

Zhanna Litvina, President

Belarus Association of Journalists (BAJ)

**Message of Solidarity to the delegates
of the BAJ Congress, 24 April 2014**

On behalf of the European Federation of Journalists, the largest organisation of journalists in Europe, representing over 300. 000 journalists in 60 journalists' organisations in 39 countries including the Belarus Association of Journalists, we wish you a successful Congress next week.

The EFJ has followed with great concern and in solidarity the hardships BAJ members and journalists in Belarus have been facing for years.

As you know, we and several of our national affiliates have sent an appeal to the Belarus Minister of Information requesting to change the Belarusian law "On Mass Media" to give a full recognition to journalists and their rights. To date, we have not received a response.

The EFJ fully agrees with the BAJ that this law is inconsistent with International and European standards on freedom of expression and information. In practice, it makes the work of freelance journalists, an ever growing community of journalists in Europe, impossible. The absence of legal status for freelance journalists and the increasing wave of prosecution in relation to journalists for 'illegal production and distribution of mass media products' with enormous fines is an obvious deprivation of their labor rights, guaranteed by the Constitution and international obligations of Belarus.

Journalism is a public good

We are truly impressed by the courage and professional attitude of BAJ members when it comes to fighting for press freedom in Belarus and for improved professional standards.

The EFJ Freelance Expert Group meeting in Minsk last October confirmed this view and together with the EFJ and IFJ is ready to support you in all your lobbying efforts when it comes to allowing freelance journalists doing their work without fear, especially with regard to the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN. We observed that the repressive trend is growing. 8 freelance journalists, who contribute their materials to foreign media without press accreditations, have been fined on the ridiculous charges, since the beginning of this year.

Taking into account the above, we hope that you will have a very good lively Congress! Do not give up or feel isolated. We are behind you!

Please keep us informed about the outcome.

With Kind Regards and in solidarity,

Mogens Blicher Bjerregård



EFJ President

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