

The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), is a non-governmental, non-profit and non-partisan association of media workers, promoting freedom of expression and independent journalism ideas in Belarus.

In December 2004 the European Parliament awarded BAJ **A. Sakharov Prize “For the Freedom of Speech”**. The EP President Josep Borrell who presented the prize noted in his speech that “Awarding the Sakharov Prize 2004 to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, which fights for freedom of information against the attempts by President Lukashenka to smother it, is a very positive event.



The results of the latest elections in this country make it clear that those fighting for freedom of information in Belarus and everywhere else in the world deserve our support.” The BAJ Chairperson Zhanna Litvina expressed sincere gratitude to the EP deputies for their support of democratic movement in Belarus, aimed at the defense of fundamental civil society values. “This prize is a signal for us that we aren't alone in our fight for keeping the professional principles and the people's right to get unbiased information,” – she added.

The Organisation

The main **goal** of BAJ is to facilitate the exercise of civil, social, cultural, economic and professional rights and the pursuit of legitimate interests of its members, help to develop expertise and get a chance for creative self-fulfilment, as well as to create conditions that enable freedom of the press, including the journalists right to obtain and impart information without any interference.

The main **tasks** of BAJ activities are:

- BAJ protects journalists' rights and legitimate interests in state bodies and international organizations;
- BAJ helps to create material, technical, organizational and other facilities, vital for improving journalist proficiency;
- BAJ is drawing up an effective program to develop mass media so that it would create favorable conditions for their functioning in Belarus;
- BAJ establishes relations with journalist organizations all over the world.

Aims, tasks and principles of BAJ are laid down in the **Statute of BAJ**.

The History of Its Creation

BAJ was founded in 1995, one year after A. Lukashenka came to power. In 2006 it went through the state re-registration successfully.

The creation of BAJ was led by a necessity to defend journalists' professional rights and the public constitutional right to receive objective and truthful information.

The initiative of founding a non-state, non-partisan, non-profit association of journalists was presented by a famous Belarusian journalist **Ms. Zhanna Litvina**. (She worked as the Editor-in-chief of “Belarusskaya Maladziozhnaya” radio station until 1994, when the media outlet got closed by the authorities under a pretext of structural reorganization. Zh. Litvina was the Chief of Minsk Bureau of Radio “Liberty” – Belarusian Service for several years. She was a concept creator and the head of the only existing independent Belarusian-language “101.2” FM radio station that was permitted to broadcast its programs for one year only. Zh. Litvina was a founder and the head of “Radio Racyja” that transmitted its programs to Belarus from abroad for several years.) Zh. Litvina is still the head of BAJ. She is unanimously re-elected to hold the position by her colleagues at the BAJ Congresses that take place every three years.

Structure and members

Today BAJ numbers more than 1,000 members who work for a wide range of periodical editions, TV and Radio companies, and publishing companies. Some members of BAJ work for state-owned media companies. BAJ has the central office in Minsk and 5 regional branches.

International cooperation

Starting from the first years of its existence, the Belarusian Association of Journalists has been developing strong international contacts and cooperation. The present list of permanent partners of BAJ includes:

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (BAJ has been its associate member since 1997)

The International Media Support (Denmark)

The Swedish Helsinki Committee (SHC)

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC)

The European Journalism Center (EJC)

The “Article 19” Global Campaign for the Freedom of Speech

The Reporters without Borders (BAJ signed an affiliation agreement with the organization in 2003)

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

The Danish Union of Journalists (DJ)

The Norwegian Union of Journalists

The Lithuanian Union of Journalists

The Russian Union of Journalists

The Center for Extreme Journalism (Moscow)

The “Glasnost” Defense Foundation (Moscow)

The European Mass Media Institute (Dusseldorf)
The Ukrainian Independent Center for Political Research etc.

Educational programs

BAJ pays special attention to programs of professional training for journalists. Such organizations as the International Media Support (Denmark), the European Journalism Center, the Lithuanian Union of Journalists, the FOJO Institute (Sweden), The Norwegian Union of Journalists, F. Ebert Foundation etc. act as partners in this field.

Thus, e.g. the FOJO Institute (Sweden), dealing with the advanced journalist studies, has been a BAJ partner on carrying out a program of educational seminars for Belarusian journalists as well as for students and professors from the Journalism Department at the Belarusian State University for several years already.

BAJ was closely cooperating with the European Journalism Center (Maastricht) within an educational project for journalists and university professors for two years. The seminars within the project were held in partnership with the Lithuanian Union of Journalists in Vilnius.

Also, BAJ was cooperating with the Lithuanian Union of Journalists within a project on “Development of Democratic Media in Belarus”, funded by the European Commission in the years 2001 – 2003. All in all, more than 60 training courses at the editorial offices of regional media outlets were held within the program.

BAJ in cooperation with F.Ebert Foundation office in Belarus holds regular seminars for journalists. The educational sessions are mainly dedicated to legal issues. They are held in the regional centers and other cities across the country.

Other awards

BAJ was awarded the **Golden Pen of Freedom** prize at the World Newspaper Congress and the World Editors Forum in Dublin (Ireland) in June 2003. It was the second time that the prize was presented to an organization instead of an individual author (also, the Golden Pen of Freedom prize was awarded to the Czech press in 1969).

The Atlantic Council Freedom Award was presented to BAJ by the Atlantic Council in June, 2011. Apart from BAJ, the Freedom Awards were presented to the Human Rights Center “Viasna” and Belarus Free Theatre.

BAJ has been constantly monitoring violations of freedom of expression and freedom of the media since 1998. The organization has a network of correspondents across Belarus who collect and send information about the local situation in the media field.

Elections monitoring

BAJ monitored the coverage of election campaigns in 2004, 2006, 2007 and 2010 by the Belarusian media. Journalists in Minsk and in the regions implemented qualitative and quantitative analyses of publications and programs in state-owned and independent mass media. They were fixing the time, dedicated by the media to different subjects within the

election process, and noted the manner of presentation. Analytical conclusions with processed monitoring data were presented at special press-conferences every two weeks. Also, they were sent in electronic form and presented on the BAJ website (www.baj.by) in Belarusian, Russian and English.

Printed and electronic reporting

BAJ has been publishing a professional magazine “Abajour” since 2000. “Abajour” is delivered to non-state media outlets as well as to 118 state-owned newspapers and 6 regional TV and Radio companies. The magazine publishes materials about the purpose and the role of mass media in society, professional obligations and responsibilities, journalism ethics, problems with collecting and distributing information etc.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists is a unique source of information about the situation in the Belarusian media field. This information is posted onto the organization's website (www.baj.by), and also it is sent in electronic form to more than two hundred addresses of BAJ colleagues and partners in Belarus and abroad. The monitoring data, provided by BAJ, are widely used by the Belarusian mass media.

Contact:

+375 17 203-63-66

+375 17 203-63-66

Street address:

Pl. Svobody 17-304, 220030 MINSK, Belarus

 baj@baj.by

 <http://baj.by/?newlang=eng>

Sources: <http://baj.by/en/aboutbaj>
 <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/9233.html>