

Media Freedom, Frantskevich, Fine for Refusing to Write in Belarusian – Belarus Civil Society Digest

Recently, Belarusian authorities released political prisoner Aliaksandr Frantskevich. Eastern Europe Studies Centre published its Civil Society Forum program entitled Eastern Partnership Reality Check, as one of the official events to take place at the Vilnius Summit.

Belarus ranks last in the Media Freedom Index among Eastern Partnership countries. Belarusian governmental institutions hinder the process of providing information to journalists, the Belarusian Association of Journalists informs.

Several interesting events for women also took place. Photo project Without Borders plans to show mothers in wheelchairs. Women in Hrodna have a chance to participate in the school to become a “Lady Leader”. Vitsebsk Women’s Club invites people to take part in their training on gender advocacy.

Events, lectures and campaigns

Rating of Closed Institutions. The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) conducted a survey of its members regarding access to information from government institutions and rated them by degree of openness of information. As a result, more than 46% of journalists had problems getting information from the Ministry of Health; 40% – the Ministry of Agriculture, and 33% – the Committee for State Security. To end this inhibiting practice, BAJ forwarded the related official requests to more than 40 government ministries, departments and agencies.

Civil Society EaP Reality Check in Vilnius. On 27-29 November in Vilnius, Lithuania, the *Civil Society Conference Eastern Partnership Reality Check: Political Challenges and Future Agenda for Civil Society* will be held. It is an official event sponsored by the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council and will take place on the eve of the 3rd EaP Summit. Organized by the Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC), the conference will bring together civil society leaders from the EaP countries and the EU, key NGO experts, think-tanks, as well as international aid agencies and political foundations.

“Mova ci Kava” launches its second season. In September after the summer break, Minsk and Moscow will host courses of study for the Belarusian language “Mova ci Kava” (Language or Coffee). The second season in Minsk will start on 16 September at gallery “Ź”. The courses are free of charge lessons, a project initiated by journalist Katerina Kibalchich. Last year the Minsk classes were attended by up to 120 people.

Media Freedom in EaP countries. On 6 September on the eve of the International Day of Solidarity of Journalists, BAJ announced the results of a pilot Index of Media Freedom in Eastern Partnership countries. Namely, the most favourable conditions for the media exist in Georgia, while Belarus takes last place out of the six countries. The finalized report was prepared by Internews-Ukraine under the EU project “Monitoring of Freedom of Speech in the East Region of the European Neighbourhood Policy”.

Training on gender advocacy. The Vitebsk Women’s Club NGO invites representatives of Vitebsk and Mogilev CSOs to take part in the training “Advocacy on Gender Legislation,” which will be held on 21-22 September in Vitsebsk. The organisers cover all related costs. Source: belngo.info newsletter.

Lady Leader in Hrodna. On 12-15 September women of Hrodna of 22-35 years are invited to participate in the fall school “Lady Leader”. The School provides a series of trainings on

strengthening one's leadership capacity, the basics of communication, time management, and learning the art of presentation. After graduating participants will have the opportunity to take part in organising charitable and social activities in Hrodna.

[Photo project "Maternity without borders."](#) Republican Association of Wheelchair Users is looking for moms to participate in a photo project "Motherhood without borders!" The photographic project aims to discuss the lives of women in wheelchairs, who were not afraid of difficulties and gave birth to a child. After the participants will be recruited and they will work with a professional photographer. The project results will be exhibited in one Minsk's galleries.

["Civil Control" takes the regions under protection.](#) On 4 September in Minsk, independent trade union REP and non-profit institution "Innovation Platform" announced a joint campaign "Civil Control". The new public campaign will be apolitical and aims to address the problems of the regions. According to the campaign initiators, the traditional activities of human rights and political organizations are concentrated in Minsk while no one solves problematic issues in the regions.

[Belarusian HRH looking for volunteers.](#) Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius invites individuals to join to a team of volunteer-interns and is looking for civically minded people who are ready to dedicate their time and efforts to volunteer work and are interested in gaining experience. The work is unpaid, but provides opportunities for participating in Belarusian and international projects, seminars and lectures.

[Six Arguments against Death Penalty-2.](#) The second part of the film "Six Arguments against Death Penalty" by film producer Viktor Tratsiakou appeared on the web recently. Aleh Alkayeu, who used to be the head of the remand prison No.1 in Minsk in 1996-2001, discusses the specifics of the activities and the psychological state of the people who are executed after

receiving death sentences. The film was prepared within the framework of the campaign “Human Rights Defenders against the Death Penalty in Belarus”.

Interaction between state and civil society

Political prisoner Aliaksandr Frantskevich released from jail.

On 3 September the political prisoner Aliaksandr Frantskevich was released from the Ivatsevichy colony. In September 2010, he was arrested as part of the “case of anarchists” and later sentenced to three years of imprisonment. According to the Human Right Centre Viasna, [ten more political prisoners remain in prison](#). Commenting on the release of Dzmitry Dashkevich and Aliaksandr Frantskevich, the press-secretary of the EU’s High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, Maya Kochiyanchich highlighted that the [EU calls on Belarus to immediately release](#) and rehabilitate all political prisoners.

Status of the Belarusian language defended in the court .

Blogger [Gleb Labadzenka](#) won the case in court Frunze district of Minsk – a Director of district communal services was fined of 500 thousand rubles (about \$55) for refusing to answer in Belarusian in an official letter. Some Russian media commented on the case as if “[in Belarus they had the first conviction for the use of the Russian language](#)”.

Independent Council for urban development proposed to establish in Minsk.

The idea to establish an independent Advisory Council for urban development has been articulated by the initiative “Minsk City Association of Local Initiatives.” The organisation plans to integrate active citizens who oppose the seal construction, the defenders of green zones, etc. The appeal for establishing a Council was signed by more than 50 people and forwarded on September 3 to the Head of Minsk city executive committee. Organisational support for the new initiative is provided by “European Perspective”.

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.