

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

July 21 – August 10, 2014

One more independent socio-political newspaper is gone: 12 year-old Niasvizhski Chas, covering life in Niasvizh city and district, stopped being published through economic hardships.

As became known **on July 22**, the civil activist **Aliaksandr Malochka** received another letter informing that, 10 months after the customs office seized the book **“Alexander Lukashenko. Political portrait”** by Valer Karbalevich, nothing had been decided about an expert organization that had to carry out examination of the book.

*We remind that on **September 12, 2013** the activist had the book seized from him on a border point with Lithuania – allegedly to inspect it regarding **extremist contents**. The inspection was to be performed by the Chief ideological department of the Hrodna Region Executive Committee. Four months later, the activist filed a request asking about the fate of the book and demanding the expert conclusion. He was told there was no expert conclusion but he could come and take the book from the place where it was stored. However, on February 18, 2014 the head of the customs office Ivan Niviarkevich sent another letter claiming that the previous one was untrue because the Hrodna ideologists had not replied to the questions posed. The book was redirected to the regional KGB to check if it was not on the list of goods banned for import into the territory of the Customs Union. Now the activist is going to complain to the State Customs Committee and to the prosecutor's office.*

On August 25 the Hrodna regional court **dismissed the appeal** of the regional freelance journalist **Andrei Mialeshka** against the decision of the Kastrychnitski district court fining him for 4.5 million rubles.

*We remind that on **June 16** the journalist was found guilty of “unlawful production of mass media products” and got a fine of 30 basic amounts. The court concluded that Andrei Mialeshka prepared a material for the Belarusian **Radio Racyja** (based in Bialystok, Poland); the text was published on the website of the radio on April 17 and signed by a pen name Ihar Mikalayeu. This way, the court thinks, Andrei Mialeshka violated article 22.9 of the Administrative Code (unlawful production of mass media products).*

As reported **on July 29**, the KGB tried to recruit a journalist from Brest, BAJ member **Yauhen Skrabets**. He said it happened when he tried to get employment in the city bus park in the department of tourism, marketing and foreign economic activities.

According to the journalist, the head of the company told him that his employment depended on two people who were waiting for him in a nearby cabinet. The two persons told they knew everything about the journalist's work, they knew tariffs of the **Radio Racyja**, and if he kept working for the radio, he should not be surprised by getting a fine in the future. They offered him to keep on doing civil work (not radical though) and to stay in contact with them. They also offered to sign a paper that he voluntarily agreed to cooperate with the Belarusian KGB. The journalist refused point-blank.

On July 25 at around noon, people in plain clothes **detained** the civil activist and journalist of *Novy Chas* newspaper **Mikita Brouka**. Nothing was known about his whereabouts at first; he was released at 6pm.

The journalist said he had been taken to the Soviet district police department, fingerprinted and had a talk. He was offered to answer questions with a lie detector, but he refused. Then a military commissar of Minsk district appeared and handed in a summons to undergo medical inspection.

On July 21, at the trial over the human rights defender Andrei Bandarenka in the House of Justice (Kastychnitski district court of Minsk), police officers **copied personal data** of all journalists who came to cover the trial.

A correspondent of *BelPAN* asked a man in plain clothes, who was writing down the information, what it was for, but the latter said nothing. "Before taking notes, he turned over a paper blank side up covering a page with photos of journalists with some information," said the correspondent.

On August 1 editors of the website of the international consortium *Eurobelarus* reported about a **hacker attack** on their website: for several days anonyms were publishing provocative materials about Ukraine on www.eurobelarus.info and promoted the information on social nets. According to the editor Andrei Alexandrovich, the attack started **on July 24**.

The editors of the website say the attacks could be linked to the editors' standing in covering the Ukrainian conflict; from the very first day the website ran the page "Events in Ukraine. View from Belarus".

On August 1 Roskomnadzor blocked an article of the Belarusian website **charter97.org**. The American hosting company Amazon said access to the page with the article "Siberians Want to Proclaim 'Siberian Republic'" was restricted by communication service providers in the Russian Federation following the requirement of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation.

The Prosecutor General's Office of Russia claimed the article contained "calls for mass disorders, extremist activities and participation in the mass (public) events held with violation of the established order".

As reported **on August 1** by BAJ member Leanid Sudalenka, the Chyhunanchny district police department of Homel had **revealed the person** who had left an **insulting comment** about Sudalenka on the website TUT.by. It was a 39 year-old woman, Minsk city resident. Now he is going to sue her in court.

Leanid Sudalenka complained to the police **in March** after seeing the comment calling him "an ugly creature" under the article "Homel freelancers received warnings". The journalist thinks that the woman insulted them intentionally: he noticed she actively commented all news about Homel region.

On August 4 the spokesperson of BAJ Barys Haretski received a **reply** from the **Ministry of Information** regarding his complaint about **coverage of Ukrainian events** on the mainstream Russian TV channels broadcast in Belarus. The complaint demanded to review a peculiar TV program on the Russian 1st channel and to assess if the program complies with the Belarusian Law on Mass Media. The news episode on the 1st channel "A refugee from Slovyansk tells how a militiaman's young son and wife were executed" evoked wide public response. The witness in the episode gave too shocking information to believe, and many people doubted it could happen.

The official reply signed by the Deputy Minister of Information says: "The Ministry of Information does not have any information about outright calumny and disinformation regarding Ukrainian and Belarusian events taking place daily on the mainstream Russian TV channels" that you mentioned in your petition, and it is not entitled to comment on violations of law of the Russian Federation by the editorial office of the 1st channel."

The Ministry reminded that it could withdraw license on broadcasting only in case the broadcaster roughly violates the law on licensing, i.e. if it "disseminates information banned or restricted by legislation".

The petition to ban broadcasting of Russian channels in Belarus had been already promoted earlier, by the organizational committee of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party as well as the civil committee of solidarity with Ukraine.

On August 4, the Brest region court **dismissed the appeal** against the court decision on honor and dignity case against the independent newspaper ***Brestskaya Gazeta***. We remind that the Lenin district court of Brest (judge Alena Karpava) **dismissed the lawsuit** against the newspaper on June 6; the plaintiff wanted two journalists of the newspaper to pay 30 million rubles each for moral damages. The details of the lawsuit are secret.

On August 4 the unitary enterprise *IntexPress-Pegion* **stopped publishing** the newspaper ***Niasvizhski Chas*** which had existed in the Niasvizh city and district for 12 years.

The chief editor Aliaksei Bely said the newspaper was unable to overcome economic hardships. After critical publications, the newspaper was left out from the Minsk voblsayuzdruk kiosks. Also, a large trading network refused to sell the newspaper. Most businesses refused to place their ads in the newspaper. In addition, the local communal enterprise refused to prolong the rent of the editorial office. Now *Niasvizhski Chas* will be published only twice a year in order to keep its registration as a mass medium.

On August 7 the independent journalist from Mahilow **Aliaksandr Burakow** was summoned to a local department of the Investigative Committee. The investigative officer Maxim Rubeka informed that a **criminal case** had been initiated in relation with the **hacker attack** of the website ***Svabodny Fariat***. To crack the website, anonyms used proxy servers from Sweden and Holland. And the police officers already filed their requests to their colleagues abroad.

The journalist was acknowledged to be an aggrieved person; he was questioned and informed that other journalists contributing to the resource would be summoned for questioning.

*We remind that the website formats.by was hacked on March 14. All articles were deleted and two articles of libelous character were published targeting pro-democracy activists of the Mahilow region. **On March 19** the website editor filed a complaint to the department of high-tech crimes.*