The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Belarus Supreme Court Upholds 'Chernobyl Milk' Libel Against Journalist

March 17, 2017



Yuras Karmanau **Belarusian Association of Journalists**

Belarus' Supreme Court has upheld libel charges against a journalist investigating the use of radioactive milk in the country's dairy products.

Belarusian dairy company Milkavita sued Associated Press journalist Yuras Karmanau for libel last year after he claimed the company was using milk contaminated with radioactivity.

Swathes of Belarus are still uninhabitable after the devastating accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in modern-day Ukraine 30 years ago.

Karmanau claimed that milk samples he had collected from a Milkavita farm near the contaminated zone had contained radioactive isotopes 10 times above national safety levels when tested in a lab in Minsk.

After hearing testimony from a lab employee, Belarus' Supreme Court upheld a ruling which ordered Karmanau pay court costs and retract key evidence from his story.

"The AP continues to disagree with the decision of the Belarus Economic Court and will not accept as truthful the statements that Mr. Karmanau is being ordered to deliver," said Ian Phillips, the AP's vice president for international news. "AP unreservedly stands behind Mr. Karmanau and the accuracy of his reporting."

When a lower court initially ruled against Karmanu in October, the Belarusian Association of Journalists was quick to criticize the decision.

“The result of this trial significantly narrows the boundaries of freedom of speech in the country,” the group said in a statement on the day of the court’s decision. “It calls into question the very possibility of significant investigative journalism in Belarus.”

Belarus ranks 157 out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders’ Press Freedom Index. The group describes Belarus as a country where, “The information ministry has stepped up its control over print media distribution networks and the Internet, and has banned the software used to circumvent online censorship.”

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/03/17/belarus-supreme-court-upholds-chernobyl-milk-ruling-against-journalist-a57461