

# MASS MEDIA

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# IN BELARUS

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THE BELARUSIAN  
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*The Ministry has to do everything possible, in order to ensure the information security in the current age of Internet and quick dissemination of information.*

***Vasil Zharko, Deputy Prime-Minister's of Belarus  
address to the newly appointed  
Minister of Information***

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*We condemn this new wave of trials, which has the sole aim of intimidating journalists and forcing them to submit to government pressure, we urge the Belarusian government to end the systematic judicial harassment of independent journalists.*

***Johann Bihl, the head of RSF's Eastern Europe  
and Central Asia desk***



## Situation in Mass Media Field in August–October 2017 (review)

The approaching Eastern partnership summit in Brussels, scheduled for November 24, 2017, didn't exert any influence on the situation with mass media in Belarus, despite the fact that the Belarusian president was invited for the first time to take part in the event. Moreover, the harassment against freelance journalists for their cooperation with foreign mass media increased within the period under review. The number of fines, which were imposed on journalists for the alleged 'violation of procedures on production and/or distribution of mass media products' totaled 50 since the year start that exceeded the total number of fines in 2014-2016.

Three Belarusian columnists were arrested in December 2016. They had published their materials on the Russian Web-sites and got accused of incitement of ethnic hatred (the so-called 'Regnum' writers' case). The case was sent to court at the end of October 2017.



A new Minister of Information of Belarus, Aliaksandr Karliukevich was appointed to the post of the Minister of Information of Belarus in October 2017. He replaced **Liliya Ananich**, who had worked at the Ministry of Information on different positions since the moment, when the state regulatory body was created in the media field. The newly appointed Minister used to be Deputy Minister of Information and the head of the state-owned 'Zviazda' publishing house in the past. Following his appointment to the post, the new Minister of Information announced the preparation of a new version of 'Mass Media law' that will reportedly affect the Internet and the social media, first of all.



# Main Events in Mass Media Field in August–October 2017

## The increased harrassment against freelance journalists for cooperation with foreign Mass Media

The persecution of journalists for cooperation with foreign media without accreditation was on the rise in July – October 2017. The courts penalized them 26 times on the alleged administrative charges within the period under review. In particular, a freelance journalist Kastus Zhukouski from Homiel was fined 7 times within the reporting period and 10 times since the beginning of the year.

All in all, the Belarusian journalists were fined 50 times in the period since the beginning of January till the end of October 2017. Thus, the overall sum of fines exceeded the total number of fines within the previous three years.



**The independent journalists are charged on the basis of police reports for the arbitrary violation of article 22.9, part 2 of Belarus Code on Administrative Offenses that envisages legal responsibility for the illegal production and/or distribution of mass media products. The article has been repeatedly applied in judicial practice since May 2014. Journalists were fined 48 times on its grounds till 2017. In all the cases, it wasn't the content of materials, but the mere fact of their appearance in the foreign media that was used as the ground for bringing the journalists to legal**



accountability. The journalists, contributing to **the 'Belsat' TV channel**, have been prosecuted in the majority of cases. It's worth mentioning that 'Belsat' is a constituent part of the Polish TV Company - Telewizja Polska S.A. However it is represented as an independent TV-channel in Belarus.

## The seizure of expensive technical equipment from 'Belsat' on court decision

On October 10, 2017, the Piershamayski City District Court in Minsk found a journalist Aliaksandr Barazenska guilty of violating the copyright on the trademark of 'Belsat TV' and confiscated all technical equipment that had been taken from the media worker at the moment of his arrest. **A.Barazenska was detained during a live broadcast from a civic protest action on March 25, 2017) and sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 27, 2017.** While the journalist was in custody, the unknown people glued self-made 'Belsat' stickers on his video equipment. Consequently, it was seized from him upon the court decision.

Moreover, the court took **a decision to confiscate the expensive technical equipment**, which was seized during the searches at the offices of 'Belsat' TV channel on March 31, 2017. The searches were conducted within the same case on copyright protection.

**The Belarusian Association of Journalists stated** that the court decision on the case was aimed at oppressing freedom of speech in the country and looked like a part of the well-planned harassment campaign in relation to the journalists, cooperating with the TV channel.





The dispute over the 'Belsat TV' trademark lasts for almost five years. The 'BELSATplus' company owner from Belarus is convinced that the TV channel violates his business interests. Initially, the Supreme Court of Belarus rejected his claim for trademark protection. However, after the start of the persecution of journalists for their cooperation with foreign media without accreditation in 2014, the Presidium of the Supreme Court overturned the ruling and sent the case back for retrial. The newly appointed group of judges supported the claim and prohibited the Polish television, which includes the 'Belsat' television channel, to use the trademark "Belsat TV" when broadcasting on the territory of Belarus and on the Web-page.

## Criminal case against 'Regnum' correspondents brought to court

The Belarusian authors of 'Regnum' news agency (Russia) and a number of other Russian on-line news resources Dzmityr Alimkin, Yury Paulaviets, and Siarhei Shyptenka were charged with **inciting ethnic hatred** (article 130, part 3 of Belarus Criminal Code) in August 2017. The case was brought to court in October 2017.

**D. Alimkin, Y. Paulavets, and S. Shyptenka were detained in Belarus in December 2016. Since then, they have been kept in custody. They are threatened with up to 12 years of imprisonment for articles about the situation in Belarus, placed under pseudonyms on some Russian information resources.**

The Belarusian human rights organizations have appealed to the judicial authorities with **a request to ensure the open trial** on the case in accordance with the principles of fair trial as well as international standards in the field of freedom of speech and expression of opinions.



## A new Minister of information reported about preparations of amendments into the Mass Media law

A new Minister of Information of Belarus was appointed on September 28, 2017. **Aliaksandr Karliukevich** succeeded the previous Minister Liliya Ananich on the post. Unlike his predecessor, Aliaksandr Karliukevich has extensive experience in journalistic and editorial work.

Before joining the Ministry of Information on the position of Deputy Minister in 2016, he headed the state-owned 'Zviazda' publishing house.

The newly appointed Minister of Information Aliaksandr Karliukevich noted in his first public speech on his post during 'The Editors' Club' program on 'Belarus 1' TV channel that a **range of amendments are about to be introduced into the Belarus Mass Media law**. Reportedly, the amendments will affect the Internet and the social media, first of all.





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