

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Fortnight in Belarus

August 15 – 28, 2011

*Termination of criminal proceedings in relation to Natallia Radzina, a BAJ member and the “Charter’97” Web-site Editor was the most significant event within the period under consideration. The journalist’s parents received a corresponding notification from the Preliminary Investigation Division of City Department of Internal Affairs at Minsk City Executive Committee in Kobryn (Brest region). N. Radzina treated skeptically the news and stated that she wasn’t going to come back to Belarus. (It is worth mentioning she has applied for asylum in Lithuania.)*

*In the meanwhile, there appeared follow-ups of incidents with detention of journalists, who covered ‘silent’ protest actions in June-July 2011. A lot of colleagues appealed to the public prosecution bodies and courts against illegal actions of police officers at the time of these detentions. The complaints helped to reach positive results in a number of cases. In particular, there were appointed additional checks and issued instructions to call the guilty to account.*

*Still, the journalists’ working conditions have generally remained the same. There were registered several new cases of detentions of media representatives, one refusal to accredit a foreign correspondent, and one ban to enter the country within the period under review.*

On **August 16, 2011**, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused once again to accredit Vitaut Parfionienka, “Radio Racyja” correspondent from Hrodna in the country. It was the journalist’s third attempt to get credentials from the governmental authority. The ministerial officials explain their decision by item 10 of “Regulations on the Procedure of Accrediting Foreign Media Journalists in Belarus”. Accordingly, it is impossible to accredit the “Radio Racyja” reporter, since he worked for the media outlet without the official credentials from the Ministry in the past.

V. Parfionienka advised the journalist in a phone talk to abstain from publishing articles within a year’s course in order to be able to receive the accreditation next time.

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As reported on **August 18, 2011**, Pavel Seviarynets, Co-Head of Organizing Committee on Belarusian Christian Democracy political party foundation will serve three years of his term of detention in the “Bordo” farm enterprise in the village of Kuplina, Pruzhany district, Brest region. The penitentiary authorities didn’t find any proper vacancy for the writer and journalist in Pruzhany district.

Also, P. Seviarynets noted he had submitted a request to the colony chief to get a permission to attend divine services in the nearest church in Pruzhany on Sundays. However, he didn’t receive any official reply.

It is worth mentioning that Pavel Seviarynets used to be the Head for V. Rymasheuski’s election headquarters during the Presidential election 2010. He was sentenced to three years of restriction of liberty for arrangement / preparation of actions that violated severely the public order and / or active participation in such actions (article 342, part 1

of Belarusian Criminal Code) by Zavodski City District Court of Minsk on May 16, 2011. Consequently, he was sent to a corrective labor colony.

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As reported on **August 19, 2011**, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Chyhunachny City District of Homiel will conduct an additional check, following a complaint from Alena Germanovich, BelaPAN correspondent, detained by police during the so-called 'silent protest' action on July 3, 2011. Previously, the public prosecution officials had informed the journalist that the Head of Chyhunachny City District Department of Interior Alaksandr Koshman had acted legally at the moment of her detention. A. Giermanovich received a corresponding note on August 13, 2011. Surprisingly, the reporter received another notification from the Public Prosecutor for Chyhunachny City District of Homiel five days later. He informed the claimant that the Public Prosecutor's office resumed a check against the police officer.

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The Road Police stopped repeatedly a mini-bus with journalists and HR activists on their way to a trial over a former political prisoner Yury Ling in Smarhon, Hrodna region, on **August 19, 2011**.

Firstly, the road police stopped the car with journalists, as it seemed to them that one passenger wasn't fastened with a seatbelt. Then, the car was stopped again "for examination of documents" and again for the check of side-curtains. Another inspection of documents took place at the entrance to Smarhon. In order to be in time for the trial session, the journalists were made to go further on foot. Finally, the police officers from Smarhon District Department of Internal Affairs didn't permit the journalists and HR activists to enter the premises of Smarhon District Court without explanation of reasons.

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On **August 20, 2011**, the Belarusian Public Prosecutor-General's Office officially confirmed the illegality of detentions of "European Radio for Belarus" reporters by the plain-clothes police officers during the so-called 'silent protest' civil actions in June – July 2011. The Prosecutor-General's Office concluded that the journalists' rights had been violated as a result of their detentions.

The ERB representative showed a confidential document with surnames of five police officers, who detained journalists and prevented them from implementing their professional duties. The Prosecutor General asked the Minister of Internal Affairs A. Kulashou "to consider the issue of making disciplinary liable" the police representatives, "whose unprofessional actions led to blatant violations of legal rights and interests of foreign media representatives and justified complaints, filed by the management of several media outlets to the Prosecutor-General's Office".

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Lida District Court terminated an administrative case against a "Belsat" reporter Siarhei Karpienka on **August 22, 2011**. The journalist had been detained during a 'silent protest' action on June 22, 2011. However, the court didn't find any corpus delicti in his actions. It is worth mentioning that the police had composed two reports in relation to S. Karpienka, accusing him of disorderly conduct and disobedience to police. The journalist managed to find a video record of his detention and showed it in court. The video record proved that S. Karpienka hadn't offered any resistance to the police officers before they put the handcuffs on him.

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HR defenders and civil activists arranged an informatory street action in support of the detained human rights activist Ales Bialatski in different Belarusian cities and towns on **August 23, 2011**. The action participants distributed leaflets with information about their colleague's activity and called upon the people to stand bail for him. Several journalists and BAJ members were detained during the solidarity actions in Minsk - Alena Laptionak, Aleh Matskievich (HR activists) and Viktoryja Ravinskaya (ex-press.by), in Mahilou – Yauhien Hlushakou and Alina Skarabunova, as well as in Hrodna – Viktor Sazonau.

The Minsk journalists and BAJ members were released from the Central City District Police Department on interrogations and fingerprint analyses approximately in three hours after their detention.

The Mahilou journalists were detained on leaving the place of action. They were kept in Leninski City District Police Station for three hours and released on providing 'explanations' without any reports.

Viktor Sazonau was detained in the city center of Hrodna, while distributing leaflets about Ales Bialatski together with other HR activists. He was kept in the Central police department till the evening. While V. Sazonau was in custody, there were conducted searches in his private apartment and in his office. Several books and newspapers were seized from V. Sazonau's apartment. PCs, leaflets and newspapers with articles about A. Bialatski's detention were seized from the office.

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The criminal proceedings in relation to Natallia Radzina, a BAJ member and the "Charter'97" Web-site Editor were terminated on **August 23, 2011**. The journalist's parents, residing in Kobryn (Brest region), received a corresponding notification, signed by D. Dyshchanka, from the Preliminary Investigation Division of City Department of Internal Affairs at Minsk City Executive Committee

***N. Radzina treated skeptically the news and stated that she wasn't going to come back to Belarus, since new criminal proceedings might be started in relation to her.***

It is worth mentioning N. Radzina made use of the received notice to appear at the KGB investigator's office in Minsk to flee Belarus at the end of March 2011. She came to Moscow on April 1, 2011 and managed to receive new documents through the UN High Commissioner's Department on Refugees in Russia. The Netherlands backed the journalist internationally and she left for Amsterdam on July 28, 2011. However, she went to Vilnius from there a couple of days later. Reportedly, N. Radzina asked for political asylum in Lithuania on August 4, 2011.

N. Radzina was charged with taking part in "mass riots" in Minsk on December 19, 2010. She was kept behind the bars in the KGB Investigative Isolation Ward since December 20, 2010 till January 28, 2011 and released from custody on signing her cognizance not to leave the place of her permanent residence in Kobryn (Brest region).

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As reported on **August 23, 2011**, Mahilou Regional Court cancelled a court verdict, returned by the judge of Babruysk City and District Court in relation to Viktor Masalovich, a "Bobruyskiy Kuryer" journalist. Having considered V. Masalovich's appeal against the initial court decision, pronounced by the district judge Natallia Charapukha, the regional justice admitted that the verdict "couldn't be found legal and relevant."

Consequently, it had to be cancelled and returned to the court of first instance for a new judicial review.

It is worth mentioning that Viktor Masalovich was detained by police in the central square of Babruysk on July 6, 2011. Despite having an editorial assignment, he was taken to the police station and preliminary charged with breaking the law on participation in mass actions. Consequently, he was found guilty by the first instance court and fined 5 base amounts (approx. EUR 15).

A similar verdict was returned by the primary instance court in relation to another "Bobruyskiy Kuryer" journalist Viktor Kachan. The latter appealed against the unfair verdict to Mahilou Regional Court too. Presently, he is waiting for consideration of his complaint.

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A group of Lithuanian journalists wasn't allowed to enter Belarus by Belarusian border authorities on **August 24, 2011**. A correspondent of LTV channel Ruta Lankininkaitė was told that she was a persona non-grata in the country and that her visa was cancelled. The journalist was advised to clear out the reasons for the ban in Minsk.

The Lithuanian reporters were going to Hrodna to film a story about the economic crisis in Belarus. It should be mentioned that Ms. Lankininkaitė had worked in Belarus for 6 years before that.

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A correspondent Kastus Shytal (westki.info Web-site, Hlybokaye, Vitsiebsk region) was detained by the plainclothes secret agents, while taking photos of Hlybokaye District Executive Committee on **August 26, 2011**. Some unknown culprits had stained the premises shortly before that.

The journalist was taken to the town police department and asked to establish his alibi for the moment, when the façade was thought to be stained. Moreover, his fingerprints were taken for further analysis. The reporter was kept in custody for nearly 2.5 hours. He was forced to delete all photos with the local Executive Committee from his camera.

*Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service*