

# MASS MEDIA

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# IN BELARUS

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## Mass Media in the Period of Elections to the Chamber of Representatives



THE BELARUSIAN  
ASSOCIATION  
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# Situation in Mass Media Field in the Period of Election Campaign – 2016

**The elections to the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus took place on September 11, 2016.**



The pressure on Belarusian mass media and journalists somewhat decreased within the election period. Thus, there weren't registered any new cases of administrative prosecution of journalists for cooperation with foreign media without accreditation. (It is one of the most serious **problems**, faced by Belarusian independent journalism in the recent times). Also, there weren't registered any cases of mass counteraction to journalist activities during the elections or other forms of evident pressure on non-state mass media in Belarus within the reporting period. Apparently, it was connected with the intention of Belarusian authorities **to receive positive evaluation of the elections** from international structures.

On the other hand, several independent printed periodical editions weren't permitted to enter the state monopolist press distribution systems. Also, there was continued criminal prosecution against Eduard Palchyts, the founder of [www.1863x.com](http://www.1863x.com) Web-site. A number of materials on the Web-site were considered to be 'extremist' by Belarusian authorities.

Generally, the situation in mass media field remained to be under strict governmental control. The Election Observation Mission of OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and



Human Rights **published its interim report on August 31, 2016**. Among other, it is mentioned there as follows:

*“While the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, prohibits censorship and establishes the right to receive, store and disseminate information, the Criminal Code contains provisions on defamation, libel and insult. Since 2014, online media outlets have the same obligations, except for the requirement of state registration, and are subject to the same restrictions as traditional media. In case of a suspected violation, the Ministry of Information is now entitled to limit access to websites without a court decision... Television is widely considered as the primary source of information. The state-owned BelTelRadio Company (BTRC) is the largest media company, which dominates both the broadcast and the print media landscape. Private media outlets have a limited impact and according to many OSCE/ODIHR EOM interlocutors are frequently subject to pressure from the authorities. Journalists require accreditation to work for foreign and Belarusian media based abroad and they cannot work for both foreign and national media. Citizen journalists, bloggers and freelancers are not considered journalists and they receive fines for reporting without accreditation. The limited number of independent broadcasting media and the growing Internet penetration allow online media to increasingly serve as an alternative source of political and election-related information”.*

**The monitoring of election coverage in mass media was traditionally conducted by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (since August 11) and the Belarusian Association of Journalists (since July 4 till September 21, 2016).**

For the first time in history, the Belarusian Union of Journalists **delivered its monitoring report on the media coverage of the Parliamentary election campaign** within the period since August 15 till August 29, 2016. The BUJ unites the workers of state mass media in the country.



# Main Events in Mass Media Field in July – September 2016

## Eduard Palchys’ Case

On August 25, 2016, the Court of Central City District of Minsk found 9 articles, published on [www.1863x.com](http://www.1863x.com) Web-site, to be extremist. The verdict was rendered during a closed session of court. The Web-site founder and author Eduard Palchys wasn’t present at the trial. He is kept in Minsk Detention Facility. The Belarusian authorities accuse Mr Palchys of inciting racial, national and religious enmity or strife (part 1, article 130 of Belarus Criminal Code) for on-line distribution of articles, which were found to be extremist on August 25, 2016, as well as for the alleged distribution of porn materials (part 2, article 343 of Belarus Criminal Code).



The Web-site [www.1863x.com](http://www.1863x.com) was created around 2 years ago. Its owner administered completely anonymously the Web-resource under the nickname of Jhon Silver. He criticized severely the so-called ‘Russian world’ and Russian governmental authorities. The criminal case against Palchys was filed in 2015. The blogger fled Belarus immediately afterwards. He was detained in Russia in January 2016 and extradited to Belarus in May 2016. On October 5, 2016, several Belarusian human rights organizations **recognized E. Palchys to be a political prisoner.**

## Pressure on Freelance Journalists

On July 28, 2016, Loyeu District Court (Homiel region) fined a freelance journalist Kanstantsin Zhukouski from Homiel three base amounts (i.e., 63 Belarusian rubles



that equals approx. EUR 30) for petty hooliganism (article 17.1 of Belarus Code on Administrative Offenses).



The case had been filed on June 21, 2016, when the police detained K. Zhukouski and his colleague Aliaksei Atroshchanka for taking video records of the local plant of construction materials. According to K. Zhukouski, the police officers used force against him and injured him.

Following Zhukouski's appeal to the Legal Investigation Committee, the police composed six reports in relation to the freelance journalists. Four of them concerned K. Zhukouski. In particular, the freelancer was accused of 'insulting' the local officials from Loyeu District Executive Committee, who had prevented the journalist from making video records before the police arrived. Also, the reporter was blamed for hooliganism, disobedience to the police and offending the Head of Loyeu District Police Department.

The judge Antanina Muzychenka returned three police reports in relation to K. Zhukouski for revision to the police department and imposed a minimum fine on the freelance reporter, grounded on accusations in the fourth police report. By now, the deadline to prosecute the freelance journalists on the grounds of other reports has passed.

There was another incident with K. Zhukouski and A. Atroshchanka in September 2016. A 'Mercedes' car was following the freelance reporters, while they were conducting a survey about work and salaries in the district centre of Naroulia, Homiel region.

As soon as A. Atroshchanka came to the 'Mercedes' that stopped opposite the police, in order to clarify the situation, the car started moving all of a sudden, throwing the journalist to the hood.

It appeared that a Deputy Chairperson of Naroulia District Executive Committee Natallia Koval, who is also responsible for ideology, was driving the car. Following the road accident, A. Atroshchanka submitted a corresponding statement



to the police. The forensic examination registered minor injuries, caused to A. Atroshchanka, at the end of September 2016.

The incident was unexpectedly continued at the beginning of October 2016. K.Zhukouski was summoned to Naroulia District Police Department, where a police report against him was composed. The journalist was accused of illegal production and dissemination of mass media products (part 2, article 22.9 of Belarus Code on Administrative Offenses).

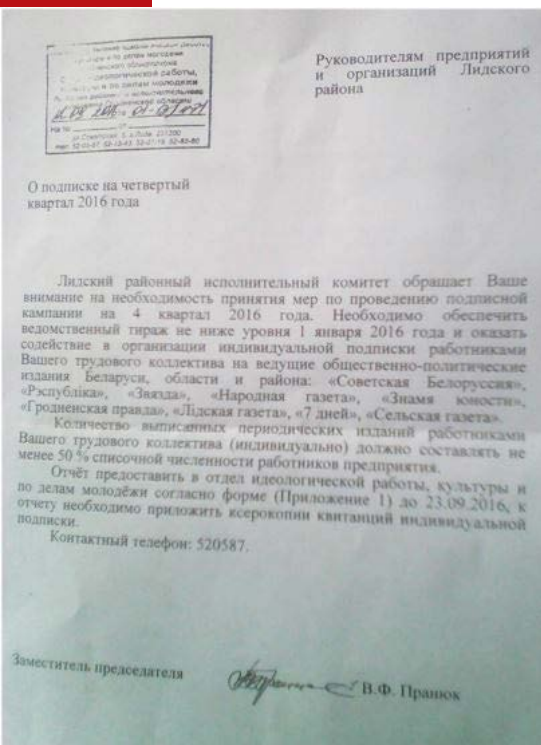
**Since the beginning of 2016, freelance journalists have been charged 10 times for contributing their materials to foreign media without accreditation (part 2, article 22.9 of Belarus Code on Administrative Offenses). All 10 trials took place in Homiel region. K.Zhukouski was fined 7 times at that. None of new cases on article 22.9 were filed since mid-April till October 2016.**

## Economic Discrimination of Independent Periodical Editions

The 'Belsayuzdruk' and 'Belposhta' state monopolist enterprises with domineering positions on the Belarusian retail press distribution market **sent another rejection note to the 'Novy Chas' independent weekly editorial, refusing to distribute the periodical by subscription and through the news stalls.**

It is worth reminding that similar refusals had been received from 'Belposhta' and / or 'Sayuzdruk' by **'Intex-Press' newspaper** (Baranavichy, Brest region), **'Gazeta Slonimskaya' and 'Otdushina' weeklies** (Slonim, Hrodna region), as well as **'Barysauskiya naviny' newspaper** (Barysau, Minsk region).

**Around 20 independent periodical editions were ousted from the state-owned press distribution systems 11 years ago. Quite a few of them have terminated their publication since then.**



At the same time, the state-owned media receive lavish funding from the state budget and make use of administrative preferences.

In September 2016, the journalists of 'Radio Liberty' found a letter from the Ideology Department at Lida District Executive Committee 'On Holding Subscription Campaign for the 4th Quarter 2016'. <http://www.svaboda.org/a/prymusovaja-papiska/28002619.html>.

The leadership of Ideology Department at Lida District Committee 'attracted' the local chief executive officers' attention to the necessity to facilitate a subscription campaign for a range of state-owned newspapers. The top managers of organizations and enterprises were to prepare a report on the conducted work and submit photocopies of subscription receipts. The number of subscribed copies of periodical editions couldn't be less than a half of employees, working at the corresponding enterprises. The list of recommended press included the following state-owned nationwide, regional and local media: 'Sovietskaya Belorussiya', 'Respublika', 'Zviazda', 'Narodnaya Gazeta', 'Znamya Yunosti', 'Hrodzienskaya Prauda', 'Lidskaya Gazeta', '7 Days', and 'Selskaya Gazeta'.

## Rating Lists, Indexes, Statistics

Only 32 media in Belarus are published in Belarusian nowadays. The figure was mentioned by the Deputy Minister of Information of Belarus Uladzimir Matusievich in his reply to an inquiry note, submitted by the BAJ Press Officer Barys Haretski. At the same time, 837 periodicals are published in Russian. 526 periodical editions are published in Russian and Belarusian.



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