

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

May 26 - June 8, 2014

Dismissal of the Information Minister Aleh Praliaskouski does not promise any changes in practice unless global changes in the state policy take place. This opinion is shared by many representatives of the independent journalistic community of Belarus. "Changing one cog for another will not bring any relief. There is little hope also that a new Minister would be able to understand the problems of the writing community: it's been long time since the post of the Information Minister was taken by a journalist," wrote analysts.

On May 27, the Karelitchy district court (Hrodna region) heard the case of **Ales' Zaleuski**, staff journalist of the *Televisia Polska TVP*, which is the head office for the satellite TV channel *Belsat*. The journalist was found guilty of work for foreign mass media **without accreditation**. On the basis of a police's report, the court found the journalist guilty of violating **article 22.9** of the Administrative Code of Belarus (illegal production and distribution of mass media products), and fined him for 30 basic amounts (around 327 euro). Zaleuski disagrees with the court decision and is going to appeal it.

On May 27, the head of the organization and HR department of the Baranavichy City Executive Committee Tatsiana Chylik **denied information** to the regional newspaper *Intex-Press*. The Correspondent Atrsiom Harbatsevich asked the executive committee about costs spent from the budget on a three-day city holiday with fireworks and a Belarusian finalist from Eurovision. The official representative claimed: "I will not give information to your newspaper, I don't want to talk to you at all." In order to get the info, the newspaper filed an official request to the executive committee.

On May 28 activists of the United Civil Party in Brest published a statement with the **demand to restore broadcasting of Ukrainian channels** in the city. The statement stemmed from the fact that operators of cable TV in Brest suspended transmission of Ukrainian channels *1+1* and *Inter*, referring to a ruling of the Council of Ministers. The civil activists believe that the mentioned TV channels were the only ones who reflected Ukraine's position in their programs "at this hard and tragic time for the country." Thus, the statement says, for thousands of Brest residents of Ukrainian origin "cutting off the channels also cut off their TV link with their historic motherland", and Belarusian citizens now have got less information about events in the neighboring country. "At the background of the total informational prevalence of Russian TV channels, this step of Brest TV operators, whatever motives they might have, raises reasonable suspicions about political underpinning of their actions."

On May 28 a civil activist from Babruysk, local leader of the United Civil Party Viktor Buzinayeu received a letter from the Babruysk police department informing he was under **administrative case for distributing** the newspaper *Novy Chas*. The case had been opened upon the information that on May 7 the activist distributed the newspaper *Novy Chas* at the central market in the city. The letter informed that the administrative **case was closed** because there were no violation constituents in actions of Mr Buzinayeu falling under **article 22.9** (part 2) (illegal production and distribution of mass media products). Viktor Buzinayeu said that he had learnt about the administrative case only with receiving this letter. The activist remarked that he had all necessary documents that allow him to be a distributor of the newspaper.

On May 30 it became known that BAJ member, freelancer Mikalay Bianco filed an **appeal** to the Central District Court of Homel against the **warning** issued to him on March 5 by the prosecutor's deputy of Homel region Vadzim Suschynski. *We remind that Mikalay Bianco was accused of preparing informational materials for a foreign mass medium (for Belarusian Radio Racyja) without accreditation. The freelancer tried to appeal the warning to the prosecutor of the Homel region and to the Prosecutor General Aliaksandr Kaniuk, but unsuccessfully.*

On June 2 it became known that the independent newspaper in Baranavichy *Intex-Press* again got a **refusal** to its application **to be distributed** in subscription catalogues of *Belposhta* and in kiosk of *Belsayzdruk*. The application was filed in May; the editorial office wanted to conclude a contract for the second half of 2014. Both the companies sent refusals without motivation. *Belposhta* sets forward an excuse that formation of the subscription catalogues of mass media is the right of the enterprise. Participants of civil-law relations "are free to establish their own rights" and "on the basis of the abovementioned, entering *Intex-Press* into the catalogues is impossible," said managers of *Belposhta*. Brest branches of *Belposhta* and *Belsayzdruk* replied in the same manner, warning the editorial office that "forcing to concluding a contract is unallowable." *So, the independent newspaper Intex-Press has been out of the catalogues of the two state-run monopolists for almost nine years, after it was excluded on the eve of the presidential election in 2006.*

On June 3 police officers **interfered with journalistic work** at opening a new metro station in Minsk. Iryna Arakhouskaya, from *Nasha Niva*, made a photo of a police officer going out from the tube with a drunk man. The police officers ordered to delete photos threatening her with detention.

On June 4, the Mahilou Regional Court heard the **appeal** of the Babruysk **blogger Aleh Zhalnou** against the Babruysk court decision, dated May 14 when the blogger was fined for 50 basic amounts for violating **article 23.4** of the Administrative Code (disobeying lawful demand of an official representative in office). The disobedience, in police's opinion, was that on March 27, when visiting the police department in Babruysk, the blogger did not leave mobile phones in storage room on entering the building. Zhalnou says that nobody had put forward these demands, and he believes these demands are unlawful. The Mahilou Region Court **dismissed the appeal**. The blogger is going to proceed with cassation.

On June 4 the Krychauski district court heard the motion of Uladzimir Kudrautsau, publisher of the independent newspaper *Volny Horad*, asking to review the decision of the court dated September 10, 2013, due to new facts discovered. Judge Antanina Kachanova **upheld the motion**, overturned the court decision dated September 10, 2013 and ruled to return the legal expenses paid by the publisher. *We remind that on September 10, 2013 the same judge decided that the newspaper had to compensate legal expenses for the state-run building and construction enterprise Cherykau PMK-280. The legal expenses dated back to the case on June 17, 2013 when the judge of the Krychau district court Aliksandr Kurylin ruled that the newspaper, in one of its article, published false information concerning the enterprise; the judge obliged the newspaper to published a retraction. However, the decision dated June 17 was overturned on appeal by the Mahilou regional court.*

On June 4 Aleh Praliaskouski was removed from the post of the **Minister of Information** by a presidential edict. The reason for the dismissal was not explained. Belarusian journalists and media experts remember Pralisakouski as a repressive Minister. While he was in office, the *Autoradio* was closed down after the presidential election in 2010. Lohvinau publisher was deprived of publishing license after the *Belarus Press Photo 2011* album, which he published, was declared extremist.

Also, in mid 2011, the Ministry of Information initiated suits to close down independent national newspapers *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Volya*. **On June 6** it became known that **Liliya Ananich**, first Minister's Deputy, was appointed interim Minister of Information.

On June 6 the Leninski district court of Brest **dismissed the honor and business reputation claim** against the independent newspaper *Brestskaya Gazeta*. The plaintiff demanded 30 million rubles compensation to impose on the newspaper and its two journalists per each. The plaintiff motined the case to be held behind closed doors, so circumstances are unknown.