

# Belarus Headlines

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*Office for a Democratic  
Belarus*

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## **Round Table on Schengen Visa Liberalisation Policy towards Belarus and Belarus-EU Cooperation in the Field of Tourism Takes Place in Brussels**



On April 16, a round table 'Schengen visa liberalisation policy towards Belarus and Belarus-EU cooperation in the field of tourism' took place in the European Parliament. The event was organised by the vice-chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, Latvian MEP Aldis Kuskis (EPP-ED group), in cooperation with the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels).

The working meeting brought together representatives of the European Parliament and the Commission, the Group of National Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Association within the EU (ECTAA), the Association of Latvian Travel Agents (ALTA), directors of several Belarusian travel agencies, chairman of the board of the National Association of Tourist Organisations of Belarus journalists and other interested parties.

In his opening statement, Aldis Kuskis said he believed the liberalisation of visa policy towards Belarus was an important issue for everyone in Belarus and in the EU. Easier travel regulations

would help spreading European values among Belarusians, and would bring some economic benefits to both Europe and Belarus. He stressed, however, that both sides would have to take some important steps

to achieve this goal: while the EU would have to make some real progress towards relaxation of the visa regime, Belarus should continue carrying out reforms towards democratisation of the political regime.

Delegates from Belarus, Barys Vlasau of the Merlin Tour travel agency and Al'yaksandr Mirski of the Sakub Travel, described difficulties faced by Belarusians when obtaining a Schengen visa. They spoke about a very long list of documents requested by embassies for the visa application, an excessively long period it takes for a visa to be issued, and a high visa fee which amounts to a sustainable part of an average salary in the country. Olga Stuzhinskaya, director of the Office for a Democratic Belarus, added that Belarus is the only country on the EU Eastern neighbourhood, whose citizens have to pay 60 euro fee for a Schengen visa while Russians and Ukrainians pay only 35 euro.

Representatives of Belarusian travel agencies offered data

that had been collected by the National Association of Tourist Organisations of Belarus showing the negative consequences of the Schengen area expansion on the tourism sector. For example, since 2007 the number of trips to Poland booked via agencies dropped by 90%, while sales for holiday packages to Croatia and France decreased by 88% and 47% correspondingly. In general, the number of travellers to EU countries went down by 66%. Belarusian travel agencies stressed that the current EU visa policy causes great losses also to the EU tourism and service businesses affecting mostly the new EU member states.

The visa policy officer from the Directorate General on Justice, Freedom and Security of the European Commission Anne-Marie Soerensen explained that the Schengen zone is a common space of free circulation within 25 states and requires high level of security. A common set of rules and conditions is being applied by the states signatories to the Schengen agreement.

Mrs Soerensen expressed her hope that the situation with Schengen visas for Belarusian citizens would improve with the recently adopted new visa code.

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## Current Activities

### Round table on Schengen Visa Liberalisation Policy towards Belarus and Belarus-EU Cooperation in the Field of Tourism Takes Place in Brussels (continuation)



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According to the document, visa application fees would be cut by 50 % for 6- to 12-year old children; visa fees would be waived for certain categories of citizens, including students; multiple entry visas would be issued more often for frequent travellers. EU authorities also plan to introduce standardised application documents, with collected biometric and digital data remaining valid for 5 years, and a common Schengen visa information system.

Mr Michel de Blust, Secretary General of the Group of National Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Association within the EU (ECTAA) spoke about the negative impact of the strict Schengen visa policy on tourism industry and gave examples from different countries presenting not only the case of Belarus but also that of other countries, such as India. He explained that member states focus mostly on security and illegal migration issues and there is lack of real impact assessment from the tourist industry perspective.

Michel de Blust advised the Belarusian association of tour operators to join the ECTAA. Membership in the organisation, he stressed, would help Belarusians to address such issues as visa policies and increase awareness of the EU institutions of similar cases. Representatives of the Belarusian travel associa-

tion were invited to attend the EC-TAA General Assembly meeting which is scheduled to take place in Budapest in May 2009.

Participants of the round table agreed to send a joint letter to the governments of all 25 states signatories to the Schengen agreement and to EU institutions. The letter should explain the current situation with visas and request changes in the visa policy. Travel associations of various European countries will be requested to support the appeal.

Participants of the meeting agreed to organise the next expert gathering in Minsk in the coming months.

17/04/2009

**Source: ODB**

### EU Policy: Sharing Knowledge with Belarus. Second Visit of Belarusian Experts to Brussels



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On the invitation of the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels, Belgium) and the Foundation for Legal Technologies Development (Ukraine), a group of Belarusian experts on energy visited Brussels on March 29 – April 2, 2009. The Belarusian delegation, which included representatives from government institutions, civil initiatives, entrepreneur groups and media took part in a training course, entitled 'EU Energy Policy: Sharing Knowledge with Belarus'

In the framework of the course, Belarusian delegates had a chance to get acquainted with the work of the EU institutions and meet with key experts from the Council of the European Un-

ion and the Commission working on the region and the energy issues, in general. European experts stressed that energy is one of the crucial areas for the EU-Belarus cooperation and Belarus is recognised as an important energy partner of the EU. They explained that main topics include the security of gas and oil transit through Belarus, nuclear safety and development of renewable sources of energy. The Belarusian delegates also learned how the EU deals with energy issues and how some of this experience, especially that of the new member states, could possibly be applied in Belarus. This mostly concerns the use of European expertise, norms and standards for construction of a nuclear plant in Belarus and in the promotion of alternative sources of energy and energy efficiency.

Belarusian experts encouraged the European Commission to carry out more projects with Belarus stressing the need for EU assistance and expertise in their country. Their counterparts, for their part, stressed that the

recent positive developments in the political situation in Belarus may pave the way for the intensification of EU-Belarus cooperation in all areas, including energy. European experts expressed their hope that Belarus would take an active part in the Eastern Partnership initiative, which has a special platform for cooperation in energy matters.

The visit was part of a larger programme for Belarusian experts, which is being implemented by the Office for a Democratic Belarus in cooperation with the Foundation for Legal Technologies Development and supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Topics for next seminars in Brussels include transport, transit and education. Candidates for participation in the programme are selected through an open call for applications. The organisers welcome participation of experts from both civil society groups and government-affiliated structures.

29/03-02/04/2009

**Source: ODB**

## Current Activities

### A Conference 'Participation of the Belarusian Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Initiative' to Be Held in Minsk



Office for a  
Democratic Belarus  
Brussels

On April 22, 2009 the Platform for Cooperation between Civil Society Organisations and Local Governments in cooperation with the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels) will hold a conference, entitled 'Participation of the Belarusian civil society in the Eastern Partnership initiative'.

Partnership initiative (EaP) and the invitation of the European Commission to contribute to shaping the European Partnership Civil Society Forum.

Taking into account the importance of the initiative, and in order to secure transparency and openness of the civil society dialogue, the conference organisers invite a wide range of non-

The conference aims to provide forum for discussion on the recently introduced Eastern

profit groups and associations, government representatives and think tanks to participate in the discussion. Questions on the agenda of the event include the meaning of the Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP) for Belarus, the role of the Civil Society Forum in facilitating more active participation of Belarus in the EaP, etc.

The event will take place in Minsk.

20/04/2009

Source: ODB

### Exhibition of Belarusian Posters Opens in Brussels Again

The Office for a Democratic Belarus, the *Centre culturel Forest (Brussels)* and *Association Culturelle Joseph Jacquemotte*, are glad to inform that the exhibition *Visual code of the time: post-Soviet poster art in Belarus revisits Brussels*.

The exhibition represents the works of 19 designers and demonstrates the impact that important socio-political transformation taking place in Belarus in the mid 1980s-1990s had on the country's poster art. It has already been seen by the audiences of Warsaw, Berlin, Dresden, Trieste, Granarolo, and

Toulouse. In January 2009 it was also available for Brussels' citizens at Aula Toots which was kindly supported by Administration Communale d'Evere. The exhibition opens **at 19:00 on April 23 at the Cultural Centre Forest (av. Van Volxem 1190 Forest, trams 82 and 97, stop Wiels)**

The opening of the exhibition will be followed by a small reception and the presentation of a catalogue that includes 44 reproductions of Belarusian posters of different periods accompanied by explanatory texts in the English, French, Italian, and Belarusian

languages.

The entrance is free.

The exhibition will be on display until May 7, 2009.

The Office for a Democratic Belarus extends its gratitude to the **Robert Bosch Stiftung**, the **German Marshall Fund of the United States**, and all the partners that helped make this project possible.

20/04/2009

Source: ODB

## EU and Belarus

### Czech Minister Swarzenberg Visits Belarus, Invites Lukashenka to Prague Summit



*Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Karel Swarzenberg*

On April 16-17 Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg paid an official

visit to Belarus. The programme of his visit included meetings with representatives of the democratic opposition, Foreign Minister Siarhey Martynau and President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

The aim was to consider the prospects of cooperation between the European Union and Belarus including the latter's participation in the Eastern Partnership programme. The issues of bilateral economic and tech-

nical cooperation, were also on the agenda.

At a meeting in the Belarusian FM Schwarzenberg said there were positive changes in the Belarus-EU cooperation. "The situation is different from the one we had two years ago," Karel Schwarzenberg told Belarus' Foreign Minister Martynau.

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## EU and Belarus

### Czech Minister Swarzenberg Visits Belarus, Invites Lukashenka to Prague Summit



*Syarhey Martynau and Karel Swarzenberg*

Later Martynau announced that his Czech colleague had handed Lukashenka an invitation to the Eastern Partnership summit in Prague.

Schwarzenberg, for his part, said President Lukashenka did not confirm his attendance. 'He accepted the invitation. It is now for him to decide who will represent Belarus at the summit,' said the minister.

Russia reportedly welcomed the fact that the invitation of Belarusian Lu-

kashenka was invited to the European Union's Eastern Partnership summit. "Russia kept telling its European Union (EU) partners that sanctions and isolation of Belarus, a friend of ours, were not pragmatic," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's special aide Sergei Prikhodko said in a statement.

16-17/04/2009

**Source: ODB, ERB, Reuters**  
**Photos by mfa.gov.by, BelTA**

### Belarusian Leader to Travel to Italy, to Meet Pope



*Meeting Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone*

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- long shunned by the West -- will travel to Italy and meet the pope later this month, Italy's Foreign Minister and the Vatican told Reuters on Friday.

News of Lukashenka's trip to Italy came ahead of an announcement in Minsk that Belarus was also invited to an EU summit with ex-Soviet states in Prague next month, in another possible sign of thawing relations with the West.

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said in an interview that he intended to receive Lukashenka when he comes to Italy on April 26, principally for a visit to the Vatican.

'I think that our protocol people are still organising. Certainly, I'll see him. I don't know the agenda of the (Italian) president or prime minister,' Frattini added.

The Vatican said Lukashenka, who describes himself as an 'Orthodox atheist', would meet Pope Benedict during the trip, possibly on April 27.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, made a landmark trip to Belarus last year and met Lukashenka. He was the first senior Vatican official to visit Belarus, where the Orthodox Church is predominant but

Roman Catholics account for one in seven of the 10 million residents.

Frattini also said he supported inviting Belarus to a summit in Prague in May.

Frattini said he believed "the correct answer must be that of inviting the countries to the Eastern Partnership. Then, every country decides what is the level of participation.

Earlier this month on April 10, Alyaksandr Lukashenka met the Russian Orthodox church new head Patriarch Kirill. During the meeting they discussed mutual relations between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

17/04/2009

**Source: Kyivpost, ERB**

## Politics and Society

### Belarus' Hardline Interior Minister Resigns



Belarus' President Alyaksandr Lukashenka accepted Monday the resignation of his hardline interior minister Uladzimir Navumau, in what was seen as a new gesture to improve ties with Europe.

The presidential press office said Navumau had quit for 'health reasons'— and provided no further information.

Navumau was one of those blamed for the disappearance of opponents of the Lukashenka

## Politics and Society

### Belarus' Hardline Interior Minister Resigns (continuation)

"Lukashenka wants to move closer to Europe," independent analyst Alyaksandr Klaskouski said. 'The figure of Navumau annoyed the Europeans.'

He pointed out that other officials also named in the report for the pan- European rights body - which doesn't include Belarus - had already been fired.

"Navumau's dismissal will please the Europeans and will help the current regime to avoid taking real steps towards democracy in Belarus which the West is demanding," Klaskouski added.

06/04/2009

Source: AFP

### Political Prisoner Artsyom Dubski Released under Recognisance not to Leave



Artsyom Dubski was released yesterday, April 15 under the recognisance not to leave his

place of residence. Dubski had been kept in prison since February 13, 2009, the day when he was detained on the

Belarusian-Ukrainian border as he was headed to Minsk to take part in an annual opposition rally on Valentine's Day.

Dubski faces charges of illegally leaving his town once last year.

In 2008, he was found guilty of participating in an unsanctioned protest

and his freedom was restricted for two years, which includes a ban on leaving his town.

He later fled to neighbouring Ukraine to avoid other criminal charges against him.

14/04/2009

Source: Nasha Niva, ODB

### Justice Ministry Denies Registration to Belarusian Christian Democratic Party but Suspends Denial Later



"The Belarusian Ministry of Justice denied registration to Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD)," said Pavel Sevyarynets, a leader of this opposition party.

BCD held its founding conference in Minsk on February 28, electing Ryhor Dzmitruk, Vital Rymashewski, Pavel Sevyarynets and Alyaksey Shein as co-chairmen. On March 12, the group applied to the Ministry of Justice for registration.

"Belarusian Christian Democracy does not offer opposition but an alternative to what is going on in Belarus," Sevyarynets said at the founding conference. 'Many say and understand that things should not continue as they are now and that it is possible to live better when you keep the commandments set forth in the Bible.'

"After filing he application, BCD activists started complaining that they were threatened with dismissal from their jobs. Ideology officials at companies where BCD founders work approached them to say that they

should better withdraw their signatures from the party founding papers if they wanted to remain in their jobs," Shein told *BelaPAN* journalists.

On Friday The Belarusian Justice Ministry issued a statement saying it had suspended its denial of registration to the Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD) party over what it called the need to study additional information.

16-17/04/2009

Source: *BelaPAN*

### Lukashenka Predicts 'Dramatic' Changes in Government by End of April

Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka is going to perform 'dramatic' changes in the government within the next two weeks. According to him, the economic situation has forced him to do it.

'Those who cannot work will leave', — *BelaPAN* quotes Lukashenka. The leader of the state noted that economic results would influence the fate of some ministers and heads of republican administration.

17/04/2009

Source: ERB

## Finance and Economics

### Serbia, Belarus Agree Free Trade to Woo Investors

Serbia and Belarus signed a free trade agreement on Tuesday, in a latest bid by the Balkan nation's authorities to woo investors and prop up the economy, hit by the global recession and absence of new capital inflows. "The agreement we signed today is very important because our economy will be able to export goods free of duty to the market of 10 million people," Deputy Prime Minister in charge of economy Mladjan Dinkic said in a

statement.

'Foreign investors who produce in Serbia will enjoy the same benefits,' he said of the pact signed in Belarus capital Minsk.

The list of duty free products excluded sugar, alcohol, cigarettes, second-hand cars, buses and tyres.

But new cars -- the domestically assembled Punto by Italy's Fiat (nyse: FIA - news - people ) -- will be traded free of duty.

The free trade agreement was signed three weeks after Belarus leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka made a rare foreign trip, taking a week-long skiing holiday in Serbia.

Trade between the two countries stands at a mere \$65 million, but free trade will likely lead to joint ventures and partnerships in energy, telecommunications and agriculture sectors, the statement said.

31/03/2009

Source: forbes.com

### Belarus Reduces Oil Export Duty April 1

On April 1, 2009, Belarus reduced the crude oil export duty from \$115.3 per tonne to \$110 per tonne.

The oil export duty has been revised downward following a similar reduction in the export oil duty in the Russian Federation effective from April 1. The export duty on oil products will be reduced to the level of the duties valid in Russia. For example, duties on light oil products (light and middle distillates, liquefied gas, benzol, tolu-

ene and xylol) will be reduced from \$90 per tonne to \$86.4. Duties on heavy petroleum products (engine oil, processed oil products, mineral wax, oil coke, oil asphalt) will be cut from \$48.5 per tonne to \$46.5 per tonne.

In line with the intergovernmental Belarusian-Russian agreement, export duties on oil and oil products in Belarus are equal to the duties applied in Russia and are introduced on the same date.

In conformance with the Belarusian-Russian agreement, in 2009 the coefficient of 0,356 will be used for calculating the duty on oil supplied to Belarus from Russia. From April 1 the duty for Belarus makes up \$39.2 per tonne.

Belarus to step up work with EU notified bodies to get CE marking WAM/TF

01/04/2009

Source: WAM

### Belarus Cuts Budget by 20 % over Crisis



Belarus has cut 2009 budget expenditure by about 20 percent to eliminate a deficit and fend off the effects of the global financial crisis, the office of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said.

A statement issued after a meeting on April 3 said expenditure in the consolidated budget had been reduced to the equivalent of \$22.4 billion from \$27.4 billion.

The International Monetary Fund, which has agreed to lend Belarus \$2.5 billion, has called for tough budget policies as one of its recommendations.

'Let me stress that what was planned more than half a year ago at a relatively calm time no longer applies,' Lukashenka's press service quoted him as saying at the meeting.

'Every rouble due to be spent in the budget must be placed under a microscope. And everything of secondary importance must be removed.'

Budget revenues had originally been set at \$26.4 billion, with a planned deficit of 1.1 percent of gross domestic product. That was to have been financed by further sales of a part of the Beltransgaz pipeline network to Russian giant Gazprom, foreign credits and sales of domestic securities. Belarus began feeling the effects of the crisis late last year as exports plunged by 45 percent, GDP growth slowed to 1.4 percent from 10 percent and industrial output fell by 2.3 percent. Authorities say expenditure will be

reduced by cutbacks in budget funds and state investment programmes. But they say social expenditure will remain untouched in a system which prides itself on enduring state control, considerable subsidies and intervention to provide social security.

'The main thing remains that our country is a state for its people,' Lukashenka told the meeting. 'Social programmes and obligations undertaken by our government cannot be altered.'

In addition to the first \$788 million tranche of the IMF credit, Belarus has received a \$1.5 billion credit from Russia. But much of the money has already been used in recent months to maintain the stability of the Belarusian rouble currency.

03/04/2009

Source: Reuters

## Finance and Economics

### Belarusian Inflation at 0.6% in March, 6.1% for Q1



Consumer prices in Belarus went up by 0.6% in March in comparison with February, when inflation reached 1.2%, Belstat said.

In the first quarter of 2009, Belarusian inflation came to 6.1%, compared to 4.1% in the same period of 2008. Annual March-to-March inflation reached 15.5%. It was earlier reported that inflation came to 13.3% in 2008.

An approved government forecast puts consumer price growth at 9%-11% for 2009. The IMF forecasts Belarusian inflation this year at 11.5%.

10/04/2009

Source: Interfax

### IMF Restores Resident Representative in Minsk



representative in Belarus after a four-year break.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has restored the position of its resident

Nataliya Kalyadina, a former senior economist at the IMF European Department, entered upon the duties of the Fund's resident representative in Belarus on April 6.

The IMF withdrew its resident representative from Belarus in 2005, a year after the country's government announced that it would no longer borrow from the Fund.

According to Kalyadina, a team of IMF experts will be staying in Belarus between April 29 and May 13 to study the implementation of the conditions that the Fund tied to its loan. The delegation will be led by Chris Jarvis, the new chief of the IMF mission to Belarus.

14/04/2009

Source: ERB

### 44 Belarusian Open Joint Stock Companies to Be Sold by Auction and Tenders



tenders, Uladzimir Kavaleusky, from Belarus' State Property Committee, said at the Privatisation and Market Liberalisation conference, held in Minsk.

According to Kavaleusky, some investors have already shown their interest in purchasing the stake in the open joint stock companies which were included in the privatisation plan for 2008-2010. That is why the draft decree on the sale of shares of 44 open joint stock companies has been prepared. The shares of 16 open joint

Belarus State Property Committee has prepared a draft decree on the sale of shares of 44 open joint stock companies by auctions and

stock companies will be sold by auction while the shares of 26 more companies -- by tenders.

'To preserve the interest of investors, the State Property Committee is developing the terms of sale of shares,' noted Uladzimir Kavaleusky. 'As soon as the interests of a potential investor coincide with that of the state, we will start to prepare a new draft decree on the sale of another package of state-owned shares,' explained Kavaleusky.



A member of the Board of Directors of the National Bank of Belarus, Syarhey Dubkou, said 'Belarus has not given up on the plans to sell shares of the country's major

banks to foreign investors in the mid-term perspective.'

The concentration of capital in state-owned banks is quite high in Belarus reaching some 70%.

Initially the plan was to consider the sale of Belarus' major banks to foreign investors after 2010. However, the successful experience of work with small and medium banks showed that the state is ready to sell controlling blocks of shares in Belinvestbank and BPS-Bank and also 25% stakes in Belarusbank and Belagroprombank. 'This plan was voiced in public statements of the government and the National Bank,' said Dubkou.

20/04/2009

Source: BelTA



## Culture

### The Men We Choose by Maryia Martysevich



*Maryia Martysevich*

*Maryja Martysevich is a prominent young Belarusian writer and translator. In the essay that appears in her book, 'Dragons Fly for Spawning', Martysevich presents a rather critical and non-traditional view of Belarusian men and a personal reflection on what she thinks is the cause of most Belarusian past and present troubles. The essay was written in the aftermath of protests that erupted in March 2006 following the rigged presidential elections. Maryja Martysevich also runs a popular blog [http://users.livejournal.com/maryjka\\_/](http://users.livejournal.com/maryjka_/) and, in a truly post-modernistic nature, marks her main ideas with a <sup>TM</sup> sign.*

#### The Men We Choose

I like men a lot, especially Belarusian ones. The reason of my fondness towards Belarusian men can be easily explained: throughout my entire life I have been non-pragmatically and irresistibly attracted to losers<sup>TM</sup>. There is something ineffably touching in the way they muffle themselves up in their scarves, smiling guiltily, charmingly giving way to their inferiority complexes, hesitant to make the first step, stand up to their beliefs, find their place under the Sun. All this enchants me. It makes me think.

'For I'm a muzhik, a stupid muzhik (1)'. Ever since I was a child, I under-

stood the word 'muzhik' in the refrain of this poem not as a class but as a gender definition. Somehow I don't think that Yanka Kupala was urging his people to cast off the yoke of oppression. The same goes for authors of other classic texts which we had to learn by heart in order to pass exams in Belarusian literature; the texts which we still see in our restless, retrospective dreams. It seems to me that these authors merely presented their worldview and comprehended the truth that they had been pre-programmed for a failure in both their creative work and life.

The last 200 years have proven that Belarus is mission impossible. All the more so, one admires the heroes who believe and rise in spite of everything ('What if something comes out of it?'). However, unlike Hollywood heroes, they do it in order to lose, and to die losing. The best men in our history are members of Vilnia (2) Belarusian gymnasium's rugby team who, exhausted and covered with mud, fixing their broken pince-nez, are leaving the field where they have been smashed by the team from Eaton. The only thing we have left, sitting on the stands, is to be moved with this sad finale.

Chronologically, it was Pauliuk Bahrym (3) who became the first loser of modern Belarusian literature. As an adolescent, he was recruited into the Russian army after someone found a notebook with his Belarusian-language poems. Later he became a taciturn blacksmith whose most successful project was some banal girandole. However, the model loser was described by Frantsishak Bahushevich (4) in his poem, 'Things Will Get Bad'. Considering the new cultural situation of that time the title appears to be highly emblematic. The poem's main character, poor Alindarka, who happened to be born in March, saw this as a mystical reason for all his bad luck. A woman christened Alindarka in a river; his strange name was given to him by misunderstanding; he committed no crime but landed in prison. The poem ends with the words "Thank God, he was released, the same day he was once christened". A looser is a thread hero of the Belarusian socio-cultural space, beginning with Kas-

tus Kalinouski (5), who failed in everything. Some say the history is written by the winners. The history of Belarus is an exception, because it was written by the losers<sup>TM</sup> (its short version (6) had been written by one of the cult losers, Vatslau Lastouski). Our unofficial classics are all losers. These are sweet tubercular patients Maksim Bahdanovich (7), Ihnat Kancheuski (8), (Branislau Tarashkevich (9), Maksim Haretski (10), Frantsishak Aliahnovich (11) who died violent death, Uladzimir Dubouka (12), new Bahrym, Siarhey Hrahoucki, who was born in the village of Nobel but went through GULAG and never visited Stockholm; Jewish-Belarusian poet Arkadz Heine, who died in 1942 in the Holocaust, and a multitude of others who were losers to such an extent that nobody knows anything about their fate – those buried in Kurapaty (13), the Belarusian Valhalla. However, the sum of their misfortunes has created the context of our existence, and this is their major success.

Well, here is the time we have to live in. Midday break in a school, only girls remain in the classroom. We shuffle aside chairs and tables in order to make space for a class disco, and, generally, think positive. The boys, pale-faced and red-cheeked, with their eyes like cornflowers and hair like flax, with their IQ potentially equal to 130, with flat-footedness, curvature of the spine, and other reasons to avoid obligatory military service, read about their general defeat from school readers. They take it for granted, the same way they learn from textbooks about their inborn lack of iodine; they absorb their failure with the first swallow of port wine in the school backyard. A Belarusian is a loser<sup>TM</sup>, there is no escape. Loser<sup>TM</sup> is a universal karma of every man who bears the tax duty stamp *Belarus*, it embraces the intellectual sphere as well as everyday life. While listening to their poems, cleaning up their socks scattered over the floor, or listening to their speeches during political campaigns, you understand that them being losers has a genetic cause.



## Culture

I personally do not know any Belarusian man who would be perfect enough to earn his creator a decent mark in a labour education class.

In the Belarusian language, the word 'Svaboda' ('Freedom') has a feminine gender. Moreover, its synonym – 'Volya' – is a popular woman's name. On 20 March 2006, when Aliyaksandr Milinkevich (15), another charming loser, had finished his speech on the October Square, the crowd was addressed by his wife, Ina Kulej. It became immediately clear who was the real master of their village house somewhere in the Shchuchyn region. 'That's a presidential candidate we needed!', someone said. 'Why don't women run for president in our country anyways?' Still, there will never be matriarchy in our country. It also means that there will never be a revolution in Belarus. One meets a pregnant friend, put a hand over her belly and asks her 'Who are you expecting a girl or a loser?'

However, this incompleteness, this creative neglect of form and contents conceals some kind of bashful sexuality. It arouses the same kind of libido which can be described by a verb 'shkadavatsi' which in a Belarusian dialect means 'to take pity'. In the post-war years, it took my grandfather Ihnat about twenty-four hours to walk thirty kilometers along the Palesse railroad after his work shift. At home, he collapsed into the hands of my grandmother Maryja. Another grandfather, Anton, was appointed to revive a collective farm somewhere in the Pastavy region after the war. There he had a love affair with a woman working as agronomist. This resulted in the grandfather's expulsion from the Communist Party. Ashamed, he returned home, as a burden to my grandmother Zoya. When both grandfathers became old, they described their relationships with wives with the same phrase: "Her whole life she took pity of me". Freudian logics of Belarusian women of all generations can be written upon local valentines as "I pity you, therefore I

love you". Today, when you meet him at home after work, this manager of wooden plough and scythe, you tousle his hair, kiss him into his mat, and tell him as usual: "Howdy, my dear loser!"

March 25, 2006

Translated by Ales Kudrytski

1 A quote from a popular poem by Yanka Kupala, a prominent Belarusian poet, see more <http://www.democraticbelarus.eu/node/5811>

'Muzhik' is a Belarusian word which has two meanings – 'peasant' (old-fashioned) and 'man' (informal).

2 Vilnia – traditional Belarusian name of Vilnius.

3 Pauliuk Bahrym – Belarusian poet, who was conscripted into the army as a convict-soldier for a term of twenty-five years. He was not heard of thereafter as a poet and died in 1891.

4 Frantsishak Bahushevich – Belarusian lawyer and poet, who published in Krakow his book of Belarusian-language poetry 'Dudka belaruskaya' in 1891.

5 Kastus Kalinouski – leader of the 1863-1864 uprising against Russian rule on Belarusian lands. The uprising was crushed, Katus Kalinouski was hanged in Vilnius.

6 'A Short History of Belarus' – one of the first popular books about Belarusian national history, written by Vatslau Lastouski, prominent member of national independence movement, who was murdered during Stalin's purges.

7 Maksim Bahdanovich – Belarusian poet, read more about him here <http://www.democraticbelarus.eu/node/4528>

8 Ihnat Kancheuski – Belarusian philosopher and poet, author of the programmatic philosophical essay 'Along the Eternal Road'.

9 Branislau Tarashkevich – Belarusian politician and linguist, creator of the first modern Belarusian grammar (1918). Executed during Stalin's purges.

10 Maksim Haretski – prominent Belarusian prose writer and literary critic. Executed in 1937.

11 Frantsishak Aliahnovich, Belarusian writer, famous for his accounts of being arrested by Soviet secret services. Killed by an assassin in Vilnius in 1944.

12 Uladzimir Dubouka, Belarusian poet. He spent 27 years in Stalin's concentration camps.

13 Kurapaty – site of mass executions during Stalin times near Minsk.

14 Aliaksandr Milinkevich, opposition candidate during the 2006 presidential elections.



*Cover of 'Dragons Fly for Spawning'*

*by Maryia Martyssevich*