

# MASS MEDIA

E-NEWSLETTER

# IN BELARUS

№ 2 (48)  
APRIL–JUNE  
2016

## Mass Media on the Eve of Parliamentary Elections – 2016



THE BELARUSIAN  
ASSOCIATION  
OF JOURNALISTS

WWW.BAJ.BY

**Situation in Mass Media Field  
on the Eve of Elections to the Chamber  
of Representatives of the National  
Assembly of Belarus (review)**

**2**

**Main Events in Mass Media Field  
in April–June 2016**

**5**

**Rating Lists, Indexes, Statistics**

**8**



# Situation in Mass Media Field on the Eve of Elections to the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus (review)

According to the Ministry of Information of Belarus, 1592 printed periodical editions were officially registered in the country as of July 1, 2016. 437 of them are owned by the state. Basing on the statistics, the representatives of Belarusian authorities note that the non-state media prevail in the country. However, according to the conducted analysis of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the majority of private newspapers and magazines are purely commercial projects, dealing with advertising, crosswords, fashion, gardening etc. Therefore, they do not cover socially important issues. Social and political issues are covered by less than 30 registered private periodicals (further – independent mass media). Most of them suffer from economic, political, and legal discrimination. In particular, **nearly one third of independent mass media have been ousted** from the state-owned ‘Belposhta’ or/and ‘Sayuzdruk’ press distribution systems that deal with the press distribution by subscription and through news-stalls since 10 years already. All of them face problems with access to information and suffer from pressure on the part of the Ministry of Information of Belarus and the local authorities at that.

**Practically all independent periodicals are weeklies, while the majority of state-owned newspapers appear on the daily basis. The cumulative weekly circulation of independent print media is smaller than the daily circulation of ‘Sovietskaya Byelorussia’ (‘SB Today’) newspaper, published by the Presidential Administration.**



The situation is even worse in the TV-radio broadcasting field. Even statistically, the state-owned media prevail in the field – 190 independent broadcast media vs. 273 state-owned broadcast media. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that TV is the most popular channel for receiving news updates in Belarus, and it exerts the most significant influence on the public opinion in the country. Thus, according to the SATIO company group's research, the number of people in Belarus, who received information from TV, totaled 84.7% in 2015. The Belarus residents addressed more rarely to such information sources as the Internet (63.8% of users), newspapers (40.9% of users), and radio (34.3% of users) at that.

All registered TV and radio broadcasting mass media are totally controlled by the national and regional authorities (registration, licensing of broadcasting activity, allocation of broadcast frequencies etc). According to the Belarus Mass Media law, the broadcasting company production can be terminated by court decision even after a single violation of broadcasting rules. Moreover, the Ministry of Information of Belarus is authorized to deprive a company of its right to broadcasting activity out of court, as it happened to 'Autoradio' FM radio station in 2011.

The functions of independent broadcasting in Belarus are performed by several foreign mass media, which focus their attention on Belarus. The list includes 'Belsat' TV channel, 'Radio Racyja', and 'European Radio for Belarus' radio stations (all registered in Poland), as well as 'Radio Liberty'. The legal status has been granted only to the 'European Radio for Belarus' and 'Radio Liberty' in the country. The number of accredited correspondents is limited at that. The 'Belsat' and 'Radio Racyja' correspondents don't have the legal status that provokes the authorities to oppress them by means of imposing fines for work without accreditation etc. (*See more information in The Main Events in Mass Media Field in April – June 2016*).

Since July 2015, there has been introduced obligatory state registration of print, TV and radio broadcasting media distributors in Belarus. The Ministry of Information was authorized to ban the press



distributors' activity at that. The new regulation led to tougher state control over the TV and radio broadcasting and aggravated the economic situation of independent print media in the country. It should be taken into consideration that the major part of non-state press is distributed through private stores and individual entrepreneurs' outlets. Quite a few of them refused to apply for the additional license from the Ministry of Information of Belarus, feeling reluctant to get another controlling authority. Consequently, the number of sales outlets of independent newspapers reduced that led to the decrease of their circulations in the final run. The situation is especially tough for the print media, which have been ousted from the state monopolist press distribution systems. It is worth mentioning in this respect that new refusals to include periodicals into the 'Belposhta' subscription catalogues were received by '**Intexpress**' newspaper (Baranavichy, Brest region), '**Gazeta Slonimskaya**' and 'Otdushina' weeklies (Slonim, Hrodna region) in May - June 2016.

Moreover, 'Gazeta Slonimskaya' and 'Otdushina' received refusals from the 'Sayuzdruk' state-owned press distributor to sell the periodicals through the state monopolist's retail enterprises. A similar refusal was **received by 'Borisovskiye novosti'** (Barysau, Minsk region) newspaper editorial from 'Minablsayuzdruk' enterprise.



The Internet remains to be the only media sector in Belarus, where non-state news resources have prevalence over the state-owned media. Consequently, the Belarusian state authorities intend to spread the area of their control on the Web, too. Thus, the President of Belarus issued **decree No. 60** "On Measures to Improve the Use of the National Segment of the Internet" in 2010.

The Ministry of Information of Belarus was authorized to control Web-resources and apply sanctions against them in case of need, according to the **changes into the Belarusian Law 'On Mass Media'**, adopted at the end of 2014.

Generally speaking, the Ministry of Information of Belarus has broad sanctioning authority. In particular, the Ministry can issue warnings to media outlets, appeal to courts with claims to terminate mass media production, disable access to Web-resources without court decisions, ban distribution of books and mass media production, cancel licenses etc. The Ministry issued 12 official warnings to



8 media outlets and 4 news Web-resources within the period since the beginning of January till the end of June 2016.

**It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Information of Belarus hasn't applied its authority to initiate the closure of traditional media since 2011, when the 'Autoradio' broadcasting was terminated and claims on the closure of 'Nasha Niva' and 'Narodnaya Vola' newspapers were filed to court. (They were withdrawn by the Ministry of Information later on.) However, the mere presence of such provisions in the legislation combined with the repressive law enforcement practices has a 'chilling' effect on the media in Belarus.**

## Main Events in Mass Media Field in April–June 2016

---

### Prosecution of journalists

The Belarusian journalists **were prosecuted on administrative charges for their cooperation with foreign media without accreditation three times** in April – June 2016. The fines were imposed on two journalists – Larysa Shchyrakova and Kanstantsin Zhukouski – by courts in Homiel region, like in all other similar cases since the beginning of 2016.

The sums of fines totaled 25-35 base amounts (approx. 250 – 350 EUR) in each case. As before, the prosecution wasn't connected with the content of journalist materials. It was grounded only on the fact **of their broadcasting by 'Belsat' TV channel.**



Kastus Zhukouski became a kind of a record holder. The reporter was fined seven times for his cooperation with 'Belsat' for the total sum of 53,550,000 Br (more than 2,500 EUR) since the beginning of 2016. Three other fines were imposed by courts on his local colleague Larysa Shchyrakova.

On April 17, 2016, the 'Reporters without Borders' noted that Homiel had become a laboratory for elaboration of new methods of persecution of journalists and called upon the European Union "to condition its rapprochement with Belarus on specific progress in respect for media freedom".

There weren't registered any new trials of journalists for their cooperation with foreign mass media in the following months. However, police officers from Loyeu (Homiel region) made six reports in a row in relation to the prosecuted journalists on June 28, 2016. Four of them concerned the freelance reporter Kastus Zhukouski, mentioned above. Two other reports were made in relation to Ms Zhukouski's colleague, Aliaksei Atroshchanka. The media workers were accused of insulting officials, resisting police officers and petty hooliganism. Both journalists had been detained in Loyeu on June 21, 2016, when they were going to make a video footage of one local enterprise. According to Mr. Zhukouski, he was beaten by Loyeu police then. The reporter documented the injuries and addressed to the Investigation Committee.

On June 22, 2016, the Minister of Interior of Belarus Ihar Shunevich promised journalists to check the information. The police reports in relation to the abovementioned media workers from Homiel appeared six day after the Minister's promise.



It is easy to predict the results of the promised Minister's check. A journalist Pavel Dabravolski, TUT.BY appeared in a similar situation at the beginning of the year. He was detained and beaten in the Frunzenski City District Court of Minsk. The journalist was fined by the judge of the court some time later. On April 25, 2016, the Investigation Committee refused to initiate a criminal investigation into the beating of Pavel Dabravolski, stating that the police acted lawfully in that case.



## Obstruction of journalistic activities

There were registered several cases of interference with journalistic activities on the part of security services of several enterprises in April – June 2016.

Thus, the journalists **Hanna Niezhaviets and Aliaksandr Masalski** were detained twice in two different towns of Stoubtsy and Slutsk (Minsk region) on April 7, 2016. The correspondents were released from custody without police reports. However, they couldn't produce the planned video-reports because of the incidents.

**Security officers of open joint-stock company from Homiel attacked journalists of BelaPAN News Agency**, while the latter were trying to make a video-footage of a fire on the territory of the enterprise through a fence on April 12, 2016.

## The case of Eduard Palchys

Ivan Naskievich, the Chairperson of Investigative Committee of Belarus announced presentation of charges to Eduard Palchys, the founder of <http://1863x.com/> Web-site, on June 22, 2016. Mr Palchys was accused of inciting hatred on grounds of race, nationality, religion, language, or other social affiliation (Art. 1, Art. 130 of the Criminal Code of Belarus), as well as producing and distributing pornographic materials or pornographic items (Art. 343 of the Criminal Code of Belarus).



The Web-site was created around two years ago. Its owner administered the Web-resource on terms of complete anonymity, hiding under the nickname of Jhon Silver. The Web-site owner criticized severely the Belarusian authorities and the Russian authorities, first of all.

Criminal proceedings against Mr Palchys were initiated last year. He had to flee Belarus afterwards.

The <http://1863x.com/> Web-site owner was detained in Russia in January 2016. He was extradited to Belarus in May 2016.



The Investigative Committee representatives reported that the indictment concerned “nine publications on article 130 as well as distribution of two porn-collages on the Web”.

It isn't known what publications have caused the criminal charges yet. Presently, Mr. Palchys is kept in the pre-trial detention cell of prison No.8 in Zhodzina, Minsk region.

The case of Eduard Palchys has aroused great public attention. A public committee for the release of Eduard Palchys was founded in Minsk in April 2016. More than 10 people entered the committee, including such famous Belarusian politicians as Pavel Seviarynets, Dzmitry Dashkievich, and Andrei Dzmitryeu.

## Rating Lists, Indexes, Statistics

Several different organizations presented the results of their studies on the situation with media freedom in modern world in April 2016.

According to the Freedom House's report, Belarus slightly improved its positions in the Freedom of the Press 2016 Table of Scores. Thus, the country moved up from the 194th to the 192nd position in the rating list. However, it remained to be among ten countries with the worst situation with freedom of the media in the world. The fact that Belarus appeared in the lower position than 'Syria, Iran, almost all African states, China, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and many other countries with political regimes in power that can hardly be regarded as milder in comparison with the incumbent regime in Belarus' led to discussions in the Belarusian journalistic community as for the objectivity of the rating list.







**REPORTERS  
WITHOUT BORDERS**  
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Also, the Reporters without Borders didn't register any improvement of situation with mass media freedom in Belarus **in their 2016 World Press Freedom Index**. Just like in the previous years of 2014 and 2015, Belarus held the 157th position in the list of 180 countries of the world. Moreover, the absolute index of the press freedom aggravated in the country. *"...Aside from the release of leading political prisoners, nothing has changed. Freelance journalists cannot get accreditation and are harassed by the judicial authorities. The information ministry has stepped up its control over print media distribution networks and the Internet, and has banned the software used to circumvent online censorship,"* **noted the RSF analysts.**

Similar conclusions were drawn by IREX in their annual Media Sustainability Index (MSI) for Europe and Eurasia – 2016. **According to the IREX analysts' findings,** the situation in Belarus mass media field somewhat improved in 2015. However, it deteriorated again in the year of 2016, returning to its positions in the years of 2013-2014. On the one hand serious changes took place in the country. They were connected with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the economic crisis and the warming of relations with the West. On the other hand, it became even simpler for the state to keep control over the civil society and independent mass media, since foreign funding significantly decreased in connection with budgetary restrictions, introduced by donor states. The latter changed their priorities for the Middle East. Also, they were flattered by Lukashenka's peace-making initiatives, since the latter started playing professionally the role of mediator in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. At the same time, the Belarusian government continues to apply its ordinary restriction tools in relation to the traditional media and continues to tighten control over the Internet.



**THE BELARUSIAN  
ASSOCIATION  
OF JOURNALISTS**

**WWW.BAJ.BY**

The contents of this publication are copyrighted.  
It is obligatory to refer to the Belarussian Association of Journalists, when using the E-NEWSLETTER: MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS materials.

**Publisher:**  
Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)  
Kamsamolskaya Str., 7-32, 220030 Minsk,  
BELARUS

Phone: +375 17 203-63-66, 226-70-98.  
Fax: +375 17 203-63-66, 226-70-98  
E-mail: [press@baj.by](mailto:press@baj.by)  
Web: [www.baj.by](http://www.baj.by)

**Contact:**  
Mr. Andrei Bastunets, BAJ Deputy

**2016**