

# MASS MEDIA

*in Belarus*

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

**“Mass media are an important constituent part of the state information policy. They are not the fourth estate, but partners of the authorities.”**

*Liliya Ananich, First Deputy Information Minister of Belarus*  
[http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2011/10/27/ic\\_news\\_116\\_379413/](http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2011/10/27/ic_news_116_379413/)

**“It is dangerous to work as a journalist everywhere. The danger is wide-spread all over the post-Soviet space. However, sometimes I get amazed at some different things. Despite being in opposition to the Russian government, the colleagues of mine from Novaya Gazeta get in touch easily with the official authorities and their press-services. They have the right to get information, and they make use of this right. The officials do not run away from them. They are not afraid of independent journalists, unlike their Belarusian colleagues. An independent journalist can’t get any official information here in Belarus at all.”**

*Iryna Khalip, Belarusian journalist*  
<http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-11947.html>

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## DEVELOPMENT OF SITUATION IN BELARUSIAN MEDIA FIELD

### CRIMINAL PROSECUTION OF JOURNALISTS

*The problem of criminal prosecution of journalists in connection with the Presidential election 2010 remained in the focus of public attention in the fall of 2011.*

On September 4, 2011, the official authorities released 11 political prisoners, convicted for participation in protest actions in Minsk on December 19, 2010, including Alaksandr Atroshchankau, a spokesman for a former Belarusian presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau.

“Being guided by the principles of humanity, the President of Belarus has pardoned 11 people, convicted for participation in mass riots in Minsk on December 19, 2010;” A. Lukashenka’s press office said. A. Atroshchankau noted that he had been persistently proposed to write an appeal for mercy to the President, but he refused to follow the advice.

“I was present at the protest action on December 19, 2010 exclusively as a journalist and as a spokesman for a presidential candidate,” A. Atroshchankau noted.

As reported on September 8, 2011, Natallia Radzina, ‘*Charter’97*’ Web-site Editor had been granted political asylum in Lithuania.



It is worth mentioning that N. Radzina was arrested on charges of 'arrangement of mass riots' on December 19, 2010. The editor was released from custody under the cognizance not to leave the place of her permanent residence, having spent one month and a half in jail. She managed to flee the country. Reportedly, the criminal proceedings against N. Radzina were terminated on *August 23, 2011*.

However, N. Radzina hasn't returned to Belarus for safety reasons. The Web-site editorial continues its activity from abroad.



On *November 22, 2011*, Natallia Radzina received the CPJ International Press Freedom Award – 2011.

Commenting on receiving the award, Natallia Radzina said: 'The award is the world's acknowledgement of Belarusian journalists' work in inhumane and tough conditions of constant pressure and repressions... I dedicate the award to all the repressed and murdered journalists in Belarus – **Aleh Biabienin, Dzmitry Zavadski, Vieranika Charkasava** – as well as to the journalists, who served their time in jail, who faced arrests, searches, and fines for their articles, but who still continued to work in Belarus, despite all the censorship and repressions. All independent journalists in Belarus are heroes. Therefore, this award is for all of us.' <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-11541.html>



On *September 20, 2011*, Hrodna Regional Court rejected an appeal against a court verdict of Leninski City District Court of Hrodna, filed by Andrzej Paczobut, a *Gazeta Wyborcza* correspondent in Belarus. It is worth mentioning that the court of original jurisdiction found the journalist guilty of defaming the President of Belarus (part 1, article 367 of Belarusian Criminal Code) in a number of critical articles, published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* as well as in his blog <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-10476.html>. Consequently, the reporter was sentenced to three years of jail. The punishment was deferred for two years. It means that A. Paczobut can be sent to a correctional labor colony, if he breaks the law. The criminal prosecution was preceded by the journalist's conflict with KGB <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-9673.html>.

Supplementary restrictions were imposed on the journalist after his meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Radoslaw Sikorski in Warsaw on September 27, 2011. Among other, the media worker was banned to travel abroad.

The public attention was closely focused on criminal proceedings against a famous human rights defender and BAJ member Ales Bialatski in the fall of 2011.

On *November 24, 2011*, the judge of Pershamayski City District Court of Minsk Siarhey Bandarenka found Ales Bialatski guilty of large-scale tax evasion under Art.

243 (2) of the Criminal Code of Belarus and sentenced him to four and a half years of maximum security colony imprisonment with property confiscation. Moreover, the human rights activist will have to pay out 721,000,000 Br (around USD 80 thousand) and 36,000,000 Br of legal expenses (USD 4.5 thousand). The court verdict hasn't come into force yet.



On November 25, 2011, the Belarusian Association of Journalists stated <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-11972.html> that it considered the decision to be a politically motivated conviction of the head of *Viasna*, which is one of the most influential human rights organizations in Belarus, closed down in 2003. 'We are sure that the money, transferred to the accounts was used to support the repressed people in Belarus, and it cannot be regarded as Ales Bialiatski's personal income,' BAJ leaders emphasized. The Belarusian Association of Journalists called the Belarusian court to cancel the sentence in relation to A. Bialatski and demanded the authorities to release him immediately from jail. BAJ called other citizens of Belarus, foreign colleagues, and partner organizations to support the protest.

## ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA

On September 1, 2011, there was published Regulation No. 1111 of the Council of Ministers of Belarus 'On Adoption of Provisions on Procedures of Providing Subsidies to Certain Legal Entities, Vested with Functions of the Printed Mass Media.' Around EUR 4,500,000 were assigned from the state budget to support the printed periodical editions and publishing houses in 2011. (All in all, the sum of around EUR 54,000,000 was assigned to support all state-owned media, including TV and radio broadcasters.)



The subsidies are granted without competition to the editorials of state-owned media, included in special lists, adopted by the government and local executive authorities, as well as to the 'Sovietskaya Byelorussia' newspaper editorial, founded by the Belarus' Presidential Administration. The number of subsidized state-owned printed periodicals amounted to 25 media outlets in 2011, to be compared to 24 media outlets in 2010.

As reported in September 2011, Shklou paper mill started selling newsprint to the state-owned and non-state periodicals at different prices. The paper mill marketing department specialists noted that the newsprint was sold to the state-owned newspapers at the prices, reflected in the state order contract. All other periodicals were expected to purchase it at the commodity exchange. The difference between the newsprint prices for the state-owned and non-state media amounts to nearly 80%. <http://baj.by/m-p-viewpub-tid-1-pid-11520.html>



## EVENTS / RATING LISTS

According to the results of a public opinion survey, conducted by the Gallup Institute, less than 1/3 of Belarusian citizens (30%) regard the mass media of their country as free, RFE/RL reports. <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24381364.htm>

On October 5, 2011, the 'Third Sector' NGO started the 15<sup>th</sup> Young Journalists' School classes in Hrodna. The classes have been conducted since 1997. Around 300 people have graduated from the Young Journalists' School since the time of its foundation.