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The Prime-Minister of Belarus Siarhei Sidorski had a meeting with his Lithuanian colleague Gediminas Kirkilas in Druskieninkai (Lithuania) on September 1, 2008. It should be reminded that S. Sidorski had met the Head of Latvian government Ivar Godmanis a couple of weeks before.

Political observers believe that these meetings show a desire of the European Union to encourage the Belarusian officials to closer cooperation. It should be emphasized that the EC banned the EU-countries’ governmental officials with a higher rank than Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs to hold contacts with the Belarusian officials.

Thus, in fact the European Union has broken the taboo of its own. At the same time, it is possible to treat the steps as a manifestation of reasonable flexibility, as at the present moment there has appeared a chance to normalize relations between Belarus and the West, as the country’s government is looking desperately for the ways to avoid the Russian economic and political expansion.



Gediminas Kirkilas noted during the meeting in Druskieninkai as follows: “Belarus has started to move in the progressive direction, as the OSCE representatives have been invited and the political prisoners got released”.

According to the Lithuanian media, G. Kirkilas considered the meeting to be “very friendly”. He stressed the inevitable fate of his country to develop relations with the neighboring Belarus, as the states have 670 km of common border. The Prime-minister

of Lithuania emphasized during the meeting that his country was interested in simplifying the existing visa regime as well as the present procedure of crossing the border for the citizens of Belarus.

According to G. Kirkilas, it is too much to pay 60 EUR for the Lithuanian visa. However, the governmental official noted that a decision on reducing the visa cost for the Belarusian citizens had to be approved by all EU member states.

The Belarusian and Lithuanian governmental sides have a lot of economic topics for discussion as well. Lithuania is interested in transporting more potash fertilizers, oil products and other commodities from Belarus through its cargo port in Klaipeda, as significant profit comes to the state budget for the provided services. Moreover, the Lithuanian business structures see perspective fields for holding their activity in Belarus. The interest is stirred up by the recently started large-scale privatization process in the country.

Also, taking into account that Lithuania will have to close down Ignalina Nuclear Power Station

upon a request from the European Committee, the Lithuanian government is highly interested in getting the electric energy from Ukraine through Belarus and from Belarus directly as soon as the first nuclear reactor of the would-be Belarusian APP starts its work in 2014.

Analysts add that cooperation between Lithuania and Belarus in the energy field is highly up-to-date nowadays, taking into consideration harsh tendencies in the Russian energetic policy.

Independent experts believe that paradoxically the painful search for the ways of normalization of relations between the Belarusian government and the West has obtained new chances due to the recent war in the Caucasus.

The Kremlin's harsh actions in relation to Georgia worried the US government and scared the EU. Presently, the latter is ready to take more efforts in order to push Belarus to the area of its dominance. In particular, following the urgent EU summit on September 1, 2008, there was approved the final statement with a desire to develop "The Eastern Partnership" program, initiated by Poland and Sweden that aims at launching closer cooperation with Belarus.

The Belarusian analysts note that the recent statements, delivered by

EU decision-makers show their desire to minimize the list of demands to the Belarusian authorities.

Thus, Ms. Helga Schmidt, the Head of Political Department at the General Secretariat of the EU Council stressed in her interview to the BelaPAN News Agency "especial importance of the way the Parliamentary election will be held" on September 28th. "If it is held better in comparison with the previous election campaigns in Belarus, it will bring a new impulse to the development of our relations", she said.

Consequently, analysts emphasize that the EU officials are not talking about the necessity of holding transparent and democratic election anymore that appears to be quite unreal nowadays. Presently, the EU decision-makers restrict themselves to dwelling upon the necessity of observing some progress in comparison with the previous campaigns that can be reached quite easily, taking into account the visible brutality of election campaigns in the past.

Regarding the results of registration of candidates to MPs, an independent analyst noted that the authorities "had nearly lost the game", as they dismissed nearly one third of all oppositional nominees. However, nearly a hundred of democratic activists, including around 80 representatives of the United Democratic Forces and



some leaders of political parties will have an opportunity of taking part in the election.

Consequently, the vague oppositional coalition members separated considerably as for the further tactics of action. Thus, the BPF Party has decided that it will withdraw its candidates in protest against the undemocratic manner of election on the eve of the early voting start on September 23, 2008. At the same time, the UDF leadership voted for postponing the decision on further participation in the Parliamentary election till September 21, 2008. The supporters of this position believe that it is worthy to make use of the possibilities of electioneering in order to promote the oppositional views among voters as a minimum.

Some analysts predict further separation of views among the UDF

members and even complete destruction of this coalition after the Parliamentary election, as it will hardly manage to nominate the united candidate at the next Presidential election 2011 owing to the controversy of views, supported by its members.

At the same time, Mr. Hugo Mingarelli, Deputy Director General of the Directorate General for External Relations of the European Commission came for two-day visit to Minsk on August 29-30, 2008. The EU official had a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of



Belarus Siarhei Martynau, the representatives of civil community and the observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Independent analysts treated the visit as a signal from Brussels on the readiness of EU structures to revive relations with Belarus.

A part of Belarusian opposition criticizes the EU for the hasty liberation of its official position on the Belarusian issue. Some activists believe that the West betrays the

Belarusian democracy movement for the sake of pragmatic cooperation with the regime in power.

A political scientist from Miensk Andrej Fiodarau has noted as follows: “The West has a hard dilemma here. On the one hand, it is pretty clear that the election will not be perfect. Still, on the other hand, there is a real danger for the independence of Belarus. Consequently, if it concerns the country’s independence the maximalist position of the Western democracies on the Belarusian issue may be less useful than certain flexibility on their behalf”.

Dzianis Mielyantsou, an expert of Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies has stressed that “it is natural that the Belarusian opposition will stand against development of contacts between Belarus and the West until the present President is in power, even if the latter makes up his mind to hold political reforms and commence economic liberalization inside the country. This position will be grounded with reference to the moral values, shared by the West. However, this position has to be admitted as short-sighted and even harmful for the national interests of Belarus, as it prevents the country from using its historical chance to flee from the Kremlin’s area of influence and join the Western civilization”.

The Belarusian government has appeared in a hard situation, when a difficult choice has to be made. On the one hand, it is pretty easy to make a diplomatic breakthrough to the West that promises a flow of investments and technologies. On the other hand, Russia urges the Belarusian government to show its complete loyalty to the Kremlin through admitting



the political sovereignty of Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia in particular. The Belarusian side may get certain economic bonuses for that.

The Belarusian government has decided to maneuver in this situation to its best. Thus, the Belarusian President proposed to his Russian colleague Dmitry Medvedev to consider the issue of Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia at the Collective Security Treaty Organization summit, planned

for September 5, 2008. It should be reminded that this international structure includes Belarus, Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The President of Armenia has already stated that the Armenian government is not going to admit independence of Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia. It looks like the heads of other CSTO member states are not eager to join the Russia’s position on the issue as well. Thus, at least the Belarusian government has a chance to gain time for improving its relations with the West.



POLITICS

20 Short-Term Election Observers to Come from Poland to Belarus

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland informs that Stefan Batory Foundation has published a list of selected short-term observers, who will come to Belarus on the eve of the Parliamentary election.

S. Batory Foundation received more than 100 applications before the deadline of August 27th. The Board with

the participants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foundation has selected 20 participants of this mission.

OFFICIALLY

Visas to Be Issued at the Belarusian – Lithuanian and the Belarusian – Latvian Borders in Cases of Emergency

According to the Belarusian President’s ordinance No. 482, the frontier guards will be authorized to issue the Belarusian visas to the citizens of Latvia and Lithuania at the border-crossings in a restricted number of cases.

Among other, the new regulation will simplify and quicken the process of getting the Belarusian visas by the foreigners, going to Belarus in case of serious decease or death of their relatives of family members in the country.

It should be mentioned that the Lithuanian and Latvian frontier guards can issue visas to the citizens of Belarus in similar cases of emergency.



OPPOSITION

The Ministry of Justice Official Got Concerned with the Belarusian National White-Red-White Banner

A consultant of Department on Civil Associations at the Ministry of Justice of Belarus Alaksandr Kharyton personally visited the BPF Party's Head Office in Miensk in order to learn why the Belarusian national white-red-white banner was placed at the entrance to the premises.

The receptionist asked Mr. Kharyton to send his questions and remarks in the written form. In his turn, the latter promised to send a written warning to the BPF party in a short while.



ECONOMY

"El-Al" Cancels Flights to Miensk

The Israeli National Air Company "El-Al" will cancel regular flights to Miensk and

St. Petersburg in the near future. The "El-Al" management doesn't consider the mentioned directions to be profitable.

The air company has more and more losses, caused by the constant rise of prices for the fuel. Most probably, the flights to Miensk and the Russian northern capital will be cancelled since the beginning of the winter season.

After that it will be possible to get from Miensk to Tel-Aviv by "Belavia".

SOCIETY

The Belarusian Children to Be Punished for Tatsiana Kazyra



It appears that the Belarusian children from the polluted areas after Chernobyl disaster won't

be able to go neither to the United States, nor to Germany or the Netherlands anymore.

The Belarusian government made this unofficial step in response to the decision, taken by a Belarusian schoolgirl Tatsiana Kazyra to reside in the United States after such holidays.

As it has become known recently from the organizers of Chernobyl programs in the Netherlands and Germany, the Belarusian groups of children aren't permitted to leave their country anymore.

CULTURE

Arlou's Fourth Audio Book Got Recorded

The fourth audio book by a well-known author Uladzimir Arlou is available in the Belarusian disk-shops.

The CD includes famous historical short stories and the novel "The Emperor's Dreams". The novels are read aloud by author of textbooks in stage speech and the Belarusian literary pronunciation Andrei Kalyada.



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EUROPEAN RADIO FOR BELARUS



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