about **the general information source**.

**The most popular information source in Belarus**



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