

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

March 16 – 22, 2014

BAJ received an official reply to its request filed to the ministry of Home Affairs; journalists asked to publicize the internal ruling that banned taking pictures of administrative buildings. The deputy head of the chief department on crime prevention and maintaining public order I.Kubrakou answered that “lately, there have been facts in the country when citizens, including foreign ones, took photos of administrative buildings with the purpose of further discrediting of state bodies.” So, measures were taken to prevent potential threats – “from provocations to terrorist acts”. The official representative claims that law enforcement agencies have the right to find out for what purpose such pictures are taken. However, they are not obliged to publicize an internal document.

The lawyer of BAJ Andrei Bastunets said BAJ would file a claim against the “internal document”.

March 16, it became known that at the border crossing "Kamenny Loh" Belarusian customs officers seized 47 copies of the report **Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2014**, in English and Belarusian, prepared by the Human Rights Centre Viasna on the basis of monthly reviews of human rights violations.

The reviews were brought from Lithuania by Smarhon human rights activist Aleh Dzerhachou in his car, [reports Spring96](#). 47 books will most probably be sent for examination, which must determine whether it is permitted to import these books in Belarus.

Also **on March 14**, five copies of a book were seized on the Belarusian-Polish border point from a history scientist **Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk**. The book *Historic City Ensembles in Times of Changes*, a collection of materials of a scientific conference in Poland in 2014, was sent for examination by special services. The customs officers did not go into details about how long the examination would last.

March 16, the Ministry of Information replied to BAJ's request that it had issued **written warnings to several periodicals**, including the state-run magazine Vozhyk and the Baranavichy newspaper Nash Kraj. We remind that previously, in February, the Ministry warned several independent outlets because they used **abbreviation RB** in their publication data instead of the full name the Republic of Belarus. Also on March 20, the warning on the same grounds (dated February 25) reached the independent newspaper Novy Chas.

March 16, the journalist from Homel **Mikalay Bianco** informed that he had filed a complaint to **the UN HRC** against violation of his rights to gather, store and disseminate

information. Before that, he had tried to dispute the **official warning** issued to him by the regional prosecutor's office. On March 5, 2014 he and his colleague Yuliya Sivets were warned against work for foreign mass media without accreditation. The warning was given for materials on the website of the *Radio Racyja*.

March 17, journalist **Ales Kirkevich** was summoned to the Lenin district police department of Hrodna. The police conducted an inquiry under art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code (unlawful production and distribution of mass media products). The inquiry was initiated by the KGB. **On March 18**, for the same reasons, journalist **Ales Dzianisau** was questioned, too. The grounds for the check-up was a video report on *Belsat* about Slutsk belts in Hrodna museum. The materials of the case include screenshots of the website with the report. Also, it follows that the museum employee Halina Khimko was also summoned to the police and for a talk with the KGB, she was asked to identify the journalists in photos.

March 17, a journalist from Hrodna **Andrei Mialeshka** was invited by phone to the local police for talk; he refused to turn up without an official summons.

March 17, the Ministry of Information reported that on March 13 it had **restricted access to five more informational resources**, under the anti-drugs trafficking Decree No 6 (dated December 28, 2014). We remind that it had already blocked two websites "that used vulgar and tabooed vocabulary and were able to damage the national interest of the Republic of Belarus". The right to restrict access to websites has been granted to the Ministry of Information since January 1, 2015 by the amendments to the Law on Mass Media.

March 17, publisher **Ihar Lohvinau** said that the Economic Court of Minsk supported the plea to pay the confiscation by instalments within two months. We remind that on January 9, 2015 the Economic Court ruled to seize the "illegal profit" of the bookstore in the amount of 961 million rubles and imposed a fine of 30 basic amounts (5 mln 400 rubles). The "illegal entrepreneur's activities" were qualified as such because the bookstore did not get registration as a distributor of print products, although it had applied for registration to the Ministry of Information more than six times.

March 17, people in plainclothes **detained** the correspondent of the *Radio Svaboda* **Halina Abakunchyk**. She was interviewing retail sellers at the shopping center where people were expecting Aliaksandr Lukashenka to appear for a talk with the sellers. The pretext for the detention was that the correspondent had not been accredited for the meeting. In her turn, she said she was not going to attend the meeting, but only gathered people's opinions about their business issues. The correspondent was taken to a police car, her ID was checked, then a policeman saw her off to a public taxi bus and made sure that she leave the venue.

March 18, freelance journalist **Ales Liauchuk was summoned** to the Maskouski district police department of Brest. He was questioned under art. 22.9 (unlawful production and distribution of mass media products), blamed for being author of the report on Belsat TV under initials AL. His authorship, according to the inspector, was confirmed by the person he had interviewed. **On March 26**, the case was **considered in court**, without the journalist's participation. The court ruling was not yet reported to him. *Earlier, on December 24, Ales Liauchuk was fined under similar charges for 40 basic amounts (6 million rubles). On January 22, 2015 the Brest regional court turned down the appeal.*

March 19, **Ihar Barysau**, the editor of the website Nash Mahilow, and his wife Alena Barysava were **summoned** to the Kastychnitski district police of Mahilow. The police inspector wanted to find out the journalist's relation to the website. The journalist was neither a suspect nor a witness in a case; the case under art. 188 part 2 (defamation) was not open yet. The journalist refused to testify, under article 27 of the Constitution of Belarus. *We remind that on March 12, the editor's flat was searched. The police were conducting a check-up in relation to an article dated January 8. The article alleged that a director general of a local enterprise in Mahilow had lost a big sum in a casino. Upon three hours' searches, information carriers and personal computers were seized, without seizure protocols.*