

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

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The reporting period has shown that the campaign of public discrediting of PA “BAJ”, started with the film “Bash na BAJ”, continues. In the program “Editors’ Club” shown on “Belarus-1” on March 4, Chairperson of the PA “Belarusian Union of Journalists” Anatol Lemiashonak claimed that BAJ chairperson Zhanna Litvina and her deputies took part in making up lists of citizens banned entry to the EU.

“I remind once again to Anatol Lemiashonak and all other participants of the “Editors’ Club” that nobody consulted with me or my deputies to discuss the “blacklists” before imposing the visa sanctions a year ago,” said Zhanna Litvina. “Though, I can understand why such decision was made: it was a reaction to the rude propaganda and “ideological support” of the repressions against the authorities’ opponents after the presidential elections”.

We remind that the list of Belarusian citizens with banned entry to the EU was adopted by the EU Council of Ministers on January 31, 2011. The list included names of some state media journalists and heads of the Ministry of Information.

As reported on **March 6**, the political prisoner **Dzmitry Bandarenka**, BAJ member and “European Belarus” coordinator, was denied disability status. An interagency commission of experts examined Dzmitry's medical records at a meeting in the Republican Scientific Medical Center in Haradzishchy (Minsk district) on March 2 and refused to declare his disability status. Volha Bandarenka expressed her fear that from that time on her husband would not get any concessions, despite the condition of his health.

Background: Dzmitry Bandarenka, who was a campaign aide to the candidate Andrey Sannikau in the 2010 presidential race, was sentenced to two years in prison in April 2011. His chronic spinal problems deteriorated after the arrest, and he underwent back surgery in the 5th Clinical Hospital in Minsk in July 2011. At the end of January 2012, his imprisonment conditions were toughened: he was prohibited to use a walking crutch and wear special footwear; he was ordered to appear at checks and walk in the line. On February 1, Bandarenka finally applied for a presidential pardon, after which he was given back his crutch and soft shoes.

On March 6 it became known that the correspondent for Baranavichy independent newspaper “Intex-press” **Natallia Salamianka** was denied information from the local Civil Status Registration Office. The journalist wanted to find out the number of registered marriages in the city. On March 1 **Sviatlana Valynets**, head of the office, said that this information would be announced at the meeting of the city Executive Committee the next day. On March 5, she again refused to provide this information by phone, referring the journalist to the state newspaper “Nash Kray”.

Editors’ board of “Intex-press” has sent a written request to the registry office, and is preparing a petition to the prosecutor’s office, asking to foster getting information from this establishment.

These year “Intex-press” has faced difficulty in getting information, which is seen as intentionally created obstacles to their professional activities. For example, to a journalist’s inquiry about the recent statistics on bad kids’ eyesight, the senior doctor of

the Central children's city hospital **Elmira Bahdanovich** also referred the journalist to the ideological department of the city Executive Committee.

As reported on **March 8**, the city resident of Navapolatsk **Zmitser Ryzhchenka** filed a libel lawsuit to Navapolatsk city court against the regional TV-channel "Vektar-TV". The reason for the lawsuit was a program on February 24 about an "ultra-right youth group". 19-year old man thinks that the TV-channel humiliated his honor and dignity by calling him an "extremist" and member of a pro-fascist organization. Ryzhchenka wants the TV-channel to refute this information on air and pay him moral damages.

On March 11 Rahachou local police drew up an administrative protocol against the civil activist **Dzianis Dashkevich** (Art. 9/21). He is accused of violating author and patent rights. The lawsuit against him was filed by the editor of the state newspaper "Svobodnaye Slova" **Andrey Shyshkin**: he is dissatisfied that the independent website **vrogacheve.ru** published without his permit 9 materials from the newspaper and a photo of the chair of the district Executive Committee V. Banchuk.