

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week. Presidential Elections 2010

Info-posting – September 27 – October 3, 2010

The Presidential elections will take place in Belarus on September 19, 2010. The initiative groups of presidential nominees were registered at the beginning of October 2010. Presently, the nominees' supporters collect signatures in order to get the nominees registered as presidential candidates. The state-owned media started a broad campaign on defaming A. Lukashenka's political opponents at the beginning of pre-election period. Moreover, the cases of detentions and penalties in relation to the independent press distributors have become more frequent since recently.

A. Lukashenka named the opposition newspapers 'liars' and 'battle papers' during his press-conference for Russian journalists on *October 1, 2010*. Moreover, he assured the media workers that it was possible to buy all the newspapers at the news stalls, located inside the Presidential Office building. "I banned categorically to put any kind of obstacles. Collect signatures and say whatever you wish! You are not closed down. You are not banned. We will talk with you after the election," he promised. "These are the key words here," Andrei Bastunets, Deputy Chair of BAJ noted. "They sound like a naked threat. Such 'talks' resulted in criminal prosecution in relation to Markievich, Mazheyka, and Ivashkievich after the elections in 2001 as well as in mass administrative arrests of journalists after the elections in 2006," A. Bastunets added.

The Leninski City District Court in Mahilou fined a human rights activist Valery Shchukin 30 base amounts (around EUR 250 in equivalent) on *October 1, 2010*. The judge Stanislau Shandarovich found him guilty of producing, transporting, and distributing the printed production that was made with violations of Belarusian law. Valery Shchukin was detained on August 8, 2010. Policemen found 24,000 copies of "Nash Dom" newspaper as well as 5,500 copies of leaflets, dedicated to women's rights in his car. Valery Shchukin rejects to plead guilty and states that he will appeal against the court verdict to the Vitsiebsk Regional Court.

A special report about Uladzimir Niaklayeu, the leader of "Tell the Truth!" civil campaign was broadcast by the First Channel of Belarusian State TV and Radio Channel in the peak-viewing time on *September 27, 2010*. The report presenter Vadzim Gigin, the Editor-in-chief of "Belaruskaya Dumka" magazine and some police officers stated that the whole campaign was "based on lies". Apart from the images of the seized print-runs of leaflets, newspapers, and post-cards, a number of intimate photos were demonstrated in the report. The reporters claimed the photos belonged to the civil campaign activist.

The Chairperson of Belarusian Association of Journalists regarded the TV report as "vulgar" during a talk with the BDIHR OSCE representatives on *September 29, 2010*. The experts are going to act as observers during the Presidential election campaign – 2010.

As reported on *September 27, 2010*, the "Press-photo of Belarus - 2010" exhibition was censored in Brest. Among other, a photo by **Yulia Darashkievich** ("Nasha Niva") and a series of photos by **Vasil Fiodosienka** ("Reuters"), illustrating protest actions and elections in the past were taken away by the Head of Regional Public and Cultural Center. The

“Press-photo of Belarus - 2010” has been held for the first time this year. 96 Belarusian photographers, cooperating with the media, took part in the contest.

A flying squad detained a youth activist Andrei Zubr and convoyed him to Zhodzina Town Department of Internal Affairs on *September 27, 2010*. He was kept in the police department for three hours. 216 copies of “Tut i Ciapier” (‘Here and Now’) newspaper were seized from the civil activist.

According to Andrei Zubr, the police representatives phoned to his parents and managers after the detention.

The Press Center for the coverage of activities on preparing and holding the Elections of the President of Belarus has been founded by decision of Salihorsk District Executive Committee. The Press Center is managed by the Chief of Ideological Department at Salihorsk District Executive Committee L. Zhukava and the Deputy Chief of the same Ideological Department T. Subotina. The Chief Specialist of the same Ideological Department has been employed as the Press Center secretary.

Human rights watchdogs from the “HR activists for free elections” campaign doubt that the “state vertical” representatives will manage to ensure the unbiased coverage of the coming election campaign in the local press.