

The Belarusian Association of Journalists

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In May OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic sent a letter to Belarusian government, where she expressed her concern about pressure against independent media in Belarus. “Intimidation of journalists exerts a 'chilling' effect on already weakened investigative journalism in Belarus,” Mijatovic said. She also expressed disappointment that Internet legislation was adopted without public consultation.

Belarusian Association of Journalists made a statement in which it expresses its indignation because of a new wave of repressions against the freedom of expression in Belarus. The wave started 18 May with another police raid at offices and private apartments of civil activists. Sergey Vozniak, a member of BAJ Board and the editor of *Tovarishch* newspaper, was detained for three days. Besides, several more BAJ members were searched and interrogated, namely Yury Aleinik, Yury Varonezhtsau, Larysa Nasanovich, Aliaksandr Ulitsionak, Aliaksandr Fiaduta. Their private equipment and information carriers were also confiscated.

26 April Siarhei Dzezhka, Prosecutor of Hantsavitski District, issued an official warning to the editor of *Hantsavitski Chas* independent newspaper Aliaksei Bely and its journalist Katsiaryna Kurlovich. That was a result of considering of an appeal to the Prosecutor's Office by a local election commission. Katsiaryna Kurlovich made mistakes in a name of one of candidates and in a date nomination of candidates had stopped. Besides, according to the Prosecutor's Office, a caption to a picture in an article, that went “Results of the elections often depend not on voters, but on officials from election commissions”, “does not contain well-grounded arguments of this statement.”

29 April it became public that Charter'97 web site is a figurant of one more criminal case. It deals with comments visitors of the web site left to an article re-published from *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, a newspaper of Presidential Administration. The article dwells on the issue of veterans of Afganistan war. The General Prosecutor's office filed a suit on slander with veterans of the Afganistan war Aleh Volchak and Aliaksandr Kamarouski being witnesses on the case.

4 May Aleh Praliaskouski, the Minister of Information of Belarus, was a guest of online conference at BELTA state information agency web site. “If you remember, there is such an organization as BAJ. Its representatives used to wave with press cards with a word ‘press’ on it, but they were only members of an NGO, not press. There is court practice on this, they were refused the right to be called press,” the Minister said. He also added that one has to register a media outlet, and only after that one has the right to apply for accreditation.

4 May more than 12,000 copies of *Nash Dom* unregistered newspaper were confiscated in Mahiliou from Chrystsina Shatsikava. The police first explained the confiscation by suspicion that there might be stolen things in packs the activists had been detained with. But after they had opened the packs they found out there were the newspaper copies. Ms. Shatsikava were taken to a police station, where an administrative protocole was compiled for dissemination of printed materials that contain no output data.

5 May Viktor Ramniou, a founder of *Vitebskiy Kurier* independent newspaper, was sentenced to a fine of 1,050,000 Belarusian rubles (about 280 Euro). A judge of Pershamayski District Court of Vitsebsk found him guilty of illegal distribution of the newspaper. 53 copies of the newspaper was found by the police in Viktor Ramniou's car 1 April 2010.

6 May the Supreme Economic Court left in force a decision of the Economic Court of Vitsebsk Region that refused a press distribution license to *Vitebskiy Korund* company. A distribution list of the company contained *Vitebskiy Kurier* independent newspaper, and managers of *Vitebskiy Korund* are sure the refusal is directly connected to this fact.

8 May it became public that Gomelskie Vedomosti state local newspaper moved to a new office, which was provided to the editorial board by local authorities free of charge.

12 May Siarhei Serabro, the editor of *Narodnyja Naviny Vitsebska* web site, and a TV freelancer Uladzislau Staraverau were not allowed to court hearings on a case against Siarhei Kavalenka, a local civil activists. Two days later Siarhei Serabro made another attempt to visit the court hearings, but was refused access again.

12 May it became public that representatives of two non-state local newspapers were not invited to official receptions organized by local authorities on the occasion of the Belarusian Press Day. It happened in Luninets (with *Inform-Progulka* newspaper), and in Babruysk, where *Bobruyskiy Kurier* became the only edition whose representatives were not invited to the local Executive Committee.

12 May First Deputy Minister of Information Liliya Ananich met the founders of four non-state regional newspapers, *Nash Dom* from Vitsebsk, *Khimik-Dva Goroda* from Navapolatsk, *Soligorsk Plus* from Salihorsk and *Novaya Gazeta Bobruyska* from Babruysk, that had been refused registration. According to journalists, the negotiations came to nothing. Ananich told them the Ministry worked within the legislative borders and refused registration on legal grounds.

13 May Viktor Chaykouski, the Head of Brest Department of Perspektiva, an NGO that unites private entrepreneurs, received an official warning from a local Public Prosecutor's Office for "non-objective comments in media". The Public Prosecutor's Office warns the civil activists that such comments can lead him into "discredit of the Republic of Belarus" and thus into violating Article 369 of the Criminal Code. "According to Article 33 of the Belarusian Constitution, everyone is guaranteed freedom of thoughts and beliefs and their free expression, and no one shall be forced to express one's beliefs or to deny them. The warning issued to Mr. Chaykouski is a direct violation of this article of the Constitution, which demonstrates an attitude of the state to the freedom of expression in our country," Andrei Bastunets, a Vice Chairman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, commented.

14 May Dzmitry Bandarchuk, an activist of the United Civil Party, was detained in Hrodna, when he carried 200 copies of *Novy Chas* newspaper. An official administrative protocol was compiled for "distribution of printed materials without output data", despite of the fact that Dzmitry Bandarchuk had an official document with a stamp of the newspaper, and the edition is officially registered and has all the necessary data in it.

14 May Homiel Regional Court left in force a decision of Buda-Kashaliova District Court that had sentenced Valery Shchukin, a civil activist, to a fine of 1,050,000 Belarusian rubles (about 280 Euro). He had been detained by the road police when he and a driver had been driving from Vitsebsk to Homiel with 24,000 copies of *Nash Dom* newspaper.

15 May Vitsebsk Regional Court left in force a decision of Beshankovichy District Court that had sentenced Georgy Stankevich, a publisher of a local small-circulation *Kryvinka* newspaper, to a fine of 700,000 Belarusian rubles (about 190 Euro) for “illegal distribution” of the edition.

18 May the police conducted a series of searches in private apartments and offices of civil activists and journalists in Minsk, Homiel, Brest, Hrodna, Mahiliou, Babruysk, Barysau, Vaukavysk, Salihorsk. The searches were conducted in relation to Tell the Truth campaign. Sergey Vozniak, a member of BAJ Board and the editor of *Tovarishch* newspaper, was detained for three days as a suspect on a criminal case. Besides, several more BAJ members were searched and interrogated, namely Yury Aleinik, Yury Varonezhitsau, Larysa Nasanovich, Aliaksandr Ulitsionak, Aliaksandr Fiaduta. Their private equipment and information carriers were also confiscated.

19 May it became public that neither Natallia Radzina, a *Charter'97* journalist, nor Maryna Koktysh and Sviatlana Kalinkina, senior editorial workers of *Narodnaya Volia* newspaper, had been returned their computers. Moreover, it has come out that all 8 PCs, seized during a police search at the *Charter'97* office, as well as a flash-stick and system units of home and work PCs, belonging to Maryna Koktysh, are regarded as items of material evidence within the defamation suit.

26 May Iryna Khalip, a journalist of *Novaya Gazeta*, Russia, was once again interrogated at Pershamayski District Police Department of Minsk. The interrogation lasted for two hours. The journalist was informed her computer, that had been confiscated from her during a search in February 2010, was material evidence within the defamation suit. The same day, another witness on the case, Sviatlana Kalinkina, was returned two of the four computers confiscated.

25 May Mikalay Petrushenka, a journalist of *Vitebskiy Kurier* newspaper, registered in Russia, was summoned to Talachyn District Police Department to provide explanations about his article “Let Officials’ Incomes Be Public”. Uladzimir Shashalevich, the Head of Department of Sport and Tourism of a local Executive Committee, applied with a complaint about the article. At the same time, the publication stated that official newspapers of the Talachyn and neighboring districts did not publish information about incomes of candidates for the local elections.