



THE BELARUSIAN  
ASSOCIATION  
OF JOURNALISTS

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# MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

E-NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2015



*Changes in Belarus always follow 'one step forward – two steps backwards' principle... We don't need cosmetic changes. We need systemic reforms of Belarusian media legislation...*

*Mikhail Yanchuk,  
Deputy Chairperson,  
Belarusian Association of Journalists*



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# SITUATION IN MASS MEDIA FIELD IN OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2015 (REVIEW)

The Presidential election was held in Belarus on October 16, 2015.

The post-election period didn't bring any significant changes to the situation in the mass media field in the country.

The implementation of discriminatory policies in relation to independent newspapers continued during the recent subscription campaign. At the same time, the Belarusian official authorities carried on the practice of funding the state-owned media from the state budget without any tenders, providing them with administrative support and other preferences.

A new wave of administrative prosecution of journalists for their cooperation with foreign mass media without accreditation was among the most alarming events in the period under review. For the time being, it is still unknown if the new police reports against journalists in Homiel region have been a local initiative or declare the return of previous repressive policies at the national level.

The presentation of Nobel Prize for Literature to a Belarusian writer Sviatlana Alekseyevich was in the focus of media attention at the end of 2015. However, the Belarusian state TV-channels didn't broadcast the awarding ceremony at that.



Фота: Васіль Фядосенка

# MAIN EVENTS IN MASS MEDIA FIELD IN OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2015

## UNEQUAL CONDITIONS OF SUBSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN – 2016

The subscription campaign at the end of 2015 showed unequal conditions of economic activity for the state-owned and non-state media.

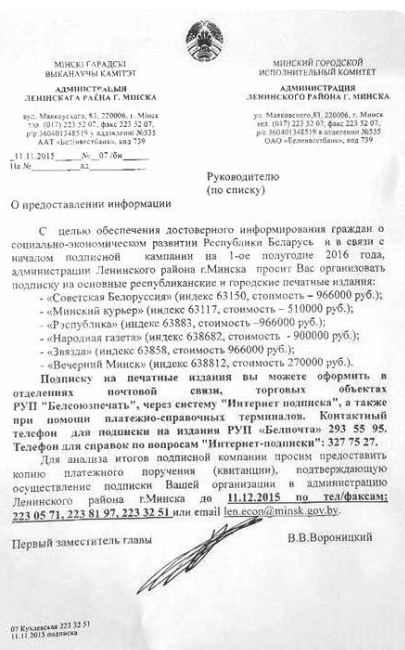
On the one hand, the 'Belposhta' state monopolist press distributor **refused to include a number of non-state media outlets** ('Gazeta Slonimskaya', 'Intex-press', 'SNPlus. Svobodnye Novosti Plus' etc) into its subscription catalogue.

On the other hand, the administrative resource was broadly used for subscribing readers to the state press.

Thus, the Administration of Leninsky Municipal District of Minsk addressed to the heads of locally registered organizations to arrange subscription to "the main national and municipal printed periodical editions", included in the special list, and report upon the achieved results. The local authorities explained their appeal by the beginning of subscription campaign for the first half-year of 2016 and **the need "to ensure correct informing of citizens about social and economic development of Belarus"**.

According to the [mahilyowspring.org](http://mahilyowspring.org) human rights Web-resource, Mahilou factory workers **were urged to subscribe to the local state-owned press**. They were given templates of requests to keep a part of their wages for subscription.

The management of 'Krychautsementschyfer' (Krychau, Mahilou region) Public Corporation **ordered the heads of departments to arrange their subordinates' subscription** to the 'controlled' periodical editions with indication of their titles and the number of copies to be subscribed to.



## BUDGETARY FUNDING OF THE STATE-OWNED MEDIA

The Belarus Law ‘On the National Budget for 2016’ was adopted on December 30, 2015. It provides for the issuance of around EUR 45 million (900 120 843.0 thousand Br) for financing the state-owned media in 2016. Among other, the budgetary funding includes around EUR 36.6 million (734 815 075.0 thousand Br) for TV and radio broadcasting, around EUR 3.5 million (69 154 793.0 thousand Br) for the periodical press and publishing houses, and around EUR 4.7 million (96 150 975.0 thousand Br) for ‘other issues in the mass media field’.

**The funding is provided without tenders at that. The list of 26 state-owned newspapers and magazines for funding from the national budget in 2016 was defined by a government resolution No.966 of November 19, 2015.**

## RESUMPTION OF PROSECUTION AGAINST JOURNALISTS FOR COOPERATION WITH FOREIGN MASS MEDIA

The prosecution of journalists on administrative charges for their materials in the foreign media was resumed at the end of 2015.

On December 24, 2015, a police report was made in relation to a journalist Larysa Shchyraakova from Homiel. It was compiled in her absence by Homiel Department of Internal Affairs. (The freelance reporter was on holidays at the moment.) According to the police report, the journalist was accused of producing a TV-report, dedicated to the problems of a former foster-child from the orphanage in Urytski settlement, Homiel region. (The TV footage was presented on ‘Belsat’ TV channel.)



On December 28, 2015, two police reports for breaking article 22.9, part 2 of Belarus Code on Administrative Offenses were drawn up in relation to another journalist from Homiel, Kastus Zhukouski. The reports were made in the journalist’s absence by

officers from Kalinkavichy and Karma District Departments of Internal Affairs (Homiel region). The police officers claimed against broadcasting of two ‘illegally produced’ TV-reports by Kastus Zhukouski on ‘Belsat’ TV channel.



The administrative prosecution against Belarusian journalists for their cooperation with foreign media without accreditation started in April 2014. The Belarusian authorities started to accuse the journalists of breaking regulations on production and (or) distribution of mass media products (article 22.9, part 2 of Belarus Code on Administrative Offenses).

There were registered 10 cases of bringing journalists to legal liability for breaking the article in 2014 and 28 cases of prosecuting journalists on the administrative charges within the period since January till August 2015. The situation improved after the President A. Lukashenka had promised ‘to examine the situation’ during his interview to journalists of independent mass media on August 4, 2015. Consequently, none of administrative cases against journalists for breaking article 22.9, part 2 of Belarus Code on Administrative Offenses were filed since the end of August till December 24, 2015.

## RATING LISTS, INDEXES, STATISTICS

On October 9, 2015, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media [Dunja Mijatović](#) congratulated [Sviatlana Aleksievich](#), a Belarusian writer and journalist, for winning the Nobel Prize in Literature: “The brave voice of Aleksievich, recognized by the Nobel jury, has greatly contributed to the pluralism and diversity of opinions on issues of recent history,” Mijatović said. “Her tireless efforts serve as a remarkable example for independent and investigative journalists in Belarus and beyond.”



“This award is a recognition of the indispensable role investigative and courageous writing and journalism has in our society,” Mijatović added.

The Freedom House human rights organization (USA) placed Belarus on the list of countries with non-free Internet in its ‘[Freedom on the Net](#)’ annual report.

The report embraces the period since June 1, 2014 till May 31, 2015. While describing the current trends in the Belarusian Internet segment, [Freedom House highlighted the recent amendments](#) to the Belarus Mass Media law as well as other legal measures, which were introduced by the authorities to broaden their possibilities to restrict critical content on the Web.



Moreover, the blocking of access to Web-sites of independent media, the reinforcement of administrative prosecution against independent journalists, among other, for their work without accreditation, and the adoption of provisions, aimed at restricting access to Tor and anonymizers were mentioned in the ‘Freedom on the Net-2015’ country report on Belarus.





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