



THE BELARUSIAN
ASSOCIATION
OF JOURNALISTS

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MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

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JULY-AUGUST 2014



Accreditation should not be a license to work and the lack of it should not restrict journalists in their ability to work and express themselves freely... All journalists should have the same professional rights as journalists employed with registered media outlets, including the right to seek and disseminate information.

*Dunja Mijatović,
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media*

We cannot start talking about freedom of mass media in Belarus until the obligatory press accreditation is canceled.

*Dunja Mijatović,
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media*



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MAIN EVENTS IN MASS MEDIA FIELD IN JULY-AUGUST 2014

FOUNDATION OF COMMITTEE ON EVALUATION OF INFORMATIONAL PRODUCTION ON PRESENCE OF SIGNS OF EXTREMISM

The **National Expert Committee** on Evaluation of Informational Production on Presence of Signs of Extremism was founded by resolution of the Council of Ministers of Belarus #810 on August 21, 2014.



The Regional Executive Committees were advised to found similar committees in the corresponding Belarusian regions and approve their structure.

Experts believe that foundation of such expert committees transfers the task of considering materials to be extremist from the legal to the bureaucratic plane. At the same time, they believe that the main danger is not connected with foundation of committees. It is rather connected with the excessively broad interpretation of notions of 'extremism' and 'extremist materials' in Belarusian legislation.



Recognition of 'Press-photo Belarus 2011' photo album as extremist materials appeared to be the most sensational case in 2013. The publication included the best press-photos of Belarus, selected by an international jury, consisting of famous photographers from different states. The contest has been arranged annually since 2010.

PERSECUTION OF FREELANCE JOURNALISTS, WHO COOPERATE WITH FOREIGN MEDIA

On August 18, 2014, an independent journalist Aliaksandr Burakou was called by phone to the local police station. He was informed that administrative proceedings for 'illegal work for a foreign media outlet without valid press credentials' had been initiated in relation to him. Major Ruslan Marozau asked the media worker to provide explanations, regarding a TV-report on BelSat in the autumn of 2013. The report dwelt upon the emergency condition of one house in the city of Mahilou.

The case materials were shown to A. Burakou. According to them, the KGB Department on Mahilou region had conducted investigative and search activities, aimed at the identification of journalists, who interviewed the report figurants, i.e. A. Burakou and M. Arshynski.

On August 19, 2014, a police major Ruslan Marozau had a talk with a freelance journalist M. Arshynski. He composed the interrogation report. The police officer wondered if M. Arshynski had any connection to producing the video report about housing problems in Mahilou and inquired the media workers as for the possible ways the video file could reach the BelSat TV channel.

The BelSat official representative in Belarus Mikhail Yanchuk didn't exclude the connection between the increased attention to journalists with [the approaching review of the case](#) on 'BelSat' trade mark in court. A meeting of the parties in court was scheduled for September 4, 2014.



"BelSat" is an independent satellite TV channel. It was founded in 2007, following a treaty between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland and the Polish public TV. The TV channel broadcasting is aimed at the Belarusian audience. Starting from the moment of its creation, BelSat TV was trying repeatedly to obtain the legal status in Belarus. However, all of them were in vain. The Belarusian journalists, who cooperate with the TB

channel alongside with other independent media) received repeated warnings from the public prosecution and KGB. Since the spring of 2014, the journalists faced prosecution and fines for **activity without accreditations** at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

WEB-HACKING AND DISABLING ACCESS TO WEB-SITES

There were registered several attempts to restrict dissemination of information in the Internet in July-August 2014.



On July 31, 2014, the Web-editorial of 'EuroBelarus' International Consortium stated that the Web-resource had faced a hacker attack. A range of highly provocative materials about the events in Ukraine was posted on the Web-site - www.eurobelarus.info and actively disseminated in the social media for a few days. The Web-site editor Andrei Aleksandrovich noted that the attack had started on July 24, 2014.

The Web-site editorial team members connect the incident with the active position of 'EuroBelarus' Web-resource in the coverage of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. A special Web-section 'Events in Ukraine as viewed from Belarus' has been actively updated since the first days of confrontation between the neighboring countries.

On August 14, 2014, a state-owned monopolist Internet-provider disabled access to the **Charter'97 Web-site** from the territory of Belarus.

The Web-site users informed the editorial that they couldn't access the Web-resource in the regular way, but note that they could cope with the task with the use of proxy-servers. The problems with access to Charter'97 Web-site were registered during the whole day then.



BLOGGER'S FAMILY FACES CRIMINAL CHARGES

On July 15, 2014, a blogger Aleh Zhalnou from Babruysk (Mahilou region) learned that a criminal case had been filed against his wife on criminal charges (art. 364 of Belarus Criminal Code- 'Violence or threat of violence in relation to an officer of the Interior').

The blogger states that his wife became a victim of aggressive actions of police officers from the local Department of Internal Affairs, who conducted a search in the Zhelnous' private apartment in May 2014. According to him, the wife was trying to prevent the policemen from entering the apartment, since the latter intended to burst into it without presenting the search order. The woman was thrown to the floor. One of policemen from the group of intruders accused her of the use of violence. (In particular, he stated that she had bitten him.)



On July 22, 2014, Babruysk City Court finished a trial on charges against Aleh Zhalnou's son Aliaksei Zhalnou. The judge Yuliya Beraziuk sentenced the young person to three years of confinement in the open-type penal colony. Also, Aliaksei was obliged to pay a fine in the amount of 50 million Belarusian rubles (approx. 3,500 EUR).

The international organization '[Reporters without Borders](#)' expressed protest on the score of the repressive verdict of Babruysk City Court. "Unable to silence Aleh Zhalnou, the authorities are now targeting his son," said Johann Bihr, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. "We deplore this verdict, which preserves the impunity of the local police, and we call on the courts to overturn it on appeal." The 'Reporters without Borders' underscored that Belarus was ranked 157th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

The court found the blogger's son guilty of hitting a police officer in a police station on September 4, 2013 during the scuffle that ensued when the police handcuffed and hit him and his father. They had been arrested for filming traffic police

cars illegally parked on a pedestrian crossing. The police released them a few hours later but kept the video footage they had filmed.

Consequently, the blogger's son was accused of violating article 364 of Belarus Criminal Code - 'Violence or threat of violence in relation to an officer of the Interior'.

Also, a criminal case on article 369 of Belarus Criminal Code was filed against the blogger himself. In particular, he was accused of 'offending officials in his personal blog'.

STATISTICS

The Ministry of Information of Belarus [has published information](#) about the number of the printed and broadcasting media, officially registered in the first half-year of 2014. Since January till June 2014, the Ministry registered 37 new printed media, including 9 state-owned and 28 non-state media outlets. At the same time, the Ministry cancelled 16 registration certificates, belonging to one state-owned and 15 non-state print media outlets within the same period of time.

All in all, 1,556 print media could be found in the state register as of August 1, 2014. The number of state-owned and non-state print media amounted to 424 and 1,132 media outlets correspondingly.



264 TV and radio broadcasting media had official registration certificates in Belarus as of August 1, 2014. 179 of them were state-owned and 85 of them belonged to private owners. One state-owned and two non-state broadcasting media were officially registered in the first half-year of 2014. The registration certificate of one non-state broadcasting company was cancelled by the Ministry of Information within the first half-year of 2014.

Registration of Belarusian print and broadcasting media is implemented by the Ministry of Information of Belarus. (It is required to receive a permit from the governmental body to get officially registered in the country.) According to the Minister of Information of Belarus Aleh Praliaskouski, the Ministry of Information refused to register 105 media outlets in Belarus in 2010-2012.

The overwhelming majority of non-state print media are entertaining, advertising and the like. According to BAJ calculations, the number of officially registered non-state media is less than 30 in Belarus nowadays. Almost half of them were ousted from the state-owned monopolist press distribution systems (i.e. from subscription catalogues and news-stalls) in 2005. It happened on the eve of the Presidential election 2006. 11 independent periodicals still face problems with reaching the audience. Quite a few of non-state socio-political media face problems with attracting advertisers. The problem is especially acute for nationwide publications.

As a result of economic discrimination, the 'Niasvizhski Chas' socio-political newspaper seized to exist in July 2014. The weekly had been distributed in the town of Niasvizh (Minsk region) and the surrounding area for almost 12 years.



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