

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting July 30 – August 5, 2012

On August 8 it was a year since Ales Bialiatski was arrested. The head of the human rights center “Viasna” and vice-president of FIDH was supported by actions of solidarity in Belarus, Armenia, Ukraine, Italy, the USA, Russia. On the initiative of Russian human rights activists, August 4 was announced an International Day of solidarity with Belarus civil society and human rights movement.

On July 30 parents of the arrested freelancer Anton Surapin met again the lawyer who had previously visited the journalist. As earlier, she did not tell much, referring to the secrecy of investigation. She only said that they had discussed all routine questions. The lawyer says Surapin feels well. And the lawyer also added that if her defendant should be released, she will know it first, as she must be present at the procedure of his release.

On August 2 PA “BAJ” sent an urgent appeal to the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of expression Frank La Rue, asking him to react to the fact of the detention of Anton Surapin. PA “BAJ” asked the Special Rapporteur to urge the Belarusian authorities to release the journalist and to stop the prosecution; and also to issue recommendations to cease the practice of criminal prosecution of journalists at work with the aim to curb the freedom of expression.

On August 3 a special bank account was open to support Anton Surapin. The money will be used to pay for legal services and for transfers to the detention center. The account was open for his mother, Alena Surapina in Slutsk Belagroprombank.

On July 31 Vitsebsk authorities banned a picket of solidarity with Ales Bialiatski. The picket was planned to take place on August 4 – the day when Ales Bialiatski was arrested a year ago. The deputy head of the Kastychnitski district administration in Vitsebsk Victor Halanau said that the human rights activists’ application for the picket was dismissed, as they had not signed contracts with the local police, medics and the communal housing service. Earlier similar applications to hold actions of solidarity with Bialiatski were dismissed in Baranavichy, Mazyr and some other cities.

On July 31 it became known that a civil activist in Mahilou Uladzimir Tryzunou was fired from a bread-baking factory No4 (where he worked as a loader). The official reason was absence from work. However, a little earlier Uladzimir Tryzunou took photos with his cell phone camera at a section of the factory where a lot of spoilt margarine and yeast could be seen; the products were stored for making cookies. The photos got into the Internet and on independent website. The administration of the factory soon found the “civil journalist”. In a talk with the factory director and ideologist, U.Tryzunou found out the real reason for his dismissal. Representatives of the factory refuse to comment the situation for the media. Uladzimir Tryzunou considers his dismissal unlawful and is going to be reinstated with the help of court.

On August 2 a correspondent for “Novaya Gazeta” Mikita Brouka was hindered at work in Minsk. He was taking video near St Elizabeth cloister (in Malinauka residential area) to report about the demolition of a 5-storey house and future handover of the land to the cloister. First the guards of the cloister tried to take away the journalist’s equipment. Then a policeman, who presented himself as the district policeman, demanded to stop work and verified the journalist’s credentials. He intended to take him to a police department, but gave up after the house residents interceded for the journalist.

On August 2 the **Ukrainian** journalist Sergyi Shevchenko was **denied entry to Belarus**. He going to Karelia (Russia) within a Ukrainian delegation to mark an anniversary dedicated to victims of political repressions in Solovki labor camp and Sandarmokh forest. However, on the border pass Guta Sergyi Shevchenko was taken off the bus without any explanations. The journalist is an author of a number of publications and books about Solovki. The delegation included relatives of the repressed, civil activists, writers, journalists. Their route went via Belarus, Saint Petersburg and Petrozavodsk.

On August 2 the deputy chair of Rahachou district court Maryna Damasevich **dismissed the lawsuit** of former worker of ideological department of the local newspaper “Svobodnaye Slova”. Siarhei Serhiyenka demanded a compensation equal to 10-months’ salaries for unlawful dismissal.

S. Serhiyenka had worked five years for the newspaper. On June 15 he stayed in the editorial office for two hours, and then went away leaving a request for compensatory leave in the office. The chief editor and his deputy were absent on that day, so the application was left unsigned. Then the original paper simply disappeared (Serhiyenka provided a copy), and the journalist was fired for truancy.

According to S. Serhiyenka, he had long time had complicated relations with his boss. He had his own views on economy and politics, because of which he was labeled an oppositionist and, according to the journalist, often received reprimands and was deprived of salary bonuses.

On August 3 the Belarusian channel **ONT** stopped retransmission of the Russian program “Time” at 8.19 pm, although usually this program lasts from 8 to 8.30 pm. At 8.20 the “Time” showed an episode “After the teddy bears landing Belarusian and **Swedish ambassadors** lost their jobs”. This episode was **censored** by the ONT.

On August 3 human rights defenders handed in a **petition** to Aliaksandr Lukashenka’s Administration demanding to **free unconditionally Ales Bialiatski**.

The action marks the International Day of Solidarity with Belarusian civil society. A year ago, on August 4 Ales Bialiatski was arrested: head of the human rights center Viasna, FIDH vice-president and BAI member was sentenced to four and a half years of imprisonment for alleged tax evasion. However, civil activists insist that this is political persecution for his human rights activities. The means in the bank accounts were aimed for the activities of the HRC “Viasna” which has been many times denied official registration in Belarus. The appellate court upheld the sentence, although the so called harm inflicted to the state was compensated from public resources. Amnesty International recognized Ales Bialiatski a prisoner of conscience.