

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting – September 19 – October 2, 2011

The period under review was characterized by difficulties with access to information and violations of freedom of movement that prevented journalists from implementing their professional activities.

On **September 20, 2011**, *Hrodna Regional Court* rejected an appeal against a court verdict of Leninski City District Court of Hrodna, filed by Andrzej Paczobut, a “Gazeta Wyborcza” correspondent in Belarus. It is worth mentioning that the court of original jurisdiction had found the journalist guilty of defaming the President of Belarus (part 1, article 367 of Belarusian Criminal Code) in a number of critical articles. Consequently, the reporter was sentenced to three years of jail. The punishment was deferred for two years.

On **September 27, 2011**, the Inspectorate on Criminal Punishment notified Andrzej Paczobut about a ban to leave the territory of Belarus. The journalist had been summoned to the executive body on his return from Poland. A.Paczobut’s fingerprints were taken once again. Also, the media worker was informed that apart from the ban to leave the country, he couldn’t change the place of his residence without a permit from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and had to get registered at the Inspectorate three times a month. A.Paczobut was threatened with sending back to custody in case of three violations of the restrictions of liberty, mentioned above.

On **September 21, 2011**, Viktor Masalovich, a “Bobruyskiy Kuryer” newspaper journalist received a ruling from the Court for Babruysk and Babruysk district on vindication him from charges under the administrative law. In particular, the court admitted that V. Masalovich was reporting from the city center of Babruysk on July 6, 2011.

It was the second court hearing on the administrative case. The first trial had taken place in Babruysk on July 7, 2011. Consequently, the media worker was found guilty of breaking the law on mass events and fined five base amounts (approx. EUR 20). V.Masalovich filed an appeal against the court decision to Mahilou Regional Court. The regional judiciary ruled to cancel the initial verdict and recommit the case to another local judge for further inquiry.

A similar verdict of Babruysk court within the administrative proceedings in relation to another “Bobruyskiy Kuryer” journalist Viktor Kachan has been cancelled by Mahilou Regional Court and relegated to the lower court for revision too. The media worker hasn’t received the final verdict yet.

It is worth mentioning that “Bobruyskiy Kuryer” journalists Viktor Masalovich and Viktor Kachan were detained by police during a ‘silent protest action’ in the central square of Babruysk on July 6, 2011. Both reporters were had been sent to the city center by their editor to cover the socially important event.

As reported on **September 21, 2011**, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused to explain the reasons for the withdrawal of a Belarusian entrance visa from Yauhien Vapa, the Chairman of the 'Radio Racyja' Board and the Editor-in-chief of "Niva" weekly, published for the Belarusian people, residing in Poland.

A corresponding notification was sent by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in reply to the inquiry, submitted by the World Alliance of Belarusians '*Batskaushchyna*.' The governmental official referred to article 31 of Belarusian Law "On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons" that releases the state authorities from the necessity to explain the reasons of such decisions.

It's worth reminding that the Belarusian border guards cancelled Y. Vapa's visa at the Poland-Belarus border crossing on May 23, 2011.

Ales Bialatski, Head of 'Viasna' Center for Human Rights started looking through the materials relating to the criminal proceedings, initiated against him under part 2, article 243 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (*'Large scale concealment of income'*) on **September 23, 2011**.

"It can be said that the legal investigation process on Bialatski's case is over, and, apparently, the trial may begin in the second half of October 2011," the 'Viasna' lawyer Uladzimir Labkovich noted.

The Belarusian and international civil community considers the suit to be politically motivated and demands the immediate release of Ales Bialatski from custody. The human rights activists express concern with the possible closure of the case hearings to the public.

As reported on **September 26, 2011**, a specialist of Hantsavichy District Sanitary Service Lidziya Koush refused to tell Sviatlana Malyshka, a "Hantsavitski Chas" newspaper correspondent, how to protect yourself from wasp stings and what to do in case of wasp attacks on learning that the correspondent represented the non-state periodical. According to the local sanitary official, she was banned to communicate with the "Hantsavitski Chas" reporters.

A "Novy Chas" newspaper correspondent Lola Burieva and a "Nasha Niva" correspondent Siarhei Satsiuk were detained by police in the central market of Vorsha (Vitsiebsk region) on **September 28, 2011**. The incident happened, when the journalists were shooting a report about the economic state of Belarusian society. The journalists were interrogated and released in two hours after their detention.

A non-staff correspondent of "Brestskiy Kuryer" newspaper Alisa Pol was detained near the Central Marketplace of Brest on **September 28, 2011**. The police officers from Leninski City District of Internal Affairs approached the reporter and accused her of "oppositional campaigning," when she interviewed the local residents. Alisa Pol was convoyed to the local police station and forced to provide explanations of her actions in the written form. After being detained for about half an hour, the journalist was released. The police apologized to her.

As reported on **September 29, 2011**, Maladechna city authorities banned to take photo and video cameras to the “Dazhynki-2011” Festival area in the town center, if the lens exceeded 4 cm. According to Alaksandr Danilchanka, the Spokesman for the Interior Department at Minsk Regional Executive Committee, it was a demand of the Presidential Security Service.

According to the local officials, the journalists had to be issued special credentials at the Presidential Administration in order to be able to use professional cameras with large lens during the event. However, the dead-line for getting the required credentials had expired on September 20, 2011.

According to photo correspondents, it was for the first time that they faced such technical restrictions in the coverage of public events.

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