

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

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Extremist books in Belarus are likely to grow in number. Recently, there have become more cases when customs' officers seize printed products for further examination regarding extremist contents. On September 14 a book about Alexander Lukashenko was seized by the customs' office on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. The book by Ales Bialiatski "*Asvechanyja Belarushchynaj*", seized earlier, was called "harmful for the reputation of the Republic of Belarus."

On September 9 the head of the Baranavichy city police department Viachaslau Herasimovich denied information in reply to a written request of the non-state newspaper *Intex-press* about the statistics on violations committed in drunken condition, on illegal alcohol sells and moonshining. The official representative replied that the information was restricted.

Remarkably, the respective statistics at the national level is open and published on the website of the Ministry of the Interior, and has been several times quoted by the Baranavichy police. Moreover, on the same days when *Intex-press* received the refusal, the requested statistics appeared in the state-run newspaper *Nash Kraj*.

"Thus, either somebody from the Baranavichy city police department provided "restricted" information to the state-run mass medium, or the official of the police provided us with wrong information," commented editors of *Intex-press*.

On September 10 the Krychau district court (judge Antanina Kachanova) upheld the lawsuit of the Cherykau building enterprise PMK-280 against journalists of the independent newspaper *Volny Horad*. The newspaper has to pay legal expenses incurred during the honor and business reputation case for the article "*Krepostnyje?*" According to the court ruling, the editor Siarhei Niarouny and journalist Mikalay Herdzij must compensate 900 thousand Belarusian rubles (a little less than 100\$).

On September 11 a blogger Ruslan Mirzojeu was informed that there was a criminal case opened against him for five violations, and thus he faced up to three years in jail.

We remind that in summer the blogger made a series of videos about the Minsk Automobile Factory, after which he was fired. After a new video about drug addicts and juvenile delinquents in a residential area of the capital, he was placed under seven days' house arrest for disobeying the demands of the police.

On September 11 a blogger from Babruysk Aleh Zhalnou was forced to undergo a psychiatric examination. Before that he was summoned to an investigator of the traffic police regarding an administrative case filed against him on September 4 allegedly for disobeying the demands of the traffic police.

The blogger said that there was no questioning as such. Two officers of the traffic police appeared and invited him to proceed with them, without explanations. The blogger was taken to the building of the specialized forensic institution. As a result of the examination, which lasted an hour and a half, the invited psychiatrist concluded that the blogger was sane.

We remind that on September 4 Aleh Zhalnou and his son were detained after they reported to the traffic police about wrong parking on a pavement. The officers treated the detainees badly and compiled

two administrative protocols against them. The case has been passed over to the Investigative Committee.

As became known **on September 12**, policemen from Brest **do not return a computer system unit to the civil activist** from Liakhavichy **Valiantsina Panfila** which had been seized from her two months before. Meanwhile, they several times promised to give it back.

The seizure was related to a **cyber-attack** on the website of the **independent newspaper *Nasha Niva***. Somebody added malware to a headline on the newspaper website which resulted in blocking it **on June 22**. **On June 24** the hacking repeated. On June 28 the newspaper editor **Andrei Skurko** **filed a complaint to the police** asking to investigate the attack. Further the police seized the computer from the activist, claiming that the attack had been performed from her IP-address. An examination of the equipment gave no results, and the attackers have not been found yet.

On September 14 a civil activist **Aliaksandr Malochka** was searched for 2.5 hours at the Kamenny Loh border point on his way back from Lithuania. The customs' office **seized a book "Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Political portrait" by Valery Karbalevich** to find out if it contained **extremist materials**. The activist was told that after examination he would have a talk with KGB employees.

September 14, a correspondent of *Radio Svaboda* **Aleh Hruzdilovich**, and journalists of *Nasha Niva* **Iryna Arakhoukaya** and **Hanna Badziaka** were **detained** when they were going to cover a **picket** of relatives of Ihar Ptsichkin who died in prison.

Relatives and participants of the protest as well as the journalists were detained not far from the place in Valadarskaha Street where the action was planned. They were taken to the Central district police department and were held there for three hours. They were made to leave their fingerprints and to delete all photos and videos from that day.

The press-service of BAI tried to find out where the detainees were, but the duty policemen of the police department denied that anyone had been detained. The spokesperson for the police of the Minsk City Executive Committee Aliaksandr Lastouski also replied that he did not have any information about the detainees.

On September 16 the website *Viasna* published the results of examining the book **"Enlightened by Belarusianness"** ("Asvechanyia Belaruschunai") by **Ales Bialiatski**. 40 copies of the book were seized on **July 3** from the human rights defender **Tatsiana Raviaka** on the border point Kamenny Loh. The customs office passed over the book to the ideological department of the Hrodna Region Executive Committee, where an expert commission made the following conclusions: the contents have "vivid tendentious and populist character" and "can damage the image of the Republic of Belarus"; "it does not contain obvious and unambiguous calls for extremist activities or its propaganda..." but "the style and the rhetoric might push the reader toward wrong conclusions which further can be misinterpreted and misunderstood by the public and provoke activities related to inciting national, political or ideological hostility"; "the contents of the printed output might shape a wrong impression about the Republic of Belarus, its historic past, and might cause social and political tension in society".

The expert resolution was signed by two teachers of Hrodna State University, one of whom, a dean of the criminal law and criminology department **Vadzim Khiliuta**, was also part of the expert commission in Belarus Press Photo 2011 case.

The Ashmiany customs office offered to Tatsiana Raviaka either to **take the books back to Lithuania** or **to pay the customs duty**. The human rights defender is trying to return the books by complaining to the State Customs Committee.

On September 16 mother of an **editor of Belsat website Zmitser Yahorau** received a **summons** for her son to the Investigative Committee. The Department of the Investigative Committee in Hrodna region summoned him as a witness in a criminal case on September 18 (it was not clarified what case was meant). The summons was signed by an investigator in transport crimes and military service violations. Zmitser Yahorau ignored the summons, claiming that it should have been delivered to him personally. He said that “he had not witnessed any crimes neither in transport nor at military service.” He assumed it might have been pressure related to his professional activities.

On September 16 the Bialynichy district court (judge Aksana Zahorskaya) **dismissed two police’s administrative protocols** against editor of a low-circulation newspaper **Valery Vusik**. The protocols were compiled in February, accusing the editor of **libeling** the former chairperson of the agricultural farming complex **Lebiadzianka**. The ground for the accusation was an article published in the newspaper *Mahilouski Vybar*; also, the editor was accused of violating the Law on Mass Media when distributing the outlet.

*We remind that on **March 29** the Bialynichy district court (judge Uladzimir Huz) **fined** Valery Vusik to 30 base amounts for libel and 20 base amounts for violating the distribution rules. The Mahilou regional court (judge Pavel Klimau) supported the sentence on appeal. However, **on August 1** Ihar Prashko, the chairperson of the Mahilou regional court, overturned the previous rulings and sent the case to the first instance court to another judge.*

As became known **on September 17**, in Hrodna a young man **was fined for an online comment** regarding a traffic police officer. The 22-year old man wrote the comment after his girlfriend failed at an exam for the driving license. The court hearing took place on **August 22**. The man was fined four million rubles (approx. 350 €), plus one million rubles of moral damage to the officer.

“The text on the website insulted the aggrieved person and placed him in an embarrassing position in relations with his colleagues,” reported the website of the traffic police in Hrodna region.

We remind that in July another large fine for an online comment was imposed on a playwright Andrei Karelin – for negative comments regarding Belarusian police.

On September 18 – 19 the Krychau district court heard a **lawsuit of the Cherykau PMK-280** (building enterprise) against the low-circulation newspaper *Volny Horad*. The company accuses the newspaper of discrediting the administration and undermining its business reputation, they were insulted by the article “We’ll wait with the retraction” (dated June 29), and demands to publish a retraction. After hearing all sides, the judge put off the trial till **October 21**.