

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting April 30 – May 5, 2012

On May 1 the international organization Freedom House published the yearly report “Press Freedom 2012: A Global Survey of Media Independence”. It says that out of the 197 countries and territories assessed during 2011, a total of 66 (33.5 percent) were rated Free, 72 (36.5 percent) were rated Partly Free, and 59 (30 percent) were rated Not Free. Belarus traditionally occupies one of the worst positions in the rating – worse only in Eritrea, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and North Korea.

On April 30 independent TV journalists **Victoryia Kolchyna** and **Siarhey Krauchuk** were **detained** at a private demonstration of the documentary “Europe’s last dictator”, organized by the representatives of the “Free Theater” in Minsk. Five minutes after the beginning special forces burst into the building. All 20 spectators were told to face the wall, then they were taken to the police department in the Soviet district in Minsk. All the spectators were questioned, photographed, fingerprinted and three hours later were released. Siarhey Krauchuk’s **camera** was kicked out of his hands during the detention, so it was **damaged**. After he was set free and received his camera back, he noted that the **memory card was missing**. Victoryia Kolchyna was unable to switch on her computer immediately – it was blocked.

On May 2, around 8pm local **policemen paid a visit** to the Minsk office of the **radio “Racyia”**, near Victory square. They were inspecting all rooms in the building in connection with a rehearsal of the parade on May 9. One employee was present in the office, and opened the door. Seeing the label of the radio and the equipment, the policemen called their colleagues from the Central district police department. In order to inspect the building, they decided to **seize the equipment**. A protocol was drawn up, saying a laptop and a CPU unit were seized for a check. The protocol was signed by the senior officer **Babkou**; the operation was guided by the deputy head of the police department **Anatol Shakhlay**.

On May 3 unknown people staged a **provocation** against Hrodna-based journalist **Andrzej Poczobut**. At the entrances of the neighboring houses they pasted up posters with a black-and-white photo of the journalist with a caption “Take care, pedophile!” Andrzej Poczobut brought one of the leaflets to the police and filed a charge. He thinks that it was another method to make revenge for his civil position and journalistic activities. He also doesn’t exclude that the provocation could be made by the KGB.

We remind that Andrzej Poczobut was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment with two-year adjournment for “defaming the president” (Art. 367/1 of the Criminal Code); he is denied exit abroad. The trial was behind doors. The journalist spent three months in prison.

As reported **on May 5**, the correspondent of the Minsk office of the “European Radio for Belarus” **Dzmitry Lukashuk** was **denied information** at the Ministry of Home Affairs and the press-service of the Council of Ministers. Preparing materials on lack of personnel in the Belarusian militia, he filed a written request to the main personnel department of the Ministry of Home Affairs. A week later the first deputy head of the department Aleh Kruchynski answered that such information was “restricted for dissemination”.

He also sent a written request about the reasons why the charge for driving license had been raised 4 times (on the initiative of the Council of Ministers). The press-secretary of the Council of Ministers Olga

Dolgaya kicked him off with an “answer” that the requested information would soon appear on the website of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

On May 5 the chief editor of “Babruyski Courier” **Anatol Sanatsienka** received an answer to his letter to the inspection of the **Ministry on taxes and duties** of the Republic of Belarus in Babruysk city.

In his letter Anatol Sanatsienka pointed out that his **rights had been violated by the KGB** workers who questioned him for two and a half hours in the cabinet of his tax inspector and tried to intimidate him because of his articles on public and political issues.

Anatol Sanatsienka suggested that the administration of the inspection should compensate the moral damage by officially giving him apologies; also they should replace his tax inspector and pay attention to the Labor Code, because during the “talk” all the tax inspectors left their work places.

In the answer the first deputy head of the inspection **Y.D.Tarabuyeu** confirms the fact of inviting Sanatsienka to the tax inspection, but doesn’t say a single word about the episode with the KGB – as if it had not taken place at all.

We remind that on May 5 Anatol Sanatsienka was invited to the tax inspection on a routine talk; but instead, two KGB-men met him at the cabinet of his tax inspector and talked with him for 2.5 hours.