

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

*Info-posting – February 20 - 26, 2012*

**The main feature of the reporting period was a wave of new summons of journalists to the prosecutor's office and the KGB, mainly in the regions (especially in Hrodna). Most of them got warnings for collaboration with foreign mass media without accreditation. The reason for this tendency is unclear. Some of the journalists think it can be pressure on PA "BAJ" – now through separate members of the organization. Also, there were registered several cases of serious impediments to journalists' work – in particular, in Vitsebsk at the trial of the public activist Siarhey Kavalenka.**

**On February 21 Viktor Parfionenka**, Hrodna correspondent for Radio *Racyia*, was summoned to Hrodna region prosecutor's office, where he was given a written warning for collaboration with foreign mass media without accreditation from the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The chief deputy of Hrodna region prosecutor's office **Pavedayka V.I** used print-outs from the Radio *Racyia* website as evidence. He warned the journalist that the next fact of his violating the law would be punished according to Art. 22/9 of the Administrative Code (unlawful dissemination of information). When Parfionenka explained that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied him accreditation three times, Pavedayka recommended that the journalist sue the Ministry in court.

**On February 21** Hrodna journalist **Ales Dzianisau** also received a warning for his work for *Belsat*. In his case, chief prosecutor's deputy Pavedayka didn't care to present any evidence at all.

**On February 21** the police forced three independent journalists to leave the village of Niaznanava in Navahradak district, Hrodna region. The correspondent for the online-newspaper "Solidarity" **Siarhey Balay** and correspondents for the newspaper "Obozrevatel" ("Observer") **Aliaxey Matsiushkou** and **Dzmitry Korsak** tried to find out the reasons for extermination of all pigs in this village. Soon after their arrival in the village, there appeared policemen from the local district police department. "Two lieutenant colonels claimed that we could not stay in the territory where veterinary emergency response exercises took place". The journalists were threatened to be taken to the police department "to clarify circumstances" in case they disobeyed. The policemen also demanded harshly to delete all photos of them.

**On February 21** BAJ member **Pavel Sitnik** was driving the car which was stopped by the road police on entering the city of Vitsebsk. There were also four members of the "Young Front" (registered in the Czech Republic). They were going to attend the trial of Vitsebsk activist Siarhey Kavalenka. All those people in the car were taken to Vitsebsk district police department on accusations of minor hooliganism (using obscene language, Article 17.1 of the Administrative Code). **On February 22** Vitsebsk district court (judge Lipskaya), having heard the testimony of witnesses – policemen - fined Pavel Sitnik to three base amounts. The journalist is going to appeal against the decision.

**On February 22** in Polatsk **Yauhen Parchynski**, founder of the website “Svobodny Region” received a verbal warning from the local KGB. He was questioned about the recently created website, and also about his participation in the action “Revolution through social nets”. The KGB man read aloud several articles from the Criminal Code and warned that journalistic activity without accreditation is forbidden – especially work for foreign media.

**On February 22** in Homel the correspondent for the non-state information agency *BelaPAN* **Alena Hermanovich** wasn’t allowed to attend the official seminar on relations between the authorities and the business. The employee from the ideology department of the Regional Executive Committee **Volha Babikava** demanded that the journalist should leave the room. The formal reason for the demand was absence of accreditation for the event. According to Hermanovich, none of the state-media journalists – from STV, ONT or “Homelskaya Prauda” – were asked to show any accreditation – they took down comments freely. Among the participants of the meeting, there was Chairperson of the Committee of State Control **Aliaksandr Yakabson**, Chairperson of the Regional Executive Committee **Uladzimir Dvornik**, Prosecutor General **Aliaksandr Kaniuk**.

**On February 22** court guards prevented journalists from entering the courtroom where the trial of Vitsebsk civil activist Siarhey Kavalenka took place. **Alena Sciapanava** (independent journalist), **Valery Kalinouski** (Radio Freedom), **Bahdan Arlou** (cameraman), **Siarzhuk Serabro** (editor of the website “Narodnyia Naviny Vitsebska”) were stopped at the entrance to the court hall. The journalists were told that any technological equipment was forbidden (Alena Sciapanava had a dictophone, and Valery Kalinouski had a computer). Kalinouski, who is an accredited journalist, went to the court chairman to complain against the actions of the policemen. The chairman **Uladzislau Biassmertny** said he “doesn’t have the right to issue orders to policemen”. The journalists were also told to delete the photo and the video of a conflict between the policemen and relatives of Siarhey Kavalenka which happened before the beginning of the trial.

According to the Code of the Criminal Procedure (Art. 287/6 – “Ensuring publicity of the trial”) “all people present at an open trial have the right to take written and audio recording”. The court chairman gives his permit for photo and video recording, but all this – only after the trial starts. A “preventive” ban to attend an open trial is out of the question.

**On February 23** policemen also didn’t let the journalists attend the trial of Siarhey Kavalenka and roughly interfered with their work. The journalists were ousted from the corridor of the court. Alena Sciapanava was forced out by three riot policemen. Even in front of the court building, the correspondent for Radio *Freedom* Valery Kalinouski was beaten on the hands and his camera view was obstructed. After the trial began, Judge **Alena Zhuk** dismissed the request filed by Siarhey Kavalenka, asking to allow journalists to the trial. However, as it turned out later, among all there were also journalists from the state media, invited beforehand, in particular, journalists from the newspaper “Vitsebski Rabochy”.

**On February 24** – the fourth day of Siarhey Kavalenka trial – independent journalists were again prevented from entering the courtroom, on the grounds that there were no empty places. In particular, journalists from Radio *Freedom*, newspaper “Vitsebski Kuryer”, online-media “Narodnyia Naviny Vitsebska”, correspondents for the Polish public radio and inform-agency PAP. The correspondent for Radio *Freedom* V.Kalinouski left a complaint against

actions of the policemen in the book of feedbacks and suggestions of the Pershamayski District Court of Vitsebsk.

**On February 23** an unknown man in plain clothes stood in the way of the TV cameraman and BAJ member **Larysa Shchyakova** who was filming the street action of distributing postcards “Stop drinking – it’s time to feed the family and defend the country”, made by the coalition “Our alternative”. When the riot police started to detain activists, the man intentionally obstructed the view of the camera.

**On February 25** guards of the detention center in Valadarski street in Minsk refused to take a parcel to the human rights defender **Ales Bialiatski**. His wife Natallia Pinchuk tried to send him the food he had asked for in his letter on February 23. Also the guards confirmed that Ales Bialiatski was staying in that detention center at that moment.