

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

*Info-posting November 18 – December 1, 2013*

Registration of Internet resources might cause more negative rather than positive consequences – this was the comment of Andrei Bastunets, chairperson of BAJ, to the information publicized by the Information Deputy Minister Dzmitry Shadko about preparing respective amendments to the Mass Media Law. “Most probably, Internet resources will have to register editorial offices with all rights of a legal entity. Natural persons and ordinary citizens will not be able to act as editorials. They will be obliged to have officially rented offices, to hold financial reports, and the chief editor of an Internet outlet will need to have higher education and five years’ experience at administrative positions in related spheres. And they will be accountable according to the provisions of the Law on Mass Media,” supposes Andrei Bastunets.

On November 19 the Deputy Minister of Information **Dzmitry Shadko** announced that **amendments to the media law** were being prepared. The amendments might oblige **online news resources to register as mass media** “in order to organize an effective counteraction to negative social phenomena on the web”. The information was announced at the meeting of the Committee on Juveniles at the Belarusian Council of Ministers.

Dzmitry Shadko informed that a **working group** had already been set up at the Council of Ministers, with participation of agencies concerned. “We suggest introducing amendments to the media law, under which the most popular and influential Internet resources will be defined as mass media and will be responsible before law for disseminating any information, up to withdrawal of registration.”

On November 19 in **Rahachou** (Homel region), officers of the Investigative Committees **searched the flat of Dzianis Dashkevich**, civil activist and editor of the regional portal **vrogacheve.ru**. Two computers and a modem were seized. The searches were conducted with a warrant, issued for investigation in a criminal case of insulting an official representative.

According to Dzianis Dashkevich, the website vrogacheve.ru published an article about a local official representative. “He was fired from the Zhlobin customs’ office allegedly for stealing petrol from service vehicles. We held a journalistic investigation, questioned people who worked with him, and also people from the local executive committee. We presented both opinions on the website: some people asserted he really dumped fuel on the sly, for what he was demoted. Others, from the executive committee, said it was not true. I don’t understand what insult can be in this article”.

According to the activist, after the officers from the Investigative Committee left, somebody called on the phone and was keeping silent. He also received messages on Skype: “now you’ve got it”, “you’ll go to jail soon”.

On November 22 the spokesperson of BAJ **Barys Haretski** was summoned to the Investigative Committee of Kastychnitski district in Minsk. Officer Nadzeja Aliaksandrava informed that she was holding an **investigation** into his complaint regarding the **detention of journalists at Minsk railway station** when they were meeting Pavel Seviarynets returning from three-year term in a labor colony.

*We remind that on October 19 ten journalists were detained at the railway platform; this way they were prevented from covering the event. Among the detainees there were Ales’ Piletski, Vital Ruhain, Aliaksandr Vasiukovich, Siarhei Hudzilin, Andrei Korsak, Zakhar Scharbakou, Yahor Majorchyk, Dzianis Nosau, Nadzeja Hatsak and Barys Haretski.*

**On November 25** in Hrodna journalists were **not allowed to cover a concert** of the folk-band **Stary Olsa** organized by the regional **Philharmonic Hall**. There were *BelaPAN* photo correspondent **Aliaksandr Sajenka**, *Radio Racyja* correspondent **Viktar Parfionenka**, and also *Belsat* correspondents.

According to Parfionenka, he tried to get **accreditation** during the day of the concert, but did not reach the person responsible (art director) by phone. When the journalists came to the concert, the art director Viktar Sakalouski forbid them to enter, saying they should have got accreditation for the whole Music Philharmonic Decade, but not for only one concert. Other journalists did not get comprehensible explanations at all.

**On November 26** two journalists were briefly **detained** by the **traffic police** near **Hlybokaye** town (Vitebsk region) on the pretext that they reminded someone wanted by the police.

**Viachalsau Piashko** and **Natallia Reznikava** were going to make a video report for the website of *Novy Chas* newspaper. The traffic police stopped them to check IDs, and then invited the journalists to proceed to a police department, saying that the car and the journalists reminded some fraudsters wanted by the police. In the department the journalists were questioned one by one, their passport data were copied and they were set free approximately half an hour later.

"It all looked pretty suspicious," told Viacjaslau Piashko to the press service of BAJ. When the journalists asked to see the portrait of the alleged fraudsters, they were shown a document from a computer with a general description of a man of European looks. The policemen refused to print out the document.

As became known on **November 29**, an employee of an informational agency paid **a fine of 20 million rubles for insulting a judge in an online comment**, reported *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusii*.

KP published neither the name of the agency nor the name of the employee. The article under which the perpetrator wrote the comment dealt with a conflict between a housing developer and his clients regarding construction of an apartment block in Minsk. The conflict was resolved in court in favor of the housing developer. One of the clients expressed his anger about the judge on the website.

The developer's company managers were first to pay attention to the comments; they made screenshots and sent them to the police of the Minsk city Executive Committee. A criminal case was initiated under article 391 of the Criminal Code – insulting a judge or a lay judge.

The accused did not plead guilty, saying he did not mean the one particular judge. The offended judge also spoke in court: he said that he did not like that the man spoke badly of the judicial system, and that he emphasized that the judge was banned entry to the EU. The commentator paid the fine of 20 million rubles, according to KP, which is more than 2 100 \$.