

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting May 14 - 20, 2012

On May 18 the VIII Congress of BAJ was held in Minsk. As a result of the voting of 75 delegates, Zhanna Litvina was re-elected Chairperson unanimously. Andrey Bastunets, Aliaksandr Starykevich, Alina Suravets and Sviatlana Kalinkina were elected the Chairperson Deputies. The Administrative board now includes 15 members – the chairperson and the deputies (become members automatically) plus elected Aliaksandr Koktysh, Siarhey Vazniak, Yanina Melnikava, Yuras' Karmanau, Tatsiana Melnichuk, Viachaslau Khadasouski, Volha Khvoin, Henadz Sudnik, Iryna Vidanova, Mikhas' Yanchuk.

The Council consists of 42 members; on the proposal of Siarhey Vazniak, it was formed on the principle of representation - one person from each of 5 regional branches and 10 regional communities, and also from major editorial offices which actively take part in the life of BAJ.

Also the Congress elected the Control and Auditing Committee of 3 people – these are Mikalay Toustsik, Aliaksandr Zhuk and Iryna Karamyshava. Also, the Committee on ethics now includes 7 people - Anatol Huliayeu, Ales' Antsipenka, Maryna Zahorskaya, Anzhela Blush, Liubou Luniova, Dzmitry Padbiareski, Valery Karbalevich.

On May 14 Minsk City Court (the judge Tatsiana Vysotskaya) **dismissed the appeal** of **Aliaksandr Pratsko**, a Homel city activist of the civil movement "For freedom!"

The activist filed an appeal against the decision of the Pershamayski district court of Minsk. He claimed compensation for moral damages, inflicted to his daughter Halina by a program "Zone X" shown on the 1st National channel of the **Belteleradiocompany**.

We remind that Halina Pratsko was detained in August 2010 on charges of human trafficking. Although she hadn't been convicted yet, she was shown in the TV program "Zone X" which said she had been directly engaged in the criminal business. It was a violation of the presumption of innocence towards Halina, insulting her honor and dignity. At first the woman was sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment for human trafficking. As a result of many appeals, the court changed the charges to "involvement of people into prostitution" and changed the penalty to 2 years in prison.

On May 16 Navapolatsk City Court (judge Sviatlana Volkava) **dismissed the charges** from 19-year old **Dzmitry Ryzhychenka** against the local TV channel "**Vector TV**". Ryzhychenka went to court to defend his honor and dignity, after on February 24 "Vector TV" showed a program in which the young man was called an "extremist" and a member of pro-fascist organization. The youngster claimed public refutation of the information and moral damages compensation from the TV channel. In court he attempted to make clear that the organization "Soviest'18" ("Conscience 18") really existed, but it was officially registered with the City Executive

Committee and was engaged in social work in children's asylum. Dzmitry Ryzhychenka also tried to prove that he did not have extremist views. The head of the Vector TV" Aliaksandr Asenka referred to the website <http://novopolock.ru/>, where, according to his words, an interview with the man was published in which he said offensive things. However, now there is no such material on the website.

Dzmitry Ryzhychenka is going to appeal against the decision to Vitsebsk Regional Court.

On May 17 students of the Institute of Journalism reported that their **access** to the website **charter97.org** was **blocked**. When trying to open the website, they were redirected to a page with the logo of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, saying that the address of the requested web-resource was blocked.

As reported **on May 17**, the Internet magazine **34mag.net** received the **Free Media Pioneer Award** from the International Press institute. The award exists since 1996 as recognition of mass media contribution to promotion of freedom of speech and support of independent mass media in a region. 34mag.net is a multimedia version of the magazine "Studentskaya Dumka", closed by the authorities in 2005. The online format allows bypassing the ban. Nowadays, 34mag.net is published online and on CDs.

On May 17 the journalist for "Belsat" **Aliaksandr Barazenska** was summoned to the Investigating Committee in relation to the last summer **silent protests**. He remarked that the questioning would relate to the beating of Illia Petravets, member of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. Last summer he was detained during the silent protests, and had his nose broken in the police van. Barazenska witnessed the beating, and now he is invited for explanations as the Investigating Committee is handling the case. Journalists **Siarhey Balay** and **Ales' Piletski** were summoned, too.

On May 18 the independent journalist **Larysa Shchyryakova** was **summoned** to Homel region **prosecutor's office**, to the prosecutor Alesia Rabtsava. The journalist thought that it was related to her work as an independent journalist, as this prosecutor is widely known among journalists as "mass media specialist": she issued warnings to several local journalists - Tatsiana Bublikawa, Aleh Razhkov (for contributing to Belsat), Aleh Karniyenka (for contributing to Radio Racyja).

We remind that a year ago Larysa Shchyryakova was also summoned to the prosecutor's office. At that time Alesia Rabtsava questioned whether the journalist cooperated with Belsat. She then got away without a warning. However, Larysa Shchyryakova was detained almost during all silent protests. After the presidential elections, in 2011 her place was searched and her technical equipment was confiscated.

On May 18 the **US State Department** awarded **Ales' Bialiatski** for his activities in the sphere of human rights. "This award recognizes individuals or non-governmental organizations that show exceptional valor and leadership in advocating the protection of human rights and democracy in the face of government repression. Ales Bialiatski has bravely advocated on behalf of victims of political oppression and their families despite harassment by the Government of Belarus. As the founder of one of Belarus' leading human rights organizations, "Viasna", Bialiatski

provided legal and practical support to victims of an on-going crackdown and acted as a key source of information about human rights violations. He is currently a political prisoner, serving a four and a half year sentence for defending human rights,” says the Statement of the Department of State.

On May 19 the Minister of Information **Aleh Praliaskouski** said that by the end of 2012 **two publishing houses would be set up** in Belarus based on the republican newspapers. The working group headed by Praliaskouski has already started preparatory work. One publishing house will be based on four republican newspapers. Now the legal entities of the editions are being merged. “At the first stage the newspapers will stay on. The administration body will be optimized,” said the Minister. He said it could be possible that the final result would be a single socio-political newspaper.

As for the other publishing house, Praliaskouski explained that it would be based on “Zviazda” newspaper and the editorial and publishing house “Literature and Art” (“LiM”). It will specialize in cultural topics.

On May 19 the football team of BAJ won the **championship in the memory of Yury Shyroki**, journalist of BelaPAN. In all, seven journalist teams took part in the championship – from “Nasha Niva”, “Euroradio”, “Radio Svaboda”, “Belsat”, BelaPAN, team of “Friends of Shyroki” and team of BAJ. The team of BAJ beat the team of BelaPAN in the final with the score 3:0.

Note: the director deputy of the information company BelaPAN Yury Shyroki suddenly died from heart attack on January 13 2008, 37 years of age. His colleagues and friends founded a championship in his memory.

On May 20, Yulia Kanapliova, a journalist for the independent newspaper “**Vitsebski Courier**” was **detained** on the way to Orsha for more than three hours. It is worth mentioning that Yulia is 8 months pregnant.

The road police stopped her at 3.40 pm on the M1 as she was entering Orsha district. The policemen did not introduce themselves and they didn’t have any badges. They told Yulia to follow them to the police department, without indicating reasons for detention. In the department the police seized eight signal copies of the new magazine “Pol politiki” (Half politics) published by the International Center of Gender Initiatives “Adliga” and 200 copies of the special issue of comics “About local self-governance” published by “Nash Dom”.

Although the materials don’t fall under the provisions of the “Law on Mass Media” (comics are not periodic editions) the protocol of the administrative violation says that the journalist violated Art. 29.9/2 of the Administrative code – “unlawful distribution of printed mass media in the territory of the Republic of Belarus” (signed by sub lieutenant Uladzimir Laryn).