

The Belarusian Association of Journalists

Info posting #14

19–25 April 2010

Several journalists were detained in Belarus, including those who covered local election voting at polling stations.

BAJ finalized results of its Free Word journalistic competition. Besides, the Association received an answer from Prosecutor's Office to an appeal of BAJ about searches and interrogations of journalists in February–April 2010. According to the Prosecutor's Office, law enforcements officers did not violate law.

19 April *Tovarishch* non-state newspaper re-started issuing after five-month break. The left-wing weekly keeps be printed in Smolensk, Russia as no printing house in Belarus agrees to publish it due to political pressure.

20 April Hrodna Regional Court left in force a Leninski District Court decision in relation to Aliaksandr Dzianisau, a member of BAJ and a freelance journalist. 15 March 2010 he was sentenced to a 70,000 rubles (about 17.5 EUR) fine for “arbitrariness.” The journalist was detained in January 2010 in a school in Hrodna, where he was going to make a video piece about a new subject to be introduced in the school. Mr. Dzianisau had a BAJ press card, but he did not have an ID of any editorial board, and that fact was regarded as “arbitrariness.”

21 April issue No.1000 of *Brestskiy Kurier* was published. The first independent weekly was launched in Brest Region almost 20 years ago. On the eve of the jubilee a new version of the web site of the newspaper was launched.

21 April Tacciana Belashova, an independent journalist, was detained in Minsk. It happened when she was recording a conversation with Andrei Sannikau, a leader of European Belarus Civil Campaign. The journalist was kept in the police station fro about three hours. No protocols were compiled. The police tried to take her fingerprints, but the journalist refused.

21 April Uladzislau Staraverau, an independent journalist, was detained in Vitsebsk, not far away from a detainment center where local civil activists Siarhei and Vital Kavalenka served their week terms of arrest. The police confiscated a video cassette with recordings, and told the journalist they would “study its contents.”

21 April the jury of the Free Word annual journalistic competition, organized by BAJ. The winners of 2009 contest are Chryscina Marchuk ('Debut'), Sviatlana Stankievich ('The best information article'), Anzhela Belush ('The best artistic journalism article'), Kastus Lashkievich ('The best analytical article') and Yauhen Valoshyn ('The best journalistic investigation'). The winners received their awards 3 May, during a ceremony traditionally held on the World Press Freedom Day.

22 April BAJ web site (baj.by) published a letter of Homiel Public Prosecutor's Office, which was the answer to an appeal of BAJ concerning searches and interrogations of journalists. The Belarusian Association of Journalists protested against investigative

actions in relation to journalists. Still, the Prosecutor's Office stated it found no violations of law in such actions of law enforcements officers.

23 April Yuras Karmanau, a member of BAJ Board and a reporter of Associated Press, received a phone call from an unknown person who told the journalist he was a KGB (State Security Committee) officer and asked him for a meeting concerning the reporter's recent mission to Kyrgyzstan. Mr. Karmanau refused to have such meetings without an official notice. Yuras Karmanau was on a mission in Bishkek from 8 till 19 April 2010 on instructions of Moscow Bureau of AP, and he covered the events there.

23 April it became public that the Prosecutor's Office of Leninski District of Minsk refused to file a suit on an appeal of Natallia Radzina, a member of BAJ and a journalist of Charter'97 web site. The journalist appealed against police officers who hit her on her face while they were entering a premises to conduct a search 16 March 2010. The letter from the Prosecutor's Office states refusal is grounded "by the absence of a publicly dangerous action that provided for in the criminal code."

23 April Iryna Damaratskaya, a journalist of Hantsavitski Chas newspaper, was unable to receive information about the number of candidates for members of a local council and about the amount of funds spent on their campaigns. Aliaksandr Simaha, a chairman of the District Electoral Commission, and Natallia Maliauka, a member of the DEC, both refused to provide the journalist with that information.

25 April the chairperson of the electoral commission at Polling Station 75 in Minsk together with other members of the commission did not let Valery Ruselik, a journalist of *European Radio for Belarus*, conduct photo and video shooting at the polling station. When the journalist mentioned that was not prohibited by law, the chairperson of the commission called the police.

25 April Vadzim Aleksandrovich, a journalist of *Belorusy I Rynok* newspaper, was detained at Polling Station 19 of the Electoral Constituency No. 30 in Minsk. The reporter was filming the process of counting of votes, and members of the electoral commission did not like it. The police took the journalist to a police station, where he was asked for explanations. No protocols were compiled. The journalist was detained for almost three hours, and then was set free.

25 April Aliaksandr Muzhdabaeu, a member of BAJ and a journalist of *Ximik.info* web site from Navapolatsk, was not allowed to film inside of a polling station. Police officers also did not let the journalist conduct a vox-pop in front of a polling station. The chairman of Navapolatsk Regional Electoral Commission Piotr Gusarov told the journalist "there is enough press covering the elections already" and "all the information can be found in official media."