



The escalation of Belarusian – US diplomatic conflict continued last week. A temporary Charge d'affaires for the United States in Belarus Jonathan Moore was summoned to the Belarus' Foreign Office on March 17, 2008. He was insistently recommended to cut down the quantity of personnel at the US Embassy in Miensk.

As widely known, having been insistently pressurized by the Belarus' Foreign Office, the US Ambassador Karen Stewart had to leave Belarus on March 12, 2008.

As soon as Jonathan Moore visited the Belarus' Foreign Office, the US Embassy in Belarus delivered a special report, stating that the US government was considering recommendations of Belarus' Foreign Office, regarding the necessity of reducing the quantity of staff at the US Embassy in Miensk.

“The U.S. Government is in the process of reviewing the request made by the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 17 that the U.S. Embassy in Minsk reduce its staffing. Therefore, visa processing has been temporarily suspended, while our resources are engaged addressing other priorities”, the US Embassy's press-release says. It should be mentioned that this restriction is related to the Belarusian citizens only.

The recurrent aggravation of relations between the Belarusian and the US governments is taking place against the background of important events that have taken place in Brussels and Moscow.

The US Deputy Secretary of State David Kramer and the US Ambassador in Belarus Karen Stewart held intensive consultations with the EU leadership and the official representatives of the EU member-states in Brussels. There are good reasons to state that their European collocutors treated very seriously the deterioration of relations between Belarus and the United States and unambiguously shared the US governmental officials' concern with the behavior of Belarusian authorities. Among other, the Europeans confirmed their demand to the Belarusian authorities to release the political prisoners. It was repeatedly stated that any steps towards the Belarusian governmental authorities could be taken as soon as all political prisoners in the country were released from jail.

However, the recent piece of news about the US citizen and his employee's arrest in Miensk can intensify tension in the current conflict situation.

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Lukashenka's repeated refusal to release a former candidate to Presidency and a political prisoner Alaksandar Kazulin from jail or at least to extenuate his punishment has given rise to doubts if the Belarusian ruler has any sensible view of things at all.

As reported, A. Kazulin's daughter Yuliya sent a letter to the state authorities on March 13, 2008. She requested to extenuate her father's punishment and asked to substitute the colony imprisonment with public or disciplinary work. Also, she asked to reconsider 10 violations of colony regulations, arrogated to her father. In particular, she asked to review the violations of regulations, fixed during A. Kazulin's hunger-strike.

The aggressive behaviour of Belarusian government in relation to the United States looks clearly discordant to the global press comments upon negotiations of the US Secretary of State Condoliza Rice and the Pentagon Head Robert Gates with their Russian colleagues in the "two vs. two" mode as well as their meetings with the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and a newly-elected President Dmitry Medvedev. Practically all reporters noted conciliatory atmosphere during the meetings. Nothing of the kind can be seen in the Belarusian part of the Union State. Surprisingly, Belarus and Russia signed a treaty on coordination of foreign policy not long ago. Independent observers note the Kremlin's neutral and silent position as far as the Belarusian – US conflict is concerned.

A recent meeting of Lukashenka with the State Security Council officers was a logical continuation of his policy, aimed at boosting tension in the country. Among other, the Head of State noted that the officers "shouldn't give orders" themselves. He called upon them "to coordinate implementation of Presidential policy" in their respective fields instead. Also, Lukashenka emphasized a necessity of "improving provisions in the Criminal Code and the Criminal Code of Practice". A. Lukashenka promised to "stir up" the economic sector in the Belarusian government later on.

Among other Lukashenka dwelt upon the situation in the world. He threatened his subordinates with a forecast of "much tenser international climate" as well as the strained attention to Belarus. The Belarusian Head of State noted that the settled by the Western neighbours issue of placing the US anti-missile complexes in close proximity to the Belarusian borders "was ruining the strategic stability" in the area.

It looks as if Lukashenka is capable of retaining his political power with the use of constantly created tension in foreign and domestic policy only.

The "Belarus to Europe!" civil campaign may turn to be a highly important event in the country's social and political life. Its activists passed a proposal to Mr. Hans-Johan Schmidt, the Head of OSCE Office in Miensk to hold public hearings in cooperation with the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the implementation of OSCE membership responsibilities of Belarus.

The campaign activists link the necessity of holding the public hearings with the repeated appeals of Belarusian authorities to the OSCE, caused by the reported violations of basic OSCE documents by separate member states. The civil activists believe that the Belarusian government doesn't foster in full carrying out its own responsibilities within the OSCE. In particular, the Belarusian government has been repeatedly criticized by honorable international and national NGOs for its actions, which disagree completely with such basic OSCE principles as respect for human rights and fundamental liberties, democracy and supremacy of law etc.

The proposed public hearings have to be held before the end of May 2008. The initiators state that they will be carried out in any case.

The application for holding the public hearings was sent to the Belarus' Foreign office on March 19, 2008 as well.

OFFICIALLY

Belarusian Authoritarian Regime Expressed Support to China in Conflict with Tibet

“The Belarusian side regards invariably Tibet as an integral part of China”, as stated the Belarusian Foreign Ministry in its press-release on March 19, 2008.

“The Belarusian party believes that the present illegal actions in the autonomous region will be terminated in the nearest future”, the Ministry’s press secretary Andrei Papou added in his speech.

According to unofficial reports, around 100 people have been murdered in fights with the Chinese riot police during the protesting actions against the political rule of China in Tibet. At the same time, the Chinese authorities tell about 13 slaughtered protesters.

POLITICS

The Republic of Belarus informed the UN Secretary General about the US sanctions against “Belnaftakhim”

The permanent Belarusian mission at the UN forwarded to the UN secretariat a letter of claim to publish the relevant statement of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry dated by the 7-th of March as an official document of the General Assembly of the UN.

It is mentioned in the document that “on having signed the Helsinki Act, the USA and other countries-members of the OSCE have to abstain from any act of economic pressure directed to submission to its own interests of execution of its rights that are the party of its own sovereignty by any other country-member of the OSCE”.

The Belarusian government believes that the recent steps of the United States contradict to

this agreement and challenge other members of the OSCE.

SOCIETY

“Spadchyna” organization awarded Aliaksander Kazulin

“Spadchyna” organization awarded Aliaksander Kazulin with the Order of Kastus Kalinousky. “Malady Front” leader Zmitser Dashkevich was awarded with the first Order.

The decision was taken to award a number of well-known figures in light of 90 year anniversary of the Belarusian People’s Republic. For example, among the mentioned is Hvedar Niunjka, a worker of the Union of Belarusians of Lithuania, Volga Kazulina – daughter of the political prisoner, a coordinator of the Charter’97 Andrei Sannikau, a writer Ales Pashkevich and other figures.

OPPOSITION

Siarhei Halahaniuk Went On Hunger Strike

A civil activist Siarhei Halahaniuk has joined a collective hunger strike, initiated by the brothers Skrabiets.

Thus, three people already keep on strike, demanding the state authorities to release Alaksandar Kazulin. However, they are sure that their number will increase to around 10 people in a couple of days.

ECONOMY

“iKobo” Company Leaving Belarus

The “iKobo Inc.” Financial Company (USA) has announced termination of its services, provided to the clients, located or residing on the territory of Belarus.

Belarus cannot be found any more on the “iKobo” Company’s Web-site anymore (https://ru.ikobo.com/enru/country_pages.html). The “iKobo Visa” cardholders have received warnings that the company will not be able to provide them with services, in relation with the US governmental restrictions to Belarus. The clients are proposed to withdraw cash from the cards within five days. The “Inter-Smith” Company Director Alaksandar Nikalaychuk believes that the changes may affect around 3 thousand “iKobo Visa” cardholders in Belarus. Most of them are computer engineers and programmers, working for different IT-companies abroad.

After Svaboda.org

CULTURE

Jozef Krasheuski Memorial Exhibition Open in Bierascie

An exhibition, dedicated to a well-known writer, publicist, publisher,

ethnographer and archeologist of the 19th century has been open in the Bierascie Museum of Saved Values, the Polish Radio reports.

Jozef Krasheuski was born into a family of cornet from Pruzhany. He spent his childhood in the village of Douhaye near the town. Krasheuski’s life is connected both with the political and literary activity. Thus, he was a participant of the anti-tsarist conspiracy in 1830-32. Later on, he was imprisoned. Having been released from jail, he went abroad and spent the rest of his life there far away from his motherland.

At the same time, Krasheuski was a famous writer. His name was included in the Guinness Book, as he wrote the immense number of 223 fascinating novels and stories.

Moreover, he wrote interesting essays about the Bierascie region, about Pinsk, Bierascie, Kobryn and Pruzhany. Also, he is considered to be the founder of the Polish realistic historical novel.



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

