

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

#### Info-posting December 17 – 23, 2012

In 2013 the law “On the republican budget” allocates 669 206 189.2 thousand rubles to state-run mass media, which equals to 60 million Euro. The biggest part of the sum is allocated to TV and radio – 514 674 681.3 thousand rubles, or 46 million euro. 70 128 094.4 thousand rubles (6 million Euro) is allocated to periodic editions and publishing houses. 84 403 413.5 thousand rubles (about 7.5 mln Euro) is allocated to “other issues in mass media”.

“The fact that budget support of state-run mass media has increased as compared to the previous year looks strange at the background of the statements by Belarusian officials that austerity measures are needed and state mass media must earn themselves,” says BAJ deputy chairperson and lawyer Andrei Bastunets.

On December 18 members of Slonim society of democratic forces started an action to support the non-state regional *Hazeta Slonimskaya*. Activists offer the residents of Slonim district to sign a petition to *Belposhta* and *Belsayuzdruk*. In the petition the activists ask to get the newspaper back to the state distribution systems. “We express our protest and dissatisfaction because we consider that all mass media must be provided with equal conditions and opportunities for publishing and distribution,” written in the petition.

*We remind that Hazeta Slonimskaya, alongside with several other socio-political non-state newspapers, has been excluded from Belposhta subscription catalogues and from Belsayuzdruk kiosks since 2006. These enterprises are state monopolists in the sphere of press distribution.*

As reported on December 18, the political prisoner, ex-candidate for presidency Mikalay Statkevich still did not receive the non-state newspaper *Novy Chas*, to which he had been subscribed a year ago by the editorial office of the mass medium. The administration of the prison excuses by the fact that the newspaper is not in the catalogue of *Belposhta*.

The chief editor of the newspaper Aliaxei Karol filed an official complaint to the Department of Sentence Execution of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Department of Sentence Execution (DSE) in Mahilou Region, to prosecutor’s office in Mahilou region and Mahilou prison #4 where Mikalay Statkevich is serving a sentence “for organizing public disorders”. The chief editor argues that *Novy Chas* is an officially registered newspaper, and neither the Criminal Executive Code nor inner regulations in colonies provide any limitations for distributing the press from *Belposhta* catalogues only.

The head of prison #4 A.Dzmitrou answered on December 10 that Statkevich “subscribes to print mass media which he gets fully according to the set terms” and “he did not ask the prison’s administration to subscribe to *Novy Chas*”. Approximately the same answer was given by the head of the DSE in Mahilou region U.Skamarokh on December 7: “individual subscription is made upon convicts’ request to the administration of the facility,” but Statkevich did not ask the administration of prison #4 about *Novy Chas*. Mahilou prosecutor’s office and the Department of Sentence Execution of the Ministry of the Interior redirected the complaints to the DSE in Mahilou region.

On December 19 the non-state regional newspaper *Borisovskiye Novosti* addressed to Babruysk District Executive Committee, asking to publish information about this mass medium’s on the website of the committee in the section “Mass media”.

We remind that the website of the region administration provides information about a number of state-run and private regional mass media. However, the officially registered print mass medium *Borisovskiye Novosti* was missing on the website.

**On December 19** it became known that Rahachou District Executive Committee tried to deprive the independent website vrogacheve.ru **of the right to use local symbols** – heraldic image of a corn in the golden field. The deputy chairperson of the committee on ideological issues Vasil Karalchuk sent a letter to the civil activist, current editor of the website Dzianis Dashkevich, demanding to take the image off the website.

“According to the provision on the coat of arms of the city Rahachou #13/4, adopted by Rahachou district council on May 4, 2001, the right to use the symbols of the city of Rahachou and its district is given by Rahachou District Executive Committee. The website vrogacheve.ru uses the coat of arms of Rahachou without complying it with the executive committee,” says the letter.

A court hearing was scheduled for **December 20** in Brest: BAJ member **Milaha Kharytonava** filed a case against **Uladzimir Mikhnevich**, aiming **to defend her honor and business reputation**. The independent photo journalist, Milana Kharytonava found an **anonymous insulting comment** in her regards on a city web resource in March 2012. She filed a complaint to the police, asking to detect the offender. It turned out to be Mr. Mikhnevich, a journalist of the state newspaper *Brestskij Vestnik*. Milana Kharytonava demanded three million rubles compensation for moral damage and public renunciation of the conclusions made in the insulting comment. However, Mr. Mikhnevich did not appear in court, on a pretext of an urgent business trip. The court hearing was postponed for January 11, 2013.

**On December 20 the EU delegation in Belarus** expressed its regret over **the TV program** broadcast on *Belarus 1* TV channel: “the Delegation of the European Union to Belarus and the Embassies of the EU Member States represented in Belarus express regret at the airing of the TV program titled “Pseudo-Modernism” on **Sunday 16** December on Belarus' Channel 1. The broadcast contains incorrect and false information concerning the purpose and content of **the European Dialogue on Modernization**,” says the press-release.

“The journalistic investigation” was prepared by the department of special projects of the Agency of TV News (ATN). “What stands behind the new project of Euro bureaucracy? Why does the dialogue start with sanctions and end with privatization? Privatization for Belarus without Belarusians – what are the recipes that the Old World is ready to pay for, and who stands behind the attempt to sell the country? A constitutional coup, mass lustration, and eliminating the institute of presidency – what other reforms for Belarus are being prepared in Warsaw and Brussels? The dialogue on modernization: a technology of robbery or another Euro utopia?” this is the general tone of the ATN report.

“The European Dialogue on Modernization is an open, transparent, and inclusive process consisting of a series of discussions aimed at fostering a competitive economy, a pluralistic society and the rule of law in Belarus. It is also about possible EU support to the reform efforts of Belarus in this regard. The authorities, which themselves have stated their commitment to reform and modernization, have been invited to participate and join the initiative since the beginning.”

As became known on **December 22, the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD)** found that the detention of **Mr. Ales Bialiatski**, President of the Human Rights Centre (HRC) “Viasna” and FIDH Vice-President, was **arbitrary**, “being in contravention of article 20, paragraph 1, of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights [UDHR] and article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” (ICCPR). The Working Group emphasized that “the adequate remedy is to release Mr. Bialatski and accord him an enforceable right to compensation pursuant to article 9, paragraph 5, of the [ICCPR]”.

In making the decision, the WGAD took into account the communication it received from the Observatory on human rights on April 2, 2012 which denounces the imprisonment of Ales Bialiatski. The Observatory on Human Rights is a joint program of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organization against Torture (OMCT).

**On December 22** it became known that the president's edict to **exempt from taxes** the **National State TV and Radio Company** and its sub-structural organizations has been extended for 2013. The edict dated **October 1, 2009** exempts the company from profit taxes and value-added taxes. The new edict on extending the period was published on the National legal internet portal pravo.by. Earlier Aliaksandr Lukashenka declared about significant cuts on state support of Belarusian TV channels in 2013.