

Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)

MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

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CONTENTS

SITUATION IN THE SPHERE OF MASS MEDIA IN 2016 (OVERVIEW)	3
CHANGES IN LEGISLATION	5
VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS OF MASS MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS, CONFLICTS IN THE SPHERE OF MASS MEDIA	8
Criminal cases	8
Other court cases (except for administrative prosecution)	9
Detention of journalists, judicial administrative prosecution	11
Physical attacks against journalists	17
Seizure of equipment, damages, confiscation	19
Warnings of the Ministry of Information	19
Restrictions on the free use of the Web	20
Violations related to access to information	21
Violations during the elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus	24
Economic policy in mass media field	25
Other forms of pressure and violation of rights of journalists and mass media	27

SITUATION IN THE SPHERE OF MASS MEDIA IN 2016 (OVERVIEW)

The main factor that influenced the media situation in Belarus in 2016 was the elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. They took place in September 2016 against the backdrop of a worsening economic situation and a complex foreign policy environment. The Belarusian authorities sought to receive a positive assessment of the elections by international bodies, and as the election campaign approached and during its course, direct repression of journalists decreased. However, at the system level, the situation has not changed for the better, and the legislation in the field of media regulation has only become tougher. This shows the situational nature and volatility of some positive changes in the media sector in 2016.

Proof of this is the persecution of Belarusian freelance journalists for cooperation with foreign media without an accreditation. For the first time, the Belarusian authorities used the practice of bringing them to justice for the "illegal production and distribution of mass media products" (Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code) in April 2014. By August 2015, courts fined Belarusian journalists on 68 occasions for materials that appeared in foreign media. In all cases, the basis for bringing them to justice was not the content of their materials, but the very fact of their appearance in foreign media. In August 2015, on the eve of the presidential elections, Alexander Lukashenka promised to deal with the situation, after which the harassment of journalists for cooperation with foreign media was temporarily suspended. However, since January 2016 this practice has been resumed in the Homiel region. In the first four months of 2016 the courts held journalists from Homiel Kantantsin Zhukouski and Larysa Shchyrakova administratively liable ten times for cooperation with the TV channel *Belsat* (Poland), fining them for a total amount equivalent to 3,500 Euro. In May 2016, as the elections to the House of Representatives approached, the persecution of freelance journalists again stopped and until the end of 2016 new reports on administrative violations were no longer drawn up for cooperation with foreign media. However, in 2017, the situation changed again for the worse.

Among the positive changes in the media sector in 2016 (which unfortunately also proved to be unsustainable), the Belarusian Association of Journalists recorded a decrease in the number of detentions of journalists: thirteen detentions against nineteen in 2015 (and 167 in the crisis year of 2011). On the other hand, in 2016 there were unpunished cases of use of physical violence against journalists by police. The most resonant of them was the detention and beating in the courthouse of Paviel Dabravolski, the journalist of the popular online portal *tut.by*. On the same day, Paviel Dabravolski was held administratively liable and fined for resisting police officers and hooliganism. He officially recorded the beatings and applied to the Investigative Committee, but the latter refused to instigate criminal proceedings against the police officers.

Arrests and criminal prosecution of Belarusian citizens for online publications caused serious concern in 2016. During the year, four bloggers and media columnists were arrested in connection with the initiation of criminal cases against them on charges of inciting hatred on the grounds of race, nationality, religion, language or other social affiliation (Article 130 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus). Eduard Palchys, the founder of the web site 1863x.com, was convicted on 26 October 2016 to one year and nine months of restriction of freedom without referral to a correctional institution and released in the courtroom. By that time, he spent about ten months in custody. The web site 1863.com was created about two years earlier; it sharply criticised the "Russian world" and the Russian authorities.

In December 2016, Yuri Pavlovets, Dmitry Alimkin and Sergey Shiptenko were imprisoned. Their materials on Russian web sites Regnum, Lenta.ru, EADaily contained criticism of Belarusian statehood and, according to the Belarusian authorities, could sow discord between the peoples of Russia and Belarus. The criminal proceedings were initiated on the

recommendation of the Ministry of Information on the basis of the conclusion of the National Expert Commission on Extremism (operating under the Ministry of Information), which stated that some articles of the authors could contain incitement to national hatred or discord.

The Ministry of Information continued the practice of extrajudicial sanctions against the media. Eight printed media outlets and eight online resources received warnings. Since the receipt of two warnings during the year can create grounds for stopping the publication of the media, such measures have a serious "cooling effect". Forty-seven web sites were also blocked (twenty-one for distributing information aimed at selling narcotic drugs, thirteen for distributing extremist materials, eleven for improper advertising, and two for promoting pornography, violence and cruelty). Subsequently, access to one site was restored.

The policy of discrimination against a number of independent media by the state-owned *Belposhta* and *Belsajuzdruk* distribution systems continued. These companies dominate the subscription and retail media distribution markets. Problems with the distribution of independent printed media in state networks arose on the eve of the presidential election campaign in 2006. Then, *Belposhta* refused to include in the subscription catalogues, and *Belsajuzdruk* branches - to sell about twenty independent socio-political newspapers through their newsstands. As a result, many of the non-state printed media ceased to appear. In 2016, at least eight registered socio-political newspapers, which remained on the market, continued to face difficulties in distribution. At the same time, the subscription to the state press was conducted with the use of an administrative resource; budgetary financing of the state media continued. Thus, the republican budget for 2017 provides for the allocation of 97,666,846 BYN (about 46.2 million Euro) to finance state media. This is about 1.4 million Euro more than in 2016. Financing is allocated by the government on a non-competitive and non-transparent basis.

CHANGES IN LEGISLATION

On 11 May 2016, the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Introduction of Changes and Amendments to Certain Laws of the Republic of Belarus” was adopted.

A) The Law of the Republic of Belarus “On the Rights of the Child” was supplemented by **Chapter 4-1** “Protecting children from the information that is harmful to their health and development”. It provides for children’s right to protection from the information that is harmful to their health and development (Article 37-1). It includes the information:

- inducing desire to consume alcoholic and low alcoholic drinks, beer, narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, their analogues, toxic or other intoxicating substances, and tobacco products;
- inciting to the commission of a crime or other socially dangerous act including the engagement in prostitution, begging, vagrancy, gambling, committing acts involving the production and distribution of pornographic materials or objects of pornographic nature;
- positively assessing a crime or idealizing criminals, encouraging the behaviour that infringes on human dignity, including the commission of violent acts against people or animals;
- displaying the bullying of a person or a group of people or their humiliation in connection with ethnic origin, nationality, race, religion, language, gender, belief or views, social status or illness;
- encouraging or positively assessing cruelty, physical, mental or sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and sexual relations involving children;
- encouraging the infliction of bodily harm or suicide, describing the means or circumstances of suicide;
- containing technics or other materials about the ways to manufacture objects that are dangerous for life and health of people and about their use;
- encouraging habits that are contrary to the formation of a healthy lifestyle;
- containing obscene words and expressions;
- discrediting the institution of family and marriage and family relations;
- of intimidating nature including in the form of depiction or description in a humiliating way of death, incident, accident, disaster, disease and (or) their consequences; and
- containing pornographic materials and (or) eroticism.

It is prohibited to distribute the information products and, among other things, mass media products and printed publications without assigning a marker of the age category that represents a sound and (or) a visual warning indicating the age category of children among which the distribution of information products is allowed:

- "0+" – without age restrictions (universal);
- "6+" – intended for persons who have reached the age of 6;
- "12+" – intended for persons who have reached the age of 12;
- "16+" – intended for persons who have reached the age of 16;
- "18+" – intended for persons who have reached the age of 18 (Article 37-2).

The age category marker is assigned by the legal entities and individual entrepreneurs that are involved in producing information products.

The Public Advisory Council shall be established under the government of the Republic of Belarus to protect children from the information that is harmful to their health and development; the decisions of the Council shall be of advisory nature (Article 37-3).

B) Amendments were introduced to the **Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media”**. In particular, **Article 17** was supplemented with the paragraphs 5-1 and 5-2 as follows:

“5-1. Before the distribution of mass media products the legal entity that is entrusted with the functions of the editorial board of a mass media outlet is under an obligation to assign a marker of the age category to the products of the mass media outlet in accordance with the procedure and criteria established by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus except in the cases where the marker is optional under the Paragraph 5-2, Part 1 of this Article.

5-2. The distribution of products of a mass media outlet including the products of a foreign mass media outlet without a marker of the age category that is assigned in accordance with the procedure and criteria established by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus is prohibited, except for:

TV and radio products broadcast live;

TV and radio programs of information-analytical, information, cultural, educational, sports and spiritual-educational character;

foreign TV and radio programs distributed in the territory of the Republic of Belarus without a modification in their form or content;

printed mass media specializing in the dissemination of information of general political, scientific, industrial and practical, normative industrial and practical, mass political, official, spiritual-educational, reference, cultural, educational, abstractive and statistical character; and

information messages and (or) materials distributed through the global computer network of Internet.

... The marker of the age category is assigned to the information resources (their constituent parts) located in the global computer network of Internet by their owners on a voluntary basis in accordance with the procedure and criteria established by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus”.

In accordance with the amendments introduced in **Article 49** of the Law on mass media, a written warning of the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus may be issued to the editorial board of a mass media outlet or the owner of an information resource (its constituent part) located in the global computer network of Internet, in the case of:

- absence of a marker of the age category on the products of a mass media outlet produced in the territory of the Republic of Belarus when the presence of such marker is mandatory;
- distribution of the products of a foreign mass media outlet without a marker of the age category when the presence of such marker is mandatory.

C) Amendments and additions were introduced in the **Law of the Republic of Belarus “On the Publishing Activities in the Republic of Belarus”**, which regulates the activities of publishers and distributors of printed publications (except for mass media).

On 25 October 2016, the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 871 “On Measures to Implement the Law of the Republic of Belarus from 11 May 2016 “On Introduction of Changes and Amendments to Certain Laws of the Republic of Belarus”, which enters into force on 1 July 2017, approved:

- the Regulations on the procedure for assigning the marker of the age category to

information products and some aspects of its distribution;

- the Regulations on the criteria for determining the age category of children among which the distribution of information products is allowed;
- the Regulations on the Public Advisory Council to protect children from the information that is harmful to their health and development;
- the composition of the Public Advisory Council to protect children from the information that is harmful to their health and development.

On 18 October, the Law “**On the Republican Budget for 2017**” was adopted. The law provides for the allocation of about 97,666,846 BYN (about 46.2 million Euro) to finance state-owned mass media, which is by about 1.4 million Euro more than in 2016. It includes 80,531,381 BYN (about 38.1 million Euro) for television and radio broadcasting, 7,071,874 BYN (about 3.3 million Euro) for periodicals and publishing houses, and 10,063,591 BYN (about 4.8 million Euro) for “other media-related matters”. Meanwhile, the financing of television and radio broadcasting was increased, and the financing of periodicals and publishing houses was reduced in comparison with the previous year.

On 21 December, the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 1060 “*On the approval of the list of printed mass media, the editorial boards of which will receive support from the republican budget in 2017*” was adopted. Twenty-six state-owned newspapers and magazines were included in this list on a non-competitive and non-transparent basis.

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

1. Criminal cases

Case of Aliaksandr Aliesin

On 25 January, it became known that the Committee for State Security (KGB) had suspended the criminal case against **Aliaksandr Aliesin**. The probable cause of the suspension of the case was the complete removal by **the Law of the Republic of Belarus from 5 January 2016** of Article 356.1 – “Establishment of collaboration with a special service, a security or intelligence agency of a foreign state” – from the Criminal Code.

It shall be reminded that Aliaksandr Aliesin, a military expert and columnist of the weekly *Belorusy i Rynok*, **was detained** by Belarusian special services on **25 November 2014**. It became known only in early December; however, the KGB failed to report the reasons for detention or the whereabouts of the journalist. It later emerged that he was kept in the KGB jail. Initially, he was charged with treason (Article 356 of the Criminal Code) and establishing collaboration with a special service, a security or intelligence agency of a foreign state (Article 356-1). **On 10 December 2014**, Aliesin was released on his own recognisance. The charge of treason was dropped; only the charge of collaboration with a foreign special service remained.

Case of Eduard Palchys

On 25 August, a judge of the Centralny district court in Minsk found “extremist” nine articles published on the web site *1863x.com* in connection with the criminal case of **Eduard Palchys**, the detained editor of the web site. The trial was held in closed session. According to Palchys’ lawyer, Hanna Bakhtsina, the court considered only the conclusions of the expertise and not the materials from the web site.

Eduard Palchys (pen-name Jhon Silver) is a founder of *1863x.com* – a blog devoted to the analysis of current political events in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine as well as the Belarusian history and culture. In 2015, he was charged with inciting hatred on grounds of race, nationality, religion, language or other social identity (Article 130, Part 1 of the Criminal Code) as well as with distribution of pornographic materials (Article 343 of the Criminal Code). In October 2015, he left Belarus to avoid the prosecution and was put on the international wanted list; he was then detained in the Russian Federation when crossing the border between Ukraine and Russia on 23 January 2016. Eduard Palchys was transferred from the detention facility in Bryansk to the pre-trial detention centre in Minsk in late May. He remained in custody awaiting the trial. Belarusian human rights organisations have recognized Eduard Palchys a political prisoner and the case against him – a politically motivated one.

On 28 October, the city court in Minsk sentenced blogger Eduard Palchys to one year and nine months of custodial restraint without sending him to prison. The blogger was found guilty of inciting hatred on the grounds of race, nationality, religion, language or other social identity (Article 130, Part 1 of the Criminal Code) as well as with distributing pornographic materials (Article 343 of the Criminal Code).

Eduard Palchys was released from custody in the courtroom. Taking into account the time Palchys spent in custody and in a special medical facility during the forensic examination, the remainder of the sentence amounted to two months.

Criminal persecution of authors of *Regnum*

On 6 December, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus arrested bloggers **Yuri Pavlovets** (in Minsk) and **Dmitry Alimkin** (in Brest) and opened criminal proceedings against them for inciting hatred (Article 130 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus) based on their publications on the Russian web sites *Regnum*, *Lenta.ru*, and *EADaily*.

On 9 December, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus reported the arrest of **Sergey Shiptenko**, a staffer of the Russian web site *Regnum* in the framework of the criminal investigation under Article 130 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. The proceedings were opened on suspicion of “committing deliberate acts aimed at inciting national and other social enmity among different groups of population of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus as well as enmity on the grounds of national, linguistic and other social identity, expressed in the preparation and online publication of articles under the pen name Artur Grigoriev”.

The suspects’ houses were searched and their equipment was seized.

Initially, it was reported that the criminal proceedings were opened under Article 130, Part 3 of the Criminal Code (committing a crime by a group of persons), which provides for a punishment of imprisonment for five to twelve years. Subsequently, the charge was changed to Part 1 of this article, which allows for alternative forms of punishment (fine, arrest, restriction of liberty for up to ten years or imprisonment for the same period).

The basis for opening the criminal proceedings was established by the letters of the Ministry of Information to the Investigative Committee about the presence of signs of extremism in publications of these authors. The Ministry of Information referred to a conclusion of the Republican expert commission under the Ministry for the evaluation of information products for the purpose of identifying presence or absence of signs of extremism in them.

The opinions of Belarusian public about the detention of authors of *Regnum* have remained divided. Many have seen these actions as directed at the defence of national sovereignty but others have seen them as a threat to freedom of expression. The editorial board of *Regnum* described the actions of Belarusian law-enforcement bodies as “provocative and treacherous against Belarus and Russia”.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called on the Belarusian authorities to immediately release the detainees. “The posts of these three bloggers are controversial but that does not justify their imprisonment,” said Johann Bihl, the head of RSF’s Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. “According to international standards, their provisional detention is neither necessary nor proportionate”.

2. Other court cases (except for administrative prosecution)

On 2 March, the Maskouski district court in Minsk ruled to pay a compensation for moral damages to Anton Surapin in the amount of 8 million BYR, which was equal to about 350 Euro (the plaintiff demanded a compensation amounting to 190 million BYR) for an illegal arrest.

In **2012**, the young Belarusian press photographer spent over one month in the Belarusian KGB detention centre. At that time, Anton Surapin was accused of preparing an illegal crossing of the state border by Swedes, although the journalist was just the first to publish photos of the “teddy bear airdrop” on his web site. The KGB officially announced the termination of the criminal prosecution of Anton Surapin in June **2013**. Surapin’s arrest led the list of ten most absurd arrests of the year in a ranking prepared by Amnesty International.

On 16 May, the Minsk city court, having considered the appeals by Surapin and the Ministry of Finance, upheld the ruling of the court of first instance.

On 17 June, the Centralny district court in Minsk rejected the claim of Lieanid Sudalienka, a human rights activist and member of the BAJ, against *Belorusskaya Voyennaya Gazeta*. Judge Maryna Kazlova took the decision. The human rights activist from Homiel, **Lieanid Sudalienka** in April 2016 filed a lawsuit to invalidate and refute the information disseminated by *Belorusskaya Voyennaya Gazeta*. The lawsuit designated the newspaper's journalist **Uladzimir Kazheunikau** and the state institution "Military Information Agency of the Armed Forces of Belarus *Vajar*" (*Belorusskaya Voyennaya Gazeta* is one of the three periodicals that **make part of the Vajar agency**) as co-defendants. The publication in question was an article from 10 March 2016 entitled "Who benefits from defaming the Belarusian Army?" The article dealt with an incident related to **the runaway of two soldiers** because of the beatings and threats from the military unit No. 92616 located in Brest. Lieanid Sudalienka then initiated a **petition** of 75 citizens to the Minister of Defence of Belarus demanding to stop hazing in the Belarusian Army. The publication entitled "Who benefits from defaming the Belarusian Army?" said that the human rights activist was engaged in "*anti-Army propaganda*", "*denunciations*", "*discrediting his country*" and "*destroying society*". Sudalienka wrote to the periodical demanding an apology and a retraction but Colonel **Aliaksiej Pashkievich**, the head of the state institution "Military Information Agency of the Armed Forces of Belarus *Vajar*" **decided that there was no reason to do so**.

On 26 September, the Centralny district court in Minsk decided to block the web site of the anarchist grouping *Pramien*, **pramen.io**, because of the allegedly "extremist materials" published on this web site. "The true reason is that our web site represents an alternative to the official point of view on the events in Belarus and the world", said a representative of the grouping. "Its blocking is a logical step of the state in destroying any media outside of its control".

On 22 December, the Economic court in Minsk ruled that **Juras Karmanau**, a reporter of Associated Press, must write and publish a retraction of his story about the excessive level of strontium in milk produced by farmer Mikalaj Chubianok. The court also ordered to Karmanau to compensate for the legal costs (840 BYN) and services of Milkavita JSC's lawyer (1,500BYN).

The court took the decision despite the fact that Aksana Drabysheuskaja, an employee of the Minsk centre for hygiene and epidemiology, who had run the test, confirmed during the court proceedings that the Centre issued a measurement report to Karmanau where the "native results" for strontium had exceeded the norm by the factor of ten. Later, the Centre said that the results were "incorrect".

Article 52 of the Law on mass media stipulates that the journalist "cannot be held responsible for disseminating untrue information if this information was received from state bodies, other state organisations and their officials". However, the court refused to designate as co-defendant the Minsk centre for hygiene and epidemiology – the state body that had provided the information to the reporter.

In **April 2016**, reporters of Associated Press conducted an investigation of the active use of contaminated lands of the Chernobyl zone for agriculture. The journalists learned that farmer Mikalaj Chubianok who ran a dairy farm a few kilometres from the signs "Stop! Radiation!" was selling about two tonnes of milk daily to *Milkavita JSC* plant in Khojniki. About 90% of *Milkavita JSC* products from Khojniki were exported to Russia. In accordance with the measurement report of the Minsk city centre for hygiene and epidemiology, which the journalists received, the milk contained 37.5 Bq / kg of strontium while the permissible level was 3.7 Bq / kg. The journalists informed the management of *Milkavita JSC* about the test results and quoted Maja Fiedarchuk, the plant's representative, in their story. She told that the "own test of the plant's laboratory shows that the milk complies with the norms and contains an average of 2.85 Bq / kg of strontium". After the publication, the Department for the Mitigation of the Aftermath of the Disaster at the Chernobyl NPP of the Ministry for Emergencies conducted an investigation

that did not find an excess of strontium-90 in the milk. *Milkavita JSC* referred to these findings in its lawsuit.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists adopted a statement on the ruling of the Economic court in Minsk on the lawsuit of *Milkavita JSC* against journalist Juras Karmanau where it expressed concern regarding the situation with freedom of speech after the ruling of the Economic court in Minsk on the lawsuit of *Milkavita JSC* against journalist of Associated Press Juras Karmanau because it called into question the very possibility of meaningful investigative journalism in Belarus.

On 26 December, the Maskouski district court in Minsk announced the ruling on the lawsuit of Dr Majsiejenka against *Onliner Ltd*, journalist of *Onliner.by* **Aliaksandr Charnukha** and a patient called Julija on the protection of his honour and dignity. Majsiejenka filed a lawsuit because of the story entitled “I am a person whose future was stolen”. A story of a diagnosis” published on *Onliner.by*. Majsiejenka decided that the publication contained false information defaming his business reputation. The claim on the protection of honour, dignity and business reputation and compensation for moral damage amounted to 25,000 BYN. The court dismissed Majsiejenka’s claim.

On 28 December, Judge Valiantsina Lapatsina ruled that the online poll of the administrator of the web site Mogilev.Live Aliaksandr Irkho did not contain information that would defame the business reputation of the Mahiliou police. The case was heard in the Lieninski district court in Mahiliou.

The Mahiliou region police department accused Aliaksandr Irkho of publishing information of “negative, slanderous and provocative nature” about road police officers in the *Vkontakte* social network. **On 21 November**, Aliaksandr Irkho published an online poll on *Vkontakte* with the question “What amount of money did you give to road police officers of the Mahiliou region?” It was possible to choose one of the following answers: “Less than 20 USD”, “101 USD and more”, “I dealt with problems without money” and some others. The police department considered this poll to be offensive and filed a claim against Aliaksandr Irkho on the protection of honour, dignity and business reputation to the Lieninski district court in Mahiliou demanding an apology and a refutation.

3. Detention of journalists, judicial administrative prosecution

On 11 January, the administrative proceedings were instigated against journalist from Homiel **Larysa Shchyrakova** under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus for illegal production and distribution of mass media – working for a foreign media outlet without an accreditation. The question was about a story at the TV channel Belsat entitled “Horrible conditions of Belarusian people with disabilities” aired on 3 December 2015. In the three minute long story, the video about a girl with disability from Sviethahorsk took 40 seconds. However, it was sufficient to local policemen to accuse Larysa Shchyrakova of producing and distributing mass media products without an accreditation. **On 5 February**, Judge Uladzimir Stsiapanau from the Sviethahorsk district court in the Homiel region terminated the administrative proceedings under Article 22.9 against Larysa Shchyrakova because of the expiration of the period of limitation for the institution of administrative proceedings.

On 13 January, **Larysa Shchyrakova** was fined for 4,620,000 BYR (about 225 Euro) by Judge Aliaksandr Lisouski from the Homiel district court for the violation under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code (“Illegal production and distribution of mass media products”) but in fact for working for a foreign media outlet without an accreditation. The story, which became the basis for the report, was dedicated to problems of a foster child of the boarding

school in the settlement of Urytskaje and was aired by the TV channel *Belsat*. The report was drawn on **24 December 2015** by Police Captain R. Tsitou from the Homiel district police department. Larysa Shchyrakova was not present at that and received the document by mail on **4 January**. According to the report, the reporter, *being on 24 December 2015 in the agricultural settlement of Urytskaje in the Homiel district, without possessing an accreditation as a foreign correspondent of mass media, interviewed different citizens, illegally produced mass media products, namely the video story entitled “Supporting orphans on their path to adulthood”, which was aired on 24 December 2015 by the TV channel Belsat.*

On 14 January, Judge Liudzmila Savastsjanava from the Kalinkavichy district court found journalist from Homiel **Kastus Zhukouski** guilty of a violation under Article 22.9 of the Administrative Code and sentenced him to a fine in the amount of about 330 Euro.

According to the court’s ruling, **on 20 November 2015**, Kastus Zhukouski, *“without possessing an accreditation in the Republic of Belarus as a journalist of foreign mass media... interviewed citizens, and, as a result, illegally produced mass media products, namely a video story entitled “Pahonia as a symbol of a person’s independence”, which was aired on 24 November 2015 at the satellite television of the Republic of Poland Belsat in the programme Abjektyu.*

On 20 January, a judge of the Karma district court in the Homiel region sentenced freelance journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** who works for the TV channel *Belsat* to the fine of about 280 Euro for a violation under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code - illegal production and distribution of mass media products. **On 22 December 2015**, the journalist and his colleague Arkadz Malysh were briefly detained by the police in Karma while shooting a video about problems with water supply in the town. After the detention, Kastus Zhukouski was summoned to the police station for drawing up a report; his colleague was summoned only to court as a witness.

On 25 January, in the premises of the Frunzienski district court in Minsk police officers detained and beat Paviel Dabravolski, a journalist of the web portal TUT.BY.

The journalist was in the court building to cover a high-profile trial. He was filming the process of detention in the court building of two activists who were holding a poster “No to political prosecution!” on the camera of his mobile phone and was detained along with them.

Police officers pushed Dabravolski and two activists in a room next to the courtroom and beat.

Paviel Dabravolski carried his press card with him, which he tried in vain to show to the police. The press card was taken away from him together with his mobile phone.

On the same day, a police report was drawn up against the journalist, and he was fined in the same court building by Judge Maryja Jarokhina for 9,450,000 BYR (about 420 Euro) for “petty hooliganism” (Article 17.1 of the Administrative Code) and “disobedience to lawful demands of officials” (Article 23.4 of the Administrative Code).

After his release, the journalist filed a complaint to the police, had his battery-induced injuries verified and filed a complaint to the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

On 1 March, Judge Valiery Kamisarau from the Minsk city court **heard the appeal** of **Paviel Dabravolski** regarding the incident involving the detention and beating on 25 January and upheld the ruling of the Frunzienski district court.

On 28 April, after a three-month long investigation, the Investigative Committee refused to open criminal proceedings on the complaint of Paviel Dabravolski. Investigator Siamion Pitsko agreed with the version of the police and came to the conclusion that the use of force had been lawful as Dabravolski looked like a criminal. The journalist had allegedly interfered in the police actions, shouted insults and grabbed them by clothes. The injuries on the journalist’s body had possibly appeared when the officers had tried to fix him near a wall and on the floor. The

recording on Dabravolski's mobile phone, which had been made in the room where he had been beaten, was recognized by the Investigative Committee as unrelated to the investigation.

On 4 February, the Buda-Kashaliova district court in the Homiel region sentenced **Kastus Zhukouski** to a fine in the amount of 8,400,000 BYR (about 350 Euro) for working with a foreign mass media outlet without an accreditation. The journalist was found guilty of a violation under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products). The reason for the fine was his video story entitled "Russia stops Belarusian plants" aired by the TV channel *Belsat* on 16 December 2015.

On 24 February, Judge Valiantsina Saponava from the Zhlobin district court in the Homiel region considered two separate cases against freelance journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** for cooperation with the TV channel *Belsat* broadcasting from Poland. He was charged under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products). The journalist was fined in both cases for 8,400,000 BYR (about 350 Euro).

The accusations were based on two police reports regarding two video stories aired by *Belsat* – about the adverse economic situation of the Belarusian Steel Works and about dwellers of the village of Rudzienka who had to look for work in other regions because the local farm had been under reconstruction for over ten years. **On 28 April**, after considering the appeal of Kastus Zhukouski, Judge Vasil Biahun from the Homiel regional court reduced the amount of the fine awarded to the freelancer by two, from 16,800,000 BYR to 8,400,000 BYR.

On 2 March, freelance journalist from Homiel **Kastus Zhukouski** was summoned to the Mazyr district police department for drawing up the administrative report under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products), which allegedly resulted in the production of a video story for the Polish TV channel *Belsat* without an accreditation in the Belarusian Foreign Ministry. A senior police inspector explained that the question was about the news story entitled "Mazyr: distillery going bankrupt" aired by *Belsat* on 9 February. Kastus Zhukouski refused to go to Mazyr.

On 17 March, freelance journalist from Homiel **Kastus Zhukouski** was sentenced to the fine of 7,350,000 BYR (about 360 Euro) in the Mazyr district court. The journalist was found guilty in the illegal production and distribution of mass media products under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code. He shot a video about the bankruptcy of the Mazyr distillery, which the TV channel *Belsat* aired on 9 February.

On 24 March, the police in Rechytsa detained freelance journalist from Homiel **Kastus Zhukouski** while he conducted a street survey on the attitude of town dwellers to the phrase of Kastus Kalinouski "Not people for the government but the government for people". Police officers approached him and asked him to follow them to the police station but failed to explain the reasons for detention. There, they demanded him to provide written explanations. Zhukouski refused to do so as their demand was not based on the law. The journalist spent about two hours in the police station and was then released.

On 31 March, Judge Tamara Zastaunietskaja from the Homiel district court returned for revision the report drawn up by Police Major Dzmitry Chan in regard to freelance journalist **Larysa Shchyrakova**. She was accused of a violation of the Law on mass media under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code, which allegedly resulted in the production of the video story entitled "Barysau tragedy could happen again in Homiel" and its publication on her account in YouTube and on the local web site "Silnyje Novosti".

On 3 April, police officers in Naroulia in the Homiel region detained freelance journalist Alies Zalieuski as well as his crew and the person they were interviewing. The journalists were shooting a video story about a disabled Ivan Vitkouski who took part in the mitigation of the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. As a result, they had to spend several hours in the local police station and provide an explanation about the video story that they had shot. In

particular, the crew was accused of illegally filming several government building. Police officers reviewed all footage and then released the journalists.

On 5 April, Judge Tamara Zastaunietskaja from the Homiel district court sentenced freelance journalist **Larysa Shchyrakova** to the fine of 5,250,000 BYR (about 320 Euro). The basis for the punishment was the airing of her video story entitled “Barysau tragedy could happen again in Homiel” by the TV channel Belsat on 7 February. It was qualified by the judge as a violation under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code (illegal production and distribution of mass media products). The story was dedicated to the problem of concentration of carbon monoxide in new buildings in the village of Balshavik.

On 6 April, journalists from Homiel **Kastus Zhukouski and Arkadz Malysh** were summoned to the Svietlahorsk district court. It was assumed that the court would hold hearings of yet another administrative violation for “illegal production and distribution” of mass media products under Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus. Meanwhile, when the journalists arrived to the court building, they were told that the administrative report in their regard had been sent to the Svietlahorsk district police department for revision. It was drawn up in regard to the story entitled “A natural disaster in the Homiel region”, which was aired in February 2016 at the TV channel *Belsat* about the mass death of fish in the Sasnovy Bor water reservoir in the Svietlahorsk district. The police conducted an investigation about the persons who had talked to local dwellers and published online the information used by the TV channel *Belsat*.

On 7 April, security guards of the Minsk Motor Works in Stoubtsy in the Minsk region detained freelance journalist **Hanna Niezhaviets** and cameraman **Aliaksandr Masalski**. They were filming the plant’s premises from outside. The guards detained the journalists and demanded them to delete the footage referring to the fact that the plant was a high-security facility. The journalists complied with the demand but they remained detained until after they wrote an explanation to the name of the plant’s top manager. About one hour later the journalists were released. “The security guard said that, as the footage showed barbed wire, we allegedly wanted to show life of our people as life in a concentration camp”, Hanna Niezhaviets said. According to the reporter, the guard called the local KGB station. However, after they learned that the detention did not take place on the plant’s grounds, they refused to come.

On 7 April, journalist **Hanna Niezhaviets** and cameraman **Aliaksandr Masalski** were brought to the police station in Slutsk and briefly held there. The journalists were in Slutsk to shoot a story about the local market. Having seen their camera, the market’s security guard called the police. The journalists were taken to the police station where their identity information was recorded. Afterwards, they were released. Earlier on the same day, the journalists experienced a similar incident in Stoubtsy where they were detained by guards of a local plant.

On 8 April, the police drew up a report under Article 23.34 of the Administrative Code for a violation of the Law on mass events against **Jauhien Hlaholieu-Vaskovich** who works in *Bobrujskij Kurier*. **On 24 April**, he was summoned over the phone to a local police inspector for questioning. He was charged with the participation in an unauthorized picket of activists of an independent trade union in Slonim on 31 March. Together with Alieksandryna Hlaholieva, he covered the picket on an assignment from his newspaper, and on 2 April, the story about this event was published on the web site of *Bobrujskij Kurier*. Nevertheless, the police opened the administrative proceedings against Alieksandryna Hlaholieva and Jauhien Hlaholieu-Vaskovich as violators of the Law on mass events. However, the case against Hlaholieu-Vaskovich was never submitted to court.

On 8 April, the police drew up an administrative report against **Alieksandryna Hlaholieva**, a journalist of *Bobrujskij Kurier* under Article 23.34 of the Administrative Code. In the preceding month, on 31 March in Slonim, she covered a picket of the trade union of workers of radio-electronic industry (REI) along with Jauhien Hlaholieu-Vaskovich on an assignment from *Bobrujskij Kurier*. A story about this event entitled “Activists of the REI trade union from

Babrujsk supported their colleague from Slonim” was **published** on the web site of *Bobrujskij Kurier*. Nevertheless, the police opened the administrative proceedings against Alieksandryna Hlaholieva and Jauhien Hlaholieu-Vaskovich as violators of the Law on mass events. On **30 April**, the journalist was summoned to police inspector Jury Savich in Babrujsk where she was made aware of the report drawn up by Aliaksandr Navasad, a police inspector from Slonim. The case of Hlaholieva was returned to the Slonim police by the Babrujsk city court. The journalist received this notification in the mail. Judge Natallia Sheheda from Babrujsk informed her that the administrative case under Article 23.34, Part 1 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus against Alieksandryna Hlaholieva was being returned to the Slonim police department. Later, the case was closed because of the expiration of the period of limitation for the institution of administrative proceedings. On **22 June**, local police inspector Jury Savich in Babrujsk summoned **Alieksandryna Hlaholieva** over the phone to provide additional evidence in the administrative proceedings opened already on 8 April 2016. The journalist told the local police inspector that she would come only on a summons drawn in accordance with the law. After that, according to Hlaholieva, the inspector began to talk to her in a raised voice, to threaten her with “consequences” and to accuse her of allegedly “delaying the process”.

On **13 April**, freelance journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** was detained in Svietlahorsk. He was going to cover a meeting of local officials with entrepreneurs but was detained by police officers. When he was filming the building of the district executive committee, he was approached by Ala Mankievich, an employee of the ideology office of the district executive committee, who told him that the journalist had no right to film. Kastus Zhukouski replied that it was not prohibited by the law. Then the official called the police. In the meantime, the journalist entered the building of the district executive committee. The arriving police officers took him out of the building by force and brought to the police station. Zhukouski spent there about two hours and provided an explanation.

On **15 April**, Judge Aliaksiej Piskunou from the Centralny district court in Homiel ruled that freelance journalists **Kastus Zhukouski and Larysa Shchyrakova** must pay a fine in the amount of 7,350,000 BYR (about 330 Euro) each. Both of them were charged with the illegal production and distribution of mass media products (Article 22.9, Part 2 of the Administrative Code), and in fact, with working for a foreign media outlet without an accreditation. The video story produced by Zhukouski and dedicated to Ukrainian refugees in Homiel and the visit of Jean-Yves Bouchardy, UNHCR Representative in Belarus was aired by the TV channel Belsat. The story did not have a single shot by Larysa Shchyrakova. She recorded the visit on her mobile phone for her private use. Nevertheless, neither the police nor the judge asked for proof of her participation in the preparation of the story for Belsat. The judge did not permit Zhukouski to have a counsel during the proceedings. In protest, the latter put a bandage on his mouth and refused to answer the judges’ questions. After the court hearing, Zhukouski said that he was going to sew up his mouth in protest against the prosecution of journalist and kept his promise in front of a camera.

Prior to that, during 2016, Kastus Zhukouski was already fined six times on the same charge to the total amount of over 2,200 Euro.

On **14 May**, reporter **Alieh Hruzdilovich** from Radio Liberty was detained during his coverage of the action called “Avenue of the national flag” at the Kastychnitskaja square near the entrance to the Kastychnitskaja metro station when he was taking pictures of public utilities’ workers who were removing the white-red-white flag from a flagpole, which was attached there by a protester. Hruzdilovich was charged with going out into the carriageway. Meanwhile, the traffic on the avenue was closed during the entire event for an unknown reason. The journalist was taken in a police car to the Hotel Europe where he was given the fine of 210,000 BYR for a traffic violation.

On **2 June**, the police detained press photographer **Hienadz Vieratsinski** in Krupki in the Minsk region. He came there with two activists of the United Civil Party who were going to meet with local dwellers. When the activists were handing out leaflets, the journalist was

detained together with them and brought to the Krupki district police department. The police threatened all the detainees with administrative reports for handing out information materials. However, they all were released in about an hour after the detention, after their passport data was recorded.

On 6 June, Andrej Pavuk, an administrator of the group *Rudabielsk Windows Dressing* in the Odnoklassniki social network was fined for 2,100,000 BYR (about 92 Euro) under Article 9.2 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus (“Slander”). The decision was taken by Judge Uladzimir Vasilieuski from the Kastrychnitski district court in the Homiel region. The report was drawn up at the request of Siarhiej Zarychny, deputy director for ideology, culture and youth in the Kastrychnitski district executive committee. The complaint to the police was caused by a post by Andrej Pavuk, where he suspected the official of corruption. The administrator **recognised** that he had wanted to ask a question but it had come out as an assertion. He apologized to the complainant in court but the latter did not accept the apologies.

On 21 June, freelance journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** and cameraman **Aliaksiej Atroshchankau** were detained in Lojeu in the Homiel region while they were shooting a local brick factory to produce a story for the TV channel *Belsat* about the poor state of economy in the Belarusian province. The road police suddenly interrupted their work; local police officers came later and forcefully detained the journalists.

“The police came and harshly detained me and my colleague Aliaksiej. We were brought to a police station. They seized the equipment from our hands and broke it. I was knocked down to the floor, handcuffed and my head was pressed with a knee; the person who did it called himself deputy head Hienadz Madzharski”, Kastus Zhukouski told *BelaPAN*. The journalist also said that he had high blood pressure. An ambulance was called and he received an injection. Kastus Zhukouski and Aliaksiej Atroshchankau spent six hours in the police station. Despite the threat, no report was drawn up. Atroshchankau filed a complaint to the Investigative Committee asking them to investigate the police actions.

On 28 June, four reports on administrative violations were drawn up against freelance journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** and two – against his colleague **Aliaksiej Atroshchankau** following their harsh detention in Lojeu **on 21 June**. The reports were drawn up by Andrej Khichou a week later and sent to the journalists by mail. Kastus Zhukouski was charged with insulting two officials of the local district executive committee, Iryna Pastukhova and Natallia Kaurava, as well as deputy head of the local police, Hienadz Madzhara, who detained them (two reports). The third report was for disobeying a police officer (Hienadz Madzhara) and the fourth – for petty hooliganism. According to the reports, Zhukouski shouted, pronounced curses and showed open disrespect to the public. Aliaksiej Atroshchankau was charged with insulting officials and disobeying lawful demands of the police: he allegedly insulted two women and later refused to get into the car to go to the police station. **On 26 July**, when the case was considered in the Lojeu district court, Judge Antanina Muzychenka returned three out of four reports for revision to the police, except for the report for petty hooliganism drawn up against Zhukouski.

On 12 August, Police Major Andrej Khichou drew up a report against freelance journalist Kastus Zhukouski in Lojeu in the Homiel region. He was charged with illegal conduct of an opinion poll (Article 9.28 of the Administrative Code). It was the fifth charge against the journalist after his harsh detention **on 21 June**. According to the document, the journalist conducted an opinion poll on the geopolitical situation without a proper accreditation in the territory of the Lojeu district; then, its results appeared on *Belsat*.

On 1 July, it became known that reporter of *Hantsavitski Chas* **Mikita Jarash** was summoned to the police a few days earlier in order to provide explanations on a complaint from the Hantsavitski district executive committee. Top district officials believed that the newspaper’s editorial board had violated the Law on mass media by publishing on its web site an audio recording of a conversation between Mikita Jarash and Iryna Buzhan, a deputy head of the ideology office. The prosecutor’s office forwarded the complaint to the police. In the meantime,

the editorial board of *Hantsavitiski Chas* received a letter from the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus where it demanded explanations on the fact of online publication of the conversation between Mikita Jarash and Iryna Buzhan in open access; almost five months passed after the publication.

On 11 November, freelance journalists **Kastus Zhukouski and Aliaksiej Atroshchankau** were brought to a police station in Svietlahorsk in the Mahiliou region. They were detained at the central square where they were shooting the spruce and walnut trees cut down by the town authorities. First, the police approached the journalists and asked to see their IDs. After the inspection, a Police Major who called himself Viazhevich ran to the journalists and asked to show their IDs again. The journalists replied that they had just shown the IDs and there was no reason to do it again.

“The Major told us to follow him to the police station. We offered no resistance. At the police station, he behaved inappropriately: he was grasping the camcorder and the hand, pushing and insulting me, tried to provoke me in any way. I wrote a complaint about these actions of the police officer. Then, the Major took us to a corner and ordered us to lay out all our belongings. We told him that we would do it only after the personal inspection report would be drawn up. After some time, someone called the Major, and two policemen who replaced him drew up the inspection report”, Kastus Zhukouski said.

The journalists were questioned and their personal belongings were examined by the police. They were released after they spent about three hours at the police station.

On 8 December, the police detained journalists of the independent newspaper *Nasha Niva* **Mikita Niedavierkau and Iryna Arakhouskaja**. They were filming an action of the opposition organization Youth Front whose participants were hanging national flags in the centre of Minsk. According to the journalists, a man approached the patrol car and pointed at them. Meanwhile, the journalists were covering the action and they held a camcorder. Also, the police officers claimed that the journalists had no right to film them because it was an invasion of privacy. The journalists spent about an hour in the police station and then were released.

On 15 December, **Alexander Lapshin**, a Russo-Israeli blogger, was detained in Minsk on the extradition request from Azerbaijan. He was detained in a hotel in Minsk soon after he entered Belarus. The first night after his detention Lapshin was held in the Pershamajski district police department and later transferred to the detention facility on Valadarskaja Street.

Lapshin lived in Moscow and was writing in Russian in a popular travel blog. He was wanted internationally at the request from Azerbaijan because of his visits to the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh and for criticizing the policy of the Azerbaijani authorities in his blog.

On 17 January 2017, Deputy Prosecutor General of Belarus Aliaksiej Stuk signed the decision to extradite Alexander Lapshin to Azerbaijan. **On 26 January**, the Minsk city court upheld this decision. **On 7 February**, the Supreme Court of Belarus dismissed the complaint of Lapshin against the decision of the Minsk city court, after which he was deported to Azerbaijan.

4. Physical attacks against journalists

On 25 January, in the premises of the Frunzienski district court in Minsk policemen detained and beat Paviel Dabravolski, a journalist of the web portal TUT.BY.

The journalist was in the court building to cover a high-profile trial. He was filming the process of detention in the court building of two activists who were holding a poster “No to political prosecution!” on the camera of his mobile phone and was detained along with them.

Police officers pushed Dabravolski and two activists in a room next to the courtroom and beat.

Paviel Dabravolski carried his press card with him, which he tried in vain to show to the police. The press card was taken away from him together with his mobile phone.

On the same day, a police report was drawn up against the journalist, and he was fined in the same court building by Judge Maryja Jarokhina for 9,450,000 BYR (about 420 Euro) for “petty hooliganism” (Article 17.1 of the Administrative Code) and “disobedience to lawful demands of officials” (Article 23.4 of the Administrative Code).

Paviel Dabravolski had bruises on his face and body and his jacket and trousers were torn. The journalist filed a complaint to the police, had his battery-induced injuries verified and filed a complaint to the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus against the police action. **OSCE** and the international human rights organization **Reporters Without Borders** condemned the beating.

On 1 March, Judge Valiery Kamisarau from the Minsk city court **heard the appeal of Paviel Dabravolski** regarding the **incident involving the detention and beating on 25 January** and upheld the ruling of the Frunzienski district court.

On 28 April, after a three-month long investigation, the Investigative Committee refused to open criminal proceedings on the complaint of Paviel Dabravolski. Investigator Siamion Pitsko agreed with the version of the police and came to the conclusion that the use of force was lawful as Dabravolski looked like a criminal. The journalist had allegedly interfered in the police actions, shouted insults and grabbed them by clothes. The injuries on the journalist’s body had possibly appeared when the officers had tried to fix him near a wall and on the floor. The recording on Dabravolski’s mobile phone, which had been made in the room where he had been beaten, was recognized by the Investigative Committee as unrelated to the investigation.

On 12 April, when journalists were filming and taking photographs of a fire in Homiel that happened at the wallpaper factory “Fox”, they were suddenly attacked by the factory’s guard with sticks and swearing. They began hiding the fire from the journalists by unrolled wallpaper from the inner side of the fence and throwing sticks to the journalists to drive them away. They beat those journalists, who climbed on the gate to continue to shoot, on their arms and camcorders. Despite the aggressive behaviour of the security guards, the journalists were able to do their job.

On 1 May, leader of the Russian biker movement Zaldostanov got angry and pushed reporter **Alies Liauchuk** from the TV channel *Belsat* who asked the biker’s opinion on the USSR being on Hitler’s side at the beginning of the Second World War and attacking Poland, the Baltic countries and Finland.

On 21 June, freelance journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** and cameraman **Aliaksiej Atroshchankau** were detained in Lojeu in the Homiel region while they were shooting a local brick factory to produce a story for the TV channel *Belsat* about the poor state of economy in the Belarusian province. The road police suddenly interrupted their work; local police officers came later and forcefully detained the journalists.

“The police came and harshly detained me and my colleague Aliaksiej. We were brought to a police station. They seized the equipment from our hands and broke it. I was knocked down to the floor, handcuffed and my head was pressed with a knee; the person who did it called himself deputy head Hienadz Madzharski”, Kastus Zhukouski told *BelaPAN*. The journalist also said that he had high blood pressure. An ambulance was called and he received an injection.

“When I got better, I demanded the book of comments and suggestions where I described what had happened, Zhukouski added. An official of the district office of the Investigative Committee reacted to the complaint; he recorded my testimony and received my statement about the incident and then referred me to the forensic medical examination. We were held in the

district police department for nearly six hours and later released. No reports were drawn up. When I came back to Homiel I went to the examination because I had severe pain in the neck, shoulder and my wrists were swollen”.

In addition to the complaint to the Investigative Committee, Kastus Zhukouski and Aliaksiej Atroshchankau filed a complaint to the head of the regional police where they stated that they had been brought to the Lojeu district police department without legal justification and violently. However, none of the complaints had an effect.

5. Seizure of equipment, damages, confiscation

On 5 July in Brest, police officers confiscated the laptop computer and the mobile phone from famous blogger **Siarhiej Piatrukhin** who is engaged in journalistic investigations of corruption of state officials and law-enforcement officers and publishes his videos on his YouTube channel “People’s Reporter”. Three months ago, in April, Piatrukhin posted a video about an official from the Committee for State Control who allegedly obtained illegally a land plot in the centre of the city from the chairman of the Brest city executive committee. The report led to criminal charges. In May, the blogger was questioned by the police about someone’s online comments regarding an official from the Committee for State Control. Later, the investigation was not conducted. Siarhiej Piatrukhin believed that the resumption of the investigation followed his nomination as a candidate in the parliamentary elections.

On 6 December, during the arrests of bloggers **Yuri Pavlovets** in Minsk and **Dmitry Alimkin** in Brest, against whom criminal proceedings were instigated for inciting hatred (Article 130 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus) because of their publications on Russian web sites *Regnum*, *Lenta.ru*, and *EADaily*, the Investigative Committee carried out searches in their homes and seized equipment.

On 9 December, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus announced the arrest of a staffer of the Russian web site *Regnum* **Sergey Shiptenko** in the framework of the criminal investigation under Article 130 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. A search and seizure of equipment also took place in his home.

6. Warnings of the Ministry of Information

On 2 March, the web sites **nn.by (Nasha Niva)** and **ej.by (Ezhednevnik)** received the written warnings of the Ministry of Information for violations of the Law on mass media. This information was posted on the ministry's web site under the title “The Law on mass media must be respected”. NN.by was warned for the publication entitled “Belarus at the red level of demographic security: a district centre dies every year”. In the ministry’s opinion, it discredits the efficiency of the government’s demographic policy. Ej.by was warned for “discrediting the armed forces of the Republic of Belarus” – the text about the combat readiness of the Belarusian army was accompanied by a photograph of German military equipment of the Second World War era.

On 10 August, the Ministry of Information issued written warnings to a number of distributors of TV media products because of some violations of the Law on mass media and the Law on copyright and related rights. According to the ministry, in June – July 2016 it conducted the scheduled monitoring of activities of telecommunication operators in the Brest and Minsk

regions as well as in Mahiliou (*Brestabharant JSC, TVSAT LLC, Mir-TV LLC, Efir-TV LLC, Sfera-TV UE, Nord LLC, Svet DLC, Tsifra LLC, Harant Television Communal Service LLC, Jam TV DLC, Elektrosviaz DLC, and Sat-TV DLC*). As a result of the monitoring, the following violations of the Law on mass media and the Law on copyright and related rights were identified:

- the failure of telecommunications operators to provide the TV channels which make part of the mandatory public package to their subscribers and to ensure the order of priority of their broadcast (the mandatory public package of TV channels was approved by the resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 407 dated 13 May 2015);
- broadcasting foreign TV channels that have not received a permission for distribution in the territory of the Republic of Belarus;
- failure to notify the Ministry of Information about the beginning (end) of distribution of TV channels;
- broadcasting TV programmes of erotic content without a special encoding.
- In connection with these violations, the ministry issued written warnings to the above-mentioned telecommunications operators.

On 26 December, the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus issued a written warning to the independent information online portal Vitsiebski Kurjer (vkurier.by) “for spreading false information that could harm the public interest”. The official communication published on the web site of the Ministry of Information failed to specify the kind of information in question.

On 31 December, it became known from the reply of a deputy minister of information to the BAJ’s inquiry that from January to November 2016 the Ministry of Information issued fifteen warnings: seven to mass media and eight to online information resources. In total, during 2016, the Ministry of Information issued sixteen warnings (eight to mass media and eight to online information resources).

Besides, in 2016, the Ministry of Information decided to restrict access to forty-seven information resources and restored access to one resource. Twenty-one out of them were blocked for disseminating information aimed at selling narcotic drugs, thirteen – for disseminating extremist materials, eleven – for improper advertising, and two – for the promotion of pornography, violence and cruelty.

7. Restrictions on the free use of the Web

On 15 February, there was no access to the web site of the **BelaPAN** news agency because of a hacker attack. It was not the first hacker attack at web sites of the news agency during important public events. As BelaPAN pointed out, “It happened on the day of important events in the country’s life: a rally of individual entrepreneurs on the Kastychnitskaja Square in Minsk and a EU Council meeting in Brussels where the question of lifting sanctions from most Belarusian officials was considered”.

On 16 August, the web site of the Mahiliou branch of the human rights centre Viasna mspring.online was inaccessible because of the activities of unknown persons. According to journalist of the web site Aliaksandr Burakou Jr., someone attempted to block access of the system administrator to the web site. In fact, the web site was completely destroyed. It took six hours to restore the web site. The journalists of mspring.online linked the attempt to hinder the

work of the web site with the elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. In fact, the web site was the only independent online resource in Mahiliou that provided information about the election campaign on a regular basis.

On 26 September, the Centralny district court in Minsk decided to block the web site of the anarchist grouping *Pramien*, **pramen.io**, in the territory of Belarus because of the allegedly “extremist materials” published on this web site. “The true reason is that our web site represents an alternative to the official point of view on the events in Belarus and the world”, said a representative of the grouping. “Its blocking is a logical step of the state in destroying any media outside of its control”.

8. Violations related to access to information

On 26 January, journalist of the web portal TUT.BY Paviel Dabravolski, who had been beaten by the police while covering a trial on 25 January, asked the State Committee for Forensic Examinations to record the beating. He was accompanied by journalists **Katsiaryna Andrejeva and Andrej Rabchyk**. When the journalists arrived, employees of the agency called the police. Police officers prohibited the reporters to take pictures and followed them the entire time of their stay in the premises.

On 31 March, journalist of the independent newspaper *Intex-Press* (Baranavichy) **Tatstsiana Niekrashevich** received a reply to her complaint about the refusal of officials from the state Department for Capital Construction to provide information to her newspaper. For a long time, the journalists of this independent publication cannot obtain information from the Department for Capital Construction about what would be built on the site of the barracks that the authorities wanted to demolish and the residents did not want to leave. Chief engineer Aliaksandr Karpienia refused to answer the journalist’s questions, so she filed a complaint in this regard. According to the journalist, Director of the Department Uladzimir Dronkin failed to say anything specific in reply to the questions that were within his competence, thus violating the journalists’ right to information. At the same time, he is actively cooperating with the official state-owned newspaper of the Baranavichy district.

On 5 April, correspondent of *Hazieta Slonimskaja* **Jauhien Valadashchuk** was forced to leave a meeting of residents of the villages of Rakhavichy and Surynka in the Slonim district due to persistent demands of the local authorities. The reporter was invited by local residents to attend the meeting with the participation of chairman of the Slonim district council of deputies Siarhiej Rahozyk at which the fate of the local lake was discussed – there were rumours that the authorities were going to drain it. When Siarhiej Rahozyk arrived, the first thing he did was to order the journalist who was shooting video to leave the meeting. Jauhien Valadashchuk had already enough material for the story, so he had to leave the meeting. When the article was already published on the web site *gs.by* alongside with the video and the next issue of the newspaper was sent to print, Chairman Siarhiej Rahozyk called Editor-in-Chief of *Hazieta Slonimskaja* Viktor Valadashchuk and asked him to his office for a talk. There, the chairman asked to cancel the publication of the story but the editor refused.

On 12 April, when journalists were filming and taking photographs of a fire in Homiel that happened at the wallpaper factory “Fox”, they were suddenly attacked by the factory’s guard with sticks and swearing. They began hiding the fire from the journalists by unrolled wallpaper from the inner side of the fence and throwing sticks to the journalists to drive them away. They claimed that it was a private property and told the journalists to get lost. They beat those journalists, who climbed on the gate to continue to shoot, on their arms and camcorders. Despite the aggressive behaviour of the security guards, the journalists were able to do their job.

On 20 April, there appeared reports that the newspaper **Borisovskije Novosti** was facing systematic hindrance in access to information. The editorial board suspected the Barysau district executive committee of imposing sequester on information. This fact was insistently mentioned in private conversations by those who depended on the district authorities. An example of such attitude was the refusal of representatives of the Barysau diocese of the Belarusian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate to answer questions of **Krystsina Stasionak**, a reporter of the newspaper. The questions concerned the construction of St. George's Orthodox Church on Dymki Street. The reporter wanted to get a comment from Archpriest Andrej Shabalouski, the rector of the church. Initially, Andrej Shabalouski agreed on the interview but asked to be called the next day to agree on time and venue. The next morning, Andrej Shabalouski apologized and told Krystsina Stasionak to apply to the church hierarchy for permission. The hierarchy in the person of Archdeacon Sierhij Kierko, after hearing the request, also recommended to contact him the next day. The same reason was provided: it was necessary to receive a permission from the senior management to allow Rector Andrej Shabalouski to give interview to the journalist. Eventually, Sierhij Kierko refused to talk to the reporter of **Borisovskije Novosti**. "Higher authorities forbade us to collaborate with your newspaper": this was more or less the result of the negotiations that lasted several days. The archdeacon refused to answer the question about who exactly had introduced this ban. Then, Krystsina Stasionak attempted to obtain necessary information from Archpriest Aliaksandr Viarbila, the rector of the church of the Nativity of Christ. It was him who mentioned in his conversation with the journalist the "recommendation" of the Barysau district executive committee not to give any information to the independent newspaper.

When journalists tried to interview Siarhiej Anatoljevich, an engineer from the Barysau forestry research enterprise, about harvesting birch sap, he refused to answer their questions and recommended to send a formal request to his company.

In March, reporters of the newspaper wanted to ask some questions to an employee of a waste landfill. However, the latter recommended the already well known scheme to the journalists: to refer to his immediate superiors. His boss, in his turn, asked to make a formal request of the interview so that he could get it approved by an even higher authority.

Former district architect Stanislau Tkachenka also reported the existence of an order that prohibited officials from giving interview and comments to **Borisovskije Novosti**.

On 13 May, the Ministry of Information of Belarus refused to accredit a reporter and a cameraman of the independent news agency *BelaPAN* at the XI Belarusian International Media Forum that was held in Minsk. It deprived *BelaPAN* of the possibility to cover this event as the unaccredited journalists were denied entry. The attempt to get a comment from the Ministry of Information about the reasons for denial of accreditation failed.

On 16 May, the Baranavichy district executive committee informed the independent newspaper *Intex-Press* about the refusal to accredit its reporter **Julija Ivashka**.

The formal letter in this regard was signed by Deputy Chairman Aliaksandr Hrytskievich. The letter stated that the district executive committee had no intention to expand the list of the publications that are admitted for coverage of its meetings. All three approved publications are owned by the state.

On 30 May, the editorial board of the newspaper *Intex-Press* from Baranavichy received a reply to its written request that contained questions about the participation in "one of the most important forms of democracy in the Republic of Belarus" – the All-Belarusian People's Assembly. In the reply drafted by head of the office for the organizational and personnel work Tatstsiana Chylik and head of the office for ideology, culture and youth Sviatlana Paulovich most questions of the independent newspaper that had been asked in the written request remained unanswered.

On 16 November, a reporter of Radio Liberty was removed from a courtroom for an attempt to photograph four riot police officers who had detained an opposition activist and testified in court. The Partyzanski district court in Minsk considered the case against leader of the opposition Youth Front Zmicier Dashkievich. He was charged with ‘disobeying the police’, ‘hooliganism’ and participation in an unauthorized event” during the inauguration of a monument to Vladimir Lenin on 7 November when he had been brutally detained by the police. Taking photographs was not prohibited, other press photographers and cameramen stayed in the courtroom.

On 16 November, a *Belsat* crew was not allowed to attend a meeting of people with disabilities with Deputy Head of the Brest regional executive committee Viktor Sakouski. A group of persons with disabilities who live in a house unsuitable for their movement and who had long sought from the local authorities a change in this situation, had initiated the meeting with the official and invited independent journalists to attend. However, **Maksim Khliabiets, Alies Liauchuk and Milana Kharytonava** were not able to attend the meeting. The ban came from Volha Vierabiej, the head of one of the offices of the regional executive committee. The official said that the meeting was of private nature and left the journalists behind the closed doors.

On 5 December, Siarhiej Mikalajeu, the head of the Baranavichy city veterinary station, refused to provide a reporter of *Intex-Press* with a photo of the scorpion that had bitten a customer in one of the stores in Baranavichy. Reporter of *Intex-Press* **Aliena Zielianko** called Mikalajeu with a request to provide a photo of the caught scorpion for publication. However, Mikalajeu replied that he had no pictures as he had allegedly deleted all of them. Some time later, the pictures provided by Mikalajeu appeared on the web site of the state-owned district newspaper *Nash Kraj*.

On 13 December, reporter of BelaPAN **Uladzimir Laptsevich** from Mahiliou was refused entry to the building of the Kastychnitski district court in Mahiliou because a security officer decided that the press card of the news agency BelaPAN could not be taken as a document to verify the person’s identity. Uladzimir Laptsevich wanted to get acquainted with the list of the court meetings scheduled on 13 December.

On 14 December, a local official in the settlement of Aktsiabrski in the Homiel region hampered freelance journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** who works for *Belsat* in doing his job. The reported was shooting a video about expensive cars that local officials had bought with money from the budget. When Zhukouski was filming the building of the local administration, he was approached by Valiantsina Shlapakova, the office manager, who demanded to see his ID and forbade to take pictures of the building. She pushed the journalist, grabbed his camcorder and clothes and demanded to see the accreditation.

On 14 December, the Brest regional police department “closed” the operative information about the crimes committed in the region. If earlier the journalists were able to obtain information about the violations that happened in the region, starting on 14 December the information bulletins began containing statistical data only. Moreover, the earlier bulletins were deleted. These police bulletins are still available on the web sites of the police departments in other regions. According to unofficial information of the BAJ’s monitoring service, the bulletins were removed by the personal order of Fiodar Baliejka, the head of the Brest regional police department. It is possible that the important media attention to the road accident when the drunken acting head of the Baranavichy road police killed a woman with his car in the Liakhavichy district played its role in this decision.

On 16 December, the journalists were prohibited from making an audio recording of the trial in the Mahiliou regional court in the so called “case of black realtors” who were charged with six murders. According to reporter of the news agency BelaPAN **Uladzimir Laptsevich**, a security guard allowed the journalists to enter the courtroom after they had left their audio, video and photo equipment as well as the mobile phones in the locker. He referred to the order of

Judge Ryhor Kachalau who was hearing the case. According to the Belarusian law, making an audio recording in the courtroom cannot be prohibited. Laptsevich recorded a complaint in the book of comments and suggestions about the violation of the journalists' rights by Judge Kachalau.

9. Violations during the elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus

The elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus took place on 11 September 2016.

On 2 August, police officers prohibited freelance journalist **Dzmitry Karenka** to take pictures near the entrance to the premises of the Central Election Commission which is situated in the residence of the Belarusian government. He was going to make a video story about the last day of submission of documents for the registration of candidates to the deputies of the House of Representatives. However, at 6 pm near the entrance to the premises of the Central Election Commission he was approached by police officers who told Karenka that the administrative buildings in Belarus could be filmed “only for news bulletins” and asked him to produce a press card that he did not have as a freelancer. The inquiry lasted for over an hour, after which the police officers let him go and advised not to film the administrative buildings any more.

On 10 August, at a meeting of one of the district election commissions in Barysau in the Minsk region, Editor-in-Chief of the independent newspaper Borisovskije Novosti **Anatol Bukas** asked to provide him with information about the registration of the candidates to the deputies of the lower chamber of the Belarusian parliament for the publication in the newspaper. Paviel Zhuga, deputy head and chief administrator of the Barysau district executive committee, said that he “did not know such a newspaper”. The complaint submitted by Bukas to the Central Election Commission was rejected.

On 16 August, as **the local television in Homiel** broadcast the video recording of the statement by a candidate from the United Civil Party Uladzimir Niapomniashchykh, the slogan written on his clothing was changed. Niapomniashchykh was wearing a T-shirt with the inscription “For Belarus without Lukashenka” when his statement, which is guaranteed by the electoral law, was recorded by TV. Nevertheless, in the video aired on 16 August the second part of the slogan was hidden behind an on-screen inscription with the candidate's name. It helped to transform it into the slogan “For Belarus” that Aliaksandr Lukashenka had used during his election campaign in 2010. The candidate decided that the TV people deliberately hid a part of the slogan and recalled that in 2012 his statement was not aired at all, and his photograph in this T-shirt was not accepted for the campaign posters.

On 17 August, the regional newspapers *Viechiernij Brest* refused to print the election program of Ihar Maslouski, a candidate to the deputies of the House of Representatives from the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada). The grounds for refusal was his appeal to the voters not to support the candidates from the authorities. In particular, the candidate's programme said, “Do not support the doctors, the military men and other good people at the elections – they are all the authorities' candidates. They are all good people at their workplace but they are all dependent on the authorities and become “bad” candidates! These “good” people vote as they are told to. It is with their connivance that the authorities raised the retirement age, deprived those who served in the army, were on maternity leave or studied in the university of their years of pensionable service, etc. It is them who supported the tax on unemployed and did nothing to create new jobs”. According to Maslouski, as follows from the answer of the acting

editor-in-chief of the newspaper, it “can be considered as an insult against people of different professions”.

On 20 August, the newspaper *Astravietskaja Prawda* refused to publish the election program of Mikalaj Ulasievich, a candidate to the deputies from the United Civil Party, despite the fact that in accordance with the law of the Republic of Belarus all candidates have the right to equal access to public media during the election campaign. As Ulasievich said on his Facebook account, the newspaper’s editorial board believed that his election programme did not meet the requirements set forth in Articles 47 and 75 of the Electoral Code. These articles establish that the election programme must not contain “the propaganda of war, incitement to violent change of the constitutional order, violation of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Belarus, social, national, religious and racial hatred, the appeals that incite to or aimed at the disruption, cancellation or postponement of the elections scheduled in accordance with the law of the Republic of Belarus as well as insults and slander against the officials of the Republic of Belarus, other candidates for the President of the Republic of Belarus or to the deputies”. In his programme published on Facebook, Ulasievich opposed the construction of the nuclear power plant in Belarus and spoke about the problem of corruption in the country. According to Ulasievich, he did not violate the norms of the Electoral Code which does not provide for censorship of the programmes of candidates to the deputies.

On 22 August, the newspaper *Viacherni Minsk* refused to publish the election programme of opposition activist and presenter of Belsat Jury Khashchavatski. Editor-in-Chief of Viacherni Minsk Siarhiej Protas stated that the election programme “cannot be published as it does not meet the requirements set forth in Articles 47 and 75 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus.” However, the editor failed to specify what expressions of Khashchavatski violated the law. According to Jury Khashchavatski, the editor might not like some of his words about President Lukashenka.

On 26 August, the *Hrodna regional state television* did not air the appeal to the voters by Mikalaj Ulasievich, a candidate to the deputies of the House of Representatives from the United Civil Party. Mikalaj Ulasievich is the initiator of the public initiative “Astraviets NPP is a crime”. In his appeal to the voters that was recorded but not aired at the scheduled time, Ulasievich spoke against the construction of the NPP in Belarus and also touched upon the problem of corruption. According to the Belarusian law, all candidates must have equal access to public media.

On 11 September, on the election day, a reporter of the independent newspaper *Nasha Niva* was prohibited from taking pictures at the polling station where President Aliaksandr Lukashenka was expected to vote. Plain-clothed security guards explained it by the fact that he was not accredited as a press photographer.

10. Economic policy in mass media field

On 14 April, it became known that Editor-in-Chief of *Hazieta Slonimskaja and Otdushina* Viktor Valadashchuk received another refusal to his applications to *Belposhta* and *Belsajuzdruk* to include these independent newspapers from Slonim to the subscription catalogue of *Belposhta* and the newsstands distribution system of *Belsajuzdruk* for the second half of 2016. The editor received negative carbon-copy replies to his request to readmit the newspaper in the state distribution system. It has been happening since 2006 when after the presidential election *Hazieta Slonimskaja*, alongside some other publications, was excluded from the postal subscription catalogues and the distribution system through the newsstands.

Viktar Valadashchuk petitioned the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies and the Ministry of Information. He tried to find out what he needed to do, as a publisher and an editor-in-chief, to get Hazieta Slonimskaja and Otdushina to the subscription catalogue and the newsstands. He received the reply that, in case of disagreement with the actions of *Belposhta*, he had the right to sue it. Viktar Valadashchuk could not see any point in suing the company in accordance with the recommendation of the Ministry of Communications, as he believed that “*it was a question of political will and not an issue between economic entities*”.

On 24 June, *Belposhta* again refused to include the independent publication *Intex-Press* in the subscription catalogue for the second half of 2016. *Belposhta* has not cooperated with *Intex-Press* since 2008. However, this year the situation seemed to begin getting somewhere. **On 1 June**, the editorial board sent a letter to the Brest branch of *Belposhta*. After some time, an official of *Belposhta* called the editorial board and inquired in which section of the catalogue the publication would like to be included – the nationwide publications or local publications. He also told to await the attribution of the subscription code. But later, the editorial board received a letter from the main office of *Belposhta* in Minsk to which it had never applied. The letter signed by Deputy Director General Hienadz Dziamjanienka informed the editorial board that “*the law does not provide for an obligation to include [publications] in the catalogue; the choice of printed publications for the inclusion in the catalogue for their further distribution through subscription is the right of Belposhta*” and that “*the demands to enter into a contract and to include a publication in the catalogue are not based on legal norms*”.

On 26 October, in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On the Republican budget for 2017” the state-owned mass media were allocated over 47 million Euro. It is by 3 million Euro more than in 2016. Thus, the Belarusian budget’s expenditures in 2017 will include:

- for TV and radio broadcasting — 39 million Euro;
- for printed publications and publishing houses — 3.4 million Euro;
- for “other questions in mass media field” — 4.9 million Euro.

On 26 October, the Prosecutor’s Office of the Lida district replied to a letter from the Belarusian Association of Journalists about the subscription to state-owned publications. In September, mass media obtained a copy of the letter sent by the Lida district executive committee to managers of the enterprises and organisations registered in the district. There, the authorities reminded the companies’ managers about “*the need to carry out the subscription campaign for the fourth quarter to the publications Sovetskaya Belorussiya, Respublika, Zviazda, Hrodzienskaja Prauda, Lidskaja Hazieta and others...*” The number of subscribed publications must be at least 50 per cent of the number of the company’s employees”, the document said.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists saw in this fact a violation of the equal economic rights for state-owned and independent printed mass media and petitioned the Prosecutor’s Office with a request to verify the legitimacy of the local authorities’ demand. After having considered the letter of the BAJ, the Prosecutor’s Office of the Lida district replied that the letter to the companies’ managers containing such expressions as “need to ensure” and “must amount to” was of recommendatory nature.

On 8 December, *Brestablsajuzdruk* communicated that it “had no possibility to make the contract on the distribution of the newspaper *Intex-Press*”, once again refusing to distribute the independent publication.

11. Other forms of pressure and violation of rights of journalists and mass media

On 11 February, the KGB tried to put pressure on Aliaksandr Shymko, a film cutter of the TV channel *STV*, threatening him with the dismissal from work and inclusion in a “black list” in order to force him to confess in his cooperation with the Polish TV channel *Belsat*. A man in civilian clothes who introduced himself as a “State security official” Andrej Andrejevich visited Aliaksandr Shymko at his workplace. Threatening him, “Andrej” demanded from Aliaksandr to acknowledge that he was working for *Belsat* and to inform the KGB about his further work. The next morning, “Andrej” waited for Aliaksandr Shymko in the street and tried to force him into going to the KGB office to pass a lie-detector test. The film-cutter refused to go there without an official summons – then the KGB official gave him a document to sign committing him to come to the KGB.

On 12 February, **Radaslau Dambrowski**, a reporter of the Belarusian Radio Racyja (Poland) was again denied the Belarusian visa. The journalist was going to come to Minsk to attend a concert of participants of the music festival *Basovishcha*. An official from the Belarusian consulate in Bialystok called Dambrowski and asked him to collect his passport without providing an explanation. Dambrowski was told that his passport would otherwise be stamped again with “Entry denied”. In June 2015, Radaslau Dambrowski also tried to visit Belarus in the visa-free format together with a tour group from Poland. At the border crossing, his passport was stamped with “Entry denied”. Previously, Dambrowski was denied the Belarusian visa in October 2014 when he was going to attend the “Listapad” film festival.

On 28 March, it became known that reporter **Vasil Siamashka**, as he claims, was fired from the Minsk office of the Russian information agency *Sputnik* after the publication of his interview about his trip to the occupied part of the Donbass entitled “People tortured in the Donetsk People’s Republic? Are not they tortured in the Minsk police?” on the web site of Radio Liberty. Head of the office Andrej Kachura commented on the journalist’s claim saying that the latter had never been on the payroll but cooperated on occasional basis.

On 29 April, freelance journalist from Homiel **Kastus Zhukouski** received a demand of the tax inspection of the Centralny district in Homiel to explain his source of income for the last five years. The letter signed by deputy head of the tax inspection Eva Zubrej said that, when comparing his income and expenditure, the inspection had established excess of expenditure over income during the last three years in the amount of 31.9 million BYR. Zhukouski believed that such a requirement by the authorities created yet another obstacle to his journalistic activities since he had timely submitted his personal income declarations that were consistent with his expenditure.

On 21 June, a car with a *Belsat* crew inside was blocked at the exit gate from the Liabiazhy market near Minsk. The market’s management called the police to detain the journalists. The crew accompanied Anatol Shumchanka, a leader of the entrepreneurs’ protests, who came to the market where the authorities were carrying out inspections and confiscations throughout the week. *Belsat*’s journalists were covering the developments. The market’s security guard said that Valier Zajtsau, the deputy director of the Liabiazhy market, had ordered to block the entrepreneur’s car at the exit gate. The journalists also stayed in the car; the reasons for detention were not provided. Later the police arrived. The market’s management demanded to take Shumchanka and the journalists to the police station and to search them. However, after having recorded Shumchanka’s identity information, the police released them.

On 15 September, freelance cameraman **Aliaksiej Atroshchankau** pursued the car that had hit him during the filming in Naroulia in the Homiel region. He and journalist **Kastus Zhukouski** filmed a story about the poor economic situation in the town. They were followed by two cars in Naroulia – a Mercedes, driven by first deputy chairperson of the Naroulia district

executive committee Natallia Koval, and an Audi. When Atroshchankau came out of his car and began filming the front of the first car to record the license plate, the woman started the car and drove despite the fact that she saw him standing in front. She hit him in the knee and he staggered. The journalists called the police but they did not know what to do. When Zhukouski asked her why they followed the crew she replied that she was doing her job. She was taken to a hospital for an alcohol test and the other persons who remained in her car kept hiding their faces. *After the incident the journalists went to the police station. Aliaksiej Atroshchankau filed a complaint.*

On 29 September, the military counter-intelligence of the Belarusian KGB got interest in *Belsat*'s reporters **Larysa Shchyrakova and Kastus Zhukouski**. When Jauhien Mierkis, the chairman of the Homiel local history association *Talaka*, came to the regional executive committee to clarify a number of issues related to the organization, officials told him that someone wanted to talk to him in the next room. A person in that room called himself Aliaksandr and confirmed that he was working in the KGB. He made Mierkis to remain for a long time in the room while asking him questions about *Talaka*'s activities and prevented him from taking pictures. Finally, "Aliaksandr" took special interest in two members of *Talaka* – freelance journalists Larysa Shchyrakova and Kastus Zhukouski. He asked whether they were working for *Belsat*.

On 2 October, the Russian TV channel NTV made fun of Lukashenka. Presenter of *International Sawmill* Tigran Keosayan called Lukashenka the only person in the world capable of spoiling the milk with the power of his word. "As soon as he says something, Russia will immediately recognize the Belarusian milk as spoilt and ban it", he said in the show, but this fragment was cut from the version aired by *NTV-Belarus*. Member of the Belarusian Association of Journalists Barys Haretski asked the Belarusian TV and Radio Company to inform him about the legal basis for censoring NTV shows. In her reply, chief director of the TV channel *NTV-Belarus* Marharyta Chystasierdava said that the channel was acting in accordance with the law, including the Law on mass media. Later the satirical show *International Sawmill* was taken off the air. For the last time, the show was aired on *NTV-Belarus* on 30 October.