

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

April 7 – 19, 2014

Within the reporting period, one more journalist was fined for cooperation with foreign mass media. Several online provocation occurred, involving an independent news outlet and a human rights defender. BAJ member, political prisoner Yauhen Vaskovich had a short-term meeting with his relatives.

April 8, Homel policemen **searched** the socio-political center in Paleskaya Street, 52 and the apartment of the lawyer, BAJ member **Leanid Sudalenka** (he was in Sweden at the moment). The police confiscated the system unit of his computer and a laptop. The official reason the searches was a complaint of a citizen who had received porn video greeting on the occasion of March 8 sent from Sudalenka's email, and from the IP-address of the socio-political center. The searches were conducted as a preliminary inquiry under art. 343 part 2 of the Criminal Code.

On April 15 Leanid Sudalenka gave explanations at the Investigative Committee. He said he had not used the email sudalenko@mail.ru for 15 years. At the end of 2014 the email was **hacked**, he lost control over it, he held communication with the technical service of Mail.ru about this problem, which he can prove. On the day the email was sent, he did not control the email box.

On April 9, publisher and book-seller **Ihar Lohvinau** had **20 books seized** on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border point Kamenny Loh. The book was "Anthropology. Ethics. Politics", a compilation of philosophy essays of Tatsiana Shchytsova, teacher of the **European Humanities University**. Lohvinau had no relations to publication of the book – he was only asked to bring them to Minsk for a presentation.

As became known **on April 9**, BAJ member, freelancer **Larysa Schyrakova was fined** by Retchytsa district court. The case was heard at the end of March without the journalist - she was abroad, and notified the court with a special paper that she would not be able to attend the hearing.

According to the court ruling, **on February 6** at a market in Retchytsa, Larysa Shchyrakova "without being a journalist of mass media, without having the right, interviewed citizens, prepared a video report titled "Administration of the market robs sellers" which she published on the same day on the website of the TV channel Belsat, and by doing so performed illegal production and distribution of mass media products" (**art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code**). A similar "violation", as the ruling says, Larysa Shchyrakova performed on February 12, by making and publishing a report on Belsat titled "Inhuman conditions at Retchytsa market". This is already the third fine imposed on Larysa since the start of the year; the total sum of the fines makes 8 million rubles.

As reported **on April 9**, the resident of Brest suspected of **defaming the president of Belarus**, Mikhail Lukashevich was sent **for psychiatric examination**. The case was opened on December 29 by the Investigative Committee, according to **art. 367, part 1** of the Criminal Code. The

grounds for the case were political slogans the man wrote on his garage and a fence around it in Brest, Yesenin Street. The slogans had been there for over 10 years.

On April 10 photographer **Anton Matolka** received a reply to his complaint to the **National State TV and Radio Company**. On March 18 the photographer saw his pictures of the Polar shining in Belarus which were demonstrated by Belarus-1 channel without naming the author and without asking his permit. The photographer demanded public excuses and a compensation of 10 million rubles for the moral damage and 5 million 400 thousand as a compensation for violation of **copyright**. The chairperson of the company Henadz Davydzka replied that the photo was in public access online and the author had not banned using them, so the complaint was ungrounded. The photographer spoke of his intention to sue the company in court.

On April 11, BAJ member from Brest **Ina Khomich** filed a **complaint** to the Brest regional court against the fine imposed on her for “illegal production of mass media products”. Besides, she asked the court to request the **Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court** to evaluate the legislation regulating work of foreign journalists in Belarus and the very notion of “accreditation”. The fine that she disputes was imposed on her for an article about the launch of the museum of bread in a village of Motal, Ivanava district, which she had made for Brestskiy Courier newspaper and the Belarusian Radio Racyja.

On April 13, freelance journalist **Viktar Parfionenka** received a **reply** from **Minsk City Court** concerning his supervisory complaint. We remind that the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** had denied to him accreditation as a journalist of the *Radio Racyja* for 7 years. The journalist asked the Lenin district court of Minsk to initiate civil litigation against the Ministry, but on December 19, 2014 the court dismissed his complaint. This decision of the lower instance court was upheld by the panel of judges of the Minsk City Court, and this time, by the chairperson of the Minsk City Court P. Karshunovich.

On April 15, the editorial office of the online news portal [Media-Polesye reported](#) that anonymous persons had created a **fake copy of their website**. The fake copy had only one symbol different in their domain name and posted daily news from the original news website. However, the fake website also had a section Donbass and posted news from the self-proclaimed, now at war, Donetsk People’s Republic.

On April 16, the **Slonim district court dismissed the complaint** of a bus driver against a journalist of *Hazeta Slonimskaya*. The bus driver asked to defend the **honor, dignity and business reputation** harmed, in his view, by article Indifference Frightens dated February 4, 2015 authored by Tatsiana Plakhetka. The journalist described a situation that occurred to her 7-year old daughter; the bus driver did not stop at a bus stop and the girl, without parents, could not get off at the right stop. Later the mother asked for contact of the bus driver, but he refused to communicate.

On April 17, the political prisoner, journalist of *Bobruyskij Courier* and BAJ member **Yauhen Vaskovich** had a short-term meeting with his relatives. In September, there is a chance for amnesty if he has no violations. Meantime, recently the special commission refused amnesty to his friend, Artsiom Prakapenka who had pleaded for pardon two months before. We

remind, in May, 2011 Yauhen Vaskovich, Artsiom Prakapenka and Pavel Syramalotau were sentenced for 7 years in jail for setting fire to the Babruysk building of the KGB. The minor damage, spoilt outer decoration, amounted to 253 thousand rubles, and was compensated. However, they were sentenced under the article for causing large-scale damage.