

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### *Mass Media Week in Belarus*

*Info-posting September 24 – October 14*

The photo of the “Associated Press” journalist Siarhei Hryts with black eye spread in all independent online and print media. The journalist was hit in the face by unknown people in plain clothes when detained at the pre-electoral picket in Minsk together with the participants of the action and other journalists. The detainees were held for several hours in the Frunzenski district police department, and then were set free, with parting wishes not to turn up at such actions because “militia may behave inadequately”. The journalist did a medical expertise and next day filed a complaint to the police. On October 7 an answer came from the Frunzenski district police department: “none of the police workers had applied physical force or violence against S.Hryts, as well as any special means”. Also at the end of September BAJ received a reply to the petition addressed to the head of the Minsk City Executive Committee police department Aliaksandr Ioskin. BAJ had suggested holding a meeting to discuss issues of ensuring journalists’ safety at street mass events. Mr Ioskin answered that he found the level of relations between policemen and journalists “sufficient” and declined the suggestion.

The imprisoned human rights defender **Ales Bialiatski** was honored with the **US State Department award** on **September 25, his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday**. The prisoner’s wife Natallia Pinchuk attended the awarding ceremony in the US Ambassador’s residence in Warsaw. The award was presented by the Ambassador Lee Feinstein on behalf of the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: the message underlines that the award was granted for achievements, commitment and courage in human rights activities.

*Ales Bialiatski was sentenced to 4.5 years imprisonment in medium-security colony with property confiscation on tax-evasion charges. The criminal prosecution resulted from information about foreign bank accounts. The court disregarded the fact that the money in the accounts was aimed for human rights activities of the human rights center Viasna closed down by the authorities. The court also dismissed the fact that the alleged damage had been compensated by voluntary donations within the case.*

*The arrest stirred great public discussion in the international community. He is recognized a prisoner of conscience; democratic countries, leaders of the EU and the USA demand his release.*

**On September 25** the editor of the website *Charter-97* **Natallia Radzina** informed that her phone lines were constantly attacked. Constant phone calls came from the number of the chief editor of the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* **Dmitry Muratov**, who knows. The editor, who knows Radzina very well, was unaware of this attack. Natallia Radzina is sure that the phone lines were blocked by the Belarusian special services. She said she would possibly appeal for help to the Polish prosecutor’s office.

We remind that a similar incident took place with Iryna Khalip, journalist of *Novaya Gazeta* and wife of ex-candidate for presidency Andrei Sannikau. She received phone calls from different people willing to buy a car, rent a flat and the like. Iryna also thinks that this was the business of the special services.

**On September 26** BAJ received a letter from the **General Prosecutor’s office** in response to the **campaign** in support of Anton Surapin. We remind that in August 14 to September 13 BAJ held the campaign of signing the **petition to dismiss criminal charges against Anton Surapin**, editor of the website *Belarus News Photo* that first published the teddy bears from the Swedish plane. The collected signatures under the petition were sent to the KGB and the General Prosecutor’s office. The General Prosecutor’s office in the letter signed by the department head **D.Charkas** informed that the General Prosecutor’s office also handed over the petition with the signatures to the KGB.

**On September 28** BAJ received a **reply** from the head of the police department of Minsk City Executive Committee **Aliaksandr Ioskin**. The Belarusian Association of Journalists invited the police representative to hold a discussion on the issues of ensuring **safety for journalists** at mass events. Aliaksandr Ioskin

thinks that the level of relations between the police and the media is “sufficient”, and **declined** the suggestion.

In the meantime media workers are often targeted at mass events. The latest incident took place on **September 18** when the police detained and beat a team of journalists that covered an electoral picket.

As reported on **September 28**, **Amos Roberts**, Australian SBS TV journalist whose equipment had been confiscated at the customs of Minsk-2 airport on September 21, **filed a complaint** to the Belarusian General Prosecutor’s office. Copies of the complaint were also sent to the Interior Ministry, the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Customs Committee.

In the complaint Amos Roberts informed that the confiscated information carriers contained around 12 hours of recorded materials, several thousand of photos etc. which is the journalist’s intellectual property. The journalist underlined that during the procedure of confiscation the customs officers started to delete the photos themselves, despite his numerous protests. Among the confiscated things were HD video camera Panasonic HPX-170, HD video camera Go-Pro Hero, a photo camera Canon G12, a laptop Macbook, an Apple DVD-drive, digital information carriers, an iPhone, several documents from the archive of SBS and a teddy bear with a parachute.

**On September 28 Anatol Bukas**, the chief editor of *Borisovskiy Novosti* and its commercial supplement *Reklamnyj BorJoMi* informed that the newspaper kept on enduring **pressure**. In particular, around 60 copies of the newspaper were removed from newsstands on demand of the sanitary inspection. Mr Bukas says the sanitary inspection implements oral ruling of Barysau City Executive Committee. Also the prosecutor’s office answered to the complaint filed by Anatol Bukas against arbitrary demolition of the newspaper sign over the entrance to its office in August this year. The prosecutor’s office found no violations of law in these actions.

**On October 3 Maryna Adamovich**, wife of the political prisoner **Mikalay Statkevich**, who was a candidate for presidency in 2010, said that her husband **did not receive independent press**, such as *Nasha Niva* and *Novy Chas*.

*We remind that the political prisoner Mikalay Statkevich was sentenced to six years' imprisonment in medium security colony under article 293, part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing mass riots) in the case of December 19, 2012. On December 12, 2012 the court ruled to toughen the imprisonment conditions, and the prisoner was transferred from colony No17 in Shklou to prison No4 in Mahilou.*

**On October 5** it became known that the republican **draft budget** for 2013 allocates 10 mln dollars more for the **Belteleradiocompany**, which is **20% more** as compared to the previous year. In 2012 the republican budget allocated to the BT 360 billion rubles, which is around 43 mln dollars (currency rate of end of December, 2011). This year the sum equals to 53 mln 411 thousand dollars.

**On October 7** the AP **photographer Siarhei Hryts**, who had been beaten by policemen on an electoral rally, **received an answer** from the police department of the Frunzenski district administration in Minsk. The letter says that the police conducted a check-up on his complaint and did not find crime constituents in the actions of their workers (art. 174, part 1, point 2 of the Code on Criminal Procedure). The answer states: “The check-up failed to clarify circumstances of how bodily harm was inflicted to Hryts S.V. because none of the policemen used force or physical violence against him, as well as special means”. “There was no possibility to clarify circumstances how the video materials from Hryts’ camera were deleted” (the journalist had a PHOTO camera – BAJ). The ruling was signed by the deputy head of the department on maintenance of public order and preventive measures/... / of Frunzenski district administration A.Chumik and deputy head of the police department of the Frunzenski district administration R.Vaskrasenski.

*We remind that Siarhei Hryts was detained and wounded on September 18 when shooting an electoral rally made by activists of Tell the Truth! Campaign calling for boycott (in all seven journalists were detain then). The van with plain clothed people appeared at the place before the rally actually started. The unidentified people started to push and grab journalists and activists. Siarhei Hryts had his spectacles broken and damaged eyelid. The detainees were taken to the Frunzenski district police department and*

*held there for three hours. When Siarhei Hryts had his camera back, all photos of the action were deleted. The next day the journalist underwent medical expertise and filed a complaint to the police.*

**On October 9** the video reporter for *Nasha Niva* **Tatsiana Haurylchyk** was **detained** when recording an art performance in October square in Minsk. She was set free three hours later without protocols and without the video recording she had made.

**On October 10** Mahilou independent journalist **Ales Burakou** was called via phone to the police to undergo **fingerprinting**. He answered he would appear only by the official written summons.

**On October 11** it became known about the **end of the linguistic expertise** of the article written by Vitebsk journalist Mikalay Petrushenka. *We remind that at the end of August Orsha Municipal Department of Legal Investigation Committee of Belarus filed a criminal case against the independent journalist Mikalai Pietrushenka for “insulting a governmental official”. The legal prosecution was caused by a Web-publication “A Pedophile Received Bonuses for the Best Children’s Playgrounds” by M. Pietrushenka, published in the Blog Section on www.nash-dom.info Web-resource on August 8, 2012. In accordance with the resolution, signed by Senior Legal Investigator S. Shcharbianka, the journalist “noted” that the Deputy Chairman of Orsha City Executive Committee was suspected in facilitating a pedophile’s activity. Consequently, it was stated that Petrushenka had “publicly insulted” the municipal official on duty, says the ruling. According to the investigator, the case materials are enough to state a crime under article 369 of the Criminal Code “Insulting an official representative”.*

Mr Petrushenka was allowed to be present at the expertise. The journalist motioned to carry out the expertise by a joint commission of BAJ and BUJ representatives, the investigative officers entrusted the deal to Vitsebsk Pedagogical University named after Piotr Masherau.

**On October 11** the activists of the youth initiative “Alternative” **staged an action** in Minsk center with a TV-set, noodle-soup over the TV-set and logos of state TV channels. The sign below says “Donations for BT salaries”; some people throw cash. Aleh Korban explains that in his view this is the salary the official media workers deserve. The activists were taken to the Partyzanski district police department. **On October 12** the judge of the Partyzanski district court Ryta Shahrai sentenced the people to five days’ administrative arrest for petty hooliganism (article17.1 of the Administrative Code).

**On October 12** the judge of the Soviet district court in Homel **Siarhei Ulasau cancelled the fine** to the civil activist **Aliaksandr Pratsko** for “selling newspapers in improper place”. The ruling on the administrative fine was remanded to the commission of the Soviet district administration. According to Aliksandr Pratsko the legal counselor that presented the Soviet administration in court asked not to cancel the fine; however he could not explain what legal norm the distributor had violated by selling the newspapers in Pryvakzalnaya square.

*We remind that on August 20 in Homel in Pryvakzalnaia Square the civil activist Aliksandr Pratsko was detained while selling the independent weekly “Novy Chas”. An administrative protocol was drawn up, stating he had violated article 12.17 of the CoAO – he was selling newspapers in an inappropriate place. On September 6 the administration’s commission fined the distributor 100 thousand rubles (nine euro) for selling the newspaper “Novy Chas” in improper place. Aliksandr Pratsko appealed against the fine on the grounds that the mentioned article envisages a fine not for selling press in an inappropriate place, but for selling press in places where it is banned by law.*