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The Council reaffirms its readiness to deepen its relations with Belarus depending on developments in Belarus towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law as well as its readiness to assist the country in attaining these objectives.

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# Belarus Headlines

## Promoting Visa-Free Regime for Belarus and Other Countries of the Eastern Partnership

In its statement of 25 October, the Council of the European Union underlined the importance of enhanced contacts between people and expressed its interest in receiving the European Commission's proposals for the negotiating directives for visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus.



The Office for a Democratic Belarus (ODB) strongly welcomes the prospect of visa negotiations between the EU and Belarus and will continue its efforts in promoting a visa free regime for the citizens of Belarus and other countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

In the framework of a project *Paving the road towards visa-free travel between the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU* that was initiated by the Public Association for an Open Society (PASOS) and supported by the European Stability Initiative (ESI), the Office will participate in activities aimed at promotion of closer integration and people-to-people contacts between the EaP countries and the EU. As official participant of the EaP Civil Society Forum (SCF) II, the ODB is planning to actively engage in the work of the sub-group on visas of the Working Group 1 of the Forum.

Our organisation believes that the question of visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus, as well as the possibility of free travel to countries of Schengen space for Belarusians in the long term should not be closely bound to political dimension but rather regarded as a "technical" issue and serve the interest of the population. Coherent regional approach towards all EaP countries needs to be applied.

The ODB therefore calls on the EU institutions, governments of the Member States, international organisations and civil society groups of the EU countries to join efforts in promoting better contacts with its EaP neighbours. Enhanced travel opportunities for citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine would lead to effective promotion of EU values and standards and facilitate the process of modernisation and transformation in these countries.

## Office for Poland-Belarus-Ukraine CBC-Programme Opens in Lviv



The Lviv office of the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) of the **Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme** has officially started its operations, announcing forthcoming plans that include a Partner Search Forum, competition for schools "Call for Young Ideas", and a Cross-border Forum of Journalists.

The opening ceremony first saw representatives of the Ukrainian regional

authorities, Ministry of Economy of Ukraine and Joint Managing Authority (Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Poland) meet to discuss the current stage of Programme implementation and tasks of the Branch Office of the JTS.

This was followed by a press briefing, and open hours for the public, during which 38 potential applicants and beneficiaries visited the Branch Office and took advantage of the opportunity to meet its experts to collect more information about the Programme.

Details regarding future events will be announced in the near future, the programme said.

The JTS Branch Office was set up in order to ensure publicity and provide

appropriate information to potential applicants and beneficiaries. Its tasks include:

- implementation of the information and communication plan,
- support in the organisation of the meetings of the Joint Monitoring Committee, trainings and other events, collection of data to improve the monitoring of projects.

The **Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation Programme** is one of the two cross border programmes in the ENPI East managed by EU member state Poland. The total Programme budget is €202.9 million. The implementation period is November 2008 till December 2016.

15/10/2010

Source: [enpi.info.eu](http://enpi.info.eu)

## Lithuanian President Pays Official Visit to Minsk



On 20 October, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė arrived in Belarus with a one-day working visit to discuss the issues of bilateral and regional cooperation between the two countries. Grybauskaitė met with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and representatives of the Belarusian opposition.

During her talks with Lukashenka, Grybauskaitė said Lithuania was ready to help Belarus become more recognizable in the EU. "We want to help Belarus be more open to Europe," the Lithuanian President said. She also mentioned that due to her country's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2011, Lithuania would be

particularly interested not only in enhancing regional energy security but also in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially during the elections. Therefore, it is very important that the upcoming election in Belarus in December meet the international standards.

In addition to general strategic support, the two leaders also discussed more specific issues such as cooperation in energy and transport sectors, the construction of new nuclear power plants in their countries, and the possibility of electricity transit from Ukraine to Lithuania via Belarus.

Belarusian and Lithuanian leaders also attended the ceremony of signing of a bilateral agreement on the procedure of mutual travels of border area residents of Belarus and Lithuania. After its ratification this agreement will allow certain groups of border area residents of the two countries to cross the border without a visa using special local border travel permits. These

permits will be valid up to 5 years and will be issued to permanent residents of border areas, who plan to cross the border because for family, well-grounded economic, commercial, cultural and other important reasons.

During her meeting with the presidential hopefuls, Grybauskaitė called Belarusian opposition groups to unite in the election campaign.

The Belarusian President paid working visits to Lithuania in 1995 and 2009. During his last trip to Vilnius he invited his Lithuanian counterpart to pay a return visit to Minsk. Lithuania is an important trade and economic partner of Belarus. In 2009, the bilateral trade made up USD 565.6 million. There are 410 companies with Lithuanian capital operating in Belarus and over 200 Belarus-funded companies in Lithuania.

20/10/2010

Based on Belarusian and Lithuanian press agencies' information,

## European Union Extends Travel Restrictions for Belarusian Officials

On October 25, the Council of the European Union decided not to lift the restrictive measures against certain Belarusian officials and extend them until 31 October 2011. At the same time, the Council extended the suspension of the application of the travel restrictions until the same date in order to encourage progress in the areas of democratisation, human rights and the rule of law in the country. The Council expressed its concern over the democracy and human rights situation in Belarus, stressed the need for further reforms of the Electoral Code of Belarus, deplored the execution of two Belarusian citizens in March 2010 and regretted recent death sentences in Belarus.

The Council also said it would continue the discussions on a joint interim plan to set the priorities for reforms, inspired by the Action Plans developed in the framework of the European



Neighbourhood Policy, to be implemented with Belarus. The EU could consider also providing macro-financial assistance to Belarus, should the necessary precon-

ditions be met, including the conclusion of a new programme with the IMF. Recognising the importance of enhanced people-to-people contacts and recalling the Council Conclusions of 17 November 2009, the Council said it looked forward to receiving Commission proposals for negotiating directives for visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus.

Taking note of the announcement of the presidential elections in Belarus for 19 December 2010, the Council called on the Belarusian authorities to ensure the election conduct in line with international norms and standards for democratic elections and the country's commitments in the OSCE and the UN.

The Council welcomed the decision by the Belarusian authorities to invite an OSCE/ODIHR-led international election observation mission and invited the Belarusian authorities to fully cooperate with the OSCE-ODIHR. It also urged the responsible Belarusian authorities to fully implement the recommendations repeatedly made by the OSCE/ODIHR.

In its statement the Council of the EU reaffirmed its readiness to deepen relations with Belarus depending on developments in Belarus towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law as well as its readiness to assist the country in attaining these objectives.

Minsk said it regretted that the EU had not removed the sanctions altogether but said "we welcome the (EU's) intention to continue the development of cooperation with Belarus", said the Spokesperson of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, Andrei Savinykh.

26/10/2010

Source: ODB, [concilium.europa.eu](http://concilium.europa.eu)

## Polish Foreign Minister Plans to Visit Belarus in Early November



Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski plans to visit Belarus in early November 2010.

The same source reported that Mr. Sikorski is going to meet with Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynaw and representatives of the "unofficial" Union of Poles in Belarus.

Spokesman for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry Andrei Savinykh has neither confirmed nor denied the report of Mr. Sikorski's forthcoming visit.

The Polish Foreign Minister has already visited Belarus in September 2008. He then met with his Belarusian counterpart in the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park.

According to a source of the Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* in the Polish Foreign Ministry, the country's



Andrei Savinykh

27/10/2010

Source: [naviny.by](http://naviny.by), ODB  
Photo by AFP, BelaPAN



## Belarusian Activist to Appeal Fraud Conviction



Belarusian opposition activist Mikhas Bashura says he will file an appeal after being convicted for fraud and fined the equivalent of \$6,000 on October 19.

Bashura, 35, is an active member of the Tell the Truth campaign. He was arrested and charged with fraud in August. Minsk officials say he lied to a bank about his income in 2008 when

helping his wife obtain a mortgage.

Bashura pleaded not guilty, saying inaccurate information regarding his monthly earnings was an unintentional error. He told RFE/RL after his release that he was happy to be out of jail. He also said he is going to appeal the verdict.

Bashura said the conditions in Belarusian jails are intolerable. He said many people who are healthy at the time of their detention leave detention centers with serious health problems.

"We were 26 people in a cell with 15 beds," Bashura said.

Tell the Truth activists say Bashura's case was politically motivated and connected with his participation in the cam-

paign, which encourages Belarusians to speak out about social problems.

The campaign is organized by the Moving Forward movement, which is led by writer and civic activist Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu, a former chairman of the Union of Belarusian Writers.

The movement was stripped of its registration by a Minsk court on October 12 at the request of the municipal authorities.

In early October, Nyaklyaeu announced his candidacy for a presidential election scheduled for December

20/10/2010

**Source: Radio Free Europe**

## Belarusian Parliament Speaker Visits Vietnam



*With Nguyen Phu Trong*

On 19 October, Chairman of the Belarusian House of Representatives Uladzimir Andreichanka arrived in Viet Nam with a four-day working visit. During his visit Andreichanka met with Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet, the country's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung,

and Chairman of the Vietnamese Parliament Nguyen Phu Trong

Andreichanka's mission was to inform Vietnamese leaders about the progress made in the implementation of the agreements reached during Nguyen Minh Triet's visit to Belarus in May 2010.

Trade and economic relations between the two countries was the main subject of Andreichanka's meeting with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. The discussion focused on the ways to promote mutual supplies at the markets of Belarus and Viet Nam and the implementation of joint industrial initiatives. Worth noting is the fact that the bilateral trade turnover between Belarus and Viet Nam reached US\$120 million in 2009.

The two sides also discussed possible the development of the legal framework of bilateral relations and the expansion of cooperation in education.

The meeting between Andreichanka and the Chairman of the National Assembly of Viet Nam, Nguyen Phu Trong covered a wide range of issues of inter-parliamentary cooperation. The two sides also reached an agreement to provide assistance to lawmakers of the two countries in promoting a trade and economic dialogue between Belarus and Viet Nam.

19-22/10/2010

**Source: BelTA VNNews, ODB**

**Photo by: Viet Nam News**

## Election of the President of Belarus 2010: Weekly Analytical Review (October 18-24)

### CONCLUSIONS

1. The Central Election Commission (CEC) rejected a proposal to provide for a public demonstration of ballot papers during the counting, despite the absence of transparency in counting

and tabulation of votes noted by observers during previous elections, and regardless the Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR that the 2010 amendments to the election legislation did not contribute to ensuring that

"precinct commission members count the ballot papers in a transparent and properly observable manner."

**Continued on p. 5**

## Election of the President of Belarus 2010: Weekly Analytical Review (October 18-24)

2. Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) continue to operate in a non-transparent manner and in most cases do not inform observers about the time of their sittings. In addition, they have rejected requests for access to information other than what is officially published.

3. Observers continue to witness the widespread participation of persons not belonging to the initiative group of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, and the broad use of the administration of state enterprises and institutions, in the collection of signatures in support of Lukashenka.



4. Election commissions, courts and prosecutor offices continue to reject complaints related to violation of electoral legislation during collection of signatures in support of Lukashenka.

5. State mass media continue to ignore the elections, while ideological services of state enterprises and institutions have started an information campaign presenting the Fourth All-Belarus People's Assembly, to be held just before the election, as the "supreme expression of people's will." This demonstrates the authorities' intention to present the presidential election as a secondary form of people's participation in shaping power in the country.

### ELECTION OBSERVATION

According to the information released by the CEC, as of October 20, election commissions of all levels had accredited 271 domestic observers. On October 20, the first group of international observation – the CIS mission – started its work, having accredited 27 observers at the CEC. Long-term observers from the OSCE plan to start their work in mid-November.

The full text of the report can be found at: [spring96.org](http://spring96.org) or [belhel-com.org](http://belhel-com.org)

25/10/2010

**Source: Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections!**

## Foreign Experts to Probe Belarusian Journalist's Death



Swedish and Norwegian experts have arrived in Minsk to examine

documents related to the disputed death of independent Belarusian journalist Aleh Byabenin, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

The experts were sent by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

Europe (OSCE). OSCE press service representative Frane Maroevic told RFE/RL that they will visit the Minsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office on October 26 to start assessing materials connected with Byabenin's death.

Byabenin was a well-known independent journalist and cofounder of the human rights defenders' website Charter 97. He was found hanged in his summer house on September 3.

Although the official autopsy report said

no traces of violence were found on Byabenin's body, his relatives and friends say his hip was dislocated, and there were several unusual dark spots and a scratch on his body.

The experts arrival comes after the Belarusian government accepted an offer from the OSCE Secretary-General's Office to send two forensic and criminal investigation experts to Minsk to become acquainted with the case.

26/10/2010

**Source: Radio Free Europe**

## Four Die in Explosion at Belarusian Plant

On 25 October, an explosion at a plywood plant "Pinsk Wood" in the south-western Belarusian town of Pinsk resulted in four deaths and several injuries. The two main boilers of the plant exploded, causing the workshop's glass roof to collapse on dozens of workers.

The Pinsk city authorities and ambulance personnel refused to comment



on the accident. But Brest regional officials told journalists that 13 workers were hospitalized. Others were injured but did not need hospitalization.

The explosion was so strong that it shattered all the windows in nearby apartment blocks and other buildings.

The cause of the explosion is currently

unclear, and an investigation into the incident is underway.

23 accidents have occurred at Pinsk enterprises since the beginning of the year. According to Pinsk inter-district organisation for protection of labour, four incidents occurred at plants belonging to the holding company "Pinsk Wood". Five accidents resulted in workers' death.

27/10/2010

**Source: ERB, ODB**

## OSCE Media Freedom Representative: Belarus Needs Media Pluralism



*Dunja Mijatovic during the conference in Minsk*

Belarusian media and society need media pluralism, the OSCE Representative on Media Freedom, Dunja Mijatovic, said on October 27, adding that her office is ready to offer support and advice as the country liberalizes and modernizes its media policy.

Speaking at the end of a visit to Belarus at the invitation of the government, Mijatovic said she was "encouraged by the readiness of high-level officials to discuss the problems faced by independent media in Belarus in an open and constructive manner" but added that there was a "lack of progress in bringing the media situation more in line with the OSCE commitments".

Mijatovic said improvement was sorely needed as pluralism was non-existing in the broadcasting sector, restricted in the print media and vulnerable on the Internet.

"I urged my counterparts to lift all current administrative restrictions applied against independent media. Warnings and closures of newspapers have an enormous chilling effect and should not be used or provided for in the law. The authorities should also take urgent measures to support the much weakened independent media and enable the creation of independent

self-regulatory mechanisms that are not part of the government bodies," she said.

She said she was encouraged by a common understanding about the need for a gradual overhaul of the media legislation.

"The legislative framework for the media should foster pluralism. I hope that in the future we can work together on amendments of the current media law, on privatization of the state broadcast media, on decriminalisation of defamation and the adoption of an access to information law."

Mijatovic took part in a roundtable discussion on Internet developments, organized jointly by her Office and the Information Ministry, during which participants discussed how Belarus newly adopted Internet legislation compares to international standards.

"I raised my concerns about some provisions of the new legislation, such as the requirement for mandatory identification of all users, and the vaguely defined limitations and bans on illegal information I called upon the government not to design or apply new legislation that would limit freedom of the

media on the Internet," she said, adding that the Belarusian side agreed to consult her Office and civil society when reviewing current and adopting future Internet legislation. She also welcomed the Belarusian authorities' invitation to the OSCE to review the investigation of the death of Belarusian journalist Aleh Byabennin, the founder of Charter97.org. Two experts sent by the OSCE are in Belarus to examine and review evidence related to the death.

Mijatovic met with Foreign Minister Syarhei Martynau, Information Minister Aleh Pralenskousky, Presidential Aide Usevalad Yancheusky, Central Electoral Commission Head Lidziya Yarmoshina and civil society representatives during her three-day visit. She also visited the Belarusian Association of Journalists and the independent newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* and met with journalists.

**Photo by ERB**

27/10/2010

**Source: The Financial**



## Belarus Will 'Undoubtedly' Sell Bonds in U.S.A., Asia as It Avoids IMF Loans

Belarus plans to test the U.S. and Asian debt markets, as well as selling ruble-denominated bonds, as the government seeks to wean itself off international aid and sustain economic growth.

"We will undoubtedly enter the Asian and the American markets," Finance Minister Andrei Harkavets said in an interview today in Moscow, declining to comment on the timing of possible sales.

Belarus is selling state-owned companies and Eurobonds to help meet its financing needs after saying it won't seek additional loans from the International Monetary Fund. The IMF agreed to loan Belarus \$2.5 billion in December 2008 after export revenue tumbled during the global financial crisis.

The economy is expected to grow 7.2 percent this year and 6.2 percent in 2011 after expanding 0.2 percent last year, according to the IMF. The government had sought to achieve growth



of as much as 12 percent this year and keep inflation below 10 percent, Economy Minister Mikalay Snapkou said May 18.

Belarus's plan to sell as much as 15 billion rubles (\$497 million) of bonds in November is a "logical step,"

Harkavets said today. The government plans to sell ruble-denominated bonds as it seeks "a new platform," Harkavets said.

"We use the ruble in common trade, so it's a logical step for us. In addition, it's necessary to open this platform for everyone. In this respect, this debut issue is of interest for us and for the Russians."

Moscow-based OAO Sberbank is organizing the first sale of ruble-denominated sovereign bonds by a country other than Russia.

Testing Markets

Belarus may also borrow in other currencies, Harkavets said.

"We undoubtedly will look at the market, consider it from the point of view of our economy, and will issue in the currency

that will be optimal for us from the point of view of efficiency of the deal," he said. "I wouldn't rush. Since we've entered the market, we should test all the platforms."

Belarus' 8.75 percent bonds due 2015 yielded 7.74 percent at 2:45 p.m. in Minsk. The country's debt 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. "We are absolutely satisfied with how our paper is trading today," Harkavets said. "We will work further to secure reduction in the price." Last year, Belarus borrowed \$230 million via bridge loan from group of Russian banks because the country "didn't have time" to sell bonds, he said. It has no plans to borrow more from Russian banks, he said.

15/10/2010

Source: Bloomberg

## Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan to Standardize Tariffs



Within the Common Economic Space, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan will standardize the tariffs for the transit of goods until 1 January 2013, said Rus-

sian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at a press conference in Moscow. According to the Prime Minister, the tariff will be lower than the ones in existence today.

In 2015 Kazakhstani and Belarusian transporters will be able to transport cargo along the Russian railways using their own locomotives as well.

When asked about the price of Russian gas for Belarus, Putin said that in 2011, prices would be set according to the contract that is in force.

16/10/2010

Source: The Voice of Russia

## Venezuelan Oil Agreement with Belarus Estimated at USD 19.4 Billion

The Venezuelan government inked several agreements with Belarus, as part of President Hugo Chavez's international tour.

Under one of the main agreements, Venezuela will supply Belarus with 30 million tons of oil in three years starting from 2011.

Although no details of the deal were disclosed, state statistics known by Reuters show that Belarus is currently buying Venezuelan crude at USD 647 per metric ton, pricing 30 million tons at about USD 19.4 billion.

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Two Presidents during the meeting in Minsk

### Venezuelan Oil Agreement with Belarus Estimated at USD 19.4 Billion

Meanwhile, Chavez advocated the sale of state-run oil company Petroleos de Venezuela (Pdvs) stake in German refinery Ruhr Oel GmbH to Russia's state-owned oil major Rosneft. The Venezuelan president argued that the company "did not refine Venezuelan oil; it did not employ Venezuelan workers and it did not report any earnings to Venezuela. All

the money remained in Germany. We did not operate it. Everything was in British hands."

"We finally found a Russian company and we sold (the stake): I took a load off my shoulders." Chavez said that it was a strategic success. "We moved from Germany to Belarus." Thanks to the partnership, Venezuela will be able to build a refinery

in this former Soviet republic. The president added that he will have Belarus' support to "overcome the housing deficit" in Venezuela. The South American country also signed housing and transportation agreements

18/10/2010

Source: Eluniversal

### Belarus BMZ Starts Using HBI in Rebar Production

It is reported that Belarusian Iron and Steel Works in early October this year has tested technology which is new for the company at its electric steel melting shops, in particular relating to steel smelting with the addition of hot briquetted iron.

The first batch of HBI in the amount of 5,000 tonnes was received by BMZ at the end of September from Venezuela.

Accordingly, the first test at BMZ electric steel melting shop No 1 began on ordinary steel grades which are used in the produc-

tion of rebar at the plant mill-320. If all goes well, BMZ plans to use the new technology also in the production of quality steel grades.

18/10/2010

Source: stillguru

### Lithuania Rejects Lukashenka Bid for Joint Nuclear Plant



The slogan on the poster : Astravetskaya Nuclear Station? - No, thank you!

European Union member Lithuania has rejected a proposal by neighbouring non-EU Belarus for a joint nuclear power plant amid competition between three similar projects in the region, an official said Thursday. "The Lithuanian president thinks there is no

demand for some kind of joint regional nuclear plant," presidential spokesman Linas Balsys told AFP.

Hard-line Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka made his proposal during the meeting with his Lithuanian counterpart Dalia Grybauskaite, who was on a one-day visit in the Belarusian capital.

Balsys also pointed to the problems that could emerge in managing such a plant, since Lithuania, the EU member since 2004, is subject to the 27-member bloc's regulations.

"Lithuania could build a nuclear plant for herself and the neighbouring states could do so for themselves," noted Balsys .

Within 10 years, Lithuania plans to build a new nuclear power plant to replace the Ignalina facility, which was shut at the end of 2009 in line with an agreement with the EU.

Lithuania has invited her fellow Baltic states – Latvia and Estonia – as well as neighbouring Poland to join in the project.

Grybauskaite has also rejected a proposal by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to join in a plan for a nuclear plant in Russia's Kaliningrad enclave sandwiched between Lithuania and Poland.

21/10/2010

Source: The Baltic Course

### International Bank of Azerbaijan Signs an Agreement to Expand Co-Operation with Belarus

On 21 October, International Bank of Azerbaijan and Belarus-Bank signed an agreement on expansion of co-operation. Following the conclusion of the agreement, IBA Chairman of Board Jahangir Hajiyev said that the agreement envisaged expansion of service and financing in the territory

of Azerbaijan and Belarus. "It will also enable to develop trans-border collaboration. A basis for the agreement signing was dynamic development of ties between Azerbaijan and Belarus, provided by mutual visits by two countries' leaders," he added.

Belarus has become the third direction in the CIS area for IBA's expansion after Russia and Georgia.

22/10/2010

Source: abc.az



## Belarusian Deputy Vice-Minister Rejects Russia's Proposal on Oil Tariffs



Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka criticized Russia's proposal to cancel oil export duties for Belarus in exchange for money gained by Minsk from petroleum products re-export calling it the worst option.

Syamashka said "This is a last resort, the worst option for Belarus. Maybe it is just a bit better than what we have recently. His comment contradicts a statement made by Belarusian Economy Minister Mr Mikalai Snapkou recently."

Mr Snapkou told reporters that it was impossible for Belarus to turn down Russia proposal which includes a significant increase of duties on petroleum product re-exports. He said that "This is what we have been looking for."

Russia exported more than 21 million tonnes of oil to Belarus last year, but only 5

million tonnes to 6 million tonnes was for domestic consumption. The rest was re-exported after passing through one of the country two oil refineries.

Last December, Mr Igor Sechin Russian Deputy Prime Minister suggested that Belarus could import the domestic volumes duty free, citing brotherly relations between the two countries, leaving the remaining 15 million tons subject to export duties.

24/10/2010

Source: RIA Novosti

## Odessa-Brody to Pump Crude Oil to Belarus

According to the Ukrainian Minister of Fuel and Energy Yuriy Boiko, test oil pumping in the forward mode via the Odessa-Brody pipeline to Belarus will start at the end of November. He added that the volumes of test pump-



ing would amount at 80,000 tonnes

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has earlier made statements on continuation talks with the Ukrainian

side on conversion of the Odessa-Brody pipeline to operating in the forward direc-

tion in order to deliver Venezuelan crude to Belarusian refineries. Currently, the oil bought by the Belarus government in Venezuela is shipped to the Mazyr refinery from Odessa ports via railway through the territory of Ukraine.

25/10/2010

Source: Proua.com

## Belarus Keeps Cutting Rates on Loans

As stated by Deputy Chairman of the National Bank of Belarus Mikalai Luzgin, Belarusian banks will continue to cut interest rates on loans. According to Luzgin, the maximum interest rates on non-concessional loans reached 25.8% in February 2010, and 18.5% in September.



"A decline of this index by a third in such a short period is a good pace, and this process will continue," said the representative of the National Bank. He explained that such a rapid reduction of interest rates on loans has become possible due to active measures

of the National Bank and the Government of Belarus.

Luzgin also reported that the amount of individuals' credit arrears had reached Br20.1

trillion in Belarusian banks by 1 October 2010. This makes 25.3% of the total loan portfolio of banks. Thus, Br2.1 thousand of credit debt is accounted per capita in Belarus. The concessional loans arrears have increased 13 times to Br11.5 trillion since 2005.

The main areas of lending in Belarus are still real estate financing and consumer

spending. "Last year there were some difficulties in the financial sector (devaluation, the prohibition on lending in foreign currency), so there was a slight decrease in consumer lending needs, while the growth in real estate lending was maintained," noted Luzgin.

According to the National Bank, the proportion of loans for consumer needs was 45.7% in January 2009, whereas now it stands at 29.2% level. At the same time, the share of loans in real estate has increased from 65.2% to 70.8% since 2010, the bulk of these loans is subsidized.

26/10/2010

Source: Telegraf

## The Belarusian Kit (e)

*Like any other nation, the Belarusians are unique in their own way. They have for centuries celebrated their lands, using different language and names. Many of those who were born here do not consider themselves Belarusians as the borders moved faster than they could identify themselves inside. It was in the 20th century that Belarus got its present name and got the capital changed from historic Vilnius to a more central Minsk. Even now it is difficult to expect a Belarusian to be patriotic: the citizens of Belarus are a nation but not nationalists, a people who are unsure about their national roots and characteristics.*

Barys Kit (Boris Kit) is a unique Belarusian, who is well-known far beyond the boundaries of his country and who has not abandoned his roots and his native language. In April 2010, Kit has turned 100 years old. A renowned scholar, mathematician, physicist, chemist, doctor, member of various astronaut societies, including the International Academy of Astronautics, Kit celebrated his birthday in Frankfurt, Germany. And, as always, he talked a lot about Belarus.



Young Barys Kit



Kit was born in St. Petersburg to a Belarusian family in 1910 and at the age of 8 moved to his father's homeland, the Belarusian village of Aharodniki, today part of Karelichy in the Hrodna region. He graduated from the Polish school (1926) and the Belarusian high-school in Navahradak (1928), received master's degree in Mathematics and Physics from Vilnius University named after Stefan Batory (1933). In his third year of university Kit began teaching mathematics at the Belarusian gymnasium in Vilnius; and, in 1939, at the age of 29, he was appointed director of this gymnasium.

As at the end of 1939 Vilnius became part of Lithuania, Kit returned to Belarus and headed the revived Belarusian school in Navahradak. As a school inspector of the Baranavichy District, he contributed to the foundation of hundreds of Belarusian primary and dozens of secondary schools.

During the German occupation of Belarus, Kit continued to be active in his educational work. He got the permission of the German authorities to open a School of Commerce and Administration in Maladzechna, which, despite the German ban, offered university programme. The disciples of this school were not subject to expulsion to Germany as forced labour.

All in all Kit spent in Belarus 26 years. Already in 1944, expecting accusations of collaboration with the Nazis, Kit left for Germany. In Munich he studied at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Munich, and taught mathematics at the Ukrainian school.

In late 1948, at the age of 38, Kit moved to the United States. In addition to the Bela-

rusian, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, French and German, he learned English. In the States, he worked as a pharmacist and chemist until he found himself as a mathematician and systems analyst in the field of space research.

It was Kit who discovered the importance of liquid hydrogen for space fuel. His research was crucial for the development of American cosmology. He was the author of the first ever textbook on space fuel as well as the calculation of the flight path of the American spacecraft to the Moon.

Since 1958 Kit has been a permanent delegate to the International Astronaut Congress. At the same time, he had been teaching mathematics at the University of Maryland.

In 1960, the Belarusian headed the first bilateral meeting between the USSR and the USA. As a result of those negotiations the Soviet-American programme Soyuz-Apollo was launched in 1972. For the enormous contribution to world science and space exploration the name of Barys Kit was added to the list of important American scientists in a time capsule buried in the wall of the Capitol.

Soon after his arrival to the States Kit established and headed the Belarusian-American committee for cultural, social and political support of his countrymen.



## The Belarusian Kit(e)



*Barys Kit and Belarusian Religious Leader abroad Leu Haroshka (1958)*



*Barys Kit at his apartment in Frankfurt*

After his retirement in 1972, the 62-year-old Kit moved back to Frankfurt and continued teaching mathematics at the European branch of the University of Maryland. In 1982, he defended his doctoral thesis on the work of one of the most outstanding mathematicians of the twentieth century Sigmund Anton, a professor of Vilnius University. Kit was awarded the academic degree of Doctor of Philosophy in mathematics and history of science.

Kit first came back to Belarus almost half a century after he left it, in 1993. The scholar offered to open in Belarus a national university of the European type.

Two biographies of Kit were published by a literary critic Lidzia Savich - *Vyar-tanne* (Return) and *Cosmas of Belarus* (Belarusian Space). He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Hrodna University and became an honorary citizen of Navahradak.

While these are just some facts from his biography, behind them there is a century-long life story, the story of hard daily work, the struggle for survival, experience and self-culture.

Kit has always considered himself a happy man. Being a century old he is beyond time and circumstances, a member of no party, being faithful and dedicated only to science and his land Bela-

rus. Among the ingredients of his recipe for longevity: Belarusian genes, a competitive teaching career, the experience of harsh and hungry years, and, most importantly, a pure conscience. "I have never done any harm to anyone", says Kit.

Kit believes that only a free man can create, improve and be the master of his own destiny. That is how the true Belarusian lived in very different countries and through very different time, but everything he did was in the name - and to the benefit - of Belarus.

25/10/2010

By Maryna Rahlei for the ODB



*While working in Washington*





## Vegetable Trendsetter. Made in Belarus: natural food culture haute couture

With a machete in his soil-stained hands, Uladzimir Matusevič navigates a vast green field. His face is well-tanned, his fingers resemble tree roots, and nails are like small rocks with dark rims – marks left by years of hard labour. A couple of skilful swings of his knife and – voila! – another leek sprout is ready for a market stand or a supermarket shelf.

Uladzimir begins his daily work in the field at dusk. At dawn, he returns to his castle.

### To New Zealand and Back

Uladzimir Matusevič is one of the first farmers of the post-Soviet era in Belarus. Back in 1988, he returned to his native village of Macki from the nearby Minsk in order to earn his daily bread from land. Since then he managed not only to build a prosperous farm, but also to maintain independence from the “father state” – a virtue so rare in today’s authoritarian Belarus.

Uladzimir was born in the village of Macki in 1953. “All my ancestors were common, poor peasants”, says Uladzimir. His father was a local man and his mother came to Belarus from Latvia, which has been annexed by the Soviet Union as a result of World War II events. She had a very hard time adjusting to the socialist way of life at a local collective farm (“kolkhoz”). Food was scarce, let alone money. “Son, run away from here”, she urged Uladzimir when he graduated from the village school. Uladzimir studied well and enrolled into a nautical school in Tallinn, Estonia, then part of the Soviet Union, where he studied radio engineering. This gave Uladzimir a chance to see the world on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Working in Vladivostok, a Russian city across a bay from Japan, he travelled on fishing and cargo ships as far as Australia and New Zealand. “Already then I began to compare my life, the life of my parents with what I saw”, recalls Uladzimir. He supervised the ship’s radio station, which also gave him a chance to listen to radio stations from



abroad, which, in the open seas, were not jammed. “I began to wonder why we in the Soviet Union keep on building this “bright future” for our people but this future never comes”, he remembers.

Eventually, Uladzimir returned to Belarus, married his classmate and decided to try his luck in Minsk. He changed several engineering jobs, and spent more than a decade in the big city. “But I have been dreaming about coming back to my village all the time”, he says.

As the Gorbachev-inspired period of liberalization – Perestroika – unfolded in the mid-1980s and the kolkhoz stranglehold eased, people were finally allowed if not to own, then at least to rent some land and sell their crops on the market. Uladzimir sensed the opportunity and returned to his native village Macki.

### First Capital

Beetroot was (and still is) one of the most important crops grown in Belarus, used mainly for sugar production or for feeding cattle. In the Soviet times directors of chronically ineffective kolkhozes adapted a practice of thrusting small lots of beetroot upon families living in nearby villages. These people had to cultivate the lots and sell the harvest to kolkhoz at a very low price, which did not match the effort invested into its production. Those who refused to cultivate beetroot were punished by kolkhoz authorities. They would not receive timber to heat their homes in winter or get hay to feed their cows; a kolkhoz tractor might have not

come to help them plough their small personal fields. Even village doctors and teachers were subject to this beetroot serfdom.

One can only imagine the amazement of the director of the Macki kolkhoz when a man from Minsk entered his office and claimed he wanted to settle in the village and was willing to rent 5 hectares of land to grow... beetroot! This man was, of course, Uladzimir Matusevič.

“The first summer I earned about 8 thousand Soviet roubles”, says Uladzimir. At that time the sum was enough to buy a very good house. “I weeded the beetroot alone, and my whole family helped me to harvest”, he explained.

One hectare is a square sized 100 by 100 meters. One can only imagine what weeding 5 hectares by hand all alone must look like. Nevertheless, the effort paid off. Uladzimir assured kolkhoz directorate that he could manage the land and was allowed to rent more. He was a true pathfinder, one of the first of his kind in the country. When Uladzimir received papers from the bank, he was marked as “Land Renter #1”.

In 1991 Uladzimir officially changed his status from “land renter” to “farmer”. In the early 1990s the number of farmers in Belarus quickly grew to about 4000.



"Majontak Matusevičy"



Today there are some 2000 farmers in the country. Most of them are enduring people, who are able to compete with the heavily subsidized kolkhozes, relics of the Soviet past.

One of the most difficult tasks for Uladzimir, unexpectedly, turned out to be providing an official Belarusian-language name to his farm "Majontak Matusevičy" ('Matusevič Manor'). Officials insisted that it should be written in Russian, but Uladzimir prevailed.

#### Vegetable Trendsetter

Uladzimir proudly weighs a broccoli, as huge as two fists clinched together, in his hand. "We are trendsetters in terms of fancy vegetables in the country", he explains. Today, the farm of Uladzimir occupies 40 hectares of land, stretched across several fields. Many sorts of vegetables which are grown on his farm, are not to be found anywhere in Belarus. To a large extent, he remains faithful to the beetroot kind – it is just that the choice of sorts is much more elaborate and somewhat exotic for this country: for example, kohlrabi, Brussels sprout or cauliflower. In total, he grows 24 kinds of vegetables on the farm.

Uladzimir lives and works together with the family of his sister. His son and his wife have also recently joined "Majontak Matusevičy". "With my son settling to work here, life has become

much easier for me", Uladzimir sighs with obvious relief.

Uladzimir also has some seasonal workers, most of them living in nearby villages. However, today it is more and more difficult to find people who can actually work on land. Young people move to the cities, and the old are too weak. Many people living in villages have already forgotten how to work, or are plagued by alcoholism.

"I do not want to expand my farm too much, because this would keep me from work. I would have to turn into a manager, and I don't want that. I want to work myself, with my own hands", says Uladzimir.

#### Seeing Beyond Horizon

"I told myself once that the more trees I plant, the longer I would live", says Uladzimir half-jokingly. If this is true, he may well rival the Biblical Methuselah some day. Uladzimir has already planted more than 700 firs (not counting his apple garden). He tries to shape the surrounding landscape with the trees he plants. Uladzimir takes special pride in the fact that his land is already distinctively seen on internet satellite maps owing to the lanes of trees he has planted along roads.

Several years ago Uladzimir rented a small forest, which divided one of his fields. Some other farmer would probably have cut it down for timber, but Uladzimir decided differently. He liked the forest for its

beauty, and, having found three kinds of rare plants there, he even made sure that the forest is now officially protected by the state as a small natural refuge.

On the crossroads near the village Uladzimir approaches a small grove of trees. "I have planted this oak when I was 30", he says, gently tapping the coarse tree rind. "It can live for two, three hundred, or even a thousand years – all depending upon which masters this land will have in the future". Nearby, Uladzimir planted another oak-tree in order to commemorate the birth of his son. By its side there are three birch-trees – in the memory of his late mother.

"She had a very difficult life, my mother", says Uladzimir, stumbling upon his words, his eyes shining with tears. "If she could only see this..." he says, with a wide gesture, as if attempting to embrace his land. "It would be a present for her, for her hard life".

Indeed, the large house Uladzimir has built does resemble a castle. He deliberately asked the architect to recreate a Belarusian landowner's home of the past. Today, his home accommodates three families – his own, his sister's, and his son's. "I pity you, living in large cities. I live in freedom. This is not business, this is a way of life", smiles Uladzimir, looking at the vast field of broccoli, which slightly swing their leaves like small green waves under the wind.

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By Aleś Kudrytski for the ODB

Photo by: Tatsiana Haurylchyk

