

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

BELARUS MEDIA NEWS

8 – 22 November 2010

This was a period, when the Central Election Commission registered 10 candidates for the presidency. The campaigning started; the order of the candidates' appearances on state TV and radio to present their programs was set. They will appear on TV and radio from 22 November till 3 December. According to Lidziya Yarmoshyna, the CEC Chairperson, debates between candidates will be live.

At the same time, according to observers, voters lack information they can ground their sensible and free choice on. Even news about registration of candidates on three major national TV channels contained no other candidates' names mentioned, except of Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

“If there is such pressure on independent press, if the freedom of expression is restricted, free and fair elections are simply impossible,” Andrei Aliaksandrau, a Vice Chairperson of BAJ, said during a meeting of the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Paris 18 November. On behalf of BAJ, Andrei Aliaksandrau suggested PACE to organize hearings on the situation with the freedom of press in Belarus and to assess how the government of Belarus reacted al the previous resolutions and recommendations of PACE.

Increased attention of the law enforcements to non-state media and journalists can be noted as one of the tendencies of the period. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to prolong for one more year accreditation of an office of the European Radio for Belarus in Minsk.

8 November Uladzislau Staraverau, a member of BAJ, was detained for an hour and a half at Chyhunachny District Police Department in Vitsebsk. He was accused of violating of law and order – that was the police definition of an attempt to record an interview with a potential candidate for presidency Uladzimir Pravalski in the street. Siarhei Kazlou, a police officer, demanded the journalist to show his ID and then he stated that the reporter had not obeyed to that request. The process of detemtion was filmed by the journalist. He was set free without any protocol.

13 November in Minsk police officers and people in plain clothes detained for several hours distributors of *Novy Chas* independent weekly. Yazep Palubiatka, the Executive Director of the newspaper, and his driver were demanded to go to the police department of Leninsky District of Minsk, where their passport details were written down. The distributors were set free after an intervention of an unknown person, who also apologized for that misunderstanding. Aliaksei Karol, the Chief Editor of *Novy Chas*, suggested the incident shows that all media are closely watched before the elections.

16 November *Intex-press* independent newspaper from Baranavichy was informed it had been refused to be included into state subscription catalogues. In October 2010 *Intex-press* Publishing House applied to *Belposhta* (Belarusian Post) state enterprise with a request to be included into state subscription catalogues for 2011, but received a usual refusal with traditional explanations about “inexpediency”.

17 November Viktor Fedarovich, a reporter of BelaPAN independent news agency, was interrogated in the General Prosecutor’s office as a witness upon a request from the State Security Committee (KGB). The KGB is checking facts of unsanctioned disclosure of information about an investigation on a case against Sviatlana Baykova, an investigator of the General Prosecutor’s Office. The journalist had to answer some questions regarding an article called “Materials of KGB tapping on Baykova’s case”, published at Naviny.by website.

17 November Kastus Shytal, a member of BAJ, was detained while making pictures near Hlinnaya village of Dokshytsy District. A police officer wrote down the journalist’s passport details and demanded him to delete all the pictures, but he refused. The reporter was set free without any protocol.

17 November a participant of a vox pop conducted by *Hantsavitski Chas* non-state was summoned to the local Public Prosecutor’s office. Siarhei Dzieshka, the Public Prosecutor for Hantsavitski District was interested to learn if she had really told the quoted words and if she was really discontented with the lack of information about all presidential candidates, but for the incumbent president. “I regard it as pressure on the newspaper and the readers. Facing the risk of being summoned to the Public Prosecutor’s Office, quite a few of them will think twice before sharing their opinion with the newspaper in the future,” Piotr Huzayeuski, the editor of the newspaper, commented.

18 November representatives of the European Radio for Belarus (ERB) received a permit for official work of its office in Belarus till 10 November

2011. The radio station is registered in Poland. The ERB office in Belarus has been open officially since 11 November 2009 following a special ordinance by Siarhei Sidorski, the Prime Minister of Belarus.

At the same tie, **22 November** it became public that two journalists of Poland-based *Gazeta Wyborcza* were refused accreditation by the Belarus Foreign Ministry on the pretext they had previously worked without accreditation, although in reality that can only be applied to Andrzej Poczobut, a journalist of the newspaper, who does not have an accreditation since 2009. A photo reporter of the newspaper has never worked in Belarus without accreditation.