



MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS 2019

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SITUATION IN THE SPHERE OF MASS MEDIA IN 2018 (OVERVIEW)

The general situation in the Belarusian mass media field was controversial in 2019. On the one hand, it was influenced by the overwhelming trend of reinforcing governmental control over the media space. On the other hand, due to hosting the 2nd European Games, the official authorities were pushed towards greater openness of the country. The complicated foreign policy and economic situation in Belarus, including negotiation processes with the European Union and the United States, the increasing size of external debt and pressure on the part of Russia as well as the elections to the Belarusian parliament, held on November 17, 2019, had their impact on the situation in the media field, too.

The **2nd European Games** were held in the capital city of Minsk on June 21-30, 2019.

On the eve of the international sport event, a human rights organization *Human Rights Watch* called upon the Olympic officials to guarantee safety of journalists in Minsk:

"Belarusian authorities have carried out concerted attacks on media freedom over the past two years that directly affect the climate in which news media will cover the country before, during, and after the upcoming European Games, Human Rights Watch said today. The European Olympic Committees (EOC) should ensure that all journalists, foreign and local, covering the 2019 European Games in Belarus can operate free from harassment."

Despite the fears of human rights activists and journalistic organizations, none of serious conflicts related to the implementation of journalistic activities occurred during the European Games. Moreover, the pressure on freelance journalists had decreased by the beginning of the international sport event. In particular, such journalists were fined 38 times on court decisions for cooperation with foreign mass media without press credentials within the period since January till the end of May 2019. The wave of oppression suspended since May 31, 2019.

However, it resumed after a three-month-long break. Consequently, **the BAI registered 44 fines**, imposed on freelance journalists in 2019 to the total sum of 42049.5 Belarusian rubles (approx. USD 21,000)

Criminal prosecution of journalists and bloggers on different grounds was among the main problems in the field of freedom of expression in Belarus in 2019.

The guilty verdict in relation to TUT.BY Chief Editor Maryna Zolatava and completion of 'BelTA case'

On March 4, 2019, the Zavodski City District court of Minsk found the editor-in-chief of the leading Belarusian Internet portal TUT.BY (<https://www.tut.by/>) Maryna Zolatava guilty of inaction as an official (Article 425 of the Criminal Code of Belarus) and sentenced her to a fine of 7 650 Belarusian rubles (about \$ 3,800 at the rate of the National Bank of Belarus).

Moreover, the court urged her to cover the procedural costs of BelTA, connected with the litigation, **in the amount of 6 000 Belarusian rubles** (about \$3,000).

M. Zolatava's conviction completed the so-called 'BelTA case', which had been filed in the summer of 2018.

The case initiation was caused by the unsanctioned use of passwords to the news string of BelTA state news agency by some journalists. (The BelTA materials could be accessed on the Web-site of the agency free of charge at that.

The persecuted mass media published the materials in question with due consideration of BelTA rules. The passwords to the News String weren't changed by BelTA for years.)

The editorial offices of BelaPAN News Agency, TUT.BY Web-portal and a number of other media as well as private apartments of some journalists, employed by the media, were subjected to searches on August 7-9, 2018.

Professional technical equipment and information carriers were seized during the searches. Around 20 journalists were detained and interrogated by legal investigators. Eight of them were sent to custody for the period of up to three days. Criminal cases were filed in relation to 15 journalists on the charges, envisaged by article 349 part 2 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (the unauthorized access to computer information, committed out of mercenary or other personal interest.)

The legal investigators' actions evoked protests on the part of human rights defenders, journalist organizations and international bodies, [including the Council of Europe, the European Union, and OSCE](#) .

The criminal cases against 14 journalists were terminated at the end of 2018. The media workers were brought to administrative responsibility in the form of large fines and actual compulsion to pay compensation to BelTA and the "SB. Belarus today" newspaper, published by the Presidential Administration.

The TUT.BY Chief Editor Maryna Zolatava appeared to be the only convicted person on the 'BelTA case', who was brought to criminal responsibility.

"Conviction & fining of Marina Zolotova, editor of TUT.BY, along with disproportionate measures of law enforcement against BelaPAN & TUT.BY agencies in 2018, may exert chilling effect on independent media in Belarus", [noted Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media](#).

"The way the authorities persisted with this case, which was out of all proportion from the outset, shows their determination to undermine the state media's rivals", noted 'Reporters without borders' [reacting to the court verdict](#) in relation to M. Zolatava.

The Chairperson of the Supreme Court of Belarus [Valiantsin Sukala noted](#) that the increased public attention to the trial against Zolatava, including the presence of diplomats and reporters, could be regarded as indirect pressure on the court.

The case of blogger Andrei Pauk

On March 20, the Investigative Committee of Belarus used its official Telegram channel to announce the initiation of a criminal case under article 340 part 1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus on the fact of a deliberately false report of mining a district executive committee in the urban settlement of Aktsiabrski. A local blogger Andrei Pauk was presented as the suspect in the case, since his mobile phone number was indicated in the message about the mining.

A.Pauk [was detained](#) on March 20, 2019. His house was searched and his computer and other professional equipment were seized.

According to legal investigators, A. Pauk sent an email to the Homiel Regional Branch of the Ministry of Emergency Situations with a message about the mining of the Aktsiabrski District Executive Committee, which is the local governmental authority. A.Pauk was released after the interrogation procedure. The criminal case in relation to him was terminated and all technical equipment was returned to him one month later.

The story with false mining repeated in May 2019. An e-mail message about the 'mining' of the court building in the city of Mazyr was received by the Ministry of Emergency Situations. A.Pauk was considered as the suspect on the case, since his mobile phone number was mentioned in the message.

A. Pauk appealed to the Office of Legal Investigation Committee and the Prosecutor General with a request to find the person, who makes use of his personal data to disseminate false messages about the 'mining' of governmental institutions.

Moreover, he filed a claim to court against the police officers, who had violated his rights during the apartment search in his opinion. He **requested the court to oblige the policemen to cover his moral damages** for his arbitrary detention on suspicion of false mining.

The blogger received personal threats from unknown persons through the Viber messenger on the eve of the litigation in Aktsiabrski District Court on September 24, 2019:

"There will be a court hearing tomorrow, and you will lose the case. The issue with the search was initiated to make you think about your behavior, shut your stinking mouth, and find a job. Say thanks that we didn't give you anything. Should you continue to engage in sabotage and defame the existing government, certain measures will be taken against you. You will be imprisoned and your [obscenity] wife will carry parcels to jail [...]"

The author of the harassing message hasn't been found yet.

On October 4, 2019, an operational officer on duty from the local District Department of Internal Affairs phoned Andrei Pauk and told him that, allegedly, a phone call had been received from the phone number, owned by Mr. Pauk. Reportedly, the unknown person introduced himself as Andrei and told Mr. Pauk's home address, saying that he 'had killed his wife Olga'. Andrei's wife Olga had to provide explanations that the phone call was a provocation. The district police representatives informed the Pauks that they wouldn't be able to find the 'offender'.

The court refused to satisfy A. Pauk's claim against the police officers.

Criminal Conviction of Blogger Siarhei Piatrukhin

The Leninski City District Court of Brest **found a blogger Siarhei Piatrukhin** guilty under Art. 188, part 2 ("Slander") and article 189, part 2 ("Insult") of the Criminal Code of Belarus on April 18, 2019.

Four officers of the Leninsky City District Police Department of Brest were regarded as victims in the case. The court imposed a fine on S. Piatrukhin in the amount of 360 basic units (9 180 BYN that equals approx. USD 4,600). Also, the judge urged the blogger to cover moral damages to the police officers Siarhei Ihnatsiuk, Dzmitry Yakushevich, Ihar Haliantsich, and Siarhei Tokun in the total sum of 7 500 BYN that equals approx. USD 3,750. Moreover, the blogger was obliged to cover the fees, which had been paid by the victims to their attorneys and the court in the amount of 1 000 BYN.

The criminal prosecution against the blogger was reasoned by the video footage, which had been produced in March 2018 and presented on YouTube. S. Piatrukhin stated in the videos that a number of officers from Leninski City District Police Department had relation to a physical attack on a citizen P. Kaminski, who appealed to law-enforcement bodies with a demand to investigate the incident and told the blogger about it.

14 Belarusian human rights organizations issued a demand before the trial start to terminate the criminal prosecution in relation to S.Piatrukhin. According to them, the **persecution was politically motivated** and associated exclusively with implementation of his constitutional rights and international norms in the field of human rights and liberties, including the freedom of expression as well as the freedom to collect and disseminate information.

On July 5, 2019, the Judicial Panel on Criminal Cases at Brest Regional Court upheld the decision of the first instance court without changes.

Indexes and Rating Lists

Belarus held the 153rd position among 180 states of the world in the annual 2019 World Press Freedom Index, published by the international organization 'Reporters without Borders' in April 2019. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2019#> This year, the country managed to climb two positions higher in comparison with the previous year.

"Belarus's position in the 2019 World Press freedom Index seems to suggest an improvement but, in reality, it reflects the fact that the situation has worsened dramatically in so many other countries, as well as the fact that the record number of arrests in Belarus in 2017 was not repeated in 2018."

As before, the international human rights organization **Freedom House** continued to classify the Republic of Belarus as a non-free, but not the worst case country in its annual **Freedom in the World 2019 rating list**. However, according to the Freedom House experts' conclusions, the degree of mass media freedom in Belarus shrank to the minimum level in 2018.

"The score declined from 1 to 0 due to a crackdown on journalists that included new restrictions on online media, a criminal case against journalists accused of illegally obtaining content from the state news agency, and the frequent detention and issuing of fines against reporters in connection with their work". The **Committee to Protect Journalists** (CPJ) has placed Belarus on the 9th position in the list of countries with the strictest censorship in the world.

VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS OF MASS MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS, CONFLICTS IN THE SPHERE OF MASS MEDIA

Criminal cases

On **March 4**, the Zavodski district court in Minsk found **Maryna Zolatava**, the editor-in-chief of the leading Belarusian online portal *TUT.BY* guilty of nonfeasance in office (Article 425 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus) and sentenced her to a fine of 7,650 Belarusian rubles (an equivalent of about US\$ 3,800). The court also ordered her to compensate for BelTA's procedural costs of 6,000 rubles.

Zolatava's condemnation ended the so-called "BelTA's case", which was instigated in the summer of 2018. The reason for the case was the unauthorized use by some journalists of the passwords for the subscription-based news feed on the website of the state news agency *BelTA* (meanwhile, the stories on *BelTA's* website are available without charge; they were published by the prosecuted media according to the rules established by *BelTA*; the passwords for the subscription feed have not been changed for several years). Fifteen journalists of different media outlets became a target of the criminal prosecution under Article 349 (Part 2) of the Criminal Code ("Unauthorized access to computer information, committed out of mercenary or other personal interest"). At the end of 2018, the criminal proceedings against fourteen journalists were dropped; they were held administratively liable and sentenced to hefty fines and the payment of compensation. Maryna Zolatava became the only person who was arraigned on a criminal charge.

On **March 7**, it became known that a criminal case was initiated under Article 211 (Part 1) of the Criminal Code against Aliaksandr Kabanau, the well-known blogger from Biaroza. He was charged with misappropriation of funds at the time when he was the chairman of a condominium (in 2017). The case was initiated on the complaint of a police officer, a member of this condominium.

On July 8, the criminal case was dismissed due to a lack of evidence.

On October 1, the proceedings were resumed by a resolution of the Brest regional prosecutor's office.

On December 10, Aliaksandr Kabanau learned that his case was dismissed with the wording "due to a lack of evidence".

On **March 10**, the blogger **Paviel Spiryn** was questioned by the police as a witness in a case initiated under Article 189 of the Criminal Code ("Insult") in connection with an "insulting" commentary under his video. Paviel Spiryn posted a video from a meeting of the "parasite" commission of the administration of the Leninski district in Minsk on his YouTube channel, which gathered a lot of views and comments. The following comment appeared under the video, "Everything is right! We, employees of the executive committee, also find it disgusting, and we are also sabotaging it as we can". A photo picture of Siarhiey Pavachka, the deputy head of the administration of the Leninski district in Minsk, was attached to the comment. Pavachka filed a complaint about the insult to the police department of the Leninski district in Minsk, where he claimed that this comment offended him and demanded that Spiryn be brought to trial. Then the police, with the sanction of the prosecutor's office, searched the blogger's apartment, as a result of which the computer's hard drive was seized.

On **March 20**, the Investigative Committee of Belarus in its official Telegram channel announced the initiation of a criminal case under Article 340 (Part 1) of the Criminal Code in connection with knowingly false reports about the mining of the district executive committee in the urban village of Akciabrski. They identified the blogger **Andrej Pavuk** as a suspect in this case; his mobile phone number appeared in the message about the mining. Then Pavuk was detained. The police searched his house and seized his computer and other professional equipment. Pavuk was released after interrogation.

On April 17, the criminal case against him was dropped, and on June 6, the confiscated equipment was returned.

In May 2019, the story of pseudo-mining was repeated. The Ministry of Emergency Situations received an e-mail about the mining of a court of justice in the city of Mazyr. Again, Andrej Pavuk became a suspect. As in March, the reason for this was the indication of his mobile phone number in the message about the mining.

On **April 9**, the directorate of the Investigative Committee for the city of Minsk searched the premises used by employees of the *Belsat* satellite TV channel for their activities. As reported by the Investigative Committee, the search was carried out as part of a criminal case instituted on the fact of libel on the channel's website (Article 188 [Part 2] of the Criminal Code).

The *Belsat* management explained that the reason for the initiation of the case was a technical error made in 2018 in an article about corruption, which mistakenly mentioned Andrej Shvied, the chairman of the State Committee for Forensic Investigation. *"We quickly corrected the mistake, published a refutation, and apologized to General Andrej Shvied, affected by this mistake. The Investigative Committee conducted an audit in this case and found no grounds for criminal prosecution. However, in January this year, the Minsk prosecutor's office opened a criminal case on the same occasion"*, the *Belsat* management noted.

As a result of the search, which lasted about four hours, about a dozen storage media were seized, including three laptops and two hard drives. Two days later, on April 11, the Investigative Committee returned the seized equipment to *Belsat* employees.

On **April 18**, the Leninski district court in Brest convicted the blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** from Brest under Article 188 [Part 2] ("Defamation") and Article 189 [Part 2] ("Insult") of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. Four officers of the Leninski district police department in Brest took part as victims in the case. As a result of the trial, Piatrukhin was sentenced to a fine of 9,180 rubles, which is approximately US\$ 4,600. The court also ordered him to pay the police officers Siarhiej Ihnaciuk, Dzmitry Jakushevich, Ihar Haliancich, and Siarhiej Tokun 7,500 rubles in total, or US\$ 3,750, as well as to compensate the victims' attorney fees of 1,000 rubles and legal expenses.

The grounds for criminalizing the blogger were the videos that were filmed in March 2018 and posted on YouTube. In these videos, Piatrukhin claimed that some employees of the Leninski district police department in Brest had been involved in the beating of a Mr. Kaminski in a police station in 2016. Mr. Kaminski asked law enforcement agencies to investigate this incident and told the blogger about it.

On July 5, the penal chamber of the Brest regional court upheld the verdict of the trial court.

On **November 21**, **Uladzimir Chudziantsov**, editor of the independent online news agency *by24.org*, was detained by Belarusian customs officers for possession of drugs as he was about to cross the border into Poland by train. The customs officials claimed that they found 0.87 grams of cannabis in the clothes of Chudziantsov. The police who searched his apartment later the same day claimed that they also found drugs there. He was put in the Brest pre-trial detention center for two months; the detention was later extended.

On the eve of these events, Chudziantsov, in collaboration with Sciapan Sviatlou, a blogger known as NEXTA, took part in the making of a documentary critical of Lukashenka that has been viewed more than 1.8 million times on YouTube. After Chudziantsov's arrest, NEXTA posted a video on YouTube in his support.

On November 29, the international organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published its position on the detention of the journalist. *"The circumstances of Uladzimir Chudziantsov's arrest raise the question of why he was searched when Belarusian customs officers rarely check passengers as they are leaving the country,"* RSF's Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk said. *"Furthermore, it is strange that a journalist known for his prudence would carry drugs, especially as Belarus has draconian drug laws. If this case was fabricated, the use of such methods against a journalist would mark a disturbing escalation in Belarus's suppression of the freedom to inform."*

On November 30, Uladzimir Chudziantsov was charged under Article 328 [Part 1] of the Criminal Code ("Illegal manufacture, processing, purchase, possession, traffic or shipping of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances or their precursors or analogs, without the purpose of sale"), as well as under Article 328-1 [Part 1] ("Illegal movement

through the customs border of the Eurasian Economic Union or the state border of the Republic of Belarus of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances or their precursors or analogs”).

Other court cases (except for administrative prosecution)

On **February 14**, the Centralny district court in Minsk dismissed a lawsuit against the website *belnovosti.by* by the leaders of the REP trade union, Ihar Komlik and Hienadz Fiadynich, to defend their honor, dignity and business reputation. The case concerned the article entitled “Fictitious REP of Fiadynich”, which was published in May 2018. It stated that under the guise of union activities, the leaders of the union received money to spend on their living.

On **May 17**, the Maskouski district court in Minsk considered in private session a civil case against the *TUT.BY* news site and its journalists. Viachaslau Davydovich, who recently was released from prison, filed a lawsuit to protect his honor and dignity. In the statement of claim, he asked to refute and remove some expressions from *TUT.BY* publications, “discrediting honor, dignity and business reputation.” He asked to recover 50,000 rubles in his favor as a compensation for moral harm. The court rejected these demands.

On **July 11**, the Leninski district court in Mahiliou, after a complaint by the journalist Uladzimir Lapcevich, once again annulled the decision of the Investigative Committee to terminate the investigation against an official and a policeman. Judge Alena Litvina annulled the decision of the Investigative Committee to terminate the investigation against the employee of the Leninski district police department, Siarhiej Kaliesnikau, and the employee of the Leninski district administration in Mahiliou, Kanstancin Kiscianiou. On June 21, Ihar Rybakou, the senior investigator of the department of the Investigative Committee for the Mahiliou region, once again refused to initiate a criminal case and stopped the probe.

We will recall that on April 29, 2017, these officials prevented the journalist from fulfilling his professional duties by prohibiting him to attend a meeting of members of the Sputnik 2008 garage cooperative. For more than two years, the journalist tried to prosecute the official and the policeman for official misconduct and abuse of power. Each time after the investigators refused to institute criminal proceedings, Lapcevich appealed the refusals in court. The poor-quality additional verification has repeatedly become the reason for disciplinary measures against officers of the Investigative Committee.

On **August 16**, the Minsk economic court upheld the decision of the Republican expert commission, which concluded that two articles of the newspaper *Viacherni Mahiliou* contained signs of extremism, as they used hostile language against the LGBT community. *Viacherni Mahiliou* tried to challenge the expert opinion. This decision became the reason for a trial, as a result of which a decision was made on December 18 by the Leninski district court (see below).

On **September 5**, the Economic court of the Brest region denied the request of *Media-Hantsavichy*, a private production and trading unitary enterprise, the publisher of the regional newspaper *Hantsavitski Chas*, to invalidate the decisions of the Hantsavichy district council of deputies, which refused to accredit journalists of this independent publication. However, Judge Alena Dziemianiuk who examined the case made a separate ruling on violation of the media law, according to which the Hantsavichy district council must develop a regulation on accreditation.

On October 17, the Court of appeal of the Economic court of the Brest region rejected the appeal of *Media-Hantsavichy* against the court decision of September 5.

On **October 3**, a lawsuit against the bloggers from Brest Siarhiej Piatrukhin and Aliaksandr Kabanau on defending the honor and business reputation, initiated by the management of the *I-Power* company in the Economic court of the Brest region, was rejected. The reason for the lawsuit was that they posted on their YouTube channel *People's Reporter* an interview with two environmental activists who spoke about the pollution of the territory as a result of *I-Power's* activities and other violations by this company.

It is worth recalling that in 2018, I-Power already filed a lawsuit to protect its business reputation against Kabanau and Piatrukhin. Then, a judge ordered bloggers to remove the story about the construction of the battery plant from the YouTube channel/People's Reporter, record apologies and post them on this channel.

On **September 26**, it became known that Hienadz Khomich, the chairman of the Slonim district executive committee, sued Sciapan Pucila, who keeps the popular Telegram channel NEXTA. In August, Pucila published a story claiming that Khomich was detained drunk while driving, but the latter "hushed up" the affair. There was also a hint at the mayor's corruption.

Hienadz Khomich at first demanded to recover 50,000 rubles (about US\$ 24,000) from Pucila as compensation for moral harm. The same lawsuits were filed against the news sites *Bielaruski Partyzan*, *21.by* and *bobruisk.ru*, which reprinted the story. Then the demands were reduced to 10,000 rubles.

The website *21.by* entered into a settlement with Khomich, which the Maskouski district court in Minsk approved. Under the settlement, the website agreed to pay compensation of 1,500 rubles (about US\$ 730) and publish a refutation.

On November 12, the Minsk district court ruled that **Sciapan Pucila** must pay 3,000 rubles (approximately US\$ 1,460) in compensation for moral harm and publish the court decision on his Telegram channel.

On November 13, the Babrujsk district court ruled that the online newspaper *Vecherniy Bobruisk* (*bobruisk.ru*) should pay 2,000 rubles (about US\$ 970) to compensate for moral harm, as well as publish a refutation.

On November 18, the Savietski district court in Minsk decided to recover from **Sviatlana Kalinkina, the owner of the *Bielaruski Partyzan* website**, 3,000 rubles for non-pecuniary damage, as well as 1,653 rubles for legal costs.

On **October 11**, the Akciabrski district court in the Homiel region dismissed the lawsuit of **Andrej Pavuk**, a video blogger and a member of BAJ, against the local district police department to recover non-pecuniary damage of 25,000 rubles in connection with the unlawful detention on March 20 (see details in "Detentions"). In his lawsuit, the blogger claimed that the actions of the police had caused and were still causing him significant moral damage; they humiliated his human and civil dignity.

On November 26, the Civil action chamber of the Homiel regional court presided by Siarhiey Shytikau, rejected Pavuk's appeal against the decision of the Akciabrski district court.

On **October 18**, the Rahachou district court dismissed the claim of Homiel's human rights activist and member of BAJ Lieanid Sudalienka against **Dzianis Dashkievich**, editor of the *Rahachou-Online* website, about the protection of honor, dignity and business reputation.

On August 20, on *the Rahachou-Online* website, as well as on Facebook, on VKontakte and Odnoklassniki websites, Dashkievich reprinted from another little-known resource a publication entitled "A New Scandal in the Opposition: They Can't Share Money". The article, among other things, claimed that Sudalienka had stolen union dues. In court, Dzianis Dashkievich failed to provide any documentary evidence of the disseminated information. He only said that he also had worked in the opposition and knew that union dues were misused for various political campaigns.

On December 12, the Civil action chamber of the Homiel regional court presided by Zhanna Jahorava dismissed Sudalienka's appeal against the decision of the Rahachou district court.

On **December 18**, the Leninski district court in Mahiliou ruled that the publications of the newspaper *Vecherniy Mogilev*, in which the Ministry of Information found homophobic statements, were not extremist. Judge Aliaksandr Bushliakou took his decision based on the expert opinion of the Department of the State Committee for Forensic Investigation of the Republic of Belarus for the Mahiliou region. According to this document, *"there are no statements of incentive nature addressed to heterosexuals and calling for violent actions (actions aimed at causing harm) against a person or a group of persons united based on homosexuality or supporting such actions in the materials"*

posted on the web resource vecherniy-mogilev.by and entitled "Doomsday. Stretched Strings of Lyrical Feelings..." and "What Intolerance toward Perverts Results in?"

On **December 24**, the court heard the lawsuit of Jauhien Kazlou, the founder of a ritual company, against the online newspaper *Nasha Niva*. The court decided that although the article referred to false information, it was not related to honor and dignity.

In June 2019, booklets began to appear in mailboxes of Minsk residents offering help in organizing the funeral. Moreover, the ritual company that offered its services, sought to mimic a state organization. *Euroradio* wrote a piece about it, and *Nasha Niva* reprinted it on its website under the heading "Funeral" in the mailbox: a new player from Russia takes over the ritual market in Minsk". After some time, Kazlou sued journalist Maryja Vajtovich, as well as the editorial staff of *Euroradio* and *Nasha Niva*. He believed that the journalist disgraced his honor and business reputation. The plaintiff entered into a pre-trial settlement with *Euroradio*, therefore the Maskouski district court in Minsk heard the lawsuit only against *Nasha Niva*.

Detention of journalists, administrative proceedings

On **January 3**, the Partyzanski district court in Minsk fined the *Radio Racja* correspondent **Hienadz Barbarych** 892.5 rubles. He was convicted under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code. The journalist was punished for reporting on charges against his colleagues in the so-called "BelTA case" - an interview with the *BelaPAN* editor-in-chief Iryna Lieushyna.

On February 3, the decision to fine Barbarych was upheld. His complaint was heard by the Minsk city court.

On **January 3**, the freelance journalists **Siarhiej Krauchuk and Halina Abakunchyk** were fined 892.5 rubles each in Minsk for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **January 4**, the *Radio Racja* correspondent Maksim Klimkovich was detained by the police in Minsk near the Ministry of Internal Affairs, along with the political activist Nina Bahinskaja, who was picketing near the statue of a policeman with a poster in support of political prisoners, and two other persons. The detainees were taken to the Centralny district police department. The journalist was released after spending about four hours there.

On **January 9**, the journalists **Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava** from Brest received another fine for cooperation with *Belsat*. This time, Judge Dzmitry Shurn of the Leninski district court in Brest, ruled to punish the freelance journalists, and the journalists themselves did not participate in the hearing. He sentenced each of the journalists to a fine of 1,275 rubles. The reason for the trial was an article about another rally of opponents of the construction of a battery plant in Brest on the city's main square, posted on November 18, 2018, on the website of the *Belsat* TV channel. As a result, an administrative protocol was drawn up against Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava, covering the rally on the square, under Article 22.9 (Part 2) of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of media products).

On **January 15**, in the urban settlement of Akciabrski in the Homiel region, the police detained **Andrej Pavuk**, a blogger and a member of BAJ, who is the founder of *Rudabielskaja Pakazukha*, a popular social media group, while he was broadcasting live on his YouTube channel from the lobby of the local executive committee. The blogger, together with a resident, was waiting there for Uladzimir Dvornik, the chairman of the Homiel region executive committee, who came to Akciabrski on official business. They had personal questions that local officials failed to solve, and the intervention of the regional leader was required. The police lieutenant, who failed to provide his last name, but merely pointed to his badge with the number 71432, ordered the blogger to stop filming and show his passport to confirm his identity. The policeman refused to accept any other document. He referred to the fact that the video filming was prohibited by internal instructions of the district executive committee and ordered the policeman on duty to call for a police squad. Three policemen, led by Siarhiej Datsko, arrived at the Svetlahorsk district executive committee,

rounded up Andrej Pavuk, bent his head and led him out of the building. The blogger was taken to the Akciabrski district police department, as stated, due to his failure to comply with the lawful requirements of a police officer and to verify his identity. He was kept there for an hour and released without drawing up a police report when Uladzimir Dvornik had already left.

On January 25, Aliaksandr Lisimau, the head of the department of protection of the Homiel region police department, responded to Andrej Pavuk's complaint about his detention in the lobby of the Akciabrski district executive committee. He said that according to the instructions, "in the building of the district executive committee, it is forbidden to take photos, videos, make audio recordings using the photo, video, audio equipment, mobile phones without the consent of the chairman of the district executive committee or his deputy, or the managing director" and, therefore, the police had acted lawfully.

On **January 18**, the Leninski district police department fined the freelance journalist Halina Abakunchyk 765 rubles for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **January 21**, the *Belsat* reporters **Volha Chajchyts and Siarhiej Krauchuk** were detained on the street and forcibly taken to the Barauliany police station. They were doing their job while attending a press conference of activists who erected a cross in memory of Lithuanian victims of the Stalinist repressions in Kurapaty near Minsk. Earlier, forestry workers dismantled the cross. The police failed to provide any reason for the detention of the TV crew. To prevent the police from removing the video, Chajchyts broadcast on Facebook. She said that the police from the very beginning followed them in Kurapaty, so activists escorted them to their car. After that, a road police car followed them to detain, and the third team took them to the police station. The journalists were released after the administrative reports were drawn up against them for working without accreditation.

On **January 24**, the Viciebsk regional court rejected the appeal of the freelance journalist **Zmicier Lupach**. The journalist tried to challenge the decision of the Hlybokaje district court taken on December 22, 2018. Then he was fined under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code for the ninth time in a year. The basis for the case was a story on the *Belsat* TV channel about honoring the memory of the victims of the communist and fascist regimes in Hlybochchyna.

On **January 28**, the Frunzienski district court in Minsk fined the freelance journalist **Zmicier Mitskievich** 765 rubles for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **January 30**, the freelance journalists **Milana Kharytonava and Ales Liauchuk** were fined in Brest 1,275 rubles each for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation - under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **February 1**, the journalists **Aliaksandr Kirkievich and Ales Dzianisau** received fines of 765 rubles each in the Leninski district court in Hrodna. The reason for this was the story entitled "Historians Explore the Ancient Hrodna Cellars", which was aired on *Belsat*. Both journalists were punished under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and/or distribution of media products).

On **February 5**, the Minsk city court upheld the decision to punish the journalist of *Novy Chas* **Dyjana Sieradziuk** for alleged participation in an unauthorized protest rally at the Russian embassy on November 26, 2018, which she covered. Despite the copies of her editorial assignment, the journalist's testimony, and the article for *Novy Chas*, which were entered as evidence, the court found her guilty under Article 23.34 of the Administrative Code and sentenced her to a fine of 490 rubles.

On **February 10**, the freelance journalist **Volha Chajchyts** was fined 510 rubles in Salihorsk for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **February 11**, the Bjarozauski district court fined the blogger **Aliaksandr Kabanau** 510 rubles for failure to comply with the court decision of September 14, 2018. This decision was taken by Judge Alena Niamkova. Then Judge Kanstancin Nikicin of the Economic court of the Brest region ordered the bloggers Aliaksandr Kabanau and Siarhiej Piatrukhin to refute their statements made in the video entitled "Lead – Brest is Dead", as well as to remove the video from YouTube. According to the court ruling, its contents damaged the business reputation of the battery plant, which was being built near Brest.

On the morning of **February 17**, the blogger **Aliaksandr Kabanau** was detained at the railway station in the town of Bjaroza in the Brest region. He was about to go to Brest to cover a weekly protest against the construction of a battery plant near the city. After a long interrogation as a witness about the same protest, which took place on February 10, 2019, he was released from the police.

On **February 18**, Judge Raisa Labacheuskaja of the Maskouski region in Brest terminated the administrative case against the freelance journalist **Jauhien Skrabiets** from Brest in connection with the "expiration of the deadline for imposing an administrative penalty". The case was opened in December 2018 because of the publication entitled "Exhibition "Eternity and Moment. 1918 - 1939 – Poland is Strong in Architecture". According to the report, Skrabiets violated Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code because he "*abused the rights and duties of a journalist, produced media products in the form of an informational text message on the Radio Racja website*".

On **February 21**, the freelancer **Dzmitry Lupach** was tried in the Hlybokaje district court for a story about a monument honoring the Komsomol installed in Hlybokaje. The story was aired by the *Belsat* TV channel. The judge sentenced him to a fine of 892.5 rubles.

On **February 24**, the blogger **Aliaksandr Kabanau** was detained in Brest. This happened when he was leaving the apartment of his colleague blogger Siarhiej Piatrukhin, near which a unit of riot police was on duty in the morning. The detention took place before the start of a protest rally of opponents of the construction of a battery plant, which was held every Sunday for a year. Kabanau was released from the Maskouski district police department shortly after the rally. He was told that he had been detained because of a statement about insulting someone, but he refused to familiarize himself with the statement without a lawyer.

On **March 3**, in Brest, the police detained the journalists **Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava** for several hours. This happened when they were heading to a public transport stop to go to Lenin Square, where each Sunday opponents of the construction of a battery plant near Brest gathered. Police officers approached the journalists and suggested that they go with them to a police station. When Ales Liauchuk tried to object to this proposal, the police used force and even tried to use handcuffs. As a result, they drew up administrative reports against Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava at the police station under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code (working for foreign media without accreditation, referring to the *Belsat* TV channel). They were released in about two hours after the arrest.

On **March 4**, Judge Raman Karabajeu of the Maskouski district court in Brest imposed heavy fines on **Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava**, the freelance journalists from Brest, - 120 base units for two or 3,060 rubles. The journalists were tried according to three reports, for each of which the judge awarded the fine of 40 base units. Liauchuk and Kharytonava were accused of working for *Belsat* without accreditation. Two reports against the journalists were drawn up for covering protests against the construction of a battery plant, and the third for covering problems of residents of Paplouski Street in Brest.

On **March 6**, it became known that Police Major Jauhien Slaunikau from the Leninski district police department in Mahiliou, who was trying to hold the journalist **Alina Skrabunova** administratively liable, was warned about the inadmissibility of violating the rules of the Code of Administrative Procedure on Administrative Offenses. "Minor violations of the administrative procedure" were found in the policeman's actions but no evidence of violation of Skrabunova's rights was found, said the letter from the Mahiliou region police department received by the journalist.

In November 2018, Slaunikau drew up the administrative reports against Alina Skrabunova and the cameraman Mikhail Arshynski for "illegal creation of media products". Since the Administrative Code does not provide for administrative responsibility for participating in the illegal creation of media products, the Leninski district court twice returned the

reports to the police to remedy the identified shortcomings. In the end, the two-month period of bringing the journalists to administrative responsibility expired.

On **March 7**, the freelance journalist **Halina Abakunchyk** was fined 892.5 rubles in Slonim for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **March 12**, the freelance journalist **Ales Zalieuski** was fined 1,275 rubles in Minsk for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **March 14**, **Barys Khamajda**, an activist and a distributor of independent press from Viciebsk, was detained and taken to the Chyhunachny district police department. This happened after the police demanded that he put together his table and the white-red-white umbrella and leave. When Khamajda refused, he was told that he was violating the law on mass events and was, therefore, being detained. After two hours at the police station, a report was drawn up against Khamajda under Article 21:14 of the Administrative Code, which stated that he was cluttering the street with his property.

On **March 14**, the Viciebsk district court found **Vital Skryl** guilty of illegal production and distribution of media products under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code. He was punished with a fine of 637.5 rubles for the video story about the closure of a company in the town of Sianno in the Viciebsk region, shown on the *Belsat* TV channel.

On May 8, it became known that the regional court upheld this ruling of the trial court.

On **March 15**, in Dziarzhynsk, the freelance journalist **Volha Chajchyts** was fined 510 rubles for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **March 16**, in Minsk in the Press Club, the police detained Russian journalists **Pavel Nikulin and Jan Patarsky** from the *moloko plus* almanac. The Russian journalists came to Minsk to hold a workshop on how to raise money for a project and organize work in a horizontal edition. Three hours after their arrest, they were released without reports. However, the police took away their presentation materials to check for extremist content. The administrative process was initiated under Article 17:11 of the Administrative Code of Belarus ("Distribution, production, storage, transportation of information products containing calls for extremist activities or promoting such activities"), which was later terminated.

On **March 20**, the blogger **Andrej Pavuk** was detained at his home in the urban settlement of Akciabrski; a search was conducted there at the same time. The police detained the blogger, forcing him to leave his five-year-old daughter alone in the apartment, in fact, in a dangerous situation. The blogger was kept for five hours in the district police department because a message about the mining of the Akciabrski district executive committee was allegedly received from his email address in the Homiel department of the Ministry of Emergency Situations. However, neither the police nor the investigators showed the screenshot of the message. After the questioning, he was released. The Investigative Committee of Belarus in its official Telegram channel announced the initiation of a criminal case under Article 340 (Part 1) of the Criminal Code on the fact of a knowingly false report about the mining.

On **March 21**, the journalists from Brest, **Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava**, were found guilty of illegal production and distribution of media products, namely, cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel. Judge Raisa Labacheuskaja of the Maskouski district court in Brest punished each of them with a fine of 1,275 rubles under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus.

On **March 26**, **Volha Chajchyts and Andrej Koziel** were fined 1,020 rubles each in Dziarzhynsk for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **April 8**, the freelance journalist **Tacciana Vlasienka** was fined 1,020 rubles in Minsk for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation - under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **April 11**, the Hlybokaje district court fined the freelance journalist **Zmicier Lupach** 1,020 rubles in two cases. He was tried under Article 22.9 (illegal production and/or distribution of media products), as well as under Article 23.34 (violation of the organization or conduct of public events) of the Administrative Code. In the first case, the journalist was punished for a story aired on the *Belsat* TV channel, and in the second, for raising the white-red-white flag during Freedom Day.

On May 15, the Viciebsk regional court reviewed Zmicier Lupach's appeals against these decisions. Judge Sviatlana Ivanova dismissed both.

On **April 11**, a judge of the Leninski district court in Mahiliou ruled to punish the freelance journalist **Alina Skrabunova** with a fine of 1,275 rubles. She was found guilty of "participating in the illegal production of media products"; her video report on the opening of an inclusive cafe, where wheelchair users work, was shown on the *Belsat* TV channel.

On **April 11**, a judge of the Leninski district court in Brest heard the case against the freelance journalist **Jauhien Skrabiets** under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code for working for foreign media without accreditation and fined the journalist 765 rubles. The reason for this was an article by Skrabiets entitled "Activists and Freelance Journalists were not Allowed to Attend the Press Conference of I-Power Plant", which appeared on the website of the *Belarusian Radio Racja*.

On May 17, Judge Ruslana Sianko of the Brest regional court upheld the decision of the district court.

On **April 15**, the Sharkaushchyna district court heard the case of the freelance journalist **Zmicier Lupach** from Hlybokaje in the matter of his cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation. The judge sentenced him a fine of 892.5 rubles for a story about the weak economy and low salaries in the area.

On May 15, the Viciebsk regional court reviewed the appeal against this decision. Judge Sviatlana Ivanova dismissed it.

On **April 15**, the journalists **Volha Chajchyts and Andrej Koziel** were fined 765 rubles each in Luniniets for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation - under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **April 18**, the freelance journalists **Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava** were fined 1,275 rubles each for cooperation with *Belsat* by the decision of the chairman of the Brest district court.

On **April 24**, Judge Dzmitry Bubiencyk of the Leninski district court in Hrodna terminated the administrative case of the freelance journalists **Ales Dzianisau, Aliksiej Kairys, and Katarzyna Liudatski** due to a lack of evidence. They were charged with illegal production of media products (Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code). The basis for the administrative prosecution of all three journalists was the video story aired on the *Belsat* TV channel from the village of Staryja Vasilishki in the Shchuchyn district, the historical homeland of the world-famous rock musician Czesław Niemen.

On **April 24**, the freelance journalists **Milana Kharytonava and Ales Liauchuk** were fined 1,275 rubles each in Luniniets for illegal production and/or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **May 8**, an opposition blogger from Ingushetia, **Ismail Nalgiev**, was detained at Minsk National Airport, from where he planned to fly to the Czech Republic, allegedly for some administrative offense. It was expected that on May 10 the detainee will be tried, but instead, the Belarusian authorities decided to expel him to Russia and forbade him from entering Belarus for a period of 10 years. On the same day, Nalgiev's lawyer Anton Hashynski appealed the decision to expel his client and ban him from entering Belarus. The lawyer was assured that the deportation process would be

suspended during the consideration of the complaint, as provided by law, but after a few hours, it became known that Nalgiev was expelled from the country.

On **May 15**, the Navapolatsk city court held a trial of the freelance journalists **Alena Shabunia and Viachaslau Lazarau**. The judge found both journalists guilty under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code and fined each of them 637.5 rubles. The reason for the trial was their video story about an incident at *Polymir* enterprise in Navapolatsk.

On June 12, Judge Sviatlana Ivanova of the Viciebsk regional court upheld fines for Alena Shabunia and Viachaslau Lazarau.

On **May 26**, the blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** was preventively detained by the Brest police on a far-fetched pretext and taken to the Leninski district police department shortly before the start of an environmental protest against the construction and launch of a battery plant *I-Power*. He had to spend about an hour there.

On **May 31**, a judge of the Maskouski district court in Brest fined the journalistic duo of **Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava** for 1,020 rubles each. They were found guilty of illegal production and distribution of media products; in particular, they meant coverage of protests against the construction and launch of the battery plant *I-Power*.

On **June 2**, the blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** was detained in Brest during a live broadcast from a rally against the construction of a battery plant. At the intersection of Savietskaja and Mayakovsky streets, two men in camouflage violently pushed him into a car and took him away in an unknown direction. Mikalaj Samasiuk, the acting head of the Leninski district police department in Brest, was there at that time. At the police station, an administrative report for petty hooliganism was drawn up against Piatrukhin; the latter was placed in a temporary detention facility awaiting the trial. The next day, in court, Piatrukhin filed motions on the possibility of familiarizing himself with the case file and on agreeing with a lawyer. Judge Siemianchuk upheld them and released Piatrukhin until the trial, which was postponed to June 10.

On June 12, the Leninski district court in Brest fined Siarhiej Piatrukhin 765 rubles for petty hooliganism (Article 17.1 of the Administrative Code). The reason for this was an alleged insult to Mikalaj Samasiuk, the acting head of the Leninski district police department in Brest. At court, Samasiuk explained what exactly offended him. It turned out that the blogger, "in an intrusive form", had asked Samasiuk, who at that time was in the line of duty, to accept his complaint on an administrative offense. Mikalaj Samasiuk considered this behavior of Piatrukhin unacceptable and called riot police on him.

On **June 3**, the Pukhavichy district court fined the writer **Slavimir Adamovich** 127.5 rubles for his story entitled "Never Ask Where from", which was published in the private newspaper *Novy Chas* on December 24, 2010. Adamovich was found guilty of distributing extremist materials under Article 17:11 of the Administrative Code ("Distribution, production, storage, transportation of information products containing calls for extremist activities or promoting such activities"). The "expert commission" in its conclusion No. 92 dated April 18, 2019, found "signs of extremism" in the story. The expert examination was carried out following a letter from the Pukhavichy district police department dated April 4, 2019. The administrative report stated that this conclusion had been allegedly sent to the email address of *Novy Chas*, but the editors received no such conclusion.

On **June 7**, the Maskouski district court in Brest fined the freelance journalist **Jauhien Skrabiets** 1,020 rubles under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code, because "he performed the work of a foreign journalist without accreditation." Skrabiets learned that he had been fined four months after the trial when he received a message from a court enforcement agent that he had failed to pay the fine. The basis for drawing up the administrative report was a news article on the website of *Radio Racja* about the detention and conviction of one of the opponents of the construction of a battery plant near Brest.

On July 9, in the market of the town of Hantsavichy in the Brest region, police officers detained the journalist of the *Belsat* TV channel **Ihar Kuliej** and the cameramen **Siarhiej Kavaliou** and **Maksim Harchanok**, who were filming an episode of the show entitled "Belsat goes to Hantsavichy". The police officers ordered them to go to the police station,

saying that they were not allowed to shoot there, and forced them to switch off the cameras. Having provided explanations, the journalists were released.

On **September 18**, the freelance journalist **Zmicier Mitskievich** was fined under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code in the Pastavy district court in the Viciebsk region for cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation.

On **September 22**, at the Terespol – Brest checkpoint on the border between Poland and Belarus, the journalist of *Novy Chas* and *Green Portal* **Aliaksandr Vialitchanka**, as well as the activist Alina Sciatsova, who were returning to Belarus, were taken off the train. Their passports were immediately taken from them, and after their luggage was searched on the train, they were taken for a body search. During the search, they were asked about extremist literature. Vialitchanka and Sciatsova were finally released only four hours later. The customs officers explained their actions by the order received from above but failed to provide more information, saying that the order was classified.

On **September 25**, the journalist Farhod Odinaev, a member of the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, whose name is included in the interstate search database of the Commonwealth of Independent States, was detained at the Kamienny Loh checkpoint at the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. The Tajik authorities banned the party and declared it a terrorist organization in 2015, imprisoning its top leadership and dozens of its members. Since then, repressions have been launched against opposition activists in Tajikistan and beyond, using Interpol's extradition requests and "red notices" to detain them abroad. In 2013, while living in Russia, Odinaev founded the independent satellite television channel *SAFO*, which spoke about the plight of Tajik migrants in Russia and also covered events in Tajikistan. Since September 25, Odinaev has been in the pre-trial detention center in Hrodna, awaiting possible extradition to Tajikistan, where he is charged with criminal offenses - "public calls for extremist activities" and "organizing an extremist organization."

On November 5, the General Prosecutor's Office of Belarus issued an official decision to refuse to extradite Odinaev to the Tajik authorities.

On **October 5**, the video blogger **Siarhiej Tsikhanouski**, the author of the popular YouTube channel "Country for Life", was detained in the center of Minsk after he broadcast live online from an election rally by the opposition politician Mikalaj Statkievich. Tsikhanouski said during his live broadcast that the road police stopped his car and told him that unpaid fines were registered on the car. Later, the blogger was invited to drive to the Leninski district police department. There he was told that the car might have been stolen. After the administrative report was drawn up, Tsikhanouski was released. He spent two hours at the police station.

On **October 24**, the freelance journalist **Darja Chultsova** was fined 510 rubles in Minsk for illegal production and or distribution of media products - cooperation with the *Belsat* TV channel without accreditation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code.

On **November 8**, the police detained reporters and equipment of the German television channel *ARD* in Minsk. Later, the journalists were released. The driver of the *ARD* car spent two and a half hours in the Centralny district police department, and he was also released thereafter. The detention took place on Freedom Square on the eve of the #whatsnext rally. Earlier, on November 4, the video blogger NEXTA (Sciapan Pucila), via his Telegram channel, urged Belarusians to rally to decide where the country should move. The event was held as a pre-election picket of a candidate for parliament.

On **November 21**, **Uladzimir Chudziantsov**, editor of the independent online news agency *by24.org*, was detained by Belarusian customs officers for possession of drugs as he was about to cross the border into Poland by train. The customs officials claimed that they found 0.87 grams of cannabis in the clothes of Chudziantsov. The police who searched his apartment later the same day claimed that they also found drugs there. He was put in the Brest pre-trial detention center for a period of two months; the detention was later extended.

On **December 2**, the Orsha district court fined the video blogger **Zmicier Kazlou**, known as Gray Cat, for a video posted on YouTube. Judge Kaciaryna Mazhejka found that Kazlou had broken the law on holding mass events and

decided to fine him 510 rubles. In his video, the blogger urged people to come to Kastychnitskaja Square in Minsk to meet with candidates for deputies of the House of Representatives from the civil campaign "European Belarus".

On **December 10**, at 3 pm, the freelance journalist **Aliaksandr Ziankou**, who was filming a street performance on camera, was detained on Jakub Kolas Square in Minsk. On that day, the initiative "March, Baby" staged an "art event" against domestic violence against women. After the arrest, the journalist was taken to the Savietski district police department in Minsk, where they took explanations and copied the recordings from his video camera. Ziankou was released in about an hour and a half after the detention.

On **December 12**, the Viciebsk district court fined the freelance journalists **Alena Shabunia and Zmicier Lupach** 816 and 1,071 rubles, respectively, under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code. Judge Hanna Ihnacienka found the journalists guilty of violating the law on mass media – cooperation with foreign media without accreditation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On November 16, the *Belsat* TV channel aired a video about residents of the village of Shevina who refused to vote in the recent parliamentary elections because of a long-standing unresolved problem.

On **December 26**, the Maskouski district court in Minsk fined a member of the Belarusian Popular Front, Ilya Dabratvor, under Article 23.34 of the Administrative Code ("Violation of the procedure for organizing and holding a mass event"), although he was preparing stories for the websites *belprauda.org* and *pyx.by*.

On the morning of **December 27**, on the M5 highway near the village of Liebiadziouka, officers from the Zhlobin road police detained the blogger **Siarhiej Tsikhanouski**, the author of the YouTube channel "Country for Life". He was stopped by two road police crews and a civilian car in which people in police uniforms were sitting. A road police captain told Tsikhanouski that the car was wanted by the Vietka district police department and asked Tsikhanouski to go to the police department for an examination. The blogger refused, as it was possible to inspect the car on the spot, but no one did. Through the stream, the blogger reported that he was going to Minsk in a Renault owned by a friend of his and associated his detention primarily with the filming of protests against the integration of Belarus and Russia, which were taking place in Minsk.

The night before, Tsikhanouski received a text message demanding him to appear on December 27 in the Savietski district court in Homiel, where an administrative case against him under Article 23.34 ("Violation of the procedure for organizing and holding a mass event") was to be heard. The blogger replied that he could not come to court because he had a business trip to Minsk planned. Finally, Tsikhanouski was brought to the Savietski district court in Homiel, where Judge Alena Shain arrested Siarhiej for 15 days for participating in a rally against integration with Russia.

On **December 27**, the Kastychnitski district court in Minsk sentenced the photographer **Hienadz Vieracinski**, a freelance reporter for the magazine *Abazhur*, to a fine of 765 rubles for allegedly illegal participation in a rally against integration with Russia, which took place in Minsk on December 7. He attended the rally and, as a journalist, took pictures of the event, which were later posted on many news websites.

Physical assault against journalists

On **January 13**, **Kanstancin Zhukouski**, a freelance reporter from Homiel, who collaborated with Belsat, said that he had been attacked by four unknown people. He was driving a car with his companion, Barys Anikiejeu, and stopped to find the reason why the car's engine was overheating. Their car was besieged by four hefty men, who immediately drove close in an SUV. They sprayed some liquid into Anikiejeu's face. Zhukouski was beaten, his passport was damaged, although it was invalid. Neither Zhukouski nor Anikiejeu reported the incident to the police. Based on their previous experience, they saw no reason to do this, since the police have never been able to find people who threatened them earlier.

On January 29, it became known that Zhukouski left Belarus with his wife and daughter for one of the countries in Western Europe. He said he was concerned with his family's well-being. In recent years, the police detained the freelance journalist dozens of times to interfere with his public and journalistic activities. In 2018 alone, about two

dozen administrative reports were drawn up against Zhukouski for illegal production of media products without accreditation for the *Belsat* TV channel. The total fines amounted to more than 5,000 Euros.

On **March 3**, in Brest, police detained the journalists **Ales Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava** for several hours. This happened when they were heading to a public transport stop to go to Lenin Square, where opponents of the construction of a battery plant near Brest gathered on Sundays. Police officers approached the journalists and suggested that they go with them to the police station. When Ales Liauchuk tried to object to this proposal, the police used force and even tried to handcuff him.

On **June 2**, the blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** was forcibly pushed into a car and taken away by two unidentified persons in camouflage. This happened at the intersection of Savietskaja and Mayakovsky Streets in Brest during a live broadcast from a rally against the construction of a battery plant. In the end, the blogger was taken to the Leninski district police department, where an administrative report was drawn up against him (see details in "Detentions, administrative prosecution").

On **November 16**, unknown persons in Minsk attacked a *Radio Liberty* TV crew, which filmed the march of participants in a "rally of free people" to the Central Election Commission, organized by the civil campaign "European Belarus". Their video camera was damaged.

Searches, seizure, and confiscation of and damage to equipment and storage devices

On **March 7**, searches were conducted at the place of residence of the well-known blogger Aliaksandr Kabanau and his parents' house in the town of Biaroza in the Brest region. They were related to the initiation of criminal proceedings against him under Article 211 (Part 1) of the Criminal Code ("Misappropriation or embezzlement") (see "*Criminal Cases*" for details).

On **March 10**, the police, with the sanction of the prosecutor's office, searched the apartment of the blogger **Paviel Spiryn**, who was on that day questioned as a witness in the investigation of the case initiated under Article 189 of the Criminal Code ("Insult") (see "*Criminal Cases*" for details). As a result, the hard drive of Spiryn's computer was seized.

On **April 9**, the directorate of the Investigative Committee for the city of Minsk searched the premises used by employees of the *Belsat* satellite TV channel for their activities. The search was carried out as part of a criminal case instituted on the fact of libel on the channel's website (Article 188 (Part 2) of the Criminal Code) (see "*Criminal Cases*" for details). As a result of the search, which lasted about four hours, about a dozen storage media were seized, including three laptops and two hard drives.

Two days later, on April 11, the Investigative Committee returned the seized equipment to *Belsat* employees.

On **November 16**, unknown persons in Minsk attacked a *Radio Liberty* TV crew, which filmed the march of participants of a "rally of free people" to the Central Election Commission, organized by the civil campaign "European Belarus". Their video camera was damaged as a result.

Threat

On **January 12**, **Kaciaryna Andrejeva**, a journalist of *Belsat*, was threatened by telephone. A former militant from Donbas, whose story was told in an article by Andrejeva published on *belsat.eu* called the author and threatened to inflict bodily harm on her. Calling Kaciaryna Andrejeva on her cell phone, he began to threaten her, swearing obscenely. "Change your place of residence! I'm not the only one who wants to twist your head", the former militant

said. According to him, the information presented in the article did not correspond to reality. He called the journalist "corrupt" and promised that she would "have problems". Andrejeva had to contact the police.

On **August 19**, Nasta Zakharevich, a journalist of *Green Portal* (*greenbelarus.info*), received messages with insults and hidden threats on the *Vkontakte* social network. The editors of the portal linked this with her publications on the construction of a battery plant in Brest and protests of environmentalists and residents of the city on this occasion.

The journalist demanded the police to bring the author of the messages to justice. The Frunzienski district police department in Minsk reported that the person who had threatened Zakharevich was not identified.

On **September 24**, the well-known blogger **Andrej Pavuk** from the town of Akciabrski in the Homiel region, who produces and distributes the program *Rudabielskaja Pakazukha* on social networks, received a threatening message from unknown persons in his Viber messenger, the text of which he published on his Facebook account: *"The trial is tomorrow, and you'll lose it. We organized the search to make you think about your behavior; shut your smelly mouth and get a job. Say thank you for us not planting anything. If you sabotage and denigrate the existing authorities, measures will be taken against you. You'll go to jail, and your [indecent] wife will carry parcels [...]*. This happened on the eve of a court hearing on recovering moral damage from the police for his unlawful detention and search, which took place in March 2019 (see details in "Detentions, administrative prosecution"). The police failed to identify the author of the message.

On **November 1**, Andrej Pavuk received another threat to his Viber account, which concerned his appeal to the Minister of Internal Affairs in connection with the refusal of the local police to protect him. In the message, an unknown person said that the blogger would continue to receive "replies that the person was not identified" to all his complaints to the police regarding provocations and threats. Besides, the anonymous message said, *"It was just written to you that you'd lose the court - it happened... Look at Manko (a businessman and blogger from Kalinkavichy - ed.). We warned him, he did not understand the warnings - as a result, he's in jail. If you behave this way, then think, perhaps the same fate awaits you, like Manko. There are many articles in the Criminal Code, and we'll find a pretext. They will put you in prison, and your ex-wife will raise children alone - do you need it? You're an adult man, get a job or collect bottles. And you should know, all your gang is on the hook"*.

Andrej Pavuk believes that all provocations and threats against him are aimed at intimidating him through psychological pressure.

Restrictions on online freedom

On **January 10**, the Ministry of Information restricted access to twenty-two online resources for posting inappropriate advertisements for lending money to the public at large. The decision was made following written notice from the Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade of the Republic of Belarus.

On **March 18**, the Ministry of Information restricted access to a website on anarchism following a decision of the Centralny district court in Minsk. The reason for this was the spread of extremist materials.

On **March 20**, the online newspaper *Nasha Niva* reported that in March several attempts were made to log illegally into instant messengers and social networks accounts, which belong to its authors. Thus, unidentified people tried to hack Arciom Harbacevich's Facebook account and log into Andrej Dynko's Telegram. On March 20, an unsuccessful attempt was made to log into the journalist Kaciaryna Karpitskaja's Telegram account. In the latter case, the person who tried to do this used special means and, most likely, had a clone of her SIM card, to which he received a digital code sent by the application. However, the account had the two-factor authentication feature, so after the digital code was entered, the application requested an additional password, which the criminal did not know.

On **April 3**, access to two hundred and forty-four online resources was restricted. This decision was made by the Ministry of Information, which received a corresponding document from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The reason

for restricting access to a record number of websites was the publication of information on the sale of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

On **September 2**, the Ministry of Information restricted access to seven resources following written notifications from the Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Access to five online resources was terminated for posting information on the sale of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, their precursors and analogs, and two more for posting inappropriate advertisements.

On **October 10**, one of the most popular web portals in Belarus, *onliner.by*, became the target of a significant DDoS attack. Website administrators reported difficulty accessing it and suspicious activity in user profiles. *Onliner.by* told their audience about what had happened and apologized for the inconvenience. The letter from the editor suggested that the website users increased the security of their profiles by changing passwords and allowing the two-factor authentication.

On **December 26**, after the publication of an announcement of the protests in Minsk scheduled for December 29, a DDoS attack on the website *belsat.eu* began, which lasted two days. According to the *Belsat* TV channel, the website was attacked from at least three thousand IP addresses.

Violations related to access to information

On **January 14**, Tatyana Asos, the head of the trade and services department of the Baranavichy city executive committee, refused to respond to a written inquiry from the independent regional newspaper *Intex-press* about the results of her work in 2018 and plans for 2019. The questions concerned the dynamics of trade and the development of the trading network and catering. The official suggested that the journalists should come for answers in March, when, according to the plan of activities of the Baranavichy city executive committee, the question "On the results of the socio-economic development of trade and public catering for 2018 and the tasks for 2019" will be considered.

On **January 17**, freelance journalists collaborating with the *Belsat* TV channel were not allowed to attend a press conference in the building of the Mahiliou regional executive committee on the environmental situation in the Mahiliou region. The main issue discussed at the press conference was the situation at the still inactive *Omsk Carbon Mahiliou* factory, where carbon black will be produced in the future. Residents of Mahiliou remain very concerned about the possible deterioration of the environmental situation when the enterprise is put into operation. Alena Dzivakova, the head of the mass media and youth policy department, demanded *Belsat* reporters to show documents that would identify them as journalists of a mass media outlet registered in Belarus and also told them about the need for pre-registration to participate in the press conference. Since these journalists are freelancers, they did not have the necessary press cards, which became a formal reason for their non-admission to the event.

On **January 25**, Sciapan Palonnikau, the first deputy chairman of the Mahiliou district executive committee, tried to prevent journalists from attending a meeting of the management of the *Omsk Carbon Mahiliou* carbon black factory and officials with residents in the agrotown of Viejna in the Mahiliou district. At first, the official told the reporters that they needed accreditation to attend the meeting. After the journalist **Uladzimir Laptsevich** told him that the Mahiliou district executive committee should first develop the corresponding rules of accreditation, Palonnikau demanded the journalists to provide their press cards and ordered an official to record their numbers.

On **January 30**, **Alieh Supruniuk**, the editor of the website *First Region*, who was going to attend the court hearing in a case of public interest, was not allowed to enter the courthouse of the Brest district court with his press card. Meanwhile, a message posted on the porch of the courthouse said that one could enter the courthouse with an ID and then get registered in the book of visitors. Alieh Supruniuk's attempts to convince the security guard that the press card is an ID were futile.

On March 8, it became known that in response to the journalist's complaint, Uladzimir Ihnaciuk, the head of the Leninski department of protection in Brest, said that "no violations of the requirements of local regulatory documents

were found" in the security guard's actions. The letter also stated that "an employee of the Department of Protection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, being on duty in the courthouse, obeys oral or written instructions of the court's management."

On **February 1**, security guards prevented the *BelaPAN* journalist **Milana Kharytonava** and the blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** from covering a trial in the Leninski district court in Brest, where a sentence was pronounced in the case of two police officers who were accused of corruption. Before the trial began, unknown people in plain clothes filled the courtroom. After that, the police began to restrict access to people, claiming a lack of space. It was noted that the restrictions primarily concerned those who could take photos and videos in the courtroom.

On **February 22**, in Brest, guards of a battery plant allowed journalists to enter its territory checking their names against some lists. It remained unknown who and by what criteria compiled these lists. Although the plant's management organized a special press tour, not all journalists and bloggers managed to get to the plant, against which people in Brest have been protesting for almost a year already. In addition to reporters of state-owned media, only some journalists of independent mass media (*BelaPAN* news agency and *TUT.by* web portal) were able to get to the *I-Power* plant.

On **March 15**, the blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** tried to enter the building of the Brest regional executive committee to attend a briefing by its deputy chairman Hienadz Barysiuk. At the entrance, he was met by an assistant to the official, Jauhien Viktaravich, who did not let the blogger in, citing his lack of accreditation, forbade him to make video recordings and called the police. Piatrukhin learned that not all the journalists and bloggers attending the briefing had accreditation.

On **April 17**, **Kryscina Saladukha**, a correspondent for *Hazieta Slonimskaja*, came to the Slonim district executive committee on the newspaper's assignment to take a picture of the exposition of a housing development project on Independence Avenue, which was presented the day before. However, a security officer did not let the journalist of the non-state media enter the building, saying that she had no right to let people in with photographic equipment without special permission.

On **April 18**, journalists from the *TUT.by* news website, *BelaPAN* news agency, the newspaper *Bielarusy I Rynak*, and the *European Radio for Belarus* were refused accreditation to cover the annual address of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to the nation and the National Assembly, which was to be held on April 19. Two of them - Tacciana Karavienkova (*TUT.by*) and the *Euroradids* special correspondent Zmicier Lukashuk - had permanent accreditation in the parliament.

On **May 3**, journalists were prevented from attending a meeting on the development of a neighborhood in the center of Minsk, which was held in the administration of the Piershmajski district in Minsk behind closed doors and under police protection. Two dozen people gathered near the door; they all submitted written applications to attend the commission but were refused entry. Also, correspondents of *Radio Liberty* and *TUT.by* were not let in. When the journalist of *Radio Liberty* **Ina Studzinskaja** approached the door, the policeman Vital Dabravolski roughly threw her out of the office.

On **May 13**, **Viktar Parfionienka**, a journalist from Hrodna, learned from a telephone conversation with a Foreign Ministry official, that he was once again denied accreditation.

Parfionienka has been working for the *Belarusian Radio Racja*, registered in Poland, for ten years already. Every year, he applies to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus with a request for accreditation as a foreign correspondent; his application has always been refused.

On **May 15**, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus refused to accredit **Jauhien Skrabiets**, a reporter of the *Belarusian Radio Racja* (Poland), as a foreign media correspondent. In its reply to the head of the radio, Eugeniusz Wappa, the Ministry referred to the fact that over the past six months there have been cases of cooperation of unaccredited journalists with *Radio Racja*.

On **June 6**, the online newspaper *Nasha Niva* published a document that was allegedly sent to farms in the Svietlahorsk district. It is called "Operation procedures for the manager and employees of an organization when communicating with the media". It proposes to immediately check the journalist's press card, and if the latter is not produced, and in response, they hear such words as "freelancer", "Belsat", or "BAJ", then refuse any comment or interview. The memo says that should anything happen, they should call Ala Mankievich, the head of the ideology department of the Svietlahorsk district executive committee. When the journalists behave aggressively, then the employees should call the police. Also, the task of the management was to instruct the staff, as well as to prevent "unauthorized persons" from entering the farm. Ala Mankievich commented on the appearance of this document online for *Nasha Niva*, claiming that she had sent out no letters, mailings, or such operation procedures and someone discredited her.

On **June 7**, a journalist of *Brestskaja Hazieta* was not allowed into the new courthouse after its grand opening, citing her lack of accreditation.

On **June 11**, the administration of the battery plant *I-Power*, the construction of which residents of Brest oppose, held a press conference; however, they refused the admission, without any comments, to the majority of journalists from independent media and bloggers who regularly cover events related to the plant.

On **June 12**, none of the media representatives could attend the meeting between the head of the Brest region executive committee Anatol Lis and ecological activists, even though three independent journalists were included in the list of participants. Audio recording and photographs during the meeting were banned.

On **June 26**, the journalists from Viciebsk, **Zmicier Kazakievich** and **Viachaslau Lazarau**, could not attend the round table that the education department organized at the request of members of *Mother 328* movement from Viciebsk. They were not allowed into the Viciebsk Regional Institute for Education Development, where the event was held because the names of independent journalists were not on the guest list, although its initiators, the parents of drug offenders, requested that the press should not be expelled.

On July 9, in the market of the town of Hantsavichy in the Brest region, police officers detained the journalist of the *Belsat* TV channel **Ihar Kuliej** and the cameramen **Siarhiej Kavaliou** and **Maksim Harchanok**, who were filming an episode of the show entitled "Belsat goes to Hantsavichy". The police officers ordered them to go to the police station, saying that they were not allowed to shoot there, and forced them to switch off the cameras. Having provided explanations, the journalists were released.

On **July 15**, the independent newspaper *Nasha Niva* asked Zinaida Biareshchanka, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Agriculture, to comment on the fact that Ihar Bryl, the deputy minister of agriculture, posted a photograph on Instagram where he posed in a T-shirt with the inscription "Russia" at the factory *Zdravushka* in Barysau. The media drew attention to this case, after which the official closed his account. During the first conversation, Biareshchanka promised to talk with Ihar Bryl, but during the second call, she refused to answer questions using indecencies, saying, "*Listen, stop politicizing where this is not necessary. Stop hammering in people's heads something that you should not hammer.*"

On **August 14**, an official of the Brest regional executive committee refused to provide information about the case of anthrax in the Stolin district to the journalist of the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Byelorussia*, **Aksana Brovach**. He replied that all the information was available on the *BelTA* website: "Can you read? What is written there?" It is worth adding that the press service of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food sent the official communication about the case of anthrax exclusively to the *BelTA* state news agency.

On **August 28**, the principal of the secondary school No. 9 in Mahiliou, Aliaksandr Siomachkin, categorically refused to talk to reporters, citing the fact that he needed permission from the education department. He said, "*... without permission, there will be no conversation with the media. Call my immediate superiors, ask them for permission.*" According to the journalist of the Mahiliou website *mspring.online* **Alexander Burakou Jr.**, reporters, together with parents of the students, were waiting for the principal near the school to discuss the fact what they were forced to take their children's documents from the school. Allegedly, this decision was made because it was economically

unprofitable to school tenth graders because of their small number. Together with Alexander Burakou Jr., correspondents from the *BelaPAN* news agency and the *TUT.by* news website tried to speak with the principal of the Mahiliou school No. 9.

On **September 26**, Volha Palityka, the deputy of the House of Representatives for the Baranavichskaja-Zakhodniaja constituency No. 5, did not answer the questions from the non-state newspaper *Intex-press* in her letter. Referring to her busyness, she said that she considered it *"premature to summarize her activities as the deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the sixth convocation"*. However, she promised to report to the voters after the end of her cadence. The deputy did not promise to answer the *Intex-press* questions later. Meanwhile, on October 3, in the TV show "Markau. Nothing personal" on the *ONTV* channel Volha Palityka gave an interview to the presenter about her activities in the House of Representatives, finding time in her busy schedule.

On **October 17**, a journalist from Hrodna, **Viktar Parfionienka**, was denied accreditation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus. This has been his eleventh attempt to obtain official permission to work as a correspondent for the *Belarusian Radio Racja*, located in Poland, which began in 2009. This time, the refusal was based on paragraph 15.4 of the Regulation on the accreditation of foreign journalists, which says *"For six months, to refuse the foreign media outlet in the accreditation of journalists if the fact was established that it has used services of journalists and (or) other persons without accreditation"*.

On **November 13**, the head of the Baranavichy city police department, Aliaksandr Silitski, refused to provide information to the correspondent of the local independent newspaper *Intex-press* **Iryna Komik**, because, according to him, the department should not communicate with journalists from this media. When asked "why", the policeman said, "I can't explain this."

On November 20, the director of the *Intex-press* publishing house Uladzimir Janukievich met with the head of the Baranavichy city police department Uladzimir Maksimchyk. At the meeting, he complained about difficulties in obtaining information from the city police department and handed the official a written complaint.

On November 29, the newspaper received a response from Uladzimir Maksimchyk, which stated that *"no violations were found in the actions of employees of the Baranavichy city police department."*

On **November 18**, the journalists of the *Belsat* TV channel **Iryna Arekhouskaja** and **Zmicier Mitskievich** were denied accreditation to cover the events of Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW Belarus 2019), which was held in Minsk from November 18 to 24.

The *Belsat* TV channel sent an application for accreditation for four journalists, and two of them received it. However, on the morning of November 18, during registration, they were told that the Ministry of Economy had revoked their accreditation.

On **November 18**, **Zoja Khrutskaja**, a journalist of *Rehijanalnaja Hazieta*, was denied information at the company *Kamunalnik*, where she called to clarify information about the provision of free containers for separate collection of garbage to residents of the city of Maladziechna. In response to her questions, one of the company's employees asked her to contact the deputy director for ideology Valier Alsheuski to receive permission to interview. In a telephone conversation with Alsheuski, Khrutskaja managed to say only, "We would like to write...". "And we would not want to," the deputy director replied. What the journalist asked, "What do you mean, you would not want to?", Valier Alsheuski said, "In the direct meaning" - and hung up. The second call, which the journalist made with her voice recorder on, ended immediately after she introduced herself and warned that the conversation was being recorded.

On **December 5**, the *BelaPAN* news agency and several other non-state media were denied accreditation to cover the meeting of Aliaksandr Lukashenka with the deputies of the House of Representatives and the members of the Council of the Republic of the outgoing and new convocations, which took place at the Palace of Independence.

On the morning of **December 18**, it became known that reporters from the *BelaPAN* news agency were denied the right to attend a meeting of the Council of the Republic scheduled for December 19. However, the agency had official

accreditation. When the BAJ asked the press secretary of the Council of the Republic, Volha Kazlovich, for clarification, the latter said that *Belapan* journalists had previously attended events of the Council of the Republic, but it was decided to invite the media to tomorrow's meeting "in a narrow format". Further, Kazlovich asked to seek written explanations, which was done. A few hours after the problem was made public, a representative of the Council of the Republic said that the journalist of the agency would be allowed to attend.

Other forms of pressure and violation of journalists' rights

On **January 14**, the *STB* TV channel removed the words of the former biathlete, Olympic champion Nadziezhda Skardzina, who told that the Presidential Administration did not allow the creation of a *Sport FM* radio station. Skardzina was going to implement this project together with a swimmer, the two-time vice-champion of the Olympics, Aliaksandra Hierasimienia. They turned to the Ministry of Information, where they were redirected to the Presidential Administration. There, officials called the project of Skardzina and Hierasimienia "inexpedient," since there are already too many radio stations in Belarus. On Sunday evening, the *STB* website published a text version of its interview with Skardzina. The words about *Sport FM* disappeared on Monday morning, and then the entire text was removed. First, the video interview was edited, and then even the edited version disappeared.

On **February 7**, the *Nasha Niva* correspondent **Arciom Harbatsevich** encountered the misconduct of the Ministry of Defense spokesman Uladzimir Makarau, whom he asked for comment on possible NATO exercises in Belarus. Instead of answering the question, the spokesman harshly advised the journalist to turn to official sources; thereafter, the following dialogue took place between them:

Makarau: As a member of the Belarusian Union of Journalists, I'd like to ask you why you did not serve in the army, huh?

Harbatsevich: What are you asking me? Here I ask you questions.

Makarau: As a member of the Belarusian Union of Journalists, I am writing another material. Are you embarrassed about your sexual orientation? We comply with the law to the letter, we are not Americans, we have no discrimination. Ah, Mr. Harbatsevich?

Harbatsevich: I can ask you a counter-question: are you a fool?

On February 22, the Ministry of Defense commented on the conversation between the spokesman Makarau and the correspondent of *Nasha Niva*. The response, signed by Lieanid Kasinski, the assistant to the Minister of Defense for ideological work, said, "*At the same time, both the head of the information department, the press secretary of the Ministry of Defense U.M. Makarau, and the journalist of the publication Nasha Niva, Arciom Harbatsevich, did not behave correctly from the point of view of professional ethics. We had a conversation with Uladzimir Makarau.*"

On **February 25**, an article was published on the website of the Presidential Administration's newspaper "*SB. Bielarus Segodnya*" about low salaries offered to graduates of the journalism department, which was later removed. It was entitled "Dean of the BSU Journalism Department: the Starting Salary Offered to Our Graduates in the Regions is 162 Rubles". Dean Volha Samusievich said this at a meeting of the Board of the Ministry of Information. "*This year, 102 graduates will undergo a career assignment. But there are huge difficulties that relate primarily to the assignment to the province. The fact is that the starting salary in regional media offered to our graduates is 162 rubles. Besides, only 30% of the regional media are ready to give the young employee a place in the staff residence or other housing. All this, as you understand, does not contribute to the graduates' desire to work in regional media*", said Samusievich. It is noteworthy that shortly after, the article on salaries of young journalists disappeared from the *SB* website for some reason. It became possible to find the publication only in the cache of search engines.

On **May 16**, **Dzianis Ivashyn**, the editor of the Belarusian service of the international volunteer community *InformNapalm* and journalist of the newspaper *Novy Chas*, made a statement about an information attack against him by Russian media and warned of possible threats to his security. According to him, this has been going on since

mid-April 2019. Ivashyn noted that some representatives of the Belarusian media were also involved in this campaign. The main information resources in this campaign, according to Ivashyn, were *antimaydan.info*, *news-front.info*, *novorosinform.org*, *politnavigator.net*, Telegram channels *338*, *Trikotazh* and several others. The journalist suggested that the nature, way of presentation and channels for the dissemination of misinformation against him might indicate that the law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation were behind this.

On **June 4**, the reporter **Maksim Khliabiets** told that his acquaintances, American journalists who worked in Brest, writing stories about the battery plant and the fate of the Belarusian language, caught three strangers in one of their rooms in the Hermitage Hotel when they returned from a working trip. One of these people was sitting at the journalist's personal computer. They did not respond to requests to name themselves. When Khliabiets and an American journalist went down together to the hotel administrator and tried to find out what kind of people those were and why they were in his room, they could not get an answer. Later, the Hermitage Hotel confirmed that there was a "misunderstanding" with foreign guests but denied the fact that someone was trying to get into the guest's personal computer. The hotel's security representative told the newspaper *Nasha Niva* that there was a complaint about the smell of smoke on the floor, and they were checking the sockets for signs of burn or short circuit.

On **August 13**, a resident of Drahichyn, Ivan Sukharevich, sent letters to the National Assembly of Belarus and the editor-in-chief of the news website *First Region*, **Piotr Huzajewski**, where he outlined his negative attitude to this online resource and personally to its Drahichyn correspondent, **Siarhiej Hardzijeuich**. The author of the letter warned of serious consequences for *First Region* if, on the eve of the elections, its journalists would try to "rock society of our town and district" and demanded that Siarhiej Hardzijeuich be brought to justice. The letter repeatedly mentioned allegations of lies but not a single fact was cited. Ivan Sukharevich's complaint was submitted to the Drahichyn district police department for examination. The latter investigated and sent a written response to the correspondent of *First Region* Siarhiej Hardzijeuich that they found no signs of illegal activities in his actions.

On **August 15**, the Barysau local official newspaper *Adzinstva* retouched the coat of arms Pahonia in a photograph. The authorities see the Pahonia as a symbol of the opposition. Viktor Zakharjev, a cross-fit trainer in the wheelchair, an interview with whom was published on the website of *Adzinstva*, was dressed in a sweatshirt with the image of Pahonia.

On **October 4**, an operational duty officer of the district police department called Andrej Pavuk and said that the police received a call from Pavuk's phone number, in which an unknown person who identified himself as Andrej Pavuk and provided his home address stated that he had "killed his wife Volha and her lover". Pavuk's wife Volha had to call and explain that this call was a provocation, and then file a complaint to the police. The police department said that the "hooligan" would not be found.

On **November 3**, in Smarhon, the human rights activist **Aliaksandr Dzierhachou**, who was distributing a special issue of the newspaper *Novy Chas* dedicated to the human rights situation in prisons on the local market, had to give explanations in a police car. After the distribution, when Dzierhachou was talking with one of the market visitors holding in his hand the last copy of the newspaper, a police officer approached him and asked whether Dzierhachou was distributing the newspaper and on what basis. In response, Dzierhachou had to explain that he was doing it in accordance with the Constitution, which guarantees the appropriate freedom. Nevertheless, the policeman asserted that the human rights activist was holding an unauthorized picket, as people gathered near him, and must give an explanation.

On **November 15**, in Babrujsk, the local radio station *Zephyr FM* fired DJ Paviel Khadjaeu for publishing an unofficial rating of Belarusian cities on the morning of November 11; Babrujsk took the last place in this rating. After that, Vital Ausiejenka, the editor-in-chief of the media holding *Babrujskaje Zhyccia*, which includes this radio station, was summoned to the city executive committee for explanations. When he returned, he said that there should be no negative information on the air, and if this was official information, it should be published in a mild form. DJ Khadjaeu was fired the next day. The head of the radio station, Alena Radouskaja, said that truancy was the official reason for the dismissal.

On November 24, it became known that another DJ, **Vadzim Kirejau**, was fired, who also spoke about the rating of Belarusian cities. The reason for his dismissal was not communicated to him.

Infringements during the elections to the House of Representatives of the Republic of Belarus

On **September 24**, the chairperson of the Central Election Commission Lidzija Jarmoshyna at a meeting of the Commission spoke about the journalists who would be allowed to work in the special press center during the elections: *"Everything is clear with the journalists who work for foreign media. They are accredited through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But what to do with ours? I propose to let in only representatives of the central media. After all, if we allow entry to representatives of local newspapers, then there will not be enough space for everyone. There are also bloggers. And each of them considers himself a media outlet. The other day I opened the portal TUT.by on my computer. I got interested in a story about famous people and their pets. And who do you think these famous people are? Bloggers alone!"*

After that, the members of the Central Election Commission unanimously supported the decision that only representatives of the central Belarusian mass media get access to the Palace of the Republic, where the election press center is traditionally located.

Since the law guarantees equal rights to all registered media, the BAJ asked the Central Election Commission for clarification. In response to this, on October 1, the Commission's chairperson Lidzija Jarmoshyna said, *"The advantage of the central mass media does not prevent the invitation of representatives of local publications if there are conditions for accommodating all invited persons. The use of the word "central" in the Regulation is due to the commonly used division of the media across the territory of distribution."*

On **October 19**, the well-known Belarusian journalist **Iryna Khalip**, the proxy of the candidate for deputy Aksana Jushkievich, was refused the right to speak on the state-owned *Radio Minsk*.

On **October 22**, the election address of the activist Uladzimir Niapomniashchykh from Homiel, who was running at the elections in the Homielskaja-Centralnaja constituency No. 33, which should have been broadcast at 19.00, was taken off the air. The first feature of his program of work in the parliament was the impeachment of Lukashenka. In his address, Niapomniashchykh also proposed limiting the security squad of the president to two officers and stated that he would seek a minimum pension for the deputies.

On **October 22**, *Radio Minsk* failed to air the previously recorded appeal of the activist of the civil campaign "European Belarus", the registered candidate for deputy Aksana Jushkievich. The editor-in-chief of the radio program V. Malinouski noted that the candidate's address called for the disruption of the elections. However, among the candidate's expressions, there were such as "Do not trust the dictator and his assistants, they lie, they do not care about you", "Basta to the collective farm dictatorship! Basta to the Astraviets NPP!".

On **October 23**, the *Belarus 3TV* channel did not show the election address of Iryna Davidovich, a candidate for deputy from the United Civic Party in the Ivsuskaja constituency No. 54. The Hrodna region election commission informed Davidovich that it had no authority to oblige the media to broadcast or publish certain materials.

She received a more detailed reply from the management of the Hrodna television and radio company. In response to the complaint about the violation of the right to freedom of expression and freedom to vote and to be elected, it was officially stated that there were no facts of pressure on the management of the TV and radio company, and the decision was made independently by the editorial council.

The following two sentences are cited among the reasons for withdrawing the address by the candidate Davidovich:

1. "All that is done by the authorities is to turn people into slaves. The slaves have only one way out, this is to flee to another country." The reply: "... *The Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus provides for criminal liability for the use of slave labor ... There are no signs of the slave-owing system in our country. The conclusion: your information is not true, its dissemination ... may lead to socio-political tension in the country. On the other hand, it is a direct insult to all citizens of the Republic of Belarus.*"

2. "How not to recall the Belarusian nuclear power plant. Built with all thumbs". The reply: "*We asked the management of the Belarusian NPP whether this information was factually accurate. We received not only a well-reasoned and factual refutation but also a warning that in case of dissemination of untrue information that discredits their business reputation, they will demand the TV and radio company to disseminate the rebuttal.*"

Thus, the Hrodna TV and radio company concluded that Iryna Davidovich in her address "*used untrue information discrediting honor, dignity and business reputation, which could lead to socio-political tension.*"

On October 30, the constituency election commission issued a warning to Davidovich for posting a video with her television address prepared for the Hrodna television in her social media accounts. On November 13, Judge Siarhieij Pipko of the Hrodna region court denied her appeal against this warning.

On **October 24**, an activist of the European Belarus campaign from Brest, Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, was expelled from the list of candidates for deputy of the House of Representatives after her speech on television. On October 28, the chairman of the regional election commission, which examined the complaint of Sharenda-Panasiuk against this decision, Aliaksandr Kaliada, said, among other things, that the words "preservation of power by the dictator", which were said during the campaign address on television, were an insult. "The worst thing is that this phrase was disseminated by a candidate for deputy," he said.

On **October 24**, the editor-in-chief of the official *Maladziechanskaja Hazieta*, Vital Krupiankou, "suggested" to the candidate for deputy Valiancin Tsishko to remove the first sentence of the program of the Movement for Freedom, which spoke about the lack of democracy and free elections in Belarus. The editor had no issues with the candidate's text; the only comments were on the Movement's program. Tsishko said that he had to temporize with the editor and accept the changes so that voters could familiarize themselves with the rest of the Movement for Freedom's program.

On **October 28**, the video recording of the address by Mikhail Bandarenka, a candidate from the Belarusian Popular Front Party in the Mazyr constituency No. 42 and an activist of the European Belarus movement, was not aired. He associated the ban on broadcasting his television appearance with his statements about the existence of a dictatorship in Belarus and the need for Lukashenka to leave.

On **October 31**, Dyjana Charnushyna, a candidate for deputy from the United Civic Party in the Minskaja-Kamennahorskaja constituency No. 101, was denied publication of her election program in the newspaper *Zviazda*. The management of Publishing House *Zviazda* considered that in her speech there were signs of "insult and slander against officials of the Republic of Belarus".

On **November 1**, the television address of the candidate for deputy in the Staravilienskaja constituency No. 105 Mikalaj Kazlou, which was supposed to be broadcast on the *Belarus 3TV* channel, was not aired.

On **November 6**, the official district newspaper, *Babrujskaje Zhyccio*, refused to print the election program of the candidate Aliaksandr Kamar, who ran in the Babrujskaja-Leninskaja constituency No. 78 from the United Civic Party. The candidate received the refusal and a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the editorial council. Paragraph 5 of the document said, "*It was recommended to Kamar A.I., the candidate for deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the seventh convocation, to amend a wording in the section "How to do this?". To acquaint the candidate with the decision of the editorial council. In case of disagreement of the candidate with the decision of the editorial council to refuse to publish the election program in the newspaper Babrujskaje Zhyccio.*" Kamar said that the expression that he refused to change was "the country has no future with Lukashenka."

On **November 17**, the election day, an incident with the blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** took place at the polling station No. 2 in Brest. From morning until noon, he observed the vote at this station, then left and returned in the evening to observe the vote count. However, the blogger failed to get to the polling station again, as the chairman of the precinct election commission, the associate professor of the Brest State Technical University, Valier Shcharbach, deprived him of accreditation because he had posted online a video from the buffet, where there were cheap vodka and food, but there was no toilet paper in the restroom.

ECONOMIC POLICY IN THE MEDIA SPHERE

On **January 3**, readers sent to the newspaper *Nasha Niva* a document of the Ministry of Health (previously distributed throughout the country) stating the following: "The Ministry reminds of the subscription for the first half of 2019 to the newspaper *Miedytsynski Viesnik* and the magazine *Healthcare with its supplement, the magazine Miedytsynskija Viedy*, including in your subordinate agencies. You must inform the Ministry of Health about the results of the subscription campaign, including in your subordinate agencies, before December 28".

On **May 21**, a special order was issued at the Mahiliou Plant *Strommashyna* JSC signed by the company's manager Siarhiej Hrynkievich, in which those in charge of ideology in the business units of the company were instructed to hold a subscription campaign for the second half of the year among employees of the company before May 31. The monitoring of the execution of the order was entrusted to the deputy manager for ideological work and social issues I. Khadorchanka. The order of the manager of *Strommashyna* was issued following a letter from the administration of the Leninski district of Mahiliou "On the promotion and organization of subscription for the 2nd half of 2019." The newspapers *Sovetskaya Belorussia*, *Viesnik Mahiliova* and *Mogilyovskiye Vedomosti* were offered for subscription.

On **June 14**, the education department of the Pastavy district executive committee sent a letter to all schools in Pastavy demanding to subscribe to the magazine *Yunyj Spasatel* in two copies for each class, *eschool.by* reported. The Pastavy emergency situations department admitted that they had sent an advertising letter about the magazine *Yunyj Spasatel* to the education department, but without the demand to organize a compulsory subscription in schools.

On **December 16**, the Law on the Republican Budget for 2020 stipulated that in 2020 the cost of financing the media sector would amount to 164.2 million rubles. At that, the budgetary support for the state television and radio would amount to 143.1 million rubles and for print media to 7.3 million rubles.