

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

February 9 – 15, 2015

Within the reporting period, there were threats and obstacles to journalists' work; state agencies kept answering something about the blocking of websites in December; and the commission on extremism announced it found no banned contents in a human rights report.

On February 9, a journalist from Hrodna and BAJ member **Viktar Sazonau** told that he had received life threats on the page in Vkontakte social net. He said it had been the second one for several months.

On February 10, the **Supreme Court of Belarus** (Judge Katsiaryna Karatkevich) dismissed the appeal of **Lohvinau** against the decision to fine the bookstore for "illegal entrepreneur's activities".

The absence of the registration as a distributor of print products in 2014 ended up with a tax inspection at the end of the year. The tax inspectors sued Lohvinau in Economic Court, which ruled to fine the bookseller 30 basic amounts (5.4 million rubles) for work without registration and to confiscate profits of the year which was claimed to be 961 million rubles (around 70 thousand euro). Last year Lohvinau applied six times to get registered as a distributor of print products, but the Ministry refused to register because of formalities.

As reported **on February 10**, **Lohvinau** bookstore was not allowed to participate in the International Book Exhibition Fair in Minsk on February 11 – 15. Lohvinau said the director of the organizing company Makbel excused by an order to do so from the Information Ministry.

On February 11, BAJ received a **reply from the Ministry of Communications and Informatization** regarding troubles with access to several websites at the end of December.

We remind that BAJ requested [information](#) from the official agencies on December 22; websites [naviny.by](#), [charter97.org](#), [udf.by](#), [gazetby.com](#) and some others had experienced troubles with access since December 19. BAJ requested to hold an inquiry, restore access and bring trouble-makers to responsibility.

The first Deputy Minister informed that the Ministry did not take any measures to block the mentioned websites in December, 2014.

On February 12 it became known that the **Republican Expert Commission on evaluating information products in respect of extremist contents** completed examination of the joint report of British and Belarusian human rights defenders "**Half an hour before spring: report on inequality and discrimination in Belarus**". The commission did not find extremist contents in the report. *We remind that the report, printed in Great Britain, was sized by customs office in the airport Minsk 2 at the beginning of August, 2014.* Aleh Hulak, from the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, said that the report was still at the customs office, although the examination was dated November 25. The procedure of return of the report is being negotiated.

On February 13, the journalist from Hrodna **Andrei Mialeshka** was denied an interview at an exhibition the Museum of Chocolate at the Hrodna History and Archeology museum. The deputy head on ideology of the Hrodna Region Executive Committee asked for a journalistic accreditation. When the journalist showed the BAJ certificate, the official claimed he could paint

a lot of such documents and demanded the journalist to leave the museum.

We remind that Andrei Mialeshka has received three fines for work for Radio Racyja, which cannot get accreditation in Belarus. Andrei Mialeshka thinks this is a ban on his right to profession and of his constitutional rights to get and disseminate information.

As reported **on February 13**, the complaint of the distributor of **Vitebskij Courier** Mikhail Zhurauliou was registered at the **UN Human Rights Committee**. The official confirmation was sent to Pavel Levinau who helped draw up the complaint.

We remind that in 2012 the distributor was fined for 2,500,000 rubles for illegal distribution of the newspaper. The fine was upheld on appeal, and all legal remedies had been exhausted.

On February 17, the judge's panel on citizen litigations of the Mahilow Regional Court dismissed the cassation appeal of the informational agency *BelaPAN*, of the editorial office of the newspaper *Uzhorak* and of the journalist of *BelaPAN* Ulazdimir Lapceвич. They wanted to overturn the decision of the Horki district court in the **honor, dignity and business reputation suit**.

We remind that on December 18, the Horki district court (judge Viktor Yaskevich) ordered that the publisher of the newspaper UzHorak and the journalist Uladzimir Laptsevich should pay moral damages of 6 million rubles to Tamara Kaltunova, chair of the local organization of the Belarusian Society of People with Disabilities; and also they should cover legal expenses. Tamara Kaltunova had filed the suit claiming the materials of BelaPAN, later reprinted by UzHorak, insulted her honor, dignity and business reputation. Neither the plaintiff nor her legal representative came to the hearing. The judge heard witnesses from defense sides who proved that the materials correctly presented the words of the plaintiff. However, the judge made the conclusion that the plaintiff had been insulted.