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Belarus scheduled to build nuclear power plant by 2020

First meeting of Belarus-Poland expert panel on conflict of Union of Poles is postponed by a week

Telecommunication companies in Belarus required to provide authorities with access to data basis of the clients

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Salamieja Piłshtynova

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Belarus Headlines

The Energy Sector in Belarus

Only 13 to 15% of supplies are provided from Belarus' own resources. The main type of fuel used in the country is a natural gas, which is purchased in Russia. Its share in the fuel mix is 75-80%.

Belarus is not the only country in Europe which depends on Russian energy supplies. The same applies to the Baltic States, as well as a number of Central European states. However, none of these countries has such a high dependence on one country – Russia – as does Belarus.

With such a huge dependence on one energy supplier, Belarus, which retained practically the entire former Soviet industry, buys such high volumes of energy that could only be afforded by rich countries. For example, in recent years, Belarus bought in Russia about 21 billion cubic meters of gas, and only because of the crisis, imports of this raw material fell by approximately 4 billion cubic meters in 2009.

In recent years, the country exported to Europe about 15 million tons of petroleum products. The revenues generated from its export of oil products formed about one third of its entire income. Belarus provided more than 60% of all exports of petroleum products to EU countries. It is estimated that the growth in exports of petroleum products in recent

years provided for 2 to 3 per cent growth of Belarus' GDP annually.

Gas

Natural gas is the main fuel used in Belarus. The biggest consumer of gas is the electric energy sector, and the enterprises of chemical and petrochemical industry and the production of building materials.

The Belarusian energy system has the capacity to produce the amount of electricity which is required to meet internal demand (up to 40 billion kWh). However, Belarus imports about 5 billion kWh of electricity, as it is considered to be profitable to import part of the electricity consumed, leaving less effective power in reserve.

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Open air museum of energy sources in Belarus

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In recent years, the transit of gas through the Belarusian "pipe" has declined. With the capacity of 51 billion cubic meters, the transit through the Belarusian transit network amounts only to 14,5 billion cubic meters. At the same time, the Yamal-Europe has reached the capacity of 33 billion cubic meters.

The Energy Sector in Belarus

One should not expect cardinal changes relating to the supply of natural gas from Russia to Belarus. The Belarusian side is studying opportunities for diversification of supply sources, but as it turns out, in the short and medium term, these are not visible.

Relatively low energy prices which Belarus had in the past years do not promote structural reforms in the energy and utilities sectors. However, the inevitability of further price increases for Russian gas renders urgent the need to find ways to reduce costs, increase efficiency and attract investment in the country's energy sector.

Nuclear Power Plant

Belarusian authorities believe that the inevitable increase in prices for natural gas is a real threat to energy security of Belarus, because it severely affects economic growth of the country and can have serious social consequences.

The Belarusian authorities seem to think that the only feasible solution in this situation is the construction of nuclear power plants. Belarus is scheduled to build a nuclear power plant with the capacity of 2 MW by 2020. The plant will consist of two reactors with the capacity of not less than 1 MW each.

The estimated cost of the nuclear plant construction is 9 billion USD. It was decided that the plant will be built by Russia's *Atomstroieksport*. However, so far the agreement has not been signed. It was also agreed that Russia would allocate a loan that would fund this project.

Oil

There are two oil refineries in Belarus – Mazyr and Navapolatsk. In recent years, they process about 22 million tonnes of oil, even though the country's oil production equals to 1.72

“Only 13 to 15% of supplies are provided from Belarus' own resources.”

million tons.

Until 2010 Belarus, within the framework of energy balance with Russia, was able to export approximately 1 million tons of oil (mainly to Poland and Germany). Belarus' revenues from the export of its own oil in the past years constituted about 500 million USD a year. However, a new oil agreement with Russia does not include export of

Belarusian oil.

Until 2010 the rules of the oil market for Belarus were determined by the agreement with Russia from 12 January 2007. It is worth noting that, in 2007, Belarus had to share the profits generated from the export of Russia's oil. Thus Moscow found it advantageous to collect these benefits immediately, through the introduction of the special duty on oil delivered to Belarus.

In 2007, the rate of duty on oil for Belarus was calculated at a rate of \$ 0,293 from the rate of customs duty on crude oil produced by Russia for export. This rate was calculated using the co-efficient of 0,335 in 2008 and the co-efficient of 0,356 in 2009.

The collection of this fee is essentially a mechanism used by Moscow and Minsk to divide the export duties on oil exported from Belarus (in 2009 the proportion was 85 to 15 - in favour of the RF).

Even though this special fee has been applied since 2007, the price of Russian oil for Belarus was about 150-170 USD / ton lower than, for example, for Ukraine.

However, in 2010 the conditions of oil supplies to Belarus have worsened. Russia has allocated a quota for Belarus in the amount of 6,3 million tons,

which will be delivered without fee, and all the remaining materials will be subject to Russia's duty. It is estimated that because of the new terms the Belarusian budget would lose about 2 billion USD.

Alternatives

The concept of energy security of the country until 2020 incorporates the requirement to find towards 2011 some alternative ways of bringing in approximately 4 million tonnes of Russian oil (20 per cent from the current volume of purchases) through the ports of the Baltic and Black Seas.

Difficulties faced by the Belarusian authorities 3 years ago, during the talks with the Kremlin on energy supplies, forced the Belarusian leadership to actively seek alternative supplies of oil in Venezuela, Iran, and Azerbaijan. However, almost none of these projects has been implemented. Belarus has been able to create a joint venture to produce oil in Venezuela. Today, this enterprise, where the share of the Belarusian side is 40%, produces about 800 thousand tons of oil per year.

Last year, Ukraine called on member countries of the EU's Eastern partnership "to rally around the Odessa-Brody project (Euro-Asian oil transportation corridor) to supply Caspian oil to Europe.

The EU's Eastern Partnership, which covers Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, provides connectivity among the main directions of the participating countries to the European energy system. It is nonetheless unclear how far Belarus' officials are prepared to support the projects within the EP. Alyaksandr Lukashenka, commenting on this subject in an interview with Azerbaijan's *Trend* news agency on 9 November 2009 once again said that it is very important for

“Belarus is scheduled to build a Nuclear power plant with the capacity of 2 MW by 2020.”

The Energy Sector in Belarus

Belarus to diversify its hydrocarbons. "Russia is a friendly country, but we cannot depend only on one supplier," said Lukashenka. a friendly country, but we cannot depend only on one supplier," said Lukashenka.

According to the Belarusian President, his country is considering the alternative of using Odessa-Brody pipeline. However, he also noted that the final decisions on the supply of Caspian hydrocarbons would be based on economic feasibility. "At the moment, the price of Azerbaijani oil is still too high." However, "as soon as we agree that it would be economically beneficial, we will immediately start implementing this project," said the Belarusian President.

As concerns Russian-Belarusian relations, the oil issue exacerbated in late 2009, when Moscow decided not to extend energy subsidies to Belarus if the latter did not allow Russian companies to participate in the privatization of its strategic assets.

Famous Ukrainian expert, President of the "Strategy XXI" centre, Mikhail Honchar, believes that the oil industry of Belarus has no future prospects without international cooperation.

As long as Belarus receives oil on preferential terms through the Soviet-era pipelines, it would be able to receive good dividends from exports on petroleum products. The Belarusian authorities are counting on preferential oil supplies and a full load of its refinery and perhaps even expect the privatization of Russia's oil companies.

According to Honchar, it is not an optimal strategy; it is like drug addiction, because it creates the effect of habituation and confidence that this will last forever. "Constant political loyalty does not guarantee

economic benefits. These can not be endless, and someone will have to pay some day. Political and military relations are not taken into consideration. They are taken for granted by the 'donor'", stresses Honchar.

Given that Belarus has a sufficiently modern refineries and produces high quality products, its businesses need access to the markets of neighbouring countries, including EU states. "But this is impossible without international cooperation and without entering into an alliance with leading corporations, even from the countries of Central Europe", clarifies the Ukrainian expert.

Honchar is also convinced that we must think about what will happen after Russia puts into operation the Baltic Pipeline System 2 (BPS-2) – an alternative to the Belarusian pipeline "Druzhba". "Of course, one can trust the promises that the status quo will be maintained. But it is hard to believe that someone who builds such a large-scale system will still be interested in others' pipelines, even if these are offered at a price of scrap metal. Therefore, there should be more cooperation on prospective oil routes with Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states, and Azerbaijan", emphasizes Honchar.

During a round table discussion on the "Policy of the European Union and Belarus in the field of Energy: Sharing experience", held in June 2009 in Minsk, Charge d'Affaires of the Delegation of the European Commission to Belarus Jean-Eric Holzapfel stressed the importance of cooperation between Belarus and the EU on energy and said that the EU is ready to provide technical support for reforming the energy sector of Belarus and facilitate the implementation of projects aimed at improving energy security of the country. At the EU summit in Prague, on 7 May



First Session of the Energy Club in Minsk

2009, the European Union and Belarus shared relevant declarations. In this regard Jean-Eric Holzapfel stressed that such cooperation aims to improve the energy security of Belarus and the EU through enhanced contacts between the two countries, the development of energy infrastructure, and the engagement of Belarus in projects aiming at finding new opportunities of supply and transit of energy resources.

Bridge for dialogue

With the expansion of contacts between Minsk and Brussels, the Office for a Democratic Belarus (ODB) is implementing a number of projects that aim at bringing Belarus closer to the European system by promoting the improvement of knowledge and professional skills of Belarusian experts in their respective areas.

The ODB organizes trips to Brussels that facilitate cooperation with various EU institutions and programmes. The Office has organized visits of Belarusian professionals in the fields of transport and transit, energy, environment, education, etc. As a follow up to these visits, round table discussions are held in Minsk with the participation of European experts.

Thanks to this, Belarusian experts, representatives of private businesses and state institutions have the opportunity to establish closer contacts with their European colleagues and a platform for exchange of ideas and organization of more effective cooperation with the EU.

The Energy Sector in Belarus

In October 2009, a new "Energy Club" project was launched in Minsk. This is a joint initiative of the Office for Democratic Belarus (Brussels, Belgium), Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (Vilnius, Lithuania).

The first session of the club was held in cooperation with the Nashe Mnenie portal and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

The mission of the "Energy Club" is to establish a platform for expert dialogue to discuss and find possible solutions to the problems of energy and energy security in Belarus.

The first meeting of the "Energy Club" brought together independent experts, representatives of state institutions, scientists and foreign diplomats. Participants discussed most pressing challenges facing the energy sector of Belarus, prospects and

risks associated with the country's participation in regional projects on energy, as well as the lessons of the recent gas "wars" in the region and their implications for energy security of Belarus. The next meeting of the "Energy Club" will be held in Minsk on March 11, 2010.

07/03/2010

Tatsyana Manoynak for the ODB

EU and Belarus

Belarus Foreign Minister Visits Hungary

On 1 March 2010, Foreign Minister of Belarus Syarhei Martynau paid an official visit to Budapest where he met with his Hungarian counterpart Peter Balazs to discuss ways to strengthen the bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

The sides agreed to expand contacts between the foreign ministries and other ministries of Belarus and Hungary, discussed ways to boost trade and encourage investment and the work of the Belarus-Hungary inter-governmental commission for economic cooperation.

Martynau and exchanged diplomatic notes enacting the intergovernmental cooperation agreement in education, science and culture, signed in May 2009. Another major topic of the talks was Belarus-EU dialogue and the Eastern Partnership initiative. The sides discussed concrete measures that could benefit all countries and the possibility of raising European financial resources to implement projects within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. The ministers agreed to continue their efforts in promoting simplified visa requirements for Belarusian citizens travelling to the EU.

Fruitful talks were also held with other officials of the Hungarian Government.

On 2 March, Syarhei Martynau took part in a joint meeting of the Visegrad Group, the Eastern Partnership countries, the Baltic states, and the EU troika (Spain, Great Britain, and Hungary).

02/03/2010

ODB, BelTA

Polish-Belarusian Expert Panel Postponed

The first meeting of a Belarusian-Polish expert panel tasked with seeking solutions to a conflict over an ethnic Polish cultural organisation has been postponed by a week.

The meeting, initially scheduled for March 9, has been postponed, tentatively until March 16, because of disagreement between the parties on the issue.

Although the composition of the group has not been made public, Henryk Litvin, the Polish Ambassador to Belarus, said it will be headed by Belarus' commissioner on religious and ethnic affairs, Leanid Hulyaka, and Polish Undersecretary of State Andrzej Kremer.

An agreement to form the expert group was reached by Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski at a meeting in Kyiv last week.

Poland is reportedly seeking the full legalization of the unofficial Union of Poles in Belarus (ZPB), an ethnic Polish cultural organization headed by Andzelika Borys.

The European Parliament is set to meet in Strasbourg on March 8-10, at which a resolution on Belarus is expected to be adopted. Some analysts believe the resolution will be postponed until the expert group agrees on a solution to the problem.

In 2005, a splinter group from the ZPB was formed, the so-called official Union of Belarusian Poles led by Stanislaw Syamashka. It is backed and recognized by the Belarusian government.

The Belarusian government has refused to register the ZPB even though the Polish government considers it the sole representative of Belarus's ethnic Polish minority.

The seizure of the ZPB's "Polish House" in the town of Ivyaniets, outside of Minsk, on February 8 caused a diplomatic row between Poland and Belarus. The Polish ambassador was briefly recalled for consultations as a result.

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04-09/03/2010

Source: RFE/RL BelPAN

MEPs Condemn Measures against Union of Poles in Belarus



The European Parliament has condemned the police action and legal measures taken against the Union of Poles in Belarus and the attempts by the authorities to impose a new leadership on the Polish community. MEPs also urge the Belarus authorities to release political activists such as Andrei Bandarenka and prisoners of conscience such as Ivan Mikhailau and Aristyom Dubski. In a resolution adopted on Wednesday, the EP demands that the Belarusian authorities re-legalise the Union

of Poles in Belarus (UPB) led by Angelika Borys. The UPB is not recognised by the state authorities and has been facing regular harassment and persecution since 2005. Its members are accused of illegal activities and face criminal charges.

Parliament urges the authorities to guarantee freedom of speech and association and to guarantee the freedom to register political parties, such as the Belarusian Christian Democracy (BDC), religious freedom and the creation of conditions conducive to the work of civil society bodies such as "Viasna". The authorities should also refrain from seeking to control the content of Belarusian sites of the World Wide Web, says the resolution.

MEPs point out that the EU has shown considerable openness to engagement with Belarus, with the country's inclu-

sion in the Eastern Partnership. The success of this process is conditional on steps taken towards democratisation and the upholding of human rights, including minority rights, by the government of Belarus.

If Belarus adheres to fundamental human rights and democracy criteria, the country could benefit from a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA), EU financial instruments such as European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), an extension of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) financing to projects involving state entities in Belarus and a restoration of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP+).

10/03/2010

Source: europar.leuropa.eu

Politics and Society

Local Elections in Belarus - 25th April 2010



'Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections' bemoan the weak representation of opposition parties in the regional election commissions. According to the new electoral code, opposition parties and NGOs should be strengthened in the election commissions and the number of officials loyal to the regime should be reduced. This is ensured by allowing parties and NGOs on the one hand, and the administration on the other hand, to each provide up to a third of the members of the election committees. The remaining seats should be filled by representatives of the workers' committees and by candidates who have collected at least 10 signatures. Those

applicants who are not chosen are able to appeal against the responsible election authority's decision in court.

The Belarusian Human Rights Defenders also point to a disproportionately high number of employees of state administrative bodies represented in the election commissions. They are appointed by the means of collecting signatures as representatives of political parties or of civil society organisations. Due to this practice, which has already taken place at this early stage of the election campaign, the legally envisaged balance in the election commissions between one third of the seats for those loyal to and one third for those critical of the regime is destroyed. In addition to this, the domestic election observers report that the state-controlled local press is not announcing the actual positions of the state

officials, so that their real number in the commissions cannot be determined. According to a statement from the Human Rights Defenders, the officials are generally appointed as members of the parties loyal to the regime (Communist Party of Belarus, Agrarian Party) or those nongovernmental organisations which are close to the state ('Belaya Rus', Belarusian Republican Youth Union, Belarusian Public Association of Veterans).

The full text can be found at policy brief section of the web-site

05/03/2010

Source: European Exchange, Human Rights Centre 'Viasna', Belarusian Helsinki Committee

Europäischer Austausch
European Exchange

Top Investigator Arrested In Belarus

A top Belarusian investigator who worked on high-profile corruption cases has been arrested.

Svyatlana Baikova, an investigator in the Prosecutor-General's Office, was arrested by the Belarusian Committee for State Security, or KGB, on March 3, 2010.



Svyatlana Baikova

former KGB officer and customs official Anatol Hramovich.

The Belarusian Prosecutor-General's Office confirmed the arrest, but did not give any details.

At the time of her arrest, Baikova was engaged in probing corruption among high-ranking KGB personnel, including

She is also known for her active role in investigating a number of cases of corruption among police officers. In 2000, Baikova began investigating the disappearance of former Interior Minister Yury Zaharanka. She was taken off that case in 2002. Zaharanka's whereabouts are still unknown.

03/03/2010

Source: Radio Free Europe

'Telecommunication companies to provide the KGB and the Presidential Administration's Operational and Analytical Centre with permanent access to their databases containing information on their customers.'

Telecommunication Companies Required to Provide Authorities with Access to Their Databases

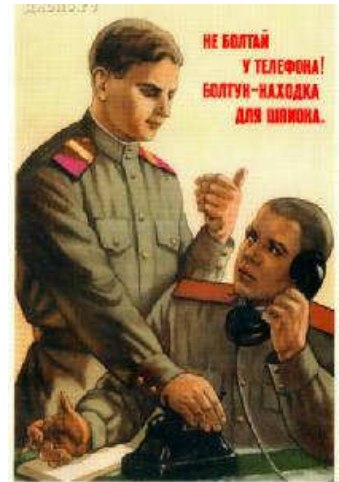
On 3 March 2010, Alyaksandr Lukashenka issued a presidential edict requiring telecommunication companies to provide the Committee for State Security (KGB) and the Presidential Administration's Operational and Analytical Centre (OAC) with permanent access to their databases on their customers.

In accordance with the edict, telecommunication companies will have to obtain equipment to secure such

access. They are required to bear the entire cost of buying, installing and maintaining such equipment. New telecommunication companies are required to notify the KGB and the OAC of their registration within a month's time and come up with a plan to introduce such equipment within three months after receiving an appropriate notice from the two agencies.

05/03/2010

Source: BelaPAN



A soviet poster warns of talking too much

Belarusian Parliament Refused to Recognize Independence of North Ossetia

Belarusian parliament refused to consider recognizing independence of North Ossetia.

According to Belarusian sources, voters of the district N 30 of Belarus applied with this request to the House of Representatives. They collected signatures and the initiative group was headed by candidate for MP Ihar Sluchak.

The initiative group introduced an official document into the Parliament and received the following reply: "given the fact that North Ossetian Republic-Alania is a unit of Russia, prerogative of changing its status belongs to Russia."

This response surprised Sluchak.

"On one hand, they recognize that the issue of the North Caucasus is a prerogative of Russia and on the other hand the question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is not considered to be a prerogative of Georgia. This is double standard" - Sluchak told "Belarusian partisans" publication.

But the Parliament of Belarus sent the initiative of this group to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sluchak hopes that the Foreign Office would be more constructive in this regard.



10/03/2010

Source: Expert Club

Belarus to Import Mineral Fertilizers at Sum of 205 mln USD

Belarus plans to import 212 thousand tons of reactant of nitrogenous fertilizers and 95 thousand tons of reactant of phosphatic fertilizers for the sum of 205 million USD that will be used in the spring sowing campaign of 2010, announced Vasil Paulousky, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food of Belarus, on February 17. Thus, the

country plans to increase imports of nitrogenous fertilizers by 3.5 times, and imports of phosphatic fertilizers will be doubles.

Paulousky explained that the level of provision with mineral fertilizers totals 39% of the required volumes.

According to Paulousky, the requirements in nitrogenous fertilizers were satisfied by 25%, phosphatic fertilizers - 28%, and potash fertilizers - 57%.

22/02/2010

Source: Agrimarket.info

Gazprom Gobbles up Minsk Transit Company

Russian energy giant Gazprom purchased a 12.5 percent-stake in a Belarusian gas transit company, raising its holdings in the company to 50 percent.

Through a \$625 million purchase Gazprom increased its holdings of the Beltransgaz to 50 percent, Russian state-run news agency RIA Novosti reports.

In 2007 Gazprom agreed to purchase 50 percent of the company shares in a series of 12.5 percent tranches.

Beltransgaz is the state operator of more than 4,000 miles of pipeline networks. The company is a partner in the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline that runs through the country. Moscow said building a second leg of the Yamal-Europe pipeline through Belarus would contribute to a diverse regional energy sector.

Gazprom and Beltransgaz in 2006 signed a deal that calls on Belarus to



pay for its gas at rates equal to European prices beginning in 2011.

Gazprom in June ordered Belarus to hand over \$244 million in gas debts or risk supply cuts. The dispute emerged over the differences between prices out-

lined in the 2006 contract and average market prices for gas.

24/02/2010

Source: UPI

Belarus to Invest Br7 Trillion in Energy Grid Modernization

This year Belarus will invest Br6.886-Br7.481 trillion in the modernization of the national energy grids, energy saving and promoting the use of local fuels. These measures are envisaged in the 2010 plan of action to the national comprehensive programme to modernise key production assets of the Belarusian energy system, promote energy saving and increase the share of local fuels till 2011. The action plan was approved by Resolution No. 224 of the Council of Ministers.

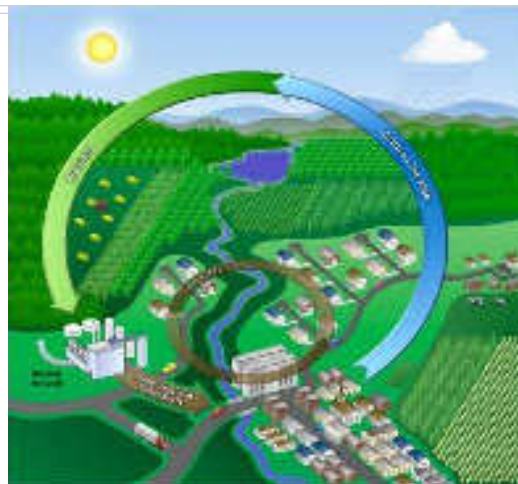
According to the document, Br1899.8 billion will be channelled into the upgrade of the key production assets including Br811.3 billion from the innovation fund of the Energy Ministry. Some Br4985.8 -Br5581.5 billion will be put into energy saving. Some Br145.76 billion of them will be the funds from the national budget set aside for the national and regional energy saving programs. Some Br24.129 billion will be invested in

the timber procurement and delivery infrastructure of the Forestry Ministry. Some 1.4 million tonnes of fuel equivalent will be saved as a result of the energy saving measures in 2010. The share of local fuels, secondary, non-conventional and renewable fuels is expected to increase to 20.5% in the boiler and furnace fuels consumption mix.

In 2009 the share of local fuels reached 20.1%, above the 19.4% target.

The action plan for 2010 meets the goals envisaged in the national comprehensive programme. Detailed completion schedules have been developed for all the energy facilities under reconstruction.

In 2010, the Energy Ministry plans to construct and upgrade 1,779 kilometres of electrical grid facilities and power



transmission lines, replace 140 kilometres of heat supply networks.

Apart from the abovementioned power generating facilities affiliated with the Belenerha, another 95.5MW generating facilities will be commissioned into operation in Belarus in 2010.

25/02/2010

Source: ISRIA

Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan Agreed upon Customs Code Text

The Commission of the Russian-Kazakh-Belarusian Customs Union has agreed upon the text of the Customs Code, Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov said.



The signatories to the Customs Union determined basic principles on which money is to be transferred on foreign payments a year ago, Shuvalov said. "We made our calculations based on the

exemptions that each country has, including up to 400 positions in Kazakhstan. Today we completed settling these principles, which are now stipulated by the Customs Union Commission's decisions," he said.

The finance ministries have been tasked with making the final calculations in order "to determine the share, and this share will be stipulated by an international agreement to be submitted to the chiefs of state and government," he said.

The parties also agreed upon the procedure for transferring the money to the

national bank accounts, Shuvalov said. "The national banks were involved in this work, and we believe this issue has been fully settled," he said.

The parties have also agreed on the work of expert groups drawing up international agreements on forming a common economic area, he said.

"This is a difficult and painstaking work. We should basically finish this work by the summer of 2010, as regards the conceptual basis of these agreements. The most important agreements should be adopted in 2010 and the rest in 2011. I would like to remind you that, in line with the instructions given by the presidents of the three countries, the common economic area should be set up by January 1, 2012," Shuvalov said.

02/03/2010

Source: Kyivpost

Iran, Belarus Sign Memorandum on Road Transportation Cooperation

Iran and Belarus signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to boost cooperation between the two countries in area of road transportation.

Iran's Minister of Road and Transportation Hamid Behbahani visited Bel-

arus at an invitation extended by his Belarusian counterpart. During their meeting, the two ministers underlined the necessity to implement agreements between Tehran and Minsk to expand international transit of goods and passengers. He added that the two sides

also agreed to extend cooperation in reopening the Dagestan route to facilitate Iranian trucks' access to Belarus.

02/03/2010

Source: FarsNews

Venezuela, Belarus Search for New Oil Reserves



State-run oil company Petroleos de Venezuela (Pdvsa), in association with a Belarusian company, is search-

ing for new fields for the production of hydrocarbons in an area of 1,930.5 square miles in the state of Apure, south-western Venezuela, Pdvsa reported in a statement.

The project is part of the agreements signed between Venezuela and Belarus, under which the Eastern European country provides "technical and technological support to Venezuela for energy and oil projects," AFP reported.

A group of Belarusian experts in drilling and surveying is analyzing the seismic data to demarcate the area and prepare the exploration of new reserves in this region.

The plan will provide 600 direct jobs and 1200 indirect jobs, Pdvsa said.

04/03/2010

Source: El Universal

Belarusian Oil-Processing Enterprises Offer to Decrease Rapeseed Prices

Belarusian producers of fat-and-oil products propose to lower prices for rapeseed oil in order to process the product for food aims.

The price should become lower in order to use rapeseed oil for food processing and bottling, declared Galina Kustinskaya, the director of OJSC Babruisk plant of vegetable oils, on March 3.

According to her, the differentiation of the oil prices for the further processing at biodiesel and for the food aims will allow increasing demand in the oil products on the domestic market.

According to data of the Belarusian State Food Concern Belgdzhazharchapram, in 2009, production volumes of vegetable oils in Belarus totalled nearly 138 thousand tonnes and in-

creased by 1.7 times compared to 2008 volumes. Rapeseed oil formed 99% of the general structure of vegetable oils.

In 2009, exports of Belarusian rapeseed oil totalled 81.5 thousand tonnes (up 3.8 times).

04/02/2010

Source: The Financial

Belarus Issues Five-Year Tax Amnesty

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on Tuesday approved a five-year tax amnesty to encourage the repatriation of funds from abroad and boost the economy, officials said.

Income tax in Belarus, a former Soviet republic lodged between Poland, Rus-

sia and Ukraine, is currently at around 12 percent.

The amnesty applies to Belarusian citizens and foreign residents.

Belarus announced a series of reforms last year to reduce the state's huge role in the economy in order to meet the con-

ditions of a 2.23-billion dollar (1.64-billion euro) loan from the International Monetary Fund.

09/02/2010

Source: Agrimarket.info

Belarus to Boost Gambling Industry

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has approved a new plan to develop the country's gambling industry in a bid to take advantage of Russian gaming restrictions, a Russian daily said on March 10.

The new plan, which was approved on March 9, includes creating a monitoring centre that will keep close track of casinos and other gaming venues across the country, RIA Novosti informs.

It is aimed at decentralizing the gambling industry in Belarus, and ensuring its financial transparency.

"We have every opportunity to gain a leading position in this sensitive sphere against a background of the changes in the Russian and Ukrainian legislation," Vremya Novostei quoted Lukashenka as saying.

He said Russia and Ukraine had been forced to strengthen the laws on casinos because they slipped out of gov-

ernment control and were divided up between different criminal groups, but Belarus would avoid this by keeping a watchful eye on gambling businesses.

"Everything will be fine here if those who are responsible for controlling this type of activity, civil servants, do not get mixed up in it thereby destroying and criminalizing it," Lukashenka said.

Many experts view the move, which could bring in visitors and money from its former Soviet neighbours, as part of efforts to drag Belarus out of economic slump.

"The gambling industry can and must become an additional source of building up the budget by means of taxes, and will help creating new jobs, and attract tourists and investment," the president said.



Russia in July 2009 ordered the closure of all gaming establishments except in four specially designated areas - in the Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad, south Siberia's Altai Territory, Primorye in the Far East, and in southern Russia - where infrastructure has yet to be developed to attract gamblers on the model of Las Vegas and Atlantic City in the United States.

Ukraine's parliament temporarily banned casinos in June 2009, after a fire broke out in a casino in Dnepropetrovsk, to the southeast of Kyiv, killing nine people and injuring 11. The Supreme Rada gave the government three months to draft a law on regulating the gaming business in Ukraine, but no action has been taken and the ban remains in effect.

10/02/2010

Source: The Financial

Salamieja Piłštynova



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

continued

**Salamieja
Turns Down a
Hungarian King
-to-be**

A young woman like Salamieja could never feel safe in the midst of the war. One day a local Pasha ordered her to cure a Hungarian aristocrat József Rákóczi, the duke of Transylvania, who came to the town of Vidin in March 1738. The young man was quite an important figure in the region. His father, Ferenc Rákóczi, was the leader of the Hungarian uprising against the Habsburgs in 1703-11 (today Hungarians consider him their national hero). At that time, his son József was a candidate for the Hungarian crown. He was backed by Yeghen Mehmet Pasha, the Great Vizier (head of the government) of the Ottoman Empire.

József Rákóczi tried to flirt with Salamieja, but without much success. The Hungarian crown candidate felt offended and accused the doctor of spying for Austria. "It was the time of bloody wars, and many innocent people accused of spying were sentenced to death", she explained in her journal. The woman realised that it was just about the time to hit the road. Without passport, she left Vidin. She took her daughter, servants, and Joseph Fortunat de Pichelstein, her "prisoner", along. However, soon Salamieja was arrested by Turks and narrowly escaped execution – as always, owing to her luck and skilful hands. The son of the Sultan's treasurer got sick. The young man's face and tongue got swollen so heavily, that he could barely breathe. Salamieja began to treat him, and in three days the treasurer's son could already open his eyes. Forty days have passed, and he was completely healthy. As a result, the doctor was pardoned.

New Husband

During a major battle for the city of Azov between the Turkish and the Russian army, several relatives of Salamieja's Turkish friends were captured by the Muscovites. Here it is important to mention that Salamieja calls the Russian Empire "Moscovia" rather than Russia. It was typical for her time, when the name "Ruś" was usually referred to the Eastern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, while the Russian Empire was called Moscovia.

Salamieja promised her friends to release their relatives (she already became proficient in that). She went to Russia across the present-day lands of Ukraine, Poland and Belarus. In the town of Bar (now in Ukraine) Salamieja decided to leave her unfortunate captive Joseph Fortunat de Pichelstein at the local Jesuit monastery, until his parents repaid the ransom. However, he seemed so mortified by the prospect of spending time with Jesuit brothers that he pleaded for a permission to become... Salamieja's husband!

The young widow figured that it would not be a bad solution after all, since her chances of getting married again were rather slim. So they married, and Salamieja even persuaded Radzivil, the Great Hetman of Lithuania, to give her husband a position of an officer.

However, the steep ascent up the career ladder made her freshly-baked husband a bit dizzy. "You are just a doctor, while I am a Lithuanian officer", he boasted to Salamieja. However, she did not pay much attention to Joseph's bragging. She even bought him all kinds of equipment a true officer from Lithuania required - from horses to pistols to signet rings and snuffboxes. Then, determined to pursue her quest of releasing captive Turkish friends, Salamieja left her daughter at the local Roman Catholic nunnery in the city of Nesviž (the unofficial capital of the Radzivil family). By the way, the girl could only speak Turk-

ish and understood no word of Polish. Salamieja entrusted to the husband all her possessions and left for St. Petersburg.

Fascinated with St. Petersburg

Salamieja became truly fascinated with the Russian capital. In her journal, she describes the drawbridges, broad avenues, and the numerous palaces of the Russian capital. "St. Petersburg is so beautiful and majestic! It stands on the Neva River. This city is more beautiful and attractive than Istanbul or Vienna. It is so neat, with its long streets, hundreds of stone buildings and palaces, all similar in size and so evenly built that they seem to form a monolith wall", she wrote.

"Salamieja had no idea why it worked. However, she repeated the same trick, and it worked – the brigadier's son came back to life."

In her journal Salamieja compliments Peter the Great, the Tsar, who had made a bold attempt to Europeanize Russia. It was him who had built the new Russian capital (it was his idea, which was implemented by conscripted serfs from all over Russia and also by Swedish prisoners of war). "There, where once swamps was, houses of stone and wood have been built. The roads are sand-tamped, and each mile is marked with five posts with signs in Russian, German, and Latin showing directions

and distance. There are many taverns with conveniences; everything is cheap, because one is not allowed to make prices higher than the fixed rates, which are put up on every door. Poor travellers can even get a free drink and a meal", describes Salamieja with excitement.

She also admires the smart way in which the city fathers kept St. Petersburg clean. "There is no mud or rubbish in St. Petersburg. If a poor peasant leaves the city, he must pay two kopecks; but if he takes litter or dung along, even a handful, than he doesn't have to pay anything. Upon entering the city, a peasant should bring a piece of wood or a stone;

Salamieja Piłštynova

otherwise he is charged two kopecks. The wood and stone is then in order to fix pavements. Bread, meat, fish, cheese, and butter – all this is very cheap here. It lacks vegetables, but there is a lot of freedom and safety for good people to walk around and to travel. People are hospitable and polite”.

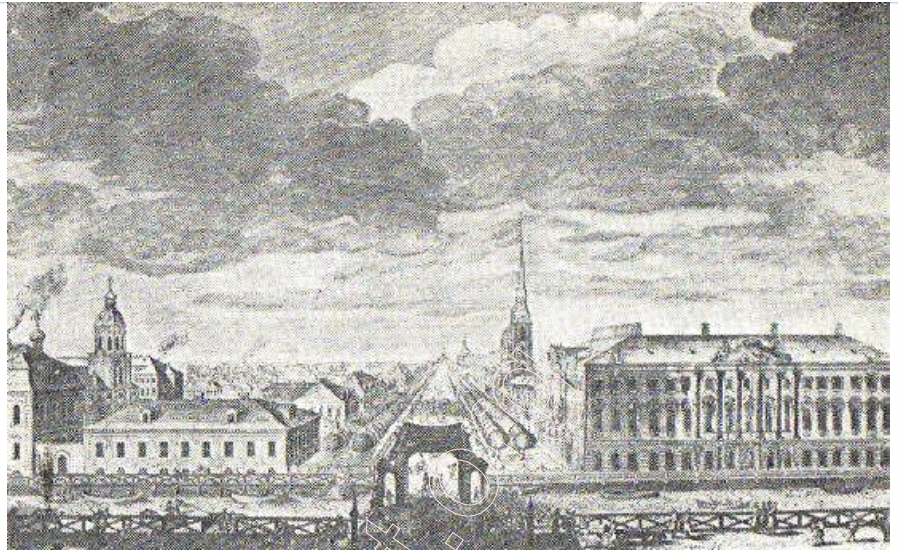
Raised from the Dead

It is difficult to tell whether this idyllic picture was realistic or Salamieja's impressions were influenced by the rich circles in which she moved. She had letters of recommendation to brigadier Semion Karaulov, famous Russian hero of many wars. His family resided in one of the city's palaces, where brigadier rented a flat.

The family of the officer could really use the services of Salamieja. His children kept dying right after their birth. When Salamieja entered their home, the brigadier's wife was just about to deliver a baby. As it had already happened before, the newborn son of Karaulov was suffering from asphyxia. When Salamieja saw it, a childhood memory instantly surfaced in her mind. Once she was present during the delivery by a 40-year-old woman in a village in her homeland. The woman's newborn son did not scream. The midwife, a simple uneducated woman, took the tab, which was used by peasants to leaven the dough, and covered the baby with it, while saying a prayer. She wasn't a half-way through with the prayer, as the child revived and began to scream. Salamieja had no idea why it worked. However, she repeated the same trick, and it worked – the brigadier's son came back to life.

Curing of the Shrew

After saving the master's son, Salamieja was surrounded by respect and care. However, her ultimate goal was to have an audience with the Empress Anna Ioannovna. It was the time, when the lazy and poorly educated Anna fully relied on her foreign consultants – mostly Baltic barons of



German origin, who run the whole country.

Karaulov advised Salamieja to seek the patronage of Duchess Maria Cherkasskaya, the wife of the only Russian-born minister in the Tsarina's government. The 60-year-old Duke Alexey Cherkassky had virtually no influence on the government's policy. However, he enjoyed respect of Anna.

Duchess Cherkasskaya was famous for her bad temper and habit of taunting her servants. Alas, Salamieja had nothing to do but to hope that the Duchess would be keen to have a foreign servant at her home. The wife of the brigadier Karaulov introduced Salamieja to the Duchess, who lived in an opulent palace on the Millionnaya Street (Millionaires' Street), in close vicinity of the Winter Palace, the Tsarina's residence.

Salamieja managed to find way to the Duchess' heart. For years the old Duchess had been suffering from vertigo and migraine. This prevented her from visiting the Winter Palace. The Tsarina, in her turn, began to suspect that the Duchess disrespected and ignored her Empress. All that complicated their relationship and, likely, was also the major cause of the bad temper of the Duchess.

For Salamieja, who, as we know, made blind people see and revived babies, it was a piece of cake to make the Duchess feel better. The vertigo disappeared;

headaches became less acute. The Duchess finally was able to pay a visit to the Tsarina's palace again, missing no chance to boast about her doctor in the company of the Empress.

The very same day Duchess Cherkasskaya went to see Empress Anna, a blind musician requested Salamieja for her services. He served at the court of Elizaveta, daughter of Peter the Great (some years later, after the death of Anna, she would seize the Emperor's throne). The musician asked Salamieja to treat his daughter, who had a cataract. "Fortunately, the girl had a light cataract, and I was able to remove it the very same day with my instruments", writes Salamieja. She doesn't write whether she attempted to treat her blind father. In fact, Salamieja is not at all too eager to speak about her failures in her journal. The cure of the musician's daughter was witnessed by lackeys from the Winter Palace, who soon spread the rumours around the court. Eventually, Salamieja was ordered to present herself before the Empress.

Medicine Manipulations

According to etiquette, Salamieja bowed three times before approaching the Empress. Anna let Salamieja kiss her hand and asked why she had come all the way to St. Petersburg. "I was in Turkey, in Istanbul, serving the Sultan's daughters and many other people – I am somewhat knowledgeable in medicine.

Salamieja Piłstynova

There I learned that Moscovia is ruled by a lady. I immediately wished that Lord would bless me with the happiness of seeing with my own eyes what I have heard about. I also hope that here, in St. Petersburg, all my needs would be provided for, with God's grace".

Flattered, the Tsarina ordered to provide Salamieja with lodgings in a room at the Winter Palace together with seven other court ladies. Adhering to the Russian tradition of adding a patronymic to one's name, the Empress called Salamieja "Solomonida Efimovna" (her father's name was Jaŭchim).

Salamieja soon found a lot of clients in the Russian capital. Women had much more confidence with her than with male doctors. This made Salamieja's male rivals envious. The personal doctor of the Empress prohibited the court pharmacy to provide medicine according to Salamieja's prescriptions. Salamieja asked one court lady, who had very ill eyes, to report the conflict to the Empress. As a result, the ban was lifted – however, on one condition: Salamieja's prescriptions should only be aimed at curing eye diseases. Nevertheless, Salamieja jumped at the opportunity and issued a prescription, which included medicines for all her clients, with all kinds of illnesses. The pharmacist became suspicious and showed the prescription to the personal doctor of the Empress. He became furious: "What kind of ophthalmologist is she, can one cure eyes with such drugs?" The word about it has reached the Empress, who demanded that Salamieja explained herself. So she did, openly telling the whole truth. This warmed the Tsarina's heart. After that Salamieja was allowed to prescribe any medicine she deemed necessary.

Standing up for Turks

Salamieja's small practice went very well. As someone who was born in

Belarus, she was familiar with both the Polish and Old Belarusian languages, which made it possible to understand Russian without problems. She also entertained the Empress with stories about her adventures in Turkey and about Turkish customs.

However, even in this regard she managed to cross someone's path. "What a deceiver you are, Solomonida Efimovna!" said the Empress one day. "You say that Turks are kind people, but look what brutes they are, how they mutilated poor Michajlovna!" She referred to Avdotja Michajlovna, an old woman, who served at the court of the Empress. She had spent 40 years as a captive in Istanbul and was released by ambassador Veshniakov. Avdotja claimed that Turks tortured her with red-hot iron grips and made her wear shoes with live coals inside.

Salamieja grew suspicious and asked Michajlovna to show her feet. "Let her present the scars on her body, at the places, where she was allegedly burned. As a child I had cut my finger. See, I still have the scar! You, Michajlovna, also should have scars. Or, perhaps - excuse me - you were a thief yourself or some other rogue; in that case even Christians would torture you, not just Turks. Thank God, I came to Turkey as a young girl of 14 years with my husband. Not a single Turk stole anything from me, nor beat me up, nor insulted, because I always avoided bad company. Moreover, if a Turk buys a horse or a cow, then he would feed them and take care of them. A captive has also been paid for – why would her master attempt to fry and mutilate her? That's not possible!"

The Tsarina agreed with Salamieja. The latter decided to make use of Anna's good mood and asked whether the Empress could give her two Turkish captives as a present. "Two? I would give you four!" Tsarina Anna answered, in a true nature of a wide Russian spirit. The next morning



Tsarina Anna Ioanovna

Salamieja discovered under her pillow the decree with an empress' seal.

Salamieja was told to visit minister Volynski, who would oversee her departure to Rzeczpospolita. The official invited Salamieja to his office and began to deliberate on how much money would suffice to bring Salamieja from St. Petersburg to Navahradak. "50 Roubles should be enough for you", he concluded.

Salamieja did not argue with him. Instead, she complained to Duke Cherkassky, who, in his turn, complained to the Empress. Anna received Salamieja the next day, and, laughing about the stingy minister, ordered to give the doctor a thousand Roubles, numerous silver goblets, valuable textiles and serviettes embroidered with the Empress's coat of arms. After that, Salamieja set out on a long journey...

Please read the final part of adventures by Salamieja Piłstynova in the next issue of **Belarus Headlines**.

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By Aleś Kudrytski for the ODB