

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting August 13 – 19, 2012

The freelance journalist Anton Surapin was released from custody under his own recognizance and conditions of non-disclosure. He was transported from the KGB detention center to his home city Slutsk. The equipment confiscated during the searches on July 13 stayed at the KGB.

On August 13 it became known that FIDH vice-president **Ales Bialiatski** was **deprived of a short-term meeting** with his relatives. It was scheduled after August 15. However, the administration of Babruysk colony No2 punished the prisoner for “violating the regime”: he curtained his bed and took a piece of bread from the canteen after supper. Earlier, when Ales Bialiatski was qualified as persistent violator of the regime, he was deprived of a long-term meeting with his relatives in September. Besides, he was deprived of food transfer.

On August 13 the independent journalist **Kastus Shytal** was summoned to the **prosecutor’s office** of Hlybokaye district and **questioned** about a publication related to the **electoral program** of Yaraslau Bernikovich. The publication was about Yaraslau Bernikovich’s proposal to help the activists who speak for the boycott of the soon-coming parliamentary elections.

The law does not forbid campaigning for boycott. However, the prosecutor’s office forbade the journalist to publish such texts on the website westki.info. Otherwise he was promised to be held accountable under the Administrative Code.

The journalist calls such threats from Hlybokaye prosecutors as absolutely unlawful. He also used his right not to testify against himself and refused to give any explanations.

On August 13 BAJ Chairperson **Zhanna Litvina** and the deputy chair **Andrei Bastunets** sent a **motion** to the KGB asking **to change the measure of restraint for the journalist Anton Surapin** under their personal guarantee.

The Criminal Code of Belarus allows two or more citizens to put forward a motion for a detainee, if they do not have previous convictions and are trustworthy. So, PA BAJ suggested that concerned Belarusian citizens should send a similar motion to the KGB.

On August 14 BAJ started a **campaign** to collect signatures for **release of Anton Surapin**. The human rights organization called on all sympathizing people to sign the petition to support the detainee.

On August 16 PA BAJ sent a letter to the **teachers’** faculty of the Journalism Institute of the BSU asking to support their student Anton Surapin and to foster his release.

On August 17 the freelance journalist **Anton Surapin was released** from custody under his own recognizance and conditions of non-disclosure. He was transported from the KGB detention center to his home city Slutsk. The lawyer was absent when the journalist was released. The equipment confiscated during the searches on July 13 stayed at the KGB. The journalist is not allowed to leave Slutsk, but he hopes to be able to get back to Minsk at the beginning of the academic year. He also said that only letters of his relatives reached him at the KGB detention center.

On August 20 BAJ announced that it continued to collect signatures in a campaign **calling to end criminal prosecution** and dismiss charges against Anton Surapin. “The journalist is still under the investigation’s focus, and he might get back behind bars at any moment. That’s why the situation

demands solidarity of the whole journalistic community. The same solidarity is needed in cases of Andrei Poczobut and Pavel Seviarynets,” reminded Zhanna Litvina.

On August 13 the **Ministry of Justice** provided an official document confirming that it did not have any claims against the Chairperson of BAJ **Zhanna Livina** and that it had not asked the Ministry of the Interior to restrict her exit from Belarus. Officials from the Ministry promised Zhanna Litvina to petition on her behalf to the law enforcement agencies to remove the restriction.

We remind that on March 15 Zhanna Litvina intended to take a plane from Minsk-2 airport to Warsaw; however at the passport control she found out she was on the list of citizens whose exit from the country was temporarily restricted, and her passport was stamped with “exit denied”. Later Zhanna Litvina received an official notice from the Department on citizenship and migration of the Soviet district of Minsk that her right to leave the country was restricted on request of the Ministry of Justice in connection with some case on bankruptcy.

The previous week the Board member of BAJ Mikhail Yanchuk received a similar answer from the Ministry of Defense: he had not been called up and had not asked to restrict his exit.

On August 16 the Department on citizenship and migration informed **Zhanna Litvina** that her **exit restrictions had been lifted**. The official letter (dated August 10) said that the computer system had suffered a system glitch in February – March this year which led to the "misunderstanding".

Zhanna Litvina thinks that the explanation is farfetched and links it to a particular political decision of the official Minsk.

We remind that in all six BAJ members appeared on the travel ban list this year: Zhanna Litvina, Mikhail Yanchuk, Andrey Dynko, Harry Pahaniayla, Valiantsin Stefanovich and Aliaksandr Atroshchankau. Three of them are still on the travel ban list – ex-political prisoner, press secretary of the “European Belarus” campaign Aliaksandr Atroshchankau, chief editor of “Nasha Niva” Andrey Dynko and “Belsat” representative Mikhail Yanchuk.

On August 14 Minsk city prosecutor’s office issued an official **warning** against contributing to foreign mass media without accreditation to the **Radio Racyia** journalist **Henadz Barbarych**. The warning was signed by the prosecutor’s deputy Kazimir Kezhun. The journalist was summoned to Minsk prosecutor’s office in connection with a check-up of Radio Racyia activities, started after the searches on May 2. According to the journalist, the prosecutor Dzmitry Pastaialka confessed that he had listened to many of his materials on the air and from the confiscated computers. The prosecutor called Barbarych a staff journalist of RR. “I answered that I am a freelancer: every day I can write to different media and I do not have any contracts with anyone. In the end, I officially refused to give any explanations, referring to the Constitution article that allows not testifying against myself,” said Barbarych.

The editor’s office of Radio Racyia is located in Poland. It started its broadcast in Belarus in 1999, founded by the Belarusian diaspora in Poland and Belarusian journalists. Then the broadcast was suspended in 2002 and resumed in 2006, by the Belarusian informational center in Bialystok (created in the same year). Now the radio broadcasts on FM frequency and also online <http://www.racyja.com>. In Belarus it works illegally, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has many times denied official accreditation for the radio.

On August 15 in **Barysau** workers of the housing service **removed the signboard** of the local non-state newspaper **“Borisovskiye Novosti”** that hanged over the entrance to the house where the editor’s office of the newspaper is located. The workers explained they did it on the order of the executive committee; however they did not have any papers confirming this.

On August 16 workers of the housing service tried to dismantle the metal framework which bore the sign. The chief editor of “Borisovskiye Novosti” Anatol Bukas had to call the police and to file a

complaint. When the policeman arrived, the workers took their tools and went away, leaving their activities half-done.

On August 16 the **Luninets** district court heard the administrative case filed by journalist **Sviatlana Harda** against a resident of Pinsk district **Albert Simanau**. 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.

The attacker did not appear in court, the same as at the previous hearing ten days before.

The judge (Chairperson Mikhail Dzenisovich) **found the man guilty** according to article 10.8 of the Code of Administrative Violations, **fined** him to 30 base amounts (3 mln Br) and ordered to pay for the material damage he had caused.

On August 17 local policemen in **Svetlahorsk hindered** independent TV journalist **Larysa Shchyrakova** to hold an opinion poll with video recording about the public hearing on the construction of a cellulose factory nearby.

At first the journalist was stopped at the entrance to the public culture center where the hearing was taking place. The journalist started to ask questions to the people outside. They expressed indignation, as the local authorities had not given a word to public activists, even to those who had registered for a presentation. Then a police mayor, who refused to tell his name, accused the journalist of violating the public order and demanded her to proceed to the police. But the journalist’s colleagues and city-dwellers interceded for her.

On August 17 the **human rights defender** and BAI member **Tatsiana Raviaka** received a phone call from an unidentified phone number. She was told she was invited to the KGB for a talk. Tatsiana Raviaka asked to send her an official summons, which was delivered a couple of hours later. She was summoned as a “person aware of some circumstances significant for the national security of the Republic of Belarus”.

The KGB **questioned** the human rights defender about the article published the day before on the website spring96.org, titled “**In Mahilou the KGB interferes with the electoral process**”. Tatsiana Raviaka was questioned about the author, the source and reliability of the information in the article. The interrogating officer argued that the article discredited the KGB. Tatsiana Raviaka disagreed that publishing such information could somehow discredit the KGB. She received a verbal warning against publishing unverified information about state security bodies.

On August 17 it became known that the popular website about the history of Minsk **minsk-old-new.com** was **forbidden to use the coat of arms** of the city. At the beginning of July the founder of the website **Uladzimir Valozhynski** decided to register as a private entrepreneur in order to publish ads on the website legally. He filed documents to Minsk City Executive Committee, and, among all, inquired if he could continue to use the coat of arms on his website. Unexpectedly, Minsk City Executive Committee answered negatively, arguing that “a number of the materials on the website are controversial.”

We remind that the website has worked for nine years and won several awards: for example, in 2008 it won the Grand Prix of the VI Contest of Belarusian Content-projects.