

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/belarus-news-website-editor-arrested-for-18-07-2012,43054.html>

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Belarus

Conditional release

## Detained photographer freed but still in need of support

21 August 2012

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Reporters Without Borders welcomes the release of the photographer **Anton Surapin**, detained illegally for more than a month by the Committee for State Security (KGB) in the Belarusian capital, Minsk. However, the press freedom organization calls for the immediate lifting of all restrictions and the withdrawal of all charges against him.

Surapin was released on 17 August and taken to his home in the town of Slutsk south of Minsk by KGB agents. He is now banned from leaving the town and must remain at the disposal of the KGB, which is continuing its inquiries.

Editor of the [bnp.by](http://bnp.by) and a student at the Minsk journalism faculty, he is being prosecuted for criminal complicity for uploading photographs of the 4 July airdrop of teddy bears with pro-democracy messages over Belarusian territory. The stunt was organized by the Swedish advertising agency Studio Total to promote freedom of expression.

Surapin has also been charged under the criminal code with helping the two pilots of the light aircraft that dropped the teddy bears to enter Belarusian air space illegally.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists, a partner organization of Reporters Without Borders, is [still collecting signatures for a petition](#) calling for the prosecution to be dropped.

Surapin was the first person to upload photos of the stunt, to which the KGB alleges he is linked. He was arrested on 13 July. Meanwhile, the defence ministry has denied that any aircraft entered Belarusian airspace illegally on 4 July.

Real estate agent Sergei Basharimov, who is being prosecuted for letting an apartment to one of the Studio Total team, was released on the same day as the photographer. Three days earlier, representatives of the agency announced they [rejected](#) a request to travel to Belarus for questioning.

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### 09.08.2012 - Two women journalists arrested for showing support for detained colleague

Photographer **Yuliya Darashkevich** of the online newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarussii* and colleague **Iryna Kozlik**, were arrested yesterday in Minsk while demonstrating their support for **Anton Surapin**, the journalist who has been held for nearly a month in connection with the teddy bear airdrop (see below).

Detained while being photographed holding a teddy bear with a political slogan, they were taken to a police station and placed in custody on a charge of organizing an unauthorized demonstration.

They were then taken to a Minsk district court where Judge Dzmitry Pawlyuchenka fined both of them 290 euros after they pleaded not guilty.

Their arrests came just days after Swedish ambassador Stefan Eriksson's expulsion in apparent connection with the teddy bear airdrop, a pro-democracy stunt organized by a Swedish public relations firm. Eriksson had been in the post for four years.

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## 08.08.2012 - Photographer charged with complicity in airdrop of teddy bears

The Committee for State Security (KGB) confirmed yesterday that 20-year-old photographer **Anton Surapin** has been charged with criminal complicity in the 4 July airdrop of teddy bears with pro-democracy messages over Belarusian territory (see below).

The first person to post photos of the stunt online, Surapin has also been charged with helping the two pilots of the light aircraft that dropped the teddy bears to enter Belarusian airspace illegally.

"We urge the KGB to release Surapin without delay," Reporters Without Borders said. "Caught hopping in another embarrassing matter, the authorities are again making scapegoats out of people who were not involved. The other parties to this matter and the European Union must intercede on behalf of this journalist at once."

The same charges have also been brought against Syarhey Basharymau, the person who allegedly provided accommodation in Minsk to members of the Swedish public relations firm that organized the stunt.

Surapin and Basharymau are facing a possible sentence of three to seven years in prison under article 371-3 of the criminal code. They have been held illegally for nearly a month in preventive detention although the authorities have no real evidence to support the charges.

The KGB said it would issue its final conclusions on the case after questioning representatives of the public relations agency.

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## 18.07.2012 - News website editor arrested for being first to post photos of free speech stunt

Reporters Without Borders demands the immediate release of **Anton Surapin**, the head of a news website who was arrested during a raid on his home on 13 July by members of the State Security Committee (KGB) investigating his role in a publicity stunt by a Swedish advertising agency designed to promote free expression.

A decision on his detention was to have been issued yesterday but he has still not been released. Under Belarusian law, suspects can be held for up to 10 days in police custody without being formally charged.

Belarusian Association of Journalists vice-president Andrew Bastunets told Reporters Without Borders that Surapin is accused of helping foreigners to cross the border illegally – a charge that carries a sentence of three to five years in prison.

The stunt by the Swedish advertising agency Studio Total must not be used by the Belarusian authorities as a pretext for arresting journalists, bloggers or members of the public who simply relayed information about it, Reporters Without Borders said.

In a show of solidarity with free speech defenders in Belarus, two Studio Total members flew a light aircraft into Belarusian airspace on 4 July and dropped hundreds of teddy-bears, each bearing a miniature placard with the message: "We support the Belarusian struggle for free speech."

Surapin, a *Journalism Institute* student and editor of the [bnp.by](http://bnp.by) news website, was the first to post photos of the stunt online. He said he received the photos in a 5 July email from an unidentified person who wrote: "At 8 a.m. I went outside and saw the plane flying. He was flying very low, and I even saw the person flying it. I waved to him, and he threw me three bears with flags on parachutes!"

Studio Total member Tomas Mazetti, one of the plane's two pilots, told the Swedish English-language newspaper [The Local](http://TheLocal) he was worried by Surapin's arrest. Reached by Reporters Without Borders, Mazetti said: "We don't know Anton Surapin. We have no connection with him whatsoever. We had no contact at all in Belarus to help us organize this. We didn't need to."

Although Studio Total [has posted videos online](#) proving that it did what it claims, the Belarusian defence ministry has denied that any aircraft entered Belarusian airspace illegally on 4 July. The ministry claims that the videos were clearly doctored or subjected to some other

form of manipulation of “a clearly provocative nature.”

President Lukashenko has been cracking down harder on dissent in recent months as [Belarus](#) – which is on the Reporters Without Borders list of “Enemies of the Internet” – sinks further into political isolation and economic stagnation. In particular, the regime has lashed out at those who try to use the Internet to circulate information, wage campaigns or carry out a “revolution via the social media.”

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