

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Fortnight in Belarus

October 10-23, 2011

Seven years passed since Vieranika Charkasava's tragic death on October 20, 2011. It is worth reminding, the Belarusian independent journalist was stabbed to death in her Minsk apartment.

*According to **Siarhey Balashau**, Minsk City Prosecutor's Aide, the investigation has been suspended in the view of "the absence of indictable suspects".*

A number of independent journalists faced an unpleasant problem of 'phone terrorism' in the form of non-stop attacks on their cell and home phones from unknown phone numbers that practically blocked the colleagues' work. "Narodnaya Vola" conducted a journalistic investigation, in order to find the villains of the piece. The special services rejected their complicity in the scurvy tricks. However, they appear to be well thought-out for a common act of hooliganism. At the same time, neither the police, nor the mobile operators rushed to help the journalists.

As reported on **October 11, 2011**, the political prisoners Eduard Lobau and Dzmitry Bandarenka don't receive non-state newspapers in custody, despite being subscribed to the periodicals by their relatives. Maryna Lobava confirmed the fact after a phone talk with her son. According to Maryna Lobava, she subscribed her son to six newspapers: "Narodnaya Vola", "Nasha Slova", "Svobodnye Novosti Plus", "BelGazeta", "Belorusy i Rynok", and "Obozrevatel".

Dzmitry Bandarenka noted in his letters that he didn't receive newspapers by subscription either.

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As reported on **October 12, 2011**, *Ranitsa*, the only children's weekly in Belarusian language had been appended to the *Perekhodny Voзраст* newspaper for teenagers, published in Russian. The publishers explained the decision by economic problems.

As reported on *October 13, 2011*, *Biarozka*, the oldest magazine for teenagers in Belarusian language would be appended to the literary *Maladosts* magazine for youngsters since the beginning of 2012. The amalgamation was reasoned by financial difficulties too.

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On **October 13, 2011**, the Belarusian journalists Iryna Khalip, Natallia Radzina, and Maryna Koktysh started receiving non-stop phone calls from the unknown attackers. The list of harassed media workers broadened on the following days. A TV reporter Pavel Sharamet, residing in Moscow, the "Narodnaya Vola" Editor-in-chief Iosif Syaredzich, and BAJ Press Officer Volha Babak faced the similar problem a couple of days later. Some of them managed to solve the problem by disabling the incoming calls. Others submitted claims to the police. Surprisingly, the law enforcement officers felt reluctant to provide urgent assistance to the journalists.

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Alina Skrabunova, a journalist of www.222.by Web-site (Mahilou) was urged to come for interrogation to the regional Public Prosecutor's office on **October 13, 2011**. The senior legal investigator Pavel Starykau inquired if the media worker hadn't left an "offending comment" that insulted the judge of Leninski City District of Mahilou Iryna Lanchava on the Charter'97 Web-site (www.charter97.org). The legal investigator underscored that the judge was a public officer and that the offender would be liable to criminal punishment. The judge retorted she had been in custody on charges of participation in a 'silent protest' civil action on the day, when the comment appeared.

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As reported on **October 13, 2011**, the students of some Minsk university were surveyed on the issue of Web-legislation in Belarus. In particular, they were inquired on the necessity to restrict access to Web-sites and social networks as well as on the methods of fighting against the threats to civil security on the Web.

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The Belarusian Association of Journalists has nominated the www.ex-press.by regional on-line newspaper and Andrzej Paczobut, a Polish *Gazeta Wyborcza* correspondent in Belarus for the Gerd Bucerius *Free Press of Eastern Europe* Award, presented by the ZEIT Foundation (Germany). A corresponding decision was taken by the BAJ Board on **October 14, 2011**.

The Gerd Bucerius Prize Free Press of Eastern Europe is given to newspapers, online media, and journalists from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. It is aimed to foster press freedom and free speech.

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Kastus Shytal, a journalist of www.westki.info on-line publication (Hlybokaye, Vitsiebsk region) and BAJ member was fined 105,000 Br (approx. EUR 8) by Miory District Court on **October 17, 2011**.

The journalist was accused of cursing ('Disorderly Conduct' – article 17.1 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Infractions). The supplementary evidence was given by two policemen.

It's worth mentioning that Kastus Shytal was detained by road police on October 7, 2011 in 5 km from the town of Miory. He was hitchhiking from Hlybokaye to Dzisna to cover the Public Assembly, which was to take place in Dzisna on the following day.

At around 5pm the road policemen forced the media worker to get out of the car, in which he was riding. They took him to the police department in Miory to check his possible involvement in a robbery on the road Hlybokaye – Sharkaushchyna. However, the law enforcement officers changed their minds as soon as they arrived at the police station, saying that the reporter had cursed while they examined the car.

The media worker spent two days behind bars in Miory police department until the first court session on October 10, 2011.

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The independent journalist community commemorated Vieranika Charkasava, the assassinated *Salidarnasts* newspaper journalist on **October 20, 2011**. The media worker had been cruelly murdered seven years before the date.

According to Siarhey Balashau, Minsk City Prosecutor's Aide, the investigation has been suspended in the view of "the absence of indictable suspects".

"The operational search actions are continued. The outcome of searches is presented at operational meetings," he added. The City Prosecutor's Aide refused to tell the date of the recent meeting, referring to the secrecy of investigation though.

V. Charkasava's relatives, friends, and colleagues came to the journalist's tomb with flowers and candles to pay tribute to her memory.

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A civil action with a demand to release political prisoners from jail took place in October Square in Minsk on **October 21, 2011**. Although the journalists, who covered the event, weren't detained, the law enforcement agents applied force against them at the moment of detaining the action participants. 'The reporters were beaten on their feet and pushed,' Siarhei Hudzilin, a *Nasha Niva* photo correspondent said. The Deputy Head of City Department of Internal Affairs Ihar Yausieyeu forced journalists to stop interviewing Lutsyna Bialzatskaya, the mother of Iryna Khalip in October Square and ordered them to leave the place, threatening with detentions.

On the eve of the civil action it was problematic to access informational Web-sites www.charter97.org, www.svaboda.org, www.belaruspartisan.org, and Vkontaktie social network.

Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service