

Belarus Headlines

Issue L

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*Office for a Democratic
Belarus*

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EU and Belarus Share Knowledge in Brussels and in Minsk



On February 1-5, 2010, on the invitation of the Office for Democratic Belarus, a group of Belarusian experts on energy visited Brussels.

The delegation, which included representatives from the State Belarusian Technical University, the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences and state institutions, took part in a training course, entitled “EU Energy Policy: Sharing Knowledge with Belarus”. During the visit, the Belarusian delegates had a chance to get acquainted with the work of various EU Institutions and meet key experts on energy issues and Eastern Europe at the Directorate-General (DG) for External Relations and the DG for Research of the European Commission, the Energy Charter, and the European Parliament. On the invitation of the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the European Union, the Belarusian group of experts also had

an opportunity to exchange views on Energy issues with fellow experts from Visegrad countries.

The topics covered in the programme included EU-Belarus relations, renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and energy security, the Eastern Partnership Initiative, and the state of the nuclear energy research in the EU.

The programme also included a visit to *Electrawinds* – a company that comprises a number of biosteam and bio-fuel plants in Oostende and is currently the largest private player on the Belgian renewable energy market.

This visit is part of a larger programme for Belarusian experts, which is being implemented by the Office for a Democratic Belarus supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DMFA). Candidates for the participation in this programme are selected through an open call for applications. The organisers wel-

come participation of experts from both civil society initiatives and state and government institutions.

On February 4, the Office for a Democratic Belarus, in close cooperation with the EU Delegation in Minsk, the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) and with financial support of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), organized a round table discussion on “EU and Belarus transport policy: sharing knowledge”. The event took place in Minsk and brought together experts from the European Commission, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Academy of Science of the Republic of Belarus, various research institutions, entrepreneurs, representatives of the analytical community, independent and state media agencies. The event was also attended by the former Minister of Transport, Uladzimir Sasnouski.

Three sessions of the conference were dedicated to questions of the current state of the EU-Belarus cooperation in the area of transport and future perspectives, development and modernization of the national transport system in Belarus, harmonization of Belarusian transport policy with EU regulations.

According to Valiantsina Liavonchyk, deputy chairwoman of the Belarusian Union of Transport Workers, the integration of Belarus’ transport system into the EU

Our Activities

EU and Belarus Share Knowledge in Brussels and in Minsk



structure is not possible without harmonisation of its legislative norms with international standards, ratification of conventions and participation of Belarus in various international transport unions and associations.

In the concluding session of the event, Uladzimir Sasnouski said he hoped this round table would give a good start to the process of dialogue among different stakeholders that deal with transport in Belarus.

One should look for effective mechanisms of dialogue, he said, both inside the country and with foreign partners. He also expressed his gratitude to the organizers for the attention dedicated to the given field and called for continuation of the programme. Uladzimir

Sasnouski stressed the urgent need for action in the field of public transport and the establishment of contacts with the Brussels-based International Association on Public Transport.

Round table on questions of cooperation between Belarus and EU in the field of higher education took place in Minsk on February 6. It presented an opportunity for extensive discussion on EU-funded programmes that are currently opened for Belarus and the projects that are being implemented in their framework. In addition, Belarusian and EU experts exchanged their views on formal and informal education, crisis of higher education and the need for reforms in this sector, as well as problems related to protection of the intellectual property in Belarus.

Among other topics, participants of the event from leading state and private universities of Belarus, the Ministry of Education, various non-governmental organisations and think tanks, experts of the European Commission and journalists actively discussed the issue of Belarus' readiness for joining the Bologna process. Deputy chief of the department on higher and special technical education

of the Ministry of Education, Mr Shautsou, informed the audience that Belarus is ready to join the initiative in 2010. However, he noted, due to the common state with Russia, norms and standards of higher education in Belarus have to be coordinated with the Russian ones. Independent experts argued that the new legislation on higher education that is in the process of development contains some "anti-Bologna" provisions.

The round table "EU and Belarus Policy: Sharing Knowledge" was organised by the Office for a Democratic Belarus in close cooperation with the EU representation office in Minsk, the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) and with financial support of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

08/02/2010

Source: ODB
Photos by ODB

EU and Belarus

Hungarian MPs Visit Belarus after 20-year Gap

On 4 February 2009, a Hungarian parliamentary delegation arrived in Belarus with a two-day visit to boost bilateral relations.

This was the first time after two decades that a parliamentary delegation had visited the country. They are there to return a visit to their Belarusian counterparts who were in Budapest in March last year.

"Belarus' interest is to become a full-fledged member of the parliamentary chapter of the EU's Eastern Partnership programme," Speaker of the Council of the Republic of Belarus Barys Batura told the Hungarian delegation. He asked his colleagues from

Hungary, which is a member of the Visegrad Four grouping, to support this interest. He also welcomed Hungary's initiative to organise a meeting between the Visegrad Four and Belarusian parliamentarians in February, reports Belta.

Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, Anatol Rubinau, who is also Deputy Chairman of the Belarus-Hungary friendship society, said relations between the two countries were "free of serious disputes or differences of opinion in the assessment of current events". He added that there was an open dialogue based on mutual trust.

Hungarian State Secretary of Foreign Ministry Jenő Faller also visited Minsk

for talks with his Belarusian counterparts.

During these talks, which took place on 11-12 February 2010, the two sides focused on the development of economic, trade and cultural relations. Amid great interest of the local press Mr Faller and Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Varanetski signed a protocol on concrete objectives of this year's bilateral cooperation. The State Secretary's consultation in Minsk meanwhile prepared the official visit to Budapest by Belarusian Foreign Minister Syarhei Martynau scheduled for 1 March 2010.

05-12/02/2009

Source: ERB, ODB

EU and Belarus

“Ways ahead: Eastern Partnership as a window of opportunity for Belarus”



Olga Stuzhinakaya, Uladzislau Vialichka, Roland Freudenstein

The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS), under the patronage of the Delegation of the European Union in Belarus and in co-operation with the EU Institute for Security Studies and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, organised its third annual conference in Minsk, ‘Belarus’ Path in Europe’.

The final panel of the event was entitled ‘The Way ahead: The Eastern Partnership as a framework for Belarus-EU relations’, concluded with Jean-Eric Holzappel, Charge d’Affaires of the European Union to Belarus, stressed that the Eastern Partnership is neither anti-Russian nor it intends to ‘Europeanize’ Belarus. He reminded that since 2008 Belarus has a window of opportunity for collaboration with the EU in five key areas.

According to Alexander Strelkov from the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow), Russian politicians and experts perceive the Eastern Partnership as an initiative threatening Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet region. Moreover, according to Strelkov, Russia does not possess a clear

stance towards the activation of external EU politics. Roland Freudenstein from the Centre for European Studies (Brussels) addressed the issue of Belarusian representation at the EaP Parliamentary Assembly (Euronest) and stated that he does not see any alternative to the ‘5 MPs + 5 reps. of opposition’ proposition of the EU.

Addressing the same problem, Syarhei Kizima, the Head of the Department of International Relations of the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus, argued that there is simple solution. He suggested that ‘if the EU is upset with those Belarusian MP’s who won the elections running against the oppositional candidates, then maybe it is better to invite those 10 MPs who did not have to compete against the opposition’.

Eugeniusz Smolar of the Centre for International Relations (Warsaw) noticed that the EU prioritizes the Eastern Partnership program given its amazing pace.

Olga Stuzhinskaya, the Director of the Office for Democratic Belarus (Brussels), argued that although it is too early to evaluate the overall impact of the Eastern Partnership, it is already clear that the programme has had a positive impact on the status of Belarus in the international relations.

Uladzislau Vialichka from the International Consortium EuraBelarus, highlighted the fact that Eastern Partnership intensified the work of Belarusian NGO’s and motivated them for further actions.

The Conference also touched upon the following topics:

- ‘The economic context: Belarus and the EU, and the Global Economic Crisis’,
- ‘The political and security context: Belarus and the EU in a changing regional and global environment’

This second panel was focused on the results of the Belarus-EU dialogue and the emerging room for maneuvering in a new geopolitical situation.

11/02/2010

Source: BISS, ODB

Delegation of European Parliamentarians to Arrive in Belarus Next Week

A delegation of the European Parliament is expected to visit Belarus next week for consultations on Belarus’ participation in the EU-RONEST, the parliamentary dimension of the Eastern Partnership, Head of the EC Delegation in Ukraine and Belarus Jose Manuel Pinto



Teixeira said in an interview with BelTA.

“The delegation will include 10 MPs,” the diplomat said. According to

him, the agenda of the visit and the membership of the delegation are being coordinated now.

According to the position of the EU, the Belarusian delegation to the EU-RONEST should consist of the Belarusian MPs, civil society representatives, and opposition members.

15/02/2009

Source: ERB, ODB

EU and Belarus

Catherine Ashton Made a Statement on Situation in Belarus

Statement by HR Ashton on the situation of the Union of Poles in Belarus
Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission:

"I am disappointed by the recent arrests of 40 members of the Union of Poles and other civil society representatives in Belarus, including that of the democratically elected chairperson of the Union of Poles, Ms Angelika Borys. I am also deeply concerned over the recent high fine imposed on Ms Borys. I condemn police action against the Union of Poles and what

appear to be attempts by the authorities to impose a new leadership on the Polish community.

The European Union has demonstrated considerable openness to engagement with Belarus, seen also in Belarus' inclusion in the Eastern Partnership. The success of this engagement is conditional on steps towards democratisation and upholding human rights, including minority rights, taken by the government of Belarus. In this context, it is of utmost importance that Belarus abides by its OSCE and international commitments in terms of the protection and promotion of the rights of its minorities. These devel-



opments undermine our efforts to strengthen relations between the European Union and Belarus. I will continue to follow the situation in Belarus closely."

16/02/2009

Source: consilium.europa.eu

Politics and Society

Belarus - Authorities Step up Pressure on Independent Journalists

The Belarusian police are increasingly harassing and intimidating independent journalists by charging them with relatively minor offences. This practice should stop at once if the government really intends, as it claims, to turn Belarus into a democracy.

In the latest case, Ivan Shulha, a journalist who works for the privately-owned satellite television station Belsat TV and who is an active member of the independent Belarus Association of Journalists (BAJ), was sentenced to 10 days in prison by a Minsk court yesterday on a charge of "minor hooliganism" in connection with an incident the day before, when he was arrested.

Judge Aksana Relyava's refusal to allow a witness of the incident to testify is indicative of the way the courts are used by the authorities to silence independent media.

Shulha's arrest came when a police unit tried twice to force its way into the apartment of another Belsat TV journalist, Mihai Yanchuk, on the afternoon of 3 February. The police, who had no warrant, said they were responding to a complaint from

neighbours about noise. The journalists present in the apartment refused to open on the grounds that Yanchuk was absent. A nearly two-hour siege ensued in which the police cut off the apartment's power supply.

Shulha, who had left the apartment seconds before the police arrived, reportedly called his colleagues by means of the intercom at the building's entrance to alert them to arrival of the police. The police claimed that he attacked an officer. Their statements initially mentioned torn braid on the officer's uniform and later talked of a broken leg. The police refused to say where they were holding Shulha until the start of the trial at noon the following day.

Like Belsat TV, which broadcasts from Poland, the BAJ is one of the few remaining entities that enable independent journalists to work in Belarus. As well as monitoring and denouncing violations of free expression, the BAJ issues press cards to its members that allow them to avoid the strict procedure for accrediting news media and journalists. It also offers a legal assistance unit to journalists who have problems with the police.

It was these functions that deputy justice minister Aliaksandr Simanau took issue with in a 13 January directive.

Arguing that it was not a news media, he ordered the BAJ to stop using the word "press" (and therefore stop issuing press cards). He also said its legal assistance unit was illegal as the BAJ statutes contained no provision for it. BAJ vice-president Andrei Bastunets insists that the legal unit is envisaged in the BAJ statutes, which were approved by the justice ministry. "It is hard to image what violations the ministry has suddenly discovered in regulations that have been in place for the past seven years," he said. The BAJ was initially given a month to comply but it has challenged the order and has requested clarification.



Journalist Ivan Shulha

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Politics and Society

Belarus - Authorities Step up Pressure on Independent Journalists (continuation)

Since its introduction a year ago, a new media law has enabled the authorities to use the accreditation procedure as an effective mechanism for vetting news media. After citing many different pretexts for not considering Belsat TV's request for accreditation, the foreign ministry turned down its request for the second time in December.

Under a decree promulgated by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka this week, the Internet is to be subjected to the same controls as the traditional media from 1 July.

The regime appears to be clamping down on all forms of access to news and information in the run up to local

elections in April and a presidential election to be held in early 2011.

03-11/02/2010

Source: From the Old (global politics and breaking news)

Belarus Fines, Gives Jail Terms to Ethnic Poles

A court in the western Belarusian city of Hrodna has fined the head of the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB), sentenced three other members from the organisation to jail terms, and detained dozens of other activists.



The Police is detaining activist of the Union of Poles

The Union of Poles chairwoman Anzhelika Borys was fined 1 million Belarusian rubles (\$360) by the court today. Deputy Chairperson Mieczyslaw Jaskiewicz, spokesman Igor Bancar, and the Union's Council Chairman Andrzej Pocozobut were sentenced to five days in jail after being found guilty of holding an unsanctioned protest in Hrodna on February 10.

Activists were arrested as they were travelling to a court hearing in the north-western town of Valozhyn.

At least 40 other Union of Poles activists and supporters have been detained by Belarusian officials since February 14.

Last week [On 8 February 2010] the police threw out members of the Union of Poles from their headquarters in Iyvanets (near Minsk). The Iyvanets branch refused to accept a decision by the union's pro-government leadership last month to dismiss the branch's chief Teresa Sobol.

Sobol, a regional UPB leader, was set to face charges that her group illegally

seized private property in the town of Iyvanets.

The case was brought by a competing ethnic Polish community group financed and supported by the state. It charges that Sobol's group, using funds provided by the Polish government, illegally purchased a two-storey brick home in the town of Iyvanets and turned the building into an organisation headquarters.

Bailiffs and police evicted Sobol and other activists from the building and closed the premises on February 8. At least 20 UPB activists and supporters were reportedly arrested in raids last week.

Meanwhile, Polish media report that Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski gave his Belarusian counterpart, Syarhey Martynau, a letter for Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka warning that if Minsk continues to violate the rights of its Polish minority, Warsaw will prepare a list of Belarusian government officials whom it will ban from entering Poland and recommend that Brussels block their entry into the EU.

The Polish government recognizes Borys's UPB as the sole legal representative of the Polish minority in Belarus.

The Union of Poles is a public organization set up to promote the Polish language and cultural traditions among ethnic Poles living in Belarus. It has

about 20,000 members.

The Union of Poles in Belarus was first established in 1988 as a Cultural Association named after Adam Mickevic. In 1991, it was reformed into a nation-wide NGO under its current name. However, at present, there are two Unions of Poles in the country. The split took place in March 2005, when the Belarusian authorities refused to recognise the results of the organisation's congress, which elected an independent candidate, Andzelika Borys, as its President. In August 2005, the Belarusian authorities, willing to create a state-controlled entity, managed to organise another meeting by putting pressure on the organisation's members and inviting Belarusian officials of Polish origin who had not been members of the Union before. As a result, the new head of the Union of Poles in Belarus was appointed. However, most members refused to recognise his leadership.

With its membership of approximately 25,000 people, the Union of Poles is one of the largest organizations in Belarus.

With the support of the Polish Government, the Belarusian Union of Poles managed to open 16 Polish cultural centres (Polish Houses) and two Polish-language schools in the country. After the split the "state-run" organisation brought under its control 14 out of 16 Polish cultural centres. Twelve of these centres were shut down in the next few years.

15/02/2010

**Source: Radio Free Europe, ODB
Photos by nn.by**

Politics and Society

Belarusian Police Cracks down on Youth Activists on St. Valentine's Day



A policeman in plane clothes is trying to take over the national flag from Tatiana Shaputka. Later the girl was diagnosed a head injury.

Belarusian police dispersed a St. Valentine's Day gathering in Minsk and detained some 30 young political activists, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

The activists, mainly members of the Youth Front movement, were re-

leased by police after about two hours on February 14 and were not charged.

Maryna Manchalouskaya told RFE/RL that she was surprised when police forced her into a bus and took her to the police station.

She said she was holding a sign at the gathering on Liberty Square that read: "I Love Belarus. I Do Not Understand Why I Cannot."

Youth Front deputy head Mikola Dzemizdenka told RFE/RL that police beat the activists, who were forced to lie on the floor of the bus while being driven to the police station.

Dzemizdenka said the police officers were "very rude" and did not let the activists speak to each other. He added that

they used vulgar words while addressing the activists.

Every year, many independent youth organizations in Minsk hold a public gathering on St. Valentine's Day that is usually forcibly dispersed by the police.

Earlier in the day, police apprehended four opposition youths who were distributing St. Valentine's Day cards coloured white and red, the colours of Belarus' historically national flag, at the Yakub Kolas subway station. Dzyanis Kobrusew, Andrey Krechka, Pavel Chubuk and Anton Koypysh were taken to a police station. They were released without charges after a while.

15/02/2010

**Source: Radio Free Europe, BelaPAN, ODB
Photo by:nn.by**

Iranian FM Holds Joint Press Conference with His Belarusian Counterpart

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki held a joint press conference with his Belarusian counterpart Syarhey Martynau here on Tuesday.

In the press conference, Mottaki, by referring to common viewpoints of both countries on world issues and

joint economic cooperation, said that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka will visit Iran in near future. He described bilateral negotiation as "good, useful and constructive," adding that mutual cooperation fields has been expanded in recent years and is still developing.

Referring to the cooperation in Joufair Oil Well, Martynau said, "We hope that in the coming months, the pre-phase of exploitation of the well could be inaugurated in the presence of the two presidents."

17/02/2010

Source: ISRIA

Finance and Economics

Telekom Austria Rolls out 3G in Belarus

Telekom Austria said its majority owned Belarusian mobile subsidiary, Velcom, has been granted a country-wide UMTS license for a price of €9.5m.

The respective spectrum was already allocated to Velcom at the end of 2009, and the 3G licence is valid until 2017. The mobile operator, which is 70 per cent owned by Telekom Austria and 30 per cent by Cypriot firm

Samauwi Brothers, said the roll out of the UMTS network is in progress with up to ten base stations being upgraded every day.

The Austria carrier expanded its operations into Belarus in 2007, paying €730m for the stake. The operator also has a put option agreement, which would allow it to buy the remaining 30 per cent stake in the fourth quarter of 2010 for approximately €320m.

The carrier markets its mobile services under the brand names "Velcom" for post-paid services and "Privet" for prepaid services and is the number two operator in Belarus with a market share of approximately 42 per cent and more than 4.1 million customers at the end of December 2009.

03/02/2010

Source: telecoms.com

Finance and Economics

Navistar Diesel Engines to be Made in Minsk



High-performance diesel engines of the US-based Navistar International Corporation are expected to be manufactured at the Minsk Engine Plant (MMZ), said the press office of the Ministry of Industry.

The engines are to have four and six cylinders, range from 180 to 400 horsepower and meet emission standards at least as strict as Euro 4, the

Ministry's Press Office said.

The MMZ management currently works on technical and economic aspects of the project.

Starters, generators, flywheels and other Navistar engine components would be made at the MMZ at the initial stage, the press office said.

The mass production of Navistar diesel engines is expected to start by the middle of 2011 and annual output should reach 10,000 engines by 2012. By that time, the engines are to be brought into compliance with the requirements of

machinery manufacturers, tested and certified, the press office said.

Founded in 1962, the MMZ is one of the largest CIS manufacturers of diesel engines with powers ranging from 60 hp to 350 hp. It makes engines for trucks, tractors and combines. The MMZ employs some 5,400 staff. In February 2009, it was transformed into a stock corporation. The Belarusian government holds 100 percent of the company's stock.

04/02/2010

Source: naviny.by

Belarus Finance Ministry Mulls Eurobond Issue in 2010

The Finance Ministry of Belarus has confirmed its intention to price a Eurobond issue in 2010, but refused to announce the timing for this event. A representative of the Ministry, quoted by Interfax, noted that it was difficult to say if it



Finance Minister Andrei Harkavets

would be the first or second half of the year. He added that they were reviewing offers from potential arrangers and assessing the borrowings potential. According to this source, the timing for pricing

the issue is not pegged to Russia or

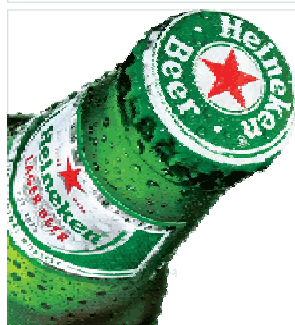
Kazakhstan tapping the market, as these countries belong to a different rating group and are more experienced market players.

Belarus and Sberbank signed an agreement on cooperation in December 2009. The plan includes Sberbank acting as an arranger for Belarus' debut Eurobonds amounting up to \$2bn and having a tenor of 3 to 5 years.

09/02/2010

Source: eurobond

Belarus Breweries report 30% Losses due to Beer Kiosk Sale Ban



Heineken Belarus CEO Aliaksei Charniaeu said at a roundtable meeting for industry professionals on 9 February in Minsk.

restaurants and bars in Belarus is yet to be developed. Retail sales through kiosks were well organized, but after the ban for beer sales in kiosks was introduced, the Belarusian brewery industry lost up to 30 percent of revenues.

The BelaPAN news agency quotes Charniaeu as saying that the beer industry might recover the losses soon only after the ban is lifted.

The Belarusian beer industry has lost up to 30 percent of revenues after the government banned beer sales at kiosks located at public transport stops,

Beer can be sold via various channels, he said. However, the network of res-

10/02/2010

Source: ERB

Finance and Economics

Medvedev Signs Protocol on Duty-free Oil Supplies to Belarus

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed into law on Monday a protocol on duty-free oil deliveries to Belarus after a bitter dispute between the two former Soviet neighbours, the Kremlin said.

Russia and Belarus signed in late January a package of documents, including amendments to an agreement on crude oil deliveries to Belarus, to end a month-long standoff that raised concerns over potential supply cuts to Belarus and the European Union.

Under the new deals, Minsk will re-

ceive 6.3 million tons of oil duty-free this year, but the volume could increase later in accordance with the country's economic growth. The two sides also agreed to raise the tariffs for oil in transit by 11 percent this year.

Belarus imported about 20 million tons of Russian oil last year at only 35.6 percent of the crude export duty. The transit country consumes about 6.3 mil-



lion tons of the Russian oil with the rest processed and pumped to the West.

Belarus sought a similar discount for 2010 but failed to strike a new agreement with Russia before the previous accord expired at the end of last December.

15/02/2010

Source: **BelaPAN**

Belarus Cuts Rates for 2nd Time in 3 Months

Belarus on Monday [February 15, 2010] unveiled its second rate cut in three months, seeking to stimulate the domestic economy by encouraging cheaper loans and aiming to meet the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund.

The refinancing rate will be cut by 50 basis points to 13 percent as of Feb. 17, the central bank said in a statement, following on from a same-size move on Dec. 1.

Pyotr Prakapovich, chairman of the Belarus central bank said last month that the refi rate will be reduced to no more than 12 percent by July 1.

The Belarusian economy has been beaten badly as demand for its goods in Russia and Europe, its chief export markets, deteriorated significantly, prompting the country to turn to the IMF for cash.

The IMF -- which has opened a \$3.63 billion credit line to the cash-strapped

former Soviet country -- has called for tight monetary policy and limits on lending to the real economy.

Belarus has said it does not exclude asking the IMF for more cash, once the final tranche of that credit line -- due by the end of the current quarter -- is received.

15/02/2010

Source: **Reuters**

IMF, Belarus Reach Tentative Staff-Level Agreement On \$700M Loan

The International Monetary Fund said Wednesday it has reached a tentative staff-level agreement to loan Belarus roughly \$700 million as part of an existing loan package.

The amount came via the IMF's fourth review of Belarus's economic performance under the loan program. The IMF Executive Board must approve the agreement, which is likely before the end of



March, IMF said in a statement.

The 15-month financial package amounts to roughly \$3.52 billion. As of December 2009, total disbursement under the program totalled \$2.88 billion when IMF approved a \$668 million loan to Belarus after completion of its third review.

IMF said Belarus' performance under its lending facility has been "good" because the country has met all performance crite-

ria and structural benchmarks at the end of December.

Additionally, Belarusian authorities have expressed "interest in continued cooperation with the IMF after the expiration of the current program," the IMF said, adding that a possible follow-up program could be considered.

18/02/2010

Source: **The Wall Street Journal**

Mysterious Belarus

Salamieja Piłstynova

Belarus-born adventuress as Dr. House of the 17th century.

Biographies of famous adventurers always make exciting reading. Having opened a book about Giacomo Casanova, Marco Polo, or Mata Hari, one can hardly lay it aside before the last page is reached.

Can Belarus boast with its own Baron Munchhausen, Odysseus, or Indiana Jones? Do the descendants of this country have any exciting life stories to offer?

In fact, they do. One of them is Salamieja Piłstynova, an 18th century adventuress. A self-taught ophthalmologist, she became the first woman known to practice medicine officially on Belarusian lands. Salamieja traveled extensively in Central Europe, the Russian Empire and the Near East, earning her daily bread by healing people. Many of her patients were wealthy and influential, but some encounters were truly dangerous.

To our delight, Salamieja Piłstynova meticulously described her adventures in a book. Today, a copy of her manuscript is one of the many treasures of the National Museum in Krakow, Poland. Originally written in Istanbul in the Polish language, the journal of Salamieja is sown with Belarusian words. No wonder; she was born in the region of Navahradak, in the very heart of Belarus in 1718. Once a major city of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, at that time Navahradak was part of Rzeczpospolita, the union of the Grand Duchy and Polish Kingdom. In her book Salamieja calls herself “Polka”, i.e. a Polish woman. At the same time she describes her native land of Navahradak as “Litva”. During the 18th century people born in the area of Rzeczpospolita that is part of today’s Belarus (once part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) often described their homeland as Litva (‘Lithuania’), while subscribing to the Polish nation in a broader sense. It was similar to calling oneself American in the USA. This tendency espe-

cially increased with time, as the Grand Duchy grew weaker in a political sense, and gradually surrendered its culture to that of its partner in the union, the Polish Kingdom.

We don’t know much about Salamieja – not even whether she was of noble or common descent. In any case, she was not a spoilt child of fortune. Her family name was Rusieckaja. When Salamieja was about 14 years old, her parents organised the marriage of Salamieja with doctor Jakub Chałpir. She probably had no thorough education, but enjoyed shooting and always had pistols and rifles at her side while traveling. It was a clever habit which would come in handy in the future.

The manuscript’s lengthy title can be translated as “The Echo of my Life’s Travels and Adventures, Presented to the World”. However, unlike her contemporary baroque authors, Salamieja did not cram her book with pompous descriptions and complicated allegories. Her writing is precise and dynamic, which reads like an adventure novel. Still, her book is not devoid of self-reflections of a woman. Salamieja had a literary ambition and pointed out that she intended to publish her journal as a book with women being her target readership. It was quite a pioneering attitude for the 18th century Rzeczpospolita.

Poisoning in Istanbul

In 1731, right after her marriage, Salamieja left her native Navahradak land and followed her husband to Istanbul. There, she attentively observed the ophthalmologic practice of Jakub.

Salamieja was fascinated with the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which was a bustling trade centre. Its Golden Horn harbour was considered one of the best in the world. “Istanbul may be a great and pompous city beyond any measure, but it is also an old city. Here one can see a palace worth of thousands, and a smithy nearby, where horses are being



Belarusian artist V. Hubaraŭ imagined how Salamieja Piłstynova could look like

shoed. Close by one would find a shop, where cucumbers and melons are sold”. Salamieja had a lively mind and good memory. Soon she began to help her husband to treat his patients. She also consulted another doctor from Iraq, who told her about ways to cure simple eye illnesses. Eventually Salamieja gained so much experience that Istanbul authorities allowed her to practice medicine officially on her own.

It turned out that being a Christian woman in a Muslim city was an advantage for her as a doctor. Unlike Muslim women, Salamieja was allowed to enter any house she wanted without supervision of her husband. However, she had to be careful. One day two women came to her house and asked for a doctor. They asked Salamieja to follow them to another part of the city in order to treat their ill mother. The women, who offered some money in advance, wore yashmaks which hid their faces. Salamieja grew suspicious and refused.

Mysterious Belarus

Instead, her neighbour, a wife of a Jewish doctor, offered her services to the women. As it was usual in Turkey, she put on all kinds of jewels before leaving her house. As a result, the yashmak-covered strangers turned out to be dressed-up janissaries - cruel Turkish soldiers - who robbed and killed the doctor's wife.

Being a doctor in Istanbul was indeed a dangerous business. Once, Jakub Chalpir, husband of Salamieja, failed to treat a Turkish official of a serious illness. The official died, and his relatives threatened to appeal for sentencing Jakub to death. However, Salamieja managed to persuade them to settle for money compensation. Jakub was saved, but his wife did not give up. She began her own investigation and soon her suspicion fell on a Portuguese doctor Fonseca, a major rival of her husband. According to historians, he was quite a remarkable person who served as a personal doctor to Sultan Ahmed III and also treated the Swedish king Charles XII after his fiasco in the battle against Russia in Poltava. Salamieja found out that Fonseca visited her husband while he prepared the medicine for the unfortunate official. She accused Fonseca of mixing a poison into the cure in order to get rid of the rival doctor. The looming court hearing scared Fonseca out of his senses. He agreed to pay the money fine instead of Jakub. However, some time later the Portuguese doctor avenged on Salamieja. He persuaded Hakim Pasha, an Ottoman official who was responsible for medicine in the Empire, to bar Salamieja from treating men. However, after she successfully cured another Ottoman official of urolithiasis, the ban was lifted. The medical system of the Ottoman Empire showed surprising flexibility in such matters.

Doctor to Balkan Robbers

In 1735 Chalpir went to Bosnia. Some time later Salamieja followed him with her small daughter and an old crippled Tatar man Jazep Krymil, who knew various Slavic languages and served as an interpreter.



The journey was full of various encounters. Salamieja describes a whole row of characters she had treated. She discovered a smart way of getting to know potential clients. Salamieja attended Turkish women baths, which were something like clubs where women could entertain themselves by singing, dancing, and chatting. Every time someone complained about poor health or had a sick relative, Salamieja offered her help.

In the city of Filibe (today, Plovdiv in Bulgaria) the doctor had an accident which almost cost Salamieja her life. She attended a sick 7-year-old daughter of the city's nasir (commandant). Salamieja treated her against helminths with an herb and acid elixir she had prepared. Having drunk a couple of drops of it, the girl died. The furious father was about to kill the doctor. Salamieja saved herself only by drinking the rest of the medicine in front of him.

In order to reach the city of Sophia, Salamieja needed to cross the Balkan Mountains. Dressed up as a man, she joined a caravan of tradesmen. However, the disguise did not help Salamieja when the caravan was attacked by the notorious robber gang of Hussein the Red-Headed. He needed a good doctor and seized the opportunity to get one after his spies had informed the gang chief about Salamieja joining the caravan.

Salamieja was brought to the seat of the robbers, which was situated in a valley. "It felt like we came down from the skies" describes Salamieja their descent from mountains. The town which served as the gang's refuge was obviously situated somewhere in the Karlovy Vary region. Salamieja was fascinated with its healing hot mineral water springs.

In about 40 days Salamieja cured the relative of Hussein the Red-Headed who could not walk; she also treated the gang's chief swollen eyes. Hussein gave her a generous reward and provided the honorary convoy to Sofia. She also found out, that her fellow co-travelers from the caravan had been killed by the gang.

Husband for a Price

In Sofia Salamieja began to work as a doctor at a harem of a local pasha called Köprülü. There she finally had a meeting with her husband, who came for a treatment to a local mineral spa. Chalpir was accompanied by an Italian, member of the Knights of Malta, who was held captive by the Turkish army.

Mysterious Belarus

Maltesian knights waged a merciless war against Muslims on the sea. Unlike other war captives, who were freed by Muslims after seven years of hard labour, the knights of Malta were kept captives forever. The Italian knight taught Salamieja how to write prescriptions in Latin, as well as presented her with books about the art of healing, lists of diseases and medicines.

Some time passed. Salamieja learned the sad news that her husband had died in Bosnia. She wanted to go there to collect his possessions, but it was too late. Austria and Hungary joined Russia in its war against the Ottoman Empire. Salamieja witnessed many bloody events of the war. This had such a negative effect on Salamieja that she decided to abandon her service for the Turkish pasha. She dressed up as a janissary and went to the fortress of Baba Vida on Danube River with her daughter and servants. Major forces of the Ottoman army gathered there. The Austrian army tried to seize the fortress several times, to no avail. Salamieja saw hundreds of captive Austrian soldiers and officers there.

Salamieja got acquainted with a well-off Turk, who introduced her to a new type of business, which flourished during the war. Rich Turks ransomed captives out for money. Not some random captives, but those officers who had rich families at home in Austria or Germany. The rescued remained with their “saviors” until their relatives repaid the ransom plus some extra charge. Until then, the rescuer agreed to provide lodging and board for the former captives. Immoral as it seems today, the trade made everyone happy and was considered respectable and humane. The Turks got their money, and the captives escaped harsh conditions and reunited with their families.

Salamieja decided to follow the advice of the Turk, who had already “purchased” 30 captive officers and their wives. She ransomed out five Austrians, who had respectable and rich families. They promised to ask relatives to repay Salamieja the sum,

which would almost double what she had paid for them. And they kept their promise – all but one. The relatives of one officer, Joseph Fortunat de Pichelstein lived in some remote village in Austria, and the correspondence got lost on the way. He had to accompany Salamieja on her journeys until the payment would come. “He

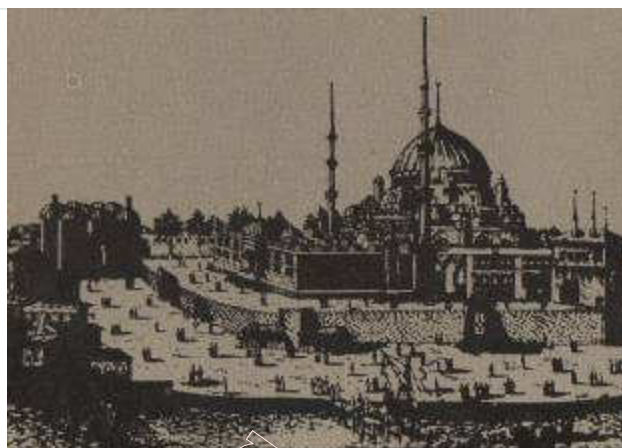
seemed [to be] a sober, obedient, quiet, and pious person to me”, she wrote. Salamieja did not know that soon she would carry the name Piłstynova, a Polish version of Pichelstein. It appears that Salamieja had purchased herself a husband. However, it turned to be rather troublesome investment. Why? You will learn all about it in the second part of the article, which would be published in the next issue of “Belarus Headlines”.

05/02/2010

By Aleś Kudrycki for the ODB

p.s. Dear readers, as you have probably noticed, we used a special spelling for Belarus-related names in this article. Belarus has a long tradition of using both Cyrillic (“kirylca”) and Latin (“lacinka”) alphabets. We even used Arabic alphabet at some point of our history, but this a story which requires a separate article, which would surely be presented to you in the future. The version of the Latin alphabet we used reflects the most recent variation of the Belarusian “lacinka”, which was suggested by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus this year and approved by the UNGEGN (**United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**), which deals with the technical problems of domestic standardization of geographical names, for the international use.

Belarus is situated on the crossroads of many cultures. As a result, the information about the personalities and events we describe is scattered across the internet, and can be found not only in Belarusian, but also in English, Russian, Polish, and other sources. For your convenience, we provide chief names, which appear in



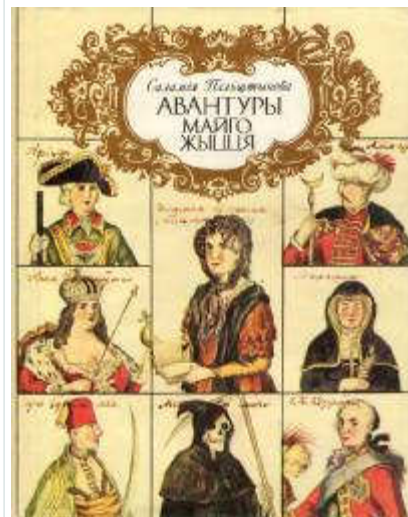
the article, in their transliteration in relevant languages. If you experiment with this, you will see, that in some languages the information is more abundant, than in others. Hopefully, this would make your search for additional information easier:

Salameja Pilshtynova – possible English transliteration (5 search results in Google)

Salomea Pilsztynowa – Polish transliteration (1 310 results)

Саламея Пільштынова – Belarusian Cyrillic (625 results)

Соломея Пильштынова – Russian transliteration (145 results).



Front cover of the memoirs by Salamieja Piłstynova, published in Minsk in 1993