

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting - March 12 - 18, 2012

Perhaps, the major event within the reporting period was restriction of travelling abroad, imposed on several BAJ members. Five BAJ members were denied exit from Belarus: human rights activist Valiantsin Stefanovich, Editor-in-chief of the independent socio-political newspaper "Nasha Niva" Andrey Dynko, Chairperson of PA BAJ Zhanna Litvina, official representative of the TV channel "Belsat" Mikhail Yanchuk, and also head of the legal commission of the "Belarusian Helsinki Committee" Harry Pahaniayla.

On March 15 the public association "Belarusian Association of Journalists" put forward the statement in response to the foreign travel restrictions, imposed on Belarusian journalists and BAJ members. BAJ expressed strong protest against the restrictions of the journalists' activities, rights and lawful interests.

BAJ also demanded that a number of state bodies should answer the question – which state establishment and on what grounds has taken the decision to ban exit to a number of Belarusian citizens.

Since March 7, around 15 people have been unable to leave the country because of the ban – they are politicians, civil activists and journalists.

On March 12 the camera crew of Sveriges Television (SVT) (cameraman **Sven Bergman**, correspondent **Olaf Christopherson**, producer **Isabelle Sommerfeld**) were detained in Minsk. The incident took place in Independence square where the journalists were planning to film an interview with **Raman Pratasevich**, an activist of the "silent protests". Together with the TV group, the police also detained **Uladzimir Chudziantsou**, a correspondent for the "Russian news service" in Belarus and BAJ member **Illia Kuzniatsou**, who accompanied the group. The detained were taken to the Maskouski district police department "for identification". In the department all the journalists' data and video material were copied. They were released approx. 3 hours later.

On March 12 a civil distributor of unregistered mass media **Siarhey Nigatsin** was detained in Mahilou. He was taken to the Leninski district police department. During personal search, there were found 30 copies of unregistered news outlets "Vybar" (Choice) and "Tut i tsiaper" (Here and Now). After 2-hours' detention, the police made up a protocol of confiscation and gave Nigatsin a summons to appear "as a witness" in the Leninski district police department on March 16.

On March 12 the editorial office of Baranavichy independent newspaper **Intex-press** received the local policeman **Vital Dabrachynski** who came to "have a talk" with journalists. The major didn't explain the problem and the status of journalists in this talk; he didn't have any official summons. So, the Director of the "Editorial House Intex-press" **Uladzimir Yanukevich** suggested that the police officer come later with

documents. On March 14 Major Dabrachynski came again without any official summons, and also failed to explain the reason for his visit. The journalists refused to have any business with the police on unofficial basis.

As reported on March 13, Radio *Svaboda* co-worker from Prague, translator **Siarhey Shupa** was denied Belarusian visa. In the Belarusian Embassy to the Czech Republic he got back his passport with the mark “denied”. He was going to hold the presentation of Alherd Bakharevich’s novel “Shabany. A tale of one disappearance”.

On March 14 a civil distributor of the independent press **Barys Khamayda** was detained in Vitsebsk. The police didn’t explain any reasons for his detention; only on his way to the Chyhunachny district police department Khamayda found out that he was going for “personality identification”. He remarked that the whole process was filmed by a cameraman. Previously, Barys Khamayda was detained last autumn.

On March 14 Andrey Dynko, Editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper “Nasha Niva”, was made to get off the train “Minsk – Vilnius”. He was told that he was on the list of citizens banned to leave Belarus. Border guards recommended him to return to Minsk and did not explain the reason, referring him to the Department of Citizenship and Migration in the place of residence.

On March 15 BAJ Chairperson **Zhanna Litvina** was denied exit from Belarus. She was going to Warsaw by plane from the airport “Minsk-2”. At the passport control she was told that she was banned from leaving the country, and her passport was stamped.

On March 15 the official representative of the TV channel “Belsat” **Mikhail Yanchuk** was denied exit from Belarus; his passport was also stamped.

On March 15, BAJ member and head of the legal commission of the "Belarusian Helsinki Committee" **Harry Pahaniayla** was given a note from the Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Maskouski district police department that he had been included on the list of citizens temporarily forbidden to leave Belarus. According to the note, he has been banned from leaving the country since March 5, 2012 because he is a debtor in a bankruptcy case or the interested party in relation to the debtor.

Earlier, **on March 11, Valiantsin Stefanovich**, BAJ member and human rights activist, was also banned from leaving the country.

On March 16 PA “BAJ” sent official letters to the heads of the General Prosecutor’s Office, Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the State Border Control of Belarus. All the letters were accompanied by yesterday’s Statement on the problem of international travel restriction.

Aliaksey Biahun (head of the Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Ministry of Home Affairs) and **Ihar Rachkouski** (head of the State Border Control) were asked to inform BAJ “which state establishment and on what grounds has taken the decision to ban BAJ members from leaving the country”, and “to take all measures

necessary to restore their rights and prevent violations of Belarusian citizens' constitutional freedom of movement in future”.

Prosecutor General **Aliaksandr Kaniuk** was asked not only to restore the journalists' rights, but also to make prescriptions for the competent bodies to eliminate law violations, reasons and conditions that enable such violations, and to warn those responsible against possible future commitment of unlawful actions.

On March 16 Zhanna Litvina paid a visit to the Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Soviet district in Minsk. She was given a note from the data base about the citizens whose international travel has been temporarily restricted. It says the information to ban her from leaving Belarus was submitted on March 5 by the Ministry of Justice.

“Such restriction can be made when there is a legal case on bankruptcy of the legal entity,” said Deputy Chair of BAJ Andrey Bastunets. ‘But it is nonsense when the debtor doesn't know about the beginning of such case. So, the fact of submitting information by the Ministry of Justice is wrong, to put it mildly. Naturally, it will be objected.”