

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

*Info-posting – April 9 - 15, 2012*

The good news of the reporting period was the release from the colony of BAJ member Dzmitry Bandarenka who had been imprisoned since December 2010. All other events conform to the regular routine – again information denied, no exit abroad, and a new fine.

**On April 9** the director general of the capital factory “Amkodor” **Valery Kandratchyk** sent a letter to the Minister of Information **Aleh Praliaskouski** “strongly asking” to issue a warning to “Nasha Niva” for dissemination of unreliable information and to take all “measures, provided by the legislation.”

Mr Kandratchyk was angered by the article “Millionaire with scalpel” about the Chairperson of the Board of Directors, Senator Aliaksandr Shakutsin, published in No 13 (754) of “Nasha Niva” on April 4, 2012. The letter enumerates a number of claims against the newspaper. “NN” gave detailed explanations to each of the claims in an editorial.

**On April 11** BAJ member, coordinator of the civil campaign “European Belarus” **Aliaksandr Atroshchankau** was denied exit from Belarus. He and his wife were taken off the train at Gudogai station on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. Border guards checked and stamped his passport, saying he was denied exit from Belarus. It all happened despite the note he had received from the Citizenship and migration unit of the Central district police department confirming that he was allowed to leave the country.

After the incident Aliaksandr Atroshchankau learnt from the Citizenship and migration department that his travel had been restricted by the court of Orsha city because of a fine imposed on him after the administrative case on March 29. “It is absolutely unlawful because the decision hasn’t come into effect yet,” said Atroshchankau.

**On April 12** the court of the Leninski district in Mahilou fined **Siarhey Nigatsin** 3 mln Br. The judge **Aksana Ratnikava** found that Mr Nigatsin was guilty because he didn’t have a contract with the editor’s office for distribution of the newspaper (which is signed with an editor’s office as a legal entity). The judge dismissed the argument that the newspapers “Vybar” (Choice) and “Tut i tsiaper” (Here and now) were not registered, and so they were not legal entities.

The witnesses at the trial were policemen that detained Siarhey Nigatsin, took him to the police department and seized around 30 newspapers. Mr Nigatsin is going to appeal against the court's decision.

As reported on **April 13**, a non-staff correspondent for "Babruyski Kurier" **Volha Asokina was denied information** at the Center of tourism and local history, geography and culture "Babrania" ("Little Beaver"). The journalist asked to specify information about the recent scientific conference, dedicated to Babruysk and its "fortress on the Biarezina".

A methodologist of the Center refused to provide such information, referring to some unpublished ban. He explained that the workers of the establishment received an instruction to give information about the conference only to the website of Babruysk city executive committee, and a worker from the Center had already delivered the information to the ideological department.

*We remind that on April 4, Volha Asokina was also denied information at Babruysk local history museum: she wanted to find out additional information about the current exhibition, devoted to a 200-year old fortress in Babruysk and 1812 personalities. The museum worker said they had been prohibited to provide any information for "Babruyski Kurier".*

As reported on **April 13**, the independent regional newspaper in Baranavichy "**Intex-press**" **failed to get official comments** from medical institutions. Readers of the newspaper had sent a letter to the editors, in which they complained about unreasonable new territorial distribution of medical services in the city.

Journalists asked the ideological department of Baranavichy City Executive Committee and Baranavichy Central Polyclinic to explain the principles of new registration of residents in this or that medical establishment, which polyclinic they could go to, and if they could change the present situation etc.

The ideological department answered "Intex-press" that they did not possess such information. And the chief doctor of Baranavichy Central Polyclinic **Aliaksandr Stetsko** informed "Intex-press" that the "requested information was published in the state press (newspaper "Nash Kray")."

**On April 14** it became known that the **court of Dubrouna** district **decided** that **the arrest of the car** which transported copies of "**Vitsebski Kurier**" was **unlawful**. After the court proceedings, the media worker was able to take away the car from the car pound.

*We remind that the car with 10 thousand copies was detained on "Moscow – Brest" highway on March 22. ("Vitsebski Courier" was unable to sign contracts with any Belarusian publishing house, so now it is published in Smolensk in Russia.) This time not only the whole print-run of the newspaper was seized, but also the car was arrested and*

*sent to a car pound in Dubrouna. During the trial Dubrouna car inspectors referred to some unpaid fines since 2009; however, the court found that all fines had been paid.*

**Dzmitry Bandarenka was set free on the morning of April 15** from Mahilou colony No15.

*The coordinator of the civil campaign “European Belarus” and close associate of the ex-candidate for presidency Andrey Sannikau (released on April 14) Bandarenka was arrested on December 20, 2010 and sentenced to two years in medium-security colony. Just after the arrest, his chronic disease deteriorated, and at the end of July he underwent an operation on the spine.*

*At the end of January 2012 the prison conditions were toughened, despite the difficult health condition: he was forced to go to work, for checks, walk in the line, and even his crutch was taken away. After a request for mercy to Lukashenka filed on February 1, the politician was given back his crutch. On March 27 the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture received a complaint with a request to investigate facts of torturing the political prisoner Zmitser Bandarenka.*