

Strategic lines of activities for BAJ in 2015 – 2017

PROFILE

The Belarusian Association of Journalists (hereinafter BAJ) is a voluntary non-governmental, non-profit and non-partisan association of citizens, engaged in journalistic activities or contributing to development of journalism. Acting since 1995, BAJ facilitates the exercise of civil, social, cultural, economic and professional rights and the pursuit of legitimate interests of its members; helps to develop expertise and get a chance for creative self-fulfillment, as well as to create conditions that enable freedom of the press, including the journalists' right to obtain and impart information without any interference. Currently, BAJ counts 1150 members. There are five organizational structures (regional branches) registered by the local authorities – in Brest, Homel, Luninets, Maladzechna, and Navapolatsk.

BAJ has been an associate member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) since 1997, full member of the European Federation of Journalists since 2013. In 2014, BAJ joined the IFEX network as an interim member.

BAJ was awarded the Golden Pen of Freedom prize at the World Newspaper Congress and the World Editors Forum in Dublin (Ireland) in June 2003. In December 2004 the European Parliament awarded BAJ Andrei Sakharov Prize "For the Freedom of Thought". The Atlantic Council Freedom Award was presented to BAJ by the Atlantic Council in June, 2011.

INTRODUCTION

The suggested project of strategic lines of development of BAJ is based on the analysis of its activities in the previous period (successes, problems, strengths, and weaknesses) and outer challenges and threats.

In 2012 – 2015, the organization faced a number of challenges. A necessity arose to react to:

- the amendments to the Law on Mass Media that have deteriorated the working conditions for mass media and journalists
- criminal prosecution of journalists and bloggers
- practice of holding journalists liable under the Administrative Code for cooperation with foreign mass media without accreditation
- the use of the Law on Counteracting to Extremism to restrict freedom of expression and information exchange.

As earlier, the authorities refused to interact positively with BAJ concerning the issues of improving the working conditions for journalists, including the issue of access to information. In spite of the tough outer conditions, the organization has managed to preserve sustainability in the mentioned period and was able to organize systemic work in the spheres of legal support, monitoring of mass media situation, contributing to professional qualification of journalists, promoting high standards and principles of journalism, holding solidarity campaigns, extending and strengthening international cooperation. Representatives of administration bodies of BAJ, regional branches, activists of the organization and international experts took part in the analysis of the organization activities in 2012-2015 and in strategic planning for 2015-2017.

GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF BAJ ACTIVITIES

The main goal of BAJ activities in 2015-2017 is expanding space for free speech through support of journalism of high quality and demand and distribution of truthful information.

The priority activities for BAJ will be:

- standing for freedom of expression and the right to get and disseminate information
- professional development and support for journalists
- enhancing organizational potential

Description of the priorities, expected outcomes and key activities:

I. Standing for freedom of expression and the right to get and disseminate information

Expected outcomes:

1. Preserving independent journalism in the country

Key actions:

- providing legal defence and support in case the journalists' rights are violated (legal consultations, practical aid, representing interests in courts, filing pleas, appeals);

- initiating and consulting in the sphere of signing collective agreements (developing a project of the agreement on the basis of the Labor Code and policies of editorial offices, meeting editors, popularizing better practices of editorial offices, discussing cases);
- defending interests of mass media in relations with state, civil and commercial structures (persona meetings, written petitions, complaints, initiating talks, consultations, joint round tables, etc.);
- interaction with state structures (parliament, President's Administration, Ministries, executive committees, etc.) in personal meetings, personal work with MPs, sending proposals, initiating and participating in joint events initiated by BAJ or organized by the OSCE, Council of Europe, other international institutions);
- organizing civil campaigns to support independent journalism
- enhancing personnel potential and financial sustainability of editorial offices of independent mass media (organizing trainings, internships, informing about possibilities to take part in support programs).

2. Facts of violating the right to freedom of speech and access to information are publicized and registered

Key actions:

- monitoring facts of violating the right to freedom of speech and access to information;
- distributing the registered facts of violations on the website, in Abajur magazine, in special bulletins, at public events, in e-mail lists;
- preparing periodic and yearly reports about the situation in the media sphere;
- informing Belarusian and international communities about the situation in the sphere of freedom of speech in Belarus, through participation of BAJ members and experts in international and national conferences, hearings, working meetings etc;
- holding events celebrating prominent colleagues who stand out by their adherence to free speech or suffered through professional activities.

3. Civil society, journalists, international organizations and foreign partners, as well as active citizens support the campaign "The right to information";

Key actions:

- work with representatives of state structures: meetings and e-mail listings, holding round table discussions and meetings with press services, forwarding proposals of amendments to laws, creating ratings of openness/secretcy of information and publicizing the results etc.
- work with journalists: holding seminars, informing about the aims and meaning of the campaign (on the website, in the magazine Abajur, on social nets, in e-mails, etc.), creating promotional package, collecting signatures, etc.
- work with representatives of NGO: communication on joining efforts in the campaign, engaging their resources in distributing information; organizing joint events; informational support of NGO projects in the sphere of media literacy etc.
- work with the public: meetings with readers audiences on the grounds of editorial offices and regional branches, issuing informational and promotional materials, monitoring of facts of propaganda and manipulating public opinion, informing the society about the results of the monitoring;
- work with foreign partners: writing petitions, organizing hearings, round table discussions and other debate platforms, regular updating about the situation, studying and popularizing experience of foreign countries; the campaign-related events with participation of foreign experts and representatives of BAJ.

4. Preparation of proposals to amend legislation, aimed to reform the media sphere

Key actions:

- legal examination of current legislation and law enforcement practices
- participation of BAJ experts in the work of expert groups on reforming the media sphere in Belarus
- developing alternative draft laws/amendments to legal acts, proposals to change legal practices in the media sphere.

II. Professional development and support

Expected results:

1. Improving the system of increasing qualification of journalists and editors

Key actions:

- identifying the needs of BAJ members in trainings (through surveys, questionnaires, etc.);
- creation of a personified system of registration of participants of educational programs;
- creation of a data base about trainers and experts who could be engaged in educational programs of BAJ
- development of a package of educational offers (courses, trainings, consultations) that can be presented by BAJ;
- implementation of educational courses, trainings, consultations responding to the needs of BAJ members;
- regular updating about the results of educational programs and collection of feedback about them (website, Abajur);
- educational trainings of experts in editorial-offices (in-house, workshops);
- press clubs and discussions on journalism ethics and quality journalism;
- a special column on the website of BAJ to cover the work of the Commission on Ethics;
- studying media management (editorial management, working out development strategies for editorial offices, advertising, distribution systems, convergence);
- holding professional and creative contests.

2. Strengthening the system of support for journalists who have faced critical situations.

Key actions:

- regular updates for BAJ members about mechanisms of receiving legal aid;
- organizing work of media jurists in regional structures of BAJ;
- organizing trainings on legal thematic for BAJ members;
- providing BAJ members with psychological aid in consultations of psychologists;
- holding psychological trainings;
- publication of psychological advice (website, Abajur).

III. Enhancing organizational potential

Expected outcomes:

1. BAJ members and its members are aware of and share the mission and strategic lines of BAJ activities.

Key actions:

- writing and approving the strategic plan of the organization development by 2017;
- working out and production of presentational materials that contain the description of the mission, BAJ priorities;
- ensuring participation of BAJ members in discussions of plan of the organization development (working meetings, idea fairs, joint planning).

2. BAJ members take active part in the life of the organization.

Key actions:

- preparation of the information guide about BAJ services;
- BAJ days - open doors for new BAJ members (presentation, informational package for a freshman, greeting meeting);
- identifying needs, gathering proposals, feedbacks from BAJ members (questionnaires, meetings, surveys);
- stimulating initiatives of BAJ members at the level of regional branches and communities (the contest for the best branch of the year, support of local and across-regional events, training activists on planning activities);
- stimulating participation of BAJ members in professional contests founded by BAJ (personal meetings, publications, e-mails etc.);
- implementation of local and all-national initiatives by BAJ members (interest clubs, campaigns, actions);
- encouraging voluntary contribution of BAJ members (taking inventory of needs, creating groups of volunteers for specific events and projects, training for the people).

3. Strengthening branches and communities of the organization and inter-regional cooperation.

Key actions:

- regular meetings with BAJ leaders and famous personalities with members of branches and communities;
- periodic meetings of leaders and activists of branches and communities;
- creation of interregional informational net (e-letters, groups on social nets);
- joint interregional events (press tours, round table discussions, workshops etc.);
- holding traditional corporate events including those on selection basis (BAJynki open-air sports event, BAJ day etc.);
- visits of branch members to other branches for experience exchange.

4. Improving the system of communication

Key actions:

- development of the website of BAJ (publications of information about people responsible for specific actions, possibilities to subscribe to e-letters, redesign of the website, quick contact with BAJ office);
- holding regular meetings of the “public” editorial office of Abajur dedicated to the website and the magazine (defining the priority thematic, authors etc.);
- improving the online version of the magazine Abajur for publications on the website (through Issuu and other services);
- involving new authors from BAJ members for the website and the magazine of BAJ;
- creation of elements of electronic office (common calendar, common documents etc.);
- creation of interregional e-letter.

5. Strengthening the material basis and financial sustainability of the organization

Key actions:

- updating office equipment and software;
- ensuring premises for the office, for educational and working meetings;
- optimization of the system of membership fees.

6. Optimization of the system of administration and organizing the work of the permanent office of the organization.

Key actions:

- redistribution of duties and responsibilities in the office;
- introducing the position of the executive director;
- organizing regular planning sessions of employees of the office and people engaged in coordination of main directions of BAJ activities;
- optimization of the number composition of administering bodies of the organization;
- distributing responsibilities of members of governing bodies of BAJ for cooperation with specific international partners and activities;
- modernizing and updating the registration system of members of BAJ.

7. Shaping the positive image of BAJ.

Key actions:

- creation of the package of promotional materials (booklets, visit cards, calendars, pens, notepads, greeting cards, video, bags and tags, T-shirts, logos);
- discussing the issue of logo redesign;
- establishing informational partnership with organizers of large-scale events (exhibitions, festivals, conferences, forums);
- encouraging materials about BAJ and its members in the media;
- special project Why I'm in BAJ on the website of the organization (video interviews, video about BAJ members);
- maintaining the project BAJ person on the website;
- organizing the campaign dedicated to 20th anniversary of BAJ (publications in the media, timeline history on the website, anniversary presentation and party, exposition);
- work on creation of the virtual museum of Belarusian independent journalism;
- traditional charity actions of BAJ;
- creative evening parties – meetings with colleagues;
- creative contests of BAJ;

- participation in international journalistic actions and campaigns;
- work with embassies (press meetings, presentations, invitations to events).

8. Establishing partner relations of BAJ

Key actions:

- participation in joint projects of IFJ, EFJ, IFEX, FOJO and others;
- participation in preparing joint reports on human rights and freedom of expression together with Belarusian human rights organizations;
- aid in preparing and participation in conferences, public hearings and other events of PACE, OSCE, UN and other organizations working with the issues of freedom of expression.