

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/belarus-authorities-step-up-harassment-of-26-09-2014,47021.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Belarus

More persecution

Authorities step up harassment of independent journalists

26 September 2014

The persecution is above all targeting journalists working for media based abroad

In a continuing drive to suppress independent news coverage, the authorities are stepping up the penalties imposed on journalists who work for foreign media, often using their inability to obtain the obligatory government press accreditation as a pretext.

In the latest case, a judge in Babruysk, in the eastern region of Mogilev, imposed a fine of 357 euros yesterday on **Marina Malchanava** for a report about an NGO that supports children with cancer. It was broadcast by *Belsat TV*, a station based in Poland that criticizes the Belarusian government.

Three other journalists – **Ales Dzyanisau**, **Andrey Myaleshka** and **Ales Zaleuski** - were fined for working for *Belsat TV* without accreditation, while **Viktar Parfyonenka**, who works for *Radio Racyja*, another station based in Poland, was denied accreditation for the seventh time on 24 September.

On 16 September, police raided the apartments of **Ales Burakou** and his parents in Mogilev on the grounds that he had sent reports to German public broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* without the necessary accreditation.

The police took Burakou's laptop and USB flash drives, and two desktop computer towers belonging to his father. Seven policemen carried out the search of Burakov's home, which was filmed.

He has filed complaints with the foreign ministry, the public prosecutor's office and the Mogilev executive committee requesting prosecution of those responsible for the unjustified police raids and assurances that the material acquired by the police during the raids will not be used to bring further charges against him.

All these journalists have been charged with "illegally creating and disseminating media products" under article 22.9 of the code of administrative offences, which does not apply to working without accreditation,

As the Belarus Association of Journalists [says](#), "*the Belarusian authorities are misusing article 22.9 when they equate working without accreditation with the illegal creation and dissemination of information.*"

During a 15-17 September visit to Belarus, Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, [called](#) on the authorities to abolish obligatory accreditation for journalists in order to [improve media freedom](#).

"As well as systematically stifling the few remaining critical media, the government has launched an offensive against foreign media and against journalists who are forced to work for foreign media without accreditation because they cannot get it," said Reporters Without Borders assistant research director Virginie Dangles.

"The regime's strategy is clear - to create the conditions under which independent journalism disappears of its own accord," Dangles added.

The authorities are also directly targeting media based abroad, such as *Belsat TV*. A lawsuit against *Belsat TV*, a station based in Poland that broadcasts to Belarus, was heard by a court on 4 September. Brought by BELSATplus, a company that sells TV cable and other TV broadcast equipment, it accused *Belsat TV* of using an existing company name. The court dismissed the case for lack of evidence.

Created in 2003 under the name of Hi-Tech Market, the company changed its name to BELSATplus in 2006, a month after *Belsat TV*'s creation in Poland with the aim of providing independent news coverage of Belarus and the rest of Europe.

Belsat TV's attempts to register its Minsk bureau with the appropriate authorities have been repeatedly rejected.

Belarus is ranked 157th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
