

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

BELARUS MEDIA FORTNIGHT

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The initiative groups finished collection of signatures for nomination of potential presidential candidates within the reporting period. Also, the divisional election committees were formed then.

Several supreme EU officials paid visits to Belarus within the period under review. In particular, Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE Representative on Media Freedom participated in a Round Table discussion on “The Belarusian Segment of Internet: Problems and Perspectives of Development” in Minsk on October 25, 2010. ‘The Belarusian authorities must seize the practice of issuing official warnings to the media and cancel passport control in cyber-cafes in order to show the reality of their intentions to improve the situation in the media field,’ she noted during the final press-conference after her visit to Minsk.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Poland and Germany Radoslaw Sikorski and Guido Westerwelle paid another symbolic visit to the Belarusian capital during the reporting period. Both ministers emphasized the utmost importance of free access of presidential candidates to mass media, regarding it as a hallmark of fair elections in Belarus.

The Monitoring Group of the Belarusian Association of Journalists presented the first results of the presidential election media coverage monitoring at the beginning of November 2010. It was stated that “the topic of the elections did not have priority for the state-owned electronic and printed media.”

Some regional journalists faced difficulties with access to the generalized information about the election process.

A group of OSCE criminal law experts from Norway and Sweden visited Minsk on **November 25 – 29, 2010** with the aim of looking into the legal investigation materials, concerning the tragic death of the independent journalist Aleh Biabienin. Among other, the foreign experts visited the accident site and had a meeting with Andrei Sannikau, a potential

Presidential nominee. (A. Biabienin used to be Sannikau's right hand in his civil activity.) Also, the experts met the journalist's friends and colleagues.

The corpse wasn't exhumed. The experts will prepare the internal report, presenting the outcome of their investigation in Belarus. Its short summary will be made public afterwards.

As reported on **November 2, 2010**, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Minsk region prolonged the check on the case for a month's term. At the same time, Alaksandar Lukashenka expressed his opinion on the case during an interview to the Polish journalists on **November 4, 2010**. The Polish Radio quoted his saying that it was "a criminal crime" and that it would be solved soon. It should be reminded that the co-founder of Charter 97 (charter97.org) oppositional Web-site was found hanged at his summer house near Minsk on September 3, 2010.

On **October 28, 2010**, a judge of Kastychnitski City District Court of Vitsiebsk didn't permit a local **BelaPAN** correspondent Siarhei Sierabro to take pictures during a trial against a hooligan, who offended the opposition activists during the pickets, which had been arranged to collect signatures in support of alternative Presidential nominees. The accused Alaksandar Haydukou was behaving aggressively in relation to the reporters, who tried to take pictures of him before the trial.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Poland and Germany Radoslaw Sikorski and Guido Westerwelle noted during the final press-conference after their one-day visit to Minsk on **November 2, 2010** that they were looking forward to the high quality of the coming Presidential election and that they didn't care about the election results. Mr. Westerwelle emphasized the necessity of ensuring free and unrestricted access of all Presidential candidates to mass media and their voters as a highly important prerequisite of free and fair Presidential election.

The Monitoring Group of the Belarusian Association of Journalists presented the first results of the presidential election media coverage monitoring on November 2, 2010. The first report summarized results of the first 3-week monitoring of Belarusian electronic and printed media in terms of their coverage of the presidential election campaign in Belarus.

"The elections results being predetermined is a new element of their coverage in the media," Ales Antsipenka admitted. Such an attitude is characteristic of non-state media, while state media "for the first time in the history of the monitoring made candidates the main characters of the elections... This is a hallmark of more active attitude towards the elections," the expert thinks. Still, the monitors had to admit that the topic of the Presidential elections did not have priority for the state-owned electronic and printed media.

The monitoring started 25 September 2010 and will last until 30 January 2011. The Monitoring Group plans to issue three more reports.

18 media outlets have become the objects of this year's monitoring.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists has conducted election media coverage monitoring since 2004. The main objective of the monitoring is to evaluate how effectively and fully the Belarusian media cover different political and civil views of candidates and their supporters, as well as to attract attention of the journalistic community of the country to a public duty of the mass media to inform the public comprehensively and thoroughly about the electoral process.

The Minister of Information of Belarus **Aleh Praliaskouski** believes that Belarusian media contain enough information about the coming Presidential election. He delivered the statement while visiting the editorial board of a state-owned newspaper in Valozhyn on **November 5, 2010**. "There is no need to ring the bells and catch journalists by the throat to make them write more about the election," the Minister said. "There is more than enough information about it if we take into consideration the Internet," the Minister admitted.

The Belarusian official authorities refused to prolong press credentials to a Belarusian citizen and BAJ member **Yauhien Ahurtsou**, who used to work as a correspondent of ["Voice of Russia"](#) radio station in Belarus for more than seven years in a row.

Mr. Ahurtsou's press-credentials expired on September 1, 2010. Being aware of this, the radio broadcaster had sent a request to prolong the correspondent's accreditation well in advance.

Particularly, the letter was sent from Moscow on August 20th. However, for some unknown reason, it appeared in Minsk on September 11, 2010 only. Consequently, Mr. Ahurtsou submitted the claim for prolongation of his press credentials to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a delay. Reportedly, it was regarded at the Ministry on **November 2, 2010**. The journalist was informed that his press credentials weren't prolonged afterwards. The state officials blamed him for breaking article 10 of "Provisions on the Procedure of Providing Accreditation to Foreign Journalists in Belarus". In particular, they accused Mr. Ahurtsou of implementing journalistic activity on behalf of a foreign media outlet without valid press credentials. The Ministry representatives stated that Mr. Ahurtsou's articles had been published on the "Voice of Russia" Web-pages after September 1, 2010.

The journalist retorted that he had been providing comments as a private person as well as a writer of political essays and that he was presented on the Web-site like that.

Alena Machalina, Executive Officer of Slonim District Executive Committee didn't permit a "Gazeta Slonimskaya" newspaper correspondent to attend a session on forming divisional election committees in Slonim district, held at the above-mentioned Executive Committee on **November 3, 2010**.

As reported on November 4, 2010, Eduard Brokarau, the Editor-in-chief of "UzHorak" independent newspaper (Horki, Mahilou region) couldn't get official information from local authorities regarding the quantity of signatures, collected in support of presidential candidates in the area. This information was kept in secret by Katsiaryna Karotkina, Head of Organizational Department at Horki District Executive Committee and Alaksandr Lukyanchyk, Deputy Chair of Drybin District Executive Committee.

Prepared by BAJ Monitoring Service