

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

*Info-posting – December 19-25, 2011*

**A number of media workers, mainly photo and video reporters, were severely detained during public actions, commemorating the dramatic events in the aftermath of the Presidential election 2010 in Minsk, on December 19<sup>th</sup>. Just another time, it became evident that either Belarusian or foreign press cards do not guarantee the inviolability of journalists in the Republic of Belarus nowadays.**

On **December 19, 2011**, a journalist from Hrodna Andrzej Paczobut received the local Prosecutor's warning for an old fault. The sanction concerned A. Paczobut's failure to appear for a check at the Department on Execution of Punishments of Hrodna Department of Internal Affairs on November 14, 2011. (The journalist has to get registered there every third Monday of a month.) Surprisingly, A. Paczobut has already been warned for the same fault by the local police. E. Burak, Public Prosecutor for Leninski City District of Hrodna noted in his letter to A. Paczobut that the latter could be sent back to custody, if similar failures take place in the future.

It is worth mentioning that A. Paczobut was sentenced to three years of imprisonment for 'Casting Aspersions' on the Head of State on July 5, 2011. The sentence was deferred for two years at that.

An unknown man dispersed pepper spray in Editor's Office of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in Belarus on **December 19, 2011**.

The hooligan came to the Accountant's Office of *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii*, introduced himself as a sales agent, selling insecticides and rodenticides. As soon as the BELKP-PRESS workers refused to buy the chemicals, the intruder turned wild and started to shout. He was taken out to the corridor, where he dispersed, most likely, pepper spray. It started to spread to all rooms through the ventilation system. Many people felt it hard to breathe.

The guard, an elderly person, suffered most of all. He was taken to hospital with the chemical burn of cornea. The workers of *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii* called the police. Consequently, a legal investigation was started.

9 journalists were detained in Minsk, and one journalist was detained in the regional center of Vitsiebsk, while reporting from public actions, commemorating the dramatic events that happened in the aftermath of the Presidential election-2010, on **December 19<sup>th</sup>**.

A *Nasha Niva* journalist **Tatsiana Haurylchyk**, independent journalists **Yuliya Darashkievich** and **Ales Barazenska** were detained, while reporting a Femen street action near the KGB building at 11 am. Also the cameraperson of Femen **Kitty Green (Australia)** had been detained, but later deported out of the country to Lithuania.

Yuliya Darashkievich and Tatsiana Haurylchyk were escorted by KGB men into their office, where, as Tatsiana reported, they were waiting for a specialist to come to erase the recordings and pictures in their cameras.

“When Ales Barazenska and I tried to find out the situation of the detained journalists, some people came up and asked to give them our equipment and follow them. But when they saw my foreign journalist’s credentials, they gave me back the documents and let me go,” the ERB correspondent Ales Piletski said. Ales Barazenska was forced to get into a car and taken to the Central District Police Department. He was released at around 4pm, after having his documents checked.

Yulia Darashkievich and Tatsiana Haurylchyk were released in the evening. They said they had stayed in KGB for 2 hours, and then they were transported to the Central District Police Department. They were not given back their equipment.

**Viktar Drachou**, the accredited **France Presse** photo correspondent, was also detained. He came too late to take any photos of the street action. He had his documents checked and was released at around 2:30 pm, without any police reports being written.

At around 8 pm near the Red Roman Catholic Church in Independence square **Mikita Brouka**, out-of-staff journalist for *Novy Chas* independent weekly, was detained.

A journalist for **milinkevich.org** online resource and a BAJ member **Artsiom Liava** was detained on December 19 in Serabranka micro-district in Minsk.

Also, at 2pm it became known that two independent TV journalists **Volha Chaychyts** and **Siarhey Kavaliou** were detained near Freedom square while they were installing shooting equipment. They had their documents checked and were set free at 2:20pm with parting wishes “all shots – tomorrow”.

A car with an independent journalist **Zmitsier Kazakievich** was stopped by the road police near Vitsebsk. The reporter and a group of civil activists from *For Freedom* civil movement! and Statkievich’s election team were heading for the colony where a former presidential candidate Mikalay Statkievich is serving the term. The road police stopped the car, since it ‘might have participated’ in an accident on November 30, 2011. Therefore, the policemen wanted to question the driver about where he had been on that day.

On **December 20, 2011**, the Partyzanski City District Court of Minsk sentenced a ‘Novy Chas’ out-of-staff correspondent Mikita Brouka to 10 days of arrest on administrative charges for participation in an unauthorized public action. Although the ‘Novy Chas’ newspaper’ Editor-in-Chief **Alaksey Karol** testified as a witness in court, noting that M. Brouka had had an editorial assignment at the public event, and even showed a corresponding document to support his words, the judge left the verdict in force.

A journalist Artsiom Liava was fined 20 base amounts (approx. EUR 65) on the same charges by the Leninski City District Court of Minsk on **December 20, 2011**. He had been kept in custody before the trial.

On **December 24, 2011**, Siarhei Sheleg, a photo correspondent for ‘Minsk-Novosti’ state-owned (!) news agency, founded by Minsk City Executive Committee, was detained by riot police, while reporting from an annual rally of Grandfathers Frosts in the city center of Minsk.

Major Maxim Hryshchanka, Deputy Head of Central City District of Internal Affairs shouted at the journalist and called for a police duty detail, when the reporter refused to leave the place of celebrations and asked the police officer to communicate more politely with him. Consequently, S. Sheleg was taken to the local police department. According to the police records, the photo correspondent was detained since he had been 'throwing himself under the train with Grandfathers Frosts'. The journalist was forcibly photographed and taken his finger-prints. Finally, he was released on being detained for an hour.

*Prepared by BAJ Monitoring Service*