

The diplomatic conflict of official Minsk and Washington became the main recent political event for Belarus

The Belarusian government recalled its Ambassador Mihail Hvastou from Washington and advised US party to do the same on the 7th of March.

The Foreign Ministry of Belarus explained the demarche as an answer to widening of economic sanctions imposed against the “Belnaftahim” concern in November, 2007.

Since Ms. Stewart was not declared as a “Persona non grata” in Belarus, Washington decided to leave her in Minsk. In this case it would have been easier to reach a compromise. But after a second “insistent recommendation” by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, the US Ambassador had to leave Belarus for a while on the 12th of March.

The US Deputy Secretary of State stressed US position and detailed the US requirements to Belarus. He declared that the US party will not negotiate until Aliaksandr Kazulin (the most important political prisoner, former political rival of Aliaksandr Lukashenka during last presidential elections) is released from prison.

Thus the conflict escalated. Actually the Belarusian government implemented the threat, made by Lukashenka, to chuck out the US Ambassador in case of strengthening the imposed sanctions. The US from the other hand decided to act on principle and declared that will not bear halved measures in the question of political prisoners.

The conflict escalation can bring to nothing all recent attempts to improve the relation with the West. Lately nearly all the political prisoners were released. It seemed that one more step left to positive breakthrough in Belarus-West situation.

Though experts think, the Belarusian government thinks differently.

Firstly, Kazulin is seemed to be the “ace of trumps” in the game with the West. So, it’s worth keeping.

Secondly, Kazulin is the most dangerous opponent to nowadays government. Besides, he is a personal enemy of Lukashenka, so we can notice here psychological and emotional factors too.

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Thirdly, the government doesn't want to look weak. The release of "political prisoner №1" can mean that the government gives in. From the other hand it can group the political opposition round Kazulin. If he is released he will have an image of a moral winner and can easily influence the society. Certainly, in this case the situation will not stay calm.

Worsening the relations with Washington by keeping Kazulin in prison, Minsk hopes, to the idea of experts, to drive a wedge between the US and the EU in relation to the Belarusian issue. The EU countries are much more tied with Belarus by economic and transit interests. That is why Brussels has to be gentler in respect of Belarus. That's extremely significant that on the 7th of March, at the same day of Minsk demarche against Washington, the Belarusian and European representatives signed the agreement in Brussels about opening the European commission office in Minsk. And Aliaksandr Lukashenka hoped that Europe will lead its own, different from the US, policy towards Belarus on meeting with British businessmen on the 10th of March.

To the other hand the Belarusian government hopes to get support from Moscow, as Russia has its own list of claims to the US (Kosovo issue, placing of antimissile systems in Europe etc.). The political observers noticed that Minsk made the demarche against Washington on the second day after telephone talk between Lukashenka and Putin. As the press service of the Belarusian President reported, the two leaders discussed "the state and perspectives of Belarusian relations with some western countries".

As a Belarusian political scientist Andrei Fedarau noticed, the escalation of the conflict is profitable to the Kremlin, as the harder is the confrontation, the more the Belarusian government will move towards Moscow. This increases the chances to enslave Belarus (to impose Russian rouble as a currency in Belarus, to sign the constitutional act of the so-called "union state", using the Belarusian "springboard" for "asymmetric answer" to the USA, placing antimissile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic).

Official Minsk, who doesn't want to become a part of Russia, has to continue its balancing between the East and West. Experts think that the Belarusian government will not break completely its relations with the US. Anyway, they will have to negotiate sooner or later.

POLITICS

USA Ambassador Leaves Belarus

US Ambassador Karen Brevard Stewart informed on meeting with the Belarusian opposition that she is leaving Minsk for Washington today. The reason is that she needs a short-term consultation, reports "Nasha Niva" newspaper.

During the conference with the opposition, the Ambassador stressed that the US policy towards Belarus will not change.

As it was reported earlier, the Belarusian government recalled its Ambassador Mihail Hvastou from Washington last Friday.

Belarusian Foreign Ministry advised US party to do the same.

US-Belarus diplomatic tensions are concerned with the sanctions imposed on Belarusian concern "Belnaftahim" by the USA.

Additional US Sanctions?

US Department of Treasury has explained the sanctions against the State Concern "Belnaftakhim" applied in November, 2007.

According to the document, asset freezing and ban on cooperation with the concern apply to all the subsidiaries of the concern and the companies with over 50% shares possessed by "Belnaftakhim".

The statement of the US representative was technical detalisation of the sanctions introduced; however, the official Mensk interpreted it as introducing new restrictive measures against Belarus, which was caused by a more liberal interpretation of the list of firms related to “Belnaftakhim”. The ambassador of Belarus in Washington Mikhail Hvastou was recalled in response to the move, while his US counterpart in Mensk Karen Stewart was recommended to leave the country. However, the US side decided not to withdraw its ambassador from Belarus.

OFFICIALLY

EU Preferences Won't Be Returned to Belarus Soon

“Most optimistically, the EU preferences will be returned to Belarus in the year of 2009”, stated Andrej Yeudachenka, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Reportedly, this issue was touched upon during the EU-Belarus Business Council's meeting in Miensk.

It will take some time to get back the benefits, even if all EU countries will support the decision.

It should be reminded that the European Committee cancelled the General System of EU Preferences in relation to Belarus in 2007. The decision was lobbed by the International Labour Organization for breaking rights of professional unions by the state authorities in Belarus.

Control over Internet

Belarusian authorities intend to introduce amendments into the acting legislation in order to take control of the Internet. First Deputy Minister of Information of Belarus Liliya Ananich stated that the responsibility for spreading information in Internet-media should be identical to that of printed media, especially if the portals are not purely commercial but rather have news and analytical bloc.

Ms. Ananich has acknowledged that Internet was “a complicated segment of media space”, which is difficult to control and register. In order to regulate the activity of Internet-media, it is possible that amendments into the current legislation are passed or a new normative act is adopted.

OPPOSITION

The United Civil Party Cannot Find Place for Holding a General Congress

The UCP Press-service informs that the political association hasn't managed to find premises for holding the party's General Congress, planned for April 20, 2008.

Nearly a dozen of different institutions have already rejected to provide the UCP with premises for various reasons or without any reason at all.

The UCP Party leader Anatol Lyabiedzka noted in this respect that even technical issues of the kind are settled on the highest political level. No institution will give a consent to hold the party Congress without a special permit from the Presidential Administration.

Skrabets Brothers on Hunger Strike

Siarhei and Aliaksandar Skrabets have announced going on an indefinite hunger strike today. In this way the brothers are fighting for the release of political prisoners Aliaksandar Kazulin, Siarhei Parsiukevich and Andrei Kim.

Siarhei Skrabets is positive that their strike will be joined by other public figures. “Now, when the US and the EU vocally demand for the release of Belarusian political prisoners we have decided to support their claim”, stated the former deputy.

This is not the first hunger strike of the former political prisoner Siarhei Skrabets. Before his release from Vitsebsk prison, Mr. Skrabets was turning down food for 25 days in solidarity with Aliaksandar Kazulin. The brothers have announced that their hunger-

strike would not be passive as they intended to take part in Freedom Day celebrations.

ECONOMY

Belarus Economy Goes Up?

Gross domestic product (GDP has increased by 9,9 %, and industrial production – by 12,9 %) in the period of January-February. Besides, make quantity of agricultural products has increased by more than 6 %, while investments in fixed capital – by 12,1 %.

This information was reported by the Minister of Statistics and Analysis Uladzimir Zinousky during his report to the Belarusian president, informs BelaPAN agency.

The Minister also informed the President that the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis is actively preparing for the general census of the population in 2009. In October, 2007 they held a test census which resulted in the program of carrying the next census in 2009.

Russia Rejects to Subsidize Belarus

The Ministry of Finances of Russia admits that it provided support to the Belarusian economy and states that these actions are in history nowadays. These declarations have been done today by Siarhej Shatalau, Deputy Minister of Finance of Russia during his speech in the State Duma.

Belarus used to get cheap natural gas from Russia and it didn't pay customs fees, while reselling oil and the oil refinery products, received from Russia, to the third parties. "These problems have been considerably regulated during the recent years", the Ministry of Finance official told to the public.

SOCIETY

The "Live Shield" on Belarusian Roads

Numerous drivers have joined the 'Live Shield' protest action in the Belarusian

capital today. A lot of cars have appeared with black and white bands on the roads.

The civil action of protest and indignation was caused by the inhuman behaviour of road police officers, who were trying to catch a drunken driver, driving at the speed of 150-180 km/h near Minsk by means of blocking the highway with the random private cars with passengers, including a child.

The accident took place on March 2, 2008. However, it received the general publicity on March 13, 2008 only, as soon as the accident victims determined to appeal to the Public Prosecutor's office, having no response from the police.

CULTURE

"Euro-Dictionary" by Lyavon Barshcheuski Published

A new edition of "Euro-Dictionary» is created by a candidate of philological science Lyavon Barshcheuski. The dictionary contains more than 100,000 lexical units in 28 languages.

The dictionary consists of four chapters. The first one includes the Belarusian lexical units with translations into 27 languages of the world, including the Latin language. The second part of the dictionary stores loan words and interjections. The third chapter presents the Belarusian – Latin dictionary of religious, biological, chemical and medical terms. The fourth chapter includes the Belarusian proverbs and sayings.

The title "Euro-Dictionary" and European symbols on the cover are not occasional. The author Lyavon Barshcheuski and editor Uladzimer Siuchyuk emphasize that the Belarusian language is getting closer to potential readers of Belarusian texts in the European countries with the help of "Euro-Dictionary". And Belarusians can get acquainted with the wealth of the European languages thanks to the dictionary.



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

