

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting August 20 – September 2

**The period is remarkable by the beginning of a new criminal case against the journalist Mikalay Petrushenka according to article 369 of the Criminal Code – “insulting an official representative”.**

**In the meantime the journalist Andrey Poczobut is pending trial over his “defaming” the president Lukashenka. Poczobut is under recognizance to stay on in his place of residence. The journalist is sure he will appear in focus of the prosecuting bodies soon after the parliamentary elections.**

**The outstanding event was also a raid on several administrators of opposition online groups in social nets which ended up in arrests of several of them.**

**On August 20** the Vitsebsk region prosecutor’s office issued an official **warning** to an independent journalist **Alena Stsiapanava** for contributing to foreign media without accreditation. The warning signed by the prosecutor’s deputy G.A.Karanko states that the journalist is accused of work for an editorial office that had ceased its activities in 2002. According to the document, the prosecutor’s office had several times caught the journalist preparing photo, video and interviews with the purpose to publish reports on a website of the Czech *Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty*. The prosecutor Zaitsau who passed on the warning to the journalist did not try to explain who and how conducted the check-up of the mentioned facts.

Alena Stsiapanava is going to appeal the warning. “The Czech Radio Liberty, as far as I know, stopped working in 2002. So I am not able physically to work for it,” said the journalist. She is the 11<sup>th</sup> journalist who has received a warning from the prosecutor’s office in 2012.

**On August 20** in Homel a civil activist **Aliaksandr Pratsko** was **detained** in Pryvakzalnaya Square for selling a non-state newspaper “*Novy Chas*”, which is officially registered. The senior lieutenant Dzianis Novikau took the distributor to the police department, took down explanations; and captain Siarhey Pauliushchanka made up a protocol for “violating the rules of selling goods and delivering services” (article 12.17 of the Code of Administrative Violations). Pratsko showed his contract concluded with the editorial office for distributing the newspaper, but the police claimed he also needed a permit from the district administration.

The chief editor of “*Novy Chas*” Aliaxey Karol is going to complain against the police’s actions. “Now the law does not require any coordination for such activities – it was earlier when you needed a license. There was no violation”.

**On August 22** it became known that the head of Minsk police **Aliaxandr Ioskin did not find time to meet BAJ representatives**. A week before Zhanna Litvina and Andrey Bastunets had registered for a meeting in order to discuss working conditions of Belarusian journalists at mass events in the capital. However, the day before the appointed meeting a secretary of Mr. Ioskin said that he was going to an urgent training

so he could not hold the meeting. On the second attempt to appoint a meeting the secretary on the phone said the schedule of Mr. Ioskin was unknown and he was unlikely to have time due to the soon-coming elections.

After that BAJ sent a written request to hold a meeting to the police department of Minsk City Executive Committee.

**On August 22** a Vitsebsk-based journalist **Mikalay Petrushenka** was summoned to **Orsha** Municipal Department of Legal Investigation Committee of Belarus. He was informed that **a criminal case** has been filed against him for “**defaming** a governmental official”. The legal prosecution was caused by an online publication “A Pedophile Received Bonuses for the Best Children’s Playgrounds” by M. Pietrushenka, published in the Blog Section on [www.nash-dom.info](http://www.nash-dom.info) Web-resource on August 8, 2012.

According to the resolution, dated August 17 and signed by Senior Legal Investigator S. Shcharbianka, the journalist “indicated” that the Deputy Chairman of Orsha City Executive Committee was suspected of facilitating a pedophile’s activity. Consequently, it was stated that Petrushenka had “publicly defamed” the municipal official on duty.

**On August 23** the official representative of Belsat TV channel in Belarus **Mikhail Yanchuk** was summoned to the Department on Citizenship and Migration where he received a notice that he “is **not subject to any travel restriction**”. “I don’t even know why you happened to be in the base,” said the deputy chair of the Department Mikhail Hryb.

The journalist spent half a year trying to restore his rights. As Mikhail Yanchuk found out earlier, in the travel banned list next to the name of each “travel banned” there was a name of an official representative responsible for introducing them into the base. It was a military commissar in Rechytsa district who restricted the journalist’s right to leave Belarus. Mikhail Yanchuk had a talk with the commissar on the phone; the latter confirmed that it was his name in the base, but he never saw the case of Mikhail Yanchuk and never introduced him into the base.

Two more BAJ members Andrey Dyn’ko and Aliaksandr Atroshchankau are staying on the “travel banned” list.

**On August 23** the chief engineer of the department of capital construction in **Baranavichy** city **Uladzimir Vesialou** refused to give information to the correspondent of an independent local newspaper *Intex-press*. Yulia Kharkevich asked to tell about the terms of building a new residential district in Baranavichy Barauki. The engineer interrupted the journalist, claiming that he would not “give comments to non-state newspapers.”

IP editorial office remark that the information related to the construction of the residential district is not available either from the communal services or architectural municipal department. Several times the journalists were denied comments or information. At the same time, the state-run local newspaper “Nash kray” publish detailed interviews on the topic.

**On August 24** the police patrol in Zhodzina **briefly detained** a human rights defender **Aliaxey Lapitski** who was **taking photo** of the street with the policemen in focus. The patrol called a car with colleagues for help. Lapitski showed his ID, conducted a talk with the policemen, and was free half an hour later.

On the morning of **August 25** Homel-based TV journalist **Larysa Schyrakova** was **detained** in the village of Liaskavichy of Petrykau district and was **not allowed to cover the folk festival** “Call of Palessie”. Representatives of law enforcement agencies came up to her, demonstrated their documents and said she had to be accredited in order to cover the festival, because the event is attended by Aliaxandr Lukashenka. The journalists’ friends noticed the photo of Larysa Shchyrakova in the hands of one of the policemen. Seven policemen convoyed her to the police department of Petrykau district for the “check-up of her video materials” where she stayed till 5.30 pm. She wrote an explanatory note – why she, a journalist and member of a country-studies organization, appeared at the folk festival.

**On August 27** the judge of Leninski district court of Minsk **Maryna Zapasnik** dismissed the appeal of BAJ member **Siarhey Vazniak** to reduce his suspended sentence.

*We remind that on May 20, 2011 the Frunzenski district court of Minsk sentenced Siarhey Vazniak to two years’ suspended imprisonment on the “December 19 case”. The sentence came into force on July 22, and recently half of the term has passed. The whole Siarhey Vazniak reported to the local police inspection and did not receive remark on violations. Among the documents submitted to the court, there were several positive characteristic, including the one from BAJ. All this should have contributed to a positive judicial outcome. Siarhey Vazniak is going to appeal the judge’s decision in Minsk City Court.*

**On August 27** the chief editor of “Bobrusykiy Kurier” **Anatol Sanatsenka**, who had filed a complaint to the **General Prosecutor’s office** against **Babruysk KGB** department, received an answer from **Mahilou regional KGB** department.

In the complaint Anatol Sanatsenka told that on April 5, 2012 he had a 2.5 hours’ talk with KGB representatives in a cabinet of the local tax department. He was threatened with a criminal case for his media publications. The journalist demanded to give legal assessment of the KGB activities.

The General Prosecutor’s office redirected the complaint to the prosecutor’s office of Mahilou region which, in their turn, redirected the complaint to the regional KGB department. So, the deputy head of the regional KGB I.P.Siarheyenka informed that the check-up on the activities of Babruysk KGB showed that the actions were lawful and grounded.

“When I sent a complaint to the General Prosecutor’s office, I meant that it was the prosecutor’s office that I trusted, and not the agency which had violated my rights,” said Sanatsenka.

**On August 27** the chief editor of non-state newspaper of “Borisovskiye Novosti” **Anatol Bukas** was deprived of **registration as a candidate** to the House of Representatives at the parliamentary elections. The electoral commission in Barysau electoral district No62 said that the journalist “did not mention that he had sold his personal car in 2011. So, all members of the commission voted unanimously to revoke the registration of Anatol Bukas as a candidate.”

“It was predictable. This is the 8<sup>th</sup> time I take part in the parliamentary elections, and I was registered directly by the commission only two times, and all other times – after it was demanded by the Central Electoral Commission,” said Anatol Bukas.

**On August 28** the investigator of Hrodna regional prosecutor's office **Arsen' Nikolski** informed that the criminal case of **Andrei Poczobut** for defaming the president had been extended. He did not tell for how long.

*Andrey Poczobut is staying under recognizance not to leave his place of residence. The journalist is sure he will return into focus just after the elections.*

*We remind that Andrey Poczobut was detained on June 21, his flat in Hrodna was searched and computers were confiscated. He spent ten days in Hrodna detention center and was released under recognizance.*

**On August 30** it became known that the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs dismissed the complaint** of the journalist of *Radio Racyja* **Victor Parfionenka**. He complained that he had applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for **accreditation** as a correspondent for a foreign mass medium four times in order to work legally in Belarus but each time received denial. The answer form the Ministry says that such complaints do not lie within the Ministry's competence.

**On August 30** one of the largest Internet communities of the social net V Kontakte was **hacked** – titled "We are fed up with this Lukashenka" the group connected 37 thousand users.

**On August 30** law enforcement agencies **detained** and **questioned administrators** of the **online** groups of social networks "We are fed up with this Lukashenka", "Liapis Trubiatskoy – Free Concert in Minsk", "Only SHOS!".

Minsk: **Pavel Yeutsikhiieu** was questioned in presence of his mother at home. The questions were about some friend named Raman, about their relation to the Internet group of V Kontakte "Liapis Trubiatskoy – Free Concert in Minsk". The plain-clothed people asked about passwords to the group. Pavel refused to say anything. The police were called who only came to seize a home computer, without drafting procedural documents. The mother tried to interfere, but Captain Aliaxandr Makarau demonstrated his documents. Pavel Yeutsikhiieu was taken to the Kastychnitski district police where he was sentenced to five days' arrest for minor hooliganism.

Administrator of the group "Only SHOS!" **Andrei Tkachou** was detained at his girlfriend's flat, which was searched and a computer was confiscated. The man was taken to questioning and sentenced to seven days' arrest for minor hooliganism.

Underage **Raman Pratasevich** was detained by KGB agents in the street. He was forced into a minibus and taken to the police department. "KGB officers took me to a police department, where Aliaksandr Ioskin, the chief of Minsk public security police, was waiting for me. They ordered to tell them passwords for an account on VKontakte social networking website. They shouted at me, delivered blows in the kidneys and liver. They threatened to accuse me of small thefts. I was just repeating that I didn't know anything. It lasted for 4 hours. Finally, they took me to another office and left me alone for some time. They then told me to take my jacket and get out," Raman Pratasevich said.

Vitsebsk: the moderator of the online group "We are fed up with this Lukashenka" **Aleh Shramuk** was detained. The police and special forces burst into his flat after deceiving the activist into opening the door. He was taken to questioning; at midnight he informed that he was in Vitsebsk KGB.

**On August 31** the head of the Center of information and PR of KGB **Aliaxandr Antanovich** told reporters of Radio Liberty that they did not have information on the incident.