

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

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An Urgent Resolution on Mass Media Freedom in Belarus was adopted during the General Congress of European Association of Journalists in Istanbul on April 18, 2010.

The European journalistic community expressed solidarity with Belarusian colleagues and called upon the Belarusian official authorities to terminate discrimination of independent mass media, to ensure full access to information, and bring the national media legislation in line with international standards in the field.

The EFJ General Congress delegates appealed to the EU, Council of Europe, and OSCE with a request to monitor violations of media freedom in Belarus and defend the media and journalists' rights in the country.

Liudmila Stetsko, a correspondent of "Intex-press" non-state periodical edition was not permitted to attend a meeting of Baranavichy City Electoral Committee on **March 25, 2010**. Moreover, the officials refused to present information about the registered candidates. The Chair of Baranavichy City Electoral Committee Yury Shestsernieu informed the newspaper editorial that journalists weren't entitled to be present at the meeting, dedicated to evaluation of registration of candidates at the Local election. However, as soon as the journalist appealed to the Secretary of Central Election Committee Mikalay Lazavik and the latter confirmed that her rights had been violated, the City Electoral Committee officials decided to invite L. Stetsko to take part in a press conference, dedicated to the above-mentioned cause.

As reported on **March 31, 2010**, a BAJ member Paval Sharamiet had been deprived of Belarusian citizenship. The media professional resides and works in Russia. He learned the fact from a registered letter from the Embassy of Belarus in Moscow. The journalist was informed that the deprivation took place as soon as he received his Russian passport. It should be emphasized that citizenship is normally granted and nullified by the President on personal requests.

"I haven't sent any letters of request,... and Belarusian authorities knew about my Russian citizenship 10 years ago," P. Sharamiet said.

Viktar Ramniou, Director of "Vitebskiy Kuryer" newspaper, registered in Russia, was detained by police close to his house in Vitsiebsk on **April 1, 2010**. His car was stopped by the road police. The police officers searched the car and confiscated 56 copies of "Vitsiebskiy Kuryer" newspaper. They convoyed V.Ramniou to Piershamayski City

District Department of Internal Affairs in Vitsiebsk and drew up a report, accusing him of distributing periodical editions without the output data. A court session on the case was appointed to April 21, 2010.

V. Ramniou's car was stopped again by the road police on **April 2, 2010**. However, the police officers' suspicions were wrong, since only one old copy of "Vitsiebskiy Kuryer" could be found in the car. Therefore, they abstained from drawing up a police report and released the independent publisher right away.

New detentions of private cars with copies of "Vitiiebskiy Kuryer" newspaper happened on **April 7, 2010**. One car with the newspaper Editor Aleh Barshcheuski and a candidate at the local election to Vitsiebsk Regional Council Volha Karach was detained in Vitsiebsk suburbs. The detained people were convoyed to a police station and their car was searched. 31 copies of "Vitsiebskiy Kuryer" newspaper were confiscated from the car. Consequently, the police drew up a report in relation to A. Barshcheuski and accused him of distributing the printed media without output data (article 22.9, part 1 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Torts.)

Viktar Ramniou's car was detained once again near Horki (Mahilou region) on the same night. The police from Horki District Department of Internal Affairs searched the car and confiscated 10,000 copies of "Vitsiebskiy Kuryer" newspaper. A police report on violation of article 22.9, part 1 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Torts was drawn up in relation to him.

On **April 2, 2010**, the President of Belarus Alaksandr Lukashenka stated in his talk with the First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Ihar Shuvalau that he was investigating more and more attentively the situation in mass media. In particular, the head of state blamed some oppositional newspapers and journalists for keeping to the "self-seeking", "hypocritical", and "money-wise" strategies.

Iryna Khalip, a correspondent of "Novaya Gazeta" (Russia), Sviatlana Kalinkina, Chief Editor of "Narodnaya Vola" weekly, and Natallia Radzina, a journalist of "Charter'97" Web-site visited the Pieshamayski City District Department of Internal Affairs in Minsk on **April 2, 2010**. The media workers were requested to come to the police department in order to get acquainted with a Senior Investigator from Homiel Department of Internal Affairs Alaksandr Pusieu. N. Radzina was interrogated during the visit within two hours and a half. The interrogation was video recorded.

Among other, the journalists were told that their computer equipment was still under revision.

A Belarusian journalist Pavel Sharamiet was interrogated by a legal investigator from Dauhaprudny Town Department of Internal Affairs (Moscow region) on **April 8, 2010**. The "Belorusskiy Partisan" Web-site was registered in the town. Also, the Web-site server is hosted there. The interrogation was ordered by the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Generally, it touched upon the work of "Belorusskiy Partisan" Web-site, owned by P. Sharamiet.

The interrogation was connected to the so-called "hunting case." It deals with four high-ranked police officers who allegedly organized illegal hunting and tried to put illegal

pressure on KGB officers. Three of them were found guilty. The policemen's relatives stated that the "hunting case" had been fabricated and that the KGB was also guilty of abuse of power. These points of view were presented on pages of "Charter'97" and "Belorusskiy Partisan" Web-sites. The law-enforcement agencies have been looking for the authors of these arguable publications since the turn of February 2010. A coherent criminal case got initiated by the Public Prosecutor's Office for Homiel region on the fact of libel in the Internet in relation to Ivan Korzh, ex-Head of KGB Department for Homiel region.

A group of nearly 30 war veterans came with banners to the "**Narodnaya Vola**" newspaper editorial in Minsk in the morning on **April 6, 2010**. They demanded the newspaper journalists to stop offending and humiliating them.

Reportedly, the elderly people were accompanied by several youngsters in plain clothes and several cameramen from the state TV channels.

The Chief Editor **Sviatlana Kalinkina** went to the protestors and tried to hold negotiations with them. She figured out that the picket was reasoned by reprinting of ["Niabyshyna. The War"](#) newspaper book by Illa Kopyl in "Narodnaya Vola". The veterans considered the author's opinion to be offensive.

12 activists of BRSM (Belarusian National Youth Union) City Organization in Minsk picketed the "**Narodnaya Vola**" editorial premises for approximately 20 minutes on **April 14, 2010**.

The unauthorized picket participants were holding posters "Is it really the People's Will?", "They won and you lie", and "Refresh your memory" in their hands.

Moreover, the youngsters were distributing different volumes from the "Memory" collection of books with the chronicles of events during the Great Patriotic War in Belarus, published by BelTA pro-Presidential News Agency in 2005 among the passers-by.

Alena Khadyka, the First Secretary of BRSM City Organization in Minsk explained to **Sviatlana Kalinkina**, Chief Editor of "Narodnaya Vola" [that the picket and the previously held war veterans' protest action](#) were reasoned by reprinting of "Niabyshyna. The War" newspaper book by Illa Kopyl in "Narodnaya Vola".

As reported on **April 15, 2010**, "The Strong News of Homiel" newspaper, published by the "Drukavanaye Slova" Private Unitary Enterprise, had been refused official registration by the Ministry of Information of Belarus.

A corresponding order was signed by the Minister Aleh Pralaskouski on April 1, 2010. He grounded the refusal with the fact that the would-be Editor-in-chief lacked 5 years of experience at this position, as required by the "Positions of Officials of Periodical Editions" reference book.

Photo reporters Uladzimir Hrydzin and Kseniya Avimava were detained in the city center of Minsk on **April 16, 2010**. The media workers were trying to report from a civil action of youth democratic NGOs. The detention took place near the BRSM premises next to the Presidential Administration building in K. Marx Street. The activists tried to pass informational materials to the state organization. However, the BRSM activists called up the police. The action participants and independent reporters were convoyed to the Leninski City District Department of Internal Affairs and kept in custody for three hours there. All of them were released afterwards.

On **April 16, 2010**, the state-owned “Zviazda” newspaper published a harsh critical letter of war veterans from Navahradak District Branch of Belarusian Civil Association of Veterans. The authors were irritated with “provocative activity” of “Beloruskiy Partisan” Web-site and called upon the Web-site owners to abstain from using the “sacred words” in the title of their informational on-line resource. Similar veterans’ letters have appeared at least five times more since the end of February 2010. The Web-site editorial logically considered the trend to be an official signal for “the beginning of another wave of pressure in relation to independent information sources” in Belarus.

Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service