

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting March 4 – 17, 2013

The main news of the period under consideration was termination of the criminal case against the journalist in Hrodna, BAJ member Andrei Poczobut: investigation did not reveal any constituent elements of offence in the journalist's actions.

On March 4 the international organization **Amnesty International** summed up the results of the **Marathon of Solidarity** which started on December 7, before the Human Rights Day, where it was suggested to take action to support the prisoner of conscience **Ales Bialiatski**. In all there were 104,731 measures taken to support the prisoner of conscience, as recognized by the international organization.

The head of the Human Rights Center *Viasna* and of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) is serving a four and a half years' prison sentence. Amnesty International held the campaign to write the petitions to free Ales Bialiatski, as well as to hold actions to promote the campaign.

People from all over the world expressed their solidarity with Ales Bialiatski: the campaign was backed from Austria, Belgium, the Bermuda islands, Bulgaria, Canada, Cypress, the Czech Republic, Finland, Ghana, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Moldova, Mongolia, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Puerto-Rico, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Togo, Tunisia, Ukraine, Venezuela, Great Britain.

On March 4 in Hrodna **Andrei Poczobut** was visited by police. He signed a paper that he had been warned against participation in unsanctioned actions, as a person who is under suspended prison sentence. The warning was not related to any specific action.

As became known **on March 5**, the investigative Committee was holding a **check-up over the detention of journalists in Smaliavichy**. It started the check-up by the initiative of Yahor Lebiadok, the deputy in the district council of Smaliavichy, to find if there was any misuse of power from Aliksandr Martysiuk, the head of the police department on guarding law and order and on prevention.

The senior lieutenant of the Investigative Committee in Minsk region **Siarhei Pudau** was gathering testimony from all participants of the incident, in particular, he talked to **Mikalai Petrushenka, Siarhei Vazniak, Lola Buryieva** and **Viachaslau Piashko**.

We remind that on December 24, 2012 police detained the journalists who were going to report a meeting of the local deputy with the public held in Smaliavichy Culture House.

On March 9 in Vilnius unknown Russian-speaking men **insulted and threatened journalists** of *Radio Svaboda* and *Belsat* TV channel for their reporting from the burial of **Roman Voinicki**, a president of the Association of Public Organization of Lithuanian Belarusians, who was murdered with tortures a week earlier.

According to the journalists, the unknown people behaved aggressively and claimed that “in other countries journalists are dealt with even worse” and there “they get as they deserve from whom necessary”.

The *Belsat* cameraman **Zdzislavs Voicehovskis** said that one of the men pushed him rudely out from the foyer of the chapel to the street and then held the hand in front of the camera lens and prevented from recording.

"I don't have proofs that these were Belarusian special services, but the manner is very similar. Nobody in Lithuania – neither police nor special services – behaves like this, especially in relation to journalists," said Z. Voicehovskis.

On March 11 the magazine *Arche. Beginning* received a **third refusal of re-registration** from the **Ministry of Information**. The official letter signed by **Liliya Ananich**, the Minister's deputy, says that the application of re-registration was filed with violation of article 12 of the Law on Mass Media – the founder did not provide his telephone number.

*The first refusal was made in **December 2012** on the grounds that the would-be editor-in-chief did not have proper qualifications (5-year work experience in an appropriate administrative position). Next refusals were explained by violations of the procedure of submitting the application.*

*The last issue of the magazine was published on **June 28, 2012**. If the *Arche* fails to publish the next issue by June 28 2013, the Ministry of Information will be able to liquidate the outlet according to the law.*

*We remind that on **September 14, 2012** police and tax inspectors detained the chief editor of the magazine Valery Bulhakau at the presentation of the book "Sovetization of Western Belarus" by Y. Shumski. Valery Bulhakau was accused of unlawful entrepreneur's activities.*

On September 21 the Department of Financial Investigations (DFI) employees started a check-up in the publishing house which published *Arche*. **In September 24 – 28** all documents for the last two years were seized for the check-up.

On October 2 more than 5 000 books from the personal collection of Valery Bulhakau were confiscated.

On October 4 the founder of the magazine Andrei Dynko was summoned for questioning to the DFI. After that Andrei Bulhakau substituted Valery Bulhakau as the chief editor, in order to save the outlet. Nevertheless, the DFI blocked the account of the magazine on the same very day, and employees of the editorial team started to be called for questionings.

On October 18 Valery Bulhakau was fined 500 thousand rubles for unlawful entrepreneur's activities.

At the end of October the situation of the magazine was covered in several reports at the state TV in criminal chronicles "Zone X": the magazine was said to contain extremist contents. **At the beginning of November** Valery Bulhakau left Belarus, fearing criminal prosecution.

On March 15 the **Investigative Committee** in Hrodna region **finished the inquiry into the case** against the journalist **Andrei Poczobut**, under article 367, part 2 of the Criminal Code (**libeling the President of Belarus**), having found no objective proofs to the alleged crime. According to the investigative officer of the Committee Siarhei Sharshanevich, the results of the linguistic examination of Poczobut's articles differ, and the preliminary investigation gave no objective proofs which would testify to the alleged fact of libel. Thus, the criminal case against Andrei Poczobut was closed on March 15. All conditions of recognizance also terminated.

We remind that Andrei Poczobut, journalist of Gazeta Wyborcza, was charged with committing a repeated crime punishable by article 367 of the Criminal Code. The investigation supposed that the journalist again defamed the president of Belarus in several online publications. Poczobut was detained on June 21, 2012 in his flat in Hrodna. After searches he was placed in an isolator. On June 30 the journalist was released on his own recognizance, since then he was obliged to stay in the city and behave well. The investigation was prolonged two times, and several linguistic examinations were made. In summer 2011 Andrei Poczobut was convicted of libel against the president. Then the Lenin district court of Hrodna sentenced him to three years' imprisonment with two years' deferral of serving the sentence. The second case against the journalist would have finished up with five years of jail. Poczobut did not admit his guilt and refused to give testimony to the investigation.

On March 15 winners of the international journalism competition 'Belarus in Focus 2012' were awarded in Warsaw. The competition, which was held the second time, received 60 articles from 36 journalists from 16 countries all over the world – from Indonesia to Germany, Costa Rica to Romania.

The first place was awarded to **Michal Potocki** (Poland) for '*Split Personality Intersection*' published in the Polish daily *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*; **Laurent Vinatier** (France) received the second prize for '*A Dictatorship's Success Stories*' published in *The Global Journal*; and Belarusian journalist and editor of a leading Belarusian language newspaper *Nasha Niva*, **Andrej Dynko**, received third prize for '*Europe's Last Dictatorship*', *The New York Times*.