

Radioactive Mushrooms, Civil Magistrate, Mova ci Kava – Digest of Belarusian Civil Society

Belarusian civil society organised a number of discussion events on topics ranging from cancer to media wars. Other initiatives included the promotion of the Belarusian language and examining radioactive mushrooms.

The Liberal Club attracted 100 practitioners to its event on information wars in the media, including representatives of state and independent media. NGO Assembly gave awards to Civil Society Champions, among them Andrzej Paczobut and Valer Bulhakau. Mahiliou activists formed a “civic magistrate” to help citizens deal with local issues.

Media

Discussion on information wars in the media: On 7 February the Liberal Club organised a discussion on how to overcome the information war in Belarusian media? The event was held at the hotel Europe and attended by about a hundred people, including well-known representatives of state and independent media: blogger Victor Malishevski, a political columnist Pavlyuk Bykovsky, the Belarusian Thought chief editor Vadim Gigin, TUT.by founder Yuri Zisser and others.

Cancer topic in media: On 4 February the Belarusian Organization of Working Women together with a team from oncopatients.by website conducted a roundtable *Cancer Topics in the Media, What Information Helps Belarusians to Beat Cancer?* The discussion was timed to correspond with the International Day Against Cancer and was attended by experts

from oncology centres, patients and journalists.

TUT.BY offers its versions of Minsk brand: After [the sensational story](#) with the official Minsk brand developed by the British company INSTID, an alternative Minsk team decided to offer other ideas for branding the city. Belarusian portal [TUT.BY](#) has also joined the initiative of designers and PR specialists and suggests own versions.

BAJ presents Anatomy of freelance: The book *The Anatomy of Freelance* sums up of the journalistic experience with and knowledge of freelancing, received over the first year of the thematic campaign implemented by the Belarusian Association of Journalists. The book is designed to help freelance journalists to overcome existing obstacles.

Social Campaigns and Initiatives

Radioactive mushrooms video: Gomel Democratic Forum with the support of the Green Alliance created a short film with a story about how radioactive mushrooms end up in Gomel residents' households and what tricks illegal collectors use to circumvent restrictive measures.

In defense of Belarusian Wetlands sums up their first results: On 1 February public campaign *In Defense of Belarusian Wetlands* held a press conference. The meeting summed up the interim results of the campaign, designed to attract the attention of people and CSOs to the destruction of eight Belarusian wetlands.

Kurapaty will be promoted: On 6 February the BPF office hosted a meeting of the members of the Kurapaty Rescue Initiative. An expert in the field of PR and advertising, Yulia Lyashkevich, presented a draft of Kurapaty promotion which aims to inform Belarusians what Kurapaty is by using the norms of advertising.

NGO Assembly named Civil Society Champions: The 4th annual

award ceremony of The Assembly of NGOs of Belarus – *Civil Society Champions 2012* – was held at the Minsk Lohvinau bookstore on 1 February. The Civil Leaders of the year were journalists Andrzej Paczobut and Valer Bulhakau; the award for the Years Most Creative was given to the Swedish airdrop of teddy bears; the Venue of the Year went to the Office of Human Rights Center *Viasna*; as the most important Regional Event of the year the establishment of independent union trade structures at the Hranit factory was honored, amongst others.

Mogilev activists form a “civic magistrate”: Activists from Mogilev city created a public discussion platform, which they call a “civic magistrate”, in order to help citizens deal with local issues. The magistrate is positioned as a non-political intermediary between residents, experts and local authorities and seeks to establish dialogue in the city around the most pressing issues. One of the recent successes of the initiative, reported on the [magistrate’s website](#), was authorities’ decision not to shut down local markets.

Marketplace undertakes local trips: Capacity Building Marketplace continues a series of local trips throughout Belarus in order to inform Belarusian CSOs about the possibilities and the importance of capacity development. The meetings with CSOs and service providers were held on 31 January [in Grodno](#); on 5 February [in Mogilev](#); the next meeting is scheduled for 12 February in Gomel.

Antimak visited addicts: Activists of the public campaign [Antimak](#) continue to draw attention to the problem of drug abuse in Belarus. This time they together with Telegraph correspondents visited the apartments where addicts live and talked to their residents.

CSOs to establish organization in response to the disregard for the decisions of the UN Human Rights Committee. On 12 February Gomel gathered civil and political activists, the

violation of whose rights by Belarusian authorities have been officially confirmed by decisions from the UN Human Rights Committee or whose complaints are pending at the Committee. The participants of the meeting decided to establish a national public organisation which would change the practise of neglecting to undertake actions under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by Belarus.

[A special hot line – 10 years.](#) A joint project of the Business Women Club and the International Organization for Migration celebrates the 10 years of the anti traffic hotline. For 10 years, the call-centre specialists have received more than 20 thousand calls; 110 people were able to return home.

[Football clubs asked to more widely use the Belarusian language.](#) On the eve of the beginning of the Belarusian football championship in the higher league, activists of the civil campaign *Office Work in Belarusian!* addressed twenty football clubs with a proposal to extensively use the Belarusian language during the organization, holding and elucidation of the matches.

[Modern life of Muzhytskaya Prauda:](#) Brest activists have resumed publication of the first revolutionary-democratic newspaper in Belarusian. In the period from 1862 to 1863 seven numbers were published. Newspaper #8 is coming in February 2013. This is the way of celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Kalinouski Rebellion in the Brest region.

Workshops and Conferences

[Master class from Talaka:](#) On 9 February Gomel youth NGO Talaka and Vetka Museum invited for a master class in creating a marriage of guardian dolls. In ancient times, this amulet guarded the union of two people and was presented to bride and groom at the wedding day. The event was scheduled to correspond with Valentine's Day.

[Mova ci Kava](#). On 18 February in Minsk educational free courses *Language or Coffee (Mova ci Kava)* will be launched. The courses are designed for people who want to improve their Belarusian language. The teachers are journalist Gleb Labadzenka and philologist Alesya Litvinovskaya who taught Stefan Eriksson to speak Belarusian. The courses will be held in a cafe once a week.

[Round table on human capital](#). BISS launches a series of presentations on the results of the research project *Human Capital as a Source of Competitiveness and Modernization*. The first round table is to be held on 15 February at the Minsk hotel Victoria. The event presents two research papers: *The Returns to Education and the Evaluation of Human Capital in Belarus* and *Belarusian Higher Education in Cross-country Perspective*.

Awards

[New award for researchers](#). The Organizing Committee of the International Congress of Belarusian Researchers announces the establishment of an annual award for the best publication in the field of social sciences and humanities during the year. The award is designed to celebrate the achievements in the social sciences and humanities during the year, as well as improve the quality of scientific work.

[I Love Belarus award](#). On 16 February Young Front invites to the ceremony of its annual award *I Love Belarus*. The prize is awarded in six nominations – Belarusization, Pro-Belarus, Journalism, Culture, Politics, Civil activity, Fighter of the Year, and Sports.

[Lyubow Kavaljowa voted Person of 2012 in Vitebsk](#). The mother of a man executed over the 2011 subway bombing in Minsk has been voted the Person of the Year 2012 in Vitebsk. A [local](#)

[news website's](#) readers had been asked to choose the person who was of the greatest use to Vitebsk or who contributed to promoting the city in the world in 2012.

[BEROC awarded](#): BEROC was awarded by *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus* as an organization which actively formed the informational sphere in Belarus in 2012. Among other winners were the National Bank, Investigative Committee, Ministry of Emergency Situations, Ministry of Statistics, etc.

[Svetlana Naumova Award](#): *Tell the Truth* campaign has completed the nomination of candidates for the Svetlana Naumova Award. The award is given in three categories – political journalism, political analyst and best young politician of the year. Among others, the short list of 2013 includes journalist Andrei Poczobut, BISS academic director Alexei Pikulik, journalist Alexander Klaskovsky, etc. The award ceremony will take place on 1 March 2013.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.