

# THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

## Mass Media Week in Belarus

*Info-posting – February 13 - 19, 2012*

**The reporting period was marked by a series of summons to freelance journalists to appear in law enforcement agencies. Some of them received warnings for conducting journalist activities for foreign mass media without accreditation. Besides, there were recorded new attempts to create obstacles for journalists trying to get information.**

**On February 14** a student of the journalism faculty of BSU **Nasta Shuleyka** was informed that she was expelled from university.

In December 2010 Nasta Shuleyka was among the organizers of the campaigns to support those detained at Akrestsina. She was detained on November 25 for participating in the street action to support Ales Bialiatski. After that, a special committee was set up to decide whether to expel her or to give a reprimand. At that time she was reprimanded.

She was detained on December 19, 2011 near the Red Church during a collective prayer, and was fined for 700 thousand Br. Besides, she was detained on December 31 near the prison in Akrestsina – and punished with administrative arrest for “using obscene language near a detention center of the police department”.

**On the morning of February 14**, a Belarusian Christian Democratic Party activist from Rahachou (Homel region) **Dzianis Dashkevich** was forced to come to the police department for questioning. At the local police department he was handed in a summons to appear as a witness at the district police department at 11am on that very day. Dzianis Dashkevich was warned that there was a possibility of opening a criminal case against him. There were four claims against him, and it hadn't been decided yet which case to start – either for defaming an official representative or “stealing” information from the local newspaper.

Dzianis Dashkevich thinks his summons is connected to the local socio-political news website <http://vrogacheve.ru/>. According to the activist, although the website appeared not long ago, it has become the most popular news resource of the town.

An awarding ceremony of the contest “I Love Belarus” took place **on February 14**. The journalist for *Narodnaya Volia* **Maryna Koktysh** won in the nomination “Journalism”: she was awarded for a brave question to Aliaxandr Lukashenka which she asked during the December 2011 press-conference.

The nominees for “Journalism” were also Yauhen Valoshyn (“Quality Journalism”), Siarhey Hudzilin (“Original photo reports and a number of nontrivial projects”), Mitsia Tarpishchau (“Opening the year for the Belarusian Internet-TV”) and Aliaxandr Lastouski (“Press Secretary for Minsk Police”).

The yearly award was founded by the Czech-registered “Young front”. It was the third time the contest took place.

**On February 15** a correspondent for *Radio Racyja* **Aliaksandr Yarashevich** was detained while doing his work in Barysau (Minsk region). The incident took place while he was preparing a news report about a workers’ protest at Barysau Factory of Automobile and Tractor Equipment (BATE). During the detention the journalist demonstrated his journalist certificate, but that was not enough. He didn’t have his passport on him, so he was taken to the local police department “for identification”. There they read his journalist certificate, phoned someone, kept him for 2 hours and a half and then released.

**On February 16** an independent journalist **Tatsiana Bublikava** was expelled from the courtroom in Hrodna district court where the trial of a former policeman Dz. Linkus took place. The journalist took several photos of the courtroom with her mobile phone before the beginning of the trial. After that the court guards ordered her to leave the courtroom. Her arguments that only the judge can ban photos after the beginning of the trial were in vain.

BAJ lawyers remind that according to the Code of the Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Belarus (Art. 287/6 – “Providing publicity of a trial”), “people present at an open trial have the right to make writing and audio recordings.” In fact, it is necessary to ask permission for photo and video recordings from the presiding person at the trial, but this is only after the trial begins.

**On February 16** an independent cameraman **Mikola Dziatchenia** was given a written warning against his work for foreign mass media without accreditation. In the prosecutor’s office Mikola Dziatchenia was shown a photo where he was standing with a camera in Svislach town during the celebrations in honor of Kalinouskiya brothers. And then he was shown a freeze-frame from *Belsat* news about this event.

**On February 16** a Hrodna-based independent journalist **Ales Dzianisau** was summoned to the prosecutor’s office for “a talk”. He answered that he didn’t mind talking, but asked to send him a written summons. The prosecutor’s office promised to do so.

**On February 16** the editor of the website “Narodnyia Naviny Vitsebska” **Siarhey Serabro** was summoned to the transport police. The reason for the summons was information and photos on the website about the white-red-white flag in solidarity with Siarhey Kavalenka (who was under trial then). S. Serabro was marked as the author.

In the phone talk with the head of the transport police S.Serabro remarked that he would like to use his journalist right not to disclose the source of confidential information, as the case had not been sent to court yet. The policeman replied that he still needed to keep record of the talk, and the journalist had to give his explanations.

**On February 16** it became known that the head of the informational and educational organization “Platform” **Andrey Bandarenka** is trying to initiate a case against a journalist of the Belarusian TV and Radio Company. An appropriate claim was filed to the Pershamayski district police department in Minsk on February 10. The reason for

the claim was a report shown on December 11, 2011 in the program “V centre vnimaniya” on Belarus-1 TV channel.

Bandarenka doesn't know the name of the author of the report. However, he thinks that the journalist violated Art. 188, 189/2 of the Criminal Code, having spread deliberately false, insulting and harming business reputation facts and rumors, combined with accusations of a serious crime (slander). In particular, the author claimed that A.Bandarenka had been involved in fraud; however, the author didn't mention that A.Bandarenka had been entirely acquitted by Minsk City Court and the Supreme Court.

As reported on **February 17**, **Ales Bialiatski** was convoyed from Zhodzina prison No8 to correctional colony No 2 in Babruysk.

We remind that Ales Bialiatski, vice-president of FIDH, head of the human rights center *Viasna*, BAJ member, was sentenced to 4,5 years in high security colony with property confiscation. The Pershamayski district court of Minsk found him guilty of large-scale tax evasion on November 24, 2011. The basis for the prosecution were foreign bank accounts provided by the authorities of Lithuania and Poland. On January 24 Minsk City Court upheld the appeal, despite the fact that the sum of the “damage”, allegedly inflicted by Ales Bialiatski (around 90 000\$), was paid by his wife. The money collected by the public was transferred to the account of the Pershamayski District Court.

The international democratic society, head of the EU, the USA and other countries consider Ales Bialiatski a political prisoner and demand his immediate release. MPs of 27 countries – members of the Council of Europe - supported the nomination of Ales Bialiatski for the Nobel Peace Prize.

**On February 17** the Minister of Information **Aleh Praliaskouski** announced that in 2011 the Ministry of Information issued 83 written warnings to 57 mass media. The information was announced at a meeting of the Ministry on the results of 2011.

As reported on **February 17**, *Radio Freedom* observer **Valery Karbalevich** won «Die Zeit» award this year.

Other winners of the award are a Moscow journalist Olga Romanova and Baku journalist Khadija Ismayilova; their main themes deal with human rights situation. Also there are two winning media outlets: Caucasian magazine "Dosh" and Ukrainian weekly "Tyzhden". The awarding ceremony will take place on May 24, 2012 in Hamburg.

The award for the best media outlets and journalists in Eastern Europe was set up in 1999 by Gerd Bucerius Foundation with the newspaper “Die Zeit” and the Norwegian organization “Fritt Ord”.

**On February 17** the chairperson of Brest City Executive Committee Aliaksandr Palyshenkau tried to expel **Milana Kharytonava**, photoreporter and BAJ member, from a meeting that was taking place at that establishment. When the meeting started, A.Palyshenkau tried to find out what media Milana represented and announced that she didn't have any accreditation to be present at the meeting. The

journalist asked if any special accreditation was required for this particular meeting. The official claimed that such accreditation was obligatory for all events, taking place at the Executive Committee, so to say "One cannot be present without it". The remark made some of the present journalists smile, after which Palyshenkau offered them also to leave the room. Having realized that the journalist won't leave the room by herself, several minutes later the chairman continued the meeting.