

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting June 25 – July 1, 2012

Case of “Gazeta Wyborcza” journalist from Hrodna Andrei Poczobut stayed at the core of attention. On June 30 he was released under his own recognizance. Earlier on that day formal charges were made, accusing the journalist of libel against the head of the state, punished by article 367, part 2 of the Criminal Code.

BAJ chairperson Andrei Bastunets commented that BAJ welcomed the change of restriction measure, but still demanded to drop all charges against the journalist. “The very use of the article of the Criminal Code bears obviously political implications. Our demand in the long run is to eliminate articles on libel and insult from the Criminal Code as they restrict freedom of expression in the country,” underlined the lawyer.

On June 26 the Ministry of Communication and Informatization suggested abolishing the practice of obligatory passport identification of users in Internet-cafes and the like. Instead, the draft ruling of the Council of Ministers, published for open discussion, suggests video recording of visitors or distribution of passwords via SMS.

At present, presidential edict #60 (point 6, part2) requires that owners of points of collective use of the Internet must identify users and store information about services rendered.

As reported **on June 26 The UN Human Rights Committee registered a complaint**, filed on behalf of **Ales Bialiatski**, head of the human rights center “Viasna” and vice-president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) who serves a 4.5 years’ prison term in a Babruysk colony. The complaint was filed by his wife Natallia Pinchuk and Antoine Bernard, the chief executive officer of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).

The complaint claims violations by the Republic of Belarus of the rights guaranteed by the international agreement, ratified and signed by the government of this county - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular such as illegally limiting the rights of freedom of association (Article 22 of the Covenant), violation of the right to fair trial (Article 14) and violation of the right to liberty and security of a person (Article 9).

The Human Rights Committee registered the complaint on June 19 and redirected it to Belarus which must provide information or objections to the mentioned facts within six months.

On June 27 MPs of the House of Representatives approved in the first hearing a draft bill under which the Ministry of Information, together with the Border and Customs

Committees of Belarus, can be **included into the list of state establishments that fight against terrorism and extremism**. This norm is provided by amendments to some laws of the Republic of Belarus relating to fighting terrorism and extremism.

The chairperson of the KGB Vadzim Zaytsau – who introduced the document – said it was necessary to add the Border and Customs Committees to the list of state security bodies, agencies of the interior and prosecutor’s office, because their absence from the list “created some obstacles for confiscation of informational products while moving it across the border of Belarus”.

On June 27 the chief editor of a sport newspaper “**Pressball**” **Uladzimir Berazhkou** was summoned to the police department in the Maskouski district of Minsk to **give explanations about his interview** in “Belgazeta” “Money Dim the Eyes” dated May 21. The publication tells about misallocation of resources by Minsk **hockey club “Dinamo”**. He was summoned on the grounds of a complaint to the general prosecutor’s office, filed by the head of “Dinamo” **Aliaksei Torbin**. Mr Torbin asks to hold the journalist liable according to the criminal article 188, part 2 (dissemination of false information and libel).

On June 27 police **searched** the office of the unregistered “**Union of Poles**” in Hrodna. They used services of a locksmith to break the door to the office. They searched not only the office of the union, but also the whole building. Police said they were looking for some anti-state press. The searches ended up with confiscation of nine computer CPU units. Journalists were not allowed to take any pictures of the searches.

The tenant of the office is Andrei Poczobut who is also the chairperson of the Council of the “Union of Poles”; at that time he was in custody on accusations of libel against the president.

On July 29 Minsk City Court was expected to consider the **appeal** of **Pavel Sviardlou** against the decision of the Maskouski district court. However, the journalist’s **appeal had not reached the Court**, and the judge refused to consider only the lawyer’s appeal.

“Euroradio” journalist Pavel Sviardlou was arrested for 15 days on charges of minor hooliganism (using obscene language, article 17.1 of the Administrative Code) on June 22. On June 25 the journalist sent an appeal to Minsk City Court. Unfortunately, his appeal didn’t reach the court. According to the procedure, Pavel handed in the appeal in the Center of isolation of violators in Akrestsina.

Meanwhile, colleagues of the journalist held their own investigation, questioned his neighbors and found no evidence that Pavel was swearing on leaving his home at 10 in the morning.

On June 29 two independent TV journalists were stopped by policemen when they were recording people’s comments near the court building where the case of the journalist

Pavel Sviardlou was to be considered. **Yulia Tsiarpuk** and **Aliaksandr Barazanka** had to **give their passport data to the policemen**, and then were set free.