

## Observers from CIS Started Work

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**R**elease of all persons whom international human rights organizations regarded as Belarusian political prisoners became the greatest sensation of the last days.

On August 16 «political prisoner number one», Aliaksandar Kazulin was pardoned by the president and released. Dr. Kazulin, a candidate in the 2006 presidential election, was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in a minimum security correctional institution on charges of mass riots organisation.

On August 20 Syarhey Parsyukevich and Andrey Kim, who took part in last winter's unsanctioned demonstration against the government's restrictive policy regarding small business owners, were released from prison.

With this actions Belarusian government fulfilled one of the 12 conditions stated by EU, under strong pressure from international community. Analysts think that the government had to compromise in sight of serious economic problems. In particular, it is a question of Russia's raising gas price for Belarus from present \$128 per 1000 cubic meters to at least \$200 per 1000 cubic meters.



Minsk is also worried by Kremlin political pressure. Its attempts to make Russian rouble common currency threatens Belarusian financial (and in perspective – not only financial) independence. Meanwhile Russian funds come into Belarusian bank system. Russian credits also make Belarus more dependent from Moscow. In connection with these processes analysts talk about Russian policy of putting a credit and financial noose around Belarus' neck.

On August 19 Belarusian President Aliaksandar Lukashenka held talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Russia's Black Sea resort of Sochi. The Russian leader practically forced the guest to publicly display his support for Kremlin's military actions regarding Georgia. At the same time analysts think that the sides didn't reach agreement in any important economic questions. In particular, Moscow offers Minsk to sign an agreement about common air defense system.

Better relations with the West could strengthen Belarusian positions in confrontation with Moscow. Moreover it means inflow of investments and

new technologies. At the same time Miensk wants just symbolic compromise without changing the essence of authoritarian regime.

Political correspondents stress the fact that there are no grounds to talk about stopping opposition persecution, improvements in internal political life and creation of real competition in politics. That's why Europe and USA representatives emphasize in their statements that they are waiting for Miensk to make further steps.

In particular, the remaining 11 Brussels' conditions include free elections and better conditions for the third sector, independent press. Now they are only getting worse. For instance, lately the president signed new Media Law which is considered repressive by independent media specialists. It's impossible to talk about democracy if points of view which differ from the main policy can not be expressed publicly, government's oponents note.

The results of district electoral committees' for the Parliamentary elections formation are also significant. Only 48 out of approximately 1300 nominated opposition representatives were included in the committees (many opposition analysts think most falsifications take place in electoral committees). So, opposition

representatives make as little as 0,07% of all electoral committees members and they of course can not control the process of votes counting. The United Democratic Forces are planning to decide by the end of August whether it makes any sense to take part in this election campaign, because it doesn't look open and fair, despite all official announcements.

According to independent analysts the government is not ready to real democratization, that's why there will be no «breakthrogth to the West» – just painful political wrangle which can also end at any moment if Moscow begins to play hard, inspired by the results of the war against small Georgia. Russian government also plans to make Belarus part of its «asymmetrical answer» to the placement of USA missile defense shield in Europe.



Dragging Belarus to this dangerous military games may make all Miensk attempts to improve relations with

the West null and void, independent analysts suppose. They think that further relations between Belarus and Europe will be greatly influenced by the Russian factor. Belarusian government is most likely to manoeuvre using Russia-West contradictions. According to political scientist Valer Karbalievich this kind of game offers Belarusian government many good moves and can bring positive responses from both sides for a long time.

In any case, after the political prisoners were released, Washington sent Miensk a clear message that they are ready for dialogue.

«The USA welcomes the release of two last political prisoners, Syarhey Parsyukevich and Andrey Kim on August 20, which followed the release of Aliaksandar Kazuin,” – says US State Department's news release. “The release of these individuals, combined with what we hope will be further positive steps, offers the real possibility of a significant improvement in relations between the United States and Belarus,” – the document states.

Meanwhile the United States' deputy assistant Secretary of State David A. Merkel headed to Minsk on a two-day visit to meet representatives of Belarusian government and opposition.

## POLITICS

### Observers from CIS Started Work

*Long-term CIS observers started work on August 19.*

Another stage of electoral process, registration of deputy candidates, began that day. The registration will continue till August 28. There are 40 long-term CIS observers altogether in Belarus. They will supervise mass media, executive officers and public structures during election campaign. They will also see if all structures stick to electoral legislation.

300 short-term observers will join the mission before the elections. They will observe the opening of the polling places and the counting of votes.

### State Media Give Information Only about the CEC and the President

*«State media continue to cover election process using a very simplified approach. That means, they don't mention election participants other than the Central Election Committee and the President.» – says the latest Belarussian Journalists Association's newsletter*

## «Parliamentary Elections 2008 as Covered in Belarusian Media».



BJA's specialist Alies Antsiepenka notes that independent media and Internet resources pay more attention to the Parliamentary elections.

The monitoring covers the period August 1 – 15, when election committees' representatives were nominated and election committees were formed.

### OFFICIALLY

## Belarussian Nuclear Plant will be Built by a Russian

*Belarusian Nuclear plant's board of directors informed that chief ingeneer will be Russian citizen, but his name was not mentioned.*

The board's representative said that the ingeneer has a 25-year experience on Russian nuclear power plants.

Now the government looks for other specialists to work at the Nuclear plant. The staff should be hired two

years before the first block starts to operate. It is planned to put the first block into operation in the year 2016. But before that 1200 professionals should be hired.



Belarusian universities began to prepare specialists for the Nuclear plant. Approximately 200 students will study «nuclear physics» this year.

### OPPOSITION

## Aliaksandar Kazulin Joins Young Front

*The former candidate for presidency Aliaksandar Kazulin held a meeting with Young Front leaders in Minsk. During the meeting, Dr. Kazulin, who had recently been pardoned by president Lukashenka, shared his vision regarding the political situation in Belarus, and expressed a desire to join the Young Front.*

According to Kazulin, he intends to take part in the current elections campaign.

Kazulin also asked for a permission to join the Young Front. At the sitting of the organization's administration, Kazulin was awarded the status of an honorary member of the Young Front.

### ECONOMY

## Belarus Tries To Attract Foreign Investments

*Prime Minister Siarhei Sidorski called on the ministries and Belarusian companies to push harder to attract direct foreign investments to Belarus. According to BelTA, Sidorski addressed this issue during today's Council of Ministers sitting.*



The Prime Minister noted that some ministries' and companies' contribution in this matter has been next to nothing. "There's no point in

waiting for foreign investors to come to Belarus. We should walk the extra mile ourselves," – Sidorski said.

The amount of direct foreign investments in Belarus during the first 6 months of 2008 has been \$339.3 million. While the amount has increased three times in the second quarter as compared to first quarter, the plan for attracting investments for the six months has only been fulfilled by 24.2%.

### SOCIETY

## Charitable Action of Belarusian Bloggers

*Belarusian bloggers unite for a charitable action. They created web-page [www.bynames.info](http://www.bynames.info) which participates in the contest with prize fund of \$4000.*

If the project wins the prize, the money will be transferred to Mihas' Laryn's bank account. This boy has a diseased heart and needs money for a costly operation. The newspaper «Kamsamolskaya Pravda» has already begun money-raising campaign, now Belarusian bloggers also decided to help.

To win the contest the web-page should get as many visitors and comments as possible, what is more, other



resources should link to it. Pitch in the action and visit the web-page at [www.bynames.info](http://www.bynames.info).

## CULTURE



## Berascie Prepares For «Belaya Vezha» Fest

*The XIII International Theatrical Fest "Belaya Vezha" is to take place in Berascie from September 12 to September 19.*

The "Belaya Vezha" fest is the most notable cultural event not only for Berascie, but for the whole country. During the 8 days of the fest spectators will have a great opportunity to witness the best trends in modern theatrical art.

This year the fest will be held for the 13th time. Despite the fact there's little time left before the opening, the fest program has not yet been published. Drama fans are rushing to buy tickets, but the book offices are closed since the Berascie Regional Drama and Music Theater as well as the Puppet Theater are on vacation.

According to preliminary information, some of the theaters to take part in the fest will come from as far as Israel and India. This year the shows will be held on the big and small stages of the Berascie Regional Drama and Music Theater, and the Center for Youth Crafts. Because of the repairs, the stage of the Puppet Theater will not be used. The free traditional street performances will be held at the central square of the city.

The "Belaya Vezha" fest has been held every September in Berascie since 1996. Every year, several dozen theaters from over 20 countries around the world take part in it. The jury are usually theater critics and journalists from at least different countries. A variety of theatrical workshops, seminars and conferences are organized to foster creativity and encourage sharing the professional experience.



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.



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