

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting – October 03 – 09, 2011

The oppositional ‘Popular Assembly’ was the most significant event for journalists within the period under review. The civil action was arranged and held in Minsk, Brest, Vitsiebsk, Homiel, Hrodna, Mahilou, and other Belarusian cities and towns on October 8, 2011. A number of journalists and BAJ members were detained by police. However, most of them were released shortly after their detention. There was only one case, when a detained reporter was made to stand trial. The litigation will be continued on October 17, 2011.

A criminal case against Vice-President of International Federation for Human Rights and BAJ member Ales Bialatski was sent to court on **October 4, 2011**. The measure of restraint wasn't changed. Consequently, he was left in custody before the start of the trial. The famous HR defender has been imprisoned since August 4, 2011. The criminal proceedings were initiated against Ales Bialatski under part 2, article 243 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (*‘Large scale concealment of income’*). The criminal prosecution is grounded on the information about A. Bialatski's banking accounts in foreign banks, handed over to Belarusian authorities by the Ministry of Justice of Lithuania and the Polish Prosecutor General's Office.

The trial is expected in the first half of October 2011. However, numerous international HR watchdogs, the EU leadership as well as the governments of the United States and other democratic states demand A. Bialatski's immediate release from custody.

As announced at a press-conference in Minsk on **October 3, 2011**, a specially founded international committee will nominate A. Bialatski for the Nobel Peace Prize for his outstanding achievements in the field of HR defense.

As reported on **October 4, 2011**, the publisher and the Editor of Krychau small-circulation *‘Volny Horad’* periodical Siarhei Niarouny and his family were left without any official means of subsistence. A labor contract with the Editor's wife hadn't been prolonged. No explanations were provided at that. The journalist himself can't find any official place of employment in the area. S. Niarouny is convinced that his wife has been dismissed for political reasons. “It is connected with the *‘Volny Horad’* newspaper publishing, since the authorities are regularly scored by the periodical,” S. Niarouny noted.

Following the wife's dismissal, the Editor received a notice from the local Tax Inspection, urging him to present the income and property declaration for the recent two years.

A *‘westki.info’* Web-site correspondent Kastus Shytal was detained on his way from Hlybokaye to Dzisna (Vitsiebsk region) on **October 7, 2011**. The journalist was going to report from the *‘Popular Assembly’* public action, planned to be carried out in different Belarusian cities and towns on **October 8, 2011**. The car with the journalist was stopped by road police. K. Shytal was convoyed to a district center of Miory, as if for checking his possible connection to robbery. However, the claims changed as soon as the reporter was

taken to a police station. The road police officers started accusing him of cursing at them during the car check. Consequently, the journalist was charged with breaking article 17.1 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Torts and had to spend two days before the trial in custody. The trial started on **October 10, 2011**. However, the general court session was put off till October 17, 2011. The media worker may be either warned or fined 2 – 30 base amounts (approx. EUR 3 - 45) or sentenced to 15 days of arrest for committing the alleged tort.

A civil activist Siarhei Trafimchyk was detained in the town of Masty (Hrodna region) on **October 7, 2011**. The police seized the “Radio Racyja” and “BelSat” promotional materials from his car. The activist had to spend several hours at a police station.

S. Trafimchyk was summoned to Masty District Department of Internal Affairs on **October 8, 2011**. He was interrogated by the police and informed that the seized printed production would be examined, since it might contain some illegal content.

The police detained journalists and prevented them from implementing their professional duties during the all-Belarusian ‘Popular Assembly’ civil action on **October 8, 2011**.

Hrodna: Border guards seized passports from a journalist Yan Roman and a HR activist Viktor Sazonau at the railway station border crossing in Hrodna on arrival from Bialystok (Poland). Both of them were kept at the Customs area for some time. The passports were returned as soon as Y. Roman and V. Sazonau requested a complaints book from the border authorities.

Homiel: A journalist Larysa Shchyrakova was detained by police, while filming the civil action. She was taken to the Chyhunachny City District Department of Internal Affairs and searched. The reporter was released from custody in approx. two hours after detention without any reports.

Hlybokaye (Vitsiebsk region): Zmitsier Lupach, a civil activist and the Editor of ‘Prefect-info’ non-state newspaper was detained in the town, while distributing information about the civil action at the market place in Hlybokaye. He was interrogated at Hlybokaye District Department of Internal Affairs and released in approx. an hour after detention.

It was next to impossible to access a number of social and political informational Web-resources in Belarus on **October 8, 2011**. Among other, the access was nearly disabled to the ‘Popular Assembly’ Web-site, www.charter97.org (Charter’97), www.svaboda.org (RL/RFE), www.belradio.fm (European Radio for Belarus), www.belaruspartisan (The Belarusian Partisan), and www.vkontakte.ru Social Network.

As reported on **October 8, 2011**, someone had deliberately *broken* the *window* on the *car belonging to* Vadzim Barshcheuski, the Chief Editor of “Vitebskiy Kuryer” newspaper.

The media worker called the police as soon as he noticed the broken glass in the morning. Surprisingly, the law enforcement agents made up their minds to take the aggrieved person to the nearest police station instead of looking into details on the spot. The Editor was kept in custody for several hours. He wasn’t permitted to use his mobile phone to inform his relatives and colleagues about his location.

Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service