

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Fortnight in Belarus

June 1 – 15, 2011

The commenced secretive trial of Andrzej Paczobut, a „Gazeta Wyborcza” correspondent became a real headache for Belarusian journalists in June 2011. The criminal litigation started in Hrodna on June 14, 2011. The prosecuted media worker is accused of breaking two articles of the Criminal Code of Belarus: “An Insult to the President of Belarus” (Part 1 of Art. 368, CC) and “Defamation of the President of Belarus” (Part 1 of Art. 367, CC).

The following court session has been scheduled for June 17, since the Public Prosecutor filed a petition to postpone the hearings of the case in order to define the charges more precisely.

„It is a show trial over honest independent journalism in general,” noted the BAJ Chairperson Zhanna Litvina on the eve of the court hearing in Hrodna. “It is a socially important litigation. If it is held behind the closed doors, it will only mean that the official authorities feel reluctant to disseminate information on the circumstances of this case,” she added.

The judicial procedure on closing down the “Nasha Niva” and “Narodnaya Vola” newspapers hasn’t been finalized yet. It should be reminded that the corresponding claim was filed by the Ministry of Information of Belarus on April 25, 2011. The periodicals are making attempts to appeal against the Ministry’s latest warnings. Consequently, the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus has suspended the cases on closing down the newspapers until the appeals are duly considered. The publishing of both periodical editions is continued.

Rodion Marinichev, a Russian “Dozhd” TV correspondent was deported from Belarus within the period under review. Also, several bloggers, who called Belarusians to civil solidarity through social networks, were detained in the first half of June 2011.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists received the Atlantic Council’s ‘Freedom Award’ together with the “Viasna” Human Rights Center and “Free Theatre” in the Polish city of Wroclaw in June 2011.

As reported on **June 1, 2011**, Andrei Parashchuk, Head of Partizanski City District Department of Interior in Minsk took a decision to deport Rodion Marinichev, a Russian “Dozhd” TV correspondent from the Republic of Belarus. Accordingly, the reporter is banned to enter the country under threat of jail until May 30, 2016. It is worth reminding the reporter was detained on interviewing a journalist Iryna Khalip next to Gorky Park in Minsk on May 30, 2011.

The International Observation Mission of the Committee on International Control over the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus reminded the Belarusian official authorities about their international commitments in the sphere of freedom of the media, concerning, in particular, the facilitation of entry and granting accreditation to foreign journalists on **June**

1, 2011. “The need to obtain mandatory accreditation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus for foreign journalists not only significantly hampers their urgent work on the coverage of dramatic events, but also a shift from accreditation rights to the “right to accredit” leads to abuses and manipulation by the authorities, leading to gross interference in the freedom of speech,” the human rights activists noted.

On **June 2, 2011**, the “Narodnaya Vola” non-state newspaper appealed against a ruling of the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus, returned on April 27, 2011, to take for consideration a claim, filed by the Ministry of Information of Belarus on closing down the periodical edition. Consequently, the court deleted the most biased wording from the claim. However, it is still to be considered by the court.

Another renter urged the **ex-press.by** regional Web-site editorial (the former “Barysau Elektronny” on-line newspaper) to leave their premises on **June 3, 2011**. It is worth mentioning that the Web-site editorial team has been ousted six times from the already pre-paid rented premises during the period of its activity. The on-line newspaper’s editors and reporters have been repeatedly interrogated at the KGB Department for Barysau district.

The “Charter’97” Web-site editorial received a copy of a peculiar document on **June 3, 2011**. The instruction testified to the continued obligatory subscription to the state media in Minsk. Accordingly, the Administration of Piershamayski City District of Minsk urged all heads of organizations and enterprises “to take over personal control of in-plant subscription to the chief national and city periodical editions”, including “Sovietskaya Belorussiya,” “Minskiy Kuryer,” “Vecherniy Minsk,” “Narodnaya Gazeta,” “Respublika,” “Zviazda,” “Znamya Yunosti,” and the “Planeta” magazine, in order to keep to the number of subscribers as of January 1, 2011.

Viktar Parfionak, a “Radio Racyja” journalist submitted again a package of documents for getting the official press accreditation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus on **June 6, 2011**. The reporter’s previous attempts to receive the press credentials in 2009 and in 2010 were in vain.

Dzmitry Niafioudau, an activist of “Rukh Buduchyni” (‘The Movement of Future’) social and enlightening organization was detained in Minsk on **June 6, 2011**. The youngster moderated the “Revolution through the social network” community in “VKontaktie”. The KGB agents came to Mr. Niafioudau’s private apartment, seized his computer, and detained the civil activist as if for ‘cursing’. Also, the KGB officers seized a computer from Siarhey Paulukievich, a moderator of “We Stand up for Great Belarus!” and “The Rally of Millions” Web-communities. The youngster was obliged to delete both communities from the Web.

Ivan Stasiuk, a civil activist from Brest was detained at the Belarusian – Polish state border crossing and convoyed to the local KGB department **on the same day**. The border guards took the activist’s passport and told him they would return the document after a preventive talk. According to Mr. Stasiuk, the KGB agents were persuading him to terminate his oppositional activity in the social networks.

The www.charter97.org faced a massive DDoS-attack on **June 6, 2011**. The server was cut off and the Web-users’ access to the Web-pages was disabled for some time.

As reported on **June 7, 2011**, a group of dangerous for communication people was distributed at Hrodna enterprises. All of them were suspected in cooperation with the "Belsat" TV Channel (Poland).

As reported on **June 8, 2011**, the Embassy of Lithuania in Minsk refused to issue visas to representatives of official Belarusian media and the official Belarusian Union of Journalists, invited to a meeting on journalists' security in the OSCE region. The event was held in Vilnius on June 7-8, 2011.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus commented upon the situation on **June 9, 2011**. The ministerial officials noted that the European Union "openly showed a disrespectful attitude" towards international obligations this way.

Vadzim Gigin, the "Belaruskaya Dumka" magazine's Editor-in-chief, included in the EU ban list, had noted before the mentioned trip on June 1, 2011 that he filed an appeal against the EU authorities to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. He underscored the EU ministers' decision violated article 2 of European Convention on Human Rights, ensuring the freedom of movement in Europe.

As reported on **June 8, 2011**, an independent journalist Yauhien Vaskovich, found guilty of setting fire to Babruysk KGB Department, had been transported under guard to Mahilou Penal Colony No.15 on May 28, 2011. It is worth mentioning that Y. Vaskovich officially confirmed the fact of taking part in setting the KGB office on fire on October 16, 2010.

As reported on **June 9, 2011**, the Web providers disabled access to a popular Web-resource s13.ru from Hrodna enterprises. Hrodna blog section on s13.ru presents news on different events in the city of Hrodna and in the Hrodna region. The number of registered blog section users exceeds 6,000 people.

As stated on **June 10, 2011**, Minsk City Court would consider the appeals against the sentences, delivered to Iryna Khalip, Pavel Seviarynets, and Siarhei Martsaleu on June 21, 2011.

It is worth mentioning that the Zavodski City District Court in Minsk found the abovementioned journalists guilty of arranging the actions that severely violated the public order. Consequently, Iryna Khalip was sentenced to two years of jail with a two-year delay of punishment. Pavel Seviarynets was sentenced to three years of restriction of liberty in a correctional facility. S. Martsaleu was sentenced to two years of jail with a two-year probation term.

A secretive trial over a „Gazeta Wyborcza” correspondent Andrzej Paczobut started in the Leninski City District Court of Hrodna on **June 14, 2011**. The police prevented the reporter's wife Aksana from entering the court premises. The first day of the trial was dedicated to listening to the experts' philological reports on the "criminal" texts by A. Paczobut. The following court session was scheduled for **June 17, 2011**, since the Public Prosecutor filed a petition to postpone the hearings of the case in order to define the charges more precisely.

The prosecuted media worker is accused of breaking two articles of the Criminal Code of Belarus: "An Insult to the President of Belarus" (Part 1 of Art. 368, CC) and "Defamation of the President of Belarus" (Part 1 of Art. 367, CC). A. Paczobut can be sentenced to 2-4

years of imprisonment. The journalist has been kept in Hrodna pre-trial jail since April 6, 2011.

Kseniya Stasiukievich, the judge of Leninski City District Court of Hrodna sentenced an independent journalist from Hrodna Ihar Bantsar to 5 days of arrest under administrative law on **June 15, 2011**. The journalist went on hunger strike to express his protest against the unfair court verdict. The BAJ member was sent to custody as if for his disorderly conduct (article 17.1 of Belarus' Code on Administrative Infractions). The charges were grounded on the testimonial pieces of evidence, provided by two policemen, who detained Ihar Bantsar at his house. Thus, they wanted to prevent him from taking part in a criminal defamation trial over his colleague A. Paczobut, mentioned above.

Prepared by the BAJ Monitoring Service