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E-NEWSLETTER

MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

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SPECIAL ISSUE

Part 1

PERSECUTION OF MASS MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS IN 2021



The situation in Belarusian mass media field has critically aggravated since the time of Presidential election a year ago.

The media and journalists have faced the unprecedented wave of repression. Journalists were detained more than 500 times by the law enforcement agencies after the election day. More than 130 colleagues were sentenced to different terms of arrest on administrative charges. 68 colleagues faced violence or were injured.

More than 60 media representatives are under criminal prosecution. 29 of them are in custody (as of October 03, 2021) or in places of imprisonment.

Dozens of legal entities that enabled operation of mass media organizations have been liquidated or are in the process of liquidation.

The info production of mass media, Web-sites, and bloggers is roundly recognized as extremist with the prohibition of its distribution by other subjects in the media field.

More than 140 searches and inspections were conducted in the offices of the majority of independent national and regional media organizations as well as at the apartments of their officers. They were accompanied by the seizure of technical equipment, documents, and money.

The official authorities restricted access to more than 100 socio-political Web-sites and online media. The majority of national and regional newspapers were forced to suspend their production in the print format. However, they continued to operate online.

The supporting media organizations suffered from persecution, too. The authorities deprived more than 270 civil society organizations of their legal status, including the Belarusian Association of Journalists and the Belarusian PEN Center, led by Noble laureate Sviatlana Aleksievich. The representatives of Press Club Belarus were subjected to criminal prosecution. The organization was also liquidated.

The pressure on mass media and their employees continues and increases.



Persecution of journalists (January – September 2021)

The trend of restricting the journalists' rights and toughening the conditions of their work started after the presidential election in August 2020. It continued in the year of 2021. Repressions against independent media workers were massive and increased particularly since July 2021. As a result of this trend, quite a few journalists couldn't continue their work in Belarus. Consequently, they had to leave the country.

The directions of pressure on journalists were as follows:

- detentions and fines for professional activity;
- aggravation of legal conditions for journalists' work;
- mass searches and detentions in connection to criminal cases;
- criminal prosecution of journalists and other media workers;
- hindering the activity of Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) and other organizations that support journalists and mass media.



Detentions and fines in connection to professional activity

The work of independent journalists in Belarus was accompanied by detentions, seizure of professional equipment and information carriers as well as administrative prosecution.

101 cases of detention were registered by the Belarusian Association of Journalists since the beginning of 2021 till the end of September 2021. The duly accredited foreign journalists were among the detained media workers - Nicholas Connolly (Germany) and Luzia Tschirky (Switzerland).

→ *The journalists were most often fined on article 23.5 of Belarus Code of Administrative Offenses (previously known as article 22.9 of the Code) for the alleged cooperation with foreign mass media without accreditation. This kind of prosecution was registered in 32 cases. Thus, a journalist from Mahilou Alina Skrabunova was fined 10 times, Zmitsier Lupach from Hlybokaye was fined 7 times.*

17 times independent reporters were brought to responsibility for their work on the ground of article 24.23 of Belarus Code of Administrative Offenses for the alleged participation in the unauthorized mass events. Thus, the authorities equalized participation in mass events with their coverage by professional journalists. As a rule, the judges issued their rulings, solely grounding them on the testimony of law enforcement agents, whose names were changed and faces hidden.

Moreover, journalists were tried on the basis of articles of Belarus Code of Administrative Offenses: 24.3 (disobedience to a lawful order or demand of an official



in the exercise of his/her official powers), 19.1 (petty hooliganism) and 19.11 (distribution, production, storage, transportation of information products containing calls for extremist activities or promoting such activities).

In 23 cases, the journalists were punished with different terms of administrative arrest, which they served in harsh conditions in overcrowded cameras without sufficient sleeping places and hygienic items etc.

<https://baj.by/ru/analytics/represii-suprac-zhurnalistau-u-2021-godze>

<https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/srf-korrespondentin-in-belarus-luzia-tschirky-maskierte-maenner-zerrten-mich-in-minibus>

Aggravation of legal conditions for journalist work

The interference in the journalists' work by law enforcement agencies was accompanied by the tightening of legal regulation of mass media and journalists' activities.

On April 2, 2021, there was adopted a large package of amendments to the laws, which enshrined extraordinary measures for any kind of protest activities, as a rule, referred to as 'extremist activities.' In fact, these measures had already been taken without any legal grounds. The amendments to the Law 'On Mass Media' and 'On Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus' aggravated the conditions of journalistic activities most of all.



In particular, there was imposed a ban on the publication of the results of unofficial opinion polls concerning the socio-political situation, referendums and elections. Also, there was introduced a ban on coverage of public events until they were authorized by the authorities. In practice, this means the impossibility of broadcasting live from unauthorized public events and conducting street polls on political topics.

Moreover, the amendments made illegal the collection of information by journalists 'in the interests of the third party, including a legal entity, that doesn't have the status of the editorial office of some media outlet.

Thus, journalists have been deprived of the right to combine work in several media if he or she is an employee of one of them.

→ *For the first time, there were introduced grounds to the law "On Mass Media" for depriving a journalist of accreditation, such as violation of the accreditation procedure, dissemination of information that does not correspond to reality, and committing any illegal actions.*

<https://isans.org/columns/popravki-v-belaruskih-zakonah-o-smi.html?fbclid=IwAR1RulJeFxr1ee0L0qz15QaWvrS0i2YZt1VwliSxmsrq7Ggn95B57yFmXBo>

Mass searches and detentions

Since July 8, 2021, the Belarusian authorities began to carry out coordinated mass repressions against independent journalists and media. In fact, they were aimed at destroying the independent media sector.



Photo by Associated Press

This activity took place within the framework of the so-called special operation to identify the participants in “destructive chats”.

Kanstantsin Bychek, Deputy Head of the Investigative Department of the KGB of Belarus commented on the activity as follows:

“A large-scale operation is being held at the present moment of time to clean up the radically minded people. Urgent investigative actions and other procedural activities are being carried out, including searches and detentions. The involvement of each participant in the implementation of criminal acts will be verified.”

https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/pravookhraniteli_belarusi_poluchili_dostup_k_informatsii_pozvolayushchey_raskryt_prestupleniya_sove/

71 searches were conducted at journalists’ apartments and editorial offices of independent mass media by the police and KGB representatives all over the country on July 8-9, 2021.

In most cases, they were grounded upon the need of investigation of criminal cases, in particular, on article 289 (act of terrorism) and article 342 (organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them). Professional equipment, information carriers, and communication devices were seized during the searches. At least 14 journalists were detained and interrogated. Yahor

Martsinovich, the 'Nasha Niva' online publication's Editor-in-chief was beaten cruelly and injured in the head.



Photo by Getty Images

The second mass attack on independent mass media took place on July 16, 2021. Searches and detentions took place in the Belsat TV studio and the office of Radio Liberty in Minsk as well as at private apartments of at least 26 independent journalists. Five journalists were detained for the term of up to ten days. A journalist of Radio Liberty Inessa Studzinskaya was on a hunger strike throughout the period of her detention.

<https://baj.by/be/content/za-poslednie-dni-obyski-proshli-v-redakciyah-i-u-zhurnalistov-bolee-desyati-media>

<https://baj.by/ru/content/snova-massovaya-ataka-silovikov-na-zhurnalistov-po-vsey-strane>

<https://baj.by/ru/content/na-svobodu-vyshli-zhurnalisty-radyyo-svaboda-i-belsata>



Criminal prosecution

The unprecedented scale of criminal prosecution was among the most serious challenges faced by independent journalists in Belarus.

The criminalization of independent media workers' activity included bringing them to legal responsibility for the coverage of events in the country as well as for the alleged commission of economic crimes. As of October 3, 2021, 29 journalists and other media workers were kept in custody in connection to their criminal prosecution.

→ *Since the beginning of 2021, 4 journalists have been convicted on criminal charges.*

A journalist of TUT.by Web-portal Katsiaryna Barysevich was sentenced to six months in jail on March 2, 2021. She was put on trial together with the doctor Artsiom Sarokin, who was fined and sentenced to the suspended term of two years in jail. Both of them were tried for the alleged disclosure of medical secrets that entailed grave consequences (article 178, part 3 of the Criminal Code).

The journalist published information about the death of a peaceful protestor Raman Bandarenka, who was beaten cruelly by people in masks and delivered to a police department in the unmarked van. The person died in hospital afterwards. The publication contradicted to the official version of his death. Katsiaryna Barysevich was released from jail on May 18, 2021.

<https://baj.by/be/content/mingorsud-ostavil-v-sile-prigovor-zhurnalistke-katerine-borisevich>

<https://baj.by/be/content/katerina-borisevich-vyshla-iz-kolonii-foto-video>



On February 18, 2021, two journalists of Belsat TV channel Katsiaryna Andreyeva and Darya Chultsova were sentenced to two years of imprisonment for the alleged 'arrangement of actions that grossly violated public order' (article 342, part 1 of Belarus

Criminal Code). The journalists were prosecuted for live broadcasting of brutal dispersal of peaceful demonstrators who came to pay tribute to the memory of Raman Bandarenka at the place of his death in the courtyard of a residential building on November 15, 2020. The female journalists are serving their sentences in the women's colony in Homiel.

<https://baj.by/ru/content/sud-vynes-prigovor-zhurnalistkam-belsata-devushkam-dali-po-dva-goda-kolonii-za-strim>

On August 2, 2021, Ivanava District Court in Brest region sentenced Siarhei Hardziyevich, a correspondent of www.1reg.by news Web-site from the town of Drahichyn to 18 months of imprisonment.

The journalist was charged under three articles of the Criminal Code: article 368 (insult to the President of the Republic of Belarus), article 188 (defamation), and article 369 (insult to a government official) for the allegedly published messages in a local chat on Viber.

The court ordered Hardziyevich to pay 2,000 rubles (about 800 US dollars) to each of the two police officers who considered

themselves insulted as compensation for moral damage. The journalist was taken into custody in the courtroom following the announcement of the verdict. He had spent more than 4 months under house arrest before the sitting of the court.

https://1reg.by/2021/07/19/bt-ne-dozhdalos-prigovor-drogichinskomu-zhurnalistu-gordievichu-ozvuchat-v-drugoy-raz/?fbclid=IwAR0HKD5pi6h1dansrva9YjOpGOKVMmYS09dC_3ZRZOhalibdbxsEesdJyIA



A blogger and the 'Radio Liberty' consultant Ihar Losik has been on trial since June 24, 2021. He was arrested more than a year ago.

The media worker is charged under two articles of the Criminal Code: article 293 (participation in mass disorders) and article 342 (arrangement and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order or active participation in them).

<https://baj.by/be/analytics/kto-takoy-igor-losik-kotorogozaderzhali-i-chno-za-telegram-kanal-vedet-obyasnyam>

<https://euroradio.fm/ru/v-gomele-nachnyotsya-sud-nad-tihanovskim-losikom-statkevichem>



On December 22, 2020, the Financial Investigation Department officers arrested a number of Press Club Belarus employees: Yulia Slutskaya, the Press Club Belarus founder and Board member of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Alla Sharko, the Press Club Belarus Program Director, Siarhei Alsheuski the Financial Director, Pyotr Slutsky, a videographer (son of Yulia Slutskaya), Siarhei Yakupau, the Director of Press Club Academy, as well as former employees of the Belarusian State TV and Radio Company Kseniya Lutskina and Dzianis Sakalouski.

It is known that the Press Club Academy arranged a hackathon of media projects, aimed at promotion of freedom of speech and that the Kseniya Lutskina's project was among the winners.

On December 31, 2020, the detainees were charged with committing a crime under article 243, part 2 of the Criminal Code (large-scale tax evasion). A Russian citizen Siarhei Yakupau was deported to Russia on the same day. Yulia Slutskaya and her colleagues spent eight months in Pre-trial Detention Center No. 1 in Minsk in extremely hard conditions.

All the accused people on the Press Club case were released after signing a petition for clemency in August 2021 with the exception of Kseniya Lutskina, who refused to sign the plea. The Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Belarus announced the termination of proceedings. Kseniya Lutskina, suffering from a growing tumor in the brain, remained in custody. A new criminal case was filed against her. (The essence of new charges remain unknown due to the fact that her lawyer had to sign a non-disclosure note).

<https://prokuratura.gov.by/ru/media/novosti/nadzor-za-resheniyami-po-ugolovnym-i-grazhdanskim-delam/generalnaya-prokuratura-prekrashcheno-proizvodstvo-po-ugolovnomu-delu-v-otnoshenii-sotrudnikov-kpu-zh/>

<https://baj.by/ru/content/sotrudniki-press-kluba-belarus-osvobozhdeny-iz-sizo>

<https://www.svaboda.org/a/31419958.html>

<https://www.svaboda.org/a/31466692.html>

A media manager and founder of www.journalby.com on-line periodical edition Andrei Aliaksandrau as well as his partner Iryna Zlobina have been held in custody since January 12, 2021.



Consequently, both of them were charged with “funding the persons involved in riots and other protests” under article 342 of the Criminal Code (arrangement and preparation of events that grossly violate public order or active participation in them).

Shortly before the expiration of the maximum possible pre-trial detention term, Aliaksandr was

charged with high treason (article 356 of the Criminal Code). He can face up to 15 years in prison on these charges.

Following the arrest of Aliaksandrau’s former colleagues at the BelaPAN News Agency, he was also recognized as a suspect under article 243 of the Criminal Code (tax and dues evasion) on August 31, 2021.

<https://baj.by/ru/analytics/mesyac-za-reshetkoy-cho-izvestno-po-delu-andreya-aleksandrova>

<https://baj.by/be/content/zhurnalistu-andreyu-aleksandrovu-predyavleno-obvinenie-v-izmene-gosudarstvu>

<https://baj.by/be/content/mediamenedzhera-andreya-aleksandrova-sdelali-podozrevaemym-i-v-uklonenii-ot-uplaty-nalogov>



Dzianis Ivashyn, an investigative journalist was arrested on March 12, 2021 in Hrodna as a suspect in a criminal case under article 365 of the Criminal Code (interference in the activities of the internal affairs officer), which provides for a maximum sentence of three years in jail. D. Ivashyn worked for 'Novy Chas' newspaper at that time. He was also the author and editor of Belarusian service of InformNapalm Web-site.

His last article in 'Novy Chas' was about former employees of the 'Berkut' special forces (Ukraine), allegedly involved in violent actions against peaceful demonstrators in Kiev in 2014, who got a job in the Belarusian police. (The article was written with the use of data from open sources).

<https://novychas.by/hramadstva/dzjanisu-ivaszynu-prad-javili-dva-novyja-kryminaln>

A journalist of Polish origin Andrzej Poczobut from Hrodna, an employee of the Polish 'Gazeta Wyborcza' daily, as well as 'Nad Niemnem' newspaper is charged under article 130, part 3 of the Criminal Code (incitement to racial, ethnic, religious or other social hostility or hatred). He faces 5 to 12 years in jail.

The journalist was arrested alongside with several other members of the Union of Poles in Belarus on March 25, 2021. He suffered from COVID-19 in detention.

According to the official version, since 2018 they have held a series of illegal events with the participation of minors in Hrodna and other cities in the region "in honor of the participants of anti-Soviet bandit formations who acted during and after the Great Patriotic War, who committed robberies, murders of civilian population of Belarus, and destruction of property." It should be noted that these actions on the part of official authorities followed the dissemination

of anti-Polish propaganda on the state television. Poland was described as an aggressor, allegedly having territorial claims against the Republic of Belarus in the propagandist narrative.

<https://www.dw.com/ru/genprokuratura-belarusi-vozbudila-ugolovnoe-delo-protiv-glavy-spb-anzheliki-boris/a-56986015>



On May 18, 2021, the Belarusian authorities launched an unprecedented attack on the leading independent information resource TUT.by. The Financial Investigation Department of Belarus filed a criminal case against its employees under article 243, part 2 of the Criminal Code for the alleged tax evasion that caused large-scale damages.

13 representatives of TUT.by and related companies were taken to custody:



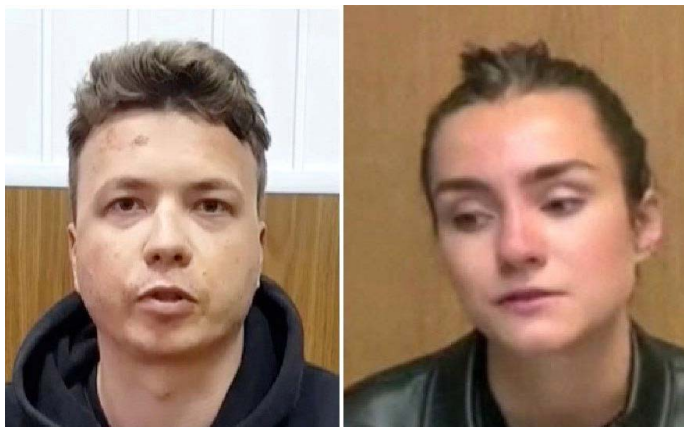
- Maryna Zolatava, Editor-in-chief;
- Ludmila Chekina, General Director;
- Anzhela Asa, Chief Accountant;
- Iryna Rybalka, Deputy Director;
- Ala Lapatka, Chief Engineer;
- Volha Loyka, Editor;
- Alena Talkachova, Journalist;
- Maryia Novik, Deputy Chief Accountant;
- Aliaksandr Daineka, General Director on Technical Issues;
- Andrei Audzieyeu, Manager;
- Siarhei Pavalishau, Director, Hoster.by (released from custody on September 1, but remains under investigation);
- Darya Danilava, General Director, RocketData;
Katsiaryna Tkachenka (house arrest);
- Iryna Kastiuchenka, a former lawyer (house arrest).

<https://baj.by/ru/content/v-tutby-prishyol-dfr-idut-obyski-sayt-tutby-zablokirovan-obnovlyaetsya>

<https://reform.by/254218-gendirektora-hoster-by-sergeja-povalisheva-vypustili-iz-sizo>

On May 23, 2021, a blogger Raman Pratasievich was arrested as a result of the forced landing of a passenger jet, flying from Athens to Vilnius, by Belarusian authorities. His girlfriend Safiya Sapiha, a citizen of Russia, was detained together with him. The alleged explosion threat was named as a pretext for landing the plane. The BelTA state news agency reported that Aliaksandr Lukashenka personally gave the order to land the plane in Minsk and approved the use of the MiG-29 fighter to facilitate the landing.

Raman Pratasievich used to be the Editor-in-chief of NEXTA Telegram Channel that played an important role for the citizens of Belarus during the Presidential election in 2020. At the time of his arrest, he was working



for another opposition Telegram channel, named 'Belarus of Head Brain', which had been previously edited by a blogger Ihar Losik.

Since 2019, Raman Pratasievich lived in Poland and Lithuania, subject to security threats in Belarus, since the Belarusian authorities stated that he had participated in 'Lukashenka. Criminal Materials' documentary film production, which was presented on the NEXTA YouTube channel.

In November 2020, the Investigative Committee of Belarus brought charges against him in connection with the events around the presidential elections on August 9, 2020. In particular, he was accused of organizing mass riots and group actions that grossly violated public order (articles 293 and 342 of the Criminal Code of Belarus). Also, he was charged with "incitement of social enmity on the basis of professional affiliation" in relation to civil servants and law enforcement officers through the Telegram channels, which were created and managed by him (article 130, part 3 of the Criminal Code). He was put on the international wanted list.

KGB included him into the List of organizations and individuals, dealing with terrorist activities then.



Following the detention, Raman Pratasievich was taken to the pre-trial isolation center. On June 14, 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arranged a briefing with the blogger, where he announced his voluntary cooperation with the legal investigation bodies.

At the end of June 2021, Raman Pratasievich and Safiya Sapieha were transferred to house arrest. He appeared on TV and Twitter on numerous occasions, showing remorse for his previous activities.

The arrest of the blogger as a result of the forced landing of a foreign jet by the Belarusian authorities caused an extremely wide response in the world, including the reaction of the UN Secretary General.

On May 24, 2021, the EU leadership decided to increase the sanctions pressure on the Belarusian regime, ordered to prohibit the Belarusian airlines from using the EU air space and urged the EU air carriers to avoid using the airspace of Belarus.

<https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-orders-to-land-ryanair-jet-in-minsk-after-bomb-alert-140132-2021/>

<https://www.sk.gov.by/ru/news-usk-gminsk-ru/view/usk-po-gorodu-minsku-vyneseny-postanovlenija-o-privlechenii-v-kachestve-obvinjaemyx-stepana-putilya-i-romana-9390/>



<https://baj.by/ru/content/zaderzhan-byvshiy-redaktor-populyarnogo-telegram-kanala-raman-protasevich>

<https://sk.gov.by/ru/news-usk-gminsk-ru/view/usk-po-gorodu-minsku-vyneseny-postanovleniya-o-privlechenii-v-kachestve-obvinjaemyx-stepana-putily-i-romana-9390/>

<https://baj.by/ru/content/mid-provelo-brifing-s-uchastiem-romana-protasevicha-zayavil-chto-nikogo-ne-predaet-prosto>

<https://baj.by/ru/content/romana-protasevicha-i-sofyu-sapegu-pereveli-pod-domashniy-arest>

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092642>

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092712>

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/05/24/european-council-conclusions-on-belarus-24-may-2021/>

<https://naviny.online/new/20210913/1631512082-sk-v-dele-protasevicha-palchisa-i-putilo-bolee-600-tomov>

Yahor Martsinovich, the 'Nasha Niva' online daily's Editor-in-chief and Andrei Skurko, the Head of 'Nasha Niva' Advertising and Marketing Department were detained on July 8, 2021. Both of them were presented criminal charges for the alleged 'property damage without signs of embezzlement' in accordance with article 216, part 2 of the Criminal Code of Belarus.

Allegedly they paid utility bills for the office at the rate for housing.

<https://baj.by/be/content/galouny-redaktar-nashay-nivy-zastaecca-za-kratami-sledchyya-vyrashyli-zmyascic-yago-u-siza>

<https://baj.by/be/content/zatrymanym-supracounikam-nashay-nivy-pradyavili-abvinavachvanne>

On July 9, 2021, Tribuna.by sports journalist Aliaksandr Ivulin was charged with arranging and preparing actions that grossly violate public order or active participation in them under part 1 of article 342 of the Criminal Code. He had already served a 30-day administrative arrest for the alleged presentation of a white-red-white banner in his window by that moment of time.

<https://by.tribuna.com/football/1098979900-ivulinu-predyavleno-obvinenie-po-342-j-state-v-techenie-dnya-budet-izb.html?sl=1>

Valeryia Kastsiuhova, a political scientist and editor of 'Belarusian Yearbook' was detained on June 30, 2021. She was presented charges of conspiracy to seize power (part 1 of article 357 of the Criminal Code) and fostering calls for the seizure of power (part 6 of article 16 and part 3 of article 361 of the Criminal Code). Her arrest was preceded by her speech on the air of 'European Radio for Belarus', where she answered questions whether it is possible to achieve the release of political prisoners with sanctions and whether a split with the West would provoke a rapid deepening of integration between Belarus and Russia.



<https://www.currenttime.tv/a/obvinenie-kostjugova/31377931.html>

Iryna Leushyna, the Director of independent BelaPAN News Agency and its former Director Dzmitry Navazhylau were arrested on August 18, 2021. They were presented



charges on article 243 part 2 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (tax evasion that caused large-scale damages).

<https://baj.by/be/content/sk-vozbudil-ugolovnoe-delo-protiv-sotrudnikov-belapan-za-neuplatu-nalogov>

<https://baj.by/be/content/byvshemu-i-nyneshnemu-direktoram-belapan-predyavili-obvinieniya>

Hindering the Activity of Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)

The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) is a public association that has been operating since 1995. It has more than 1300 members all over Belarus. Its activity includes promotion of freedom of speech and ideas of independent journalism, monitoring of violations of journalists' rights and helping the victims of these violations in Belarus.

In connection to the rapidly aggravated situation with freedom of speech in Belarus since the beginning of Presidential election campaign 2020, the legitimate activity of BAJ on journalists' rights defense was hampered by the unlawful interference of official authorities.

The BAJ Web-site (www.baj.by) was blocked in the first group of Web-resources on the election day. The mobile hotline number for journalists was blocked as well.



The Web-site couldn't be accessed by Belarusian Web-users within the period since August 9 till August 27, 2021, despite the absence of any formal decisions on restricting access to the Web-resource.

On February 16, 2021, the police conducted a search at the BAJ office in Minsk and seized documents and computer equipment. Consequently, the office premises were sealed. Also, police searches were conducted at several BAJ members' private apartments and houses in different parts of the country, including the apartments of BAJ Deputy Chairs Barys Haretski and Aleh Aheyau.

The officers of Investigative Committee of Belarus explained that the operation was carried out within the framework of a preliminary investigation into the financing or arrangement of actions that grossly violate public order under article 342 of the Criminal Code of Belarus.

The BAJ office was sealed for almost a month after the search, and representatives of its leadership were summoned to the Investigative Committee for interrogation on several occasions.



On June 21, 2021, the Ministry of Justice started to inspect the activities of the Belarusian Association of Journalists. According to the letter that was received on that day thousands of documents were required to be submitted for the period since January 1, 2018. It is noteworthy that the letter was dated June 9, 2021, but on June 21, 2021 only, i. e. on the last date when the numerous documents were asked to be submitted. The Ministry representative postponed the deadline till June 23, 2021. The BAJ representatives submitted to the Ministry of Justice all the requested documents, which they managed to collect.

On July 14, 2021, the law enforcement bodies conducted another search at the BAJ office in Minsk and sealed the premises once again. (The second search was performed in the absence of BAJ representatives.) The BAJ bank account was blocked. On the following day, a letter from the Ministry of Justice was received stating that the Deputy Minister Siarhei Kalinouski issued a warning to the Belarusian Association of Journalists in the written form on July 8, 2021. He claimed that some documents were not provided and the lease agreements of several BAJ branches had to be corrected.

It was required to eliminate the violations indicated in the warning within one day, i.e. by July 16, 2021. The BAJ leadership sent a letter to the Ministry of Justice with a request to postpone the deadline due to the lack of access to statutory documents, the seal and lease agreements subject to the fact that the BAJ office was sealed after the search.

However, on July 21, 2021, it became known that the Ministry of Justice had filed a claim with the Supreme Court of Belarus on liquidation of the Belarusian Association of Journalists in connection with the BAJ's alleged failure to take measures to eliminate violations of the law and the repeated violation of the law after the receipt of official warning in the written form.



Inesa Lazavikova, the judge of the Supreme Court of Belarus satisfied the claim of the Ministry of Justice to liquidate the Belarusian Association of Journalists on August 27, 2021. It happened against the background of a large-scale attack on the independent press and non-governmental organizations in Belarus that had taken place since July 2021. The majority of BAJ officers had to leave the country, in order to be able to continue their work.

<https://baj.by/ru/analytics/vlasti-lishili-registracii-belorusskuyu-associaciyu-zhurnalistov-hronika-dokumenty>



**THE BELARUSIAN
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