



Newsletter

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In accordance with the regulation of the president pensions in Belarus grew by 7,5% of 1 September 2007. Pensioners waited for another rise longer than usually. In fact, it is being “consumed” by inflation.

The price of tickets for public transport was raised by 20%. The law eliminating the majority of preferential rates, including those for pensioners and students in the first place, will become binding in January.

Independent commentators connect such a situation with difficulties of the economy caused by the increase of prices of energy from Russia. Departure from paternalistic patterns is predicted.

At the same time specialists say that the national economy has some reserves in order to prevent sudden drop in the standard of living. Simultaneously political opposition is trying to play their card in the wave of the social protection of the society which was earlier a trump card of the authorities.

Plans of the joint democratic forces to organize the Social March on November 4 were confirmed during a press conference on September 4.

Opposition leader Anatol Labiedzka thinks that social slogans may increase the amount of followers of the opposition from 20% to even above 50%. Experts notice that it is not an easy task taking into consideration limited possibilities of communicating with the society. Moreover, the fear of repressions among people makes it difficult to stage street campaigns.

Meanwhile on September 4 the courts were exceptionally understanding in trying two activists of the organization called „Młody Front” which is illegal due to its lack of registration. Nasta Azarka was fined in Nieśwież while Ivan Szyla was merely reprimanded in Soligorsk.

In the previous years numerous opposition activists were sentenced to prison, on the basis of an article of the Penal Code, for “being a member of an illegal organization”. A slight liberalization in this matter can be explained by Minsk’s desire to improve its image in the eyes of western countries.

Also, the main focus of the speech of Belorussian deputy foreign minister Walery Waraniecki at a conference devoted to European Neighborhood Policy in Brussels on September 3 was building bridges in relations with the countries of western Europe. The representative of Belarus concentrated

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mostly on common interests in the field of energy while skipping the issues of democracy and human rights.

Observers say that Belorussian authorities still hope to entice the European Union with the slogan of “pragmatic cooperation” and do not have the intention of yielding in the matter of democratization of public life. Numerous opinions of political experts suggest that by trying to initiate dialogue with Brussels Minsk is simultaneously trying to blackmail Moscow with the possibility of “escaping to the West”. Its aim would be to reach possibly convenient prices for energy raw materials.

Another difficult round of Belorussian-Russian negotiations on the conditions of gas deliveries in 2008 will take place soon. The Belorussian side is counting on certain discounts in connection with the election campaign already underway in Russia. Elections to the Duma are scheduled for December while presidential elections are scheduled for March 2008. In such circumstances it doesn't behoove the Kremlin to argue with an ally.

Moscow, however, is confirming its intention of switching in the next few years to full market rules in the field of delivering energy raw materials to Belarus. So far attempts to diversify sources of gas and oil deliveries have not brought Minsk any effects.

According to commentators, recently accepted projects of Belarus extracting its own oil in Iran can bring slight effects. The reason for such a situation is a small amount of oil extraction with simultaneously big expenses required for the implementation of such plans.

Belorussian authorities are trying to solve the country's financial problems with foreign loans and by selling shares of particular companies to foreign shareholders.

The opposition is criticizing the authorities for the lack of transparency of such actions, in particularly pointing to the recent sale of the shares of mobile operator “Velcom” to a Cyprus corporation “SB Telecom” which was kept confidential. The subject of “silent privatization” may become one of those most strongly expressed during approaching election campaign. Parliamentary elections have been scheduled for 12 October 2008.

POLITICS

Walery Waraniecki made a speech in Brussels

International conference devoted to the European Neighborhood Policy took place in Brussels on September 3. Deputy foreign minister Walery Waraniecki represented Belarus as an observer.

During his speech Mr. Waraniecki presented the approach of Belarus to the development of EU-Belarus relations. He spoke of the readiness of Belarus to cooperate with Europe on the issue of seeking diversified sources of energy raw materials as well as in the field of their deliveries and transit. The

representative of Belarus encouraged investors from the European Union to participate in the strategic spheres of the Belorussian economy, i.e. energy, engineering, chemical and petrochemical industries. He also mentioned the issue of prices for visas for Byelorussians to the Schengen zone. Russian media reacted strongly to the participation of Belarus in this conference. “Niezawisimaja Gazieta” wrote that Minsk is trying to improve its relations with Europe and that's why it is presenting itself as a victim of “energy dictatorship of Moscow”. “Minsk is trying to present itself in Europe as a living proof of being a victim of the Russian trick while hoping to weaken sanctions. The fact of issuing a visa to a high-ranking official of the Belorussian Foreign Ministry proves changes in this respect” – wrote the Russian paper.

Social March will take place in November in Minsk

Social March will take place on November 4 in Minsk. According to the Independent Belorussian agency BielaPAN, the head of the Organizing Committee of the March, Walery Uchnalou informed about it during a press conference.

Uchnalou stressed that the Social March is not a single action but has been planned as a series of events spread in time.

- This is only the beginning of an action whose aim is the change of the social policy of the country. Not only political parties but also numerous actively operating social organizations have joined this initiative – stressed Walery Uchnalou.

Three big campaigns have been planned for this fall within the framework of the Social March. At the end of September the opposition wants to organize over 300 demonstrations in various regions of Belarus. Its participants will present local inhabitants with their stand on the issue of eliminating preferential rates for some social groups.

As planned, the Social March will proceed from October Square to the National Library. The organizers say that they will soon submit appropriate petition to local authorities.

No New Russian Military Installations in Belarus

On 3 September Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov disproved Russian Ambassador to Belarus Alexander Surikov's statement, in which the latter claimed that Russia was going to place nuclear weapons in Belarus, says Nezavisimaya Gazeta. Moscow is not planning to locate any military installations in Belarus, said Sergey Lavrov. He stressed that the Russian Foreign Ministry had stated it long before.

Late in August Russian Ambassador Alexander Surikov said that new military installations, which possibly have something to do with nuclear weapons, might be located in Belarus. However, the next day the diplomatist claimed that he had been misinterpreted by journalists.

OFICIALITY

There will be no new Russian military objects in Belarus

On September 3 the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov denied words of the ambassador of the Russian Federation in Minsk. Ambassador Alexander Surikov announced that Russia intends to place nuclear weapons in Belarus.

"Niezawisimaja Gazeta" has informed about that. Sergey Lavrov stressed that Russia does not have such plans and that the Russian Foreign Ministry had already informed about that.

It was at the end of August that Alexander Surikov said that there might be new military objects placed in Belarus and that they might be connected with nuclear weapons. The next day, however, the diplomat said that journalists had misinterpreted his words.

OPPOSITION

Another political trial

On September 4 Walentyna Lapina, a judge of the court in Soligorsk ruled that Ivan Szyla is guilty of participating in illegal organization called „Młody Front” (“Young Front”). The court said he was guilty but was unable to punish him in accordance with articles of the Penal Code. Ivan remains free because he still is a minor and has not been fined due to the lack of evidence.

The court, however, warned him while the material evidence, among them HDs, were confiscated. Simultaneously the court decided to destroy arm bands and stamps with the inscription “Młody Front”.

Ivan Szyla himself called the court's session “a trial of the society indifference”. “It is not about Młody Front or the articles of the Penal Code but about the society which allows for being treated this way” – said the young opposition activist.

During the time of the trial 8 young people were detained in front of the court in Soligorsk. They were accused of participating in illegal demonstration. Activists of Młody Front arrived to Soligorsk in order to support their colleague. All the detained spent the

night in a local prison and were included in a police report. They appeared in the court the next day.

ECONOMY

Presidential and oligarch Republic of Belarus

Belarus rated fourth, after Poland, Estonia and Slovenia in the ranking of the development of the countries of central and eastern Europe. The rating was prepared by „Rzeczpospolita” daily based on the research of eurodeputy and professor of economy, Dariusz Rosati. The basic criterion was GDP growth indicator for the last 18 months. Economies of 28 countries, which until 1989 had constituted the eastern bloc of communist countries, were evaluated.

Professor Rosati divided the countries of the region into two groups: 1) states which followed the western model (Poland, the Baltic Republics, The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia); and 2) countries which are developing in accordance with the Asian model (states of the former Soviet Union now known as the Commonwealth of Independent States)

Professor Rosati placed Belarus among states with a presidential-oligarchy model of exercising power with visible symptoms of corruption. The effective development of the Belorussian economy will depend in the future on the presence of reforms, open market economy and the democratic model of exercising power – says the Polish economist.

Belarus will use Iranian oil fields

Belarus will prepare documentation on the exploitation of the Jufair oilfields in the southern part on Iran within the next two years. „Bielaruśnafta” signed a contract in Teheran on the basis of which it will start extracting “black gold” jointly with the Iranian company Petroiran Development Company. The value of the contract is estimated to be 450 mln USD. Both sides intend to extract in Jufair no less than 40 thousand barrels of oil per 24 hours.

Oil deposits of the Jufair oilfields are estimated at 2.1 billion barrels which, with

the extraction indicated above, allows for their use for the next 20 years.

S. Husak (Belorussian independent economist): If we take into account the processing possibilities of our Petrochemia Mozyrz they constitute exactly one tenth of the oil extracted in Iran. The Mozyrz company is able to process 16 million tons of oil a year. It is good that Belarus has achieved an alternative source of supplies of this raw material. However, there is a political side to this. Unfortunately, we are being helped by Iran and Venezuela which does not look good. All liabilities for investments and the exploitation of the deposits, in accordance with the contract, will be accounted for in form of extracted oil.

Preparatory work for the extraction of this material is underway in Jufair. Two boreholes have been made and equipment has been delivered.

SOCIETY

Public prosecutor's office has warned journalists of the foreign media

Public prosecutor's office in Grodno is warning journalists of Radio Racja and „Deutsche Welle” of their responsibility for operating on the territory of Belarus without required accreditation.

On September 3 Ivan Roman and Natalia Makuszyna were summoned to the public prosecutor's office and informed about their responsibility for violating the regulations of the Press Act – informs the Association of Belorussian Journalists (BAŻ). While in the prosecutor's office the journalists were presented with printed materials signed with their names. The prosecutor said that the articles of Ivan Roman did not always correspond with the actual situation. The prosecutor also found elements discrediting the Belorussian state in the articles of Natalia Makuszyna.

CULTURE

The Day of Belarusian Written Language Celebrated in Shklou

The 14th in history Day of Belarusian Written Language took place in the town of Shklou on September 02, 2007. This time the organizers decided to invite only the members of the politically loyal Union of Writers to take part in the event.

Numerous festive events were held on special grounds along Savietskaya Street, in the City Park as well as next to the old Town Hall that hosted the main stage of the celebrations.

The opening ceremony of Shklou Museum of Regional History and Economy was timed to the Day of Belarusian Written Language this year. The museum is located at a two-storey building of the former "Children's World" department store. The cultural institution was established within three months. Therefore, the majority of new exhibits could be found without explanatory notes. The last exhibition stand is devoted to "the First President of Belarus" Alaksandar Lukashenka, who was born in the local area.

The Head of State sent a red-letter telegram to all the participants of celebrations in Shklou. Among other, he emphasized that "the Day of Belarusian Written Language is celebrated by the people, who keep the spiritual heritage of our people, enrich the national culture and protect the mother tongue". According to Lukashenka, "the truthful and responsible words of writers and journalists are extremely required by people nowadays, and that they bring consolidation to the society".

The Day of Belarusian Written Language has been traditionally celebrated on the first Sunday of September since the year of 1994. In different years, the holiday was hosted by such cities and towns as Polatsak, Turau, Navahradak, Niasvizh, Vorsha, Pinsk, Zaslauye, Amscislau, Mir, Kamianiets and Pastavy. Next year, it is planned to hold the Day of Belarusian Written Language in Barysau.

International Theater Festival "White Tower"

12th International Theatre Festival „White Tower” will take place on September 8-14 in Brest. The organizers expect participants from 25 countries – informs state agency BiełTA. Theatre groups from Russia, Poland, Germany, Moldova and Ukraine should arrive to the city on the Bug river. For the first time, performers from Venezuela, Denmark, Luxembourg and Tajikistan are participating in the “White Tower” Theatre Festival.

16 countries have sent the theaters from their capitals which is a proof of the high artistic level of this event. Similarly to its previous editions, the program is varied: literary and music shows, performances of student theatre groups, shows of street theatres.

The jury of the „White Tower” Festival is composed of renowned theater experts from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Poland.



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.eu) site fills this gap. The site allows to order weekly reception of news in English, Polish, Belarusian, Russian.

