

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

June 9 - 22, 2014

On June 21, Ales Bialiatski, head of the human rights center *Viasna* and BAJ member, was released from the Babruysk colony No2. He said he was summoned to the administration in the morning and informed that he was released under the amnesty. The human rights defender served more than two thirds of the imprisonment term – in all 1052 days.

On June 9 the independent journalist **Maryna Malchanava** was summoned to the **police department** of the Babruysk City Executive Committee “for a talk”. Major Siarhei Rudzko asked her about her professional activities, and then demonstrated photos of participants of an opposition action held in the city. The policeman wanted the journalist to identify people in the photo. Maryna Malchanava answered she did not attend the action and could not help. *We remind that Siarhei Rudzko also conducted the administrative case against the journalist under article 23.34 (participation in an unsanctioned event) for coverage of anti-militarist action in Babruysk. The case was closed.*

On June 10 a civil activist from Hotsimsk **Valery Karankevich** filed a complaint to the Home Affairs Minister asking to overturn the ruling of the head of the Hotsimsk district police dated 16.04.2014 and the ruling of the deputy head of the Mahilou Regional Executive Committee police dated 23.05.2014. The activist wanted the police to find authors of **insulting publications on he website** *voskresinfo.com*. However, the police replied that it was impossible to identify the offenders and closed the administrative case.

On June 18 Valery Karankevich was summoned to the Hotsimsk district police to give explanations regarding his complaint to the Minister. A police officer questioned the activist about photos on the website asking where the photos had been taken, with whom, and on what other resources they had been published. No reports of questioning were offered. The officer explained they needed the information in their searches of the Internet offenders, said V.Karankevich.

On June 11 an independent journalist from Brest **Maxim Hliabets** was summoned to the Brest region **prosecutor's office** where he received a **warning** dated June 10 for violating the legislation. According to the warning, M.Hliabets contributed to the *Radio Racyja* **without accreditation**; he was admitted to be an author of two articles on the website *racyja.com* in March 2013. This is the sixth warning of the kind this year. *We remind that earlier Maxim Hliabets was summoned to the police and induced for cooperation claiming that they “knew all” about his professional activities.*

On June 12 in Baranavichy journalists from the independent paper ***Intex-Press*** Volha Shyrakastup and Dzmitry Makarevich were **not allowed to enter** the ceremony of awarding best school-leavers at the city executive committee. The head of HR department of the committee Tatsiana Chylik did not like the appearance of the journalists and the photographer's backpack.

The editorial office say the journalists looked not worse than the officials, and consider this to be a biased treatment and interference with lawful activities of journalists; they are preparing a complaint.

On June 16 a journalist from Hrodna **Andrei Mialeshka** was found guilty of “**illegal production of mass media products**” and got a **fine** of 30 basic amounts. The Kastychnitski district court of Hrodna concluded that Andrei Mialeshka prepared a material for the Belarusian *Radio Racyja* (based in Bialystok, Poland); the text was published on the website of the radio on April 17 and signed by a

pen name Ihar Mikalayeu. This way, the court thinks, Andrei Mialeshka violated article 22.9 of the Administrative Code (illegal production of mass media products). Police officers gathered testimonies that it was Andrei Mialeshka who had been preparing materials later published in the article. According to the administrative protocol, the case was based on testimonies of local doctors: they staged an action “For healthy heart”, and Andrei Mialeshka was covering the event, with the report later published on the website of the radio. The police officers claimed that the journalist had no rights to do so because the radio has not been accredited by the Belarusian Foreign Affairs Ministry. The trial continued in three separate hearings; previously, on June 4 and June 11 Judge Dzmitry Kedal summoned witnesses and verified warnings issued to the journalist previously by the prosecutor's office. The journalist is going to file an appeal. This is the third case under the administrative article 22.9 (illegal production and distribution of mass media products).

As reported **on June 19**, the human rights defender from Hrodna Viktor Sazonau received a letter informing that his complaint against prosecution for **online photos** was registered in the **UN Human Rights Committee**.

In January 2013 three activists from Hrodna, Viktor Sazonau, Raman Yurgel, Uladzimir Khilmanovich, were fined by the Lenin district court for “unsanctioned picket”: on December 10, 2013 the people made a photo with Ales Bialiatski’s portrait and published the photos on the Internet. The court claimed them guilty of staging an unsanctioned picket, and courts of appeal upheld the decision. After exhausting all national legal remedies to seek justice, the human rights defender filed a complaint to the UN HRC.

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We remind that Ales Bialiatski was arrested on August 4, 2011 by the Department of Financial Investigations of the State Control Committee. The grounds for the arrest was information about the activist's foreign bank accounts obtained by Belarusian authorities from the Justice Ministry of Lithuania and General Prosecutor's office of Poland. The money in the bank account was aimed for activities of the human rights center Viasna which deals with political persecution, election violations, and denied registration in Belarus. On November 24, 2011 the judge of the Pershamayski district court of Minsk Siarhei Bandarenka found Bialiatski guilty of large-scale tax evasion (part 2 of art. 243 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced him to four and a half years of imprisonment in high-security prison and property confiscation. Besides, Bialiatski had to pay damage to the state of 757 million rubles (around 90 thous. Dollars). Bialiatski pleaded not guilty and considered the case politically motivated. The damage was raised from donations of the public and paid. On January 24, 2012 the judges' panel of the Minsk City Court dismissed the appeal against the sentence.

On January 23 it became known that an independent journalist from Mahilow **Aliaksandr Burakou** received a notification form the **inspection on taxes and duties** of the Leninski district court of Mahilow. The journalist was invited to file a tax declaration for the period 2008 - 2013 before July 1. The journalist says he still does not know what caused such interest on behalf of the tax inspectors.