

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

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On May 22 BAJ received a **reply from** the head of the Central district **police** department Arthur Shakhlay. In response to BAJ's members request "to explain the law on mass media to policemen", "to explain to the officials and other employees of the interior that during mass actions... journalists perform their professional duties" etc.

The laconic answer says: "We inform you that your request has been considered at the Interior Department of the Central district Administration in Minsk. You can get all the information that you are interested in at the Department of Information and Public Relations at the Main Interior Department of Minsk city executive committee."

We remind that on April 17 freelance journalists on their own initiative visited three police departments in Minsk to discuss relations between law enforcement agencies and journalists at work. Only Mr Shakhlay listened to their problems and took their papers with the request and explanation of the problem. Other police officials either were absent (during the official hours of reception of citizens) or claimed that they did not have time and desire for such discussions.

On May 22 the Warsaw-based **Belarusian Embassy** "**strongly condemned**" the **documentary** "What justice looks like in Belarus" dedicated to the **bomb explosion** in Minsk subway on **April 11**, 2011 which was demonstrated on the **Polish TV channel TVN**. The commentary published on the website of the Embassy said that the film was an "outrageous manipulation of facts that has nothing to do with the reality". According to the Belarusian Embassy, the authors of the film "took the side of the terrorists sentenced for the explosion". "For the sake of the freedom of word" the diplomatic mission recommended TVN showing the Belarusian film "Metro" in order to "tell the Polish people the whole truth about the tragedy".

On May 24 TVN gave an official answer in which it **dismissed** all the **accusations** of unfair work. "Our firm principle is to check every piece of information that is gathered to create a report. The embassy did not put forward a single specific argument to substantiate its "sweeping accusations," TVN said in the statement. "In a democratic country, it is only up to an independent court to decide whether a report is a manipulation of facts or based on false information, not verified evidence," underlined TVN.

On the morning of **May 23** independent TV journalists **Ales' Liubenchuk** and **Liubou Lebedzeva** were detained while taking an interview from the representative of the PA

"Platform" **Andrey Bandarenka** near the Palace of railway workers. In Kastychnitski district police department they gave **explanations** and then were set free. They were promised that the story "would be continued". The colleague journalists said that the policemen knew beforehand who the detainees were and what they did.

"Six men conducted the detention, five of them - in plain clothes. The journalists were taken to the car; I tried to talk to the policemen, but they refused to introduce," said Andrey Bandarenka who saw the detention.

On May 23 the editor-in-chief of the non-state newspaper "**Bobruyski Courier**" **Anatol Sanatsenka** received a **reply** from Mahilou region **prosecutor's office**, related to his April's complaint on unlawful actions of employees of Babruysk KGB.

We remind that on May 5 Anatol Sanatsienka was invited to the tax inspection on a routine talk; but instead, two KGB-men met him at the cabinet of his tax inspector and talked with him for 2.5 hours. They exerted psychological pressure accusing him of possible prosecution according to article 369 of the Criminal Code "Discrediting the republic of Belarus".

In the reply, dated **May 16**, the **senior prosecutor's assistant** Ramanouski M.A. **admits the fact of the "talk"** between the KGB and the journalist. He informs that Mahilou region prosecutor's office found out that a number of materials authored by Sanatsenka "contain ungrounded facts and suggestions aimed at discrediting the Belarusian society and state," which allegedly results the journalist's disrespectful attitude towards the Belarusian law "On mass media". Besides, Ramanouski is worried that following such practice of preparation of materials in future might lead to a violation of law".

Then Ramanouski writes that the **state security agencies have the right to hold preventive actions**. And **the talk that took place between the KGB and the journalist was "the mildest form of individual prevention of violations"**.

On May 24 the shooting team of "**Belsat**" was **not allowed** to attend the anniversary **concert** of the rock-musician Aliaksandr Kulinkovich in one of Minsk clubs. According to the journalists, the organizer of the concert **Pavel Kashyryn** told the press was not welcomed at the event as it was closed to the public. Mr Kashyryn explained his actions to the press-service of BAJ the following way: "Things are not made that way. It was a half-closed event in a private club, and nobody had warned me beforehand that the shooting team of "Belsat" wanted to work there." According to Kashyryn, other journalists were covering the concert, but they were all photographers and all of them came on a previously made agreement.

On May 24 the Belarusian political scientist, analyst of Radio "Svaboda" **Valery Karbalevich** was awarded "**Free Press in East Europe**" **Gerd Bucerius Award**. The ceremony took place in the town hall of Hamburg (Germany). The contest organizers - these are two foundations, "Die Zeit" and the Norwegian organization "Fritt Ord" -

remark that freedom of the media in Belarus, Russia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine is not obvious, so this award is especially important for those who represent independent journalism in these countries in the atmosphere of repressions, persecution, defamation and intimidation.

As reported on **May 25**, the human rights defender **Andrey Bandarenka**, head of the informational and enlightening establishment “Platform” **filed a complaint** against the **National State TV and Radio Company** to defend his honor, dignity and business reputation. The activist sues the state TV company for moral damages, inflicted by an episode shown on December 11, 2011 in a program “In the center of attention” on “Belarus-1” TV channel. The first court hearing is scheduled on **June 7** (9.10 am) in Pershamayski district court of Minsk.

On **May 25** **Natallia Verashchahina**, the editor of the website praca.info (of the independent trade union **REP**), was **taken off the train Vilnius – Minsk** on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border point Gudogay. She underwent a personal search: her bag was inspected and she was forced to get undressed. As a result of a **3-hour search**, her money, laptop and a flash-card were **seized**. She was promised to get it back within a month after a “check-up”.

On **May 25** a journalist for the newspaper “**Vitsebski Courier**” **Yulia Kanapliova** **filed a complaint** to Orsha city and district court against employees of Orsha police department: on May 20 her car was stopped, and the police **seized** eight copies of the booklet “Pol palityki”, and also 200 cartoons about local self-government. The journalist argues that the products are not periodicals, so application of article 29.9 of the Administrative Code (“Unlawful distribution of the print press in the Republic of Belarus”) in her case is unlawful. Moreover, in the administrative report the policemen did not write the data about the number and the titles of the seized copies, and also they did not make a record of seizure. In her opinion, such “confiscation” does not differ from a banal robbery. The journalist asks to give her back the products and recognize the actions of the policemen as unlawful.

On May 25 a human rights defender, an activist of the campaign “**Nash Dom**” **Mikalay Petrushenka** sent a **letter** to the head of the interior department of Vitsebsk executive committee Aliaksandr Naydzenka in which he asks to explain the **reasons for seizure of the print press** from the journalist of “Vitsebski Courier” Yulia Kanapliova. He asks the police to ensure the right to distribution of information.

On **May 26** the names of the winners of the contest “**Belarus Press Photo-2012**” were announced. The Grand Prix this year went to **Ales Vasiukovich**, for a photo of Liubou Kavaliova, mother of the executed for Minsk subway explosion Uladzislau Kavalioiu. All the names of the contest winners are HERE <http://baj.by/en/node/12410>.

On **May 26**, in the evening the deputy editor of **“Narodnaya Volia” Maryna Koktysh** **was taken off the train “Vilnius – Minsk”** on the border point Gudogay. At the customs control she was **searched**. Nobody explained any reasons for the search. She did not have any carriers of information, there was nothing to seize from her. Then she was guided to the night train Moscow – Kaliningrad. She had to buy a ticket for her own money.

On **May 28 Liubou Kavaliova, mother** of the executed for the subway bombing Uladzislau Kavaliou **petitioned** to the **General Prosecutor’s office**. She wants the **film “Metro” to be assessed**: in her opinion it is slanderous.

According to Liubou Kavaliova, the film “Metro”, which was shown on the day of remembrance of the subway bombing, has a number of contradictions and discrepancies, and even distortions relating to the case of Uladzislau Kavaliou and Dzmitry Kanavalau.

Earlier, Liubou Kavaliova asked the Belteleradiocompany to call the names of the author of the film. But head of the company **Henadz Davydzka** denied information, saying that that the company was the owner of the copyright for the film, it was mentioned in the titles to the film and that was enough. He suggested that she could file an appeal against his answer to the supreme body (Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus).