

# The Belarusian Association of Journalists

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*January 25 – February 21, 2010*

In mid-February, the Belarusian Association of Journalists lodged a complaint to the Supreme Court of Belarus regarding an official warning, issued by the Ministry of Justice of Belarus to BAJ on *January 13, 2010*. The BAJ officials noted in the appeal as follows: “We consider the decision to be illegal, ungrounded, and subject to cancellation. ... Having issued the warning to the Association for breaking the media legislation, the Ministry of Justice went beyond its authority.”

Meanwhile, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) (<http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/eREC1897.htm>), the International Federation of Journalists

(<http://www.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-protests-against-legal-harassment-of-belarus-association-of-journalists>), and the Association of European Journalists expressed their deep concern with the official warning, issued by the Ministry of Justice to the Belarusian Association of Journalists. The IFJ and the AEJ sent protest letters to the Belarusian ministerial officials. Moreover, PACE addressed to Venice Committee with a request to conclude if the Ministry’s official warning to BAJ was a violation of general standards in the field of human rights.

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Policemen returned a photo camera and two computers to their owner Siarhei Sierabro, the Editor of “**Vitsiebsk People’s News**” on *January 26, 2010*. At the same time, the media worker was given a writ, obliging him to come to the police department for interrogation. It is worth reminding that the reporter took several pictures of the national white-red-white banner, banned by A.Lukashenka. The banner was placed by a Belarusian patriot Siarhej Kavalenka above the central Christmas tree in Vitsiebsk on January 7, 2010. Consequently, the police searched the apartment, rented by S. Sierabro and his wife in their absence. The journalist believes the police were trying to find a link between himself and S. Kavalenka in this wise.

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As reported on *January 29, 2010*, the “Hantsavitiski Chas” non-state regional newspaper signed a contract with the “Brestablsayuzdruk” National Unitary Enterprise. Accordingly, 150

copies of “Hantsavitski Chas” will be distributed through the news-stalls of this state monopolist enterprise in the town of Hantsavichy, Brest region till the end of 2010. However, “Hantsavitski Chas” hasn’t been included into the “Belposhta” subscription catalogue, despite making a payment for the service.

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A. Lukashenka signed ordinance No. 60 “About the measures on improving the use of the national segment of Internet” on **February 1, 2010**. The document included a range of norms that caused deep anxiety, including the possibility to disable on-line resources, identify the Internet-users in cybercafés, and make a record of the Web-sites they visit etc. The ordinance will come into effect on July 1, 2010.

Siarhei Sierabro, the Editor of “**Vitsiebsk People’s News**” was interrogated at Vitsiebsk City Department of Internal Affairs on **February 1, 2010**. The media worker was requested to explain the reasons for taking photos of the banned white-red-white national banner in the central square of Vitsiebsk on January 7, 2010. It was only during the interrogation that the journalist learned that he was treated as a witness within a criminal case against a civil activist Siarhej Kavalenka.

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On **February 3, 2010**, a group of police officers tried to enter a flat, rented by an official representative of Belsat TV Channel in Minsk **Mihias Yanchuk**. As a result of the incident an independent journalist **Ivan Shulha**, a member of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, was detained. On February 4, 2010, Ivan Shulha was brought to court and charged with minor hooliganism and sentenced to 10 days of custody.

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On **February 2, 2010**, the Economic Court for Vitsiebsk region dismissed a complaint, submitted by the “Vitsiebskiy Korund” Private Publishing Enterprise against a refusal of Vitsiebsk City Executive Committee to provide it with a license for retail sale. The state officials motivated their decision by the presence of “Vitsiebskiy Kuryer” independent weekly in the applicant’s assortment list of goods for sale.

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Maryja Stsiepaniuk, a private distributor of “Vitsiebskiy Kuryer” independent weekly was detained by the police in Vitsiebsk on **February 4, 2010**. She was accused of violating article 22.9, part 2 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Torts (“Distribution of periodical editions without official registration in the Republic of Belarus”). The case materials were sent to court.

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The Leninskiy City District Court in Minsk found the “Narodnaya Vola” non-state periodical guilty of breaking the Belarus’ Law “On Advertising” on **February 4, 2010**. Consequently, the newspaper will have to pay out 700,000 Belarusian rubles as a fine for announcing a new season of “Belsat” TV channel on its pages.

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The journalists, who covered a protest action in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk on **February 8, 2010**, were roughly prevented once again from carrying out their professional duties. Just as before, some people in plain clothes circled the journalists and severed them from the protestors. Moreover, they prevented the cameramen from filming the events.

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**Anatol Hatouchyts**, a correspondent of BelaPAN News Agency and an independent journalist **Aleh Razhkou** weren’t permitted to enter the Savietski City District Court of Homiel with photo and video cameras on **February 11, 2010**. The media workers had intended to report from a trial session on a case against Yauhien Yakavienka, accused of trying to evade conscription.

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A RL/RFE correspondent, who reported from a youth street action, dedicated to St. Valentine’s Day on **February 14, 2010**, was made to delete a photo with a patrol wagon. He was explained by the riot police officers that it was forbidden to make photos of police vans. It should be noted that the police dissolved cruelly the civil action as soon as it started.

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**Ihar Bantsar**, the “Magazyn Polski na uchodźstwie” Editor-in-chief and **Andrzej Paczobut**, a correspondent of „Gazeta Wyborcza” (Poland) were sentenced to 5 days of administrative arrest on **February 15, 2010**. They were accused of taking part in an unauthorized civil action near the Polish House (Dom Polski) in Hrodna on February 10, 2010.

Also, a police protocol was composed in relation to **Irena Walus**, the “Głos znad Niemna na uchodźstwie” small circulation newspaper’s Editor-in-chief in the town of Valozhyn on **February 15, 2010**. The media worker was accused of committing an administrative tort. In particular, the police blamed her for “offending” the leadership of pro-governmental Union of Poles in Belarus by her activity. It should be emphasized that the police detained the journalist with the impermissible use of force.

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The Belarusian Association of Journalists sent another letter of protest to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Belarus Anatol Kulyashou on **February 15, 2010**. The BAJ leadership informed the top governmental official that they hadn’t received any replies from him to their

appeals in the past regarding the cases of prevention of journalists from implementing their professional duties by some unknown people in plain clothes during street actions in the autumn of 2009. The BAJ leaders noted that their inquiries regarding legal breaches on the part of law enforcement agents must have been shelved, since the “civilians” continued to prevent journalists from carrying out their work and even threatened the media workers with the use of force in the presence of uniformed police officers during civil actions later on.

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**Julia Darashkevich**, a photo reporter of “Nasha Niva” independent newspaper and a member of BAJ, was detained by the police on *February 16, 2010* and spent almost three hours in a police station.

She was covering a street action in Kastychnitskaya Square of Minsk. An unknown person in plain clothes tried to prevent her from filming the action, and after that two police officers detained her. They said that the journalist allegedly hit the person.



“I asked the police how a girl could have hit a police officer if she was holding her camera with both hands”, Julia told BAJ Press Service after she was released.

The journalist spent almost three hours at the police station. She was interrogated, and police officers also made a list of her personal belongings.

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On *February 17, 2010*, police officers conducted a search at a working place of Deputy Editor of **Narodnaya Volia** newspaper and a BAJ member **Maryna Koktysh**.

The search was conducted at the editorial office of “Narodnaya Vola” by four police officers headed by Major **Aliaksandr Chuy**. The police had an enactment for a search signed 20

January 2010 by the Head of Homel Regional Police Department Colonel **Paliashchuk** under a sanction of Homel Region Public Prosecutor **Valiantsin Shayeu**.

The police produced a search warrant and ordered the staff to switch off their mobile phones. The search lasted for about an hour. The officers confiscated Ms. Koktysh's personal computer.

The search was connected with the so-called "[hunting case](#)", which deals with possible misuse of authority by several high-ranked officials of a regional police department.

*Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service*