

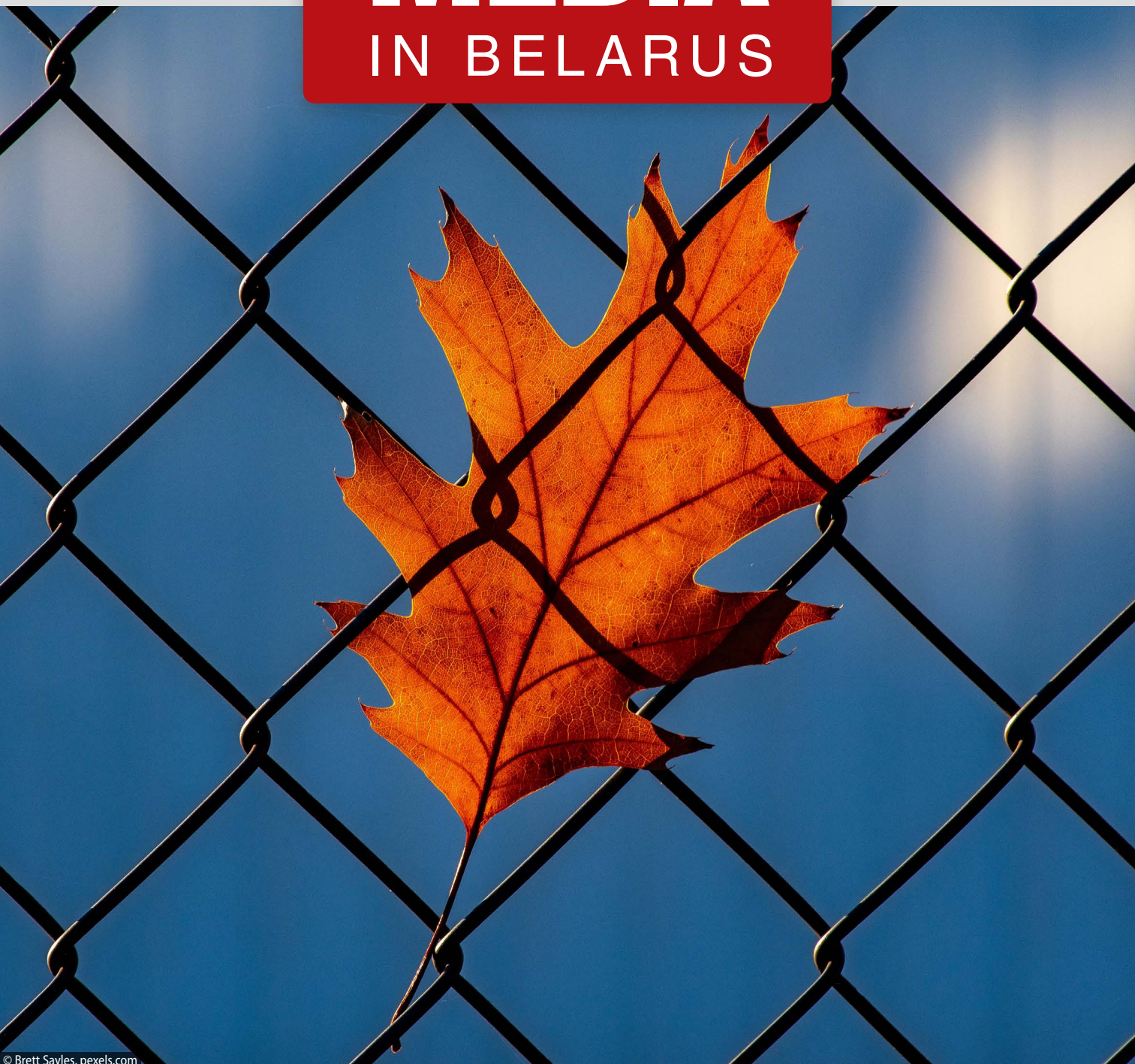
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MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

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As before, the Belarusian journalists were persecuted for their professional activity. The space for independent media operation was further shrinking.

- *32 media workers were imprisoned as of the end of October 2022.*
- *9 sentences were pronounced to journalists in criminal cases with prison terms ranging from 3 to 14 years within the period under review. New criminal cases were filed against five journalists at that.*
- *journalists were subjected to detentions, administrative charges, and other kinds of pressure.*
- *As before, anti-extremist legislation was used as a weapon in the fight against the independent press. It was primarily applied as a basis for blocking access to online media and holding media workers accountable for the dissemination of information. The first criminal case under the new article of the Criminal Code 130-2 (denial of genocide of the Belarusian people) was filed in connection with publications in independent media.*
- *As a result of governmental policies, the reduction of independent sources of information inside Belarus continued. The media were forced to terminate their activity.*
- *There exists censorship of media publications in Belarus, including the publications, produced by state-owned media.*

Criminal prosecution of journalists

On August 3, 2022, Homiel Regional Court sentenced Iryna



Slaunikava, a journalist of Polish television, a former employee of Belsat TV channel, to five years in prison under two articles of the Criminal Code: part 1 of Article 342 ('arrangement of group actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them') and part 1 of Article 361-1 ('creation of

an extremist formation or participation in it')¹.

On September 6, 2022, Brest Regional Court presented charges to Inna Mozhchanka, a former journalist of BelTA News Agency, who was accused of insulting a governmental officer (Article 369 of the Criminal Code) and inciting social hatred (Part 1 of Article 130 of the Criminal Code). Consequently, she was sentenced to three years of imprisonment in a strict regime colony with a general regime in force. Inna Mozhchenko was

¹ <https://baj.by/be/content/iryne-slaunikavay-pryznachyli-5-gadou-znyavolennya>
<https://baj.by/en/content/belarusian-journalist-slaunikava-handed-five-year-prison-term-amid-crackdown>



detained in September 2021 in connection with her negative statement about the deceased KGB officer in social media².

On September 14, 2022, an investigative journalist Dzianis Ivashyn was convicted in a closed trial under two articles of the Criminal Code: Article 365 ('interference in the activities of an internal affairs officer') and part 1 of Article 356 (high treason). The KGB accused the journalist of collaborating with Ukrainian intelligence through Ukrainian diplomats.

The media worker was sentenced to 13 years and 1 month in prison and fined 4800 Belarusian rubles (approximately, EUR 1845). Also, the journalist was obliged to reimburse moral damages in the amount of 2000 Belarusian rubles to each of nine offended people. The personalities of the alleged 'victims' remain unknown to the public. All in all, the media worker will have to pay over USD 9000 in damages³.

On September 28, 2022, Minsk City Court pronounced a sentence of eight years of imprisonment to Kseniya Lutskina, a former journalist of Belarusian TV and Radio Company and a laureate of governmental awards for achievements in her trade.

She was detained on December 22, 2020. On the same day, the employees of Press Club Belarus were taken into custody.

Initially, all these people were accused of tax evasion. However, as soon as the Press Club case was closed and all its defendants who wrote pleas for mercy, were released, Lutskina was presented other charges. This time, she was blamed for 'plotting conspiracy to seize state power by unconstitutional means (Article 357 of the Criminal Code). Allegedly, she 'headed a

² <https://spring96.org/be/news/108974>

³ <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/11593.html>
<https://baj.by/en/content/belarus-journalist-denis-ivashin-shockingly-sentenced-13-years-prison>

media support group, aimed at counteraction to the state media' in the Coordinating Council of the Belarusian opposition⁴.



After four months of court hearings behind the closed doors, the trial on the BelaPAN case ended. (BelaPAN is an independent news agency that was ruined by the security forces in the summer of 2021 and later recognized as an “extremist formation”). Media manager Andrei Aliaksandrau was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment in a penal colony. His wife Iryna

Zlobina was sentenced to 9 years in prison. Dzmitry Navazylau, former director of the BelaPAN News Agency and Iryna Leushyna, the editor-in-chief and director of BelaPAN were sentenced to 6 and 4 years in prison respectively:

▼ *Andrei Aliaksandrau and Iryna Zlobina were charged under part 2 of Article 342, for the alleged preparation of “at least 260 persons to participate in group actions that grossly violate public order” (the legal investigation interpreted their payment of fines and lawyers’ bills etc. for people who participated in post-election protests this way), they were also charged under part 1 of Article 356 of the Criminal Code (‘high treason’) for assisting the ByHelp Foundation in activities, which were allegedly “aimed at causing harm to the national security of the Republic of Belarus”;*

⁴ <https://baj.by/en/content/journalist-ksenia-lutskina-sentenced-8-years-prison>



Andrei Aliaksandrau, Dzmitry Navazhylau, and Iryna Leushyna were accused of ‘creating an extremist formation from among the BelaPAN employees and other people, as well as of leading such a formation’ under part 1 of Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code;

Andrei Aliaksandrau and Dzmitry Navazhylau were accused of tax evasion in the BelaPAN News Agency under part 2 of Article 243 of the Criminal Code. (The legal investigative committee stated that the BelaPAN employees allegedly evaded taxes in the amount of BYN 449,000 over six years and received hidden funding from foreign organizations in the amount of at \$1.6 million since 2014)⁵.

On October 26, 2022, Minsk City Court announced the verdict of eight years of imprisonment in a high security penal colony to Siarhei Satsuk, investigative journalist and the editor-in-chief of Yezhednevnik online publication. He was found guilty of ‘accepting a large bribe’ (part 2 of Article 430 of the Criminal Code), ‘abuse of power’ (Article 426), and ‘inciting social hatred’ (Article 130 of the Criminal Code)⁶.

On October 27, 2022, a freelance journalist Ales Liubianchuk, who previously collaborated with the ‘Belsat’ TV channel, was found guilty by Minsk City Court under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code (‘creating an extremist formation or taking part in it) and sentenced to 3 years in prison⁷.

⁵ <https://baj.by/en/content/defendants-belapan-case-sentenced-4-14-years-prison>

⁶ <https://baj.by/ru/content/zhurnalista-sergeya-sacuka-prigovorili-k-vosmi-godam-kolonii-usilennogo-rezhima>

⁷ <https://baj.by/en/content/journalist-ales-lubianchuk-sentenced-3-years-prison>

Criminal persecution of journalists continued. New criminal cases were filed

Ivan Murayou, a journalist, a cameraperson, and a photo reporter was detained by the Legal Investigation Committee representatives in Minsk on August 29, 2022. He was presented charges upon Article 361-1, part 3 of the Criminal Code ('participation in an extremist formation'). The journalist is being held in pre-trial detention⁸.

A freelance journalist Yauhien Merkis was detained in Homiel on September 14, 2022. Initially, it was reported that his case concerned

alleged calls for sanctions. Later it appeared that the journalist was charged under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code ('assistance to extremist activities')⁹.



A journalist couple, Aliaksandr Lychauka and Sniazhana Inanets, were detained on October 6, 2022. They were presented charges under Article 342 of the Criminal Code ('arrangement and preparation

of actions grossly violating public order, or active participation in them') in connection with participation in protests in 2020 and subscription to "destructive" Telegram channels¹⁰.

⁸ <https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/person/ivan-murauiou>

⁹ <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32035665.html>

¹⁰ <https://mediazona.by/news/2022/10/07/journalists>

<https://baj.by/en/content/police-affiliated-telegram-channel-published-video-detained-journalists-aliaksandr-lychauka>

A criminal case has been filed against Dzmitry Semchanka, a former ANT TV employee, for ‘inciting hatred’ (part 1 of Article 130 of the Criminal Code). On September 16, 2022, he was detained and sentenced twice to administrative arrest. Consequently, he was presented the criminal charges. In August 2020, Semchanka resigned from the state-owned ANT TV channel in protest against violence. He used to lead the presidential pool of journalists there¹¹.

In August 2022, Andrzej Paczobut, a journalist and an activist of the Union of Poles of Belarus, was presented additional charges of ‘calling for restrictive measures (sanctions), aimed at causing harm to national security’ (Article 361 of the Criminal Code). Initially, he had been accused of ‘inciting hatred’ (Article 130 of the Criminal Code)¹².

Pressure on journalists and mass media

The BAJ recorded 13 detentions and 12 searches that affected journalists in August – October 2022. The journalists were sentenced 8 times to different terms of administrative arrest and once fined. Moreover, the representatives of law enforcement agencies summoned journalists for questioning, and visited the homes of journalists, who had left Belarus¹³.

¹¹ <https://mediazona.by/news/2022/10/26/crimesemchenko>

¹² <https://baj.by/ru/content/andzheyu-pochobutu-predyavili-obvinenie-v-prizyvah-k-sankciyam-ili-inym-deystviyam>

¹³ <https://baj.by/en/analytics/repressions-against-journalists-belarus-2022-list-colleagues-prison>

On August 23, 2022, Siarhei Serabro, the editor of 'Vitsebsk People's News' Website was summoned to the Vitebsk Regional Department of the GUBOPiK (Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs), where he was interrogated for an hour. Then he was forced to provide explanations in the written form about his coverage of protest rallies after the presidential elections in 2020.

The 'Babruyski Kuryer' independent online publication and its editor-in-chief Anatol Sanatsenka suffered from large-scale persecution



at the beginning of autumn 2022. Anatol Sanatsenka was detained and sentenced twice to administrative arrest in mid-September 2022. His private apartment as well as the apartments of his colleagues were searched. And the technical equipment was seized.

On September 19, 2022, the authorities blocked public access to the 'Babruyski Kuryer' Website.

Consequently, on September 26, 2022, Babruysk Municipal and District Court recognized its content as 'extremist materials'.

On October 6, 2022, a defamatory five-minute story about the 'Babruyski Kuryer' newspaper its employees appeared on the Telegram channel of ZefirFM, a local state-owned radio

¹⁴ <https://baj.by/be/content/u-syargeya-serabro-uzlyali-pismovyya-tlumachenni-yak-yon-asvyatlyau-padzei-2020-ga-na-svaim>

station in Babruysk. Its text was read by Mikalai Silkou, the editor-in-chief of pro-governmental 'Babruyskaye Zhytstsiu' newspaper. The main attention in the story was given to Anatoly Sanatsenka, who was serving an administrative arrest at that moment of time. In particular, he was groundlessly accused of 'begging for money' from the United States and Germany, publishing 'fakes' about the terrorist attack in the Minsk metro, and his connection with the 'Belsat' TV channel, recognized as an "extremist formation" by Belarusian authorities¹⁵.

A media worker Andrei Famin was detained at the end of October 2022. He publicly admitted being the editor and author of publications for for the 'Vestniki' protest newspaper network, produced and distributed by activists of local initiatives. (The network merged into the 'Belarusian Vesnik' newspaper in March 2022)¹⁶.

Application of anti-extremist legislation

On August 26, 2022, the Belarusian authorities filed the first criminal case in the country under the new Article 130-2 ('denial of genocide of the Belarusian people') against the Flagpole and Zerkalo.io online media. The criminal persecution was

¹⁵ <https://baj.by/be/content/galounaga-redaktara-bobruyskogo-kurera-asudzili-drugi-raz-cyaper-na-14-sutak>

<https://baj.by/be/content/prapagandysty-babruyska-znyali-abrazlivy-videosyuzhet-pra-nezalezhnuyu-gazetu-bobruyskiy>

¹⁶ <https://baj.by/ru/content/zaderzhali-muzhchinu-kotorogo-obvinyayut-v-sozdanii-protestnogo-samizdata>

reasoned by a publication, which stated that on one of the maps of Homiel, published on the website of local authorities, there is a note about the place of mass graves of victims of political repressions in 1937, while, according to the Public Prosecutor's office, the Nazi victims are buried there. The 'resonant' map was deleted shortly afterwards. However, the criminal case was filed against two media outlets at that¹⁷.



A military expert Yahor Lebiadok was initially detained in Smaliavichy (Minsk region) on July 13, 2022 and arrested for 15 days on administrative charges. However, he was presented criminal charges under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code for the alleged facilitation of extremist activities for his comments to the 'European Radio for Belarus', which had been recognized as an extremist formation.

¹⁷ <https://baj.by/be/content/genprakuratura-raspachala-kryminalnuyu-spravu-suprac-flagstoka-i-zerkala>



In October 2022, pro-government sources reported that another criminal case was initiated against the military expert on the grounds of repetition. (Allegedly, the authorities claimed that ‘interviews with extremists form a separate crime’. Apparently, they meant part 2 of the same Article of the Criminal Code.) However, Yahor Lebiadok was detained a week before this radio station received the status of an “extremist formation”¹⁸.

The Belarusian authorities continued to include the Websites of independent periodicals and their pages in social media in the list of extremist materials. At the same time, their employees, who have been subjected to criminal investigation and conviction under certain articles of the Criminal Code, were continuously included in the lists of ‘extremists’ and ‘terrorists’.

The ‘mirror’ Website and social media of the Charter’97 Web-resource, the Facebook group and the YouTube channel of Hrodna.life online publication, the Website Borisov-info, the ‘page of EX-PRESS.BY in the Odnoklassniki social media, the Telegram chat and social media of Flagpole online publication, Telegram channels of Media Palessie and Piershy Region online periodical editions, the Website of Babruyski Kuryer online newspaper as well as the TOK | TALK channel that belongs to the Nasha Niva periodical edition and publishes interviews with the civil society members, were recognized as ‘extremist materials’ by the Belarusian authorities.

Bobruisk Courier website, as well as a channel belonging to the Nasha Niva publication «TOK | TALK, which features interviews with members of civil society.

The list also includes two Websites of the PolskieRadio radio broadcaster from Poland. A Website that publishes a feed of regional

¹⁸ <https://baj.by/be/content/novaya-sprava-suprac-lebyadka-na-vayskovaga-aglyadalnika-hochuc-pavesic-use-intervyu>



news that can be seen in the Belarusian segment of Telegram, while not subscribing to the channels themselves, has been banned, too.

The video footage of Belarusian Investigative Center about the ‘case of orthopedists’, the Telegram channel of Ekodom environmental NGO, and the Green Portal News Website were classified as ‘extremist materials’ by the Belarusian authorities within the period under review.¹⁹

The Ministry of Interior of Belarus took a decision on recognizing ‘a group of citizens united through Web-sites, Telegram channels and social media of the Charter’97 Web-resource’, as well as ‘a group of citizens united, among other, through the Belsataushchyna Telegram chat’, which is apparently linked to the Belsat TV channel, as ‘extremist formations’ during the reporting period.

The journalist Katsiaryna Andreyeva and the philosopher Uladzimir Matskevich were classified as “persons involved in extremist activity” within the period under review.²⁰

The KGB included Andrzej Paczobut, a journalist and one of the leaders of the Union of Poles in Belarus, as well as former TUT.BY employees under investigation: Editor-in-chief Maryna Zolatava, Director Lyudmila Chekina, journalists Volha Loika and Alena Talkachova in the list of ‘persons involved in terrorist activities.’²¹

¹⁹ <https://humanconstant.org/obzor-borby-s-ekstremizmom-v-belarusi-za-iyul-sentyabr-2022/>

<https://baj.by/be/content/video-belorusskogo-rassledovatel'skogo-centra-o-dele-ortopedov-priznali-ekstremistskim>

²⁰ <https://www.mvd.gov.by/ru/news/8642>

²¹ <http://kgb.by/ru/perechen-inf-ru/>

Restriction of access to information

The period was marked by changes in the procedure for blocking access to the undesired Websites well as in arranging the access of special services to the content of Internet resources. On September 23, 2022, a resolution of the Operational and Analytical Center under the President (OAC) was published. (It came into force a month after its official publication). If earlier Internet providers checked



Вася Ложкин «Родина слышит»
Источник: reform.by

the list of Web-resources with restricted access once a day, now they are required to do so every three hours during the day. Moreover, they are obliged to restrict access to the ‘forbidden’ Web resource within four hours from the moment they were added to the list.²²

On October 18, 2022, Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed Decree No. 368 “On

the interaction of telecommunication operators, telecommunication service providers and owners of Internet resources with operational and search bodies”, which provides for the creation of a special information system for electronic interaction with special services.

²² <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=T22205145&p1=1&p5=0>



The OAC and the KGB have been empowered to follow Web-users. If earlier real-time surveillance was carried out only in relation to the users of telecommunications operators, now it will become mandatory in relation to telecommunication service providers and owners of Internet resources. Those of them who are determined by the OAC and the KGB will be required to register in the system and set up their resources for the unimpeded online access of security forces within three months of the moment of their notification by the latter²³.

The Belarusian authorities continued blocking access to independent online media and Websites of non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. Thus, there was blocked access to the Web-sites of 'Viacherni Babruysk', 'Babruyski Kuryer', 'Narodnaya Volya', CityDog.io, the news Websites belprauda.com and s13.ru, the Website of 'Polish Radio' as well as a Web-site of 'Journalists for Tolerance' Human Rights Initiative (j4t.info) and a 'mirror' Website of Belarusian Association of Journalists²⁴.

The news Website about Minsk and Belarus Blizko.by was temporarily blocked by the decision of the Ministry of Information of Belarus due to mentioning a blogger Anton Matolka in one of their publications. (Anton Matolka has been included in the list of 'terrorists' by the Belarusian

²³ <https://reform.by/334565-vladelcev-sajtov-zastavjat-podkljuchitsja-k-sorm>

²⁴ <https://humanconstant.org/obzor-borby-s-ekstremizmom-v-belarusi-za-iyul-sentyabr-2022/>

<https://nashaniva.com/297671>

<https://citydog.io/post/citydog-blakujuc/>

<https://baj.by/be/content/dostup-da-internet-resursu-s13ru-abmezhevany-mininfarmam>

<https://j4t.info/2022/10/04/u-belarusi-zablakavanyi-sajt-j4t-info-naystareyshay-organizatsyi-yakaya-pratsue-na-zmyanshenne-movyi-varazhnechyi-i-nyanavistsi-u-mediyah>



authorities.) As soon as the ban was lifted, the Website lacked all political news, including archival publications²⁵.

The VKontakte social media blocked access to a number of pages and groups of Belarusian independent media. Thus, they blocked public access to 'Charter'97' and 'Flagpole' pages, having received a complaint from the Ministry of Information of Belarus within the period under review. Also, they disabled access to the 'Zerkalo' and Belarusian 'Mediazone' pages at the request of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office²⁶.

The BelBusinessChannel TV broadcaster terminated its operation without explanation or motives on August 1, 2022. The corresponding post appeared on the company page in Facebook. It was the only TV channel about business in Belarus, which dealt with rebroadcasting the programs of the RBC TV (Russia) and filming its own programs on Belarusian topics²⁷.

The last issue of 'UzHorak' newspaper (Horki, Mahilou region) was published on September 22, 2022. The editorial decided to suspend the publication of the local periodical edition after 12 years of work. The reasons for the closure were not publicly disclosed at that²⁸.

²⁵ <https://baj.by/be/content/mininfarm-razblakavau-sayt-blizkoby-cyaper-tam-nyama-palityki>

²⁶ <https://baj.by/be/content/gruppu-hartii-97-i-gomelskogo-flagshtoka-v-vkontakte-blokiruyut-po-zhalobe-mininforma>
<https://baj.by/be/content/po-trebovaniyu-genprokuratury-rf-vkontakte-zablokiroval-stranicu-zerkala>
<https://baj.by/be/content/vkontakte-zablokiroval-stranicu-belorusskoy-mediazony-v-rossii>

²⁷ <https://baj.by/be/content/prekratil-veshchanie-telekanal-belbizneschenel>

²⁸ <https://horki.info/news/21017.html>

Events in the state-owned media sector

On August 26, 2022, Uladzimir Piartsou, Minister of Information of Belarus stated that the experience of creating a media holding in the Minsk region would be implemented in all regions of the country, since, according to his words, “it is the only way to keep the audience of respective districts under the current conditions of transformation.” Accordingly, the editorial offices of district state-owned newspapers will be enlarged. They will have centralized management and a unified editorial policy for all²⁹.

The notoriously odious Belarusian propagandists were subjected to restrictions by Apple, which blocked access through the App Store to the Telegram channels of CTV employee Ryhor Azaronak and ‘Belarus-1’ TV employee Ksenia Lebedzieva due to the presence of “slandorous, discriminatory or vile content” there. Also, Meta company blocked Ryhor Azaronak’s page on Facebook.

The Ministry of Information of Belarus, which constantly initiates the blocking of websites of independent media, regarded these actions as “the smothering of freedom of speech” in a special statement³⁰.

The cases of severe censorship in the state media began to appear.

²⁹ <https://mlyn.by/26082022/opyt-sozdaniya-mediaholdinga-v-minskoj-oblasti-budut-vnedryat-vo-vseh-regionah-strany-perczov/>

³⁰ <https://mediazona.by/news/2022/09/23/ios> <https://news.zerkalo.io/cellar/24221.html?c>
<https://baj.by/be/content/blakirouka-telegram-kanalau-udushenne-svabody-slovamininfarm-zaklapaciusya-svaimi-ruparami>



Thus, Katsiaryna Varabyova, the editor-in-chief of 'Adzinstva' regional newspaper (Barysau, Minsk region) was forced to resign after she complained about the problems of district centers in an interview with a pro-government blogger³¹.

Several employees were fired at 'Homiel City Radio' within the period under review. Thus, radio hosts Artsiom Zabiran and Yaraslau Bychkouski were given a sack. They were accused of publishing seditious posts on their social media and supporting protesters in 2020 after they congratulated Russian independent journalist and video blogger Yury Dud on the air on October 11th. (Several videos of this blogger have been recognized as 'extremist materials' in Belarus)³².

The 'Hrodna Plus' TV broadcaster apologized to the viewers on the same occasion. The TV channel reported that on October 11, 2022, the video editing engineer aired an archival recording of 2019 about Yuri Dud in the 'Personality of the Day' section. The TV channel expressed gratitude to the viewers 'for their vigilance', since, according to the TV broadcaster, 'such information has no place on the air of the state TV channel'³³.

³¹ <https://nashaniva.com/297953>

³² <https://baj.by/be/content/v-gomele-uvolili-neskolkih-sotrudnikov-gosradio-odin-iz-nih-v-pryamom-efire-pozdravil-s-dnem>

³³ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/23905.html?c>



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