

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting July 16– 22, 2012

In the reporting period public attention was focused on developments in the case of Anton Surapin, 20-year old freelancer, a fourth year' student of the Journalism Institute at the BSU who stayed at the KGB detention center. First he was detained for three days, then his detention was extended to 10 days. He is contacted only through a lawyer; it is unknown if the prosecution has announced charges, as it is hidden by the secrecy of investigation. Meanwhile, human rights defenders remind that detention over 10 days without formal charges is a rude violation of the Code of Criminal Procedure. We remind that Anton Surapin was detained in connection with a criminal case of illegal state border crossing by an organized group of people (article 371, part 3 of the Criminal Code). Anton is suspected of helping the group to cross the border which is punished by article 16 of the Criminal Code (three to seven years' imprisonment).

On July 16 the official website of the **Factory of tractor details and aggregates** in Babruisk informed that a brigade of the factory **intended to file a lawsuit** against some internet-resources because **of distortion of facts about a strike** at the factory. According to the article, some media wrote about "hundreds of strikers" and published photos of the workers who didn't take part in the strike or didn't even work at that factory". A chief of one of the departments at the factory Valery Halenka said they were going to file a lawsuit to defend honor and dignity of the workers against the editions that had published their photos with false information.

On July 16, three days after the detention of **Anton Surapin**, the journalists' parents had no information about his status. After the 72-hours' period they went to the KGB, together with BAJ chairperson Zhanna Litvina and her deputy Andrei Bastunets. The receptionist was unable to provide any information, saying they have no right to interfere with the investigation.

*We remind that Anton Surapin was detained at home on July 13 in connection with a criminal case against Swedish teddy-bear-bombers. Anton Surapin, being an editor of the website Belarus News Photos, published unique photos of the teddy bears which hadn't appeared in the media before.*

*On July 17 his lawyer, who was at the interrogation the day before, said Surapin was accused of **assisting a foreign group of people to cross the border illegally** which carries punishment of three to seven years in prison (article 16 of the Criminal Code). Anton Surapin, being an editor of the website **Belarus News Photos**, published unique photos of the teddy bears which hadn't appeared in the media before. Anton wrote that the photos had been sent to him by an anonymous person who didn't live in Minsk.*

On July 17 representatives of the PR company **Studio Total**, which organized the teddy bears landing over Belarus, said that the Belarusian photographer **Anton Surapin had no relation to the action**.

"We have already said that before the action we hadn't had any contacts with any of the Belarusians. It is clear we did not have any contacts with Anton," said Tomas Mazetti who together with his colleague Hannah Frey aviated the plane.

In the meantime international human rights organizations, such as Reporters without borders, International Federation of Journalists, European Federation of Journalists, Committee to Protect Journalists demanded immediate release of the journalist.

On July 17 the house of the website **orsha.eu** editor **Ihar Kazmiarchak** was **searched**, as well as the his parents' house. As a result, a computer, two flash-cards and a 3G-modem were **confiscated**. He was interrogated about distribution of pornography via the website. It all happened two days after he

registered to be an observer at the parliamentary elections within the campaign “Human rights defenders for free elections”.

Kazmiarchak claims there was no porn material published on the website orsha.eu. He supposes that some structures are very interested in the information on his computer, that’s why they made out this catch with “distribution of pornography”.

As it became known on **July 17**, a citizen **Yury Lychkouski** filed a **lawsuit to defend honor, dignity and business reputation** against the newspaper “**Vitsebski Courier**” to the court of Talachyn district (Vitsebsk region). The plaintiff, being a head of the “Belarusian society of hunters and fishermen” got offended by the article of “Vitsebski Courier” “From forest to prison: still waters run deep”, authored by the journalist Mikalay Petrushenka (dated 23.02.2012). The article reveals issues of abuse of power and illegal hunting. Yury Lychkouski thinks that the author meant him under the expression “one-handed poacher”; the author accuses the poacher of many violations. The plaintiff asks the court to admit that the information indicated in the article was untrue and to make the newspaper publish refutation, and to pay a compensation of five million rubles. The court hearings are expected in the first half of August.

**On July 17** it became known that the mobile operator “**Belcel**” **arbitrarily blocked access** to independent websites. The fact of blocking access was noticed by a “Novy Chas” journalist. In particular, access was denied to <http://charter97.org>, <http://belaruspartisan.org> and <http://lipkovich.livejournal.com>. At the same time, mirror versions <http://charter97.eu> and <http://lipkovichea.livejournal.com> opened without problems. This was not the first fact of unlawful blocking of access to opposition websites by this mobile operator. At the beginning of the year Salihorsk users of “Belcel” noticed a similar situation, which was made public thanks to the civil activist Ivan Shyla. Also, access to the regional website <http://www.saligorsk.org/> had been restricted to all users of “Belcel” since July 14. Representatives of the mobile company claimed that the blocking for individual users was accidental and promised to correct it. However, by July 17 nothing had been done to reestablish access to one of the most popular regional independent resources.

According to the Belarusian law, some websites are blocked for state establishments; however, for individual users it can be done only at their personal request.