

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

*Info-posting October 7 – 20, 2013*

Several journalists were detained on October 19 at the railway station in Minsk while performing professional duties. The journalists came to cover how civil and political activists welcomed Pavel Seviarynets' arrival to Minsk; publicist, politician, and BAJ member, Pavel Seviarynets returned after three years' labor in Kuplin village, the sentence he got for participating in December 19, 2010 demonstration. Mass media workers were told they were detained for "suspicious looks"; however, they were held in detention just until the event was over.

On October 7 the president's edict No 456 "On amending some edicts of the President of the Republic of Belarus" was adopted, changing two earlier president's edicts – "On improving control (supervisory) activities in Belarus" (dated October 16, 2009) and "On licensing some kinds of activities" (dated September 1, 2010). The first of the two documents was amended superficially: one paragraph was added about "the control over law enforcement in the sphere of **publishing activities**". The other document was amended more essentially: "broadcasting activities" appeared as a licensed activity; also, many changes have been introduced to the "printing activities" section. Jurists draw special attention to the articles related to "gross violations in printing and broadcasting activities." Whereas earlier the edicts included phrases like "calls for extremist activities", "**extremist materials**" and "production of pornography literature", now it says that "gross violations of the law on licensing" will be "performing licensed activities for the purposes that contradict **the interests of the Republic of Belarus.**" Such vague definition gives way to many interpretations.

On October 7 a civil activist, independent media distributor **Barys Khamaida** was **detained** for a short time in Vitebsk. Officers of Chyhunachny district police accused him of holding an unsanctioned picket and took him to the department. He was set free in half an hour without drawing up any procedural documents.

Barys Khamaida is the only person in Vitebsk who distributes independent press openly: he sells the press outdoors in the city center, on a table under a red and white umbrella.

On October 8 it became known that on **October 5** an activist of the campaign *Together for Belarus* **Ales Tarnahurski** was **detained** in Dziarzhynsk town when he was distributing a newspaper *Eurapejski Vybar*. He was taken to the Dziarzhynski police department where the print materials were seized. The activist received only an act of seizure of the newspapers.

As reported on **October 8**, the Soviet district police department of Minsk **dismissed the claim** filed by an NGO against the government-run newspaper *Sovietskaya Belorussia* regarding their article where the **newspaper published letters being evidence in an espionage case.**

On August 23, the Center for Legal Transformation (Lawtrend) filed a complaint to the General prosecutor's office regarding a publication of closed criminal case materials in mass media. The complaint addressed the article in *Sovietskaya Belorussia* dated August 21, authored by Ihar Dolin. The article told about **Andrei Haydukou** who had been convicted of attempt of espionage. The Legal Transformation Center claims that the materials, in particular letters of Haydukou, were part of the criminal case, and were not publicly accessible and belonged to the sensitive information protected

by law. Cases of revealing such information are regulated by articles 198 and 287 of the Criminal Code and of the “Provision on procedure for providing information related to criminal cases of crimes that caused wide public response...” The organization drew attention to the fact that the sentence had not yet come into legal force. In this regard, the Legal Transformation Center asked to hold a prosecutor’s investigation and hold those guilty accountable.

**On August 27** the prosecutor’s office of the Soviet district in Minsk replied to the Legal Transformation Center that their complaint was passed over to the home affairs department of the Soviet district to investigate it on merits.

In the reply dated **November 2**, an inspector of the Soviet police department informs that the claim was dismissed for the reason that the incident under consideration contained **no crime constituents**. The reply says that the author had not been warned that it was inadmissible to disclose secrets of investigation or of a closed court hearing, neither did he have access to the case materials, thus the author was not subject to criminal prosecution under article 407 of the Criminal Code.

The copy of the police’s statement was sent to the Vitebsk regional department of the KGB for holding an investigation into the fact how the employee of *Sovietskaya Belorussia* had obtained the information from the Haydukou’s case.

**On October 16** the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Borisovskije Novosti* Anatol Bukas was informed that the newspaper had **missed the deadline to apply for services of Belposhta** for the next six months. The letter signed by the general director’s deputy of *Belposhta* **Alena Skrypchyk** says that the newspaper had to apply before August 30, and all regional outlets had been informed about it with special letters. Meantime, Anatol Bukas says that they did not receive any reminders about the deadline, and filed the application in September. “I talked to people in charge of compiling the catalogues, and they assured me that it was not late,” he underlined. The editor is sure that this is the result of intentional activities of the local authorities. “Anyway, we faced with artificial obstacles in distribution all the time. There is no use appealing against it because in our country only whims of the officials are satisfied,” he said.

We remind that the newspaper was included into the subscription catalogue of *Belposhta* in June after eight years’ interruption. However, even for these five months the editorial office suspected the company of deliberately poor service.

**On October 17** a blogger from Svetlahorsk **Henadzi Zhuleha** informed that the **police** had not yet given back his **computer system unit** and a **modem**. *We remind that on August 6 the blogger posted a video on social nets about the town roads and a house of the chairperson of the local executive committee. After that, the chairperson’s wife Volha Maksimenka filed a complaint to the police to start a case on defending honor and dignity. On August 17 two police officers, with prosecutor’s warrant, searched the flat of the blogger and seized the equipment.*

As became known **on August 17**, a **photojournalist** from Brest, BAJ member **Milana Kharytonava** **lodged a complaint to the Supreme Court** appealing against earlier court decisions. We remind that on March 20, 2013 the court of Maskouski district of Brest dismissed her lawsuit to defend honor, dignity and business reputation against **Uladzimir Khinevich**, a correspondent of the local state-run newspaper, who posted insulting comments in her address on the city online portal. A linguistic examination found no insult in the comments. On May 6 the Brest regional court also dismissed the appeal.

**On October 17 and 18 the website of the independent trade union [www.praca-by.info](http://www.praca-by.info) was blocked** by the hosting provider after their account was cracked and started to send spam.

The editor of the website **Natalia Pichuzhkina** supposed that the attack might have been connected with the reports on the website about a hunger strike staged by leaders of the trade union movement at the Mozyr oil refinery on those days.

“We reported something on the topic almost daily. But we’ve been informed about the blocking after I sent an English-language newsletter to around 100 addresses calling to support the hunger strikers. The newsletter mostly contained hyperlinks to our website,” said the editor.

**On October 19 Pavel Seviarynets**, BAJ member and a leader of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party, was leaving the village of Kuplin, Pruzhany district, where he served three years’ of labor sentence for participating in the December 19, 2010 demonstration. His friends and journalists gathered at the railway station in Minsk to greet him there.

However, **ten journalists were detained** at a platform under the pretext that they looked suspicious. Among the detained there were *Euroradio* journalists Ales Piletski and Vital Ruhain, a photographer Aliaksandr Vasiukovich, a photo correspondent of *Nasha Niva* Siarhei Hudzilín, *BelaPAN* correspondents Andrei Korsakou and Zakhar Scharbakou, BAJ spokesperson Barys Haretski, independent journalists Yahor Majorchyk, Dzianis Nosau and Nadzeja Hatsak. The officers of the police and of special security squad ignored the journalists’ press-cards. The police officers were rude; a plain clothed person, who did not introduce, demanded to shut down phones and used physical force against Barys Haretski in order to make him sit down and switch off the phone. The plain clothed person accompanied his actions with foul language. An hour later all the journalists were set free, after Pavel Seviarynets arrived and left the station. The head of the Minsk city executive committee **Aliaksandr Barsukou** appeared at the police station, checked again everybody’s credentials and ordered to release them.