

Mass Media Week in Belarus

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**Within the reporting period the KGB's Center of information and public relations confirmed that the charges of complicity in a crime and illegal border crossing had been brought against Anton Surapin (article 16, part 6 and article 371, part 3 of the Criminal Code respectively). The journalist stayed on in the KGB detention center.**

**In the meantime, colleagues in Belarus and abroad staged actions of solidarity with Anton Surapin. On August 8 policemen in Minsk detained a photo correspondent of "Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii" Iryna Kozlik and a freelance photographer Yulia Darashkevich while they were taking photos with teddy bears. The journalists were found guilty of unsanctioned picketing and fined 30 base amounts (3 mln rubles) each. The case stirred large public international response.**

**On August 6** the Luninets district court scheduled to hear the case of the Media-Polesie editor **Sviatlana Harda** against a citizen of Pinsk district. The journalist **asked to hold the citizen accountable** for hooliganism (article 17.1 of the Administrative Code). As the citizen did not appear in court, the hearing was adjourned till August 16.

We remind that on July 8 the journalist Sviatlana Harda was making a report for <http://media-polesye.by> in the republican nature reserve "Luninski" in order to highlight the problem of poor nature protection. The journalist was taking photos on Belaie lake shore when the man, a resident of Pinsk district, attacked her and **damaged the camera**.

**On August 7** the Center of information and public relations of the KGB announced that it had brought **formal charges** against two Anton Surapin and Siarhei Basharymau over the **teddy bears drop** from a foreign plane in July. The KGB confirmed that the Belarusian citizens had been charged with complicity in a crime (art. 16, p. 6) and assistance to illegal entry (art. 371, p.3 of the criminal Code). The KGB suggested that the Swedish citizens involved in the pro-democracy stunt should travel to Minsk for questioning in the capacity of suspects.

*We remind that on July 4, a single-engine plane piloted by two representatives of Swedish PR agency Studio Total entered Belarus' airspace and dropped more than 800 hundred teddy bears with pro-democracy signs on the cities of Ivianets and Minsk before flying back to Lithuania unhindered. The Belarusian defense ministry initially denied that any aircraft had invaded the country's airspace on that day, described the videos as fake and said that the Swedish firm had invented the story.*

*The 20-year old Anton Surapin, a student of Journalism Institute was detained in relation to the case on July 13. He first published photos of the teddy bears on his website Belarusian News Photos.*

*It is also known that a 16-year old girl Katsiaryna Skurat was questioned in presence of her parents and then was set free. She allegedly had taken photos of the teddy bears and sent the photos to Surapin.*

**On August 8** the Belarusian ambassador to German announced that the **correspondent** for Deutschland-Radio Gesine Dornblüth was **denied Belarusian accreditation**. The journalist has been working in Moscow since January. She intended to cover parliamentary elections and applied for journalist accreditation in March; however the Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied her accreditation without explaining the reasons. The ambassador suggested that the radio send another correspondent to cover the elections that are scheduled for late September.

According to the journalist Gesine Dornblüth, she visited Belarus last summer and reported on the tense social situation and, as the result, discontent in the country. “I also gave word to critics of the government in province. Perhaps, this angered the officials.”

**On August 8** the journalists **Yulia Darashkevich** (freelance photographer) and **Iryna Kozlik** (photo correspondent for “Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii”) were **detained** in the center of Minsk: they were taking photos with teddy-bears as part of the solidarity action with Anton Surapin.

They were taken to the Soviet district police department where an administrative protocol against them was compiled. They spent a night in the Akrestsina detention center.

**On August 9** the court hearing took place today in the Soviet district court of Minsk. The judge Dzmitry Pauluchenka found the photographers guilty of holding an **unsanctioned picket** (article 23.34 of the Code of Administrative Violations). They were fined 30 base amounts (3 mln rubles) each. The witnesses who testified in court traditionally were policemen.

**On August 9** independent TV journalists **Volha Starastsina** and **Dzianis Mikhailau** were **detained** by plain-clothed representatives of law enforcement agencies in **Vitsebsk**. The correspondents were preparing material about the parliamentary elections. They were taken to the Chyhunachny district police department where they spent several hours. The police spent a **prophylactic talk** with Volha and then set them free without any protocols.

“I see it as an attempt of threatening. It is obvious they are trying to prevent independent journalists from covering the elections,” said Volha Starastsina.

**On August 10** the independent journalist **Tatsiana Belashova** was **warned** against violating the law “On mass media”, in particular by contributing to a Polish TV channel. The warning was signed by the prosecutor’s deputy Kazimir Kezhun. She was summoned to Minsk city prosecutor’s office within a check-up of activities of the channel **Belsat**. The prosecutor Dzmitry Pastaialka reminded of her detention in Gorkiy Park in Minsk on June 1 when she was preparing a video report. According to the prosecutor, the video was shown later on Belsat.

*We remind that since the beginning of the year a number of independent journalists received warnings against contributing to foreign media; and in June the Investigative committee of Belarus officially announced about the beginning of the check-up on Belsat activities.*

**On August 1** the editor of the regional newspaper “**Bobruyskiy Kurier**” **Anatol Sanatsienka** said that he had sent a petition to the chairperson of the regional supervisory committee of the Main department of justice of Mahilou City Executive Committee asking **to restore the rights** of his **imprisoned colleague Yauhen Vaskovich** (21-year old Yauhen Vaskovich was convicted for hooligan actions aimed at the KGB building in Babruysk).

Anatol Sanatsienka had many times sent letters to his colleague and he is convinced that they did not reach the addressee. The same complaints were voiced by the prisoner’s relatives and friends. Letters from the prisoner do not come, either. In the rare letters that have reached his relatives, Yauhen Vaskovich complained that he had little correspondence and reading; he was banned to subscribe to some periodicals, although they are registered by the Ministry of Information.

**On August 11** the police **detained** independent journalists in a town of **Sharkaushchyna** (Vitsebsk region). The cameraman **Viachaslau Piashko** and a journalist **Hanna Azemsha** were recording how the editor of a non-state regional newspaper “**Prefect-Info**” (Hlybokaie) **Zmitser Lupach** was distributing the newspaper in a public place. Their activities were interrupted by a police patrol. The journalists were taken to the police department, had their documents checked. The police copied the journalists’ data and set them free. There weren’t any procedural papers written.

Zmitser Lupach was questioned the longest: he was asked about the registration of the newspaper, its aims and publisher. In the end the journalist was set free on condition that he would send by fax the documents confirming legality of his newspaper.

**On August 12** the website **Change.org** collecting petitions in support of Anton Surapin and Siarhei Basharymau became **inaccessible** in Belarus. The Russian language version of the website worked well in Russia and in Ukraine.

Change.org is a global platform where everybody can start one's own civil campaign. The platform is used by more than 15 million people all over the world, and 150 thousand people in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.