

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting April 1 – 14, 2013

This time public attention was focused on pre-trial proceedings concerning the suit filed by the KGB claiming to recognize the Belarus Press Photo 2011 extremist. 41 albums of photos from the Belarus Press Photo contest were seized on November 12, 2012 from the Belarusian photographers Aliaksandr Vasiukovich, Yulia Darashkevich and Vadzinm Zamirouski on the border crossing point Kamienny Log. The examination made by ideologists and teachers of Hrodna University upon the request of the KGB found that “the compilation of materials in the photo album in total reflects only negative aspects of vital activity of the Belarusian people... which... diminishes the prestige of the state authority, undermines trust to state bodies from foreign states, foreign or international organizations.” All photos of 2011 finalists included into the album can be accessed [here](#).

On April 2 in the evening anonymous hackers cracked the website of the Mahilou branch of the human rights center *Viasna* and changed passwords to the admin panel. Consequently an article appeared on the website which contained threats to a human rights defender **Barys Bukhel** and to an independent journalist **Ales Burakou**. Only on April 5 editors of the website were able to take control over the resource.

On April 3 a BAJ member from Brest, independent journalist **Alina Litvinchuk** received a reply from the General prosecutor’s office regarding a **warning** against her contribution to a **foreign mass medium without accreditation**. The journalist claimed the warning was “ungrounded and unlawful” and asked to revoke it.

The letter signed by the deputy head of the supervision department on observing rights and freedoms of citizens **Pavel Eliseyeu** informed that the complaint from Alina Litvinchuk was redirected to the prosecutor’s office of Brest region. The journalist was surprised by the answer, as the General prosecutor’s office passed over the complaint to the same state body whose actions were actually disputed in the complaint.

*We remind that the warning was issued to Alina Litvinchuk by the deputy chair of the prosecutor’s office in Brest region Aliksandr Tochka on **December 18, 2012**. The document claimed that “upon examining information on the Internet it was found that” Litvinchuk had violated the procedure of performing professional journalistic activities by working for a foreign mass medium without accreditation.*

On April 4 the court of Babruysk city and district **dismissed a moral damage suit** of a journalist from *Bobruyskij Courier* newspaper **Victor Kachan**. The lawsuit was filed against the police department of Minsk Regional Executive Committee after the incident of **July 6, 2011**: Victor Kachan, being at work and reporting from the central square of Babruysk, was **detained for one day**.

The journalist claimed damages of 10 million Belarusian rubles. Babruysk court found that these demands were unreasoned and dismissed the claim. The journalist is going to appeal the decision.

*We remind that two journalists of *Bobruyskij Courier* were detained in the central square of the city on July 6, 2011, during a silent action. Though policemen knew that they had detained journalists, they made up protocols accusing them of violating the law on mass events. The journalists were detained for around 24 hours. At first the court sentenced them to an administrative fine, but then the case was closed because of absence of corpus delicti.*

As became known on **April 5**, Barysau Regional Executive Committee **deleted from its website all information about non-state mass media** of the region. Now it provides information about state-run mass media only.

We remind that the non-state newspaper *Borisovskije Novosti* asked the executive committee to add information about their outlet to the section “Non-state mass media”. The section did not mention Borisovskije Novosti, but enumerated several other resources, such as TV companies Telecom-Guarant and Svet and a print newspaper *Homan Barysaushchyy*. The request of *Borisovskije Novosti* was dismissed, and the outlet complained to several state bodies.

The Ministry of Information answered that they could not oblige a state body to publish information which is not mandatory for distribution (the Provision №645, dated 29.04.2010 regulates the order of functioning of the websites belonging to state bodies and state organizations, according to which all decisions on the contents of the website of the executive committee can be made by the chairperson of the institution).

On April 10 the Board of BAJ adopted the text of an **appeal to the head of the Hrodna region KGB** Ivan Korzh, who initiated the court hearing on recognizing the **Belarus Press Photo 2011** albums extremist. BAJ asks the KGB to withdraw the case from court. The court hearing was scheduled for April 17.

“We consider that the fact of a court hearing over extremism in photos is absurd. The photos of the album do not contain calls for extremist actions and do not propagate it. The photos do not create, but only reflect the reality. They by definition cannot contain “intentionally distorted false insinuations on the vital activity of the Republic of Belarus” (the quote from the document that you signed),” says the statement.

On April 11 an employee of *Radio Svaboda*, political scientist **Valer Karbalevich** met obstructions on the entry to the German Embassy in Minsk. He was invited for a meeting; however, he did not have his documents on him, and the guard called an additional police patrol. Valer Karbalevich was permitted entry only after a German diplomat went out and confirmed that he was an invited guest.

On April 11 the former editor of the magazine **ARCHE. Pachatak** received an **official reply** from the Department of Financial Investigations. The deputy head of the department **V.Barceвичus** informs that “upon the results of the probe held by the DFI of the Committee of State Control in Minsk city and the region, **criminal prosecution** in your case under article 243 of the Criminal Code was **rejected**.” Valer Bulhakau was invited to the DFI “to discuss the future of the confiscated books” that belong to him. The same letter was sent to *Inbelkult* (former publisher of the magazine who also had sent a request to the DFI). Both documents are dated April 9. The requests were filed after the information appeared that there would be no criminal prosecution: the editors wanted to have confirming official documents.

April 14 the Investigative Committee in Minsk started a criminal case against former video engineer of the entertaining channel *BelMusTV* under art. 343 point 2 of the Criminal Code. On April 13 at 4pm the video engineer demonstrated pornography for 10 minutes on TV, after which he hid away. Allegedly, it was a nervous breakdown. The TV channel received a warning from the Ministry of Information.