

Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)

# **MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS**

2014

ANNUAL REPORT

Minsk 2015

## **C O N T E N T S**

<b>VIOLATIONS OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN BELARUS IN 2014 (Summary) ..</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHANGES IN LEGISLATION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHTS OF MASS MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS, CONFLICTS IN THE SPHERE OF MASS-MEDIA .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Legal Cases (Except Administrative Prosecution) .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Detention of Journalists, Judicial Administrative Prosecution .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Seizure, Damaging and Confiscation of Equipment .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Threats against Journalists and Mass Media .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Warnings, Administrative Pressure .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Infringements Related to Access to Information (Refusals to Provide Information, Restrictive Use of the Institution of Accreditation) .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Other Forms of Pressure and Violation of Journalists' Rights .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Barriers to Printing and Distribution of Mass Media .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Restrictions of the Freedom of Internet Activities .....</b>	<b>33</b>

## **VIOLATIONS OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN BELARUS IN 2014 (Summary)**

*In 2014, the official authorities kept to the trend towards considerable restriction of freedom of speech, using new legislative boundaries and new methods of pressure on mass media and journalists. However, they appeared to be unprepared for the new challenges, connected with the aggressive propagandist machine, fostered in the neighboring Russia.*

The following key problems were faced in the Belarusian media field in 2014:

- **the abrupt tightening of Mass Media law that equaled independent Web-sites to mass media and granted the official authorities the right to disable access and close down the uncontrolled Web-resources;**
- **the arbitrary simultaneous blocking of access to several popular independent Web-resources;**
- **the mass prosecution of freelance journalists for their work without press credentials;**
- **finances and detentions of journalists on duty, filing of cases against independent journalists on trumped-up reasons;**
- **confiscation of print production on charges of ‘extremism’ by customs officers, foundation of special state expert committees for examination of materials on ‘extremism’;**
- **keeping 7 discriminatory articles that prescribe penalties for distributing information about the head of state and official authorities in the Criminal Code of Belarus (discrediting the Republic of Belarus, slandering and insulting the President of Belarus, acting on behalf of unregistered organizations);**
- **denial of registration and accreditation of independent media;**
- **economic discrimination of non-state mass media;**
- **restriction of access to information about the activity of state agencies;**
- **inability of state media to resist the Russian propagandist machine.**

Having coped successfully with installation of control over traditional mass media in Belarus, the national authorities focused their efforts on Web-censorship in 2014. (The Internet is the only remaining area for distribution of independent news and opinions in the country.)

On *December 17, 2014*, the Chamber of Representatives at the National Assembly of Belarus adopted amendments to the Mass Media law in two readings in a row. The Council of the Republic of Belarus approved the bill on *December 18, 2014*. The President of Belarus Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed the bill on *December 20, 2014*. The amendments have come into force since *January 1, 2015*. (It is worth mentioning that the Presidential election is to take place in Belarus in the autumn of 2015.)

According to the adopted amendments to the Mass Media law, the owners of news Web-sites take responsibility for the content of their on-line resources, including the information that the authorities may regard as extremist or potentially damaging to the national interests of Belarus.

Moreover, the amendments authorize the Ministry of Information of Belarus to disable access to the news Web-sites without a court order.

Almost simultaneously with adoption of amendments to the law, there was disabled access to several popular independent Web-sites, namely *Charter97.org*, *Belaruspartisan.org*,

and *Gazetaby.com*. The access was blocked by the *Beltelecom* state-owned telecommunications company on *December 19, 2014*. (The organization manages broadband Internet access in the country.) However, the *Beltelecom* official representatives denied their responsibility, referring to DDoS attacks.

The access to *UDF.by*, *Zautra.by*, *21.by*, and three Web-sites of BelaPAN News Agency (*belapan.by*, *belapan.com* and *naviny.by*) was disabled on the following day after the publications, criticizing the governmental economic policies, had appeared on their pages. In order to bypass the blocking, the *Hoster.by* private hosting company changed their IP-addresses on *December 21, 2014*. However, new addresses were blocked in the same afternoon, too.

The BelaPAN Editor-in-chief Ales Lipay condemned the blocking of Web-resources and regarded it as an act of censorship. In particular, he stated that access to the Web-sites could be disabled only by order of the national authorities.

Thus, the Belarusian journalists, who regarded the Internet as the last isle of freedom in the recent years, have received a clear and distinct signal as for the governmental plans in the field.

In 2014, the official authorities started using actively the accreditation requirement, in order to restrict journalistic activity in the country. (The trend hadn't been so wide-spread in 2013.) Journalists were repeatedly prosecuted, detained, and fined for their work without accreditation. The job title of 'journalist' is interpreted very narrowly in the Belarusian law.

The situation began to aggravate dramatically in April 2014. The official authorities started applying article 22.9 of Belarusian Code on Administrative Offence ('Illegal production and distribution of mass media production') in relation to the reporters, whose names and materials appeared in foreign media. In particular, Andrei Mialeshka and Ales Zaleuski were prosecuted and fined thrice and twice correspondingly within the monitoring period.

The published article by Aliaksandr Burakou on '*Deutsche Welle*' Web-site resulted in court hearings, talks at the tax office, 'inspections of private apartments, belonging to the reporter and his parents', seizure of flash-sticks, and computer system units. The search was conducted on the day, when the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic paid a visit to Belarus. The journalist was charged with work without accreditation and fined EUR 450 in equivalent later on.

14 administrative cases for journalistic activity without accreditation were filed in Belarus since April 2014. The majority of them concerned the reporters, who contributed their materials to the 'Belsat' independent satellite TV channel. ('Belsat' broadcasts TV programs in Belarusian from the territory of Poland.)

Around 30 facts of arbitrary detention of journalists were registered in Belarus in 2014 to be compared to 45 cases of detention of reporters, registered a year before.

The administrative charges against Vitebsk activists of BAJ, who took part in the 'Stand Up for Journalism!' global solidarity campaign on November 5<sup>th</sup>, were highly indicative, indeed. The activists took pictures next to the old building with a famous city graffiti drawing, indicating 'newspaper birds', who escape their cages. The photos were posted on Web-sites that caused repressions. Seven activists from the photo-session group were tried and fined for 'taking part in an unauthorized action'. The European Federation of Journalists expressed protest against the violation of freedom of expression and held a similar photo-session in Brussels in solidarity with the Belarusian colleagues.

However, the situation in Belarus continued to deteriorate. Thus, independent journalists from Hrodna were arbitrarily detained and fined for the mere presence at a historical memorial action, dedicated to the national hero of Belarus Kastus Kalinouski. The accredited 'Radio

Liberty' correspondent Mikhail Karnevidh was among the prosecuted reporters. Among other, the police accused the reporters of 'standing next to the monument and moving in an organized group'. The Belarusian Association of Journalists regarded the charges as 'a ban on the profession'.

The Belarusian journalists and press distributors paid around 105,000,000 Belarusian rubles (approx. USD 10,000) in fines within the year's course. Among other, 52,050,000 Belarusian rubles were imposed on foreign correspondents for their work without accreditation. 21,450,000 Belarusian rubles were paid by media workers in fines for their alleged 'participation in unauthorized events'. The independent press distributors were charged 25,500,000 Belarusian rubles for their activity.

The official authorities applied more frequently the Belarus law 'On Counteraction to Extremism' in 2014. The printed production has been seized no less than 7 times by the Belarusian customs officers since two years. In particular, the copies of '*Alexander Lukashenko. A Political Portrait*' book by Valery Karbalevich were confiscated at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border crossing. The print-run of the common report of British and Belarusian human rights activists - *Half an Hour to Spring: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Belarus* was seized by the Belarusian customs officers at Minsk airport. (The report had been printed in the U.K. and sent by mail to Belarus.) The terms of examination were extended several times. The human rights activists connected the decisions with foundation of special state committees for examination of information production on extremism.

Independent experts do not regard the fact of creating the committees as the main danger to freedom of expression in the country. They believe that the main danger is caused by broad interpretation of 'extremism' and 'extremist materials' in Belarusian legislation. It is worth reminding that the official acknowledgement of 'Press Photo Belarus' photo album as 'an extremist publication' was the most scandalous case in the field in 2013. (The photo album contained the photo contest winners' materials. The contest jury included famous professional photo-reporters from different countries of the world.)

In 2014, the Belarusian authorities increased the wave of their attacks on 'Belsat', the only independent TV channel that broadcasts programs in Belarusian from the territory of Poland. The TV channel wasn't permitted to open a representation office in Belarus. The channel reporters were denied accreditation in the country.

In September 2014, the Supreme Court of Belarus introduced a ban on the use of 'Belsat' trademark in the country. (The TV channel has been working for seven years already. Presently, it is a fully-fledged satellite TV channel. Its broadcasting capacity equals 17 hours a day.)

The Belarusian independent mass media work in conditions of economic discrimination. More than 10 non-state printed periodical editions faced problems with distribution through the 'Belposhta' and 'Belsayuzdruk' state-owned monopolist enterprises in 2014. The independent mass media had to pay much more for their access to the distribution system in comparison with the state-owned media.

Different printing costs are introduced for the state and non-state periodicals in the country. The non-state media suffer from the ungrounded refusals of printing houses from time to time. Thus, all of a sudden, the 'Plutas-market' printing house refused to cooperate with the 'Svobodnye novosti plus' weekly in December 2014.

The official authorities kept to the restriction policies in the field of advertising in non-state mass media in 2014. Thus, advertisers were not recommended to place commercials there. The state enterprises obeyed to the unofficial ban on advertising in the independent media. It happened against a background of lavish governmental subsidies to the state media. EUR

52,000,000 got allocated from the state budget to support the state-owned mass media in 2014. In 2015, the sum of support has increased to as much as EUR 60,000,000 in equivalent.

In 2014, independent journalists continued to face significant restrictions on access to information about the activity of state agencies. The obstacles were legally ensured by a range of legislative acts, including the Belarusian laws 'On State Secrets', 'On Public Service' etc. The list of state agencies that can classify information reached 60 institutions, including the Ministry of Information, the Belarusian TV and Radio Company etc.

In connection with the conflict in Ukraine, the Belarusian information field appeared under the influence of the aggressive propagandist machine, resembling the worst examples from the times of the Cold War. For many years, the Belarusian governmental authorities had been taking pains to form the national information security system to counteract the domestic opponents and Western influence, but they appeared to be completely insecure in the face of Russian propaganda.

The Belarusian state-owned media showed their complete unpreparedness and incapability to counteract to the informational aggression from abroad as well as their complete inability to formulate and promote the Belarusian position in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

The Russian propaganda found fertile soil in Belarus. The Belarusian society lacked critical response to the propaganda. It led to disorientation and paralysis of common sense.

According to IISEPS, from 50% to two thirds of Belarusian respondents believe in the version of Ukrainian events, presented by the Russian mass media. In particular, 62.2% of them regard the annexation of the Crimea as 'historical justice'. 65.5% of respondents consider the events in the east of Ukraine as 'public protest against illegitimate authorities'.

The manipulation of public opinion has become a global problem that has gone beyond the boundaries of separate states. In the absence of freedom of speech, it is easy to govern and control the people with the use of lies and falsification of facts. The instability of public opinion is a large-scale problem that threatens the entire European media landscape.

## CHANGES IN LEGISLATION

On 21 August, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus adopted the *Resolution N 810 "On expert commissions for evaluation of information products to determine presence (absence) of signs of extremism therein"*. This document approved the Regulations on the Republican expert commission for evaluation of information products to determine presence (absence) of signs of extremism therein as well as its personal composition. In addition, the resolution recommends to the regional executive committees to approve, with the concurrence of the Republican expert commission, their own regulations on the relevant regional expert commissions. In September, the Ministry of Information established under its aegis the Republican commission for evaluation of information products to determine presence (absence) of signs of extremism therein. The regional territorial authorities established similar commissions. Decisions adopted by these commissions may serve as a basis for prosecution and destruction of information materials and, as a consequence, for exercising censorship.

On 20 December, the *Law of the Republic of Belarus №213-3 "On introduction of amendments to the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On mass media"* introduced amendments to the law on mass media. These amendments, adopted without any public discussion, significantly tightened the government control over the information space. In particular, they:

- extended the administrative powers of the Ministry of Information (including the use of sanctions and closure of mass media) to the online resources;
- worsened the operating conditions of traditional media;
- tightened control over distributors of mass media outlets.

One can highlight the following changes to the legal regulation of mass media:

1. The law on mass media, with the exception of the requirements related to the state registration of mass media, now regulates those *"information resources (their components), published in the global computer network Internet, through which products of a mass media outlet are disseminated"*. In absence of definition of the *"information resources (their components), published in the global computer network Internet"*, which disseminate products of mass media and are covered by the law, the law enforcers can apply its provisions to virtually any online resources at their sole discretion, regardless of their recognition as mass media in the countries of their location (i.e., in Russia).
2. As a result of changes in the definition of broadcasting (currently, it relates to the broadcasting of TV and radio programmes), the requirements to the broadcasters can be extended to include the online TV and radio.
3. The law now includes the concept of *"owner of an information resource (its component) in the case of dissemination of products of a mass media outlet via an information resource (its component) hosted in the global computer network Internet"*. At that, the owner of an online resource is not seen as an editorial board of a mass media outlet but as a distributor of mass media products.
4. The owners of online resources now have the duty to publish retractions. They have one day to publish a retraction and to remove the retracted publications.
5. The owner of an online resource has the duty to prevent use of this resource for dissemination of information, the content of which is deemed contrary to the requirements of the law on mass media (i.e. the owner must track comments). Thus, it becomes possible to prosecute them right down to the blocking of online resources. (This is contrary to the provisions of paragraph 12 of the Decree № 60 of the President of the Republic of Belarus, which places responsibility for the content

of information, which has been published (broadcasted) in the national segment of the Internet network, on the persons who have published (broadcasted) this information. At that, the law fails to specify clearly at what time and which actions the owner of the online resource must undertake in order to avoid being found responsible for the posted comment, which provides the law enforcers with broad opportunities to use their powers.

6. The Ministry of Information received the right to issue warnings to owners of online resources and other distributors of mass media products on the same grounds as to an editorial board.
7. The law has been supplemented with Art. 51-1 "Restriction of access to mass media products disseminated via an information resource (its component) hosted in the global computer network Internet", related to the blocking of online resources. The article provides that the Ministry of Information can block a media outlet through the extrajudicial procedure within three months after the publication of the material; there is no provision about a possibility of a court appeal against the blocking. Apart from the Ministry of Information, other state agencies can require remedy of violation of the law on mass media. Not only the online resources of the Belarusian segment of Internet but also the web sites, which are hosted outside of Belarus, can be blocked. The blocking is possible even for a single violation.
8. The list of information prohibited from dissemination in mass media has been extended in an inexplicit manner to include "... information, the dissemination of which may harm the national interests of the Republic of Belarus". This list provides grounds for the application of sanctions against a media outlet, right down to its closure as well as the blocking of online resources.
9. The maximum share of foreign participation in the charter capital of a media outlet has been reduced from 30% down to 20%. This provision does not apply to those mass media, which have been registered before the amendment of the law on mass media took effect.
10. The law has established the State registers of distributors of printed mass media and distributors of products of TV and radio mass media outlets and has provided for use of sanctions against distributors specified in the law on mass media, right down to the revocation of the right to distribute mass media.
11. The period of suspension of a publication by the Ministry of Information has been increased from three to six months.
12. The time limit within which the Ministry of Information can take a legal action to obtain the discontinuation of publication of a mass media outlet has been extended. If earlier the court decision to stop the publication of a media outlet could be taken not later than three months from the date of the second warning to the editorial board or the founder of a printed media outlet within a year (or a single violation of the law by broadcast media etc.), now the legal action to stop the publication of a media outlet can be taken not later than six months from the date when the reasons for such a decision emerged.

Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE Representative, made an overall assessment of amendments to the law on mass media: "These amendments are based on vaguely formulated legal provisions and give the state the vast right to interfere with any information posted on the Internet. They also impose quasi-censorship functions on disseminators of information".

**On 28 December**, the president of Belarus signed **the Decree № 6 "On urgent measures to combat drug trafficking"**. Among other things, it affects the operation of information resources, which can be classified among mass media in accordance with the amended law on mass media. The Decree's provisions contain the following innovations

motivated by the need to counter drug trafficking, which carry threats to the free flow of information as well as to the free access to it:

1. Obligation of the owners of online resources to track content.
2. Restriction of access to information resources, which contain messages and (or) materials related to drug trafficking, at the instigation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which sends a written notification to the Ministry of Information, which, at its turn, must adopt the relevant decision, which is binding on all providers of the Internet services in the territory of the Republic of Belarus.
3. Administrative liability of owners of information resources for failure of owners of online resources to comply with the notifications of the Ministry of Information about the need to remove messages and (or) materials related to drug trafficking. The sanctions provide for the imposition of a fine upon an individual in the amount from five to twenty basic units, upon a self-employed entrepreneur – from twenty to fifty basic units, and upon a legal person – up to one hundred basic units.
4. Total control over the visitors of online resources: from 1 January 2016, the providers of Internet services must implement the generation and storage of up-to-date data about the information resources visited by the users of Internet services in the form and manner set by the Ministry of Communications and Information Systems Development. The failure to comply with these duties entails the administrative liability in the form of a fine (from twenty to fifty basic units for an individual; from fifty to one hundred basic units for an individual entrepreneur; and up to two hundred basic units for a legal person).

## **VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHTS OF MASS MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS, CONFLICTS IN THE SPHERE OF MASS-MEDIA**

### **Legal cases (Except Administrative Prosecution)**

#### **Criminal proceedings**

**On 7 February**, the prosecutor's office of Babrujsk instituted the criminal proceedings under Art. 369 ("Public insult of a public officer in connection with the performance of his duties"). A communique of the Mahilou regional police department states that during 2012 – 2013, a number of insulting publications against a police officer were posted on the personal web site "Blog of Aleh Zhaunou" and other online resources. The proceedings were instituted against an unidentified person. Aleh Zhaunou regarded the initiation of the criminal proceedings as an attempt of to exert pressure on him because of his blogger activities.

**On 5 May**, the criminal proceedings were initiated against Aleh Zhaunou under Art. 340 of the Criminal Code ("Wilfully false report about a danger"). An episode that took place on **4 February**, served as a basis for initiation of the criminal proceedings. On that day, Aleh Zhaunou was on his way to a meeting in the police department and, at the request of a police officer, he had to check all his belongings in a storage chamber. The police officer saw the blogger's jocular remark about the car alarm key that might explode if heated to a certain temperature as a "wilfully false report about an impending explosion".

**On 23 May**, Aleh Zhaunou's apartment was searched in the framework of these criminal proceedings. As a result, the blogger had seen almost all his electronic media seized: a netbook, a mobile phone, a video recorder, four hard drives and various memory cards – twelve items in total.

Subsequently, the Babrujsk interdistrict department of the Investigative committee dismissed the proceedings. (See also "Detention of journalists, judicial administrative prosecution").

**On 18 July**, the court of Babrujsk found 25-year old Alaksiej Zhaunou, a son of Aleh Zhaunou, guilty of violating Art. 364 of the Criminal Code ("Violence or a threat of violence against a police officer") and sentenced him to three years in an open-type correctional facility. Zhaunou Jr. also has to pay 50 million roubles (about 3.5 thousand Euro) for non-pecuniary damage.

The criminal proceedings were initiated in **January 2014**. Alaksiej Zhaunou was charged with causing minor injuries to Police Captain Alaksandr Butouski (by allegedly hitting him on the head) on 4 September 2013, when he was being detained together with his father by Babrujsk road police officers (illegally, according to human rights activists).

*On 4 September 2013, blogger Aleh Zhaunou and his son Alaksiej accidentally witnessed a traffic violation – an illegal parking on sidewalk – by a police officer. He recorded this fact on a camcorder and reported it to road police officers who were nearby. As a result, the road police officers never documented the traffic violation, but Zhaunou Sr. and Zhaunou Jr. were detained.*

*The international organisation Reporters without Borders protested in connection with this sentence of the Babrujsk court. "Unable to silence Aleh Zhaunou (the blogger who is engaged in exposing violations of local authorities), the authorities are now targeting his son," said Johann Bihr, the head of the Reporters without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. "We deplore this verdict, which preserves the impunity of the local police, and we call on*

*the courts to overturn it on appeal." Nevertheless, the appeal and supervisory courts upheld the sentence against the blogger's son.*

**On 19 June**, the criminal proceedings were initiated against 68-year old civil society activist Kaciaryna Sadouskaja for "insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus" (Art. 368, Part 2, of the Criminal Code). The criminal prosecution was based on the record made by Kaciaryna Sadouskaja on 28 April 2014 in the comments book of the Saviecki district court in Minsk regarding the arbitrary detention of civil society activists during the World Hockey Championship in Minsk. According to the investigation, the record contained "offensive language towards the President of the Republic of Belarus and wilfully false and defamatory information linked with accusations of committing serious and very serious crimes". Art. 368, Part 2, of the Criminal Code provides for the punishment by a fine or correctional labour for up to two years, or the restriction of freedom for up to two year, or the imprisonment for the same term.

The case against Kaciaryna Sadouskaja was dropped in July 2014. Sadouskaja pleaded guilty and was pardoned under the law on amnesty before the court hearings began.

*In 2006, Kaciaryna Sadouskaja was already found guilty of violating Art. 368, Part 2, of the Criminal Code. Then, in the court's opinion, Sadouskaja insulted the president by demanding to conduct a psychiatric examination of the head of state. She was also found guilty under Art. 389 ("Threat against a judge or a lay judge") and Art. 391 ("Insult of a judge or a lay judge"). The court of the Leninski district in Minsk sentenced Kaciaryna Sadouskaja to two years of imprisonment in a penal colony. She was released on parole in May 2007 "for exemplary behaviour".*

**On 9 September**, it became known that a resident of Hrodna paid three million roubles in compensation of moral damages for insulting a customs officer. The criminal proceedings against him were initiated based on a comment posted online. According to the press service of the Customs Committee of Belarus, **on 24 June**, the Hrodna blog S.13.ru reprinted an article from the web site Onliner.by entitled "A conflict on the border: a resident of Hrodna was returning from a Polish IKEA shop with purchases and he believes that customs officials made him pay illegally". An author with the nickname Yunek left a comment under the publication where he mentioned the head of the customs clearance and control department of the Customs post № 2 Bruzhi. This officer filed complaint to law enforcement bodies, and the Kastrychnicki district police department in Hrodna established the identity of the author of the comment after an investigation.

**On 4 August**, the Kastrychnicki district court in Hrodna accepted the application for initiation of the criminal proceedings under Art. 189 of the Criminal Code "Insult". During the trial, the author of the comment pleaded guilty. He paid three million roubles (the plaintiff gave the money to charity) and publicly apologised in a local newspaper. After that, **on 27 August**, the criminal proceedings against the author of the comment were ceased because of the reconciliation of the parties.

**On 25 November** in Minsk, KGB officers detained Alaksandr Alesin, a military analyst and a columnist in the weekly *Bielarusy i Rynak*. They put him in the KGB remand prison. On the same day, the apartment of the journalist was searched. The journalistic community learned about the detention of their colleague **on 4 December**. The KGB press service refused to comment on this detention. **On 8 December**, relatives of Alaksandr Alesin said, with reference to the KGB, that he had been charged with treason (Art. 356 of the Criminal Code) and entering in cooperation with a special service of a security agency or an intelligence agency of a foreign state (Art. 356-1 of the Criminal Code). The relatives also told that Alaksandr Alesin was not the main suspect (the main defendant was an unnamed foreign diplomat). **On 10 December**, Alaksandr Alesin was released on bail due to a sharp deterioration in his health condition. The

charges of treason were dropped against him and now he is only accused of cooperation with a foreign special service.

## Civil cases

**On 8 January**, the journalists of the Krychau small-circulation newspaper Volny Horad received a copy of a decision of the presidium of the Mahilou regional court, which stated that the ruling of the Krychau district court on the claim of the public utility company "Cherykau mobile mechanical division № 280" against Volny Horad had been overturned, and the proceedings had been terminated as the cases on protection of business reputation in the field of economic activity are not within the jurisdiction of the general courts.

*On 17 June 2013, the Krychau district court found untrue the information about the public utility company "Cherykau mobile mechanical division № 280" published by the newspaper (№4 from 3 February 2013) in the article "Bond Slaves" and ordered the newspaper to publish a retraction.*

**On 21 January**, the Frunzienski district court in Minsk dismissed a claim of the owner of the trading network Evroopt (Evroopt Ltd) about the protection of business reputation. Several Belarusian media resources and journalists as well as Uladzimir Karahin, the chairman of Minsk union of entrepreneurs and employers, whose remarks mass media had circulated, were co-defendants in these judicial proceedings. Evroopt Ltd demanded the defendants to refute some remarks made by Uladzimir Karahin at a meeting of a round-table on the issue of hostile takeovers of companies on 24 June 2013.

The online portal TUT.by, the online newspaper Jezhednevnik and journalists Dzmitry Zajac and Siarhiey Sacuk who had written the articles about the round-table were among the co-defendants in that case.

**On 27 January**, the board of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus dismissed the claim of Andrej Bielakou, the director of the private trading company BELSATplus, against the Polish company Telewizja Polska (SA TVP), the founder of the TV channel Belsat TV. The plaintiff argued that the TV channel Belsat illegally used the trademark and demanded that the satellite Astra ceased broadcasting the signal of Belsat TV. The court decided that Andrej Bielakou failed to provide the evidence of violation of an exclusive right on the trademark of Belsat in the territory of Belarus.

**On 21 June**, Mikhail Janchuk, the official representative of the TV channel Belsat in Belarus, received notice that Alaksandr Fiedarcou, the deputy chairman of the Supreme Court, had lodged a protest against this decision of the board to the presidium of the Supreme Court.

**On 24 June**, the presidium of the Supreme Court considered the protest with participation of the parties. Andrej Bielakou claimed that his company BELSATplus, which sells equipment for reception of satellite and cable television, was allegedly suffering losses because of the consonance of its name with the name of the TV channel. In his turn, Mikhail Janchuk claimed that the name and logo of the TV channel Belsat had been registered in Poland in 2006 and the rights of Bielakou could not be violated. As a result, the presidium of the Supreme Court decided to overturn the ruling from 27 January and refer the case for a new trial because of an alleged failure to examine the evidence in the case properly.

**On 4 September**, the Supreme Court's judicial panel for intellectual property finished the retrial. This time, the judicial panel chaired by Halina Hlukhouskaja took the side of the plaintiff. The Supreme Court banned the use of the name BELSAT by Telewizja Polska S.A. in the broadcast of the channel within the territory of Belarus and on the pages of the channel's web site

available to the users of the Belarusian Internet. The court also ruled to collect 9,998,800 roubles (roughly 740 Euro) in favour of Andrej Bielakou. The representatives of the TV channel called attention of the court to the fact that Telewizja Polska S.A. was not exercising any economic activity in the territory of Belarus and thus was unable to violate Andrej Bielakou's copyright. The management of the TV channel said that the decision of the Supreme Court was politically motivated.

**On 4 February**, the Leninski district court in Hrodna held a hearing in the lawsuit of defamation against journalists of the state TV channel Hrodna Plus. Iryna Salej, mother of Alaksiej Salej, a press photographer from Hrodna, filed a suit with the court. The reason for the suit was a video report about the detention of a suspect in a rape by police officers aired in December 2013. After showing the episode of detention, they run a close-up of a poster featuring a photo of her son. Thus, in this context, the audience was getting an impression that Alaksiej Salej was the person detained. Iryna Salej called the story a provocation and demanded that the journalists of the regional TV channel compensated the non-pecuniary damage.

Cameraman Siarhiej Piacheryca and reporter Halina Davydzik claimed that the photo of Alaksiej Salej had got into the video sequence accidentally – the story had been shot in the police station where they had a "Wanted" poster on the wall. After the journalists and a representative of the TV channel admitted their fault and expressed willingness to apologise, Iryna Salej abandoned her claim.

*Alaksiej Salej, freelance press photographer and member of the BAJ, is officially wanted by the police. He was repeatedly persecuted for his professional activities. In May 2011, the criminal proceedings were initiated against him for alleged production and distribution of pornographic materials. After that, the journalist fled Belarus.*

**On 10 March**, the district court of Horki in the Mahilou region began hearing the claim of Tamara Kaltunova, chairperson of the Horki district branch of the Belarusian Society of the Disabled (BSD), against the editorial board of local independent newspaper UzHorak, the BelaPAN news agency and its journalist Uladzimir Lapcevich. The plaintiff believed that the reports of BelaPAN from the open trial held in 2013 in other proceedings with participation of Tamara Kaltunova, which had been reprinted by UzHorak, contained defamatory information and asked the court to recover fifty million roubles from the editorial board. *(In 2013, BelaPAN's reporter Uladzimir Lapcevich covered a litigation between Tamara Kaltunova and members of the district branch of the society of the disabled, whom she was also accusing of libel).*

On 18 December, the Horki district court ruled to recover six million roubles jointly from the publisher of the independent regional newspaper UzHorak, the BelaPAN news agency and its journalist Uladzimir Lapcevich in compensation of non-pecuniary damage to Tamara Kaltunova, chairperson of the Horki district branch of the BSD. The defendants also must pay the legal costs incurred by the plaintiff. Neither Tamara Kaltunova nor her lawyer attended the trial. In court, the witnesses called by the defendants confirmed that the information in the reports of the BelaPAN reprinted by UzHorak accurately conveyed their words and opinions expressed at the litigation between members of the district branch of the society of the disabled and Tamara Kaltunova, chairperson of the Horki district branch of the BSD, which took place in late 2013. Despite this, Judge Jaskievich concluded that the journalistic materials had compromised on honour, dignity and business reputation of Tamara Kaltunova.

**On 6 June**, the court of the Leninski district in Brest dismissed a claim of Siarhiej Ivaniukovich about protection of honour and business reputation and disclosure of medical confidentiality against the independent newspaper Brestskaja Gazeta. The plaintiff sought to recover from the newspaper and its reporters Marta Martyniuk and Dzmitry Bosak thirty million roubles from each. At the request of the applicant, the trial was heard in closed session. After the consideration of the case, the court decided to dismiss the claim.

**On 4 August**, the Brest regional court dismissed the appeal of the plaintiff. As in the court of original jurisdiction, the hearing was held in closed session, so no details of the trial were disclosed.

**On 8 December**, the Krychau district court decided to partially satisfy the claim on protection of honour, dignity and business reputation and compensation of non-pecuniary damage filed by Maryna Martynava, the head of the department of ideology, culture and youth affairs of the Krychau district executive committee, against the independent regional newspaper Volny Horad, its publisher Uladzimir Kudraucau, editor Siarhiej Niarouny and journalist Mikalaj Hierdyj. Judge Alena Azaranka ruled to recover from the defendants a compensation for the non-pecuniary damage incurred by Maryna Martynava in the amount of seven million roubles as well as the money she had spent on the litigation fee and a legal representative – 4,050,000 roubles in total. The article "A round peg in a square hole?" published on 14 September 2014 on the web site of the newspaper Volny Horad and in the printed edition served as a basis for the claim. The article dealt with the failure of the ideology department of the district executive committee and the local district newspaper Krychauskaje Zhyccio to pay sufficient attention to the consequences of the collapse of the building of assembly hall and canteen of the local gymnasium. Regarding Maryna Martynava, it was said, "she understands the ideological work as a well-known animal understands oranges".

### Detention of journalists, judicial administrative prosecution

**On 20 January** in Viciebsk, police officers detained Aleh Barshcheuski, the editor-in-chief of the non-governmental newspaper Vitebskij Kurier. They told him that they were suspecting him in forging his driver's license. He spent some time in the Kastrychnicki police department in Viciebsk. The tax inspectors, who came to the police department, forced Barshcheuski to sign a written commitment to file a tax declaration before 11 February.

**On 4 February** in Babrujsk, blogger Aleh Zhaunou was detained for almost twelve hours on suspicion of preparing an explosion. In the morning of the same day, Zhaunou, on his way to see the head of the Babrujsk interdistrict department of the Investigative committee, had to check all his belongings, including his car alarm key, in the storage chamber. For some reason, a duty officer decided that the car alarm key was a remote control to activate an explosive device. Zhaunou was searched, placed in a cell and then taken to an investigator for questioning. Later, the blogger was released with the wording "Reasons for further detention in custody no longer in place". All media, which Zhaunou had with him – three flash drives, three mobile phones without SIM-cards and a 3G modem – remained in the police department. (*See also Criminal Proceedings*).

**On 5 February** in Miory, the Viciebsk region, the police detained TV reporters Siarhiej Kruchkou and Nastassia Reznikava and cameraman Alaksandr Paciejeu who came to shoot a story about a pressing issue for local residents – a weeklong suspension of hot water supply in the apartments while it was freezing temperature outside. Policemen said that the crew was in the forbidden zone of a military exercise and detained them for an "identity check". In the Miory police department, the journalists had to write explanations; the police strongly advised the crew to leave Miory and warned them that they would face serious problems if they attempted again to film anything. The journalists were escorted to the town's borders.

**On 2 March** in Minsk, the journalists who were going to cover a protest against the Russian intervention in Ukraine were detained near the embassy of Russia. Even before the event, policemen detained Uladzimir Hrydzin, Iryna Arekhouskaja, Vasil Siamashka, Siarhiej

Hapon, Arciom Lava and Jauhien Jerchak and brought them to the Centralny district police department. According to the journalists, Alaksandr Barsukou, the head of the Minsk city police department, personally commanded the detentions.

Ina Studzinskaja, a Radio Liberty reporter, came to the site of the protest rally some five minutes before it was scheduled to begin (other journalists had already been detained). According to her, when she began taking pictures of a rough detention of an elderly female protester by a group of plain-clothed men, the riot police came running to the journalist. Ina Studzinskaja showed them her press card issued by the Belarusian foreign ministry. At that point, Alaksandr Barsukou approached them and questioned the authenticity of the document. The riot police demanded the journalist to destroy the pictures and then grabbed her and dragged her to the police van. They took her to the Centralny district police department where other detained journalists were held. Policemen called them "sold-outs", "nationalists" and "Banderovites". The journalists were released in about one hour after the detention.

**On 12 March**, Anatol Hatouchyc was detained at the railway station in Homiel where he was interviewing passengers who came from Ukraine. Senior warrant police officer Kukharenka approached him and asked him to produce an ID. The journalist produced his press card and his passport. However, the police officer took Hatouchyc to the police control room at the railway station for an identity check; then they released him with no report drafted.

**On 12 March**, the Babrujsk city police department summoned Maryna Malchanava, a reporter of the online newspaper Bobrujskij Kurier in her capacity of a person against whom the administrative proceedings were initiated for an alleged violation of the law on mass events (Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code). The reason for this was that **on 6 March**, on an assignment of the editorial board, the journalist covered an anti-war rally held in Babrujsk by local activists. In the department's building, Siarhiej Rudzko, the deputy head of the law enforcement and prevention division, questioned the journalist and wrote a summons for 17 March – this time to draw out the administrative report. **On 17 March**, Maryna Malchanava visited the Babrujsk city police department as summoned, but no administrative report was drawn out. The police officer in charge of the administrative process told her that he was busy and that she would be summoned at another time, if needed. **On 3 April**, Maryna Malchanava received a reply from the prosecutor's office to her complaint against the investigator, Major Siarhiej Rudzko. The journalist believed that the police officer was persecuting her for her professional activities. The prosecutor's office informed the journalist that **on 19 March**, a decision was taken to dismiss the proceedings against her. However, the prosecutor's office disregarded Maryna Malchanava's request to investigate the facts in her complaint and to consider the actions of investigator Siarhiej Rudzko under Art. 198 of the Criminal Code ("Impeding the legitimate professional activities of a journalist") and take the prosecutor's response measures.

**On 16 March** in Minsk, the police detained freelance journalists Natalla Valakida and Alaksandr Silich, who covered an election picket of the United Civic Party near the Kamarouski market. In the Saviecki district police department, the journalists' identity data was recorded and no other procedures were conducted. Alaksandr Silich had his camcorder confiscated. His equipment was returned to him when he was released but all recordings made at the event had been deleted and the memory card had been formatted. Natalla Valakida was released at about 14.00, and Alaksandr Silich at 14.30.

**On 17 March**, the Babrujsk district court fined blogger Aleh Zhaunou for 45 basic units (5,850,000 roubles) for posting a recording on YouTube from a citizens' appointment with an official. The court qualified Aleh Zhaunou's actions as a violation of Art. 23.4 of the Administrative Code ("Disobedience to a lawful order or request of an official in the exercise of official authority"). The reason for this was a video recording made by the blogger **on 30 January** during his visit to Alaksandr Vasiljeu, the head of the Babrujsk city police department. Before the appointment, the police duty officer demanded the blogger to check all his personal

belongings in a storage chamber. However, later, a recording of the meeting of Aleh Zhaunou with the head of the police department was posted online. As a result, the Babrujsk police accused the blogger of a non-compliance with the demand of the duty officer to check in all his audio and video recording equipment.

**On 3 April** in Hrodna, the administrative reports were drawn out against members of the BAJ Viktor Sazonau, Uladzimir Khilmanovich, as well as human rights activist Raman Jurhiel for holding an unauthorised picket (Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code). The reasons for this was that **on 25 March** they had their pictures taken while displaying the Belarusian and Ukrainian symbols in memorable places in Hrodna and posted these pictures online. On the same day, the Leninski district court fined each of the "picketers" for 25 basic units (3,735,000 roubles).

**On 6 May**, the Hrodna regional court, having examined the appeals of Viktor Sazonau and Uladzimir Khilmanovich against the decision to fine them for illegal picketing, upheld the court's decision. During the hearing, human rights activists argued about the legal absurdity of the district court's decision and explained that they had not been violating the law on mass events. However, Judge Anatol Zajac disregarded all argumentation.

**On 3 April**, the Babrujsk district court found blogger Aleh Zhaunou guilty of violating Art. 23.4 of the Administrative Code ("Disobedience to a lawful order or request of an official in the exercise of official authority") and fined him for 46 basic units (6,900,000 roubles). **On 4 February**, Aleh Zhaunou, on his way to a meeting with the acting head of the Babrujsk office of the Investigative committee, failed to check in his mobile phones, a 3G modem and a memory card with a duty police officer.

*It shall be reminded that **on 17 March** the same court fined Aleh Zhaunou for 45 basic units for the similar misdemeanour.*

**On 4 April**, the Leninski district court in Hrodna found journalist Alaksandr Dzianisau guilty of illegally producing and distributing products of mass media (Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code). Judge Jury Kazakievich fined him for 30 basic units (4,500,000 roubles). Alaksandr Dzianisau was accused of producing a TV spot about the opening night of the play "Faust. Dreams", which was later aired by the TV channel Belsat, thus allegedly violating the law on mass media.

**On 13 May**, the Hrodna regional court examined the appeal of Alaksandr Dzianisau against the decision of the Leninski district court. Judge Anatol Zajac upheld it.

**On 17 April**, freelance journalist Alena Sciapanava visited the Kastrychnicki district police department in Viciebsk. She was summoned to the police over the phone a day before. Siarhiej Vieraksa, the senior inspector of the office for law enforcement and prevention, wanted to obtain explanations from Sciapanava regarding the publication entitled "Viciebsk students refuse to learn the national anthem" and posted in January 2014 on the Radio Liberty web site. The article was published unsigned.

**On 3 May**, Alena Sciapanava received a written notice from the Kastrychnicki district police department in Viciebsk that the administrative proceedings initiated against her in **April** by police officer Siarhiej Vieraksa had been terminated. They sent her the decision on the termination of the proceedings.

**On 9 May** in Minsk, policemen detained Radio Liberty reporter Valery Kalinouski with his crew while they were on air. The journalists covered the street festivities near the Minsk-Arena. The reporter asked the head of the Minsk riot police regiment why police was not responding to the fact that people were drinking alcohol in a public place. In response, policemen detained the journalists and took them to the Centralny district police department where they made them write explanations for the reason and the exact purpose of their presence near the

Minsk-Arena. The journalists were released without formalities in about two hours after the detention.

**On 14 May**, blogger Aleh Zhaunou from Babrujsk was again fined by the Babrujsk district and city court for 50 basic units for violating Art. 23.4 of the Administrative Code ("Disobedience to a lawful order or request of an official in the exercise of official authority"). According to police officers, the "disobedience" expressed itself in the failure of Aleh Zhaunou to check in the "forbidden items", in particular, a mobile phone, in the storage chamber of the Babrujsk city police department **on 27 March**. Aleh Zhaunou believed that nobody had the right to make such requests to him, as they were illegal.

**On 4 June**, the Mahilou regional court examined the appeal of Aleh Zhaunou against the ruling of the Babrujsk district and city court from 14 May. The decision was upheld.

**On 17 May** in Brest, plain-clothed persons detained freelance journalist Jauhien Skrabiec near his home claiming he resembled a criminal. They brought him to the Leninski district police department for an identity check where they drew out an administrative report against him for "using obscene language in a public place" (Art.17.1 of the Administrative Code). Until the court hearing, i.e. until the morning of 19 May, Jauhien Skrabiec was held in a temporary detention facility.

**On 19 May**, the Leninski district court in Brest held hearings in the case of Jauhien Skrabiec. After Jauhien Skrabiec filed a motion for the admission of a lawyer to the trial, the judge decided to postpone the trial until 21 May and released the journalist. However, the police officers said immediately that they would detain him again and take to the police station. As a result, for the second time that day, Jauhien Skrabiec was brought to the court, which sentenced him to ten days of administrative arrest.

**On 27 May**, the Karelichy district court in the Hrodna region examined the case of Ales Zaleuski, a staffer of the Polish public television TVP, which includes the satellite TV channel Belsat. The journalist was charged with working for a foreign mass media outlet without an accreditation. Based on the police report, the court found the journalist guilty of violating the law and fined for 30 basic units (about 327 Euro) under Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products). **On 26 June**, the Hrodna regional court rejected the appeal of Ales Zaleuski against the decision of the Karelichy court in the administrative proceedings. According to Ales Zaleuski, Judge Viktor Kavalchuk said that it was not the first case of this kind and therefore, he considered the violation of Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code by the journalist to be proved.

**On 28 May**, Viktor Buzinajeu, a civil society activist from Babrujsk and a local leader of the United Civic Party, received in the mail a letter from the Babrujsk police department. The document notified him of the administrative proceedings initiated against him and about a probe into the fact of distribution of the newspaper *Novy Chas*. The proceedings were terminated because of the absence of the event of an offense under Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products) in Buzinajeu's actions. The reason for the probe was the information that on 7 May, the activist distributed the newspaper *Novy Chas* in the city's central market. Viktor Buzinajeu possessed all the documents needed to distribute the newspaper.

**On 16 June**, freelance reporter from Hrodna Andrej Mialeshka was fined for 30 basic units for collaboration with a foreign mass media outlet without an accreditation in the Belarusian foreign minister. Dzmitry Kidal, Judge of the Kastychnicki district court in Hrodna, concluded that Andrej Mialeshka had violated Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products) by preparing a story for the Belarusian Radio Racyja (Poland). The reason for initiating the proceedings against the journalist was a publication posted on 17 April on the web site of Radio Racyja and signed by the pen name Ihar

Nikalajeu. Policemen argued, based on the evidence they had collected, that Andrej Mialeshka wrote that article.

**On 25 August**, the Hrodna regional court dismissed the appeal of Andrej Mialeshka against the decision from 16 June, which had sentenced him to a fine of 4,500,000 roubles.

**On 25 July** in Minsk, unknown plain-clothed persons detained in the street Mikita Brouka, a civil society activist and a journalist of the independent newspaper *Novy Chas*. The detention took place at about 12.30, and no information was available about the journalists' whereabouts until the evening. According to Mikita Brouka, after his detention he was taken to the Saviecki district police department in Minsk where he was fingerprinted and questioned. The police also wanted the journalist to pass a lie detector test but he refused. After that, the Minsk district chief enlistment officer came to the district police department and served him a summons for a medical exam. Mikita Brouka was released at about 18.00.

**On 18 August**, Alaksandr Burakou, a freelance journalist from Mahilou, was summoned to a police station in his capacity of a person against whom the administrative proceedings were initiated for "working for a foreign mass media outlet without an accreditation". Major Marozau made him provide explanations about a video story aired by Belsat in the autumn of 2013. The story told about the unsafe condition of the house at 4, Budaunikou Str. in Mahilou. As it followed from the documents of the administrative proceedings, which Alaksandr Burakou was acquainted with, after the story was aired, the KGB department for the Mahilou region conducted an investigation and took measures to establish the author's identity. The persons shown in the video were asked to identify the journalists, who talked to them, from photographs. The name of the investigating KGB officer was blacked out in the case files. Burakou told the police officer that he had not collaborated with Belsat and did not know how the video spot ended up at this TV channel.

**On 19 August**, police inspector Marozau also questioned freelance journalist Mikhail Arshynski. Unlike Burakou, he was not shown the files of the administrative proceedings against him. The police officer wanted to find out whether Mikhail Arshynski had been involved in shooting the story about the housing problems and how this video ended up at the TV channel Belsat. The journalist did not deny the fact of his involvement in the shooting but said that he did not know how Belsat had got the story. According to Mikhail Arshynski, during their conversation the inspector said that the instructions to conduct the probe had come "from Minsk, from the Ministry".

**On 3 September** in Minsk, at about 18.30 near the metro station Kamiennaja Horka, police officers detained a group of freelance journalists who were covering the collection of signatures under an appeal to the prosecutor's office to check for extremism and ban the broadcasting of Russian TV channels in Belarus. Activists of the organising committee of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party ran this event. The detained persons were taken to the Frunzienski district police department where they were held for about three hours. According to one of the detained, reporter of the newspaper *Novy Chas* Viachaslau Piashko, they had been questioned in the police department but no administrative violation reports had been drawn out.

**On 15 September**, journalist Vital Siamashka received an official letter from the Lida district police department in the Hrodna region. The document informed him that the administrative proceedings had been initiated against him earlier under Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code for a violation of the law on mass media (working for a foreign media outlet without an accreditation). Then, the police informed Vital Siamashka that the charges had already been dropped because of the expiration of the statute of limitations. According to the journalist, he learned about the initiation of the proceedings from this letter only.

**On 16 September** in Minsk, plain-clothed persons detained freelance journalists Natalla Valakida and Alaksandr Barazienka and *BelaPAN*'s reporter Siarhiej Saciuk near the building of

the Centralny district court in Minsk. The journalists were interviewing Jury Rubcou, a civil society activist from Homiel, before the beginning of the hearing in the administrative proceedings on insulting a judge. The journalists were brought to the Leninski district police department in Minsk where they were held for three hours.

**On 25 September**, the Babrujsk district and town court found journalist Maryna Malchanava guilty of illegal production and distribution of mass media products (Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code), and namely in the fact that the web site of the TV channel Belsat had posted an article signed by her. Judge Natalla Charapukha fined Maryna Malchanava for 32 basic units (4,800,000 roubles) for working for a foreign media outlet. **On 28 October**, Judge Paviel Klimau in the Mahilou regional court examined the appeal of Maryna Malchanava and upheld the decision to fine the journalist.

**On 7 October**, the Hrodna district court fined freelance reporter Andrej Mialeshka for 35 basic units. Judge Anna Levusik found the journalist guilty of illegal production of mass media products (Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code) and ruled to fine him for 5,250,000 roubles. The court called Aleh Sozinou, the head of the department of phytology in the Hrodna State University named after Janka Kupala, as a witness who confirmed that Mialeshka had interviewed him about the creation of an ecological nature reserve in the Hrodna region. The article with the researcher's comments was posted unsigned on the web site of the Belarusian Radio Racyja in August. Based on this publication, the administrative proceedings were initiated against Andrej Mialeshka. **On 30 October**, the Hrodna regional court upheld the decision of the Hrodna district court in the case of Andrej Mialeshka (Judge Sviatlana Dauhashej examined the appeal).

*It was the second fine the journalist received in three months under Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code. On 16 June, he was fined for 30 basic units.*

**On 8 October**, the Leninski district court in Mahilou fined journalist Alaksandr Burakou for 6,000,000 roubles for collaboration with a foreign media outlet. Judge Alena Volkava found him guilty of violating Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products). The court viewed the article "On the smuggler's path: Do the Russian sanctions work in the border zone?" posted on the web site DW.de on 25 August 2014 and signed by Alaksandr Burakou as well as some other publications as the "products", which the journalist allegedly "produced and distributed". The articles on the web site of the Russian service of Deutsche Welle also provided grounds for a search in his apartment and the apartment of his parents **on 16 September**. **On 20 November**, the Mahilou regional court (Judge Melnikau) upheld the decision of the court of original jurisdiction to fine journalist Alaksandr Burakou.

**On 20 October** in Minsk, the police detained journalists Alaksandr Lubienchuk and Maryja Arcybashava, who were interviewing politician Uladzimir Niaklajeu in the street. Niaklajeu's Belarusian language aroused suspicions of the policemen who walked past them. The journalists and the politician were taken to the Saviecki district police department in Minsk. There, the identities of the detained persons were checked against the police database. The policemen also wanted to review the footage. In about one hour after the detention, the journalists and the politician were released without police reports.

**On 29 October**, freelance journalist from Brest Alina Litvinchuk was summoned to the police as a witness in administrative proceedings. However, she was told there that the administrative proceedings were initiated against her under Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code. A letter from A. Krupienkin, the deputy head of the KGB department for the Brest region, dated 1 October 2014 about "illegal journalistic activities of Alina Litvinchuk on behalf of a foreign mass media", was attached to the police report. The reason for this was a publication entitled "Peers will tell students about the dangers of spice" posted on the web site of the Belarusian Radio Racyja in September. The journalist refused to testify against herself. Then, a police

officer drew out a report and served a subpoena on her for 6 November. He left empty the fields with information about the victim and witnesses in the document. In the evening of **31 October**, the story had an unexpected sequel: police officers, using threats, tried to enter the journalist's apartment in order to rewrite the report, which the court returned for revision. Alina Litvinchuk again refused to testify and to sign the new report. At the request of the journalist, the court postponed the consideration of the administrative case to a later date.

**On 8 November** near Zaslauje, the police detained people who were engaged in shooting a video clip for the Hrodna music band Dzieciuki as well as several journalists – a member of the BAJ from Hrodna, Alaksandr Dzianisau, and a staffer of the newspaper Novy Chas, historian Ihar Mielnikau. Without any explanations, the police loaded them into a paddy wagon and took to the Zaslauje district police department.

The policemen classified the shooting as an unauthorised event. Three hours later, everybody was released. The police seized the footage for ten days "to clarify the contents".

**On 10 November** in Babrujsk, TV reporters Viachaslau Piashko and Artur Bondarau were detained while exercising their professional activities. They were interviewing Mikhail Kavalkou, a trade union activist, at the entrance to the Tractor Parts and Component Units Plant when policemen came, said that the recording was illegal and took away IDs of all those present. After that, the police put the trade union activist in their car and ordered the journalists to follow them to a police precinct in their own car. In the police precinct, the police questioned Viachaslau Piashko and Artur Bondarau about the interview near the plant entrance and drew out relevant reports. In about three hours after the detention, the journalists were released. The police strongly recommended them not to write anything about the hunger strike and the workers' protest at the plant.

**On 25 November**, the Leninski district court in Hrodna (Judge Alena Piatrova) found members of the BAJ journalist of Radio Liberty Mikhail Karnievich and Uladzimir Khilmanovich guilty of violating the order of organising or holding mass events (Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code). Uladzimir Khilmanovich was fined for 35 basic units and Mikhail Karnievich was fined for 15 basic units. Their alleged offense took place **on 26 October** in Svislach, the Hrodna region, during a ceremony to commemorate the rebels of Kastus Kalinouski's uprising of 1863. The reason behind the charges against Uladzimir Khilmanovich was his photograph against the backdrop of the white-red-white flag, and against Mikhail Karnievich – the fact that he was near the monument to Kalinouski and was "moving as a part of an organised group". **On 16 December**, the Hrodna regional court (Judge Mikalaj Rachynski) dismissed the appeal of Uladzimir Khilmanovich against the decision of the Leninski district court. **On 18 December**, Judge Mikalaj Rachynski also dismissed the appeal of journalist Mikhail Karnievich and upheld the decision of the court of original jurisdiction.

**On 28 November**, the Chyhunachny district court in Viciebsk fined three participants in a journalistic photo shoot "Birds and Cages" held in the framework of the international campaign "Stand Up for Journalism". In particular, the participants in the photo shoot were accused of having their pictures taken in a public place against the backdrop of urban graffiti (images of three cells from which birds made from newspapers were flying out) without an authorisation of the district administration. The court found them guilty of violating the order of organising or holding mass events (Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code). Dzmitry Kazakievich (Judge Alena Cyhankova) and Alena Sciapanava (Judge Dzianis Hubanau) were fined for 20 basic units each and Alena Shabunia (Judge Dzianis Hubanau) was fined for 18 basic units. **On 1 December**, in the same case, Alena Cyhankova fined Kanstancin Mardvincau for 20 basic units and Tacciana Sieviaryniec for 20 basic units. It emerged at the hearings that a police report was also drawn up against Piotr Biarlinau, a passer-by from Viciebsk who had joined the journalistic photo shoot. **On 3 December**, Judge Alena Cyhankova punished him with three days of arrest. **On 17 December**, the Chyhunachny district court in Viciebsk examined the seventh episode in the

administrative proceedings on the photo shoot with "birds and cages". Along the lines of the previous trials, Judge Alena Cyhankova found member of the BAJ Paviel Levinau guilty of violating the order of organising or holding mass events (Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code) and fined him for 25 basic units. **On 24 December**, the Viciebsk regional court examined the appeals of the local journalists who participated in the photo shoot "Birds and Cages", which was qualified by the police as an unsanctioned picket (Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code). As a result, the court dismissed all appeals.

**On 2 December**, the Leninski district court in Hrodna (Judge Jury Kazakievich) fined journalist Andrej Mialeshka for 40 basic units for journalistic activities without an accreditation in favour of a foreign mass media outlet – the Belarusian Radio Racyja. The journalist was charged with violation of Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code. Professor Valery Charapica, who spoke about his interview to the journalist, as well as Tamara Pivavarchyk, the head of the department of journalism of the Hrodna University named after Janka Kupala, testified upon the trial.

*It shall be reminded that in 2014, Andrej Mialeshka was already fined twice for violation of Art. 22.9., Part 2 of the Administrative Code: the first time, in June, for 30 basic units and the second time, in October, for 35 basic units.*

**On 6 December** in Minsk, freelance photographer and member of the BAJ Uladzimir Hrydzin was detained while he was doing his job. He was detained together with civil society activists when they were handing out ribbons with an authentic Belarusian ornament to passers-by near the Kamarouski market. Uladzimir Hrydzin was taking pictures of the event. The detained persons were taken to the Saviecki district department in Minsk where they had to provide explanations and then they were released without police reports.

**On 11 December**, the Slonim district court (Judge Andrej Likhach) found journalist Ales Zaleuski guilty of illegal production and distribution of mass media products (Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code) and fined him for 40 basic units. Ales Zaleuski is a staff journalist of the Polish TV channel Belsat. In Slonim, he was shooting a story about the abuse and corruption in the housing and utilities sphere. Mikalaj Syantovich, the head of the housing and utilities department in Slonim and Zaleuski's interviewee, testified upon the trial. He confirmed that Ales Zaleuski had interviewed him but had not tell him which TV channel he worked for.

It was the second administrative case against Ales Zaleuski during the year. In May, he was fined for 30 basic units under the same article.

**On 17 December**, the Biaroza district court (Judge Natalla Vakulchuk) fined freelance journalist Tamara Shchapiotkina for 30 basic units for "illegal production and distribution of mass media products". The judge took into account the fact that Shchapiotkina had earlier received a warning for working for a foreign mass media outlet without an accreditation. The materials, for which the journalist was prosecuted, were published on the web site of the Belarusian Radio Racyja. These were interviews with the head of a pharmacy and the director of a school. The police visited them later and asked them about their interviewer. Based on their answers, the police drew out a report on an administrative violation.

**On 24 December**, the Leninski district court in Brest fined journalist Alaksandr Lauchuk for 40 basic units for illegal production and distribution of mass media products (Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code), i.e. for collaboration with a foreign mass media outlet without an accreditation. According to the journalist, the files of his administrative proceedings stated, referring to information received from the KGB, that his work for the TV channel Belsat was an established fact.

## Seizure, damaging and confiscation of equipment

**On 4 February**, in the course of detention of blogger Aleh Zhaunou in the Babrujsk interdistrict department of the Investigating committee, the police seized all media in his possession – three flash drives, three mobile phones without SIM-cards and a 3G modem.

**On 23 May** in Babrujsk, a search was conducted in the apartment of blogger Aleh Zhaunou, against whom the criminal proceedings were initiated (see "Criminal proceedings" for details). The search lasted for over three hours. As a result, the police seized Aleh Zhaunou almost all electronic media from Aleh Zhaunou: a netbook, a mobile phone, a video recorder, four hard drives and various memory cards – twelve items in total.

**On 16 September** in Mahilou, an "inspection of the site of an administrative offense" was carried out in the apartment of journalist Alaksandr Burakou. The reason for this was the publication of three materials signed by Alaksandr Burakou in July – August 2014 on the web site DW.DE (Deutsche Welle). As a result, two laptop computers and two flash drives were seized in the journalist's apartment. Later the same day, on the same grounds, a search was conducted in the apartment of the journalist's parents; two computer system units were seized. Meanwhile, the police left no papers documenting the seizure of the equipment.

**On 19 September** in Hrodna, after the detention of civil society activist Volha Krapocina, who was putting leaflets on cars with the Russian license plates calling for the return of Crimea to Ukraine, her apartment was searched and the police seized a laptop computer and two flash drives (later the equipment was returned).

## Threats against journalists and Mass Media

**On 6 February**, Kaciaryna Siniuk, a journalist of the information portal TUT.BY, received a text message with threats. It happened on the day of publication of her article "Why "serious fellows" lured minor boys in a cottage in the village of Zacien?" by the portal. "Big hello to you from "Davydovich's boys". We'll soon talk informally and in an unexpected place. Do you sleep well?", said the message, which was sent to the journalist's personal phone number from the web site of the mobile operator. Besides, she was getting calls from unlisted and hidden numbers almost every five minutes after the article was posted online. In the article, the journalist told about Viachaslau Davydovich, the former head of the international charity association "Help to Orphans". As the journalistic investigation showed, he was associated with persons involved in a high-profile criminal case of paedophiles.

**On 14 March**, Maryna Malchanava, a journalist of Bobrujskij Kurier, received an email from an unknown person signed as "Ivan Ivanov", which can be seen as a threat: "Zh...nou ended his writing badly and calmed down, and someone will also devote more time to normal human values".

Obviously, the letter referred to well-known Babrujsk blogger Aleh Zhaunou who wrote a lot about violations by police officers. In February 2014, the Babrujsk prosecutor's office initiated the criminal proceedings against him for an alleged insult of a police officer in his blog.

*Earlier, in February, someone was sending insulting emails in the name of Maryna Malchanava. Independent candidates from Babrujsk, Alena Miadzviedzieva and Nastassia Miadzviedzieva, received two such "messages".*

## Warnings, administrative pressure

**On 19 February**, the Lida district prosecutor's office in the Hrodna region issued an official warning about the inadmissibility of violation of the law on mass media to Jury Dziashuk, a freelance journalist from Biaroza. The warning reminds about the prohibition to work for foreign mass media without an accreditation as well as about the inadmissibility of publishing unchecked information. The prosecutor's office refused to provide the journalist with a written copy of the warning.

Earlier, **on 10 February**, the prosecutor's office questioned Jury Dziashuk about his journalistic activities. At that time, the journalist refused to answer some questions by invoking his right not to incriminate himself; however, he explained that he collaborated with mass media as a freelancer, and many Belarusian web sites as well as newspapers and magazines published his articles.

**On 5 March**, the Hrodna regional prosecutor's office issued official warnings to freelance journalists from Homiel, Julia Bielaus and Mikalaj Bianco. The prosecutor's office accused them of preparing information materials without an accreditation for a foreign media outlet – Radio Racyja, which is registered in Poland. As evidence, the prosecutor's office showed the reports, which had been posted on the web site racyja.com and signed by Julia Bielaus and Mikalaj Bianco. The journalists refused to answer the questions of the prosecutor, to whom they had been summoned for a conversation prior to the issuance of warnings. Later, it turned out that the documents had been prepared in advance.

**On 26 August**, the Centralny district court in Homiel dismissed the appeal of Mikalaj Bianco against the actions of Vadzim Sushchynski, the first deputy prosecutor of the Homiel region, who had issued the journalist a warning for the preparation of information materials for a foreign media outlet without an accreditation.

**On 25 March** in Hrodna, the police summoned activist and journalist Alaksandr Kirkievich for a preventive talk. After that, his apartment was searched. According to the police, they were looking for stickers with the image of Putin, which had allegedly appeared in the neighbourhood where Alaksandr Kirkievich lived, but they found nothing in the end. They fingerprinted Alaksandr Kirkievich, took his saliva samples, and handed him an official warning. He believed that they had no reason to do this, as he did not commit any offence.

*Alaksandr Kirkievich is a former political prisoner. He was arrested for participation in street protests after the presidential election in December 2010, sentenced to four years but pardoned and released in September 2011.*

**On 25 March** in Smarhon, the police questioned Alaksandr Dzierhachou, the editor of the small-circulation bulletin Smarhonski Hrak, and distributor Uladzimir Shulzhycki about the functioning of the periodical and the submission of mandatory copies to governmental agencies and archives. The police did not draw out any reports but insistently "advised" the journalists to obey the law. The demand to submit the publication, such as Smarhonski Hrak, is illegitimate since, in accordance with the law, it does not apply to the newspapers with the circulation of no more than 299 copies, which do not register their editorial board as a legal entity.

**On 31 March**, the Brest city prosecutor's office issued a written warning to freelance journalist Jauhien Skrabiec about the inadmissibility of illegal actions. The warning regarded the journalist's publications on the web site of the Belarusian Radio Racyja, which has its main office in Bialystok (Poland). The prosecutor's office refused to give the document to the journalist. In this connection, Jauhien Skrabiec filed a statement to the prosecutor's office asking to provide him with a copy of the document for further appeal.

*Earlier, on 21 March, the city prosecutor's office summoned the journalist for questioning. Then, assistant prosecutor Alena Paulava asked him whether he was working for foreign mass media without an accreditation and discrediting the Republic of Belarus in his publications.*

**On 4 April** in Brest, the Saviecki district police department summoned freelance journalist Maksim Khlabiec as a witness in administrative proceedings. However, during the questioning, the police turned the conversation mostly to the topic of the reporter's professional activities. "Maksim Mielnik and another police officer who failed to introduce himself said that they knew everything about my journalistic activities and considered it to be illegal. The police officers showed photographs, which, in their opinion, proved my collaboration with the Belarusian Radio Racyja", the journalist said later. According to Khlabiec, in conclusion of the conversation, the policemen began inclining him to cooperation and threatening him with responsibility.

**On 15 April**, the Viciebsk regional prosecutor's office issued an official warning to Sviatlana Sciapanava, a journalist from Viciebsk, about potential responsibility for illegal production and distribution of mass media products (Art. 22.9., Part 2 of the Administrative Code). The prosecutor's office believed that she was collaborating without an accreditation with a foreign media outlet. Gieorhi Karenka, the deputy prosecutor for the Viciebsk region, signed the warning.

**On 26 April**, the police summoned freelance journalist Jauhien Skrabiec "for questioning". First, the police officers said that he allegedly resembled a participant in a fight, which had happened in Brest in February. Later, they moved on to questions about his collaboration with Radio Racyja and his visit to the Maidan in Ukraine.

**On 12 May**, the Ministry of Information issued a written warning to the independent newspaper SNplus. Svobodnyje Novosti Plus signed by Minister Aleh Pralaskouski. The newspaper was accused of spreading misinformation, which was harmful to public interests and generated a negative attitude towards the hockey championship. The reason for the sanctions was the article "World Championship - 2014: Second Strings Playing " in №17 from 6 May 2014. The article said that Russia failed to include any of the players who participated in the Olympic Games in Sochi in its team for the championship. According to Vasil Zdaniuk, the editor-in-chief of SNplus, at press time, on 5 May, the information was perfectly accurate. However, on 6 May, the Russian team suddenly changed the line-up it had previously submitted and included two hockey players who had taken part in the Olympic tournament in Sochi.

**On 9 June**, the Babrujsk city police summoned freelance journalist Maryna Malchanava "for a talk". First, Major Siarhiej Rudzko took interest in the reporter's professional activities and then showed her photographs from an opposition rally held in the city and asked her to identify those present. The police officers inquired who the author of the photographs was. According to Maryna Malchanava, she answered that she had not attended that rally and was unable to help the police. Siarhiej Rudzko initiated the administrative proceedings against Malchanava in the spring under Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code (participation in an unsanctioned rally) for covering an anti-war rally of activists from Babrujsk. The proceedings were later dismissed.

**On 11 June** in Brest, freelance journalist Maksim Khlabiec visited the Brest regional prosecutor's office, where he was summoned officially "because of a necessity that emerged". Senior prosecutor Nina Bakharava gave the reporter a written warning about the collaboration with a foreign media outlet without an accreditation. It followed from the document that the prosecutor's office viewed two articles posted on the web site racyja.com in March 2013 as the evidence of Maksim Khlabiec's cooperation with the Belarusian Radio Racyja. The warning was dated **10 June** and signed by Alaksandr Tochka, the deputy prosecutor of the Brest region.

**On 15 December**, the Minsk city prosecutor's office issued an official warning to TV reporter Ales Zaleuski about the inadmissibility of violation of the law on mass media. Kazimir Kiezhun, the deputy prosecutor of Minsk, signed the warning. The reason for the prosecutor's sanction was the coverage by the journalist of the extradition case of Alena Tankachova, a renowned human rights activist. According to information gathered by the prosecutor's office, on that day, Ales Zaleuski filmed a story for the TV channel Belsat, thus violating the Belarusian law.

### **Infringements related to access to information (refusals to provide information, restrictive use of the institution of accreditation)**

**On 8 January** in Klimavichy, Siarhiey Arzhancou, the publisher of the socio-political bulletin Klimavickaja Infa-Panarama, was not allowed to attend a meeting of the administrative committee of the Klimavichy district executive committee, which was scheduled to consider several administrative proceedings. The ban came without explanations from Natalla Asmalouskaja, the chairperson of the administrative committee. Meanwhile, in accordance with Art. 2.14 of the Execution Procedure Administrative Code, "the administrative cases are heard in public". In this connection, Siarhiey Arzhancou left a corresponding entry in the book of comments and suggestions of the Klimavichy district executive committee. In response, A. Lamanau, the chairman of the Klimavichy district executive committee, justified the actions of his subordinate by informing Siarhiey Arzhancou that his presence had been deemed "unwarranted", because he was not a participant in the administrative proceedings. Then, Siarhiey Arzhancou complained to a higher authority. **On 18 February**, Siarhiey Arzhancou received a reply from the Mahilou regional executive committee to his complaint against the actions of the chairperson of the administrative committee of the Klimavichy district executive committee. A. Stalarou, the deputy head of the main directorate of justice of the Mahilou regional executive committee, wrote that while the administrative proceedings were heard in public, the ban of the district official had legitimate reasons.

**In the evening of 29 January** in Minsk, unknown plain-clothed people impeded the work of journalists on the Niezalezhnasci Square during the filming of the movie "Abel". About a dozen of these sneaks stood before the journalists and blocked the film set from the cameras with their bodies. At that time, the scenes of mass protests of 2010 were shot.

**On 1 February**, plain-clothed persons detained Vasil Siamashka, a cameraman of the BelaPAN news agency, after the filming of "Abel". The incident took place after he interviewed two students who worked as film extras. According to the cameraman, at approximately 22.45, three unknown plain-clothed persons approached him and began asking him about the questions he had asked the extras. They tried to detain these students. The "sneaks" demanded the journalist to delete the footage and refrain from restoring and publishing it.

**On 12 February**, Paviel Zahraj, the head of the Brest housing and utilities department, refused to talk to Alaksandr Lauchuk, a freelance reporter of the BelaPAN news agency. The reason for interviewing the official was a petition of a group of citizens to the Brest city prosecutor's office requesting the initiation of criminal proceedings against officials of the Brest housing and utilities department because of their failure to fulfil their duties of maintenance and repair of a dwelling house, making it uninhabitable. While preparing an article on this topic, Lauchuk wanted to know the opinion of the other side, the head of the housing and utilities department. However, Paviel Zahraj said through his secretary that he would not comment on anything, and the department's head engineer, Vasil Sumar, just run from the reporter. Alaksandr

Lauchuk wrote a complaint against the actions of the managers of the housing and utilities department in the book of comments and suggestions.

**On 18 February** in Barysau, the journalists were banned from attending a meeting of defence ministry officials with military pensioners of the Barysau garrison, who had earlier complained to the presidential administration and the defence ministry about low pensions. Editor of the local non-governmental newspaper Borisovskije Novosti Anatol Bukas, freelancer Alaksandr Ziankou and a crew of a local TV channel were not allowed into the territory of the military unit where the meeting was held. Chief of staff Lieutenant Colonel Hierasimau said that the journalists lacked a special accreditation of the defence ministry. At the same time, lawyers did not find any publicly available documents, which would regulate the procurement of such an accreditation.

Anatol Bukas asked military prosecutor Mikhail Bychok to solve this issue. The editor emphasised the fact that this situation violated the rights of journalists guaranteed by the law on mass media. In response, the prosecutor only advised him to file an official complaint.

**On 18 February**, it became known that the information about the number of casinos in Babrujsk became "classified" for the regional newspaper Bobrujskij Kurier. While writing an article about a woman from Babrujsk who lost about USD 200,000 in a casino, a journalist of the newspaper asked the executive committee about the number of gaming establishments in the city. The journalist was referred from one department of the executive committee to another and then to the tax inspection. As a result, Babrujsk officials never provided the journalist with the information he needed.

**On 3 March** in Minsk, during an open trial of activist Siarhiej Finkievich, who was detained near the Russian embassy, Alaksandr Jakunchykhin, a judge of the Centralny district in Minsk, prohibited reporters from making audio recordings of the proceedings.

Having seen voice recorders in the hands of journalists, Judge Jakunchykhin said that any audio recording at the trial might be made with his permission only and that the journalists might be held liable if they disobeyed. Meanwhile, the decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Court "On ensuring the transparency in the administration of justice and dissemination of information on the activities of the courts" clearly states that one cannot forbid the journalists from making audio recordings during the open trials and a judge's permission is not needed. **On 22 April**, the Belarusian Association of Journalists received a reply to a complaint against the actions of Judge Alaksandr Jakunchykhin from the Supreme Court signed by deputy chairman Valery Kalinkovich. The letter said that the Supreme Court had refused to initiate disciplinary proceedings against Judge Jakunchykhin because no complaints had been filed against the actions of Judge Jakunchykhin during the administrative trial of Siarhiej Finkievich.

**On 6 March**, it became known that three district electoral commission – in Horki, Drybin and Mscislau – refused to provide information to the officially registered non-governmental newspaper UzHorak. The publication asked them to provide information about the registered candidates at the local elections.

**On 16 March** in Minsk, the police first obstructed the camera of press photographer Hienadz Vieracinski while he was taking pictures of the election picket of the United Civic Party near the Kamarouski market, and then took the camera away from him and deleted all photographs.

**On 20 March** in Brest, Ina Khomich, a reporter of the non-governmental newspaper Brestskij Kurier, was not allowed to work as a journalist at the polling station № 75. She was accredited as an observer since the beginning of the early voting but when she was forbidden to photograph the voting results report, Ina Khomich showed her press card of the reporter of Brestskij Kurier to the members of the electoral commission and announced that from that moment on she would stay at the polling station in her journalistic capacity as well. In response,

the secretary of the commission said that the electoral law allegedly forbade someone being an observer and a journalist at the same time. The journalist filed a complaint against such actions to the chairperson of the polling station's electoral commission, to the city electoral commission and the prosecutor of Brest.

**On 23 March** in Barysau, Valiancina Ziankova, BelaPAN's freelance press photographer, was not allowed to take pictures at the polling station № 59 in the Barysau district. The journalist showed her BelaPAN press card to the chairman of the commission; however, the latter demanded her to present additional "accreditation" and prohibited her from taking photographs, which is contrary to the electoral law.

**On 25 March** in Minsk, police officers hindered activities of journalists during an authorised march held to celebrate the Freedom Day (the traditional annual rally of the democratic opposition). Before the rally, the police tried to detain Alena Jakzhyk, a reporter of the online newspaper Salidarnasc, for taking photographs of the paddy wagons, which arrived at the site of the event. The journalist showed her press card and avoided the detention after a brief discussion. Plain-clothed persons prevented Belsat's cameraman Alaksandr Barazienka from going up to the terrace of the Kastrychnik movie theatre to make a panoramic photo of the rally. According to Alaksandr Barazienka, they refused to show their IDs, behaved very rudely and threatened him with an arrest.

**On 28 March**, the editorial board of the independent newspaper Intex-Press in Baranavichy prepared a complaint to the Central Election Commission about violations of the rights of journalists during the local elections. During the election campaign, journalists of Intex-Press encountered obstacles to their activities, in the first place, because of violations of the Electoral Code. Thus, on the first day of the early voting, at the polling station № 47, members of the precinct committee demanded the journalists to produce an "authorisation to be present at the polling station signed by the chairperson of the Central Election Commission". The conflict was finally resolved but the work of the reporters at this polling station was disrupted. **On 23 March**, at the polling station № 27, chairman of the commission Jury Khryshchanovich told a reporter of Intex-Press that it was forbidden to take pictures during the vote count. Only after some consultations over the phone, the chairman admitted that he had been wrong. **On 24 March**, Tamara Shukala, chairperson of the Baranavichy city territorial commission, refused to provide the election results for each electoral district in Baranavichy to Intex-Press. She announced only the number of votes for each candidate and recommended to check out the other results in the state-run newspaper Nash Kraj. **On 11 April**, the editorial board of Intex-Press received a reply to its complaint to the Central Election Commission. It followed from the letter signed by chairperson of the Commission Lidyja Jarmoshyna that the Central Election Commission had found no violations of the rights of journalists of Intex-Press during the local election campaign. **On 8 April**, the editorial board received a similar reply from the Brest regional territorial election commission signed by its deputy chairperson Natalla Hryhorjeva.

**On 28 March** in Brest, reporters of the BelaPAN news agency Alaksandr Lauchuk and Milana Kharytonava faced obstacles in covering a meeting of the city local election commission. First, the chairman of the commission slammed the door in front of the reporters and refused to let them enter. Later, the reporters managed to get to the meeting but the members of the commission forbade them to use photo, video- and audio-recording equipment.

**On 6 May**, the police prevented freelance journalists Volha Chajchyc and Alaksandra Dynko from assisting at an open trial. The incident took place in the Frunzienski district court in Minsk where civil society activist Mikalaj Dziemidzienka, detained on 5 May, was put on trial. The journalists managed to get to the trial half an hour later, after the court's deputy chairperson intervened.

**On 8 May** in Minsk, the police impeded the work of a crew of the Finnish TV channel Yleisradio. The Finnish journalists were interviewing Minsk residents when police officers came up and ordered the crew including Kaj Kunnas, a renowned Finnish sports commentator, to stop filming and to leave the area near the Palace of Sports.

**On 23 May**, a journalist from Hrodna, Viktor Parfionienka, received his sixth accreditation denial as a reporter of the Belarusian Radio Racyja from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In its official reply, the ministry referred to the law on mass media and the Regulations for the accreditation of foreign journalists in Belarus.

**On 27 May**, Tacciana Chylik, the head of the administrative and personnel department of the Baranavichy city executive committee, refused to provide information to the independent regional newspaper Intex-Press. Reporter Arciom Harbacevich asked her about the cost to the city budget of the three-day city festival with fireworks and the concert of Teo, the Belarusian finalist of the Eurovision contest. In response, the official refused to talk to him. As a result, in order to get answers to these questions, the independent media outlet had to send a written inquiry to the city executive committee.

**On 3 June** in Minsk, during the ceremonial opening of the new metro station Malinauka, police officers, using the threat of detention, ordered a reporter of the independent newspaper Nasha Niva to delete photographs from her camera. Iryna Arakhouskaja took picture of a police officer who was leading a drunk man out from the metro station.

**On 12 June** in Baranavichy, reporters of the independent newspaper Intex-Press Volha Shyrokastup and Dzmitry Makarevich were refused access to the city executive committee to attend the ceremony honouring the best graduates of the city. Tacciana Chylik, the head of the administrative and personnel department of the Baranavichy city executive committee, "did not like" the appearance of the reporters as well as the backpack of the press photographer, in which he carried his camera. The officials had no issues with other photographers and cameramen who also carried big bags and backpacks with equipment.

**On 26 June**, it became known that Judge Ludmila Vashchanka (the Hlybokaje district court) forbade local journalists to make audio recordings during an open trial. According to Dzmitry Lupach who, together with a colleague, attended an open trial in the criminal case of murder, the judge forbade them to use technical means on the first day of the hearings. On the second day, the journalists began using the voice recorders. Then, the judge banned the use of voice recorders and threatened to remove the reporters from the courtroom.

**On 27 August**, an official of the ideology department of the Hlybokaje district executive committee prevented local journalist Dzmitry Lupach from participating in an event of the Christian film festival Magnificat. Despite the advanced accreditation with the chairman of the festival, the official did not allow Dzmitry Lupach to board the coach prepared for the journalists. She said that the journalist of Katalicki Viesnik allegedly lacked the accreditation and could not go with all other journalists. According to Dzmitry Lupach, it was possible that this behaviour of the official was her reaction to his material for the information resource westki.info where at one of the illustrations one can see an erroneous spelling of the name of one of the participating countries – "Macidonia".

**On 8 September** in Baranavichy, reporters of the regional non-governmental newspaper Intex-Press were prevented from photographing the obscene words addressed to the president of Russia, which had been written a day before on the fence of a slaughterhouse by unknown persons. An employee of the slaughterhouse ran towards press photographer Alaksandr Trypucka when the latter was taking pictures. He grasped the reporter's vest, obstructed the camera, demanded to stop taking pictures and insulted the journalist by shouting: "You wrote it and now you are photographing it!" The police who were standing nearby did not react in any way to the aggressive behaviour of the company's employee. Instead, they checked the

documents of reporters Natalla Siemianovich and Alaksandr Trypucka and recorded their personal data. One of the policemen, a sergeant, strongly advised the journalists to delete the pictures from the camera's memory.

**On 10 November** in Babrujsk, TV reporters Viachaslau Piashko and Artur Bondarau were detained while exercising their professional activities. They were interviewing Mikhail Kavalkou, a trade union activist, at the entrance to the Tractor Parts and Component Units Plant when policemen came, said that the recording was illegal and took away IDs from all those present. In the police precinct, the police questioned Viachaslau Piashko and Artur Bondarau about the interview near the plant entrance and strongly advised them not to write anything about the hunger strike and the workers' protest at the plant.

**On 24 November**, reporter of the BelaPAN news agency Uladzimir Lapcevich was not allowed to attend the extraordinary sixth session of the Mahilou regional council of deputies of the 27<sup>th</sup> convocation. As a reason for refusal, chief specialist of the Mahilou regional council Jauhien Nalhachou cited the absence of the reporter in the guest list. It was not the first incident of this kind. In October, the same official removed Uladzimir Lapcevich from the meeting room of the Mahilou regional council where a regular session of the council was taking place. Uladzimir Lapcevich filed a complaint against Nalhachou's actions. On 19 November, during a personal appointment, chairman of the Mahilou regional council Anatol Isachanka assured the reporter that he personally had not banned anyone from attending the sessions of the regional council.

**On 28 November**, during the examination of the cases of three participants in the journalistic photo shoot "Birds and Cages" by the Chyhunachny district court in Viciebsk, which was held on the eve of the international campaign "Stand Up for Journalism" (see also "Detention of journalists, judicial administrative prosecution"), the reporters who were going to cover the proceedings encountered problems, as the judge intended to hold the trial in closed session in her room. In order to attend the trial, the journalists had to speak with the chairman of the court, and only after that, five persons were allowed to enter the room (in accordance with the number of chairs).

## Other forms of pressure and violation of journalists' rights

**On 1 January**, the editorial board of the regional non-governmental newspaper Hazieta Slonimskaja was evicted from the premises, which she leased from Partner-Slonim Ltd for office use. The official reason was the ban of the fire department to use the second floor of the building. Viktor Valadashchuk, the editor-in-chief of Hazieta Slonimskaja, doubted that the property owner had taken an independent decision and remained certain that the newspaper was the primary target of these actions. He said that local officials had repeatedly asked the administration of the building to evict the newspaper.

**On 17 January**, it became known that ideology officials of the Viciebsk regional executive committee were exerting pressure on local members of the BAJ and journalists. The participants in a friendly meeting, which was held on the New Year's eve, on 28 December, in Viciebsk came in sight of the ideology workers: those in attendance were drinking tea, listening to a bard and a member of the BAJ from Bieshankovichy, Gieorhi Stankievich, and discussing their plans for the next year. The regional executive committee viewed this meeting as ideologically harmful: the ideology department summoned some journalists as well as heads of the editorial boards of local newspapers to question them about their "unwelcome" membership in the "unwelcome" organisation. Even those who were not members of the BAJ were told that

they had been "where they should not have been" and met with "the colleagues they should not have met". Those who wanted to join the Belarusian Association of Journalists were advised to join the Belarusian Union of Journalists instead. On those who already made their choice, the ideology officials tried to put pressure through their bosses: they called local editorial boards, told them about the membership of their employees in the "unwelcome organisation" and warned them about dangers of such meetings.

**On 10 February**, human rights activist and member of the BAJ Leanid Sudalenka from Homiel received a reply from the Ministry for Internal Affairs to his demand to identify the person who was posting slanderous and insulting information about him and other democratic activists at the web site gomelbest.com from a Belarusian IP address. Ihar Charnienka, the head of the department for investigation of high-technology crimes, wrote in the official reply that the Ministry for Internal Affairs "did not have the above-mentioned technical capacity". Earlier, Leanid Sudalenka repeatedly asked the Homiel regional police department to identify the trespasser. From there, the inquiry was forwarded to the Chyhunachny district police department in Homiel but it brought no result.

**On 18 February**, Viktor Andrejeu, the founder of the web site orshatut.by from Orsha, said that KGB officers were advising advertisers to stop cooperation with his media outlet, because the site was "not quite the same it should be". One of his regular advertisers asked to take his advertising from the web site, having referred to his private conversation with an acquaintance from the KGB, who had recommended him to do it in order to avoid problems in his business activities later.

**On 3 March**, Maryna Malchanava, a freelance reporter of Bobrujskij Kurier, said that someone was sending insulting and threatening emails in her name. They were addressed to two candidates in the local elections who represented the civic campaign Tell the Truth - Alena Miadzviedzieva and Nastassia Miadzviedzieva. An unknown person created an email account at Mail.ru in the name of the journalist for this purpose. In one of such emails, the candidates were threatened in the name of journalists. Maryna Malchanava believed that these messages originated from "fairly well-known agencies", which wanted to discredit her in the eyes of the local community.

**On 8 April**, the Hlybokaje district court (Judge Andrej Tarasievich) fined the regional independent newspaper Prefect-Info for 25 basic units (3,750,000 roubles) for a number of violations of the law on advertising in the October issue. The editorial board was not able to find the money to pay this considerable amount. The publication of the newspaper was virtually suspended at that time already due to financial difficulties. "I often see similar violations in our district newspaper and not only there", said Dzmitry Lupach, Prefect-Info's editor-in-chief. "Sadly, I must say that further publication of our newspaper is no longer possible. We eked out a living from the advertising revenue. The authorities impeded our work in every possible way. The banks' managers were prohibited from placing advertisements with us, and businessmen were also told, "Think about whom you are giving the advertisement to; they are in opposition; you may have problems later". Then, many people refused to place advertisement with us".

**On 7 May**, Jonathan Rugman, a reporter of the British Channel 4 News, was refused entry to Belarus. According to the journalist's message on Twitter, he was "taken off the train and sent packing". The incident took place in the border checkpoint Gudogaj.

Press secretary of the State Border Committee Alaksandr Cishchanka explained the incident by the fact that Rugman lacked a valid visa or a ticket for the world hockey championship or an accreditation for this sports event. Jonathan Rugman, in his turn, affirmed that he had been deported from Belarus despite the fact that he had had an accreditation for the world hockey championship. According to him, Belarusian border guards took him off the train Vilnius – Minsk because "something was wrong with the passport".

*Background information: Jonathan Rugman focuses on issues of foreign policy, terrorism and international development. He reported about revolutions and uprisings in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Bahrain, covered the problem of hunger in Somalia, the Eurozone crisis, the earthquake in Haiti etc.*

**On 29 July**, KGB officers tried to recruit journalist Jauhien Skrabiec from Brest as an informant. According to Jauhien Skrabiec, it happened when he tried to get the position of the head of office for tourism, marketing and foreign economic activities in the bus garage № 1 of Brestablautatrans JSV. When he came to an interview with the company's director, the latter said that his employment depended on his conversation with two persons who were expecting him in the office of chief engineer. The two unknown persons indicated that they knew a lot about Jauhien Skrabiec's life and activities in the last year. After that, they told him that, after taking his new job, the journalist should continue to be engaged in civil society (but not radical) activities and keep in touch with them. They also offered him to sign a document according to which he had agreed to become an informant of the Belarusian KGB. Plain-clothed men expressed interest in Jauhien Skrabiec's collaboration with the Belarusian Radio Racyja. They warned him that if he began actively working there he should not be surprised about getting a fine of four million roubles soon. According to Jauhien Skrabiec, he categorically refused the offer of "cooperation".

**On 31 July**, in the Kastychnicki district court in Minsk, police officers copied personal data of the journalists who came to cover the trial of human rights activist Andrej Bandarenka, who was charged with hooliganism. A plain-clothed man, who was copying this information, left unanswered the question of a BelaPAN reporter about why he was doing it.

**On 14 August**, Jury Lashchynski, the programme director of the Belarusian Radio Racyja, was again refused entry to Belarus. The Belarusian consulate in Bialystok stamped the journalist's passport accordingly without providing a reason. Jury Lashchynski applied for a single-entry tourist visa. Previously, Jury Lashchynski was refused the Belarusian visa in August 2013, and during the 2006 presidential election, his valid visa was cancelled.

## Barriers to Printing and Distribution of Mass Media

**On 12 February**, it became known that the Viciebsk regional library discontinued its subscription to the non-governmental newspapers *Nasha Niva*, *Narodnaja Vola* and *BelHazieta* for 2014. The librarians told the readers who were unhappy about this novelty that it was an order from the regional department for ideology, culture and youth affairs. Director of the regional library Alaksandr Siomkin, in his turn, explained the cancellation of the subscription by the "budget cuts". However, in 2014, the regional library subscribed to a greater number of periodicals than in 2013. A similar situation existed in other libraries of the city: for instance, the central city library named after Gorky also did not subscribe to *BelHazieta*, *Narodnaja Vola* and *Nasha Niva* for 2014.

**On 20 March** in Smarhon, local activist Uladzimir Shulzhycki was detained for distribution of the small-circulation information bulletin *Smarhonski Hrak*. The police seized 31 copies of the bulletin from the activist and drew out a report under Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code – illegal dissemination of mass media products. In the evening of the same day, the police search the apartment of the distributor and found another copy of the bulletin there. **On 17 April**, the Smarhon district court fined Uladzimir Shulzhycki for 3,000,000 roubles. According to the court, Shulzhycki should have concluded first a distribution contract with the legal entity – the editorial board of the bulletin. However, the law on mass media does

not provide for registration of print media with the circulation of up to 299 copies and for creation of a legal entity. Accordingly, a legal entity, with which the distributor should have concluded the contract, have not existed.

**On 3 April**, the Bieshankovichy district court ruled in the case of Gieorhi Stankievich, the publisher of the small-circulation newspaper Kryvinka. He received the maximum fine of 50 basic units (7,500,000 roubles). The court found that Gieorhi Stankievich had violated the rules of distribution of the publication and requirements to publishing activities (Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code). According to the police report, he violated the law on mass media by handing out the newspaper to passers-by in the market in Bieshankovichy. Judge Natalla Reut refused to postpone the proceedings for one day despite the publisher's request, who wanted his lawyer to be able to come from Minsk. The judge also rejected a petition by Gieorhi Stankievich to invite an interpreter from Russian to Belarusian to the hearing (the trial was conducted in Russian). The judge said that he was only delaying the trial with his requests. As a result, Judge Reut expelled Gieorhi Stankievich from the courtroom, having accused him of violating the order – after he repeatedly filed motions for her disqualification. **On 20 May**, Gieorhi Stankievich received in the mail the decision of the Viciebsk regional court on his appeal against the ruling of the Bieshankovichy district court. The ruling of the court of original jurisdiction was upheld.

*It was the third prosecution already for teacher Gieorhi Stankievich for distribution of Kryvinka. In 2010, he was fined for 20 basic units and in 2012, the fine amounted to 40 basic units already.*

**On 20 April** at the Belarusian – Lithuanian border, journalist of the newspaper Novy Chas Anna Aziemsha was refused entry in Belarus because she had information bulletins about election monitoring in her luggage. According to the journalist, in the border checkpoint Kamienny Loh, during an inspection of her car, customs officers noticed information bulletins "Eight Interesting Facts about Elections" (130 copies) and "An Observer Reports" (65 copies). As a result, the customs officers did not confiscate anything but ordered her to leave the territory of Belarus and throw out or pass the bulletins to someone. Only after having done that, Anna Aziemsha was able to enter the country.

**On 2 June**, it became known that the editorial board of the Baranavichy independent newspaper Intex-Press was again denied distribution through the subscription catalogues and newsstands. The publication asked the state distribution organisations for cooperation in the second half of 2014. All of them sent the non-motivated refusals. Thus, for the ninth year already, the independent regional newspaper Intex-Press has been trying in vain to get back in the distribution system, from which it was expelled together with other independent periodicals on the eve of the 2006 presidential election.

**On 12 August**, the Mahilou district court fined Ihar Barysau, the editor of the small-circulation newspaper Nash Mahilou, for 30 basic units. Judge Stanislau Leuchanka found him guilty of violating the law on mass media and illegal distribution of mass media products (Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code). The journalist claimed at the hearing that he had not distributed the newspaper Nash Mahilou and the bulletin Social Democrat but had been simply carrying them in his personal car. In court, Ihar Barysau stated that he considered the administrative proceedings against him to be politically motivated. He admitted that he had been carrying the circulation of newspapers that exceeded the one declared in the output (299 copies, which do not require registration of a periodical as a mass media outlet) but pointed out that this restriction was not consistent with the Constitution and international agreements.

**On 29 August** in Minsk, Raman Khalilau, an activist of the anarchist movement, was summoned to the Saviecki district police department. According to Khalilau, an administrative case was already prepared against him under Art. 17.11 of the Administrative Code "Manufacturing, distribution and (or) storage of extremist materials". The detention report was

also prepared in advance. At the same time, no expert examination was carried out. "When the lawyer asked the police officer, who was in charge of the case, whether an expert examination was scheduled, he said that the court would take the decision", the activist said.

The examination of the case took place on the same day in the Saviecki district court in Minsk. Judge Arciom Bieskishski ruled that all 92 publications, which the activist possessed, were the extremist ones and sentenced Raman Khalilau to a ten-day arrest. The books, booklets and newspapers, which the police found during the search of Raman Khalilau's apartment, became evidence in the case on the extremist materials. This list included the works, which has no relation to politics, for example, the books "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu (recognised as one of the finest ancient philosophical treaties on the art of strategy) and "Social Anarchism versus Lifestyle Anarchism", the brochure "NPP: Total Truth about Security. Antinuclear Resistance", the magazine *Autonom*, leaflets "How to Organise a Strike", the brochure "Strategic Aim of Anarchism", the newspaper *Nasha Pravda* and the book "Chernobyl's Lessons".

**On 11 September**, Alaksandra Drankova, a judge of the Orsha district court, fined Tacciana Siachko, a civil society activist from Orsha who had been putting leaflets in mailboxes, for 40 basic units for violating Art. 22.9 of the Administrative Code (illegal distribution of mass media products). Tacciana Siachko, who disagreed with the court's ruling, asked the Ministry of Information for clarification whether the leaflets were considered mass media. Deputy minister Uladzimir Matusievich said in his reply that, according to the GOST, such "printed products" were not mass media.

**On 21 October**, the Viciebsk regional court upheld the ruling of the court of original jurisdiction against Tacciana Siachko despite the fact that the official letter from the Ministry of Information had been entered upon the appeal's records.

**On 19 September**, a plain-clothed man detained civil society activist Volha Krapocina in the centre of Hrodna when she was putting leaflets calling for a return of Crimea to Ukraine on cars with the Russian licence plates. Volha Krapocina was held for several hours in the district police department; the police seized sixteen leaflets "for examination" and then searched her apartment and seized a laptop computer and two flash cards (later, they returned the equipment). **On 18 November**, the Leninski district court in Hrodna fined Volha Krapocina for 30 basic units under Art. 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code. Judge Dzmitry Bubiienchyk saw the distribution of leaflets as a "violation of the law on mass media". **On 16 December**, the Hrodna regional court dismissed her appeal. Judge A. Koziel examined the appeal; the hearing lasted for about three minutes.

## Restrictions of the Freedom of Internet Activities

**On 28 January**, unknown hackers broke into the web site *Sober Look - spaseostranu.com*, which is owned by Homiel public campaign "Drink No More – Start Living!" The web site's administrator Kanstancin Zhukouski said that the hackers had changed the logo and posted a material about gays. According to the activists of the anti-alcohol campaign, the Belarusian secret services were behind the hackers: the attack was launched on the day of the funeral of Euromaidan hero Mikhail Zhyzniewski near Homiel. The web site published a story about him.

**On 13 March** at noon Minsk time, unknown persons tried to break into a server of the information web site *charter97.org* and then launched a DDoS-attack, which lasted for several hours using resources of a Russian backbone Internet provider. The editorial board of

*charter97.org* linked the attack with the active coverage of the events in Ukraine by *charter97.org*.

**On 14 March**, two articles appeared on the Mahilou-based independent online resource Free Format. Alaksandr Lenieuski, the owner of *formats.by*, was the alleged author of the articles. The publications, which were posted on the web site, discredited and insulted civil society and political activists of the Mahilou region. All the entries, which were posted after 9 September 2013, also disappeared from the web site. The journalists from Mahilou, who collaborated earlier with the editorial board of Free Format, said that they had not posted any news on the web site Free Format after the launch of their new project "Milk" (*milkmag.by*) on 10 February, and the libellous content had been placed there by hackers. One of the journalists, Alaksandr Burakou, also said that an unknown person was sending provocative emails in his name to a large group of people from his pseudo-address. **On 19 March**, Alaksandr Burakou, a co-owner of the domain name *formats.by*, filed a complaint to the department for investigation of high-technology crimes in the Mahilou regional police department asking them to find the hackers. **On 7 August**, Alaksandr Burakou was summoned to the Mahilou interdistrict department of the Investigative committee. Investigator Maksim Rubieka said that the criminal proceedings had been initiated following the complaint about the hacking of the web site Free Format and the search for the persons involved was under way. As the hackers used proxy-servers and IP addresses registered in Sweden and the Netherlands for their attacks, the police sent inquires to these countries.

**On 21 March**, Kanstancin Mardvincau, the editor of the independent Viciebsk web site *dyjalog.info*, reported the blocking of this online resource. According to him, an intentionally sent virus caused it. The latest materials posted on the web site dealt with the election campaign as well as a scandalous fact – the mass poisoning of prisoners in the Orsha colony.

**In the evening of 25 March**, during several hours, the site of the independent newspaper *Nasha Niva* was inaccessible. On that day in Minsk, the Freedom Day rally was taking place and the newspaper conducted a live webcast of the event. During the time the web site was blocked, the newspaper worked through social networks. The web site of the Belarusian service of Radio Liberty also posted a message about the blocking of the signal of live video broadcasting of the rally. The problems arose only in the territory of Belarus. There were signs of intentional external interference.

*The blocking of popular online resources happens in Belarus virtually during all important political events. The most massive restriction of access to independent news sites took place on the day of the 2010 presidential election.*

**On 1 August**, the editorial board of the web site of the international consortium EuroBelarus reported a hacker attack. During several days, unknown persons posted provocative materials about the events in Ukraine on the web site *euobelarus.info* and actively disseminated them in social networks. According to editor Andrej Aleksandrovich, the attack on the web site began **on 24 July**. The site's staffers linked this incident with the active position of the editorial board in covering the Russian - Ukrainian conflict: from the first days of confrontation, they posted many articles in the special section "Events in Ukraine. Belarusian Perspective".

**On 1 August**, the Russian Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media blocked an article on the Belarusian web site *charter97.org*. As the hosting company informed the web site's editorial board, the online page with the article "The Siberians Want to Proclaim the "Siberian Republic" was blocked in the territory of the Russian Federation based on the request from the General Prosecutor's Office of Russia. According to the Russian prosecutors, the information contained calls to mass disorder and extremist activities.

**On 14 August**, at approximately 18.00, the information online resource *charter97.org* began experiencing problems with access in the territory of Belarus. However, the site was accessible through proxy servers. The investigation conducted by the site revealed that the blocking happened on the gateway of the governmental data transfer network Belpak (a division of Beltelecom). The access was restored after 23.00.

**On 15 August**, the web site of Charter'97 was again blocked during several hours in the entire territory of Belarus. Managers of Beltelecom refused to answer questions from journalists. Already in April 2011, the General Prosecutor's Office of Belarus adopted a decision to restrict access to the information web site Charter'97 referring to a violation of law they committed – making calls for participation in an unsanctioned event.

**On 19 December**, problems arose in Belarus with access to a number of Belarusian information online resources: belaruspartisan.org, charter97.org, udf.by, 21.by, gazetaby.com, zautra.by and some others. The sites reported that the problems occurred to the users in Belarus; visitors from other countries were able to access the web sites.

**On 20 December**, IP addresses of the web site belapan.by, belapan.com and naviny.by, which belong to the Belarusian news agency BelaPAN, an officially registered mass media outlet. It was not known who did it and why. In this connection, BelaPAN issued a statement, which said, "...the decision to block the IP addresses could have been taken only by the authorities, as there is a state monopoly in Belarus on awarding the IP addresses. BelaPAN did not receive any official warning or notification about the eventual blocking". After the IP addresses were changed, on 21 December, the access was restored, but at about 14.00 on the same day, the new addresses were blocked as well. The hosting company and the state monopolist Beltelecom said that they had no information about it. The attempts to receive answers to this question in the Ministry of Information were fruitless. The web sites of BelaPAN resumed their work despite the blocking.

On the same day, the Operational and Analytical Centre under the President of Belarus excluded the online resource Onliner.by from the register of the national domain zone. According to the communique of the Centre, it was done at the request of the Ministry of Trade in connection of the identified violations of trade laws. A day before, the Ministry of Trade said that it would close the online shops, which were quoting prices in conventional units.

**On 22 December**, the BAJ petitioned the General Prosecutor's Office, the Interior Ministry's department for investigation of high-technology crimes and Operational and Analytical Centre under the President of Belarus about the blocking of several online information resources. The petition demanded to urgently remedy the violation of rights and legitimate interests of citizens and organisations, which had become victims of restriction of access to the web site, to conduct investigation of their illegal blocking, to identify those responsible for violation of the law and to bring them to a statutory liability, as several articles of the Constitution and the Criminal and Administrative Codes of the Republic of Belarus were violated.

**On 23 December**, the BelaPAN news agency issued a statement about the continuing blocking of the IP addresses of the web sites belapan.by, belapan.com and naviny.by, in which it demanded the government agencies to investigate the facts of illegal blocking and to make public the information about the outcome of this investigation.

Nevertheless, the access to certain web sites was restricted until the end of 2014 and in early 2015. Apparently, such a serious attack on online resources was associated with a sharp increase of interest of Belarusians in the objective information because of another currency crisis in the country.