

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Fortnight in Belarus

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A new wave of sanctions against journalists, who report from Belarus without press credentials, appeared at the end of October 2011. In particular, a Russian correspondent was deported from Belarus. Also, three local independent TV journalists were summoned to the Prosecutor General's office in Minsk. One of them received an official warning.

A trial against a well-known Belarusian human rights activist and a BAJ member Ales Bialatski started on November 2, 2011. He is accused of tax evasion on a large scale.

As reported on **October 24, 2011**, a "*Bobruyski Kuryer*" journalist **Yauhien Vaskovich**, 20, sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment for committing an attack on the KGB building in Babruysk (Mahilou region), was sent to Mahilou Prison No.4. Nothing had been known about the media worker's location for nearly half a month.

It is worth mentioning that the prisoners, who constantly break the internal order or commit crimes in colonies, are usually transferred to Mahilou Prison No.4.

On **October 24, 2011**, an opposition politician **Viktar Ivashkievich** filed a claim against the Belarusian State TV and Radio Company to the Piershamayski City District Court in Minsk. The civil activist protested against broadcasting a slanderous news story about him on the First State TV Channel in the peak-viewing time on October 9, 2011. The story dwelt upon the alleged receipt of a grant sum of USD 340,000 by Ivashkievich for conducting the 'Popular Assemblies'. (The first of them was held on October 8, 2011.) The politician requests the court to make the state TV broadcaster refute the news and recover moral damages.

A Web-site of BelaPAN News Agency (www.belapan.com) failed to work for some time in the evening of **October 24, 2011**, since the foreign server had been hacked by the unknown violators.

As reported on **October 25, 2011**, quite a few non-state national and regional socio-political periodicals weren't included into the "Belposhta" subscription catalogue for the first half-year 2012. It's worth mentioning the problem started at the beginning of 2006, when more than a dozen of independent periodical editions were excluded from the state monopolist press distribution networks. The "Belsayuzdruk" and "Belposhta" enterprises explained the decision by "*economic inexpediency*" of cooperation with non-state socio-political periodical editions. "Nasha Niva" and "Narodnaya Vola" newspapers were returned to the subscription catalogues and the "Belsayuzdruk" news-stalls in 2008. However, the situation remains unchanged for all other periodicals, deprived of any opportunity of using the state-owned press distribution network in the country.

On-line transmission of a talk with a famous Belarusian musician and man of letters **Lavon Volski** for TUT.BY Web-portal was interrupted on **October 25, 2011**. The TUT.BY Director General *Yury Zisser* noted the media outlet had good grounds to do so, since Volski "started mocking openly at state officials."

Commenting upon the incident, the musician expressed his surprise and noted that he hadn't delivered any illegal statements or appeals.

The portal management apologized to L. Volski later on. Finally, the unedited record appeared on the Web resource.

Igor Karmazin, a correspondent of **Moskovsky Komsomolets** newspaper (Russia), was deported from Belarus in the night of **October 25–26, 2011**.

Igor Karmazin came to Belarus to make a report about Belarusian opposition. He was detained right after an interview with Iryna Khalip, the wife of the former presidential candidate Andrey Sannikau.

Karmazin was taken to the police department of Partyzanski district of Minsk, where he was searched, all recordings were erased from his dictaphone and his fingerprints were taken.

Finally, the Russian journalist received a document signed by the deputy chief of the police department of Partyzanski district Aliaksandr Hladun, stating that Karmazin was banned entry to the territory of Belarus for one year. In case he violates the order, he faces a punishment of up to 3 years of jail.

The spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Andrey Savinyh made comments to Belapan News Agency on the incident. He said that Igor Karmazin was on private business in Belarus, as he hadn't received the press credentials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is required by law that all foreign journalists, if they want to perform journalist work, must get accreditation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A journalist Alina Radachynskaya was summoned to the General Prosecutor's Office on **October 27, 2011**. She had a 25-minute talk, after which she got an official warning, signed by Deputy Prosecutor General Mikalay Kuklis. It states that she mustn't cooperate with foreign media, lacking accreditation in Belarus (Article 35, part 4 of the Media Law of Belarus). "I was told that if I continued violating the law, I would be punished for that," Alina Radachynskaya said.

Other independent journalists Aleh Razhkou and Ales Barazienka were summoned to the General Prosecutor's Office on **October 27, 2011** and **October 28, 2011** correspondingly. They referred to Article 27 of the Constitution of Belarus and refused to testify against themselves. Consequently, they didn't receive any sanctions at all.

On **October 31, 2011**, Anatol Sanatsenka, the 'Bobruyskiy Kuryer' Editor-in-chief sent letters of appeal to the chiefs of Babruysk Department of Internal Affairs and Police Department No.2 with a suggestion to express public apologies to the journalists of his newspaper **Viktar Kachan** and **Viktar Masalovich**. The Editor underscored in his letters that the actions of police officers had caused material and moral damage to the 'Bobruyskiy Kuryer' editorial members and him, since the police prevented the journalists from contributing materials and informing the readers about the events in time.

It is worth mentioning that the police detained the 'Bobruyskiy Kuryer' journalists in Lenin Square in Babruysk on July 6, 2011, while the media workers performed an editorial assignment of reporting from the epicenter of events. The court of first instance fined the reporters 5 base amounts each, basing upon the police reports. However, the higher court cancelled the verdicts later.

As reported on **October 31, 2011**, **Ludmila Atchanashanka**, the Editor of [www.ex-Press.by](http://www.ex-press.by) regional on-line publication (Barysau, Minsk region) received an oral warning at the district Public Prosecutor's Office for breaking the law on mass events.

The Public Prosecutor's Aide Iryna Pashkievich noted that the journalist had been warned for publishing informational materials about preparations of local civil activists for the 'Popular Assembly' in the city.

Trial against **Ales Bialatski** began at 10 am on **November 2, 2011**. The case is heard by Judge Siarhey Bandarenka of the Pershamayski City District Court of Minsk, but the hearing takes place in the building of the Maskouski City District Court with larger courtrooms.

The courtrooms accommodating 80 people were almost full. Not only relatives, but also famous politicians and public figures attended the hearing, namely Valiantsin Stefanovich, Aleh Volchak, Tatsiana Raviaka, Raisa Mikhayloskaya, the Milinkeviches and the Niaklieus. Previously, it became known that Belarusian embassies in France, Belgium, Norway, and Sweden had refused visas to a number of human rights activists. Around twenty people, who introduced themselves as students of law faculty, came to the trial as well.

The criminal case materials against the leader of a human rights group Viasna (Spring), who is also Vice President of the International Federation for Human Rights, were transferred to court on October 4, 2011. Ales Bialatski has been held in a detention center in Minsk since August 4, 2011. On August 12, he was formally charged with large-scale tax evasion (Art. 243, part 2 of the Criminal Code of Belarus), facing a prison term of up to seven years with property confiscation. The criminal prosecution was reasoned by information about accounts of the human rights center in foreign banks, shared with Belarusian authorities by the Ministry of Justice of Lithuania and the Prosecutor General's Office in Poland. The human rights

activist was accused of concealing more than Br 1 billion and avoiding tax payment of around Br 150 million.

Ales Bialatski and 'Viasna' are well-known across Belarus and abroad. Bialatski's colleagues say that the money from his accounts was used to support political prisoners, their relatives, and generally the people whose rights had been violated. Consequently, the funds cannot be regarded as A. Bialatski's personal income.

The authorities of Lithuania and Poland publicly apologized to the arrested human rights activists and his family, and also suspended contacts with Belarus in the framework of agreements on legal assistance.

International human rights structures, the EU and the US leadership as well as the governments of other independent states have demanded an immediate release of Ales Bialatski from custody.

As reported on **November 3, 2011**, the 'BelMarket' shopping center in Horki (Mahilou region) refused to take a fresh issue of 'UzHorak' non-state newspaper for sale. The Chief Editor Halina Budnaya was told the decision to cancel the contract had come from the central office of 'BelMarket' in Minsk.

'**UzHorak**' is a regional socio-political newspaper. It is distributed in Horki, Drybin, and Mstsislau districts of Mahilou region. The periodical intends to present unbiased coverage of local news and reports upon urgent national problems.

As reported on **November 4, 2011**, the sentence to a political prisoner *Paval Seviarynets* had been upheld by Uladzimir Putsila, Chair of Minsk City Court.

The journalist's lawyer Vadzim Mushynski filed a supervisory appeal against the decision of the Zavodski City District Court of Minsk. He demanded to reverse the sentence of three years' imprisonment in a correctional labor colony for participation in the protest actions on December 19, 2010.

The judge Putsila noted in the ruling that the court of the first instance had presented sufficient motivation of the presence of corpus delicti. He concluded that the investigation was comprehensive and thorough, and that the punishment corresponded to the crime.

Reportedly, the attorney is going to file another appeal to the Supreme Court of Belarus.

The publisher of 'Kryvinka' unregistered newspaper **Georgy Stankievich** was detained by police in his native town of Bieshankovichy, Mahilou region on **November 5, 2011**. The incident happened, when the publisher was delivering the periodical to local readers by bike. G. Stankievich was taken to Bieshankovichy District Department of Internal Affairs. The police drew up a report on illegal distribution of unregistered published materials. The date of the trial is unknown yet.

It's worth mentioning that it was the second case of making Mr Stankievich liable for his samizdat activity and the 'Kryvinka' newspaper distribution. In particular, he had been fined on the similar charges in April 2010.

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