

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting September 3 – 9

From August 22 to September 22, 2012 the electoral campaign takes place in the run-up to the elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly. Among the forms of political agitation are free presentations of candidates' speeches on TV and the radio, and also publication of their programs in the media listed by the Central Electoral Committee. At the very beginning observers registered many facts of censorship of the agitation materials of some candidates. Their full account is provided in the report of the campaign "Human rights defenders for free elections".

On September 3 two years passed since the death of the founder of the **charter97.org** website **Aleh Biabenin**. He was found hanging from the staircase in his country house not far from Minsk. The law enforcement agencies at once proposed the version of suicide. However the journalist's death raised many questions. Aleh did not leave any note. Friends and colleagues of the journalist reported of signs of violence on the dead body. Representatives of democratic community spoke of a "political murder". Aleh Biabenin was a member of the electoral team of Andrey Sannikau, leader of the civil campaign "European Belarus", a candidate for the President in 2010.

On September 3 the TV channel "Belarus 2" **cancelled the recording of the debates** between parliamentary candidates Anatol Liabedzka (leader of the United Civil Party) and Mikalay Samaseyka (actual MP). A.Liabedzka learnt about it on the phone in the morning; the reason was "equipment failure". On September 4 the deputy chair of the Belteleradiocompany **Marat Markau** reported that the recording of the debates had not been cancelled, but postponed because of the "technical maintenance activities".

On September 3 police **detained the independent distributor** of newspapers **Barys Khamaida** near the so called "blue house" in **Vitsebsk**. After the distributor set up a placard "**Boycott the unlawful elections to the unlawful chamber!**" near his table, he was detained, taken to court and fined 400 thousand rubles.

On September 5 the policemen **told the distributor to go away** from the traditional place of selling newspapers because he hindered to shoot a movie about Marc Chagall. The civil activist says the demand was inadequate because he did not hinder the movie-makers as they were working half a kilometer away.

On September 6 Barys Khamaida had a **protocol** drawn up against him for **hooliganism**. In the morning he was told to go away from the shop of Vesta trade network (near which the newspapers are sold), but he refused categorically. Then the shop-keeper came out and told him to move away because she wanted to place a table for selling goods. He moved a little away (he had a white-red-white umbrella with a coat of arms "Pahonia"). But the shop-keeper was not satisfied with that and intended to rip off the symbols. He grabbed her by the hand. She called the police, and they made up a protocol for hooliganism against Barys Khamaida.

On September 4 an independent cameraman in Homel, BAJ member **Larysa Shchyrakova** filed a **complaint** to the regional prosecutor's office asking to find out who had **stolen the photos from her personal computer and published them online** on porn-website. Larysa Shchyrakova wrote that she had received the links from her acquaintance. At the websites she was surprised

to find her photos of personal character made by her husband. The photos were stored at their home computer.

"I did not publish these photos anywhere on the web, I did not even send it to anyone by e-mail. I suppose the photos were stolen in the period from the middle of January to May 2011 when the computer was in Homel department of the KGB" said the journalist.

On September 6 Larysa Schyrakova, who is also a member of the country-studies community "Talaka", sent a **complaint** to the prosecutor's office of Petrykau district. She asked to find out why her constitutional rights to gather and disseminate information were violated.

*We remind that on August 25 the journalist was **detained** in the village of Liaskavichy of Petrykau district and was not allowed to cover the folk festival "Call of Palessie". Plain-clothed people came up to her, demonstrated their documents and said she had to be accredited in order to cover the festival. Seven policemen convoyed her to the local police station where they looked through the pictures made by the journalist. Then she was taken to the police department of Petrykau district where the materials were viewed again. The check-up, which lasted longer than three hours, was guided by the deputy head **Andrey Buyski**.*

On September 6 the administrative commission of Soviet district in Homel **fined** the independent **distributor** of "Novy Chas" **Aliaksandr Pratsko** for 100 thousand rubles for selling the newspaper in improper place.

The deputy head of the administration **Siarhey Kadola** told that the journalist's agreement had to also indicate the place for selling newspapers. The fine was issued on the grounds of the police's protocol under article 12.17 of the Administrative Code (violating the trade regulations). We remind that **on August 20** the senior lieutenant Dzianis Novikau **detained** Aliaksandr Pratsko for selling the newspaper "Novy Chas" on Pryvokzalnaya Square.

The editorial board is going to appeal the fine, as the current legislation does not demand getting permission from the executive committee for place of selling newspapers and magazines.

On September 7 BAJ chairperson Zhanna Litvina and the deputy chair Andrey Bastunets **were not included into the Supervisory Council of the Central Electoral Committee** on control of the order and regulations of holding pre-electoral agitation in the media. The first editor's deputy of the state-run "SB – Belarus Segodnia" **Mikhail Liabedzik** said that the Supervisory Council discussed the issue and said presence of BAJ members in the Council was "inexpedient".

The Council included seven people: employees of the Ministry of Information, of several state-run media, of the National TV and Radio Company and representatives of the BUJ.

On September 9 the coordinator of the campaign "European Belarus", ex-political prisoner, BAJ member **Dzmitry Bandarenka** informed that **he was not going to return to Belarus**. He has been taking treatment in Poland since July. "I think that now there is a real threat of a new arrest. My return will be possible only after the release of all political prisoners, expungement of convictions and full rehabilitation," said the politician.

We remind that Zmitser Bandarenka was sentenced to two years imprisonment for participation in the demonstration of December 19, 2010. In prison he underwent a serious operation on the spine. He was granted presidential pardon in May 2012.