

Belarusian authorities continued demonstrating tough course in both internal and foreign policy during the last week.

Court of Tsebratny District of Minsk awarded a sentence to ten participants of the winter unsanctioned protest action of market vendors. Defendants are returned guilty in organizing and preparation of activities, which commit a gross violation of public order. Two are punished by fines, seven people – by restraint of liberty for two years. The most strict sentence – 1,5 years of imprisonment – was given to Andrei Kim, also accused in punching a militiaman.

The next day, April 23, an activist of an entrepreneur movement Syarhei Parsyukevich, accused in assault and battery of a policeman, was sentenced to 2,5 years of imprisonment.

Both trials were connected with winter disorders of market vendors, revolted by the authority decisions, which sufficiently complicated conditions of small business method. According to analysts, those actions threatened the ruling top, because for the first time the social layer, earlier inactive in social and political sense, had ripened to street protests. Besides, oppositional parties tried to politicize grass roots marches through its activists at that time. According to the experts, the authority wants to intimidate both entrepreneurs and young activists of the oppositional movement, to stop an inflow of younger forces to a camp of the titular opposition.

Political scientist Aliaksei Karol considers: both sentences significantly witness that political thaw in Belarus has finished. According to him, the authorities saw, that “new forces had appeared, that they make self-sacrifice actions, that they are held in respect in their environment”, and a concern “that it may have chain reaction”, forced the ruling top “to switch on the frightening mechanism”.

Number of facts of the recent days illustrates this trend in the line of tightening the screws in social and political sphere.

Thus, Minsk City Council didn't allow a rally along the Independence Lane during the traditional mass action “Charnobyl Way” on April 26. Organizers were proposed an unpopular route. It raises the danger of conflicts between manifestants and law-enforcement forces.

The decree of the President came into effect since April 24, according to which reducing coefficient of a rental rate are cancelled for majority of public organizations. Representatives of the third sector forecast that in the soonest perspective it will lead to disappearance of a whole number of non-governmental associations, which simply just don't bear financial weight. “It is another economic noose around civic organizations' neck”, - said the human rights defender Garry

POLITICS

- Benefits for Retirees for Summer Time

OFFICIALLY

- The United States Demand to Release Andrei Kim from Jail

OPPOSITION

- Milinkevich Received a Reply from the Ministry of Justice

ECONOMY

- “Silicon Valley” to Be Built by a Commercial Company from South Africa

SOCIETY

- 2.5 Years of Imprisonment for S. Parsyukevich

CULTURE

- “Bagpipe Festival 2008” Takes Place in Minsk

Pogoniajlo. According to him, such rental rates are “unmanageable” for many organizations. Thus, civic organizations will have to pay now 10 Euros for square meter instead of 1 Euro in Mensk as it was earlier.



L. Yarmoshyna

The Chairman of the Central Elections Commission Lidziya Yarmoshyna called proposals of a Belarusian opposition “impracticable”, considering improving the organization of Parliamentary elections in the country, on April 24. It may mean that the authorities do not have an intention to go even for decorative democratization of electoral process and are planning to hold the elections to the Chamber of Representatives, previously projected on September 28, according to usual tough script, when all the political enemies are cut off from real fight for mandates.

With that, the authority maneuvers, aiming to score points in the eyes of average citizens. Thus, the right of reduced fare tickets on the town suburban transport was returned to retirees for summer time (practically – for half a year) by the Presidential decree. Earlier such easing had been made for students and military and policing branch of government. They also promise to return benefits to those, injured in Charnobyl disaster. Thereby, an unpopular reform of benefits system is factually being backed.

Moreover, there is a process of untwisting the screws in the economic sphere. Thus, according to the recent Presidential decree, restrictions for the industrial stock movement are being removed step-by-step. With that, independent analysts emphasize, that the process of economic liberalization is as yet inconsequent, weak, and in the absence of transparent mechanisms may lead to some variant of state oligarchic capitalism, when representatives of the power elite “convert power into ownership”.

“Diplomatic war” with Washington lasts at the same time. United States Charge d’Affaires in Belarus Jonathan Moore was invited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 23. U.S. embassy in Belarus was offered to give a list of 5 American diplomats, staying to work in Belarus, by April 30. Thus, it comes to additional sufficient staff reduction of the diplomatic mission (the Ambassador Karen Stewart and 17 diplomats had already left the country on the demand of Belarusian authorities). Experts say that Mensk may lead to factual freezing of diplomatic negotiations. The reason for such behavior became American sanctions against the concern “Belnaftahim”.

According to certain experts, situation of the Belarusian authority becomes easier, because the European Union is not going to share economic sanctions of the USA. Jean-Eric Holzapfel, the European Commission Charge d’Affaires in Belarus, said about it several days earlier. From the other side, Moscow doesn’t pressure yet on Belarus by economic and political demands, because Russian elite is fully busy with the process of power reapportionment in the line Putin – Medvedev.

POLITICS

Benefits for Retirees for Summer Time

Retirees will have reduced fare tickets on the town suburban transport from May to October of the running year. Aliaksander Lukashenka signed the corresponding decree within the

framework of the state support of the people, reached retirement age.

The decision is connected with the summer time coming, when the retirees travel to summer cottages and vegetable gardens, often situated outside cities and towns.

The decree acts since April, 22.

OFFICIALLY

The United States Demand to Release Andrei Kim from Jail

An official representative of the US Department of State Tom Casey has delivered a statement with a demand “to release Andrei Kim as well as other political prisoners in Belarus immediately.”

As reported, a democratic youth activist Andrei Kim got sentenced to 1.5 years of imprisonment for taking part in a protest action of Belarusian individual entrepreneurs



A. Kim, photo by Yulia Darashkevich

in Minsk in January 2008. In particular, he was groundlessly accused of “attacking a policeman” during the action. Also, he was blamed for arranging and preparing actions that grossly violate the civil order, the BelaPAN News Agency

informs.

According to Tom Casey, the Belarusian authorities carry on implementing brutal methods for dispersing oppositional rallies and prosecuting civil activists in the country.

OPPOSITION

Milinkevich Received a Reply from the Ministry of Justice



The Ministry of Justice of Belarus has proposed to Aliaksander Milinkevich to revise registration documentation of “Za Svabodu” civil movement within a month’s term, the civil

initiative’s Press Service reports.

The Ministry of Justice claimed the Civil Movement’s aims and objectives, stated in the Charter do not correspond to the Movement platform, presented on A. Milinkevich’s personal Web-site.

Also, the Ministry of Justice officials noted that the leader of “Za Svabodu” movement has been punished in accordance to the Belarus Code on Administrative Torts that may hamper the registration.

According to Aliaksander Milinkevich, the activists of “Za Svabodu” movement will carry on attempts to get registered their civil initiative. The organization members are eager to act legally and in line with the law, the politician emphasized.

ECONOMY

“Silicon Valley” to Be Built by a Commercial Company from South Africa

Belarusian government has signed an investment contract with the “Lyons Financial Solutions Holdings” Company.

A commercial company from South Africa has won an international tender on the selection of a strategic investor for carrying out a project of building the Belarusian Hi-Tech Park. Around 3 million USD will be disbursed for the project implementation by the Belarusian state this year.

Valery Tsepkala, the Administrative Director of the project has noted that in accordance with the investment agreement, the investor will pass the settled quantity of square meters in the constructed buildings to the HTP administration. In particular, the premises in business centers will be rented to different IT-companies.

It is planned that the Hi-Tech Park will be built on the territory of 50 hectares in the north-eastern part of Minsk. Presently, 46 residents and 6 business projects are registered in the HTP.

SOCIETY

2.5 Years of Imprisonment for S. Parsyukevich

Syarhei Parsyukevich is sentenced to 2.5 years in a general regime colony. He was found guilty in assault and battery of a policeman in the special

distribution jail in Akrestsin Street. At first, an attorney demanded 3 years of imprisonment, but because Syarhei



*S. Parsyukevich, photo
by Uladz Hrydzin*

Parsyukevich has a juvenile son, the judge decreased the sentence to 2,5 years.

Besides, the entrepreneur is to pay BR 1 mln 100 thousand as compensation for moral damages to the “beat up” policeman.

When the sentence was read in the court, those present began shouting “Shame!”

It is possible to appeal a court verdict within 10 days.

CULTURE

“Bagpipe Festival 2008” Takes Place in Mensk

VII International Bagpipe Festival “Dudarsky Fest” will take place in Mensk during four days – on April 24-27. Pipers from Belarus, Lithuania, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and Estonia will participate in it.

According to Belarusian ethnic tradition the pipe has big ritual meaning. It was a symbolic instrument during rites. First of all. It is connected with celebrating Christmas, when dramatized goat killing took place, and a musical instrument was made of its fell. Sounds of the bagpipe accompanied stubble and Kupalle, as well as weddings.

“Bagpipe Festival 2008” is devoted to celebrating Easter, when according to the rite “vagrancy” house-to-house trip is made with the bagpipe and singing.

TUT.BY



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.

