

# MASS MEDIA

*in Belarus*

E-NEWSLETTER

# 3 (18) May – June 2010



BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS  
[www.baj.by](http://www.baj.by)

**“There is a reference rule in the Media Law providing for regulation of electronic media activity in accordance with the governmental provision on the media. A corresponding draft will be submitted to the government in a short while. It will introduce the largest possible degree of regulation of on-line media.”**

*Aleh Pralaskouski, Minister of Information of Belarus*  
<http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-8416.html>

**“The Presidential decree on regulation of Internet activity causes anxiety, since it creates legal grounds for disabling the Web-resources, regarded as extremist by the official authorities. We’ve already witnessed the practice of acknowledging some periodicals to be extremist” (see: <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-6546.html>, <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-6555.html>). I mean the “ARCHE” magazine and the “Svaboda” newspaper here... In this connection, there appears an eventual possibility for the Web-pages of “Viasna”, “Charter’97”, “BHK”, and other on-line resources to be acknowledged extremist by the authorities and disabled.”**

*Valantsin Stefanovich, “Viasna” HR Center (non-registered)*

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## 1. STATISTICS

1308 printed periodical editions, including 675 newspapers, 605 magazines, 36 newsletters, 9 catalogues, and 1 almanac, as well as 9 news agencies were registered in the Republic of Belarus as of July 1, 2010.

399 periodical editions are owned by the state. The list of state-owned periodicals includes 212 newspapers that embrace the whole country and form a peculiar 'ideological vertical' of power. They appear at the national, regional, district, and city level. Apart from that, they include a range of departmental newspapers.

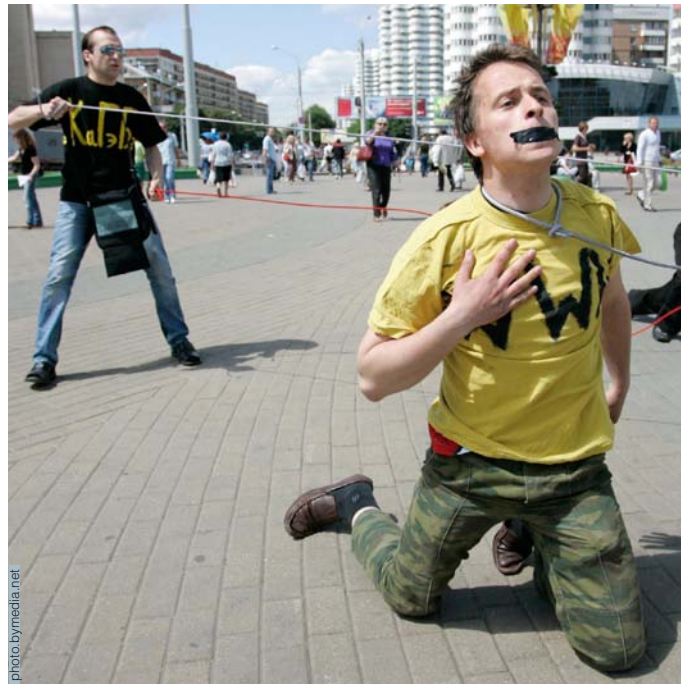
In accordance with governmental regulation #855 of June 3, 2010 "On approving the list of printed periodical mass media outlets to be subsidized from the national budget in 2010" 24 state-owned printed periodicals have been granted subsidies in the amount of more than USD 5.5 million (both editorials and publishing houses) on the out-of-competition basis.

The list of subsidized newspapers includes "Sovietskaya Byelorussia", founded by the Belarusian President's Office, "Respublika", founded by the Council of Ministers, i.e. Belarusian government, and "Zvezda", founded by both chambers of National Assembly, i.e. the Belarusian legislative body and the government of Belarus - <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-8591.html>.

107 new periodical editions have been officially registered in Belarus since the beginning of 2010. However, the founders of at least 8 newspapers received repeated refusals from the Ministry for different far-fetched and arguable reasons, e.g. in case the potential Editors-in-chief lacked 5-year-long working experience at the managerial positions in the media, in spite of the fact that the current Belarusian Law "On Mass Media" does not provide for the refusal in official registration of media outlets on these grounds.

236 TV and radio broadcasting programs, including 158 radio broadcasters and 78 TV broadcasters were officially registered in Belarus as of July 1, 2010. 2 new radio programs and 4 new TV programs have been registered in the country since the year start.

164 TV and radio broadcasting media that make the majority of such media in the country are owned by the state. All non-state TV and radio programs are rigidly controlled by the national, regional, and local governmental authorities.



## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF SITUATION IN BELARUSIAN MEDIA FIELD (May – June 2010)

The events, connected with persecution of journalists and civil activists for expressing their opinions as well as the close perspective of Presidential Decree #60 on Regulation of Internet coming into force were in the focus of attention in May – June 2010.

The police conducted a series of searches in private apartments and offices of civil activists and journalists in Minsk, Homiel, Brest, Hrodna, Mahiliou, Babruysk, Barysau, Vaukavysk, and Salihorsk on May 18, 2010. The searches were conducted in relation to 'Tell the Truth' campaign. Three people, including Siargey Vazniak, a member of BAJ Board and the editor of "Tovarishch" newspaper, were detained for three days on far-fetched charges as suspects within a criminal case.

The state authorities carried on persecution of independent journalists Sviatlana Kalinkina, Maryna Koktysh ("Narodnaya Vola", <http://www.nv-online.info>), Natallia Radzina ("Charter'97 Web-site" [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org)), and Iryna Khalip in relation to a defamation suit, filed by a KGB general Ivan Korzh (see more: E-newsletter "Mass Media in Belarus" #2 (17)). Also, it came out that all professional equipment seized from the journalists was regarded as material evidence within the defamation suit. The legal investigator requested the experts to look into the journalists' personal e-mail correspondence. However, the specialists failed to get the passwords of their e-mail boxes.

The Ministry of Information of Belarus issued several official warnings to independent media outlets at the turn of May and at the beginning of June 2010. (It should be noted that the Ministry may appeal to court with a request to close down a media

outlet on issuing two official warnings, related to any violation of media legislation, including the minor ones, within a year's course.) The majority of official warnings, mentioned above, were issued within two days – on May 31st and June 1st. The warnings were passed to "Narodnaya Volya" (the third official warning within the recent year), "Salidarnasc" (the newspaper works in the on-line mode and publishes its printed issues once in half a year in order to keep its media registration certificate), and "Novy Chas" weekly.

The official authorities continued persecution of registered and non-registered independent press distributors. The city of Vitsiebsk appeared to be in the center of attention in this respect within the recent months. The police officers were repeatedly detaining the "Vitsiebskiy Kuryer" newspaper distributors there and the local courts were imposing penalties on them. It should be mentioned that the newspaper is officially registered in Russia. The editorial had to take this step as soon as the Belarusian registration certificate of "Vitebskiy Kuryer M" had been invalidated.

The Belarusian state authorities refuse to renew the official registration of "Vitebskiy Kuryer". Moreover, they've refused thrice to register a new newspaper "Nash Dom" for a variety of highly arguable reasons.

The founders of "Khimik" newspaper (Navapolatsk, Vitsiebsk region) have encountered three refusals to resume their official registration status as well. (Presently, the newspaper exists as an on-line edition only.)

The Presidential ordinance No. 60 "On the measures to improve the use of the national segment of Internet" came into effect on July 1, 2010.

Among other, the ordinance provides for:

- registration of on-line resources that deal with rendering different services;
- identification of Internet-users in Web-cafes as well as registration and storage of data about the visited Web-pages by them (reportedly, the requirement will apply to the Wi-Fi Internet connection as well);
- disabling / limitation of access to the "banned" information on the Web upon the users' requests as well as upon the requests, received from the "authorized state structures" (see more: E-newsletter "Mass Media in Belarus" #2 (17)).

Nearly 2/3 of all Web-resources in the Belarusian national Web-segment were officially registered as of June 1, 2010. In particular, the registration authority approved 16,000 applications, rejected 7,000 applications and continued consideration of 2,000 more applications then. A number of Web-resources, including [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org), [www.kurier.vitebsk.by](http://www.kurier.vitebsk.by), <http://vialejka.org>, encountered certain difficulties in their activity as soon as the Presidential ordinance came into force.

The state authorities adopted several by-laws to facilitate application of Presidential ordinance No.60 in practice.

The largest anxiety is caused by a common regulation of Operational and Analytical Center at the President of Belarus and the Ministry of Communications

No.4/11 of June 29, 2010 “On Approving the Provisions on the Procedure of Restricting the Access of Customers of Internet services to the Legally Banned Information”.

Accordingly, the State Inspection on Telecommunications will form lists of banned Web-resources, basing upon the proposals of state bodies. The <http://> addresses of banned Web-sites in the national Web-segment will be published openly and their owners will be able to go to law in order to appeal against the inclusion into the list. The list of banned Web-sites from other domain zones will be kept in secret.

The access to the Web-sites, officially included into the ‘black-lists’ will be banned at state institutions and organizations that prevail in the present-day administrative-command system in Belarus, at the educational and cultural establishments (institutions of higher learning, secondary schools, libraries etc.). Apparently, the access to these Web-sites will be disabled by Wi-Fi and at the Internet-cafes.

The system of restricting access to the ‘banned’ Web-sites will be launched since September 1, 2010.