

From the main events of the last several days in Belarus we can point out, perhaps, two: on April 7 the European Union prolonged its sanctions against the most hideous Belarusian state officials, and on April 16 the central district court of Miensk will initiate the “process of 14” - criminal case against the democratic forces activists accused of organizing mass disturbances during the Entrepreneurs action on February 21.

On the background of these episodes yet another demand of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to again reduce the staff of the American Embassy in Miensk has not earned attention of the media obviously tired of inconsiderate dictator Lukashenka’s moves. Similarly failed to become a world-scale event Lukashenka’s official visit to Vietnam, the country to which Lukashenka promised Belarus as a base for Vietnamese interests. It is worth mentioning that Lukashenka has given similar promises to almost all Asian, African, and Latin American states which received him. And at times these promises are met.

According to unofficial sources, the House of Representatives of the Belarusian National Assembly at a closed session on April 9 ratified the Belarusian-Venezuelan Accord on cooperation in creating a joint Venezuelan anti-missile defense.

According to one of the deputies, the session which addressed the issue of participation of Belarusian specialists and experts in establishing the joint anti-missile defense and the system of radio electronic defense on the request of the Venezuelan side was held with closed doors.

The information about the endorsement was neither confirmed by the deputy chairman of the House of Representatives Siargiej Zabalociec, nor by the press-service of the lower chamber of the parliament. The Venezuelan Embassy in Miensk refused to comment upon the information.

It is worth mention that the Belarusian-Venezuelan agreement was considered by the parliamentary Commission on international affairs and relations with CIS on March 25. The session was held with open doors and attended by journalists.

The agreement to create the joint anti-missile defense was signed in December 2007 after the negotiations held during Lukashenka’s visit to Venezuela. The regime’s propagandists are inclined to present Venezuelan anti-missile defense assisted by Belarus as a certain response to the plans of the US Administration to deploy elements of American anti-missile defense in Poland and Czech Republic. They deliberately create the atmosphere of secrecy around the parliamentary ratification in order to add importance to the Belarusian-Venezuelan plans.

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As is known, prolonged sanctions foresee restriction on several Belarusian officials' entry to the EU, including Aliaksandr Lukashenka and freezing of their financial accounts. The decision of the EU was supported by other 10 non-EU countries.

The experts claim that after the dispersal of the Freedom Day peaceful demonstration in Minsk on March, 25 and a new wave of repressions against independent journalists a different decision was simply impossible, though the official Minsk urged the EU to retract the "black lists". The Belarusian regime nurtured certain hopes for success with relation to its consent to open the representation of the European Commission in Minsk. However, the hopes turned to be fruitless. Though wrong proved to be also those who professed that the EU would join the economic sanctions imposed by the US on Lukashenka regime as a further step after excluding Belarus from the EU General System of Trade Preference. Nevertheless some indications of support for US sanction among EU member-states are becoming evident as the ambassador of Belarus in Lithuania has acknowledged that the state-owned Belarusian concern "Belnaftakhim" is experiencing troubles while working with Lithuanian banks.

During one of the recent conferences in Vienna the representatives of the Belarusian opposition have spread the address to the clients of the Austrian "Raiffeisenbank" calling upon them to sever ties with the bank and withdraw their money from it. The initiators of the action believe that the current Belarusian regime is being financially supported not only from Russia, but also by this Austrian bank. It is a well-known fact that Lukashenka has decorated one of the "Raiffeisenbank" heads with a Belarusian order.

There are grounds to believe that the trend of mounting difficulties for "Belnaftakhim" and some businesses closely associated with the regime will be sustained along with the strengthening of the Euroatlantic solidarity with respect to the current repressive policy of the Belarusian regime.

Another recent trend when some Belarusian banks are beginning to offer for sale reasonable holdings of their assets is far from unambiguous. Thus, it has already been declared the majority stock of two large-scale state-owned Belarusian banks "Belprambudbank" and "Investbank" will be sold to foreign parties, while "Belarusbank" and "Agrabank" are expected to offer 15% of the stock for sale. Apart from that, another 7 banks are to sell large shares of their stock abroad. Some analysts believe the process to be a means to attract foreign investment, others view it as a threat to the national sovereignty from the side of Russia, for the buyers are predominantly Russian banks.

For a number of years already the Belarusian opposition has been commemorating the victims of the regime on the 16th day of every month. In April on this day the biggest process in modern Belarusian history in the case of the activists of the democratic movement is to take place. In the "cage" at the court room will be 14 people accused by the authorities in organising mass disturbances during the street action of private proprietors in Minsk. It is possible that on the eve of the traditional action "Charnobylski Shliakh" organised the "For Freedom" Movement on April, 26, the Belarusian authorities intend to intimidate the citizens tired of Lukashenka regime and protesting against its plans to force the building of the nuclear power plant.

## OFFICIALLY

### **The Minsk-located „Zhdanovichy” Shopping Center’s Director Arrested**

**The fact of arrest has been confirmed by the Belarus’ Minister of Internal Affairs Uladzimir Navumau.**

The „Zhdanovichy” Shopping Center’s Director Yauhien Shyhalou is suspected of committing a crime, determined by article 424 of Belarus’ Criminal Code – „misuse of power or duty”, the Interfax News Agency reports.

Also, the Minister Navumau informed the public that the Deputy Director of „Zhdanovichy” Shopping Center and a state official that dealt with issuing permits for building were detained together with Shyhalou.

It should be mentioned that Yauhien Shyhalou has been in the top-ten list of most influential Belarusian



entrepreneurs, and the shopping center „Zhdanovichy” is a tasty morsel, which consists of several markets, manufacturing enterprises, sports and health complex in Tarasava, and a restaurant club “Orion”.

## POLITICS

### **Lidziya Yarmoshyna Considers Herself to Be a Political Prisoner**

**The EU sanctions against the Belarusian top officials have been prolonged till April 10, 2009.**

The ‘black list’ was introduced on April 10, 2006 for two years. However, the Council of Ministers of Transport, Telecommunications and Energetics has decided to prolong the sanctions for one year.



41 people can be found in the list, including the President of Belarus Alaksandar Lukashenka. All of them have lost the right to get visas to 27 EU countries and 8 other European states that joined the restrictions. According to the sanctions, the personal

banking accounts, belonging to the mentioned persons “non-grata” will be frozen as well.

Among other, the Head of Central Election Committee Lidziya Yarmoshyna is mentioned in the list. Being interviewed by BelaPAN

News Agency, she told that she considered herself to be a political prisoner of the European Union in a way, punished for her political views.

## SOCIETY

### **War for „Satellites Dishes”**

**Dwellers of Soviet and Partizan districts of Minsk can pay a fine, if they don’t have a written allowance for placing satellites antennas and air conditioners.**

It may be considered as another attack against “satellites dishes”. Belarusian Association of Journalists mentions that demands of local authorities do not correspond to the Belarusian legislation. Article 21 of the Administrative Code “About violation of architectural facades of buildings” considers only those citizens, who had installed satellite dishes after March 2007.

Minsk citizens, who had installed satellite dishes earlier, should not necessarily have a written allowance.



## OPPOSITION

### **‘Charnobylski Shlakh’ to Be Started near the Academy of Sciences in Miensk**

**The organizational committee of United Democratic Forces has held its second meeting, dedicated to the arrangement of ‘Charnobylski Shlakh’ rally in Miensk.**

The committee members discussed the application draft for holding the action to be submitted to Miensk City Executive Committee till April 10th. It was decided that

the public action would be started at the Academy of Sciences in Miensk at 2 pm on April 26, 2008. Also, it was suggested that the





rally would move towards Independence Square.

The scope of demands to the state authorities was presented during the meeting as well.

## ECONOMY

### Prices for Meat, Milk, Bread and Cigarettes Up

**Now a Belarusian who likes to eat and smoke a lot will overpay \$2.**



The Ministry of Economy of Belarus has stated that since April 1 the prices for flour, bread, milk, kefir, sour cream, cottage cheese, beef and pork have increased.

In particular, the price increase for flour reached 3%. The Ministry explains it by the low profitability and high expenditure of the flour production, which is accounted for by the price increase for fuels and imported wheat.

The dairy prices have increased by 2%, meat – 1,5%, bread – 1%, which is also explained according to the Ministry of Economy by the price increase for the raw materials.

Since yesterday, April 3, the price for domestic cigarettes went up by 10-40 BrB. The price for certain brands of imported vine increased by 50 BrB. The Ministry of Economics claims the price increase was made on the request of the Belarusian tobacco producers and importers. The former in their turn explain this by the growth of production costs, excise tax, and contract prices.

## CULTURE

### Wroclaw: the European Capital of Publishing Belarusian Books

**More than two dozen of books by Belarusian authors, translated into Polish as well as the books by Polish authors, translated into Belarusian will be published in Wroclaw this year. It has become possible to reach the achievement due to the attempts, taken by the Collegium of Eastern Europe that deals with promotion of neighboring cultures to the east of Poland.**

Belarusian Publishing Program is planning to edit “Rebellion of Belarus” by Piotra Rudkousky, “100 essays” by Pavel Seviarynets, and to reissue “Belarusian Tristan” in Polish language this year.

Books “Zinc Boys” by Sviatlana Aleksievich, “Dialogues with God” by Valiantsin Akudovich, and “Reflections on Runes” by Igar Babkou have been published. “Anthology of Belarusian Poetry of XV–XX centuries” and also collected stories of Algerd Baharevich are being prepared for printing in the publishing house.

During almost two years of Belarusian Publishing Program existence, a large range of books in Belarusian and Polish have been printed in Wroclaw. The list includes literary works by Vasil Bykau, Ryhor Baradulin, Andrej Khadanovich. Uladzimir Arlou, Sviatlana Aleksievich, Zbigniew Herbert, Czeslaw Milosz, Rafal Wojaczka and other Belarusian and Polish writers and poets.

“The Belarusian library” is published under the patronage of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of 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 site [belarus-live](http://belarus-live) fills this gap. The site allows to order weekly reception of news in English, Polish, Belarusian, Russian.

