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# Belarus Headlines

## EU and Belarus Share Knowledge



*Second session of the "Energy Club": Olga Stuzhinskaya (ODB, Brussels), Michael Voegele (EU Delegation to Ukraine and Belarus), Interpreter, Philipp Peck (University of Lund, Sweden). Minsk, 11 February 2010. Photo by the ODB.*



*A group of Belarusian experts on environment on a study-visit to Brussels. DG Environment, Brussels, 17 March 2010. Photo by the ODB.*

### "Energy Club": Prospective Strategies for Development Alternative Energy Sources



*Professor Phillip Peck*

The discussions of the second meeting of the "Energy Club", which took place in Minsk in March 2010, centred around strategies for the use of alternative energy in Europe and Belarus. The meeting was organized by the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Belgium) in partnership with the Belarussian Institute for Strategic Studies (Lithuania) and the Delegation of the European Union in Ukraine and Belarus, with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

#### Gas and oil are not promising for all

According to Professor Phillip Peck of the University of Lund (Sweden), classic terms of energy security are made up of several components: the diversification of sources, reliability of supplies and good infrastructure. Energy efficiency has also been acquiring increasing importance.

Unreliable supplies and rising energy prices are perceived to be the main problems in countries where traditional sources of energy are prevalent in the overall energy balance. In addition, the world's oil and gas reserves are dwindling. Unsurprisingly, Russia has already been undertaking attempts to explore the shelf of the Arctic Ocean.

The environmentalists raise alarm over the emissions of carbon dioxide

from the burning of natural gas. However, one may wonder whether more harm is being actually caused by plants that burn coal, resulting in greater levels of carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide emissions.

Natural gas was regarded as an excellent source of energy before the problem of climate change became apparent throughout the world, explains Philip Peck. Over the past 20 years the development of technology that uses peat and brown coal to produce substitute natural gas, as well as energy generation from agricultural and industrial waste, reached the level that allows to replace traditional energy sources.

Today, the EU and the USA place great emphasis on developing techniques to produce synthetic liquid fuels. However, these could only be regarded as a promising alternative when their price will be not more than \$60 per barrel. While at the moment there are only demonstration plants producing synthetic liquid fuels, it is expected that by 2015, a demonstration plant in Gothenburg will be converted into a commercial plant. Professor Peck believes that to produce gas Belarus could use its vast brown coal and peat resources. This has been a successful practice in Germany since the 1930s. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the GDR produced more than 300 million tons of brown coal, which was used for solving its energy problems, even though the USSR had always supplied it with cheap oil and natural gas.

Scientists believe in our ability to opt out of expensive oil in the future. According to Peck, this will lead to a thousand-fold increase of

*"Unreliable supplies and rising energy prices are perceived to the main problems in countries where traditional sources of energy are prevalent in the overall energy balance".*

biomass in the production of alternative sources.

#### Biomass as a potential

Scientists argue that the production of gas and synthetic liquid fuels from biomass will be a commonplace reality in Europe in 2020. This may well be the case, since biomass is a natural material derived from wood, waste, garbage or other living or recently living organisms. One therefore naturally thinks of vast quantities of fallen trees after hurricanes or the waste produced by plants.

Trees, however, may also be planted in areas not suitable for agricultural production. For example, in Poland there are about three million hectares of farmland with soil that contain high levels of heavy metals. These grounds may well be suitable for planting willow, which has shown potential for use in the phytoremediation of soil contaminated with *heavy metals*. It could then be used to produce electricity.

Using straw as biomass, according to Peck, allows obtaining very cheap electricity. And the European experience should be of interest to Belarus. At least half of the straw that remains on fields after harvesting of grain could be used to produce electricity. In Denmark, there are regions where 25% of consumed electricity is produced

from straw collected within a radius of less than one hundred kilometres from the station.

*"Belarus has an enormous potential to use biofuels for energy production."*

Phillip Peck believes that Belarus has an enormous potential to use biofuels for energy production. Although the major energy sources for the country are the traditional oil and gas, in the overall energy balance they constitute slightly more than 60%.



## “Energy Club”: Prospective Strategies for Development Alternative Energy Sources



*Rector Syamion Kudas*

### Private business is ready to participate

In Belarus there is no law regulating private business opportunities in the energy sector. Although the fact that the Belarusian business community and, in particular, small and medium-size enterprises are ready to follow the example of the Europeans.

A barrier that hinders the development of alternative energy is the lack of regulatory instruments for the system of economic incentives to attract private capital into this area. Meanwhile, the state today is not

able to finance all interesting projects for the country that aim to develop alternative energy and energy efficiency.

Such a development requires significant financial resources and new technologies, notes the rector of the Sakharov International State Environmental University, Syamion Kudas. According to him, Belarus, together with some countries in Africa, South America, Asia, does not have the means necessary to develop such projects and is in need of assistance and investment.

Kudas recognizes that the transition to alternative energy necessarily requires the will of the state. However, it is equally important to disseminate information about alternative energy among the masses and acquaint them with the potential benefits on their everyday life, and we should start with the students. Belarus' leading institution in the field of environment, the Sakharov College has developed various educational programmes on environment for students of different ages and profes-

sions.

### Choosing the best

Choosing and developing a programme of transition to alternative energy sources, Belarus should take into account local conditions and the reliability of existing techniques and technologies. For example, the use of solar energy, according to Phillip Peck, is inefficient in the Nordic countries.

Syamion Kudas believes that Belarus should not flatly reject the solar industry, as the technology for producing solar energy develops very fast. Today, it costs much less to install solar energy systems than 30 years ago, and it is going to be even cheaper in the future. However, as long as Russia delivers relatively cheap energy, developing solar power in Belarus could not be profitable, notes the rector.

17/03/2010

**By Alena Daneika** (*the translation from the “Novaya Europa” PDF-magazine a joint project by the [www.n-europe.eu](http://www.n-europe.eu) and the ODB. Translated by the ODB*)

## Belarusian Experts in Environment Visit Brussels

On March 15-18, on the invitation of the Office for a Democratic Belarus, a group of Belarusian experts in environ-



ment visited Brussels, Belgium. The delegation, which consisted of experts from the Hrodna regional Committee for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, the Sakharov International State Environmental University (Minsk), representatives of the Belarusian NGOs working on environmental issues as well as relevant business organisations and journalists, took part in a training course “EU Environmental Policy: Sharing Knowledge with Belarus”.

During the visit, the Belarusian delegates had the opportunity to meet key

experts on environmental issues and the region at the Directorate-General (DG) for Aid and Cooperation, DG Research and DG Environment of the European Commission.

The training course also included meetings with various non-profit groups, including the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Climate Alliance and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The coordinator of the Masters' Programme at the Free University of Brussels delivered a presentation about the University's graduate courses on Human Ecology and Sustainable Environment.

The topics covered in the programme of the training course included EU environmental policy, the programmes of IUCN and the Improving Forest Law and Governance in the European Neighbourhood Policy East Countries and Russia (ENPI-

FLEG), opportunities for research in the area of environment and climate change, the ways to get involved in EU projects at national level, and funding opportunities for implementing environmental projects.

During the meetings the Belarusian specialists stressed the importance of cross-border cooperation in the field of environment and spoke about some successful regional projects. They also voiced a need to support and develop independent media publications on environmental issues and encouraged the EU to initiate greater number of projects with Belarus on environmental protection and sustainable environment for the common benefit of the region.

19/03/2010

**Source: ODB**

## Polish-Belarusian Talks on Union of Poles Start

Polish-Belarusian consultations on the situation of the Union of Poles in Belarus begin Friday, after accusations that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime has persecuted the minority organisation. It was agreed to hold joint talks after Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski

met with Lukashenka in Ukraine this month. Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrzej Kremer is representing his country in Minsk at a meeting chaired by Belarusian ministers responsible for minority rights. The EU has warned Belarus that the harassment of the Union of Poles, which is

led by Andzelika Borys and has had its property confiscated and members arrested, must stop, otherwise Minsk risks losing financial aid packages and other diplomatic contacts.

19/03/2010

Source: Polskie Radio

## Europe's Parliamentarians Unite to Condemn Executions in Belarus

The heads of three European parliamentary bodies dealing with Belarus have firmly condemned the execution of Andrei Zhuk and Vasily Yuzepchuk which, according to human rights organisations, took place in Belarus last week in complete secrecy and which has yet to be confirmed officially by the authorities.



Europe, the European Parliament and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly correspondingly: "The Belarusian authorities carried out the executions ignoring all appeals for clemency and knowing that capital punishment represents an insurmountable obstacle for the development of political dialogue with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament," they said.

"The decision to execute Mr Zhuk and Mr Yuzepchuk was taken in blatant disregard of the fact that the UN Human Rights Committee was still considering individual

applications on their cases and had called on the Belarusian government to suspend the enforcement of the penalty. Politically, this decision is also at odds with the initiative of setting up an ad hoc group in the Belarusian parliament to consider the issue of capital punishment in Belarus," the parliamentarians added.

"In Europe, there is no place for the death penalty. The Belarusian authorities should be aware that there cannot be political dialogue without shared values," they concluded.

24/03/2010

Source: assembly.coe.int

## Members of European Parliament Would Like to Monitor Local Elections in Belarus



The European Parliament expects Belarus to invite its members as observers to the local elections, Kristian Wigenin, the chairman of the European Parliament's delegation to Euronest, told a news conference on March 24. MEPs would like to observe how the recently passed amendments to the election laws would be implemented and if there are real

positive breakthroughs in this field.

Although the European Parliament usually monitors the presidential and parliamentary elections, an invitation from Belarus to the local polls would be a positive sign. For instance, last week a decision was taken to form a delegation of observers for the local polls in Georgia, the MEP said. Kristian Wigenin noted that the local elections would become one of the most important indicators of Belarus' readiness to move forward. The presence of Belarusian MPs in Brussels will depend on that.

Foreign diplomats could also monitor the local polls. "I hope that as we were told the foreign diplomats will be al-

lowed to observe the local elections and they could prepare a report for us", Wigenin said.

The head of the Central Election Commission Lidziya Yarmishyna said that only foreign diplomats would be able to observe the local election in Belarus. She also mentioned that there was no decision to invite representatives of other international bodies or organisations. According to Yarmishyna, they can only be invited as experts and not observers.

24-25/03/2010

Source: ERB, ODB

## Supreme Court's Ruling Deprives Independent Journalists of Protection in Run-Up Election



*BAJ director Zhanna Litvina near the Supreme Court*

The Belarusian Supreme Court has upheld a government order that will obstruct the work of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the country's most prominent press freedom and media support organization. The Committee to Protect Journalists denounced the ruling, which was handed down Monday.

The court backed a directive issued in January by the Ministry of Justice that orders the association, known as BAJ, to halt legal assistance work on behalf of local journalists. It also ordered BAJ to revise language on its Web site, to revoke its membership cards, and to halt the issuance of similar cards.

BAJ has one month to meet the conditions of the order or face a six-month suspension. It faces permanent closure if it ultimately fails to comply, according to local press reports and CPJ interviews. BAJ will appeal the ruling to the court's chairman, the group's director, Zhanna Litvina, told CPJ.

The Ministry of Justice told BAJ on January 13 that its membership cards, which contain the word "Press," would allow "the unwarranted appropriation by members of the said organization of the rights of journalists

who work for mass media," BAJ reported on its Web site. Journalists, particularly freelancers, occasionally use BAJ cards to identify themselves as members of the press. The order also said that the organization's Legal Centre

for Media Protection, which provides journalists with pro bono legal support, does not comply with BAJ's "stated mandate." The ministry ordered BAJ to revise the goals spelled out on its Web site to conform precisely to the group's charter, BAJ reported. The organization appealed the ministry's order in February, leading to Monday's ruling.

Andrei Bastunets, BAJ's deputy director and a lawyer by training, told reporters that the Ministry of Justice was unable in court to specify any Belarusian law that the association had violated. Bastunets said the ruling sets a dangerous precedent in effectively allowing the government to define who in Belarus is a journalist and who is not.

"This ruling is a serious blow to press freedom in Belarus and must be overturned," CPJ Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator Nina Ognianova said. "The government cannot point to a single law that the Belarusian Association of Journalists has broken."

Founded in 1995, BAJ has been recognized domestically and internationally for its work. The group has more than 1,000 members, 85 percent of whom work for independent media outlets. BAJ documents and publicizes press freedom violations; organizes press conferences and discussions on issues facing Belarusian journalists; monitors

election coverage; provides free legal support for journalists in trouble; and maintains an investigative reporting centre. In 2004, BAJ received the prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought from the European Parliament.

Earlier this month, the police search the offices of the "Narodnaya volya" newspaper in Minsk.

Police in Minsk searched the offices and apartments of journalists, activists, and politicians and allegedly struck a staffer at one NGO during the course of the raids on March 16, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

Opposition activists say the searches are part of ongoing political pressure on the opposition and independent media.

Computers, compact discs, and USB flash drives were confiscated from the offices of the independent newspaper "Narodnaya volya" (People's Will) and the nongovernmental organization Charter 97.

Charter 97 press secretary and web editor Natalya Radzina told RFE/RL that her eye swelled up after she was hit by one of the policemen. She added that she would file a legal complaint against the officer.

Police also searched the apartment of European Belarus movement leader Andrey Sannikau and his wife, Irina Khalip, who is a correspondent for the Moscow-based weekly "Novaya gazeta."

The apartment of Maryna Koktysh -- the deputy editor in chief of "Narodnaya volya" -- was also searched.

Police confiscated their computers, explaining that the searches were conducted as part of an investigation into a libel case filed by Homel oblast authorities.

16-23/03/2010

Source: CPJ, Radio Free Europe



## Chinese Vice President Visits Belarus

On March 23, Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping arrived in Belarus for an official visit at the invitation of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Xi Jinping held talks with the Belarusian authorities and members of Parliament. The sides discussed urgent issues of trade, economic, investment and banking cooperation. More than ten intergovernmental and interbank documents together with the contracts between the major companies of the two countries were signed after the talks.

A Chinese delegation consisted of more than 50 representatives of twenty major Chinese corporations. The businessmen of the two countries held a separate meeting. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to Belarus Lu Guicheng, Belarusian Ambassador to China Anatol Tozik, and Chairman of the State Control Committee of Belarus Zyanon Lomat' also took part in this meeting.

Belarus and China have confirmed their readiness to advance political contacts.

### Background info

Since China and Belarus established diplomatic ties on 2 January 1992, bilateral friendly cooperation has grown steadily in various areas, with mutual political trust enhanced through frequent exchanges of high-level visits.

In December 2005, Belarusian President Lukashenka paid an official visit to China at the invitation of Chinese President Hu Jintao. During the visit, the two leaders issued a joint statement pledging to promote bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in various fields. They also signed several documents on bilateral cooperation.

In November 2007, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao paid an official visit to Belarus,

*'Beijing's aid package to Belarus includes \$1 billion credit on easy terms, commercial contracts worth \$3.4 billion, and a \$9 million cash grant, which is not re-payable.'*

**Source: RTT News**

**26/03/2010**

during which the two leaders issued a joint communique pledging further efforts to promote bilateral cooperation. In August 2008, Hu met with Lukashenka in Beijing during the Olympic Games. The two leaders hailed the sincere friendship between the two countries and exchanged views and reached consensus on bilateral relations.

By the end of 2008, China and Belarus have signed some 70 bilateral cooperation documents, covering political issues, economic and trade cooperation, science and technology, education, culture, military affairs and other fields.

24-26/03/2010

**Source: China Daily, People Daily, BelTA, ODB**

## Belarus Opposition Rallies Despite Police Blocks



Some 2,000 opposition activists in Belarus held a protest rally Thursday despite police blocks that authorities explained were part of security measures against an alleged bomb threat. Some two dozen activists were arrested while making their way to the Belarusian capital for the protest, said Valyantsin Stefanovich of the Vyasna opposition movement. Police could not immediately be reached for comment.

In downtown Minsk, hundreds of club-wielding police blocked the Independence Avenue as the demonstrators gathered to protest the policies of authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka — who has dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by the United States and some European countries for his government's efforts to quash opposition groups and independent media.

Police spokesman Alyaksandr Lastousky told the protesters that the blocks were necessary after foreigners had arrived in Belarus to plant a bomb on Independence Avenue. He gave no further details, saying only that "Our holy duty is to protect all." Authorities had sanctioned the rally in a remote park, but the activists defied a ban to march in central Minsk. "Freedom is no holiday for Belarusian

authorities," said Alyaksey Yanukevich, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front. "Clubs, intimidation and riot police are the tools the government uses to communicate with us." Some protesters draped European Union flags over their heads. "Belarus should get back to Europe; its farewell to its Communist past is taking too long," said Irina Gulevich, a 19-year-old university student. March 25 has long been a traditional day of opposition demonstration, marking what they call Freedom Day — the anniversary of the 1918 declaration of the first, short-lived independent Belarusian state.

26/03/2010

**Source: The Associated Press**

### Venezuela to Export 80,000 Barrels of Oil per Day to Belarus

Venezuela in May will start selling 80,000 barrels of oil a day to Belarus, the South American nation's president, Hugo Chavez, announced Monday.

Venezuela's leader made the announcement following a meeting in Caracas with Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka, who was in town to sign a variety of bilateral accords.

In a statement, Chavez said the agreement to supply Belarus with petroleum will be signed "in the coming hours."

According to the statement, Luka-

shenka said the plan is for the two countries to also refine Venezuelan oil together and eventually sell oil products throughout Europe.

Belarus has no hydrocarbon resources of its own, and depends on Russia for much of its energy supplies. It aims to diversify its energy imports to get products from Venezuela and elsewhere. Venezuela, meanwhile, has been looking to reduce its dependence on the U.S., the main buyer of Venezuelan crude, by increasing its sales to other nations.



*This scheme reflects a possible way of oil delivery from Venezuela to Belarus. The distance is approximately 10 thousand kilometers.*

15/03/2010

Source: The Wall Street Journal

### Putin offers Belarus Zero Oil Import Duties

On March 16, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin offered to abolish import duties on Russian oil for neighbouring Belarus starting in 2012. Putin arrived in Brest, on the Belarus-Polish border, for discussions with the Belarusian prime minister on creating a single economic zone.

Belarus, a former Soviet republic, receives 20 million tons of oil from Russia, two thirds of which it refines and ships to the West in a cargo worth more than a third of all export revenues. Belarus pays full import duties on the Russian oil it exports but none on the oil it consumes. Putin said Tuesday that all tariffs would be waived if Belarus agreed to enter a single economic zone.

"With the creating of the single economic space all internal duties should be removed," Putin said, adding the zone should come into effect January 1, 2012.

Analysts say Putin wants favours from Belarus in return, such as recognition of the Moscow-friendly breakaway provinces of Georgia. Putin lamented Belarus' caution over the thorny issue, saying he had hoped Belarus would "quickly, energetically and dramatically support Russia ... but this is not

happening."

In what some observers have called a snub to Putin, Belarus' authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was in Caracas those days to secure oil deals with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

"Putin is trying to buy Belarus' loyalty," said Alyaksandr Klaskousky, a political analyst. "But Minsk is wary that the Kremlin is being greedy and won't pay up." Minsk is the capital of Belarus. Russia is on a drive to reassert its Soviet-era influence in the former satellite states, and some observers say Putin is trying to keep them on a short leash by using the country's formidable energy resources.

"Putin ... harbours imperial ambitions," said another analyst, Yaraslau Raman-chuk. "And Minsk is trying to make Russia pay a pretty penny for these ambitions."



Putin also called for a single currency to be adopted between the two nations by 2012.

Lukashenka has been accused of playing Russia and the West off each other to secure loans and political support from both.

Venezuela, also a strong Russian ally, plans to sell 80,000 barrels of heavy crude a day to Belarus, President Hugo Chavez said.

Russia has its own considerable economic interests in Venezuela.

16/03/2010

Source: The Associated Press

## Stadler Rail Will Deliver Ten Electric Multiple Units for Belarus Railway

Swiss manufacturer Stadler Rail won a 60 million euro contract to deliver ten electric multiple units for Belarus Railway. Delivery of four-carriage trains will start in December this year and continue until the middle 2012. The trains are part of



train network in the region of the Bela-

rusian capital Minsk. The other four FLIRT (Fast Light Innovative Regional Train) Stadler's model family. The trains will be built in two versions: six FLIRTs will serve the traditional local

train network in the region of the Belarusian capital Minsk. The other four FLIRTs are intended for intercity travel between the larger towns. These will have a more comfortable, higher level interior, in view of the longer journey times. The trains in Belarus will operate on a broad-gauge track of 1,524 millimetres, and have a larger clearance.

19/03/2010

Source: publicbg

## Belarus issues January-February Steel Production Results

According to the data released by Belarus' National Statistical Committee, in January-February this year the country registered a 2.7 percent decrease year on year in its crude steel production to 432,100 metric tons, and a 4.4 percent drop in its finished steel product output to 412,000 metric tons.

Meanwhile, in the first two months of 2010 Belarus' outputs of steel pipe and steel cord registered increases of 57.9 and 14.1 percent year on year respectively to 23,700 and 16,200 metric tons. On the other hand, the country's wire rod production went down by 32 percent to 10,000 metric

tons compared to January-February 2009.

As of March 1 this year, Belarus' steel-makers had accumulated 6,100 metric tons of steel pipes in their warehouses, a figure which equals 59.3 percent of their average monthly pipe production volume, and 10,600 metric tons of finished steel products, which equals to 5.1 percent of their average monthly finished steel product output. The total value of steel products accumulated in the warehouses of local steelmakers as of March 1 this year amounted to Belarus Ruble 85 billion (approx. \$28.67 million).

22/03/2010

Source: Steel Orbis



## Belarus, Russia Agree on Gas Transit to Russian Consumers

Russia's Federal Grid Company and Belarus' Belenerha have signed an agreement to ensure Russian gas transit through the territory of Belarus to consumers in the Kaliningrad, Pskov and Bryansk regions. According to the Russian company's press office, this will allow the implementation of the

fuel and energy balance of the Customs Union, which was approved by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart Syarhei Sidorskiy. It will also allow both sides to continue successful long-term cooperation in the future. In January of this year, Inter RAO UES and Belenerha signed

an agreement in Moscow on energy supplies to Belarus and the terms of its transit to the Baltic States and the Kaliningrad region.

22/03/2010

Source: Rosbusiness consulting

## Russian Sberbank Promises Huge Loans to Belarus

Sberbank, Russian biggest lender, promised hundreds of million dollars worth of loans to Belarusian companies at a time when Russia's loan market is stagnating.

The money will come in handy for Belarus, whose economy has been badly hit as demand deteriorates for its goods in Russia and Europe, its chief export markets.

State-controlled Sberbank has recently acquired BPS bank from the Belarus government and may play a major role in Minsk's plans for debt issuance this year. **Continued on p. 9**



## Russian Sberbank Promises Huge Loans to Belarus (continued)

"Sberbank has significant resources of free liquidity ... We will aim at providing several hundred million dollars worth of loans to several major Belarusian companies," Sberbank's head German Gref said during a visit to Minsk on Wednesday. Sberbank accounts for

roughly a quarter of the total banking assets in Russia and expects its loan portfolio to grow by around 10 percent in 2010 as crisis-hit Russian companies are unwilling to borrow amid global economic uncertainty.

Last year a pool of Russian banks including Sberbank, VEB and Alfa Bank provided a 6 billion roubles (\$203 million) to Belarus.

24/03/2010

Source: Reuters

## Belarus Sues Russia over Oil Duty

Belarus has filed a lawsuit against Russia over oil export fees, the Belarusian justice ministry said on Thursday. The suit was filed to an official Commonwealth of Independent States court.

Russia allowed Belarus to import oil

last year at only 35.6 percent of its crude export tariff.

But in January the two countries signed a new supply deal resolving a month-long row that had threatened to disrupt Russian oil flows to European Union

members Germany and Poland. Under the new agreement, Belarus will have to pay full export duties for much of the oil it receives from Russia.

25/03/2010

Source: Reuters

## China to Lend \$1 Billion to Belarus

China will lend Belarus more than \$1 billion for financing cooperation projects, according to Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping.

An additional amount of around \$8.8 million will be given in non-repayable financial aid, Xi said Wednesday during his visit to Minsk.

'The Chinese side will provide Belarus with \$1 billion in loan on favourable



terms, which will be used to finance cooperation projects, agreed by the two states,' he said.

'The Chinese government has also resolved to provide

Belarus with 60 million yuan (\$8.8 million) in non-repayable aid,' the Chinese vice president said.

Xi said the two states should boost scientific and military cooperation.

Belarus and China are set to strike commercial deals worth \$3.4 billion, and talks are on for more joint projects in energy, telecommunications and car production.

The two governments have already signed a deal to boost bilateral trade and economic cooperation during the Chinese vice president's visit.

25/03/2010

Source: RIA Novosti

## Belarus Hires Bank for Debut Eurobond Sale

Belarus hired BNP Paribas SA, Deutsche Bank AG, Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc and OAO Sberbank for a debut Eurobond offering this year as the country seeks to bolster its finances after export revenue tumbled.

"Today work officially began" on the debt sale, Pavel Ladzik, an aide to the former Soviet republic's Finance Minister, said by phone from Minsk. The offering and its terms "will be subject

to market conditions," he said.

Belarus, a country of 10 million people with an economy the size of Sudan's, is rated B1, four levels below investment grade, by Moody's Investors Service and an equivalent B+ by Standard & Poor's, the same level as Bosnia & Herzegovina and Uganda. Belarus joins its biggest trading partner, Russia, in seeking to tap international debt markets this year.



26/03/2010

Source: Bloomberg

## Salamieja Piłštynova



Narva Castle XVIII century

Belarus-born adventuress as Dr. House of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

Continued from issue LII

## Besieged by Robbers

The route of Salamieja's journey went through Estonia which, at that time, was under the Russian Empire. In a fortress of Narva she picked up two captured Turks, and another two in Revel (now Tallinn, the capital of Estonia). The commandant of the Revel fortress showed unusual hospitality. He did not allow Salamieja to leave under the pretext that the frost was too bitter to travel. In the meantime, he and his wife frequented other respectable homes in Revel, always taking Salamieja along on their visits. A young foreign doctor woman became an invaluable source of entertainment for Revel's upper circles.

Finally, Salamieja managed to escape the friendly embrace of Revel's commandant. She was provided with a convoy of seven Russian soldiers. They came in very handy on the way from Revel to Riga (now the capital of Latvia). One night Salamieja with her convoy, servants and the captured Turks decided to spend a night in an Estonian tavern. The soldiers chucked out all the visitors from the tavern, except of one, who seemed to be totally drunk and quietly slept in a corner.

When the lights were extinguished and everyone went off to bed, an old woman working at the tavern quietly woke Salamieja up. She told the doc-

tor that she was born in Vilnia (Vilnius) and recognized Salamieja as a person from her native land when she spoke to her servants. The woman told Salamieja that the doctor and her company were in a deadly danger.

Not a single important visitor had ever left this tavern alive. It was the way the master of the tavern and his accomplices treated their guests — they let them drink, eat, and fall asleep; then they robbed and murdered them. The "drunkard" was indeed a sober robber, who waited for a handy moment to open the doors to his people.

Salamieja thanked the kind woman and woke her people up. They tied up the tavern-keeper and the "drunken" watchman. They made it clear to the master of the tavern that if anything bad happened, his family should expect no mercy.

At midnight, when the expected signal did not come, the bandits approached the tavern in the darkness. Salamieja and her people drew the blinds so that it would be impossible to see from the outside how many people were inside and what they were doing. The captured Turks began to make a terrible rattling and noise in their native tongue in order to create an illusion that there were many of them in the house. However, this did not help. The robbers began to dismantle the gates. The Russian soldiers managed to shoot three of them. Benedykt, Salamieja's servant, was beating the robbers with a long pole, sitting atop the fence. The siege promised to be long and who knows how it would have ended if a rich Russian aristocrat did not happen to ride by with his cortege. His servants chased away the robbers.

## Visiting Husband's Family

When Salamieja reached her homeland an unpleasant surprise expected her. Rzeczpospolita signed a peace treaty with Turkey. Hetman Radzivil did not allow Salamieja to go to Turkey; and, the ex-captured Turks were set free and left the country without returning the ransom to Salamieja. To make everything even worse, Radzivil sent Salamieja's husband Joseph Fortunat de Pichelstein to serve at a faraway village of Lachva near the city of Brest (now in western Belarus). Salamieja could not imagine spending years in

such a god-forsaken hole. She left her daughter Kanstancyja and all her possessions and, despite being pregnant, set out on a journey to Austria in order to visit her husband's family and claim the long-expected ransom for Joseph.

The family of Joseph lived in the town of Kamna Gorica in Western Slovenia, which was under the rule of Habsburg dynasty. Joseph came from the family of miners. For many generations his an-

cestors mined iron ore, for which they were even rewarded with an aristocratic title. Joseph had three brothers and four sisters, all of them held respectable positions in society. Joseph was the only child who disappointed his parents. He never obeyed them and wasted a lot of their money. He decided to become a soldier in the Austrian army without their consent. Perhaps, that was the reason why the father of Joseph paid Salamieja only one third of what she had originally spent in order to ransom him.

## No Fun in Vienna

Salamieja spent a month and a half in Kamna Gorica and then visited Vienna. The city disappointed Salamieja.

*"The captured Turks began to make a terrible rattling and noise in their native tongue in order to create an illusion that there were many of them in the house. However, this did not help. The robbers began to dismantle the gates."*

## Salamieja Piłštynova

It was nothing like St. Petersburg. “Vienna, the city where the Christian Emperor lives, is like Istanbul. Here one sees a majestic monastery and a poor shack of an artisan or a teacher nearby; there is an old house near a brand-new palace”.

Salamieja took up her residence in a hotel and filed an official application in order to receive Joseph’s military service payments and get back the ransom she had paid for him. Eventually, Salamieja was received by the Emperor Karl VI. The Emperor assured Salamieja that her request will be satisfied. However, nothing happened. Salamieja had an audience with Empress Elizabeth, who gave Salamieja five golden ducats, even though she had paid 60 times more for him.

Salamieja was running out of money. She complained about Austrians’ stinginess and lack of hospitality. “Oh, here it is nothing like in Russia! No one invites me to dinner. Germans have no such tradition as Poles or Russians, who not only drink to a person but always treat this person to a cup. It is nothing like that in Germany. ‘Your health, my dear lady!’ says a German and drinks to my health, without treating me to a cup. In such moments I feel like I am bathing in boiling water!”

A Turkish diplomatic mission came to Vienna and settled close to the hotel where Salamieja lived. She offered her medical help to the mission. The Turkish ambassador was happy to hire Salamieja, because his previous Austrian doctor could not understand Turkish and had to use an interpreter. Vienna aristocrats noticed that Salamieja was popular at the Turkish mission and also began to turn to her for medical advice.

### One Woman, Two Pistols

Having given birth to her son Franciśak in Vienna, Salamieja finally saved enough money to return home. However, everything was spoilt by the news of her husband’s misbehaviour

in her absence. She tried to let bygones be bygones, but it did not work. Despite of being pregnant again, Salamieja decided to leave Joseph.

She went to Bulgaria in order to search for the four Turkish captives who still owed her their ransoms. She soon found them. Two of them, after some bargaining, agreed to pay the money back; the other two, however, argued that they owed nothing to Salamieja. As a result, she sued them at a Turkish court.

During the hearing Salamieja produced an order from Sultan which supported her claim. After that, the first of the ex-captives immediately agreed to pay the money, while the second one threatened Salamieja with a savage reprisal. Salamieja answered by taking a couple of loaded pistols from her pockets. “I have enough gunpowder even for your servants”, she said. “Give me what belongs to me, and then let God decide what happens next”.

### On the Way to Jerusalem

Having saved some money, Salamieja moved to a Ukrainian town Kamenets Podolski, and brought all her children together. It seemed like she finally got settled in life. However, everything went wrong again. The commandant of the fortress of Kamenets Podolski had borrowed a large sum of money from her on the security of table silver, horses and other valuables. However, when Salamieja wanted to have her money back, the commandant not only refused to return it, but also demanded that she returned him his possessions. Salamieja refused. The commandant ordered to put her under house arrest.

Salamieja could not receive a passport to leave the town. In this dramatic moment Joseph de Pichelstein abandoned his wife. The commandant realised that Salamieja remained without her last protection and ordered to send the doctor to the town of Bila Cerkva in a life-long exile. Nevertheless, Salamieja managed to find refuge at a local Dominican nunnery. In 1743, she dressed in somebody else’s clothes and left the town. “I remained such an orphan,

without any help, without money! This is how my Motherland has treated me!” wrote Salamieja about Rzeczpospolita.

Eventually, she reached Warsaw. There she persuaded Crown Hetman Potocki, commander of the military forces of Polish Kingdom, to make the commandant return her the money.

After various adventures and misfortunes, Salamieja returned to Istanbul. Her ultimate plan was to visit Jerusalem, the city she had heard a lot about, but never been to. This is where she interrupts her journal. We do not know, whether Salamieja had reached Jerusalem. However, considering her previous experiences, there is a very good chance she actually had.

### Open Mind

The journal of Salamieja Piłštynova shows her as a very broad-minded and independent person. While it was commonplace in Rzeczpospolita to ridicule Russians and Turks as barbarians, she flattered the generosity and spirit of these peoples. At the same time, she scorned at the “golden freedoms” of Rzeczpospolitan aristocracy. In this sense, she was not devoid of political foresight. The aristocratic anarchy soon lamed Rzeczpospolita so that it could no longer resist foreign threats and was divided in three pieces between Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The autocratic regime of tsarist Russia was obviously appealing to Salamieja. She fancied the order in St. Petersburg, which was installed by the iron hand of Peter the Great. If Salamieja could visit her native Belarusian lands today, there is a good chance that she would have liked its authoritarian regime as well. Streets are clean, street crime is low. However, her opinion could be reversed by the acquaintance with the Belarusian health system: doctors besieged by demanding patients and making ends meet on their pitiful wages.

Another peculiarity of Salamieja’s writing, which gave her journal almost a journalistic quality, is the fact that she supported the information by naming



## Salamieja Piłštnova

her sources. If one attempts to verify them, the sources usually prove correct. Her descriptions of daily life in Russia, Turkey and other countries are picturesque and precise. All this gives the stories of Salamieja credibility and value.

Unlike Casanova and other younger colleagues of hers in the field of adventure, Salamieja entered palaces not through the main gates, but through back doors. Salameja was of a modest descent, but managed to work her way into the upper circles with disarming ease. She not only described the habits and whims of aristocracy, but also the daily life and struggles of common folk: servants, tavern owners, market tenants, etc. This makes her book especially exciting to read.

### Genius or Fraud?

Salamieja was also a keen learner. She absorbed new information as a sponge. In her journal she even voiced her desire to publish the medical knowledge she had accumulated with time in a separate book. Unfortunately, this manuscript, if at all existent, has not been found yet. However, what happens if one attempts to analyse Salamieja's medical notes from today's point of view? What if she exaggerated her successes?

For instance, Salamieja often writes that she has been approached by blind people – and managed to cure them. If today's medicine is far from being able to tackle blindness, how could a sole amateur doctor make people see almost three centuries ago? Or, how could she cure cataracts, if today they are treated by surgery, which involves implanting artificial crystalline lenses?

The author of this article described the cases of Salameja's practice to an ophthalmologist working at a major clinic in Minsk and was told that Salamieja may have been quite honest in her journal. First, we do not know exactly what she understood and described as blindness. In earlier ages "blind" could also be used to describe

a person with seeing disorder. Salamieja described several cases in which she successfully treated blind people whose eyes were red and swollen. It is therefore possible that these people simply had cornea inflammation. In those times hygiene was poor. It was enough simply to touch one's eyes with dirty hands, scratch or slightly hurt them in order to get a severe inflammation. Such inflammations could also be caused by flu or other diseases. If one was able to cure the illness, which had a side effect on the eyes, the person could become able to see.

Another case of "blindness" may be thrombosis of retina, when blood is not able to reach the eye through the vessels normally. If one has a simple medicine which improves blood circulation, it is well possible that the eyesight may return or improve.

What about cataract? A cataract is a clouding that develops in the crystalline lens of the eye or in its envelope, varying in degree from slight to complete opacity and obstructing the passage of light. Today it is cured by implanting an artificial intraocular lens.

"Fortunately, the girl had a light cataract, and I was able to remove it the same day with my instruments," describes Salameja a case from her practice. How could she treat cataract in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with her primitive instruments? Hard to believe but that was quite possible. In fact, early cataract surgery was developed long before Salameja by an Indian surgeon, Sushruta (6th century B.C.). The Indian tradition of cataract surgery was performed with a special tool called the Jabamukhi Salaka, a curved needle used to loosen the eye lens and push the cataract clouding out of the field of vision. The eye would later be soaked with warm butter and then bandaged. Greek physicians and philosophers left records about their travels to India where these surgeries were performed on them. The removal of cataract by surgery was also introduced into China from India.

The first references to cataract and its treatment in Ancient Rome are found in 29 A.D. in "De Medicinæ", the work of the Latin encyclopedist Aulus Cornelius Celsus. The Romans were pioneers in the health arena—particularly in the area of eye care.

The Iraqi ophthalmologist Ammar ibn Ali of Mosul performed the first extraction of cataracts through suction. He invented a hollow metallic syringe hypodermic needle, which he applied through the sclerotic and extracted the cataracts using suction. In his "Choice of Eye Diseases", written in ca. 1000, he wrote of his invention of the hypodermic needle and how he discovered the technique of cataract extraction while experimenting with it on a patient.

It is, therefore, possible that Salamieja performed simple cataract surgeries on her own. According to her journal, she had so few medical failures, that she may be awarded the title of Dr. House of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Or is it simply because she preferred not to write about her fiascos?

### Conclusion

The journal of Salamieja was written in Istanbul in 1760. Its first publication took place only two centuries later, in 1957. Her book is particularly impressive since it was written by a woman in the times when women had barely any rights in Europe, let alone the Near East.

Today, when Belarusfilm- Belarus' national film production company – struggles with lack of creative ideas, and Belarusian TV channels are parrotting (and pirating) western sitcoms, the book by Salamieja Piłštnova could provide fruitful material for a movie or TV series. However, there is one major hurdle. What should one do in order to inspire Belarusian producers for a library visit?

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By Aleś Kudrytski for the ODB