

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting November 26 – December 12, 2012

A new expertize has been appointed within the criminal case against the Hrodna-based journalist, BAJ member Andrei Poczobut – he was informed about it on November 29 by employees of the Investigative Committee in Hrodna region. He was told that the investigation suspends during the expertize, but he stays in the status of the accused.

The correspondent of the Polish newspaper “*Gazeta Wyborcza*” is accused of violating art. 367, part 2 of the Criminal Code “Defaming the President of Belarus”. The case was started by the Investigative Committee in Hrodna region in June 2012 upon several online publications by Poczobut. Under the Criminal Code, the journalist can be punished by five-year imprisonment or freedom restriction.

Poczobut had already been convicted under art. 367, part 1 on July 5, 2011: he got three years sentence with two years deferral. If he is found guilty, the prison terms will be summed up and the sentence will be enforced immediately.

On November 26 human rights defenders of “*Viasna*” – human rights center closed down by the authorities – moved out from the flat that they had occupied for 12 years. The flat belonged to Ales Bialiatski and was confiscated according to the court ruling. *We remind that on November 24, 2011 Ales Bialiatski was sentenced to four and a half years prison term with property confiscation on charges of large-scale tax evasion. The financial means on the bank accounts, which were the grounds for the investigation, were aimed for the human rights center “Viasna”. The human rights center for the time of its existence has rendered aid to thousands of citizens who were victims of political pressure. “Viasna” conducts conferences, seminars, trainings, organized raising aid to political prisoners etc. Although the human rights center lost its premises, it will continue human rights activities.*

On November 27 the head of the department of telecommunications of the Ministry of Communication and Informatization Pavel Petrulevich announced that Internet users will be again allowed into Internet cafes without passports. According to the official representative, owners of web cafes have an option to use alternative means of personal identification, i.e. photo and video registration and other technical means, including SMS. In the meantime, the owner or an authorized person are obliged to register and store personal data of users, as well as time of the services rendered. The data have to be stored for one year. The appropriate regulation is due to be adopted by the end of 2012.

On November 27 Aliaksandr Lukashenka, hearing the report of the head of the National TV and Radio Company Henadz Davydzka, told that the state support of Belarusian channels in 2013 might decrease. “... 25 – 30% cuts and increase of efficiency – this is my firm demand,” declared Lukashenka when discussing optimization of the NSTVRC work.

We remind that the law on state budget in 2013 allocated 514 674 681 300 rubles, out of them 450 billion rubles – for the NSTVRC. According to the current currency balance, it is 53 million dollars. And this is 10 million USD more than was allocated to the company in 2012.

On November 30 BAJ received an answer from the Department of Financial Investigations in Minsk and Minsk region in response to BAJ’s petition to unblock the account of Arche. The answer, signed by the deputy head of the department A. Lahunou, says that the account will stay blocked until the editorial office submits all the necessary documents, requested for by the

department. Since not all the papers have been submitted yet, there are no grounds for the department to recall the decision to block the account.

The editorial office of *Arche* claim that they have submitted all the requested documents to the DFI. “We did everything they demanded for. I personally received the letter to submit such materials, I brought the bags with the documents, I submitted them with a signature, and they did not have any claims to us,” says the present editor of the office **Ales Pashkevich**.

On November 3 it became known that the professional **lyceum in Hlybokaye** demanded from the **non-state newspaper “Volnaye Hlybokaye” to refute information** that was shown on Russian TV. **On November 22** the newspaper published an article which said the following: “The **Russian TV channel NTV** showed an episode how students of the professional lyceum were made to rescue flax harvest from under the snow; however the episode was not shown in Belarus because of censorship.” The episode was really prepared by the journalist of NTV Alexey Prokin and was shown in Russia **on October 30**. Many Belarusian mass media wrote about it.

The administration of the lyceum insists that they had not sent their students to emergent harvesting of flax from the snow, and demand to refute the information publicly. It is interesting that the lyceum did not put forward any claims to the initial source of the news item – the Russian channel NTV.

On November 29 the editor of the website **orsha.eu Ihar Kazmerchak got back computers and flash-cards, confiscated** by the **Investigative Committee of Orsha** during searches on **July 17**. However, according to the editor, the equipment doesn’t work after the check-up and needs repairing.

As it was reported earlier, the reason for the pressure on the independent city website was alleged link to a porn website, posted on orsha.eu.

The expertise, the results of which stay unknown to the editor, confirmed that the Orsha editorial office of the website has no relation to distribution of pornographic content. As a result, the equipment was returned to the owner.

Still, independent observers linked the pressure on the independent web resource to the **electoral campaign**: the website, unlike state media, informed about activities of the opposition candidates to **Parliament**.

On **November 30** it became known that providing statistical data on subscription campaign is a paid-for service. Periodic editions that would like to have operative data must pay a definite sum to **Belposhta**. Earlier such information about the number of subscribers was given to periodic editions for free; now it costs 86 400 rubles (around 10\$). This information was a complete surprise for editorial offices of Brest newspapers that wanted to know the number of their subscribers. As it turned out later, Belposhta offices received a new regulation for 2013 with the new point that “the publisher must pay for providing operative and final information” about the subscription campaign.