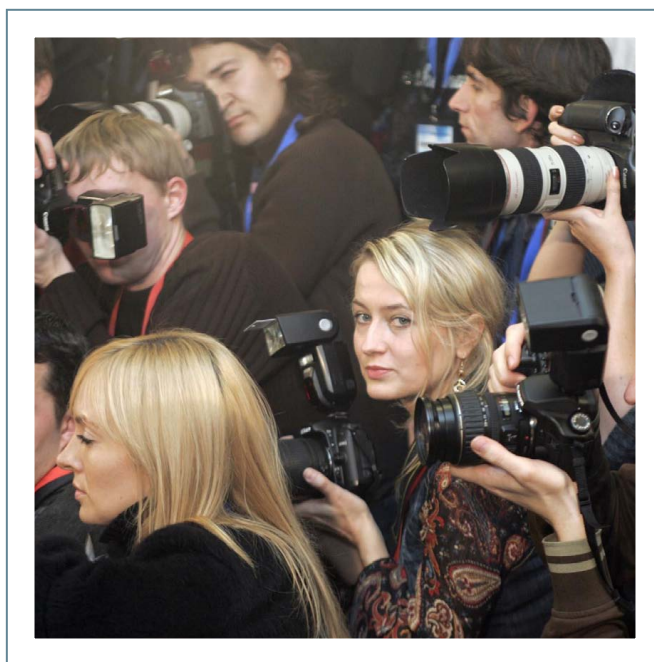


MASS MEDIA

in Belarus

E-NEWSLETTER

2 (13) March – April 2009



BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS
www.baj.by

“A new media law... in any case mustn't impede the freedom of speech in Belarus. However, we state that it is regularly used against the mass media that wish to get press credentials in the country.”

Jean-François Juillard, General Secretary, RSF

“We are incensed by the Belarusian authorities' punishment of Andrzej Poczobut for his critical reporting by denying him press credentials... Instead of going after a journalist for doing his job, the government should investigate the harassment against him and his family.”

*Nina Ognianova, Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator,
“Committee to Protect Journalists” (USA)*

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2. SITUATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEDIA FIELD IN MARCH – APRIL 2009

The European Parliament hailed a resolution on Belarus with a majority of votes on April 2, 2009. The document evaluated the results of the dialogue between the EU and Belarus, held within the recent half a year. In particular, it focused on the situation with the media freedom in the country.

The European Parliament enlisted several points that could be regarded as hallmarks of changes to the better. They included:



- provision of equal rights to all media outlets by means of lifting a ban on distribution of independent printed periodical editions through the “Sayuzdruk” and “Belposhta” state-owned press distribution networks;

- exclusion of articles 367, 368, 369, and 369-1 of Belarus’ Criminal Code that envisage liability for libel and offense in relation to the President of Belarus, governmental officials as well as for defamation of Belarus that appear to be frequently misused in order to persecute journalists for implementing their professional activity;

- simplification of procedure of getting press credentials for the local and foreign media representatives.

Moreover, the European Parliament called upon the European Commission to render financial assistance to the Belarusian independent “Belsat” TV Channel, broadcasting its programs from the territory of Poland and urged the Belarusian government to have the TV channel officially registered in the country.



Similar recommendations had been included in the EP resolution on situation with the media, adopted on January 15, 2009. However, no progress can be seen in different fields, mentioned in the previous EP resolutions.

13 independent media still cannot be distributed through the “Sayuzdruk” and “Belposhta” state-owned press distribution systems. Several periodical editions, including “Gazeta Slonimskaya”, “Otdushina”, and “Volhaye Hlybokaye” received repeated refusals to distribute the periodicals from the state monopolist institutions, mentioned above. Moreover, Babruysk branch of “Belpostha” terminated a contract with the “Bobruyskiy Kuryer” local independent newspaper on distributing the periodical by subscription in the city and in the vicinity (the newspaper used to enjoy this opportunity in the past). The Criminal Code of Belarus still contains the repressive articles, mentioned above.

Thus, despite the started dialogue with the European Union, the Belarusian authorities continued to infringe upon the media freedom in the country in March – April 2009. On the one hand, the journalists' access to information was restricted. On the other hand, the readers' access to mass media was complicated. The authorities hindered distribution of non-censored information inside the country as well as dissemination of free information from Belarus to the foreign audiences and from abroad to Belarus.

3. RATING LISTS AND EVENTS

Traditional media are losing popularity with city dwellers in Baranavichy (a district center in Brest region, the 8th largest city in Belarus), the "Intex-press" independent newspaper reports. Baranavichy residents expended 13% less money to purchase newspapers, magazines and other periodicals last year in comparison with the year of 2007. The sales of TV-sets in Baranavichy fell almost twice – from 11,221 to 6,597 items. At the same time the city residents spent 30% more funds to buy nonfoods.



However, the number of Internet users increased considerably in Baranavichy in 2008. The number of ADSL Internet users increased almost four times from 1,000 to 3,700 clients. Around 11,000 private apartments had dial-up Internet connection last year. Thus, the number of dial-up Internet users increased by 500 clients in 2008.

The first session of the Public Coordination Council on the mass media field took place on March 26, 2009. It is worth mentioning, the Council has been founded, basing upon the legal norms of the new Belarusian law "On Mass Media". Despite the title, the Council members as well as the Council's statutory notes are adopted by the Council of Ministers of Belarus. The Council's first session was mainly dedicated to "procedural" issues as well as to the following session, scheduled for mid-May 2009, and its agenda.

"Journalists for Ecological Welfare" media campaign was started in Miensk on April 30, 2009. It was initiated by young leaders of Belarusian Association of Journalists. The media campaign initiators aim at drawing journalists' attention to the problems, connected with the lack of information about construction of APP in Belarus and hushing up the information about alternative energy sources and the consequences of Chernobyl disaster in the country.

Among other, the media campaign includes discussions with the participation of supporters and opposers of the idea to build the APP in Belarus, monitoring of coverage of this problematic in the media, press-tours to the "problem" areas, information support of anti-nuclear activity of civil initiatives and non-governmental organizations. A special *section*, dedicated to the "Journalists for Ecological Welfare" media campaign has been launched on the BAJ Web-site – www.baj.by.