

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

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Within the reporting period, a blogger Aliaksandr Haniseuski disappeared in a regional town Mikashevichy. 29-year old man left his parents' house on December 28 and has been missing since then. Investigation has been launched. After graduation from the journalism faculty, the blogger moved to Moscow to work there. The man visited his parents in the town in Brest region. It is not clear yet if the disappearance is related to his professional activities.

On December 26 employees of the Paliessie State Radiation Ecological Reserve publicized a document demanding subscription to state-run press. In a letter to charter97.org, people sent a copy of the document providing a plan for subscribing to eight national and regional newspapers, including *Sovetskaya Belorussia*, *Gomelskaya Pravda*, *Respublika* etc. The subscription is individual and, according to the letter, is compulsory for prolonging the employment contract: "People fear of the perspective to turn unemployed, they are indignant, but they subscribe," says the letter. The plan was sent to all heads of departments in the reserve to be fulfilled by employees of the departments. The results of the subscription "campaign" were to be reported to the director's deputy on ideological work.

On January 1 the Partner-Slonim Co Ltd terminated the lease for *Hazeta Slonimskaya* newspaper. Officially, the fire security services forbid to use the second floor of the building where the editorial office was located. The chief editor Viktor Valadaschuk doubts that the decision was made by the landlord autonomously. "We know that local authorities several times addressed to the administration of the building to make them force us out," he says. The editorial office has been located there since 2008. For 16 years, the editorial office changed four landlords.

On January 8 journalists of the low-circulation newspaper received a copy of the court ruling from the Presidium of the Mahilou regional court. **We remind that on December 4 the Mahilou regional court upheld the appeal of the low-circulation newspaper Volny Horad against the decision of the Krychau district court. The judges' panel overturned the decision of the district court and closed the case because it was beyond the district court's jurisdiction: disputes on defending business reputation between legal entities were to be resolved not in court of law, but in economic court** (note – since January 2014 the system of economic courts and courts of law has been unified, under the reform initiated by A.Lukashenko in autumn 2013). The newspaper Volny Horad was sued by Cherykau PMK No280 building company. The newspaper wrote that some employees of the company worked without proper employment contracts. The company's management denied the information and accused the newspaper of discrediting the company's managers and undermining its business reputation.

As became known on January 8, the book by Ales' Bialiatki "**Asvechanyja Belaruschynaj**" was banned from Belarus by the second expert examination. In early January, a member of the Board of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" Tatsiana Reviaka received a letter signed by the deputy chief of Ashmiany customs A. Datchuk, which states that the customs received a conclusion of the expert committee on the results of the examination from the General Directorate of ideological work, culture and youth affairs of Hrodna Regional Executive Committee. **The text of the expert conclusion wasn't submitted** to T. Reviaka, though she asked about it after being informed about sending the book for examination. However, as it is stated in the letter, "according to the results of the two customs examinations and on

the basis of Chapter 1.3 of the Common list of goods subject to bans or restrictions on the import or export by the Member States of the Customs Union within the Eurasian Economic Community" Tatsiana Reviaka should arrive to Ashmiany customs within 10 working days "for the purpose of **re-export to the territory of the Republic of Lithuania** " of **40 copies** of the book.

The human rights defender **disputes the procedure of appointing the expert examination** in court. While the issue is handled in court, the decision to re-export the book must be suspended.

We remind that in early July 2013 40 copies of the book by A. Bialiatski "Enlightened by the Belarusian Issue" were seized by the Belarusian customs officers at the border crossing "Kamenny Loh" and sent for examination for the content of extremist materials.

On January 8 in Klimavichy Siarhei Arzhantsau, publisher of the socio-political *Klimavitskaya Info-Panorama*, member of BAJ, was **denied access to a meeting** of a commission of the local **executive committee** which handled several cases of administrative violations. The decision to ban the journalist from the open hearing was made by the chair of the administrative commission Natallia Asmalouskaya. The decision violates art. 2.14 of the Code on Administrative Procedure stipulating that administrative violations are heard publicly.

On January 9 a ruling of the Plenum of the Supreme Court was published on its website "On ensuring publicity in delivering justice and disseminating information on courts' activities". The document stresses that **journalists have a lawful right to attend public court hearings**, to gather and disseminate information, including taking audio recordings during court proceedings.

Photo and video in civil proceedings can be taken with the permission of the judge and parties involved; in criminal proceedings it must be permitted by the presiding judge and parties involved. Journalists have to address to the court for a respective permit. The procedure must be registered in the court's records.

According to the document, if journalists are expected to attend a hearing, the court should provide necessary places for them in the court room. The ruling was signed by Valiantsin Sukala, the Chair of the Supreme Court.

As reported on **January 10, journalist Aliaksandr Haniseuski disappeared** in his native town Mikashevichy. He graduated from the Belarusian State University, then moved to work in Moscow. He runs a blog on the website of the radio *Echo of Moscow*.

The 29 year-old man disappeared in Mikashevichy (Luninets district, Brest region) **on December 28**. He came back to Belarus to take care of his father who recently endured a stroke. According to his brother, Aliaksandr left home without documents and telephone. He promised his friends that he would get back to Moscow by the New Year. The police initiated a criminal case and are investigating the disappearance.