

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

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Some ‘bad traditions’ reappeared in Belarusian media field within the reporting period. In particular, on the one hand, there was resumed the compulsory individual and organizational subscription to the state-owned media. On the other hand, the state authorities obstructed distribution of non-state printed media in the country.

An independent journalist **Andrzej Pachobut** got a warning from the local police department in Hrodna on **November 15, 2011**.

It is worth mentioning that the journalist was sentenced for three years of jail with the adjournment of the court decision for 2 years. Among other, he has to come to the local police department for regular checks. The timetable of these checks is odd — the first, the second and the third Mondays of the month.

“Yesterday I worked hard and I had a number of problems to solve. I simply forgot this duty to my country — to visit the criminal inspection department on Mondays,” Andrzej Pachobut said.

If the journalist gets two more warnings, he may be sent to jail.

As reported on **November 15, 2011**, Vaukavysk District Executive Committee had sent official letters to the heads of local enterprises with a demand to ensure the organizational and individual subscription of their employees to a range of state-owned periodical editions for the first quarter 2012. Uladzimir Zakharchuk, Deputy Chairman of Vaukavysk District Executive Committee requested the heads of local enterprises to report on the results of subscription to ‘Sovietskaya Belorussiya’, ‘Respublika’, ‘7 Days’, ‘Hrodzienskaya Prada’ and some other state-owned periodicals to the local Ideological Department by December 24, 2011.

The trial against a human rights activist and a BAJ member **Ales Bialiatski** resumed on **November 16, 2011**. The prosecutor Uladzimir Saykouski started with a request of half an hour break, in order to formulate new charges. Finally, the updated charges were presented.

They appeared to be the same as brought against Ales Bialiatski before — Article 243 (2) of the Criminal Code of Belarus (‘large-scale tax evasion’). The only difference is a phrase ‘in pursuance of earlier agreements’. Unlike the previous charge, stating that Bialiatski simply owned income stored in foreign accounts, the new formulation presupposed that he had received the money in connection with some contractual obligations.

The Article provides for up to seven years of imprisonment including possible property confiscation.

A. Bialatski's attorney asked for a break to study the new charges.
The trial is to continue on November 22.

On **November 16, 2011**, **Iryna Khalip** got a warning from the staff of the Correctional Department (DIN) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It happened, when the journalist started to invite her colleagues by phone to come to cover the problem of sudden transfer of her husband, **Andrei Sannikau**, from Babruysk colony to Mahilou jail No.4.

Soon after the arrival of journalists, police officers in plain clothes appeared in the building of DIN, together with the head of the public security police Ihar Yauseyeu. Luckily, there were no incidents.

"Unfortunately, the authorities and law enforcement agencies tend to call any occasion a 'mass action', from press gatherings reporting socially significant events (as in this case) to a bicycle race," noted Deputy Chairman of BAJ and lawyer **Andrei Bastunets**. "As regards the situation with the warning to Iryna Khalip, I underline that the journalists were invited not to protest or take other actions, to which the legislation on public events is applied. They were gathering to report the event. This way, any news conference can be called an unsanctioned action — unless, of course, we take into account the Law "On mass media" and its article 34, which allows journalists to attend public events in order to receive and disseminate information," he added.

As reported on **November 18, 2011**, a journalist of 'Bobruyskiy Kuryer' independent weekly and a BAJ member *Yauhien Vaskovich* had spent nearly a month in a solitary cell in Mahilou jail No.4.

The first 10 days' punishment was prolonged two times. Last time, the journalist was sent to the isolation ward for refusing to obey the guard's command to face the wall during the bedtime.

It is worth mentioning that Yauhen Vaskovich was charged for committing an attack on the local KGB office in Babruysk in the night of October 16-17, 2010. Nobody was injured and real damages amounted to Br 253 thousand (for that time less than \$100), and the damages were paid. However, Yauhen Vaskovich was sentenced to seven years imprisonment in a high security colony in spite of all.

As reported on **November 20, 2011**, Babruysk KGB agents had banned mini-bus drivers to deliver the officially registered 'Novy Chas' independent weekly to the town from Minsk.

A public activist **Volha Pimanava** has been distributing the newspaper among her friends and acquaintances in Babruysk for several years already. According to her, the mini-bus drivers, who used to bring 'Novy Chas' for a long time, said they wouldn't help with the newspaper delivery any longer, since they had been warned against doing this by Babruysk KGB officers.

Babruysk civil activists are looking for some new ways to receive the newspaper now.

Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service