

The last days in Belarus have been overshadowed by political repressions. This time targeted were the participants of street celebrations of Freedom Day in Minsk (90th anniversary of proclaiming the independence of Belarusian People's Republic) as well the journalists working for foreign media.

On March 25 riot police attacked the participants of the manifestation commemorating Freedom Day. About a hundred people were detained, some of them beaten. Among those detained were foreign citizens, namely two journalists of Lithuanian TV. On the next day 26 people were sentenced to administrative arrests and another 50 fined for violating the order of conducting mass events.

On March 27 KGB officers conducted searches in several editorships of independent media and in the flats of journalists. The repressions were primarily directed against those who cooperate with the Polish satellite TV station "Belsat", radio "Radio Racyja" (Bialystok) and "European Radio for Belarus". KGB officers were seizing computers and data storage equipment.

In all the cases security service officers presented warrants reading that their actions fall within the criminal case on the defamation of the president of the Republic of Belarus instituted as early as in 2005 on the issue of spreading satirical cartoons in the Internet. Independent observers believe this to be only a formal ground to paralyze the work of journalists for foreign media received in Belarus.

The representative of Belarusian Foreign Ministry stated on the same day that the foreign media subject to searches are not accredited in the country, which is why the issue is about "some private Belarusian citizens who have been for a long time illegally doing journalist work in the territory of Belarus".

The head of the Belarusian Association of Journalists Zhanna Litvina believes that such actions of the authorities may be "the emotional reaction on the way the media covered the events of March, 25 in Minsk".

Experts underscore that thanks to the information and the comments of independent journalists the whole world got to know about the brutal dispersal of the festive rally which did not help improve the image of the Belarusian regime. However, the official Minsk has lately taken interest in the services of the British PR-heavyweight Lord Timothy Bell. On March, 13 the latter met with president Lukashenko and the British specialist is currently working on improving the image of Belarus in the world.

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However, the top priority for the Belarusian regime is currently to exhibit toughness in both foreign and domestic policy, which is primarily related to the diplomatic war with the USA. The diplomatic conflict sparked off in March after the White House toughened economic sanctions against a highly profitable Belarusian concern “Belnaftakhim” applied in response to Lukashenka’s unwillingness to free Aliaksandar Kazulin, who is believed by Washington to be a political prisoner.

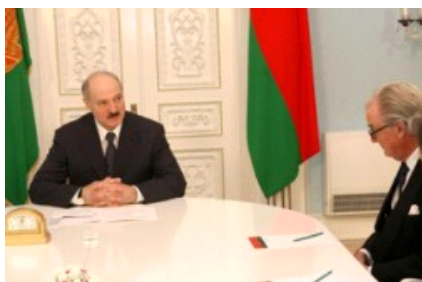


Photo: BELTA

As the attempts to improve the relations with the West have failed, Belarusian authorities have attempted to imitate the slackening of the regime. However, the current task is to “sober up” the emboldened opposition and retain public fear of repressions. The brutality of the riot police on March 25 is,

according to the analysts, aimed to dampen the traditional surge of opposition street actions in spring (namely, “Charnobylski Shliakh” on April 26). The authorities are also willing to reduce the political activity of people prior to the parliamentary elections scheduled for September.

Meanwhile, the diplomatic war with Washington had a continuation. 17 diplomats had to leave Belarus in response to the demand of official Minsk to shorten staff of the American Embassy on March, 26. Earlier, the first channel of the Belarusian television showed the plot, according to which one of the workers of the American Embassy had allegedly organized a spy network from the citizens of Belarus. The American side explained that in reality the matter concerns the group of the security workers of the American Embassy, who were fulfilling their direct duties. But this information didn’t reach the most part of the Belarusian citizens. Thus, there is an image of an external enemy and his “fifth column” in the country, created by the efforts of the state Belarusian media, state independent observers.

According to the experts, Belarusian authorities hope for Moscow support in the confrontation with the USA. But it draws attention that the meeting between Vladimir Putin and George Bush will take place in Sochi on April, 6. It is not improbable that the elected President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev will participate in the dialogue. The analysts mention: if the new Russian leader wishes to improve negotiations with Washington, including the compromise in the question of disposal of elements of anti-missile defense, then the situation of the Belarusian authorities may seriously get worse.

President Lukashenka held a meeting focusing on issues of economic cooperation development with Arab states of the Persian Gulf on April 27. The state leader didn’t hide that the problem of export diversification got worse in connection with the American sanctions. The analysts consider that the economic gap of Belarus into the region of Persian Gulf would hardly happen. Belarusian production causes limited interest there (first of all, goods of military and double purpose are bought), and local reach investors don’t hurry to invest money into Belarus, because there is not the most attractive investment climate. Besides, it is not improbable that Persian Gulf countries (except for Iran) wouldn’t wish to irritate Washington with the stirring up of cooperation with the Belarusian regime.

POLITICS

American Diplomats Leaving Belarus

The only way to solve Belarusian-American crisis – is to cancel the USA sanctions against Belarus. Belarusian MFA Press Secretary Andrei Papou stated it.

He emphasized that the USA representatives in Belarus had formed negative attitude to Belarusians among American and at the international scene. Papou added that the American administration had aimed to cause maximal damage to the Belarusian state and people in order to subordinate Belarus to the USA interests.

17 US diplomats are leaving Belarus today. The same number remains in the Belarusian capital. The quantity is based upon the number of Belarusian diplomats, working in the United States.

The diplomats have to leave Belarus until March 27, 2008, following a demand of Belarusian state authorities to the US Embassy in Minsk to reduce its staffing.

The American partners believe that these statements are violating the regulations of Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

OFFICIALLY

EU Demands Freedom for Detained on March 25

The EU will demand prompt release of all the detained participants of the rally on March, 25. The European Commissioner for External Relation Benita Ferrero-Waldner stated that the detentions and beating of peaceful participants of the event as well as the journalists are unacceptable.

The Commissioner added that the reaction of Belarusian authorities causes both indignation and astonishment as the official Minsk had lately released a number of political prisoners and gave consent to open the representation of the European Union in Belarus.

It should be reminded, that on March, 25 the peaceful demonstration commemorating the 90th anniversary of Belarusian People's Republic was brutally repressed by riot police. Detained were over 80 people. On March, 26 seventy five administrative case were brought to trial with 26 people sentenced to terms of arrest ranging from 5 to 15 days and 50 demonstrates fined.

Lithuanian Government Demands Explanation

The government of Lithuania has demanded official explanations from the Belarusian side in connection with the detention of a journalist and a cameraman of Lithuanian TV in Minsk on March, 25. The journalists were

kept in custody for two hours and stripped of the tape they had shot during the opposition rally.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania has presented an official note of protest to the Belarusian ambassador in Vilnius demanding detailed investigation into the case, official explanations of the incident and the return of the illegally confiscated tapes.

The Lithuanian side underscores that the move does not only undermine the principles of speech and press freedom respected by all democratic countries but also hinders the development of good neighbourly relations with the adjacent EU member-states.

OPPOSITION

Freedom Day 2008: Gloomy Results

Almost 90 Belarusian citizens are being tried today for their participation in a peaceful march and meeting, dedicated to the Freedom Day 2008 – the 90th anniversary of Belarusian People's Republic. The public action was cruelly dispersed by the riot police troops. Numerous participants were relentlessly beaten and detained.

Anatol Kulashou, the Chief of Main Department of Internal Affairs in Minsk has informed the public that all in all 88 people were detained. 13 under-age demonstrators were handed over to their parents. Two people were released without composing police protocols.

Also, the police chief told that two



Detention of A. Liankevich

policemen were hospitalized during the action.

The detained people are accused of breaking the order of arranging and holding mass events as well as of failing to obey the police. The march participants may be arrested for

up to 15 days or fined up to 30 base amounts (around EUR 320).

Mass actions, dedicated to the Freedom Day took place in a number of smaller cities in different Belarusian regions. Thus, there were detained 14 people in Baranavichy (Brest region). The democratic activists came to the square in the city centre. They were going to place flowers near a Memorial Cross, commemorating the victims of political repressions. However, they were detained by the police at the very beginning of their march.

ECONOMY

Belarus Should Respond to US Sanctions by Diversifying Exports – A. Lukashenka

The US sanctions against Belarus should be compensated for by the diversification of Belarusian exports, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko said at a meeting focusing on foreign policy issues.

Recently, more often than before, the Belarusian opposition has been warning of economic problems that Belarus is going to have, that the USA has put severe pressure on us; the Foreign Ministry has been reporting this, too” the head of state said. “If we had been working in other areas, we would not have noticed these US sanctions,” he added.

“Is it really a problem to sell potassium into other countries, and potassium is the main export item to the USA?” asked the President. “It has turned out that there are no problems with that. We can easily place our orders. The demand for potassium has been growing worldwide, triggering prices for potash fertilizers. It has turned out that we can easily sell this product, and these American sanctions are worthless, they have now understood and recognized it themselves.”

Alexander Lukashenka stressed that Belarus should have diversified its exports long ago. “We should not depend just on Russia, the EU and the USA,” he added.

BELTA

SOCIETY

Dwelling of Independent Journalists Searched

Searches are being under way in the offices of the independent media and private dwellings of journalists working for foreign media, namely Radio „Racyja”, „European Radio for Belarus” and „Belsat” TV.

The official reason for the searches is the criminal case on the defamation of the president with journalists treated as the witnesses. The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) claims that little is known about the case itself. It is most probable that the defamation case is only a dodge to detain independent journalists.

The management of “Belsat” TV channel and “European Radio for Belarus” cannot locate and contact some of their employees. According to BAJ, searches are being conducted across the country.

CULTURE

“Tutejshyja in Mahiliou”

The cultural committee of BPF party has opened an exhibition in Mahiliou titled “Historical Persons of Belarus”. The visitors of the exhibition were presented with two films – a screen version of “Tutejshyja” play and a piece on Belarusian anti-Communist resistance.

The exhibition “Historical Persons of Belarus” features the graphics of Zmitsier Shapavalau and

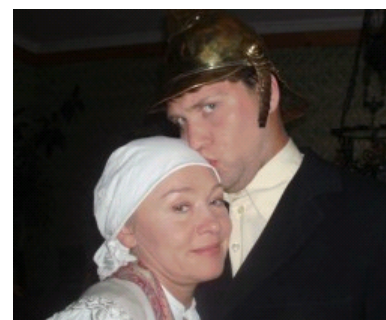


Photo by: Franak Viachorka

lithographs of Valiantsina and Llewyl Varets. The works depict Barbara Radzivil, Tadevush Kastsiushka, Leu Sapieha and other well-known historical persons.

After the opening of the exhibition the people of Mahiliou were shown a documentary by “Partyzanfilm” studio titled “Belarusian Anti-Soviet Struggle in 1944-1957”, shot on the basis of the book of Siarhei Jorsh and Siarhei Horbik “Belarusian Resistance”.

The event was finished with the Belarusian first night of “Tutejshyja” movie, shot on the basis of Yanka Kupala’s play of the same name on the order of “Belsat” satellite TV channel.



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.

