

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting No. 16-17

March 02 – 13, 2011

The first court verdict has been issued to a journalist, accused of participation in ‘mass riots’ on December 19, 2010. Alaksandr Atroshchankau, spokesman for former Presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau was sentenced to four years of imprisonment in a strict regime colony. Mr. Atroshchankau’s attorney has already appealed against the verdict.

“There have been beaten all records of repressions against journalists in Belarus,” BAJ Chairperson Zhanna Litvina commented on the event.

In the meanwhile, six other journalists and BAJ members are waiting for trials. They’ve been similarly charged with arrangement or/and participation in mass riots. A. Fiaduta, P. Sieviarynets, and D. Bandarenka are kept in the KGB isolation ward. I. Khalip has been placed under house arrest with very strict conditions. N. Radzina and S. Vazniak were released from jail and forced to sign written undertakings not to leave the places of residence until the trial.

On March 2, 2011, there was distributed information on the Web about the appearance of some new ‘black list’ of cultural workers and music bands, as if banned for TV and radio broadcasting. Representatives of several media confirmed that the list had been handed over to them by governmental authorities. At the same time, the Ministry of Information representatives denied categorically the mere existence of the list. However, as soon as the updates about the ‘black list’ appeared, musical compositions of some rock bands disappeared from FM radio and several concerts of disloyal musicians were cancelled. Reportedly, the abovementioned list included famous musicians, literary men, and actors from Belarus and abroad. All of them expressed protest against state repressions in relation to Belarusian opposition and civil society in the aftermath of the Presidential election 2010.

A long story with court hearings on the “Autoradio” case seemed to come to an end within the period under consideration. (The FM

radio station had been closed down by the governmental authorities as if for distribution of “extremist materials” in the form of election addresses, delivered by former Presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau.) The Supreme Economic Court cancelled the official decision on ceasing the “Autoradio” broadcasting. However, the Minister of Information Pralaskouski regarded the verdict as unfair and promised to appeal against the court decision to the Panel of Judges at the Supreme Economic Court.

On **March 2, 2011**, the judge Tatsiana Charkas from Frunzenski City District Court of Minsk sentenced *Alaksandr Atroshchankau*, a journalist and a spokesman for the former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau to four years of imprisonment in a high security colony. He was found guilty of taking part in mass riots in the aftermath of presidential election 2010 (part 2, article 293 of Belarusian Criminal Code).

Mr. Atroshchankau’s attorney Vadzim Mushynski appealed against the verdict to a superior court.

On **March 3, 2011**, the Minister of Information of Belarus Aleh Pralaskouski disclaimed the existence of new ‘black lists’ of cultural workers, as if banned for broadcasting on the official TV and radio stations. He named the document ‘a shameless provocation’ and ‘a rotten counterfeit’ at that.

Surprisingly enough, it appeared that a concert of “Liapis Trubetskoi” in Homiel, Neuro Dubel in Minsk, and Zmitsier Vaytsiushkevich in Brest were cancelled without any plausible pretexts in a couple of days after the Minister’s declaration.

As reported on **March 3, 2011**, a journalist Ales Lyauchuk was forced to transfer 1,100,000 Belarusian rubles (approx. EUR 250) to the editorial account of “Znamya Yunosti” state-owned newspaper. The verdict had been issued by Brest City court. A. Lyauchuk objected to the court decision and planned to appeal against it to a higher court. It is worth mentioning that the journalist asserts that he was dismissed from office at the “Znamya Yunosti” newspaper editorial for his reluctance to contribute defamatory articles about the events of December 19, 2010 in Minsk. The newspaper editorial refuted the contention.

Pavel Sapielka, an attorney for the imprisoned BAJ member Paval Sevyarynets, was expelled for far-fetched reasons from Minsk City Bar Association on **March 4, 2011**.

On **March 9, 2011**, the KGB Department for Minsk and Minsk region replied negatively to a request of “Nasha Niva” newspaper editorial to return their computer equipment, seized after the searches at the editorial office and at the newspaper Editor’s and the newspaper photo correspondent’s private apartments at the end of December 2010.

The **‘Amnesty International’** called upon Belarusian governmental authorities to release immediately and without any prior conditions the imprisoned Alaksandr Atroshchankau and 11 other prisoners of conscience in their statement of **March 9, 2011**. Also, the human rights watchdogs urged the Belarus’ government to conduct an independent investigation of testimonies about tortures of prisoners in the KGB isolation ward and provide medical experts with free access to all the political prisoners in custody.

On **March 9, 2011**, the Supreme Economic Court found an official warning to “Autoradio” Close Corporation, issued by the Ministry of Information of Belarus to be invalid. It is worth mentioning that the warning to the FM radio station was issued on January 10, 2011. The National Committee on TV and Radio Broadcasting referred to the document, while taking its decision to terminate the “Autoradio” broadcasting in the country on January 12, 2011. The Minister of Information A. Pralaskouski stated on **March 10, 2011** that the governmental agency would appeal against the ‘unfair’ court verdict in order ‘to right the wrong’.

A “Nasha Niva” correspondent Ales Piletski was sent off a court room in Maskouski City District Court of Minsk on **March 10, 2011**. The cases of several participants of ‘mass riots’ were regarded during the court session. The “Nasha Niva” journalist was irrelevantly punished for on-line reporting from the trial.

The judge of Hlybokaye District Court rendered a judgement on **March 10, 2011** to dismiss an administrative case against a local civil activist and a journalist of www.westki.info regional Web-portal, and a BAJ member Kastus Shytal. The local electoral committee officials had accused media worker of breaking the election legislation during the recent Presidential election. The law suit against K. Shytal was barred by statute of limitation.

A journalist and a BAJ activist Andrzej Paczobut received an official warning from the Public Prosecutor’s Office for Hrodna region for reporting to “Gazeta Wyborcza” daily (Poland) without press credentials on **March 10, 2011**. The journalist insists that the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs violate his constitutional right to free collection

and distribution of information. Hence, he is not going to cease his journalistic activity.

The media worker addressed to the Prosecutor General of Belarus Ryhor Vasilevich with an open letter on **March 9, 2011**. The media worker asked the Prosecutor General to look into a legal casus that happened in his opinion as a result of prosecuting him for participation in the unauthorized protest action in Minsk on December 19, 2010.

An independent journalist and a BAJ member Aleh Razhkou was detained by police in Central market place of Homiel on **March 13, 2011**. He had come to the market place in order to report on a flash-mob action. The media worker was released in an hour on providing an explanation for his presence at the place of the event. A. Razhkou's BAJ membership card and IFJ Press card were seized from him "for further evaluation of validity."

Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service