

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

August 11 – 24, 2014

Article 22.9 of the Code of Administrative Violations (illegal production and distribution of mass media products) started to be used not only against journalists, but also against distributors of print press. Within the reporting period, two journalists were summoned to the police in relation with administrative cases against them, and one distributor was fined.

On August 12 the Mahilow district court **fined Ihar Barysaw**, the editor of the low-circulation paper *Nash Mahilow*, for 30 basic amounts. Judge Stanislaw Lewchanka found him guilty of violating the Law on Mass Media and **art. 22.9, part 2** of the Administrative Code (**illegal distribution of print products**). The editor argued that he did not distribute the newspapers (*Nash Mahilow* and the bulletin *Social Democrat*), but simply transported them in his personal car. The editor admitted that the number of newspapers in the car exceeded 299, the number indicated as circulation of the newspaper (by law, such outlets do not need official registration as a mass medium). He claimed the trial was politically motivated. Before the hearing, the journalist motioned to close the case and to have his print products back, but the judge dismissed the motion.

The editor's car was stopped **on July 16** by the traffic police and sent to the police department of Mahilow district. There, the car was searched, and 12 thousand copies of *Nash Mahilow* and bulletins of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party were confiscated.

On August 14 Belarusian authorities **denied a single-entry tourist visa** to **Yury Liaschynski**, the program director of the *Belarusian Radio Racyja*. The Belarusian consulate in Bialystok put a “visa denied” stamp into his passport without any excuses.

We remind that Yury Liaschynski was denied visa also in 2013; and during the presidential elections in 2006 his active visa was annulled.

On August 14, at around 6pm, users from Belarus experienced **problems with accessing the website charter97.org**. It was reported that the website was accessible in Belarus only via proxy servers.

The blocking occurred for clients of a number of Internet providers - byfly, Atlant Telecom, Cosmos TV, velcom, MTC, life:), Belinonet and many other smaller providers.

A research revealed that blocking was carried out through the gateway of the state-run net Belpack (a structural department of Beltelecom) through which all other providers are switched online. Access resumed after 11 pm. Beltelecom refused to give comments.

“Yesterday the press service of Beltelecom informed about repair and tuning works on the Absolute Billing System. This system among all allows aggregating IP traffic and interacting with SORM. In other words, Belarusian authorities apply more and more sophisticated technologies to stifle freedoms in our country, and the first victim of this novelty has become the biggest news

resource with daily audience of more than 300 thousand unique users,” wrote Charter97.

We remind that in April 2011 the General Prosecutor's office of Belarus issued a ruling to restrict access to the informational resource Charter'97 referring to their violations of legislation – calling to participate in an unsanctioned event. This year Charter'97 for several publications entered onto the black list of Roskomnadzor.

On August 18 the freelance journalist from Mahilow, BAI member **Aliaksandr Burakow** was **summoned** to a police station as a person under administrative prosecution for cooperation with a **foreign mass medium without accreditation**. Major Marozaw took explanations about a report published on *Belsat* in autumn 2013. The report dealt with a critical condition of a building in Mahilow. After the publication, the regional KGB department held an investigation and found people from the report. They were offered to identify the journalist who had talked to them. According to the journalist, the name of the investigative officer of the KGB was crossed out in the case materials. The investigation was held in October – November 2013. The journalist claimed he did not cooperate with *Belsat* and did not know how the report appeared on this TV channel.

On August 19, another journalist **Mikhail Arshynski** was questioned by the same Major Marozaw. Unlike with Aliaksandr Burakow, this journalist did not see his case materials. The major wanted to know details about the same report. The journalist did not deny that he was recorded in the report, but he said he did not know how the report got to *Belsat*. According to Arshynski, the inspector said that the task to hold investigation into the matter came “from Minsk, from the Ministry” and not from the regional KGB as it had been alleged.

On August 21 the Council of Ministers of Belarus adopted **Ruling No180** on creation of the **Republican expert commission on assessment of informational products regarding extremist contents**. “To defend public interests from destructive displays in informational sphere”, reported BelTA. The commission will work under the Ministry of Information from September 27. The ruling envisages a separate commission in each region. The commission will be entitled to request materials for examination; to invite representatives of state bodies, CSOs and individual entrepreneurs to their hearings. Different specialists and public persons will be invited when necessary.

Examination can be initiated by request of state bodies, CSOs and individual businessmen; also based on rulings of state bodies or official representatives “who are entitled”. Expert conclusion of the commission can be disputed in court. The ruling was adopted “to develop the Law on counteracting Extremism”.

As reported **on August 22**, customs officers of Minsk-2 airport **seized a report** prepared jointly by Belarusian and British human rights defenders and sent it for examination in terms of smuggling. The report “Half an hour before spring: inequality and discrimination in Belarus” was made by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Equal Rights Trust. The report was printed in Britain and sent to Belarus by post.