

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

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The presidential elections on October 11 went by with many violations of journalists' rights, such as denial of information on electoral updates, interference into their work at and near polling stations, bans to take photo and video recording.

On October 3, at noon the non-state agency *BelaPAN* was subject to **DDoS attack**, after its website **naviny.by** published an article about the religious-political action "A prayer for Belarus" with participation of Alexander Lukashenka. The article criticized methods for organizing the event, quoted opinions of students who were forced to take part in the action. ON October 5, BAJ made a statement denouncing the attack: "We think it is another manifestation of the systemic policy of control over information in our country aimed to manipulate public opinion. We back [the demand of the informational company](#) *BelaPAN* to ensure proper maintenance for websites in the territory of Belarus and protect them from any attacks. BAJ calls to stop any attacks on mass media in order to ensure the constitutional citizen right to get uncensored information from multiple sources."

On October 6 in Brest, journalists **Ales' Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava** had to [deal with interference](#) on behalf of an observer at the **polling station** of the Brest State Technical University. The journalists surveyed students who had come to vote in early voting under pressure. The students said that a representative of the university controlled students' turnout in early voting. The journalists found out that the controller was **Sviatlana Kurgan**, deputy dean of the university, who was accredited at the polling station as an observer from the public association *Belaya Rus'*. The journalists said that Sviatlana Kurgan interfered when the students were being interviewed, made them deny what they were saying. She refused to introduce, said she was just a person from the street; and she promised to sue the journalists for defamation.

On October 8, a journalist from non-state newspaper *Intex-press* (Baranavichy) wanted to know the number of citizens who had voted in early vote; however, the chairperson of the Baranavichy city electoral commission **Tamara Shukala** said that they did not have that information. Later, *Intex-press* received the figures about early voters from the Brest regional electoral commission. Representatives of the commission said they were gathering the data from the city electoral commission. Lawyers of the newspaper filed a complaint to the Central Electoral Commission.

On October 9, **Artsiom Liava**, journalist of the newspaper *Novy Chas*, was taking photos at **polling station No 29** in Minsk. **Alena Pazenka**, headmaster of the school housing the polling station, claimed that the journalist interfered into the electoral process, compiled a report against him and made him leave the polling station. The journalist complained to CEC, however, the commission stated that the actions of the member of the electoral commission were lawful. We remind that according to art. 13 of the Electoral Code, media representatives have the right to be present on the premises of polling stations and attend meetings of electoral commissions. Journalists have the right to gather information and receive information from state bodies according to art. 34 of the Law on Mass Media.

On October 9, a journalist of the website *Bobruyskiy Courier* **Alexandra Glagoleva** was making a report from polling station No 20 in Babruysk. The chairperson of the electoral commission first denied the journalist's right to stay there, then finally registered her as a representative of mass media, but with the

condition that the journalists takes one photo and leaves. The journalist had nothing to do but leave; she [reported about the incident](#) and filed a complaint to the prosecutor's office.

On October 11, Artsiom Liava [was not allowed](#) to report from **polling station No 33** in Lenin district in Minsk (the chairperson – **Dzmitry Ahulik**). The grounds for the denied access was a report against the journalist compiled a day earlier. It was written that the journalist “violated rules at the polling station”, as result “issues arose about uncomfortable” electoral process (“he stopped the voters and asked them questions”). He refused to sit at a particular place in order not to stand in voters' way. The whole previous day, there were no complaints at the polling station; the journalist thinks that commission from No 33 had had information from station No 29, and there was a centralized decision not to allow him to polling stations. He filed a complaint to the prosecutor's office.

On October 9, in the evening, two shooting teams of the **Ukrainian channel 1+1** were **detained** on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border, the information published by Volha Malcheuskaya, journalist of TSN channel, in her Twitter. The detainees were questioned by the KGB, a scrupulous customs inspection was performed. After that, the journalists were allowed entry to Belarus, nothing was seized.

On October 11, a journalist of the Polish website **Eastbook.eu** tried to shoot the counting of ballots at polling station No 6 at the Pershamayski district in Minsk. Members of the commission shielded themselves with chairs; when she demanded that she wanted to see the process, the chairperson of the commission **Natallia Kunouskaya** replied that she was the chief and she dictated the rules. A member of the commission also demanded that she did not want to be seen in the video. The chairperson of the electoral commission said that the journalist was violating the rights of the person and ordered her to stay away from the table where ballots were counted.

On October 12, from 1.20 to 1.35 at night, websites **nn.by, charter97.org, belaruspartisan.org, naviny.by, euroradio.fm** were inaccessible, reported *Nasha Niva*. The outlet underlined that the glitch was strange because the outlets belong to different servers and domain zones.

On October 15, the journalist from Hrodna **Viktar Parfionenka** reported that he had filed a **complaint to the UN HRC** against the facts that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had seven times **denied accreditation** to him as a correspondent of the *Belarusian Radio Racyja* (Poland). The journalist tried to protest against the denials of accreditation in court, but it was useless.

On October 16, it was reported that the police of Kastychnitski district of Hrodna **failed to find crimes components** in facts listed in complaint of the journalist, BAJ member **Andrei Mialeshka**. In August 2015, he complained to the police asking to find authors of **a defamatory article about the journalist** and his family members, which was published on a Russian website. The police found out who administered the website and associated social media from the website – the authors live in the same city as the journalist. However, the police did not find crime components and are not going to initiate criminal proceedings. The journalist intends to complain to the prosecutor's office.

After the elections, the editorial office of *Nasha Niva* [requested](#) a possibility from Lidziya Yarmoshyna, chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission, to see the minutes of all polling stations in the capital. The reply from [Lidziya Yarmoshyna says that CEC does not have the documents](#) – they stayed at the Minsk City Commission. However, then the city commission had ceased its work, no one picked up the phone. The journalists wanted to verify information that at many polling stations minutes were re-written after the ballot count completed, and did not coincide with the data publicized immediately after the ballots were counted.

On October 23, [it was reported](#) that the state examination commission did not find extremism in the book by Anatol Liabedzka, leader of the United Civil Party. The book "108 days and nights behind bars in the KGB", in 30 copies, was seized from its author on May 9, 2015 on the border point Kamenny Loh. Now the Ashmiany customs office officially informed that he could take the books back.