

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting July 23– 29, 2012

**Within the reporting period public attention was focused on the case of the 20-year old photographer Anton Surapin who was placed in the KGB detention center because of publishing online photos of teddy bears dropped over Belarus from a Swedish airplane.**

**On July 24 international human rights organizations Index on Censorship and Amnesty International called the Belarusian authorities to release the journalist immediately.**

**On July 25 the public association “Belarusian Association of Journalists” sent a petition to the KGB chairperson Vadzim Zaitsau demanding to release Anton Surapin immediately and to stop his criminal prosecution.**

**On July 25 Amnesty International recognized Anton Surapin a prisoner of conscience.**

**On July 23**, after the **10-day term** of detention envisaged by law before making official charges, the young freelance journalist **Anton Surapin stayed in the KGB detention center.**

*We remind that Anton Surapin was detained on July 13 after searches at the flat that he rented in Minsk. On July 17 the duty lawyer, who attended his questioning the day before, informed Surapin’s parents that the journalist was detained within the criminal case under article 371, part 3 of the Penal Code – trespass of state border, performed by an organized group of people. Anton was suspected of assistance in committing the crime (article 16 of the Penal Code); the grounds for the suspicion were unique photos of the Swedish teddy bears published on his website Belarus News Photos.*

**On July 26** the new lawyer of Anton Surapin, hired by his parents, **was unable to have a meeting** with her defendant, as there were **no empty rooms in the KGB detention center**, according to their official excuse.

As became known on **July 24**, **Natallia Pinchuk**, wife of Ales Bialiatski, **received an answer to her complaint** from Mahilou region Department on execution of sentences. In the complaint Natallia Pinchuk made focus on **disproportion between the latest violation and punishment** applied to her husband in the colony. After receiving a third additional penalty, Ales Bialiatski acquired the status of a **“malicious violator of the regime”** and was **deprived of a long-term visit**; also the maximum sum of money transfer allowed for him was reduced from 500 thousand Br to 100 thousand Br (from around 50 to ten euro). Ales Bialiatski got **the third penalty on June 1** for “sleeping dressed on the bed”. In an explanatory note Bialiatski excused by tiredness, bad health condition, confirmed by the fact that the day before he consulted with the colony doctor and received medicine that causes sleepiness.

The answer from the Department says that “the penalty in the form of deprivation of a long-term visit has been imposed according to the law and is proportionate with the gravity of the violation”. The sentence executioners think that “the violation wasn’t connected with health condition, but was an intentional violation of the daily regime”.

On the morning of **July 24** *Euroradio* journalist **Vital Ruhain** was **taken off the train** Vilnius – Minsk when he was coming back home after a month’s leave. At **Gudogai** border station the journalist’ **laptop** had been **confiscated**, with fixing the procedure in a protocol. However, an hour later the journalist received the laptop back and gave away the protocol.

*We remind that on June 22, when another journalist for Euroradio Pavel Sviardlou was arrested on trumped-up charges of hooliganism, Vital Ruhain was also a subject of search for the people in plain clothes. Then Vital Ruhain, supported by a group of journalists, literally escaped from the office. He decided to leave for Poland for some time.*

**On July 25** in the evening, on his 25th birthday, **Vital Ruhain was detained**, in the center of Minsk by plain-clothed people and taken to the Leninski police department where a protocol was drawn up against him – accusing him of **speaking foul language**, administrative article 17.1. He spent the night at the Akrestsina detention center.

**On July 26** the court proceedings took place at 2pm in the Central district court, judge **Tatsiana Tkachova**. The journalist was judged in the cabinet, behind closed doors. “Journalists were not allowed into the room, only the lawyer managed to get in,” reported *Euroradio*. The witnesses-policemen confused facts, so the judge sent the case back for revision, and the journalist was **set free** in the court room.

*Euroradio* journalists suppose that this is police’s revenge for a report on safety measures in Minsk subway: they made an experiment and carried a heavy valise in the subway without being noticed.

**On July 24** it became known that the **Investigative Committee refused to start a criminal case against the policemen** who detained the journalist Aliaksandr Yarashevich at the concert “**Food not bombs**”. The journalist was informed about the refusal by an official letter. According to the letter, a check-up did not reveal any unlawful actions performed by the police during the detention.

*The incident took place on March 24 at the concert at the Palace of Culture of Minsk Tractor Factory. The journalist was there on a job assignment. At 7pm special forces burst into the hall; around 100 people were detained and taken to the Partyzanski and the Central district police departments. After giving written explanations, most of the detained were set free. The official reason for the detention was the police check on drug use and drug trafficking. Aliaksandr Yarashevich was found guilty of using obscene language in the Central district police department and was fined to three base amounts.*

Aliaksandr Yarashevich intends to complain against the refusal to the Supreme Court.

As reported on **July 25**, blogger **Yauhen Lipkovich** sent a **complaint** to the General prosecutor’s office and the Ministry of Information **against the military newspaper “Vo slavu Rodiny”**. The state-run newspaper “Vo slavu Rodiny” publishes regular satirical articles about the blogger, authored by colonel Makarau. The blogger asked **to issue a warning** to the edition for violating article 44 of the law “On mass media”. **On July 18** Yauhen Lipkovich sent a demand to the editorial office to refute untruthful information in the newspaper. The law envisages five days’ term to give an answer to the claimant. However, by July 23 Lipkovich received no answer.

**On July 26** the administration of the penal colony in the village of Kuplin made an official statement that **Pavel Seviarynets did not fall under amnesty**. The decision was made under paragraph 9 of the law “On Amnesty” dated July 9. Paragraph 9 says that prisoners convicted under article 342 of the Criminal Code (organizing and preparing activities which severely violate the public order or active participation in such activities) don’t fall under amnesty.

*We remind that Pavel Seviarynets is serving three years’ sentence in a low-security labor colony in the village Kuplin, Pruzhany district, Brest region. He was convicted under article 342 after the presidential elections in 2010 as an active participant of the “riots”. The term ends on October 19, 2013.*

**On July 27** the non-state sport newspaper “**Pressball**” sent a **complaint** to the Central district **prosecutor’s office** against the **hockey club “Dinamo-Minsk”**. The complaint dealt with **refusals to accredit the journalists** of the newspaper for a number of competitions, conferences, other events of the club.

The editorial office of “Pressball” considers that the club violates articles 7, 35 and 48 of the law “On mass media” (inadmissibility of illegal restriction of freedom of mass information, accreditation of mass media’s journalists) and also the Administrative and the Penal Codes. The newspaper asks the prosecutor to enforce the law and issue a warning to the club and its director general Aliaxey Torbin.