

Belarus Media Week. Elections 2010.

11 – 18 October 2010

During the last week two bodies that will regulate media coverage of the presidential election campaign were created. They are the Observation Council on Information Disputes and the Election Coverage Information Center Attached to the Central Election Commission. Both bodies are headed by Deputy Ministers of Information. While forming them the Central Election Commission did not ask for an opinion or suggestions of the Belarusian Association of Journalists. Besides, the CEC adopted regulations on debates between candidates that will be broadcasted pre-recorded.

14 October the CEC adopted regulations on holding debates between presidential candidates. Both TV and radio debates will be one hour long and they will be pre-recorded. The Chairperson of the CEC **Lidziya Yarmoshyna** told with reference to the management of the State TV and Radio Company, that it “is not ready yet to broadcast debates live.”

14 October Katsiaryna Karotkina, an officer of Horki local authorities office, refused to provide **Eduard Brokarau**, the editor of a local independent newspaper *Uzhorak*, with information about the list of members of a local election commission. According to the officer, this information is “for internal use only.”

14 October the Central Election Commission issued decisions to create the Observation Council on Information Disputes and the Election Coverage Information Center. The Observation Council is headed by the First Deputy Minister of Information **Liliya Ananich**, while another Deputy Minister of Information, **Aliaksandr Slabadchuk**, became the head of the Election Coverage Information Center. Press Service of the Belarusian Association of Journalists made a phone call to **Mikalay Lazavik**, the CEC Secretary, to inquire why BAJ was not among the organizations that suggested experts to the Council. “First of all we consider an opinion of the Ministry of Information, because it is the body of state control over implementation of media-related legislation,” Mr. Lazavik said.

18 October observers of *Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections* campaign received information that increased circulations of *Sovetskata Belorussiya* and *Homielskaya Prauda* state newspapers were coming to newsstands of Belsayuzdruk state press retail distribution system in Mazyr, Homiel Region. According to information from a whistle-blower from the company, the management of the enterprise obliges newsstands sellers to fulfill the increased plan on selling those newspapers. All the sellers must suggest those state newspapers to their customers.

18 October the editorial board of *Infrom Progulka* non-state newspaper from Luninets, Brest Region, received an official inquiry from the Ministry of Trade of Belarus about advertisements of Belsat satellite TV channel that the newspaper had published. According to the letter from the Ministry of Trade, it has suspicions some newspapers violate provisions of the Law “On Advertising”, that is why the Ministry monitors the publications that advertised Belsat.

Several editorial boards of other regional newspapers confirmed it to BAJ that they had also received such letters and are now preparing documents on the ministerial request. “The Ministry of Trade does have the right to control implementation of the law on advertising, and newspapers have to abide by the law,” Andrei Bastunets, a Vice

Chairperson of BAJ, comments. "But it is worth mentioning that the Ministry pays special attention to Belsat TV Channel, and such mass checks take place on the eve of the presidential elections."