

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting May 28 – June 3, 2012

On May 29 Homel region prosecutor's office issued a warning to BAJ member Larysa Shchyrakova for "contributing to the producer company N.E.W.S. Informacja (Poland)". The prosecutor's office thinks that the company is a foreign mass medium, and in order to have relations with it, one needs to have accreditation from the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The warning was signed by the prosecutor's deputy, senior justice counselor Henadz Ramaniuk.

The pretext for the sanction were two complaints from two citizens in relation to a video report of a meeting of Yakimava Slabada village dwellers, in Svetlahorsk region, who protest against the construction of a cellulose factory near the village. The journalist was invited to the meeting by its initiative group. She posted the video materials on youtube.com. Later the materials were distributed on other websites.

In the meanwhile the prosecutor's office received two complains from citizens Uladzimir Akhremkin and Zinaida Khmarun. The man wrote: "After the video report was shown on the TV-channel "Belsat", I've found out that Shchyrakova L. was a correspondent for opposition mass media." She "in a deceptive way took an interview from the residents of the village who thought she was representing an official mass medium and wanted to cover the problem of the factory construction, to break it through to the President of the Republic of Belarus, but in fact made use of our problems and shot a video favorable for opposition." Another complaint was of a similar character.

As reported on May 29, the situation of distribution of non-state newspapers of social and political topics through the state networks of distribution "Belposhta" and "Soyuzdruk" has not improved. As earlier, 13 newspapers and one magazine have problems reaching readers on subscription or through newspaper shops: "Bobruyski Courier", "Borisovskiye Novosti", "Vitesbki Courier", "VOlnaye Hlybokaye", "Hazeta Slonimskaya", "Hantsavitiski Chas", "Intexpress", "Novy Chas", "Niasvizhski Chas", "Otdushina", "Regiyanalnaya Hazeta", "SNplus. Svobodnye Novosti Plus", "Tovarishch", and magazine ARCHE.

The regional newspaper "Bobruyski Courier" and the republican "Tovarishch" stopped publishing paper versions because of financial difficulties: they continue updating online-versions, however they still have the state registration.

We remind that since 2006 a number of non-state newspapers have stopped their publishing because of economic reasons, including termination of contracts with "Belposhta" and "Soyuzdruk": "BDG. Delovaya Gazeta", "Birzha Informacii" (Hrodna), "Liakhavitski Chas" (Liakhavichy), "Mestnaya Gazeta" (Vaukavysk), "Salidarnasts", "Khimik" (Navapolatsk), "Miastsovy Chas" (Pinsk), "Vitebski Courier-M" (Vitsebsk), "Gazeta Dlia Vas" (Ivatsevichy).

On May 29 the famous Belarusian blogger Yauhen Lipkovich expressed his intention to sue in court the ideologist of the Ministry of Defense Uladzimir Makarau for insulting his honor and dignity. The blogger became indignant at the article in the state-run newspaper "Belorusskaya

Voyennaya Gazeta” dated 18.05.2012 and titled “Lipkovich: a clinical case of pyromania, or?..” Lipkovich is also going to sue the newspaper in the prosecutor’s office.

On May 31 journalists Siarhey Balay (“Salidarnasts”), Ina Studzinskaya (Radio Svaboda), and TV journalists Alina Radachynskaya and Ales’ Barazhenka were detained in Svetlahorsk district. They were going back from the coverage a local people’s assembly that protest against the construction of the cellulose factory in the village of Yakimava Slabada. Also Siarhey Vazniak, member of the Board of BAJ, Aliaksandr Ulitsionak, member of BAJ, and Hanna Kurylovich and Mikhail Pashkevich, activists of the campaign “Tell the truth!” were detained.

The car with the activists and journalists was stopped at the entrance to the village. The road police claimed that the car driver violated traffic rules. They were taken to Svetlahorsk district police department to give explanations and stayed there two hours.

Siarhey Balay was made to give away his photo flash-card. So to say, his photos will be used as evidence against the participants of the unsanctioned event in the village. Siarhey Vazniak was made to do alco-test.

On May 31 the civil initiative “Homel Democratic Forum” in Homel was denied a rent room to hold a master-class “Communication of NGOs and the press: common interests and points”. The rent was arranged with the administration of the hotel “Sozh” a week before the event. But on the morning of May 31 the administration announced that the event would not take place because the hotel had an urgent instruction to start repairs in the conference-hall.

Representatives of NGOs and the media, bloggers and media activists were invited to the event. “It is the third time we get such refusals, and at the last moment. All such cases are connected with events aimed at developing the local public sector, local independent organizations and initiatives. It looks as if there are forces in the region not interested in developing the civil society,” said the founder of HDF Piotr Kuzniatsou.

On June 1 journalists Tatsiana Belashova and Volha Chaychyts were detained in Minsk, in Horky park, during the celebration of the International day of protection of children. The journalists were taken to the Partyzanski district police department where they had to give written explanations. They gave explanations to an inspector on the under-aged Andrey Dyanovich. Then KGB representatives appeared for a talk. At 3.30 pm Volha Chaychyts was reported to be released: she refused to talk with the KGB representatives as they did not introduce themselves. Tatsiana Belashova was set free a little later.

*We remind that at the end of March BAJ member Volha Chaychyts received a prosecutor’s warning against violating the law on mass media for collaborating with the satellite TV channel “Belsat” without official accreditation.*

On June 1 the police in Hrodna detained the journalists and BAJ members Yan Roman, Andrzej Poczobut, Yulia Kaliada, Grazhyna Shalkevich. They were going to cover the picket of the unregistered “Union of Poles in Belarus” against introducing Russian-language classes in the Polish-language school No36.

Yan Roman was detained as soon as he left his house. He was taken to the Lenin district police department and then to the criminal police department. In order not to waste time, the

journalist was offered to read the anniversary edition of the book “History of the criminal police”.

Andrzej Poczobut was summoned to the police in the morning, before the action started, as a possible participant. He was warned against violating the law, detained for three hours and set free at 1.30 pm.

The correspondent for “Glos z-nad Niomna” Grazhyna Shalkevich was detained together with the participants of the picket; a protocol of administrative violation was made up against her for participating in the unsanctioned mass event. Then she was set free. Yulia Kaliada was detained near the regional executive committee at the place where the picket was arranged. She was taken to the Lenin district police department, her documents were verified and a protocol of administrative violation was made up. The police was also on duty for several hours near the houses of the journalists Andrey Fralou and Ales Dzianisau.

On June 1 the photo correspondent of BelaPAN and the editor of the website “Narodnyia Naviny Vitsebska” Siarhey Serabro was denied accreditation to meet the participants of the strike at the factory of the concrete panel construction “DSK”.

The journalist was stopped at the control post; the deputy head on industrial production Mikalay Machykha was sent for. He talked with the journalist for a while, but didn’t allow him to see the workers on strike to discuss the condition of work and whether they were satisfied with the results of spontaneous strike.

The workers went on strike because their salary in April wasn’t paid in time.

On June 2 the coordinator of the campaign “European Belarus” and BAJ member Dzmitry Bandarenka was taken off the train “Vilnius – Minsk” on the border when he was going back from treatment in a Lithuanian sanatorium. After a personal search he was set free.