



## Newsletter

25.12.2006

On January 14 2007, the people of Belarus will be electing more than 22,5 thousand councilors to local self-government bodies. The importance of this vote cannot compare to the presidential elections, in which not only the head of state is elected, but also the direction of the state's development is determined for the next five years.

Who and why is up for election in the self-government elections, most Belarusian voters cannot understand. Under a dictatorship, their role is seriously limited. They have no real impact on the lives of ordinary citizens. Their main goal is effectively to aid in the implementation of the president's decisions.

In line with the recent tradition, the Belarusian regime will this time again try to prompt voters to go early to the polls. This mechanism allows the authorities to neutralize independent observers, if they are allowed to monitor the voting process at all. Several days ago the Belarus Justice Ministry suspended the operations of the National Belarus Voters Club, the only non-governmental organization capable of monitoring the elections.

The registration process of candidates has been completed. It is already evident that in many polling stations there will be no choice of candidates. Many opposition candidates were refused registration. No opposition representative was allowed to join any election commission. This shows that the regime clearly has something to hide from society.

Over this time, Gazprom said it was ready to pull the plug on Belarus, unless an agreement is reached for natural gas deliveries from Russia in 2007. Belarus currently pays 46.67 USD for 1,000 cubic metres of gas, while Gazprom is demanding 200 USD.

Observers say the Kremlin expects Łukašenka to start building a real union of the two countries, complete with a joint currency and constitution. Otherwise, Russia will charge Belarus market prices. Minsk is not fond of either. Łukašenka consistently refused to sell Beltransgaz to Russia, but he now seems pressed against a wall. Belarusian companies bring marginal profit, if at all. Many operate at a loss. If natural gas prices are upped considerably, the stability of the Belarusian economy would be in jeopardy.

The Minsk regime seems to understand that thanks to the sale of a controlling package of Beltransgaz to Gazprom, it will enjoy cheaper energy sources, but only for a few years' time. In the future, the Kremlin may demand that co-operation is again based on market principles.

But faced with EU sanctions, Łuhaskeno seems to have no way out. He must find a

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compromise solution with Moscow. So far no-one has taken seriously Minsk's declarations it may import crude oil from Azerbaijan or Venezuela. ■

## OFFICIALLY

### Belarus's KGB charges opposition with planned coup

**At the session of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus, KGB chief Ściapan Sucharenka declared that the Belarusian opposition was planning a coup during the local government elections at the onset of next year.**

Sucharenka said that the opposition was preparing actions of civil disobedience during the municipal elections in December. The Belarusian KGB chief revealed this as Parliament adopted a new draft law on preventing extremism. He underlined that the new law would facilitate prevention of all symptoms of extremism at an early stage.

Before the presidential elections Sucharenka many times declared that the opposition was preparing terrorist strikes in the Belarusian capital Minsk, including four bomb attacks on schools in the city and poisoning the municipal water supply.

### Belarus proposes the establishment of Union of Members of Parliaments of the Non-Aligned States

**MPs of the Belarusian parliament support the idea of creating a union of MPs from 118 countries of the world.**

Belarusian MPs want to form a special organization which would unite MPs from countries which are not a part of any military organizations. Their aim is to strengthen the Non-Aligned movement and increase its influence upon the situation in the world. Mikalaj Čarhiniec, the head of the permanent committee for international relations and national security of the Council of Republic of Belarusian parliament, stated in a interview for the BelTa press agency that this new institution will offer a possibility of more fruitful activity of the member countries on

the international arena.

According to senator Čarhiniec Belarus could also benefit as the country would be able to present its point of view in public. The idea of formation of the new structure had already been discussed by senator Čarhiniec with president Alaksandar Łukašenka. The head of Belarusian state expressed his support for the initiative of Belarusian MPs.

## POLITICS

### US to keep involved in human rights in Belarus

**„The United States is ready to take up human rights in Belarus at every possible opportunity” US ambassador to Belarus Carlyn Stewart has told journalists in Minsk.**

Commenting on a recent proposal by a US diplomat, who demanded that human rights in Belarus should be examined on a UN Security Council agenda, ambassador Stewart said her country would seek adequate means to do this.

„We are concerned by (the plight of) political prisoners, politically motivated detentions, repressions against independent media, non-governmental organizations and religious groups in Belarus” ambassador Stewart said.

The US embassy praised joint US and EU policies concerning the democratization of Belarus, the tut.by portal reports.

### Canada introduces economic sanctions against Belarus

**Foreign minister of Canada Peter McCay announced that Belarus was added to the “List of Territorial Control” as the second country after Burma.**

The decision of Canadian authorities means in practice that any exports to Belarus will require special export license. The decision does not include humanitarian aid. The reason for introduction of these sanctions is

continuous breaking of human rights in Belarus as well as lack of democratic changes in the country.

The Canadian government indicated that Belorussian authorities failed to react to numerous appeals of the international community to that effect. Canada expressed its hope that the sanctions will positively influence situation in Belarus.

## OPPOSITION

### Congress of democratic forces scheduled before 17 March

**The decision to hold the congress of democratic forces followed a session of the Political Council of the United Democratic Forces on 20 January in Minsk. Activists have started looking for a suitable venue.**

The congress of democratic forces is to be held at the turn of February and March but not later than March 17 – this was the joint decision of Political Council Members. The session also adopted the organizational and working agenda for the Congress.

As well as questions concerning the Congress, issues on the participation of democratic forces in the political campaign to local elections were raised. Members of the Council who belong to various opposition parties concluded that they will jointly decide on withdrawing candidates from the elections.

### Young Front members demand the release of their leader

**Some sixty graffiti proclaiming solidarity with Žmicier Daškevič have appeared on the streets of Mahilou.**

The action was organized by the illegal Young Front. The slogans were painted overnight. Some activists stood by to warn the protesters against police patrols. None of the participants were detained.

Daškevič was sentenced to 1.5 year in prison and is now held at a penal colony.

A correspondent for the Radio Polonia Belarus Service finds out that the information campaign will be continued.

## ECONOMY

### Belarusians make a run for US dollars

**Belarusian banks record a negative foreign trade balance.**

Between January and November 2006 Belarusians sold foreign currency to the National Bank of Belarus to the tune of 2 billion 157 million US dollars, 27.8 per cent more than in a corresponding period last year.

Over this time, Belarusian citizens purchased foreign currency amounting to 3.759 billion dollars, 30.1 per cent more than in 2005.

The negative balance of trade reported by Belarusian banks amounts to 602.1 million US dollars, 1.4 more than in a corresponding period last year, BialaPan agency reports.

### Belarusian producers of sweets ready to fight against foreign trademarks

**Belarus responds to limitation of export of sweets from the country to Russia with changes in the law.**

State custom tax committee of Republic of Belarus has already received documents sent by Belarusian sweets producers demanding the custom tax authorities to observe closely sweets imported from Russia. The action is directed against sweets the trademarks of which have been registered in Belarus. Mariam Haračka, special representative for patents in Republic of Belarus, stated in an interview for the BelPam press agency that this was a response to an action of Russian authorities.

Last month Russian custom officials refuse to allow into Russia several Belarusian trucks with sweets. Their argument was that the Belarusian sweets bore trademarks registered in Russia. At the moment tax custom register of Republic of Belarus includes 3 registered trademarks while a similar Russian register includes 180 trademarks. To avoid similar situations in the future Belarusians plan to check their trademarks before their introduction in the market. A special data base will be set up for the purpose.

## SOCIETY

### The activities of the Belarus National Voters Club is suspended

**On the eve of self-management elections, the Belarus justice ministry suspended the activities of the Belarus national voters club. On December 11 the Belarus Supreme Court examined a suit in which the justice ministry demanded the suspension of the election monitoring organization.**

In 2006 the ministry twice issued official warnings against the organization, and demanded that it be suspended for a period of six months. The Supreme Court deemed it decisive that the organization did not have any offices in the place it was registered. The organization could resume its activities if the reason of its suspension is no longer there – it was declared.

But former head of the voters club Uładzimir Huździejeŭ thinks that the ruling effectively means an end to the organization, in fact the last of its kind in Belarus.

## CULTURE

### Bob Marley in Belarusian

**Songs of the famous singer Bob Marley will be performed in Belarusian during the second part of the concert „Solidarity with Belarus”.**

Warsaw will celebrate the 25 of March, the anniversary of formation of the People's Republic of Belarus with great concert „Solidarity with Belarus-2”. The concert will be a sequel to a similar one which was organized in the New Town market in Warsaw before the presidential elections in Belarus. The last year's concert included Polish and Belarusian stars. Belarusian musicians performed Polish hits from the days of the Solidarity trade union.

Next year Belarusian musicians will sing in their native language the greatest hits of Bob Marley. They have been translated by the well-known poet and translator Michal Anempadystaŭ. The aim of the concert is to bring back to public attention the situation of Belarusian independence.



There are various sites devoted to events in Belarus, which are, however, little known in Western Europe, and among people dealing with politics towards Belarus who do not understand the Russian or Belarusian languages.

The [belarus-live](http://belarus-live) site fills this gap. The site allows to order weekly reception of news in English, French, German, Polish, Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian.

