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Lidziya Yarmoshina:
European electorate have much to learn from the Belarusian voters

Lukashenka says
Belarus no longer planning to borrow from the West

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Belarus Headlines



Belarusian opposition marked the 24th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster by organising a march in Minsk. Minsk, 26 April 2010. Photo by Radio Liberty



Chairwoman of the Central Election Commission Lidziya Yarmoshyna announces preliminary results of the local elections. Minsk, 26 April 2010. Photo by bymedia.net

Belarus Votes in Local Election

Preliminary results

On Sunday, 25 of April, Belarusian voters went to the polls to elect members of local councils. Although 21,303 seats on local councils were contested, there were only an estimated 365 opposition candidates competing against the pro-government candidates. Dozens of opposition candidates withdrew from the elections after claiming that the authorities were obstructing their campaigns. Altogether, 25,035 candidates were registered to campaign.

According to the information from the Central Election Commission (CEC), as many as 79,1 % of voters took part in the election. The CEC chairperson, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, commenting on such high turnout at the polling stations, said that the European electorate had much to learn from the Belarusian voters. The final results of the vote will be published on 30 April.

According to the preliminary results, about 30 % of the ballots were cast during the early voting period and at least three candidates from the unregistered Christian Democratic Party and three candidates from the Belarusian Party of United Leftists 'Just World' (the former Belarusian Communist Party) were elected to the local councils. No single candidate from Alyaksandr Milinkevich's 'Movement For Freedom' and the Belarusian Popular Front Party has been elected.

According to the current estimates, some opposition candidates in Homel, Magiliou and Polack failed to receive any votes during the early voting process in any of the precincts where they were standing. On election day, however, they did, according to the official protocols, receive between 10% and 20% of the votes. This is an indicator of possible falsification of the ballot papers during the earlier stage of the election.

In the Maladechna region, north of Minsk, the domestic election observers are appealing against the recognition of the election results in three electoral districts where candidates loyal to the regime were also members of the election commissions.

Elections under new legislation

This year the elections were conducted under the new rules. The amendments to the electoral code were approved in January 2010. The new rules expanded domestic election observers' opportunities, liberalised the process of candidate registration, improved transparency in the early voting procedures. It became easier to conduct the election campaign in public buildings, as well as to lodge an appeal against the refusal of a candidate's registration for the election commission.

However, as the "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" states in its report, the implementation of this law was far from being democratic. The authorities put severe pressure on numerous opposition candidates, who were either unable to register or forced to pull out of the election campaign. There have been acts of repression by the secret service and pressure put on them by their employers.

For example, Volha Karach, who ran for a seat at the Vitsebsk City Council, was removed from the election race on the first day of the early voting for distributing balloons and allegedly creating obstacles to her contender's meetings with voters. Ales Zarembyuk, candidate for the Mastys District and Hrodna Regional Council of Deputies, has been detained, his flat searched and criminal fraud charges have been filed against him.

Censorship and restrictions were placed on the production and distribution of election campaign materials by opposition candidates. In Brest and Magiliou regions state printing houses refused to print election campaign brochures and posters of the candidates

who were critical of the regime. Poster and flyer distribution in public places was often groundlessly banned, and opposition candidates' printed materials were confiscated.

There is a lack of information in the state-controlled media on the latest developments relating to the elections and the programmes of the opposition candidates. However, the state publications have been expressly advocating the election of pro-regime candidates. According to the survey of the Belarusian Independent Institute for Social Economic and Political Studies (Vilnius), as late as in March 2010, 76.5 % of voters had not heard anything about the candidates standing for election. 36 % were unable to say the date of the local elections. Two thirds of those surveyed did not know who the candidates in their electoral districts were, 46.2 % of the voters were convinced that the work of the local councils fails to have any influence on their lives.

The EU attaches great importance to these elections and expects the Belarusian authorities to ensure that the voting is held in a democratic and transparent manner, in compliance with the standards set by the OSCE and other international organizations. The representatives of diplomatic missions are taking part in a short-term observation of the preparation and conduct of the elections to the local Councils of Deputies in Belarus from 20 to 30 April 2010.

"Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" is the initiative by 130 activists, legal experts and journalists in all regions of Belarus who decided to monitor local elections in the country

26/04/2010

Source: ODB, BelTA, 'Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections', European Exchange

Belarus Rebukes Kremlin for Military Basis, Criticises Pragmatisations of Relations

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on Sunday berated ally Russia for not paying for its military bases deployed in his country and warned that he could snub the summit of a Moscow-dominated security pact next month.

Lukashenka, who has sought to improve ties with the West, bitterly hit out at Russia's gas-for-base deal with Ukraine.

"I want to congratulate my Ukrainian colleagues on this victory -- they have saved a few billion dollars by signing this deal," Lukashenka told reporters.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, bargaining with Moscow for cheaper gas, agreed last week to extend the lease of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea by 25 years beyond 2017, a move the opposition sees as Ukraine selling its sovereignty.

"If someone has forgotten it, Russia has two military bases on Belarusian land," Lukashenka said. "And Russia pays us zero roubles, zero kopecks and zero dollars for these bases."

"Besides Belarus, Russia has no one on its western flank."

He said one of the bases was part of Russia's national ballistic missile early warning system, while the other provided communications with Russian submarines in the Atlantic.

Russian officials say Moscow does not pay Minsk for the bases because Belarus gets Russian oil and gas at low prices, while Belarus says the lack of payment is due to a close military and political partnership between the two.

Those ties have soured amid trade wars, Belarus' anger over what it sees as high prices for Russian energy and

Moscow's irritation with Minsk's refusal to recognize Georgia's breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

Lukashenka: "If someone has forgotten it, Russia has two military bases on Belarusian land. And Russia pays us zero roubles, zero kopecks and zero dollars for these bases."

Adding further to tensions, Lukashenka has criticized Moscow's prompt support of Kyrgyzstan's opposition, which came to power after a bloody revolt this month. Ousted Kyrgyz leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev was sheltered in Belarus.

Lukashenka threatened he would not attend an informal summit of the Moscow-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (ODKB) set for May 8 in Moscow, unless the issue of Kyrgyzstan's "coup d'etat" was included in the agenda of the

meeting.

Both Belarus and Kyrgyzstan make part of the post-Soviet security pact, along with Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

"What sort of organization is this one, if there is bloodshed in one of our member states and an anti-constitutional coup d'etat takes place, and this body keeps silent?" Lukashenka said.

"At this stage, there is no agenda (for the summit). If nothing is changed, I have nothing to do there."

ODKB countries control a key land route from Europe to Afghanistan, and the group is often billed as a regional counterweight to NATO.

In June last year Lukashenka snubbed an ODKB summit in Moscow over a milk export row with Russia.

Earlier [20 April 2010] in his annual state-of-the-nation address at the Belarusian Parliament Lukashenka said that Russia "has undoubtedly been and still remains the main political and economic partner," adding that he wanted no confrontation with Russia. He said both countries could still get back to square one in their rela-



tions. He strongly condemned Moscow's policy of economic pragmatism adopted with regard to Belarus. He said it ran counter to the Russia-Belarus union state agreements signed earlier. He cited the imposition of oil export duties as the most blatant example.

He accused Russia of systematic efforts to squeeze Belarus out of Russian markets: "We have run into systematic actions that have called into question the survival of our state. Practically prohibitive duties on oil and petroleum products have been imposed. We are being consistently squeezed out of the Russian market. They are trying to isolate us from Eurasian transit routes. Despite all assurances from the Russian Federation, the customs border is being reinforced at checkpoints. I would like to ask the question why. We are creating a customs union, aren't we? The energy price hike has jeopardized the competitiveness of Belarusian manufacturers, primarily on the Russian market. This is another factor in squeezing our goods out of the Russian market. Oligarchic groups, which were behind all these intrigues in the first place, are shamelessly vying for a piece of our economy in these murky waters. Obviously, such pragmatism undermines the foundation of the union state and destroys its economic component."

20-25/04/2010

Source: The Washington Post, Reuters transitions on-line, ODB

Belarus Grants Bakiyev Asylum



Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Alyaksandr Lukashenka

The world has recently witnessed the overthrown Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev descend from the ominous volcanic clouds in Minsk, ending the rumours over his whereabouts and further damaging Belarus' international image.

Ousted in an April 7 uprising, Bakiyev first fled to Kazakhstan and on April 19 was safely delivered to the Belarusian capital by Alyaksandr Lukashenka's personal security services.

While Bakiyev's flight to Belarus was hardly the bold stunt Lukashenka described, Kyrgyz president indeed had good reasons for fleeing as in his home country. In Kyrgyzstan, he faces trial for allegedly ordering police to open fire on protesters and causing 85 deaths. It is more difficult to see any good reason that Minsk may have had for sheltering Bakiyev. This may further alienate it both from Russia and the West.

On one hand, alternating clashes with Russia and with the West against each other could one day turn out to a smart move on Lukashenka's part. After all, Belarus was able to get cheap gas and oil from Russia, enjoyed generous IMF loans as well as some money from Moscow, and was invited to join the Eastern Partnership.

On the other hand, from the usual "annoying either/or" Minsk's game is turning into "annoying both," as both the West and Russia are no longer on

Bakiyev's side. And the consequence of annoying both is further increasing Belarus' isolation and risking to one day wind up between Scylla and Charybdis.

So why is Minsk sheltering the Kyrgyz leader? Perhaps because Lukashenka and his "dearest guest" have a lot in common.

To start with, both have been playing the West and

Russia against each other to achieve their foreign policy goals. Just last year, Bakiyev has skillfully manipulated the issue of the US military base in Manas.

Of course, there is much more the two leaders share. Like Lukashenka 11 years earlier, Bakiyev came to power promising to wipe out corruption and improve the economy. Initially elected democratically, Bakiyev and Lukashenka have grown authoritarian with time starting to crack down on the media, suppress the opposition, and rig elections. Both presidents used referendum results to amend the constitutions of their countries gaining more power as a result.

Having retracted his letter of resignation, Bakiyev insists that he is a legitimate president of Kyrgyzstan just as Lukashenka has for the past decade insisted that he is a legitimate president of Belarus despite the discontent of some. But if "legitimate president" is the one approved generally by those who are subject to his authorities, then Bakiyev clearly does not qualify. He has failed to acquire legitimacy by being fairly elected, or by operating under democratic principles, or at least by fostering

high living standards and ensuring economic growth.

Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev, who currently chairs the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, had hinted that Bakiyev's departure from Kyrgyzstan would help ease tension. Busy earning international acceptance, the state that is all over Washington D.C. billboards as the champion of the nuclear weapon-free world, would not want to tarnish its reputation by hosting someone who could one day be searched for by the Interpol, as Kyrgyzstan's interim leader Roza Otumbayeva warned.

Minsk could clearly care less about tensions as those do not exist in Belarus. However, tensions with the outside world cannot be ignored and Belarus is already experiencing enough international isolation.

The interim Kyrgyz government has started discussions on officially removing ex-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev from his presidential post as well as annulling his presidential immunity, an interim government official told RIA

Novosti on Monday [26 April 2010].

"The decree on removing Kurmanbek Bakiyev from his position [of president] was discussed during a government meeting. According to the decree, Bakiyev is stripped of his presidential immunity and legal authorities have been instructed to return him to the republic," Edil Baisalov said.



Edil Baisalov

23-26/04/2010

Source: Belarus Digest, RIA Novosti

Sentences in Autuhovich Case Expected to Be Announced on May 6

Sentences in the trial of Mikalai Autuhovich and others will be handed down on at 2:30 p.m. on May 6, according to Vyachaslaw Siwchyk, a civil society activist who attended Tuesday's court session.



The case has been heard at the Supreme Court of Belarus since March 10. Autukhovich, a 47-year-old businessman residing in Vaukavysk, Hrodna region, his partner Uladzimir Asipenka, and Alyaksandr Laryn face charges of "preparing an

act of terrorism" against the head of the Hrodna Regional Executive Committee, Uladzimir Sawchanka, and Deputy Tax Minister Vasil Kamyanko.

Former political prisoner Mikalai Autuhovich was arrested together with his colleagues Yury Liavonau and Uladzimir Asipenka on February 8, 2009.

First Autuhovich and Liavonau were sus-

pected of committing a crime under Article 218 (2) (i.e. intentionally destroying or causing serious damage to a property). Mr. Liavonau was released in 2009 and the article has been changed to terrorism.

In July 2006, Mikalai Autuhovich and Yury Liavonau have already been sentenced to three and a half years of imprisonment and were internationally recognised as political prisoners.

21/04/2010

Source: naviny.by, ODB

Ukrainian President to Visit Belarus This Week

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich is expected to visit Belarus on April 29.

According to the Ukrainian Embassy in Minsk, Yanukovich is to hold talks with Alyaksandr Lukashenka, meet with reporters, and visit some industrial enterprises.

Prior to his visit to Belarus, Yanukovich plans to speak at a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

(PACE) in Strasbourg on April 27. PACE President Mevlut Çavuşoğlu said he plans to discuss with Yanukovich a strategy for relations with Belarus.

In the course of the meeting of the 18th intergovernmental commission for trade and economic cooperation, which took place in Kyiv on April 15, agreements were reached on the preparation of a number of bilateral documents to be signed during the upcoming visit. Ukraine showed special interest in prospects for the participation of Kharkiv's

OJSC TurboAtom in the supply of turbines for small hydroelectric and the atomic power plant in Belarus. The talks also covered prospects for the supply to Belarus of the products by the Novokramatorsky Mashinostroitelny machine-building plant, including metallurgical equipment and equipment for mining minerals.

26/04/2010

Source: ERB, nrcu.gov.ua

EU and Belarus

Syarhei Martynau Meets with Slovenian President



Foreign Minister of Belarus Syarhei Martynau and President of Slovenia Danilo Turk agreed to strengthen the economic and investment cooperation between the two countries. The

negotiations took place in Ljubljana during Syarhei Martynau's working visit to Slovenia on the invitation of his Slovenian counterpart Samuel Zbogar. The Slovenian President took note of a successful bilateral cooperation and stressed the importance of continuing developing humanitarian contacts between the two countries.

The negotiators paid special attention to a necessity of expanding trade and economic links, especially in the sphere of direct investments, the implementation of joint economic projects and pro-

grammes. The sides agreed to develop Belarus-Slovenia high-level cooperation as well as contacts between the ministries. The participants of the meeting also focused on the practical implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiatives, the development of the dialogue between Belarus and the Council of Europe, bilateral cooperation within the international organizations.

08/04/2010

Source: BelTA

Will Belarus Survive the Financial Crisis?

By Jan Lambeek

In the past years, the IMF often concluded that the economic performance of Belarus was very good. In the period between 2004 and 2008 the country recorded an economic growth of on average 10 percent, while the inflation was not too high and showed a strongly downward trend. In parallel to this, the country pursued an admirable policy, providing the regime popularity among the population. The unemployment rates were insignificant, the real wages were growing strongly, the level of poverty was the lowest among CIS members. Now, Russia and the global financial crisis threaten to be a spoil-sport.

Important reasons for solid macro-economic performance of Belarus were the enormous energy subsidies it received from Russia, the customs union with that country and the foreign (energy) demand. Belarus becomes vulnerable once these favourable external circumstances change.

This already became clear when the global economic crisis hit Belarus in 2009. Indeed, the economy shrank just a little bit in 2009. However, compared to the level of previous growth the decrease was immense. Moreover, the support from Russia is declining further. In 2009 Russia promised to provide a loan of 1 billion dollars, but it transferred only 500 million and cancelled the rest. It is also decreasing its energy subsidies.

Table 1. Current and expected economic situation, 2007-2012 (% GDP, unless specified differently)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Real growth GDP (% growth)	8.6	10.0	-0.3	3.8	4.4	5.3	6.3	6.9
Nominal GDP (billion Belarusian Ruble)	97.2	128.8	138.4	157.4	178.5	203.0	233.1	269.1
Inflation, end of the period (% growth)	12.1	13.3	10.5	8.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
Current account balance	-6.8	-8.4	-11.0	-7.2	-5.6	-4.9	-4.0	-3.4
Export of goods	53.7	54.8	44.3	50.6	50.7	50.4	50.5	50.7
Import of goods	-62.7	-64.9	-56.3	-59.1	-57.7	-56.5	-56.3	-56.1
Balance of trade	-9.0	-10.0	-12.0	-8.5	-6.9	-6.2	-5.8	-5.3

Source: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr1031.pdf>.

Table 2. Government budget (%GDP, unless specified differently)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Revenues	49.5	51.0	44.2	43.0	41.9	41.9	41.5	41.3
Expenses	49.0	49.6	45.3	44.7	44.0	43.9	43.0	42.8
Budget deficit	0.4	1.4	-1.1	-1.7	-2.0	-2.0	-1.5	-1.5
Official reserves (million dollars)	4.2	3.1	5.6	7.2	8.7	10.4	12.1	15.4
Gross external debt	27.7	25.2	42.8	44.1	41.8	38.4	33.8	30.7
Public*	6.5	6.9	17.9	18.2	17.9	16.9	15.5	14.0
Private**	21.2	18.3	24.9	25.9	23.9	21.5	18.4	16.7

*Including debts of the Central Bank and government-guaranteed debts

**The private external debt can be mainly put on account of publicly owned undertakings.

Source: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr1031.pdf>.

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Before 2007 Belarus was exempt from payment of the Russian export tariffs for oil. Belarus exported two thirds of the cheap oil it processed in its refineries to Europe against the higher market price. This provided Belarus with approximately 5 billion dollars per year. After an energy conflict in January 2007 a new agreement had been determined for a period of three years, where, among other things, it was agreed that in case of resale Belarus would refund the largest share of the export tariff (85 percent in 2009) to Russia.

"The greatest risk to the stable economic growth in the future, according to the IMF, is when the authorities would pursue a too expansive economic policy in order to reach a high economic growth forcefully."

However, Belarus did not do so. On January 27, 2010 it reached a new agreement with Russia, according to which the country remains exempt from export tariffs. Only for the oil that it consumes domestically (6.3 million tonne) and the small part that is being exported back to Russia. For the remaining 14 to 15 million tonnes that Belarus imports via pipe lines, the country will have to pay the full export tariff from now on. This way, the price is increasing by about 50%, from 380 US dollars per tonne in December to 560 US dollars in January. The negative consequences of this could hardly be exaggerated.

It is easily imaginable that the forego income will mean the doom of the authoritarian Lukashenka regime. Sale of refineries to Russia will only bring about temporary financial relief. The financial pressure of Russia made Belarus, which still has many of the characteristics of the command economy, to start reforming its economy. Mainly in the field of business great progress has been achieved in the recent years, but democratisation will be more difficult for Lukashenka. Naturally Putin is going out on a limb because his policy

is driving Belarus into European arms, and perhaps the regime that will take office after Lukashenka would maintain the distance with Russia.

It is remarkable that both the IMF and the Belarusian authorities do not seem to worry much about the nearby future. The IMF postulates that Belarus has taken sufficient measures to limit the negative consequences of the oil agreement with Russia on the budget and the current account balance. The IMF is considerably optimistic about Belarus, because, as the Fund argues, the export prices will increase and the government is pursuing a good financial and monetary policy. The rehabilitation programme that was agreed on with the IMF in January 2009, is being accurately executed by Belarus.

That will bring the country 3.5 billion dollars in total until the middle of 2010. Both parties expect to agree on a new programme for the subsequent period.

The greatest risk to the stable economic growth in the future, according to the IMF, is when the authorities would pursue a too expansive economic policy in order to reach a high economic growth forcefully. In this regard, it is important that the authorization of credit, in particular to state companies, will remain limited. In most countries the supply of credit should be stimulated these days, however the financial state institutions of Belarus tend to pump a lot of credit into the country's economy. Therefore the IMF is very satisfied that Lukashenka increased the independency of the Central Bank. All representatives of the government and the banks will disappear from the managing bodies of the Central Bank. Loans of the Central Bank with a lower interest rate than the

market interest rate will disappear as well.

Unfortunately juridical independence in the current Belarus does not say all, because the Lukashenka regime does not have any institutions which would go against the will of the president. The paper independence of the Central Bank is therefore limited by the presence of president Lukashenka. But if he would disappear from the stage, these limitations most likely would not exist any longer.

Source: This article was initially published at [Prospekt-online](http://prospekt-online.org) and translated by the ODB.

In his annual state-of-the-nation address which was carried live by Belarusian state television and radio on 20 April, Lukashenka vowed not to bow to economic pressure, noting that help unexpectedly came from the West. He said, however, that Belarus was no longer planning to borrow from the West.

"We have survived this blockade, this financial crisis. Today I am forced to thank not mother Russia, but our very own native Russia, but who? My enemies, the IMF, Europe, the West. They have been giving us those billions for the country to survive. Today we say we no longer need this programme. Right, Pyotr Pyatrovich (apparently talking to central bank governor Pyotr Prakapovich)? We can do without it."

"Unfortunately juridical independence in the current Belarus does not say all, because the Lukashenka regime does not have any institutions which would go against the will of the president."

China in Nuclear Energy Talks with Belarus, Pakistan

Officials have conducted talks on Chinese involvement in civil nuclear power projects in both Belarus and Pakistan, where Chashma 3 and 4 now look closer to reality.

Earlier this month China's Vice President, Xi Jinping, met Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Minsk. Belarus has been progressively preparing itself for the use of civil nuclear power over the last few years and Lukashenka took the opportunity to raise the possibility of nuclear cooperation with his Chinese visitor.

Belarus publicised a range of contracts worth some \$3.4 billion, as well as a loan for \$1 billion and aid from China worth \$60 million. Official announcements said that Lukashenka had proposed to cooperate with China in nuclear power, including on the construction of a power plant although Chinese official sources did not confirm the

conversation. Xi however recalled a 2005 bilateral between the nations that "symbolized a new phase of comprehensive development and strategic cooperation." Russia has real interest in the Belarussian project and its ambassador to the country quickly responded to the idea of Chinese involvement. While Russia would not object to Chinese finance, the involvement of Chinese companies and the possibility of technology transfer was not acceptable, according to quotes attributed to Alexander Surikov by the BELTA news agency.

According to Pakistani media, China has also moved forward with cooperation in that country, signing a new deal to construct two new pressurized water reactors at the Chasma plant. A detailed report in the Daily Times said China had agreed a low-interest loan to Pakistan for 82% of the \$1.912 billion cost of two 320 MWe units. It added that the cabinet had approved Pakistan's share of the

spending.

Chasma 1 was imported from China in the late 1990s with unit 2 following in the early 2000s and still under construction. In March 2009 Shanghai Nuclear Engineering Research and Design Institute announced that it was proceeding with the design of Chasma 3 and 4, with China Zhongyuan Engineering as the general contractor.

However, questions remain about China's supply of Chashma 3 and 4. Contracts for units 1 and 2 were signed in 1990 and 2000, before 2004 when China joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which maintains an embargo on sales of nuclear equipment to Pakistan as a country without full-scope safeguards on nuclear technology and materials.

03/04/2010

Source: Eurasia Review

BMZ Fails to Find Investor for New Sheet-Rolling Mill

Belarusian Iron and Steel Works (BMZ) has failed to find a foreign investor for the construction of a new sheet-rolling mill in Belarus, Russian information agency Prime-Tass has reported, citing a company source.

Accordingly, two foreign companies, Austria-based plantmaker Siemens VAI and German industry equipment provider SMS Siemag, have submitted their applications for participation in the tender. However, both proposals failed to meet the conditions of the tender, as the companies were offering only the supply of equipment, while

BMZ is looking for an investor in the construction of the plant.

Most likely, direct negotiations to find an investor will continue to be carried out. For now the tender has officially concluded without any result. In the future Belarus' Ministry of Industry will deal with the issue.

As SteelOrbis previously reported, in January this year BMZ extended the deadline for the presentation of proposals for the international tender for the construction of a new sheet-rolling mill to up to March 1, 2010. The tender was

officially announced on October 1, 2009, with the original deadline set for January 4, 2010.

The new sheet-rolling mill in Belarus, with a designed annual capacity of 1.2 million mt of hot rolled sheets in coils, will have the legal status of a joint venture in terms of a joint-stock company, with the investor to hold between a 50 to 100 percent stake. The investment value is estimated at \$1.2-1.3 billion.

09/04/2010

Source: Steel Orbis

Adidas Looks forward to Open Office in Belarus

Adidas, Germany based sports apparel producer is in deliberations with the Belarusian Ministry of Sports and Tourism for setting up their branch office, in Belarus.

Reports from Ministry's press office

state that, recently during a meet between Martin Shankland, Managing Director of Adidas for Russia and other CIS countries, Minister Aleh Kachan, First Deputy Minister, Uladzimir Al-yashkevich and other senior officials of the sports ministry in Minsk, Shankland

remarked that, with the commencement of this new office they would be able to provide Adidas products to Belarusian market at reduced rates.

20/04/2010

Source: Fibre2Fashion News Desk

Higher Ranking in Doing Business Index is Insufficient for Belarus to Boost Investment, Says World Bank Representative

A higher ranking in the World Bank's Doing Business index is insufficient for Belarus to boost foreign investment, Ivan Velev, the WB resident representative, said in Minsk on Tuesday.



The Belarusian authorities overestimate the effects of the ranking on the country's attractiveness for investment, Velev said while speaking at a conference that focused on the government's plans to move up in the global index.

"Even if Belarus makes it into the top ten countries with the best business environment, it will not automatically mean a surge in investment," he said, noting that the WB also had not taken into account the country's ranking

when considering providing loans to Belarus.

The WB representative said that a higher ranking was only one factor that could prompt investors to take a favorable decision.

Alyaksey Pikulik, an expert of the Vilnius-registered Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS), agreed that a higher ranking would not boost foreign investment. "Serious investors use other instruments to assess risks," said Pikulik.

The expert thinks that Belarus might make it into the top ten by 2012, noting that even "cosmetic changes could be sufficient" to move up in the index.

As far back as 2008, Alyaksandr Lukashenka ordered his government to take measures to fare better in the table. In

the most recent index, the country moved up 24 places to rank as the 58th best country for doing business.

"Even half-way reforms that are carried out rather for the purpose of improving the image may have positive effects for the country in general," Mr. Pikulik said.

The expert said that the government should improve its credit ranking, strengthen safeguards for investors and simplify customs clearance formalities.

To secure a better "paying tax" indicator in the index, the government should scrap some taxes, which number 56 at present, and ease formalities for filing tax returns, Mr. Pikulik said.

22/04/2010

Source: BelaPAN

Beltelecom to Launch DTT

Belarusian national PTO Beltelecom reportedly plans to launch a digital terrestrial television (DTT) service before the end of 2010, Broadband TV news reports, quoting its deputy director Gennady Melnikov. According to the Beltelecom official, the service

marks the incumbent's next step in its development of a commercial IPTV offering. Melnikov went on to say that 80% of people living in rural areas and 15% of the population as a whole are potential DTT users. At launch Beltelecom's new service, dubbed 'Zala', will

cover 60% of the country and offer a bouquet of 30 TV channels. By 2015 it hopes to have boosted DTT coverage to 95% of the population

24/03/2010

Source: telegeography.com

Prime Minister Urges Belarus Producers to Reconsider Their Export Strategies

Belarusian producers should reconsider their strategies for new markets, Prime Minister Syarhei Sidorsky said when visiting BelAZ on 22 April.

We need to change the strategy of arrival onto new markets. We need to shift from primitive deliveries, simple manufactures to sophisticated forms. I mean the markets of the countries where we have the presence already, Mr Sidorsky said. We need to arrive onto new market with new equipment and also with our own technologies, knowledge and gain a foothold there, noted the Prime Minister.

According to the PM, BelAZ should seek to set up joint facilities in the countries where it has a good market share. "We have a BelAZ joint facility in China. It was inaugurated last year. However hard it was, but we managed to outpace our competitors," the head of government remarked.

Last year BelAZ launched supplies to Chile (five vehicles have been delivered already). "The country has a big mining industry. We can win over that market despite the fact that it is far away," Sergei Sidorsky said. BelAZ vehicles are also delivered to Australia.

Belarus now needs to double or triple the presence, not the sales, of its specialists on foreign markets. One of the elements of the export strategy is to send specialists to foreign countries (Asia, Africa, Latin America) where they will showcase Belarusian products. These specialists will be based at Belarusian embassies and will act as experts promoting Belarus' economic interests on foreign markets, the Prime Minister said.

23/04/2010

Source: ISRIA

Belarus Targets \$1 bln in Privatisation This Year



Belarus hopes to raise about \$1 billion in privatisation proceeds this year, a similar amount to 2009, as it pursues economic reforms, a senior government minister said on Wednesday.

Andrei Kabyakou, the deputy prime minister in charge of the economy, said however that the aim of privatisation was not primarily to raise funds for the state.

"We regard privatisation as a means of making our public assets more efficient," he said, speaking through an interpreter. The former Soviet republic, lying between Poland and Russia, has embarked on a series of economic reforms that have seen it climb from near the bottom to 58th out of 183 in the World Bank's rankings on ease of doing business.

With a budget deficit projected to reach about \$900 million this year, money from privatisation will come in handy, but the real goal was to attract

investment to Belarusian enterprises to modernise them, Kabyakou told a briefing.

One example was last December's sale of Belarus's BPS bank to Russia's biggest lender, state-controlled Sberbank (SBER03.MM: Quote, Profile, Research). Russia is by far the biggest investor in Belarus, accounting for nearly two-thirds of investment.

Kabyakou was speaking after a two-day investment conference organised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at which Belarusian officials met more than 60 current and potential investors.

LABOUR REFORMS

Foreign direct investment in Belarus doubled to \$4.8 billion in 2009 from \$2.3 billion in 2008 and up from \$1.3 billion in 2007. Kabyakou said the main sectors attracting investment last year were commerce, trade, telecoms, industry and wood processing.

Belarus is also planning to raise at least \$500 million from a maiden Eurobond this year, and said on April 9 it could be launched in May. [ID:nLDE6380G3]

Kabyakou said Belarus would be asking the European Union to return Belarus to the EU's General System of Preferences, giving its goods favoured access to the

European market, now that it had followed International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommendations to improve workers' rights. The EU removed Belarus from the system, which helps developing and transition economies, in June 2007 after the ILO listed it as a country violating trade union rights. The ILO has now dropped Belarus from the list as a result of measures taken by the government. But the International Trade Union Confederation said Belarus continued to engage in "widespread and significant violations of workers' rights" and UNCTAD urged it do more to develop union rights given western investors' sensitivity to the issue.

Kabyakou, who was due to meet World Trade Organization officials later on Wednesday, said that he was not aware of any formal decision by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus to drop their joint bid to join the WTO, and Belarus would continue its accession bid on that basis. Russia's first deputy prime minister, Igor Shuvalov, said on Monday that Russia would pursue a lone bid rather than applying jointly with its two neighbours, with which it is forming a customs union.

28/04/2010

Source: Reuters

Iran to Inaugurate Copper Wire Plant in Belarus

Iran will inaugurate copper wire factory in Belarus in the presence of Iranian Minister of Industries and Mines Ali-Akbar Mehrabian next week, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Iranian private sector has invested eight million U.S. dollars on the project.

It will produce 12,000 tons of copper wire in the first year to be increased to



50,000 tons in the second year, the report said.

The factory's production will be exported to Russia and Ukraine, according to IRNA.

Minsk and Tehran established diplomatic relations in 1992 and the two sides have enjoyed good relations in recent

years with regular high-level meetings and various agreements.

Iran has signed an agreement to launch an assembly line of car production in Belarus and has also established a bank in Belarus in a bid to facilitate financial and banking services between the two countries.

28/04/2010

Source: Xinhua

The Godfather of Belarus

Francišak Bahuševič, the man who brought a nation to life with a twist of his pen.

If one had to name the most puzzling mystery of Belarus, what would it be? The answer is surprisingly obvious. The very name of the country is the strangest riddle of all. How, when, and why did this land come about to be called Belarus?

This man on the faded 19th century photograph might know the answer. His name is Francišak Bahuševič. By a mere twist of his pen he determined the path of the entire Belarusian nation, which, in his time, was still a nation-to-be. In his book “Dudka Bielaruskaja” (‘Belarusian Pipe’) Bahuševič not only openly called his fellow countrymen “Belarusians” but also filled this definition with a feeling of pride. This was enough to turn the tide. The next generation of intellectuals built up on the momentum Bahuševič had created. As a result, slightly more than half a century later, Belarus became an independent country for the very first time in its history. As Valiancin Akudovič, prominent contemporary Belarusian philosopher, said in his interview to “Belarusian Atlantis”, the programme aired on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “The God created the Universe, Bahuševič invented Belarus.”

Francišak Bahuševič was born in 1840 in Svirany, a small farm estate near Vilnia (Vilnius). His father was one of the country’s numerous petty aristocrats. A coat of arms and a family tree – that was about all that made the Bahuševič family different from common peasants.

The memory of the 1831 anti-Russian uprising was still vivid at that time. It was a bold attempt to overthrow the rule of the Russian Empire, which it had bestowed upon the eastern part of Rzechpospolita, the united state of the Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, after its partition in the



late 18th century.

The Russian Empire crushed the 1831 uprising. It not only repressed former insurgents, but also strangled freedoms (most notably by shutting down Vilnia University, the breeding-ground of dissent) and began to instil the pro-Russian ideology.

Belarusian people were declared to be merely the branch of the Russian family, the so-called “younger brother”. Belarus was described as the “ancestral Russian domain”. In all official documents of the Empire the country was called “the North-Western Land”. However, the crackdown and brainwashing did not prevent the intellectuals of the land from breeding ideas of freedom, equality and national independence. All this resulted in another uprising of 1863-1864. The insurgents wanted to throw off the rule of the Russian Tsar, abolish the slavery of serfdom, and insure the peoples’ right for self-determination.

By the start of the uprising, Francišak Bahuševič had already graduated from Vilnia gymnasium in 1861 and enrolled into St. Petersburg University where he studied physics and mathematics. However, two years later he was expelled after participation in the students’ protests. He returned home and worked as a school teacher in the village of Dociški. He embraced the 1863-1864 uprising with excitement. The young teacher immediately joined the ranks of the insurgents.

However, the uprising did not succeed to defeat the prevailing forces of the Empire. In one of the skirmishes Francišak Bahuševič was wounded. In order to escape repressions after the uprising had been crushed, he went into hiding and, eventually, moved to Ukraine. There Bahuševič managed to enrol into the famous Law Lyceum in the town of Nežyn. After graduation he spent some

time working in Ukrainian and Russian courts. After amnesty had been granted to former insurgents, he was finally able to return to Vilnia. There he worked as a lawyer. Bahuševič made his priority to help out peasants and the city’s poor during their trials. There, in Vilnia, Bahuševič also felt the urge to write. He published two books of verses “Dudka Bielaruskaja” (‘Belarusian Pipe’) and “Smyk Bielaruski” (‘Belarusian Violin Bow’). He wrote them in the Belarusian language – the very same way people of the Vilnia region spoke. It is also noteworthy that Bahuševič used

Lacinka, the Latin Belarusian alphabet. At that time, it was prohibited to publish books in Belarusian language in the Russian Empire. That is why both books were printed in Krakow (under the rule of the Habsburg Empire) and Posnan (under the Prussian rule).

The preface to Bahuševič’s book “Dudka Bielaruskaja” became a manifesto of the

whole future generation of intellectuals, who aspired to Belarusian cultural and national independence. Francišak Bahuševič wrote: “My dear brothers, children of our motherly land! By offering you my work, I must speak to you a bit about our lot, about the ancient language of our fathers, which is being labelled as the “peasants’ tongue; however, its real name is the “Belarusian language”. I used to think this way myself – that our language is merely peasants’ tongue. However - God bless the people who taught me to read and write – I have been to many places since then, have seen a lot, read a lot: I realised that our language is just as decent and noble as French, German, or any other.”

In the times, when not only printing books in Belarusian, but merely mentioning the word “Belarus” officially was forbidden, this was a bold idea to declare.

***“The God created
the Universe,
Bahuševič
invented
Belarus.”***

The Godfather of Belarus

"There were many peoples, who lost their native tongue first, like a person on a death bed, who suddenly goes dumb; then they went still completely. Do not abandon our Belarusian language, so that you don't perish!" Today, this phrase by Bahuševič can be found in all native literature textbooks used by Belarusian school pupils.

The titles of the books by Bahuševič, "Dudka Bielaruskaja" ('Belarusian Pipe') and "Smyk Bielaruski" ('Belarusian Violin Bow') were deeply metaphoric. *"There is a violin bow; someone might get a violin; we have got a "Pipe" already. Perhaps, we would manage to make some music!"* he wrote. What began like a solo performance, soon turned into a big orchestra when other writers followed the steps of Francišak Bahuševič. By doing so they shaped Belarusian literary language as well as the people's mentality and national idea.

Although the kernel of the idea by Bahuševič seemed to be indisputable, the form in which he packed it was not liked by everyone. For example, in the early 20th century his aesthetics already seemed somewhat outdated. In his verses, Bahuševič addressed mostly rural population. He described typical Belarusians as downtrodden peasants: *"Our fellow man is stupid as a crow"*. As realistic as they were, these verses could hardly provide creative inspiration for the nation. Bahuševič shunned aristocracy and despised urban life:

"I don't like the city (called "gorod" in Russian)

For it is too crowded and there's too much stench."

No wonder, that Vaclau Lastouski, prominent Belarusian intellectual of the first half of the 20th century, finally pleaded: *"Enough of these straw roofs! Enough of these wretched peas-*

ants in bast shoes! Enough of that misery! Look, how much beauty is around us! Let's praise this beauty!"

Modern philosopher Valiancin Akudovič points out that at the time of Ba-

rus. He points out to the result of the census, which was conducted in the Russian Empire in 1897 (six years after the first book by Bahuševič was published). According to the census, 5,9 million people in Belarus described themselves as "Belarusians". This happened in the conditions when the very name of the country was prohibited and the national culture was actively suppressed. Still, 74% of people wrote that their native language was Belarusian. Moreover, 43% of aristocrats also declared that they were Belarusians, let alone the rural population, which signed as Belarusians almost unilaterally.

Of course, the slim book by Bahuševič could not have possibly influenced these enormous masses. Most of these people never saw "Dudka Bielaruskaja" and hardly even heard about it. Francišak Bahuševič did not invent, or even discover Belarus. He was simply the first one to connect important dots on paper. Bahuševič voiced and articulated the idea which was already in the air at his time. However, he did it so vividly and directly that it became plainly obvious: Belarus became Belarus.

12/04/2010

By Ales Kudrytski for the ODB



Cover of the book "Dudka Bielaruskaja" ('Belarusian Pipe')

huševič there was another potential "project" of the Belarusian idea – that of Adam Mickievič. Adam Mickievič wrote in Polish about his native Litva – which, in fact, was at the very heart of the Belarusian land. Unlike Bahuševič, Mickievič described it as a deeply romantic, poetic and heroic country. A similar approach was adopted by Uladzimir Karatkievič, one of the most prominent Belarusian writers of the second part of the 20th century. For a present-day reader the romantic adventures of Karatkievič's characters are much more appealing than the naive peasants of Bahuševič.

Siarhej Dubaviec, prominent Belarusian intellectual and essayist, debates the notion that Bahuševič "invented" Bela-

