

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting – February 6 - 12, 2012

Within the reporting period, there were registered several refusals to provide journalists with information on important public issues.

On February 6 Vitsebsk road police detained a journalist for the newspaper “**Vitsebski Kuryer**” **Yuliya Kanapliova** for 4 hours. The policemen Aleh Laveykin and Mikhail Aniukhouski stopped the journalist’s car and demanded to open the hood. Yuliya Kanapliova said that she would like to call witnesses and to register the procedure of the car inspection. Instead the policemen started to consult with somebody on the phone and called the police patrol. Also some people in plain clothes came to the place of the incident. Approximately an hour later the policeman Anukhouski repeated again their demand “just to open the hood, without a protocol”, and got a refusal. Two hours later policemen of the Pershamayski district police of Vitsebsk came to the place of the incident, made up a protocol and inspected the car – only to find one issue of “Vitsebski Kuryer”. After that Y. Kanapliova was set free.

On February 7 the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus made a statement in connection with the documentary “Bash na BAJ” shown on “Belarus-1” channel on February 5. The Assembly expressed their indignation at the “slanderous and insulting attack of the state propaganda” against PA “BAJ”.

The Assembly sees the film as “Not only an attack on the famous public association, but also as a dangerous signal about a possible beginning of a new series of attacks of state bodies on the independent press and journalists. The Assembly calls the civil society for solidarity with BAJ, independent mass media and journalists, and also demands the Ministry of Information to issue a warning to the TV channel for dissemination of slanderous and insulting information that harms the reputation of BAJ.

We remind that the mentioned “investigative” report accused BAJ of receiving funds from the British Embassy in Minsk and failing to register the money with the Presidential Administration's property management department in violation of rules. The report featured images of papers allegedly containing information about the funding that carried no signatures or seals, as well as an anonymous letter from a former BAJ member who allegedly accused the organization of misusing funds.

On February 7 the British Embassy, giving comments on the film “Bash na BAJ” said they were disappointed at the standards applied by the BT when preparing the report about BAJ shown on “Belarus-1”. “This program seems to be just another one in the series of constant attacks on foreign diplomatic missions. The British Embassy will continue performing their regular diplomatic functions, which also includes maintaining relationships with both governmental and non-governmental organizations in Belarus.”

On February 8 the international organization “Reporters without borders” made a statement to support BAJ. RSF condemned the attempt of the Belarusian state TV to smear the “Belarusian Association of Journalists”, the country’s only autonomous association of media workers, the partner of “Reporters without borders” and the “International Federation of Journalists”.

“The protection and support that BAJ provides to independent journalists and its constant defense of the freedom to report news and information have never been so valuable as in the past year, when the government has cracked down in an unprecedented manner on Belarusian civil society,” said RSF in the statement.

As reported on **February 8**, Vitsebsk regional court (judge Iryna Smaliakova) dismissed the appeal of **Heorhi Stankevich**, the editor and publisher of a small-circulation newspaper “Kryvinka”, against the fine given to him by Beshankovichy district court for violating the order of distribution of a media outlet. H. Stankevich attracted the judge’s attention to several violations of judicial procedure in his administrative case in Beshankovichy: for instance, he was denied the right to defense. However, the regional court didn’t find these violations sufficient enough to send the case back for reconsideration.

We remind that the administrative protocol against Mr. Stankevich was made up on complaints of two female residents who didn’t like that the newspaper got into their mailboxes, although they hadn’t subscribed to it. The judge ruled that the editor and the publisher of “Kryvinka” violated the law on the media.

On February 9 it became known that the Administration of Mahilou colony No15 refused to intercede for **Dzmitry Bandarenka** for granting him a presidential pardon; Volha Bandarenka, wife of the prisoner, learnt it from the head of the colony **Siarhey Makhankou**. The parole board of the colony had considered Bandarenka’s request for mercy the day before that.

On February 1 Dzmitry Bandarenka wrote a request to Lukashenka for granting him mercy. He has serious health problems. Despite the fact that he had undergone a serious operation on the spine, on January 30 the conditions of his imprisonment were toughened: he was forbidden to use the crutch and special orthopedic footwear. On February 2 the prisoner was given back his crutch and boots and was allowed not to walk in the line.

On February 9 the head of the special department of Mahilou colony No 15 **Ludmila Hurkova** refused to announce the decision on Dzmitry Bandarenka’s case to journalists. At the reception room of the head of the colony a correspondent for *Belapan* got a refusal to put him through to **S. Makhankou**. He was recommended to make written requests on the day of reception of citizens.

On February 9 it became known that the Editor-in-chief of “**Bobruyskiy Kuryer**” **Anatol Sanatsenka** received an answer from the Leninski district prosecutor’s office to his complaint in connection with his being included into the list of citizens subject to preventive police control. In the answer, the prosecutor A. Karapetsian assures that no preventive measures are being imposed on the journalist. And the repetitive visits of policemen to his house (in his absence) are connected with the “obligatory fingerprints registration”.

Anatol Sanatsenka thinks that the prosecutor's answer does not correspond to the real facts.

On February 10 the Director General of "Brest City Housing and Communal Services" **Uladzimir Autka** promised to bring a journalist to justice if he published his interview. The journalist for "**Brestskaya Hazeta**" **Stanislau Korshunau** tried to get comments from the head of the urban HCS about raising the payment for heating because of severe frost. At first, Autka said that these figures hadn't been calculated yet. But when the journalist was going to ask another question – about heat meters – the Director General remarked that he was answering the questions without giving his agreement for an interview. "First of all, as a correspondent, you should have asked me if I agreed to the interview. So I don't agree to give an interview. I simply answered your question. I don't give any official comments on this," said Uladzimir Autka. When the journalist asked what would happen if the journalist disobeyed the "advice", the official answered: "If you publish that I have given you the interview, we will solve the issue in court".