

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

August 08 – 14, 2011

The updates about the “Charter’97” Web-site Editor Natalya Radzina, who fled Belarus at the end of March 2011, and the recently detained HR activist Ales Bialatski were actively discussed in the Belarusian journalistic community during the period under review. Reportedly, N. Radzina asked for asylum in Lithuania, where the “Charter’97” Web-site editorial is presently located. A. Bialatski was left in custody for two months on charges of “large-scale tax evasion”.

The Economic Court of Minsk fined the “Narodnaya Vola” non-state newspaper 400 base amounts (14 million Br) on **August 8, 2011**. The court verdict was taken on the administrative case, filed by the City Department on Internal Affairs at Minsk City Executive Committee on the initiative from the Ministry of Information of Belarus (article 22.9, part 3 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Offences – “The repeated violation of media legislation within a year on receiving an official warning in the written form”). The “Nasha Niva” non-state newspaper had been fined the same amount by the same court on July 29, 2011.

As reported on **August 8, 2011**, the “Charter’97” Web-site Editor and a BAJ member Natalya Radzina had asked for political asylum in Lithuania. The media worker disseminated the news in her editorial column.

N. Radzina made use of the received notice to appear at the KGB investigator’s office in Minsk and managed to leave Belarus with her friends’ assistance at the end of March 2011. The journalist came to Moscow on April 1, 2011. Her documents were still kept in the KGB. N. Radzina managed to receive new documents through the UN High Commissioner’s Department on Refugees in Russia. The Netherlands backed the journalist internationally and she left for Amsterdam on July 28, 2011. However, she went to Vilnius from there a couple of days later. (The “Charter’97” Web-site and the Web-site editorial have been located there since the time of the Presidential election in December 2010.) Reportedly, N. Radzina asked for political asylum in Lithuania on August 4, 2011. It is worth mentioning that N. Radzina was charged with taking part in “mass riots” in Minsk on December 19, 2010. She was kept behind the bars in the KGB Investigative Isolation Ward since December 20, 2010 till January 28, 2011 and released from custody on signing her cognizance not to leave the place of her permanent residence in Kobryn (Brest region). Consequently, the journalist lived at her parents’ in Kobryn and continued to work as a journalist till March 30, 2011.

The Department on Internal Affairs at Mahilou Regional Executive Committee replied to a group inquiry of BAJ members on **August 8, 2011**. The media workers had expressed their deep concern with systematic detentions of their colleagues during the coverage of street actions. The regional police officers mentioned the case of Hanna Ilyina, who had been sentenced to 6 days of arrest, but disregarded the general worrying situation with violations of journalists’ rights, in their letter of reply. They retorted that the police acted

within legal boundaries and noted that the journalists could lodge complaints either to court or to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

It is worth reminding that on July 5, 2011, a BAJ Council member Hienadz Sudnik submitted the group appeal on behalf of 17 BAJ members from Mahilou to the Heads of Mahilou City and Regional Executive Committees on the score of groundless detentions and arrests of independent journalists during their work on coverage of mass civil actions in the spring and in the summer of 2011. Mahilou City Executive Committee sent a reply in mid-July. In the city governors' opinion, the convicted journalists enjoyed the right to appeal against the court verdicts on their own. Mahilou Regional Executive Committee decided to entrust the regional Department on Internal Affairs to look into the case.

Anatol Sotnikau, the judge of Chyhunachny City District of Homiel sentenced an engineer Zmitsier Shauchenka, 36, to three days of arrest on administrative charges on **August 8, 2011**. The judge found the person guilty of "breaking the procedure of arranging and holding mass events" by means of leaving a note in the "VKontaktie" social network. Mr. Shauchenka didn't plead guilty in court. Moreover, he couldn't explain the reasons for his detention.

As reported on **August 9, 2011**, Pavel Seviarynets, a BAJ member and Co-Chairperson of Organizing Committee on Foundation of "Belarusian Christian Democracy" political party will serve the 3-year term of his punishment in a corrective labor colony, located in the village of Kuplina, Pruzhany district, Brest region. It is worth reminding that P. Seviarynets was found guilty of taking part in mass protest actions in the aftermath of Presidential election on December 19, 2010.

On **August 12, 2011**, the Minsk Regional Court dismissed an appeal against a court decision, filed by Alaksandr Ziankou, a BAJ activist and an independent correspondent from Barysau, Minsk region. The media worker had spent 5 days in custody on charges of 'resisting an authority' (article 23.4 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Offences), following the coverage of a 'silent protest action' on July 20, 2011.

The court of original jurisdiction noted the media worker couldn't appeal against the initial verdict, since it might be done within 5 days on the issuance of the court decision, when the journalist was still behind the bars. The judge Andrei Shupikau from the Minsk Regional Court supported the opinion of his colleagues.

A. Ziankou is going to lodge appeals against the verdicts to the courts of higher authority. Also, he is waiting for a reply from the Public Prosecutor's Office for Barysau district.

A. Bialatski, a BAJ member and Vice-President of International Federation for Human Rights was brought an indictment for large-scale tax evasion (article 243, part 2 of Belarus' Criminal Code) on **August 13, 2011**. The article provides for 3-7 years of imprisonment. A. Bialatski has been left in custody for two months.

It is worth reminding that the agents from the Department of Financial Investigations had detained the Head of "Viasna" HR Center and a BAJ member Ales Bialatski on August 4, 2011.

A. Bialatski was accused of large-scale tax evasion on the base of financial information on his bank accounts, presented by the judicial bodies in Poland and Lithuania.

A. Bialatski's colleagues have repeatedly underscored that the detention is connected with his civil activity and the financial assistance, provided by "Viasna" HR Center to political prisoners and victims of political repressions in Belarus.

Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service