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E-NEWSLETTER

# MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

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# **SITUATION IN BELARUS MASS MEDIA FIELD: SEPTEMBER- DECEMBER 2024. REVIEW**

**The situation of Belarusian mass media representatives in September-December 2024 was determined by preparations for the so-called “elections” of Aliaksandr Lukashenka on January 26, 2025.**

**The persecution of journalists and bloggers, censorship, and propaganda in the state media were registered much more frequently during the period under review.**

Among other, the following developments were registered in the Belarusian media field in September – December 2024:

- the continued criminal prosecution of journalists both inside the country and in absentia – the number of filed criminal cases was steadily growing,
- the increased pressure on journalists and bloggers in Belarus with the higher number of searches and detention,
- any form of interaction with the “extremist” media resources, including reposts of their publications on social media and giving interviews to their journalists, was regarded by the regime in power as a ground for prosecution,
- the “anti-extremist” legislation was widely used by the regime in power to limit freedom of expression and access to independent sources of information. As of September 1, 2024, there were about 14,000

blocked Web-resources in Belarus, and more than 5,000 of them were labeled as “extremist information products”,

- censorship went beyond the traditional “fight against extremism”, since the Ministry of Information demanded an audit of printed publications in order to exclude from sale those that “may harm national interests”,
- the propaganda activities of Belarusian state media expanded through the newly created online resources and a news TV channel,
- a media company of the Union State of Russia and Belarus was established, and it was also announced that a strategy for forming a common information space of the Union State would be developed.

## Criminal prosecution

Former journalists of independent publications that were labeled as “extremist” at various times got prosecuted in Belarus within the period under review. Sentences were handed down to [Yauhen Nikalayevich](#) (one and a half years in prison for the alleged “participation in mass riots” in 2020) and [Volha Radzivonava](#) (sentenced to 4 years in prison for publications in the ‘Die Tageszeitung’ newspaper (Germany) that allegedly contained defamatory statements).



Volha Radzivonava. Photo: Volha’s Facebook page

The previously detained journalist from Brest [Daniil Palianski](#) and the owner of s13.ru News Website from Hrodna [Siarhei Chabotska](#) were criminally charged in the period under review.





Yauhen Katliarou. Photo: Yauhen's social media

The authorities monitored bloggers' activity, tracking any critical expressions about the regime in power. Thus, even a pro-government blogger [Yauhen Katliarou](#) from Homiel was sentenced to 18 months in prison for publishing a video, condemning the actions of local authorities.

The imprisoned journalists and bloggers are constantly subjected to pressure by means of isolation and aggravating conditions of detention. Among other, it is done through handing down additional sentences, allegedly, for "disobeying maliciously the demands of prison administration" under article 411 of the Criminal Code of Belarus.

Reportedly, the supplementary sentence of 10 months of imprisonment has been handed down to the journalist [Ihar Karnei](#) in addition to the initial sentence of three years in jail. The blogger [Zmitser Kazlou](#) was about to be released from prison. However, it didn't happen, since the additional sentence of one year and five days was announced to him. A similar criminal case was also filed against the imprisoned journalist [Mikola Dziadok](#).

## Detention, searches, and other forms of pressure on journalists in Belarus

Repressions against journalists and pressure on their relatives obviously intensified within the period under review. Thus, 20 journalists were detained, and 17 journalists' houses were subjected to police searches. Also, 8 media workers were punished by administrative arrests in Belarus.



Thus, reportedly, at least seven former employees of “Intex-press” newspaper [were detained](#) in Baranavichy (Brest region). Most probably, they were convicted in a political criminal case for the alleged participation in an extremist group.

A journalist [Ihar Iliyash](#) was detained and placed in custody for interacting with Ukrainian colleagues and giving interviews to the so-called “extremist” media outlets about the situation of his imprisoned wife Katsiaryna Andreyeva, who is an independent journalist, too.



Ihar Iliyash. Photo: «Novy Chas»

## Pressure on journalists in exile

The Belarusian media workers in exile were further subjected to criminal prosecution in absentia. The list of affected individuals included [Siarhei Skulavets](#), [Ales Liauchuk](#), as well as the producers and guests of [“Plan:B” show](#) on the Belsat TV channel. Their relatives in Belarus faced searches, pressure, and intimidation.

The BAJ was updated that the property of four exiled journalists was seized during the period under review.

The exiled media representatives faced harassment in the Belarusian propaganda publications. The rhetoric of state propagandists was abundant in hate speech.

Thus, Kiryl Kazakou, “Minskiy Kuryer” newspaper’s Editor-in-chief called to shoot down a blogger [Mikita Melkazorau](#) without trial, referring to him as

“the animal”. The state newspaper’s top manager expressed his personal readiness “to do away” with the blogger.

Reportedly, 21 Belarusian journalists have been included in the wanted list of the Russian Federation over the past six months.

## The use of “anti-extremist” legislation for prosecuting the distributors of independent media content



s13.ru City News Website from Hrodna and the ‘Pozirk’ media project were labeled as ‘extremist formations’ by the regime in power within the period under review.

Numerous publications and news resources on social media (especially on TikTok and X) were recognized as extremist materials in September – December 2024. In addition to Belarusian online media, Ukrainian media could also be found on the list, such as the YouTube channel of UNIAN News Agency and eight TELEGRAF Web resources.

The Belarusian people were frequently prosecuted for distributing “extremist” media production on social media as well as for interaction with independent mass media. Most of them were prosecuted for reposting publications, despite the fact that they had been produced before the moment of time, when the original sources were recognized as “extremist”.



A historian [Ihar Melnikau](#) was sentenced to 4 years in prison on September 13, 2024 for his interview with the 'European Radio for Belarus', which he gave five months before the media outlet was declared an "extremist formation." According to the indictment, he did it "knowing in advance about the extremist activities, implemented by the members of the information resource, which is banned in Belarus, in order to develop and promote the mass media of such orientation and engage more citizens in similar activities."

The first sentence for "denying the genocide of the Belarusian people" (article 130-2 of the Criminal Code) was handed down to the 'Odnoklassniki' social media community administrator [Andrei Savitsky](#) in Minsk on October 30, 2024. Moreover, he was accused of insulting Aliaksandr Lukashenka and sentenced to three years in prison.

## Propaganda activity of state-owned media

The official authorities and state-owned media intensified censorship and propaganda activities on the eve of the "election campaign".



Minister of Information Marat Markov.  
Photo: Ministry of Information

The Minister of Information Marat Markov noted that his governmental agency pays more and more attention to "regulation of information space". In particular, he said that around 14,000 Web-resources were blocked in Belarus as of September 1, 2024. Moreover, over 5,000 Websites [were labeled](#) as "extremist content". The number of banned online resources increased almost 35 times, compared to the period 2015-2020.



The VIDEOBEL.BY multimedia Web-portal [started](#) its operation on September 12, 2024. It is supposed to accumulate socio-political content from leading Belarusian state media and conduct live broadcasts, in particular from events with the participation of Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

'The First News' state-owned TV channel [started broadcasting](#) its programs in Belarus on September 17, 2024. It was included in the mandatory publicly available package of TV Programs. The continuous news broadcasting for many hours is a peculiar feature of this TV channel.



Photo: Geri Tech / pexels.com

The Ministry of Information [reported](#) that it had set requirements for five owners of Web-resources that distribute TV production to provide general access to the mandatory public package of TV programs.

In November 2024, the Ministry of Information [urged](#) the distributors of printed production to conduct an audit of printed publications and remove from sale those items that may "harm national interests". A specific list of publications was not provided, but it referred to those that, allegedly:

- distort historical truth and justice,
- promote non-traditional sexual relations, religious intolerance, violence, cruelty and pornography, incite hostility and hatred,
- promote subcultures that are non-traditional for Belarusian society,
- provide sexual education for children and can have a negative impact on their physical and mental development, distorting the idea of true family values.





On November 5, 2024, the Union State Media Company was established at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Union State. Also, its charter and the composition of its Supervisory Board were approved. Reportedly, it is planned that the latter will be dealing with funding content production about the main events and achievements of the Union of Belarus and Russia. It is suggested that the funded content will be distributed on other media platforms, too.

Moreover, a resolution on developing a strategy for the formation of the Union States' common information space was adopted.

On September 13, 2024, the Russian General Prosecutor's Office recognized the activities of the 'Belsat' TV channel as "undesirable". The department noted in its official press-release that "one of the key tasks for the Polish 'Belsat' organization is to discredit the domestic and foreign policy of Russian authorities, create a negative image of the country, and criticize integration processes within the Union State of Russia and Belarus."





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