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Lukashenka's East-West Balancing Act

"Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it"
— George Santayana

Last year, Minsk decided to improve ties with the West after Russia's yearly price increases on its gas and oil and reductions of imports from Belarus negatively impacted Belarus' economy. The European Union and the United States indicated that they could respond if all political prisoners were freed and the upcoming elections were free and fair. President Lukashenka ordered the release of prisoners and the EU decided to go ahead with talks by lifting travel bans for the next six months on Lukashenka and 36 top officials. Although the elections held in September were basically as flawed as before, and the reforms negligible, the EU foreign ministers decided in March to lift the travel ban for another nine months.

Belarus, a country of about 10 million people, located at the geographical center of Europe, finds itself between two competing giants, Russia in the east and the European Union in the west. It has again become an object of historical East-West competition.

The territory of Belarus has always been at the crossroads of history. The early written records refer to its river system as the trade route between Scandinavia and Byzantium. Rulers from Scandinavia were invited to consolidate the various tribes, and later Eastern Christianity was brought in from Constantinople. The vast territory between the Baltic and Black Seas, became in the Middle Ages a multinational state known as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia and Samogitia, encompassing the Belarusian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian populations. The Grand Duchy was strongly influenced by European Renaissance, Reformation, and later, the Counter Reformation, accompanied by the growing influence of Poland and Catholicism. Meanwhile in the east, the Muscovite state was gaining strength, declaring itself the Third Rome, after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. The next centuries are marked with constant wars with the growing Russian Empire, leading to closer defensive relations with Poland, that finally resulted in the formation of the Commonwealth of Poland and the Grand Duchy. The wars and internal chaos eventually led to the three partitions of the Commonwealth between Russia, Prussia and Austria in the last quarter of the 18th century. All of the territory of Belarus fell under Russian occupation for more than two centuries. Napoleon's drive to Moscow, and his ignominious retreat, followed by two major uprisings, had a further disastrous impact on Belarus.

The last century was not any kinder to Belarus. World War I did not end here in 1918, as it did in rest of Europe, but continued with the Polish-Soviet war until 1920. The armistice line became the new border, dividing Belarus into two occupied parts, one by Soviet Russia, the other by Poland. The declaration of a short-lived independence in March 1918 was one positive event for the country. Stalin's later purges and the back-and-forth World War II frontlines between the forces of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union left Belarus devastated

and suffering the loss of a quarter of its population.

It is small wonder that the Belarusian people are almost genetically averse to wars. The peaceful breakup of the Soviet Union was popularly accepted. In the summer of 1990 Belarus' parliament declared sovereignty of the republic, following by the declaration of independence a year later. In December 1991, the three heads of state, Yeltsin of Russia, Kravchuk of Ukraine and Shushkevich of Belarus, met at a hunting lodge in Belarus where they signed an agreement dissolving the Soviet Union. A new constitution that provided for the office of presidency was adopted by the parliament, and election was held in June 1994. Aleksandr Lukashenka, a parliament member and a former state farm chairman, ran an unabashedly populist campaign and won decisively in a second round runoff against the nomenklatura candidate. Once in power, he dissolved the elected parliament and replaced it with one of his own choosing. Since then all the subsequent elections and referenda, including the constitution changes, have been rigged and Lukashenka has been ruling the country by edicts. While the West was shunning him, Russia embraced him.

Lukashenka's aim was to receive energy supplies at low cost and keep economic subsidies flowing. On top of that he was driven by a dream of one day occupying the Kremlin throne. To make this happen, he offered a plan for creating a Russia-Belarus Union state. Since Russia saw it as the first step in restoring the lost empire, a preliminary agreement was signed in 1997. The outlook looked good for Lukashenka as long as the aging Yeltsin was in charge. With Putin assuming the presidency in 2000, the relationship with Russia started to visibly deteriorate. Soon, President Putin proposed that Belarus integrate as a province into the Russian Federation. Lukashenka turned this proposal down and Russia resorted to tightening economic screws in addition to political pressure. And the recent Russian incursion into Georgia, plus the world economic turmoil, made Lukashenka turn to the West — primarily to the European Union.

Western Europe, dependent on Russian gas and oil supplies, had little or no interest in Belarus as long as Europe was getting the energy supplies, passing through Belarus, delivered — that is until Lukashenka turned the gas off in June 2007, which got EU's immediate attention. On its part, the Belarusian opposition looked towards the West shortly after Lukashenka came to power in 1994 and started pulling Belarus toward Russia. The opposition sought contacts first with Belarus' neighbors, Lithuania and Poland, then with the United States and later with the European Union. For example, opposition delegations met with world leaders, such as EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana in 2004, German Chancellor Merkel in 2006 and President Bush in 2007.

As part of the renewed talks with the government in 2009, the International Monetary Fund agreed to provide a billion dollar loan, requiring nominal economic reforms. Many high-ranking EU functionaries have been visiting Belarus this year, including Javier Solana, EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and Secretary General of the EU's Council, on February 19. He first met with selected opposition leaders, then followed with two hour-long talks with Lukashenka and Foreign Minister Martynau. According to a Charter 97 report, Solana said he had "a very long meeting" with the president and "a very good meeting" with the Foreign Minister. He said his visit was the beginning of a deeper and closer interaction between the European Union and Belarus.

The foreign ministers of the EU countries approved the Eastern Partnership Program, which includes Belarus and five other post-Soviet republics, in Brussels on March 20. The invitation of Lukashenka to the May 7 EU summit in Prague hasn't been decided yet.

According to Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, the level of Belarus' participation in the program will depend on the progress of democratic reforms in the country. "If Belarus makes a choice in favor of reforms and greater openness, the EU is ready to give a positive answer and help Belarus in any way possible," the commissioner said. It should be noted her visit to Belarus on March 12-13 has been suddenly rescheduled to take place in April.

The reason for cancellation seems to be obscure. Most likely, Lukashenka made himself absent on purpose to delay meeting the EU commissioner by taking his vacation outside the country. And when the EU Partnership Program was close to accepting Belarus, there was a need for consultations with Russian President Medvedev, whom he met in Russia on March 19 to discuss economic issues and on March 21 foreign policy issues related to Belarus-Russia relations and Belarus-EU relations.

Directly related to the ongoing Belarus' contacts with the West may be Vice President Biden's comment in February that the United States need to press the "reset button" in US-Russian relations. Such a changed policy may result in scaling back US relations with Russia's neighbors and return to "Russia-first" policy in exchange for Russia's cooperation on containing the Iranian nuclear threat. In the meantime, Russia rushed delivering all those promised loans and credits to Belarus, plus a new half a billion dollar loan in March. And if this financial support shouldn't help keep Belarus in Russia's orbit, then the pricing of its oil and gas, coupled with those military agreements that tie Russia and Belarus together, might come into play.

The Belarusian people deserve better. But being located at a strategic crossroads in Europe makes Belarus an easy target for competing world powers. History without doubt places Belarus within democratic, civilized Europe, rather than in dependence on autocratic, expansion-driven Russia, which appears to have inherited her behavior from the Mongols, having been under their rule for three centuries. The world and the Belarusian people would benefit if Belarus were substantively aided to remain an independent, sovereign country and become a part of the democratic European community of nations.

Joe Arciuch

From the Publisher

This issue features a number of articles dealing with relations between Belarus and the European Union. On March 20, 2009 the leaders of the EU countries approved the Eastern Partnership program. The program envisages economic integration and closer political relations with EU of six post-Soviet countries, including Belarus. The level of Belarus' participation in the program will depend on the progress of democratic reforms. The popular reaction on the street in Belarus has been positive, as was the reaction of most political leaders.

In Russia, on the other hand, the media viewed the event as interference in the internal affairs of the so called Union state of the two countries, according to Radio Liberty. An influential deputy of the Russian Duma saw the step as affecting the flow of credits from Russia.

We wish to welcome two new members to the BR staff. The circulation function will be performed by **Vital Alisyonak** and **Dzmitry Kazak**. **Serge Tryhubovich** who has very capably handled the circulation function for the last seven years, will serve temporarily as Treasurer, replacing Kacia Reznikova.

DID YOU RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

BNR Rada Acts in Defense of Youth Leaders

The President of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile (BNR) Ivonka Survilla has reached out to European leaders to seek their help in curtailing grievous abuses against some the best and brightest young people in Belarus. Excerpts from two such letters follow:

To: Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy.

"One of the achievements in 2008 (in Belarus) has been the liberation of Mr. Kazulin and two younger political prisoners. For a moment, we believed Mr. Lukashenka had understood that it is in his interest to cooperate with Europe. I am sorry to say that our hopes were unfounded. The practice of jailing opponents has been replaced by a more subtle way of depriving our most precious youth activists of freedom. After being expelled from the universities where they had been studying, they are then immediately drafted into the army..."

"While I am most thankful to you for trying to show Mr. Lukashenka that Europe is ready to help him preserve the independence of Belarus, he should not believe that he will get away with everything. I ask for your continued diligence in upholding the human rights for those Belarusians who are fighting to bring change and democracy to their country."

(Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner has plans to personally visit Belarus.)

To: Jacek Protasiewicz, Chairman of European Parliament Delegation to the Republic of Belarus.

"I would like to express my appreciation for your intervention to help Belarusian youth in the new struggle they are facing - the forced drafting into the army after their expulsion from schools and universities. The three latest cases - Franak Viachorka, Ivan Shyla, and Zmicier Fedaruk - are not only a shameless violation of human rights, but a new way to keep our best young men from participating in any kind of political life. I have myself tried to intervene wherever I could, and have been quite happy to see that you have already done the necessary in the Parliament of Europe."

Statement on Arrest Of Political Prisoners in Belarus

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 5, 2009

Madam Chairwoman,

The United States welcomed the August 2008 release of Belarusian political prisoners, including former Presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin. We also take note of additional steps the Belarusian authorities have taken, including granting permission for two independent newspapers to be distributed through state networks, the registration of the "For Freedom" movement, the formation of a public council through which to engage independent groups, and the commitment by the government of Belarus, as Ambassador Sychoy stated on January 30, 2009, to work closely with the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to rectify shortcomings in electoral laws and practices. These are all positive steps. But they are also limited in nature. We strongly encourage the Belarusian authorities to take further positive steps and ensure that progress is not reversed, and that follow-through is effective.

We share the concern of the European Union that in several important respects the Belarusian authorities have moved in a negative direction. Messrs. Yuri Leonov and Nikolay Avtukhovich, two former political prisoners, along with Mr. Vladimir Osipenko, face charges in connection with an alleged arson case from several years ago. We urge the Belarusian authorities to ensure that judicial proceedings with regard to these cases are conducted in a fair, open, and transparent manner. As the United States has made clear, a key condition for improvement in U.S.-Belarus relations is progress on respect for human rights and democracy in Belarus.

As reported in the February 19, 2009 OSCE Office in Minsk Spot Report and by the International Federation of Human Rights, police forcefully dispersed peaceful demonstrators protesting these arrests in central Minsk on February 14 and 16.

And as the OSCE Office in Minsk also reported, three youth activists Franak Vyachorka, Ivan Shyla, and Zmitser Fedaruk have been forcibly drafted into the military. We understand that Messrs. Vyachorka and Fedaruk both had medical exemptions from military service and that Mr. Fedaruk has in fact undergone surgery for his condition. We are particularly concerned about reports that Mr. Vyachorka was beaten on the day he was forcibly taken to army barracks.

Progress on respect for human rights and democracy would lead to an improved relationship between the United States and Belarus.

Thank you Madam Chairwoman.

FEATURES

As Economic Crisis Bites, Belarus' President Tries A Political Thaw

By Brian Whitmore

They called it a "Demonstration of Love" on St. Valentine's Day. The purpose: To test whether authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is serious about creating a new atmosphere of openness and tolerance in Belarus.

Activists from the opposition Youth Front gathered in Minsk dressed in festive costumes festooned with hearts and ribbons. They cheerfully greeted passersby and passed out carnations tied with red and white bands. They carried balloons and sang.

But the love only went so far. When the activists tried to march through the city center to Independence Square, they were violently dispersed by truncheon-wielding riot police who beat and clubbed them.

Opposition leaders say the Valentine's Day crackdown is a stark demonstration that recent moves by Lukashenka to liberalize Belarus have their limits -- and are motivated more by financial need than political awakening.

"What we have seen today shows the degree to which the authorities want to democratize our society," Youth Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich told RFE/RL's Belarus Service shortly after suffering a beating from police.

"This beautiful and peaceful celebration was broken up in such a brutal way. And this is taking place at the peak of the so-called period of dialogue and liberalization. We can only imagine what the self-styled dictator of Belarus will be doing after all [of his] financial and political games with the West are over."

The violence in Minsk came just days before a delegation from the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly arrived in the capital for a four-day visit to assess Belarus's progress on democratization and human rights, a precondition for receiving badly needed assistance from the West.

In recent months, Belarus has released its last political prisoners, allowed the publication of opposition newspapers, created consultative councils that include members of the opposition, and made some cautious moves to liberalize the economy and relax controls on the online media.

At the same time, Lukashenka's regime has had a hard time letting go of some of its more traditional, repressive tactics. Opposition figures still face petty harassment and arbitrary arrests. Some youth leaders have also been detained and press-ganged into the armed forces. Critics describe the practice as politically motivated conscriptions.

Reform Schizophrenia

Belarus's economy is suffering due to declining demand for its exports to Russia -- leading to inventory stockpiles

and unpaid workers. Belarus also devalued its ruble by 20 percent at the start of the year, partly to meet International Monetary Fund conditions set on a \$2.5 billion loan. The move diminished the savings of much of the population.

Belarus's financial woes have coincided with a relaxation of social and political restrictions, as Lukashenka seeks to convince the West he is a willing and apt democratic partner.

But even as he courts the West, Lukashenka is far from abandoning Minsk's special relationship with Russia. Earlier this month, Minsk and Moscow inked an air-defense deal boosting military ties between the two countries. Russia has also pledged \$2 billion in credits to Minsk, and Belarus is seeking an additional \$2.7 billion in additional loans from Moscow.

Analysts say such schizophrenia is likely to continue as the regime seeks to balance its need for better relations with the West between its dependence on Moscow and its desire to hold onto power at home at all costs.

"This is a message to the opposition that, 'Yes we are taking some steps toward liberalization. But don't get any ideas that we are completely letting go of the reins. And don't get the idea that this liberalization will be absolute,'" says Yuri Drakakhrust, a political analyst with RFE/RL's Belarus Service.

Drakakhrust adds that, like all authoritarian rulers, Lukashenka "does not like to be seen as weak," and that recent mass protests in nearby European states over the mounting financial unrest have likely given him pause.

"The Belarusian authorities are looking around. In recent months we have seen a whole series of massive protests, in Athens, in Sofia during the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis, in Riga, in Vilnius. If a few years ago we were talking about the spread of colored revolutions, then today we could be looking at a spread of rebellions and pogroms," Drakakhrust says, adding that Lukashenka seeks to send the message that despite the recent thaw, "the arm of the Belarusian state is still strong."

Belarus has already gained some concessions from the West. The European Union has suspended a travel ban against Lukashenka and other top officials, and will make a decision in April whether the move will be permanent.

Semblance Of Dialogue

Belarus is now seeking to join Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine and become a member of the European Union's Eastern Partnership program. The program would open the door to expanded economic assistance and could eventually lead to visa-free travel and free-trade agreements once certain criteria are met.

"At the moment, Belarus is not yet there because, indeed, there were lots of things missing on the democratic side. But for the other countries, in principle, the offer is there," EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner told RFE/RL in a recent interview.

"But only when, really, all the things will have been done that we need to see -- like free media access, free assembly [will Belarus be ready]. There are many, many things that still are missing."

One of Lukashenka's showcase reforms has been the creation of consultative councils -- on media, human rights, and improving Belarus's international image -- that would allow the opposition to have its voice heard. The councils, according to Lukashenka's press service, are intended to "discuss current issues in the development of the country and society and to draft proposals to bring Belarus further into world processes."

As he courts the West, Lukashenka is far from abandoning Minsk's special relationship with Russia.

Not surprisingly, Belarus's fractious opposition is divided over the councils.

Opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich's For Freedom movement has been asked to join the council, as has the liberal United Civic Party and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

The opposition Belarusian Popular Front, however, has refused to participate in the councils, criticizing them as a "semblance of a dialogue."

And in a recent speech, Lukashenka himself seemed to confirm the Popular Front's view. During a visit to an agricultural-machinery factory in Lida on February 10, Lukashenka made it clear that he had no intention of allowing the consultative councils to turn into a "parliamentary tribune" where the opposition can "shout and push their dirty ideas."

Guarded Optimism

Nevertheless, some rights activists remain optimistic.

"We can say that liberalization is taking place," says Aleh Hulyak, chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. "It can be seen in the sphere of economic and business regulation. This can also be seen in society as a whole. Because the pro-European rhetoric we can hear today was impossible a year ago or even six months ago."

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is also pushing Minsk to reform its election laws. Opposition groups are seeking greater limits on early voting, a source of vote fraud that is difficult to monitor. The opposition is also seeking greater access to media and representation on the electoral commissions.

Meanwhile, journalists have criticized a new media law requiring news outlets to re-register with the authorities. In what free-press advocates considered a major victory, however, online publications were exempted from the requirement.

The authorities are also trying to improve the business climate by easing the requirements to register enterprises. Entrepreneurs, however, complain that although registration has been eased, they still face petty harassment from authorities when operating their businesses.

Andrei Rikhter, director of the Moscow-based Center for Law and News Media, tells RFE/RL's Belarus Service that

despite the back-and-forth nature of Lukashenka's moves, he expects Belarus to continue to gradually open up.

"This [liberalization] will happen sooner or later. The question is when?" Rikhter says. "There are indications of liberalization today and I think they will develop. This is the result of the fact that in recent months, and perhaps for the past year, Belarus is looking less to Moscow and more to the West."

RFE/RL's Belarus Service contributed to this report

Source: RFE/RL, February 17, 2009

U.S. Department of State

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

2008 Human Rights Report: Belarus

February 25, 2009

Summary:

According to its constitution, Belarus is a republic. It has a population of 9.7 million, a directly elected president, who is chief of state, and a bicameral parliament, the National Assembly, consisting of the Chamber of Representatives (lower house) and the Council of the Republic (upper house). A prime minister appointed by the president is the nominal head of government. In practice, however, power is concentrated in the presidency. Since his election in 1994 as president, Alexander Lukashenka has consolidated his power over all institutions and undermined the rule of law through authoritarian means, manipulated elections, and arbitrary decrees. Subsequent presidential elections have not been free or fair, and the September 28 parliamentary election failed to meet international standards. While civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, their members continued to commit numerous human rights abuses.

The government's human rights record remained very poor as government authorities continued to commit frequent serious abuses:

- **The right of citizens to change their government was severely restricted.**
- **The government failed to account for past politically motivated disappearances.**
- **Prison conditions remained extremely poor, and reports of abuse of prisoners and detainees continued.**
- **Arbitrary arrests, detentions, and imprisonment of citizens for political reasons, criticizing officials, or for participating in demonstrations also continued. Some court trials were conducted behind closed doors without the presence of independent observers. The judiciary branch lacked independence and trial outcomes usually were predetermined.**
- **The government further restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of press, speech, assembly, association, and religion. The government seized published materials from civil society activists and closed or limited the distribution of several independent media outlets.**
- **State security services used unreasonable force to disperse peaceful protesters.**
- **Corruption continued to be a problem.**

- **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and political parties were subjected to harassment, fines, prosecution, and closure.**

- **Religious leaders were fined, imprisoned or deported for performing services, and churches were either closed, deregistered, or had their congregations evicted.**

- **Trafficking in persons remained a significant problem, although some progress was made to combat it.**

- **There was discrimination against Roma, ethnic and sexual minorities, and against use of the Belarusian language.**

- **Authorities harassed independent unions and their members, severely limiting the ability of the workers to form and join independent trade unions and to organize and bargain collectively.**

There were several noteworthy developments, including release of the last nine internationally recognized political prisoners, allowing for distribution through state-controlled outlets after a three-year ban of two prominent independent newspapers, *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva*, and the registering of the civil society NGO "For Freedom."

Full report: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119069.htm>

Influences on Belarusian Nationhood: Soviet Institutionalization Or Direct Russification?

By Ilya Kunitski

According to a widespread view within the Western political theory, particular Soviet policies and institutions facilitated the emergence of nationalism in the former Soviet republics. For instance, at the beginning of 1990s social scientists Rogers Brubaker and Ronald Suny developed the concept which adhered to a modernist approach of conceptualizing the nation as an "imagined community" and stressed the role of Soviet policies and institutions in the "crystallization" of nations within the USSR.¹ They both emphasized the contribution of these nations to the dissolution of the Union. Particularly, during the late 1980s nationalistic uprisings shook the structure of the state when national elites demanded a full independence from the center. Suny and Brubaker, therefore, argue that founders and leaders of the USSR unintentionally laid the foundation of nationalism's rise in their state by reinforcing national identities through the set of policies which will be discussed below.

One of the main features of Brubaker's analysis is the focus on the institutions and policies of the Soviet era without considering the preceding historical period. Brubaker argues that the nation is not a "sharply bounded social group" which allows him to presuppose that in the pre-Soviet period nations virtually did not exist. Some historical developments concerning the national aspirations of the people of the Russian Empire, however, cannot be ignored since in many respects they determined the course of initial Soviet policies.

Let us consider the case of Belarus. In Tsarist Russia the area was called North-Western Territory (Severo-Zapadnyi Krai), the people were denied any national aspirations and the use of the Belarusian language was prohibited in 1867. This fact, nevertheless, gave the language an additional significance and moral strength, and the area of its use expanded. During World War I the Belarusian nationalist movement surged which led to the First All-Belarusian National Congress in December 1917. The broadly represented Congress (some 1800 delegates) made a decision to proceed with full sovereignty, and on March 25, 1918 the independence of the Belarusian People's Republic (Belaruskaya Narodnaya Respublika – BNR) was proclaimed. Although, the Republic “held no general elections, and self-appointed administration lacked the elements necessary for broad international recognition”, arguably, the mere fact of its existence did not allow Bolsheviks to ignore Belarusian national aspirations and eventually led to the creation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). Therefore, one can extend the scope of any theoretical argument by including the analysis of pre-Soviet processes which directly influenced the Communist policies of the first post-revolutionary years. The moment of the independence proclamation is crucial and should not be disregarded since, as Suny fairly noted, “the very experience of a brief statehood had a profound influence on future developments.”

Brubaker lists the features of Soviet nationality regime which presumably facilitated institutionalization of the nations and nationhood on the territory of the Union, such as “the cultivation of a large number of distinct national intelligentsias; the cultivation of distinct national cadres; the cultivation and codification of a large number of national languages; and the development of an elaborate system of schooling, including higher education, in non-Russian languages”. Certainly, the “constitutive” influences of these features can be traced in the experiences of different Soviet nations. But whereas some of the policies might have helped to institutionalize the perception of the nation in other republics, it was hardly the case in Belarus.

As for the national cadres, in 1929 Belarusian staff comprised only 49.5 percent of the Party's apparatus at the republic level. Among the heads of Belarusian Communist Party there was only one Belarusian and eleven non-Belarusians during 1920-1953. Overall throughout the existence of the Party there were twenty heads, eight of them Belarusians, and all eight of them were invariably born in the most Russified Eastern provinces.

The Belarusian language was officially reformed in 1933. The first codification, however, took place in 1918 by the prominent Belarusian linguist Branislav Tarashkevich who published his “Belarusian Grammar for Schools.” It can be argued that in 1933 the language was not codified but reformed specifically in the context of a process of Russification. Several unique features of the Belarusian language were abolished in order to bring it closer to Russian. For example, in the new Russian-Belarusian dictionary which was published in 1937

words different in two languages were deliberately discarded and replaced by Russian ones in Belarusian transcription. Interestingly, so-called “tarashkevitsa” (grammatical variant of the language introduced by Tarashkevich) is still widely used by nationally oriented Belarusians nowadays, instead of “narkamauka” which represents the officially reformed variant of 1933. National Belarusian system of schooling was actively promoted only during the 1920s on the wave of “nativization” and later curtailed. As a result, there were no Belarusian schools available in the cities by the 1970s.

Both Brubaker and Suny underscore the importance of nativization (korenizatsia) in the process of reinforcing Soviet nationalities. Indeed, until the early 1930s the consolidation of nationalities proceeded by the support of the native language and culture, by creating national intelligentsia and political elite. The Belarusian nation, however, did not reap the fruits of this process. Stalin's purges of late 1930s undermined the sense of “Belarusization” by wiping out the national intelligentsia and the national political elite. For example, on October 29, 1937 during only one night, 103 Belarusian writers, poets, professors and scientists, all of them arrested on faked charges of nationalism, were shot in the KGB jail in Minsk. Thousands more were purged during 1930s and 1940s. Brubaker argues that all over Soviet Union the repression of nationalism went hand in hand with the consolidation of nationhood and nationality. In Belarus, nevertheless, the repressions took one of the severest forms. Moreover, those annihilated represented the minority of population who expressed at least some national sentiments. Although the Communists did institutionalize the nationality by issuing passports and attaching people to the place of residence, a distinct national elite did not emerge in Belarus, primarily because Soviet regime violently undermined its human base.

It is important to remember that the Soviet Union was not fully formed immediately after the 1917 Revolution, gradually annexing new territories over the course of twenty plus years. For example, Baltic republics were annexed in 1940, as were the western parts of Ukraine and Belarus at the end of 1939. This fact is particularly interesting because one can observe the experience of the country of which the eastern

Several unique features of the Belarusian language were abolished (as part of the reform) in order to bring it closer to Russian.

part was influenced by Soviet policies for nearly a generation, and the other, the western part, was not. Even though Western Belarus did not undergo such processes as nativization, radical economic and social transformation,

and though a passport system was introduced here much later, the level of nationalist sentiments was always higher there than in Eastern Belarus. More people supported independence, spoke Belarusian, and became members of national (anti-Communist and anti-Fascist) resistance during World War II in western areas of the republic.

One part of Brubaker's argument is that Soviet institutionalization of nationhood not only facilitated the disintegration of the USSR but also had enduring consequences and continued to determine the domestic politics of the fifteen successor states. Belarus, in this regard, is an interesting case to explore. The rise of nationalism in the republic in the 1980s

started as a grass-roots movement of historical-cultural associations and was small in numbers. In 1988 more organized nationalist force – the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) was formed. Its leadership was comprised of writers, teachers, workers, and scientists. There were no representatives of Communist nomenclature. The head of the Front became Zianon Pazniak, an archeologist and art critic.

In 1991 a small faction of the BPF in the Belarusian Supreme Soviet secured the passage of the Declaration of Independence owing to the indecision and disorientation of the much more numerous Communist deputies. The Belarusian ruling elites at that time were overwhelmingly anti-nationalistic. Most of them, apparently, would not have objected if Belarus were to stay in the Soviet State or to become a part of Russia. The course of history, however, could not be affected. The Russian Republic itself had already declared its independence in 1990 and in December 1991 the Belavezha Accords were signed which declared the Soviet Union to be dissolved. Although the first elected president of independent Belarus was not initially the candidate of the former Communist nomenclature, his rise to prominence reflected the attitudes of the society in general and the elites, in particular. Alexander Lukashenka, formerly a low-ranking Soviet apparatchik, became popular on an openly anti-national and populist platform by offering the bureaucrats and the nostalgic population a sort of “return to the past”. Lukashenka needed a second round to finally win a land-slide victory in presidential elections of 1994 and has remained in power ever since.

Ruling elites at that time (1991) were overwhelmingly anti-nationalistic.

Thus, in the case of Belarus, the institutionalization of nationhood did not nurture a numerous national elite let alone national sentiments among the rest of the population. Belarus is the only successor state which has restored an official Soviet-style emblem and flag. Russian was introduced in 1995 as a second state language, but in practice is used everywhere at the expense of Belarusian. Belarus is the only post-Soviet country whose authoritarian leader formed a Union with Russia as early as 1996, and as yet unratified. Today, there are virtually no national-oriented parties in Belarus, except for the Belarusian Popular Front (a remnant of the broader movement of the 1980s) which is supported by a tiny fraction of the population, as are all the other opposition parties. On the other hand, government's course on the closer economic ties with Russia is supported by nearly half of Belarusians, a position strongly influenced by state-controlled media.

Clearly, Belarus is an exception, which did not develop in the way predicted by the analysis of Soviet policies/institutions. Although the theories introduced by Brubaker and Suny can be applied to other ex-Soviet republics, Belarus, arguably, should be seen through a different prism. The forces of Russification which started in the 19th century appeared to influence the development of the country more strongly than the specific Soviet policies of 1919-1991. In fact, the Russification has never stopped, and continued to be implemented somewhat through the Soviet institutions and policies. The language reform, severe repressions, the absence of national schooling, the system of placing Russians in executive positions, all these steps effectively undermined the growth of subjective aware-

ness of being Belarusian among the republic's ordinary people and prevented the emergence of a substantial distinct national elite by the end of 1980s.

Ilya Kunitski is a historian from Belarus, now studying Political Science with a focus on International Relations at New York University.

Endnotes:

1. Ronald Suny, *Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford University Press, 1993.

2. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account, Theory and Society* (February 1994).

Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on Belarus

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- 1. The Council welcomes that certain positive steps have been taken by Belarus following the Council's decision on the temporary suspension of the travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus in October 2008. The Council also welcomes the increased high-level EU-Belarus dialogue, including bilateral contacts, and the intensified technical cooperation initiated by the Commission, as a way of building mutual understanding and providing an opportunity to address the parties' concerns and issues of common interest. The Council also welcomes and further encourages the continuation of Belarus' cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR on electoral legislation.

- 2. Nevertheless, the Council continues to be concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus and the recent cases of violation in this area. The Council stresses the importance for Belarus to address the concerns raised in this regard and to continue moving forward, through progressive substantial steps, in the areas identified in the Council Conclusions of 13 October 2008. In this context, the Council looks forward to the launching of a Human Rights Dialogue with Belarus in the near future.

- 3. In order to encourage the adoption and implementation of further concrete measures towards democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Council – while deciding to extend for one year from the date of the Council the restrictive measures provided for by Common Position 2006/276/CFSP, as extended by Common Position 2008/844/CFSP – has decided to maintain the suspension of the application of the travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus, in accordance with the terms set out in Council Common Position 2008/844/CFSP, for a nine months period. By the end of the nine months period, the Council will conduct an in-depth review of the restrictive measures taking into account the situation in Belarus, and provided that there are further positive developments, it will be ready to consider the possibility of lifting the restrictive measures.

At any time, the Council may decide to re-apply the travel restrictions if necessary, in the light of the actions of the Belarusian authorities in the sphere of democracy and human rights.

• 4. The European Union remains ready to deepen its relations with Belarus subject to progress made by Belarus on the path towards democracy, human rights and rule of law and to assist Belarus in attaining these objectives. The European Union underlines the importance of all the principles and commitments made by Belarus in the framework of the OSCE. The European Union will intensify its cooperation with Belarusian civil society in order to support the development of a democratic and pluralist environment."

Source: www.consilium.europa.eu,
March 16, 2009

Belarus' Forum

Javier Solana Visits Belarus

By David Marples

On February 19, in the latest stage of the increasing rapprochement between the EU and Belarus, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana visited Minsk and met with Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The meeting was perceived by several sources as a prelude to Belarus's acceptance into the Eastern Partnership Program (EPP), which could occur at the EU summit in Brussels on March 19 and 20. Minsk has also been visited by representatives of the Council of Europe, Prime Minister of Latvia Ivars Godmanis, and Polish Minister of the Economy Waldemar Pawlak (Belapan, February 23; European Radio for Belarus, February 20).

Solana also met earlier in the day with members of the Belarusian opposition, including former political prisoner Alyaksandr Kazulin and head of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Hanna Litvina. Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the leader of the "For Freedom" movement, considered the visit "simply a great chance for our country" and said that without doubt "the dialogue must continue." Analyst Valery Karbalevich commented that whereas even a telephone discussion with Solana would previously have been considered a major event, it was now clear that the European Union had made a strategic decision to improve relations with Belarus. The fact that the visit took place at a time when new political prisoners were being detained in the country, he added, indicated that the problems of democracy and human rights were no longer important factors in EU thinking (*Belorusy i Rynok*, February 23-March 1).

Has the EU imposed any conditions on Belarus? Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, told reporters in late February that relations would be "suspended" if Belarus decided to recognize the independence of the breakaway Georgian republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (RIA Novosti, February 24). The Belarusian parliament will vote on this issue on April 2.

The Russian news agency RIA Novosti announced erroneously on February 24 that Belarus had been accepted into the Eastern Partnership Program and stood, along with five other republics (Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), to receive \$448 million in financial assistance by the year 2013. This incorrect statement was repeated by Belarusian agencies, including the presidential organ *SB Belarus' Segodnya*, which did not retract the story,

even when it was exposed as a fabrication (European Radio for Belarus, February 27).

Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynau, interviewed by the International Herald Tribune, criticized the Western media for perpetuating "three myths" about Belarus: that the liberalization program was simply a response to pressure from the West; that Belarus had to choose a path either toward Russia or the West; and that the country was a throwback to Soviet times. Liberalization in his view follows a period of "robust" economic growth, and Belarus has climbed 30 places in the World Bank's "Ease of Doing Business" table. Over one-third of the population uses the Internet, people have access to foreign television channels, and registration of political parties and public associations has been simplified. Belarus will continue to develop good relations with both the West and Russia; and a visit to Minsk, with its McDonalds and Max Mara fashion stores, should dispel the myth that there is any nostalgia for the Soviet past (*International Herald Tribune*, February 23).

Interestingly, Lukashenka has himself undermined such positive viewpoints, both of Milinkevich and Martynau, with his own remarks and actions over the past month. He told Solana that the talks should exclude those who are not well disposed to Belarus, both outside and inside the country (www.charter97.org, February 19). Evidently, he maintains that critics of his government are ipso facto critics of Belarus. Indeed, after almost 15 years of his leadership, it has become increasingly difficult to criticize the president.

As for economic liberalization, Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski has admittedly long supported such a path, but he was only able to persuade the president of the wisdom of such a course of action at a time of economic desperation. Practically all enterprises have been denationalized, but the final decision always lies with the president. Lukashenka explained liberalization in the following way: "If you wish to buy an enterprise, entirely or in part, come to me." But first, he stated, you had to go to the factory, and the collective leadership would make a decision. Next, the issue must go to the local authorities, then to the government for the minister's approval, and finally to the desk of the president. The process is very bureaucratic, he admitted, and there were no plans to make it less so (*Obshchenatsional'noe televidenie* [National Television ONT], February 17).

Finally, links to the Soviet era have been perpetuated by the Lukashenka regime, as demonstrated recently by House of Representatives Deputy Henadz Davydzka, a Distinguished Artist of Belarus. Irritated by criticism of his country, he reminded the Europeans that Belarus had saved them from Fascism; if it had not done so, its population would be 100 million rather than 10 million. Belarus and Europe, in his view, place equal stress on democratic values, so why can Europe make demands on Belarus but not vice-versa? (*BelGazeta*, February 23).

The next two potential stages of the Belarus-EU rapprochement are acceptance of Belarus into the EPP and an invitation to Lukashenka to attend its Prague inauguration on May 7. Both are likely to happen, but there is little evidence to date that much has changed with the regime in Minsk. Simply put, the Europeans have opted to overlook issues of human rights and democracy in the interests of deeper engagement.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, March 3, 2009

Solana's Meetings with Opposition not on TV

Only Javier Solana's meetings with Belarusian officials were covered on television.

Official Belarusian television and Euronews reported about meetings of the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy with Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Belarusian foreign minister Syarhei Martynau. They didn't mention, however, that Javier Solana began his visit in Minsk with meetings with the Belarusian opposition.



Solana meeting Kazulin



Solana meeting Martynau

The EU's High Representative met a delegation of Belarusian democrats that consisted of former political prisoner Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the "For Freedom" movement Alyaksandr Milinkevich, head of the Belarusian Association of Journalists Zhanna Litvina, chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee Aleh Hulak, human rights activist Alena Tankachova, economist Pavel Daneika, and the head of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions Alyaksandr Yarashuk.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, February 20, 2009.

Quotes of Quarter

"I look forward to the day when Belarus takes its rightful place in a European family that shares the values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and that yearns for long-lasting shared peace and prosperity"

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO, President of the European Commission

Congress of Assembly of Pro-democratic NGOs

The VI Congress of the Assembly took place in Minsk on March 6-7, 2009. With 330 participants, more than 30 foreign guests, and representatives of all major independent media present, the VI Congress was the biggest NGO Forum in the Assembly's 12-year history

In a report assessing the situation of the Belarusian third sector in general and the Assembly of Pro-democratic NGOs in particular, Siarhiej Mackievič, the Chairman of the Assembly's Working Group, emphasized: **"We have not observed any systemic changes, neither at the national nor at the regional level.** The language the authorities use might have become milder, but their actions remain based on existing repressive legislation. Their goal is to ban opponents of the authorities from any type of legal activities. Unfortunately, new forms of repression, such as forced conscription and house arrest, have started to be used against democratic activists, even during the EU-Belarus dialogue period. **We call for real, not cosmetic changes in Belarus."**

The Congress heard reports on the findings of six regional and six topical round tables that had been held in January-February, 2009, in frames of the Congress preparation. The roundtables covered topics such as human rights, youth, social and women's NGOs, the environmental movement, civic education, and new media as a form of civic activism.

A new Working Group – the governing body of the Assembly consisting of 39 NGO representatives from throughout the country – was elected Siarhiej Mackievič, head of the Minsk-based "Supolnaść" Civil Society Center, was reelected chairman.

On the second day, a "Festival of Civic Activism" was held, which featured the winners of an earlier competition. At the Festival, 28 NGO stands, 11 video spots and 17 presentations of unique programs, campaigns and projects were presented. Finally, the Congress adopted a series of resolutions calling on the government to undertake a fundamental liberalization, normalize relations with and the operations of the Third Sector, abolish all forms of political persecution, and **include civil society and the public in the debate over the building of a nuclear power plant in Belarus.**

OSCE Display of Cynicism Disappointing

Independent journalists are indignant over the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE delegation's assessment of the situation concerning freedom of expression in Belarus.

"Adoption of the new media law in Belarus that took into consideration suggestions of the European community became a very good sign," BELTA state information agency cites **Uta Zapf**, the chair of the OSCE PA Working Group on Belarus.

"I cannot say that radical changes for better are taking place in Belarus. But it is pleasant to see there is a will by authorities to reconsider legislation in the European direction. And this inspires respect," stated Uta Zapf.

Independent journalists' reaction to the statement of the PA OSCE working group head:

"I am surprised to hear such assessments," commented **Andrei Bastunets**, the Deputy Chairperson of Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ).

"While adopting the new media law in Belarus no recommendations by European institutions were taken into consideration... The law itself remains non-democratic and if the political situation changes we will have the opportunity to 'get acquainted' with all its repressive provisions..."

The law still aims to control Internet. It makes it easier to shut down a media outlet and forbid activities of foreign reporters without accreditation."

Valery Bulhakau, the editor of ARCHE magazine (one of its issues has been declared extremist):

"Of course, we can see some progress in the media field, e.g. two independent newspapers are allowed to enter the state distribution system. But I doubt that the new media law will bring any progress to the media situation. So far it has only resulted in an unpleasant process of re-registration."

"It is really disappointing to see such display of cynicism by our European partners."

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, March 13, 2009

Belarus, Lithuania, and a Nuclear Power Plant in Search of a Solution

By **Andrei Azharouski**

Debates are still ongoing on the issue of possible construction of a nuclear power plant in Belarus. The suggested site is in the Astravets district in the northern part of Hrodna region - or just some fifty kilometres away from neighbouring Lithuania's capital of Vilnius.

Lithuania is worried, Belarus' Foreign Affairs Ministry is circling the wagons, and Astravets residents keep collecting signatures for a petition to stop the project. All the while, the Belarusian KGB - still very much alive in this former Soviet republic, which bore the brunt of the nuclear fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster - is calling activists in for questioning, and the propaganda machine of the country's nuclear establishment is painting anti-nuclear protesters as members of sex minorities, quite a stigma in a country viewed widely as one of the Eastern European states with the worst human rights record.

Initially, several sites were proposed to host the envisioned nuclear power plant (NPP).

Last January, reports appeared in Belarus' official media outlets that the choice had finally been made. The NPP is supposed to be built near the village of Mikhlishki in the Astravets district of the Hrodna region. However, as activists with an organisation called The Anti-Nuclear Campaign of Belarus found out, no final decision had actually been settled upon: There was only a recommendation made by a certain unidentified commission, and making a formal decision to place a new nuclear power plant at a particular site is a prerogative afforded only the president of the country.

Reports that a decision regarding a particular NPP location had ostensibly been made, combined with mass-scale pro-nuclear propaganda, may have been meant to spin public opinion the right way, as well as to probe the likely reaction on the part of neighbouring Lithuania - a European Union-integrated nation that is phasing out its nuclear power

dependence, but may soon find it has a new nuclear power plant in its backyard. If the latter is true, then the idea must have been a raving success - Astravets residents are not exactly psyched about the prospects of living inside of a 30-kilometre NPP safety zone.

Belarusians against a nuclear power plant

As soon as Astravets became a hot news media item as the likeliest site for a future NPP, local residents realised there was a serious cause for worry. An obsessive NPP publicity campaign in the press pushed them enough to want to take action. In November 2008, a steering committee was put together to organise a public initiative dubbed "Astravets NPP is a Crime." Indeed, locals deem it none other than an atrocity that a nuclear power plant is slated to appear near where they live.

KGB and local brass go to war - as they know it

The sheer course of action undertaken by the NPP proponents is, in any case, astounding: Instead of arguing the issue at hand, they choose to portray the opposition as gays and transvestites. The very idea that it might help to resort to inciting homophobic sentiments in order to promote a nuclear power plant is plainly despicable. Too bad that its perpetrators will likely remain unknown.

The signature collection campaign

Just how heart-felt is Astravets residents' refusal to allow a dangerous site in their backyard is evidenced by the fact that even after various attempts by the local authorities to thwart the anti-nuclear activities, after the KGB summons, and after the appearance of the fake leaflets with insulting innuendoes, the Anti-Nuclear Steering Committee is still holding together. Quite the opposite, instead of giving in to pressure, it keeps attracting new supporters.

As arguments against the NPP, the statement lists the threat of an accident or a disaster prompted by an operational failure at the plant, a possible increase in cancer incidence caused by so-called "sanctioned" radiation discharges that a nuclear power plant releases even in the course of routine operation, the risk of another violent earthquake of the scale of the 1909 disaster (the 7.0 magnitude quake of 1909 was the strongest ever recorded in Belarus), and the dominant western winds, which would carry the radioactive fallout all over the country should an accident in fact take place.

How viable is the project anyway?

Earlier official reports pegged the start of the construction at 2009. The first reactor block of the new NPP is projected to begin operation in 2016, and the next one in 2018.

The government has yet to select an equipment supplier or even to announce a tender or any alternative procedure to choose one. The state is likewise hard-pressed to secure enough funds to finance construction works. The costs of building a nuclear power plant of a capacity of around 2 gigawatts may set the country's budget back by as much as 5 to 6 billion EUR, which is no small amount.

Of course, there is always the expectation that the new NPP will be another "present" to Belarus from Russia - which may simply build the plant for its neighbor and append the construction costs to the already gigantic debt sheet run up by the Belarusian government. One should hope, however, that at the time of a raging financial and economic crisis, Russia will refrain from making such an expensive and, essentially, perilous gift.

Source: www.bellona.org, March 17, 2009.

Belarus Devalues Its Currency

By David Marples

On January 2 residents of Belarus learned that the national currency—the Belarusian ruble (known locally as the *zaichik* or hare)—had been devalued by 20.5 percent against the US dollar, falling from around 2,200 to 2,650. In November and December the administration of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka had denied that such a move was in the offing. The announcement has not only derailed the vision of a unique Belarusian path in economic development, with progress linked to strong state intervention, but it has led to panic buying and uncertainty among the population as to what the new year will bring.

On December 31 Lukashenka informed citizens that the New Year 2009 would be “complex.” Subsequently, a week transpired before the government offered the public an explanation of the devaluation. Lukashenka associated it with the government’s request for a \$3 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund as well as the need to lower the prices of exports to Russia. It appears, in fact, that devaluation was one of the conditions requested by the IMF (www.charter97.org, January 9).

Lukashenka offered more explanations to his countrymen in an interview to leading members of the mass media (those officially recognized by the regime), which was published in the main presidential organ on Sunday. The questions addressed the new crisis in stages, asking the president first how he would characterize the place of Belarus in the international arena and its prospects for future development. The president stressed the need for the normalization of relations with both Russia and the European Union before regressing to the losses of Belarusians in the Second World War. The independence of Belarus was attained essentially through the victory over Nazism, he stated (*Belarus’ Segodnya* [SB], January 10, 11).

He continued by recalling that the Belarusian state had survived two earlier serious economic crises: the first in the mid-1990s, a situation he inherited when he became president in 1994; and the Russian financial collapse of 1998. Today the essential thing for Belarusians, he stressed, was to avoid panic and “strongly,” “correctly” ease their way out of the current dilemma. In this respect, the situation was not yet critical. On the other hand, he emphasized, Belarusians needed to recognize that not everything depended on the authorities, but rather much of the onus lay on the people. If they understood the need to work diligently and calmly, then all the problems could be overcome; but if they began to panic or start buying items such as televisions and refrigerators by the dozen, the situation would only be exacerbated (*Belarus’ Segodnya* [SB], January 10, 11).

That is, however, precisely what Belarusian residents have begun to do, largely because of the lack of warning from the government that devaluation was about to take place. Although the official rate to the dollar remained stable, one newspaper reported that “People want to buy dollars.” Taxi drivers were buying them for BR2,500 to BR2,600; at markets the exchange rate was BR2,800-2,850; and sales of refrigerators and CDs were being made at a rate of BR3,000. On January 6 one of Belarus’s largest tourist companies announced an exchange rate of BR3,250 to the dollar (*Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii*, January 9). Lukashenka criticized people who rushed to stores to buy five or 10 television sets and refrigerators before devaluation took effect as “stupid,” because prices were falling. It was preferable, he stated, to keep money in bank accounts.

Former Chairman of the National Bank of Belarus Stanislau Bahdankevich commented that devaluation was necessary and should have been done earlier, but the Lukashenka regime had lacked the will to carry it out. In his view, the government had also failed to exploit earlier advantageous opportunities for privatization and technological improvements to industry. Rather than introduce gradual devaluation, the government, by its harsh measure, had imposed a huge burden on citizens who had also seen their heating bills rise this year by 30 to 35 percent (*Belorusy i Rynok*, January 5-12).

The president’s latest pleas for foreign loans hardly promote confidence. Over the past month he has asked Russia for a loan of \$3 billion (initially \$2 billion) and the United States for \$5 billion (*Associated Press*, December 22). Together with the forthcoming IMF loan, the requests reflect the expenditure of most of the country’s gold and hard currency reserves in a failed bid to maintain the value of the currency. The average wage has fallen “overnight” from \$400 to \$333 per month. Although the price of Russian gas for 2009 has not been finalized, a Russian source has suggested that a relatively low price may be dependent on Belarus’s recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (*RIA Novosti*, December 22).

Lukashenka is correct to point out that the crisis is international and is affecting much of the world. Psychologically, however, Belarusians were simply not prepared for the sudden announcement. Lengthy speeches about the importance of state independence and the sacrifices made in a war that ended nearly 64 years ago are unlikely to placate residents advised for years to accept a benevolent state-run economy that was supposedly immune to fluctuations in the global economy. The regime has lost its main platform: that of an “economic miracle” that permitted residents to live peacefully and prosperously, despite the regime’s lack of democratic foundations and contempt for human rights.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume: 6 Issue: 6, January 12, 2009

Elegant default

By Uladzimir Akulich

"Belarusian currency has devalued 4 times as much as Turkmen one, 1,000 times as much as Russian, 100,000 times as much as Lithuanian one.

A real default has taken place in the country. This time it is disguised as a changed mechanism of exchange rate formation. But the mechanism for some reason has been changed in a way that every Belarusian woke up in the new 2009 poorer by 20%. And now the inflation is to rise, and people are to become even poorer. 1% of devaluation in Belarus to cause 1% of price hikes, informs *Nasha Niva*.

Such economists as Bahdankevich and Ramanchuk, who support devaluation, are short-sighted. Like the National bank experts, justify the national currency's decline in value by necessity to support exporters, but according to the Constitution it is the National bank which is to support stability of the national currency. But it is doing just the contrary. By his actions he decreases real income of the population, and thus does not allow forming sufficient internal solvent demand. As a result our country remains dependent on export and foreign markets conditions the time.

With such a policy we won't ever have exchange rate like in Germany or the US, which consume 80-90% of their own GDP, as they maintained their national currencies for years. A corresponding law was adopted in Germany in the time of German mark. Thus they managed to provide high income of their countries' population. As it had been declared, we are following the path of China, increasing production, trying to sell the goods abroad; and the economy of the country still stays too dependent on export, that is why devaluation of the national currency takes place from time to time, in order to support price competitiveness of the export; at the same time with every devaluation real income of population decreases, and salaries do not reach the level of developed countries, a really capacious home market is not formed, which could have made the economy of the country less dependent on foreign markets.

Who has prevented our government to create a needed productive potential over the last 15 years? Why citizens pay for the president and his government's actions who had not trusted foreign investments for so long, and when they thought better, it was too late, as the global financial crisis started?

Over the 15 years under Masherau's rule in Belarus about 400 large enterprises were founded. And how many enterprises have been created during Lukashenka's rule? 20 or 30, not more. Who is to pay for the mistake that the authorities could not understand the role of small and middle business, service sector for the economy, which could have become the safety cushion and accumulate part of solvent demand, not allowing it to be covered by import, as a result of which problems with negative balance of foreign trade, growth of state indebtedness to other countries, pressure on the national currency exchange rate. That means, exactly the problems by which financiers justify necessity of ruble's devaluation.

And again, one should admit sincerely that the national currency's devaluation is putting money from one pocket, the pocket of the population, into the pocket of the state. Devaluation is nothing but collection of the additional so-called "inflation tax" from the population. As after the devaluation the price hike for imported goods is to take place automatically after the devaluation, and soon prices for domestic goods go after them. With prices advance the indirect taxes are to grow too (such as VAT, excise duties and so on). Their share in the state budget is to make 70-80%. So against the background of decrease of the real income, thanks to this additional money, pensions are even to be increased.

From the moment of introduction of the Belarusian ruble, Belarus is leading in the pace of deflation of the national currency even among the CIS countries, not speaking about the Eastern Europe.

Adding the four zeroes which had been cancelled during the two devaluations, one dollar would cost 26,500,000* rubles (second position is occupied by autocratic Turkmenistan, 7,125,000). To compare with: considering all devaluations in Russia from the moment of introduction of the Russian ruble, 1 US dollar would cost only 29,000 rubles. Lithuania would have 263 litas per 1 dollar; Estonia 117 kronas; Latvia 107 lat per 1 dollar. And in the Baltic countries the devaluation took place in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After full-value national currencies were introduced, their exchange rate fluctuated, but within the margins of changes of Euro exchange rate to dollar.

The Belarusian currency has lost its value as compared to the dollar 4 times as much as Turkmen, 1,000 times as much as Russian, 100,000 times as much as Lithuanian.

All this would cause low level of Belarusian salaries in dollar equivalent. They are lower even when compared to Russian ones, not to mention Central European. But that cannot be said about prices. In other words, we have had so much devaluation that it would be enough for many years to come.

According to the methodology of the UN, the country which has an average month salary of at least 1,000 is considered a developed country. With today's collapse of the Belarusian ruble, let us call the things their names, the average level of salaries in Belarus has decreased from 450 dollars in December to about 370 dollars.

***Editor's note:** The rate against the US dollar has since reached 2880 and then rebounded slightly.

Source: *Nasha Niva* and Charter 97 Press Center, January 9, 2009

Quotes of Quarter

"We may consider the statement by Uta Zapf a tactical move toward producing closer relations between Europe and Belarus. The process itself may be positive. But it is really disappointing to see such display of cynicism by our European partners."

VALER BULHAKAU, the editor of ARCHE magazine

IMF Loan to be Used for Reforms

The US embassy in Minsk has called on Belarus to use the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s \$2.46-billion loan for additional structural economic reform.

"Building on the IMF loan approved on January 12, we believe that additional efforts for structural economic reform in Belarus should follow: further price liberalization, the transparent privatization of state-owned enterprises, and legal and regulatory reform to encourage the development of a thriving private sector, as well as other measures to ensure that financial institutions operate on a fully commercial basis," the US embassy says in a statement issued on January 13. "From our perspective, such reforms would help to achieve necessary adjustments and encourage long-term growth and investment, thereby strengthening Belarus' position with regard to the global economy, regional markets, and the current financial crisis."

The embassy says it welcomes "the important and positive" steps that Belarus is taking in consultation with the IMF to address the economic crisis. "The policies Belarus has committed to under the IMF program will help to strengthen Belarus' economy and financial system," the statement says. "Belarus should follow through on these critical reforms, and continue close consultations with the IMF."

The IMF Executive Board gave final approval to the loan on January 12, saying that some \$787.9 million would be made available to Belarus immediately, while "the remainder will be phased thereafter, subject to quarterly reviews." The IMF loan is to finance a 15-month program of economic reform.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Jan. 15, 2009

Ruble's Fall Sends Belarusians On Shopping Spree

By Bahdan Andrusyshyn

A sharp depreciation of the Belarusian ruble has resulted in long lines at Minsk currency-exchange booths and stores across the Belarusian capital.

Fearing further devaluation, people are clamoring to purchase scarce U.S. dollars and unloading available rubles on all kinds of merchandise, lest prices rise precipitously.

"I stood in line for two hours and there are just no dollars or euros to be bought," said one woman at an exchange outlet in the city center.

Another man said he finally managed to purchase \$600, but only after being turned away at three other exchange booths. "I got lucky. I think the national currency is going to continue to fall."

Such is the prevailing mood among Minsk citizens, though the National Bank says the present hard-currency deficits are a temporary, technical problem, which will soon be resolved. The authorities say no further devaluation of the currency is planned.

Still, many exchange outlets visited on January 11 by RFE/RL Belarus Service correspondents had posted notices saying: "No hard currency for sale."

Meanwhile, merchandise in local stores -- everything from fur coats to vacuum cleaners to refrigerators -- seems to be flying off the shelves as consumers race to spend their rubles before another unforeseen drop in the national currency or sudden price rise. Long lines were seen on January 11 at cashier counters, display windows, and fitting rooms in Minsk's central department store.

"People are buying literally anything and everything," a manager at one Minsk shop said. "We are breaking all sales quotas."

"Our government should do things in a bit different way," said one customer, referring to the National Bank's move on January 2 to allow the ruble to lose 20 percent of its value against the dollar. "Shock therapy is not for us."

Source: RFE/RL, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, January 13, 2009

Belarus' Opposition Offers Alternative Crisis Plan

MINSK -- Representatives of the United Democratic Forces of Belarus (ADS) say they intend to hand their own plan for dealing with the global economic crisis to the presidential office.

The program was prepared by a group of economic experts working together with the ADS.

The project's coordinator, Lev Margolin, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that the major difference between the ADS's crisis plan and the government's is the system.

Margolin said Belarus, which produces goods of a lower quality than those made in a market economy, should use its advantages in order to withstand the global economic crisis.

He said these include the absence of a true real estate market and the fact that there has not been any privatization in the country.

Economist Yaroslav Ramanchuk says the crisis plan's major points are significant tax cuts and making all financial transactions in Belarusian rubles.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 16, 2009,

Quotes of Quarter

"In my view, NATO should end at the Belarusian-Russian border or the Ukrainian-Russian border"

Former Czech president **Václav HAVEL**, on the 10th anniversary of the Czech Republic's entry into NATO.

Belarus' Creative Opposition

CONTINUATION of an article in the Winter 2008 issue of BELARUSIAN REVIEW.

By Iryna Vidanava



Iryna Vidanava

Art from Anger

Sasha, an 18 year-old photographer, journalist and environmental activist, is already well-known in Minsk artistic circles. Although she is a freshman at the Visual and Cultural Studies Department of the exile European Humanities University, takes photos for the online art project "The City of Minsk" (<http://horad.exe.by/>), shoots video for the unique multimedia youth compact disc publication CDMAG, and publishes the fun-zine TRYZNAS*KEFIRAS, Sasha still does not consider herself "a super busy person."

Changing the color of her hair depending on her mood, Sasha is one of the most creative and talented people that I've ever met. She describes creativity as a buzz-word which isn't really understood by many young people. "To be creative means not being afraid to do things in an unusual way, even when you don't know what you will end up with," - Sasha says. "And if you care about something, then you shouldn't be lazy and only talk about your cause," - she continues, now describing her views on activism. Sasha is a strong believer in a strong, direct connection between creativity and activism. Even traditional opposition demonstrations, in her opinion, become much more effective when something unusual happens during them, like "when anarchists began playing their drums during the Chernobyl Day and Social marches, catching everyone's attention!"

Sasha does things her own way. During a recent march against the regime's cancellation of benefits for students and other vulnerable segments of society, she was part of a small group of young people who refused to follow the planned route and instead marched down one of Minsk's main streets. Unlike most students, Sasha also lives her life according to environmentally friendly principles. She is inspired by many things, but one of her chief motivations is what a friend once called "positive anger" - a feeling of despair that pushes one to do something new. She also has a few favorite creative blogging communities, such as <http://community.livejournal.com/4asapopi3> or http://community.livejournal.com/design_books, but says that

her main "community" is the company of her friends. Sasha is often inspired by people, like a recent conversation she had with the owner of Lithuania's largest photo studio.

Sasha is one of hundreds of Belarusians studying at European Humanities University, a leading private institution which was shut down by Belarusian authorities in 2004 and now operates in exile in Vilnius, Lithuania. For Sasha, who graduated from an elite high school in 2007, studying at EHU was a conscious choice. "After hearing terrible stories about the Journalism Department at Belarusian State University or Cultural Management at University of Culture from my friends, I had no wish to apply there. So, I found a syllabus from EHU online and decided that it was the best place for me." After a semester of commuting between Minsk and Vilnius, she still thinks it was the right choice. "First of all, something is always happening here and you don't feel like you live in a can anymore," - Sasha explains. "Secondly, I'm gaining precious experience from studying and living abroad. Even being just three hours from Minsk, I've begun looking at things from a different perspective."

Sasha hasn't planned her future yet. She says that it isn't easy for her even to make plans for next week. She is excited about her artistic projects, open to new ideas, and hopes someday to be publishing samizdat magazines and marketing the environmentally friendly soap she now makes at home for herself.

Forever Young

Only 18 years old, Vital Dabranach is already one of the veterans of the youth movement in Belarus. He became active in 2000 when, together with his teenage cousin, he began distributing an opposition newspaper. It didn't seem like hard work because they were able to pass out several thousand copies in just a few hours by choosing the busiest metro stations and yelling that the paper contained a television program. As a reward for their good work, they got a CD with Belarusian rock music and asked for more papers. The next time, however, things turned out differently. The boys were attacked by fascist thugs, which are tolerated by the regime. Vital escaped and was hidden by some people in an apartment building. His cousin was brutally beaten, but survived. "This is when I started to realize that something was wrong in my country," - he says.

Vital made the decision to join the democratic movement on his own. During the 2001 presidential election campaign, he found an information leaflet about the "Vybiraj" ("Vote / Choose!") get-out-the-vote civic initiative and dialed the contact number. This is how I met him, when he showed up at the "Vybiraj" office to pick up stickers, pins and other information materials. Five years later, 17 year-old Vital was one of the leaders of the tent city erected in Minsk's main square during the demonstrations after the rigged presidential elections of March 2006.

Back in 2001, Vital believed that victory was close. The election results came as a shock. Vital and his school buddies decorated a nearby bus stop with dozens of black ribbons, unable to believe that Lukashenka was still president. From 2001-03, Vital tried practically all of the major youth

organizations, but did not fit in. So in December 2004, he founded his own organization – “Voka” (Eye).

Voka’s mission is to promote Belarusian language and culture. During one of their first campaigns, its activists barraged Minsk’s FM stations with phone calls, spoke to DJs in Belarusian and asked them to play Belarusian rock music instead of Russian pop. The reactions were different, but the result was that more Belarusian songs began appearing on the air. On September 1st, the first day of school, Voka organizes different performances as a part of its campaign “I Want to Study in Belarusian.” This year they brought a mourning poster draped in black with the picture of a Belarusian language textbook to the Ministry of Education to raise public awareness about the disappearance of the Belarusian language from the state education system.

Vital claims that his organization is more cultural than political. Yet, Voka’s activists have participated in all of the major political and civic political campaigns in recent years, including the 2006 presidential elections. Like many other young people, Vital was very disappointed with both the results of the elections and the reaction of the opposition leadership. But he isn’t giving up and is busy these days promoting Voka’s youth website (www.moladz.org), organizing the activities of a new Belarusian music fan club, and preparing a concert tour of young Belarusian bands, which will take place in March 2008 and is dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the repressed Belarusian National Republic. He believes that, “if we want change to happen in Belarus, we must focus on working with the new generation of young people who are smart, educated, and in love with Belarus.”

Bringing People Together

Now 25 years old, Vola is the former head of the Belarusian Students’ Association, an artist, and a founder of the most popular Belarusian students’ web portal, Studenty.by. In May 2007, the portal was transformed into the online community Generation.by (www.generation.by). Its target group is Belarus’ Generation Y, young people born in the 1980s and 1990s who today are university and graduate students, young professionals, teachers, journalists, artists, designers and bloggers. “Like their peers around the world, Belarusian Ys have a sharp sense of their own personal freedom, are keen about new technologies, tend to be well-educated, and have a practical attitude towards life. The only difference, - Vola says, - is that Belarus’ Generation Y was born at a time of political and social turmoil. These young people are used to living in and adjusting to a constantly changing environment. These people want to be successful and are positive and optimistic. They set concrete goals and achieve them.”

Generation.by was created as a communications platform to connect creative and curious young Belarusians who want to learn more and have something to say to the world. Updated daily, it contains original news, articles, interviews, photo blogs, cartoons, flash animation, and music. While popular among youth, Generation.by also serves as an important source of information about what is happening in youth life for other traditional and online media. Its materials are often reprinted and some of its

products, such as a 2007 Christmas flash postcard (<http://newyear.studenty.by/>), have become popular even in Russia and Ukraine. On September 19, 2007, the Belarusian Internet joined the rest of the cyber world in celebrating the birthday of the smiley face J. On that same day in 1991, Belarus’s historic national symbols – the white-red-white flag and the emblem of a knight on a horse – were adopted after the fall of the Soviet Union (these symbols were later banned by the current regime). “While our old print media was writing articles about the history of the symbols and bloggers were congratulating each other on the Day of the Smiley, we merged both celebrations into one. We created a collection of 15 funny Belarusian emoticons with white-red-white flags (<http://generation.by/news1827.html>), which became a big hit on the Belarusian Internet this past fall. Honestly, we didn’t expect such success,” – Vola says.

What makes Generation.by really unique is the way it bridges online and traditional activism. The project is famous for its “Tuesday Meetings of Good People”: every second Tuesday, those who meet on the site in cyberspace physically come together. “This tradition is already three years old, - Vola explains. – It’s a chance for very different people to meet in an informal atmosphere, discuss the latest news, and share interesting ideas. Often the discussions develop into new projects.” Some Tuesday meetings are based on themes. Participants are, for example, asked to wear sneakers or a certain color. “Then it becomes a kind of a flash mob, symbolizing a gathering of people who are very diverse but have something in common,” – Vola continues. The most recent “Tuesday Meeting” took place simultaneously in Belarus, Austria, Italy and the Netherlands.

“(For) change to happen in Belarus, we must work with the new generation of young people who are smart, educated, and in love with Belarus,”

Voka activist Vital

The creators of Generation.by believe that there is a direct link between virtual and real life activism. The team takes part in many non-virtual artistic and civic projects, and works closely with colleagues from the traditional media to expose it to online journalism, blogging, Internet promotion and information security. Just last week, Generation.by launched an English-language version, so foreign audiences could learn more about Belarusian youth life, culture, and events (<http://logbook.generation.by/>). It is no wonder that “A good connection even offline” has become the informal slogan of the team.

Only 30 herself, Iryna Vidanava is Belarusian activist who has been working with independent youth groups and publications for more than a decade.

Source: Transitions Online, April 28, 2008

Cracking the Francysk Skaryna Code

By Ales Kudrytski

This man studied and lived in several countries, shuttled across Europe, went in and out of prison, worked as a publisher, doctor, gardener, with his interests ranging from the art of woodcut to translation, and, possibly, even Kabbalah. Now, here is the best part – he managed to do all these things five centuries ago without any Internet, budget airlines and time management courses. His name was Francysk Skaryna, the man who printed the first Belarusian book in Prague using the knowledge and skills he acquired in Poland and Italy. Indeed, he made a very good use of the “Renaissance globalisation”.



A woodcut by Skaryna featuring the author, 1517

If you come to Polatsk today, you will see a rather pleasant medium-size town, with a fair amount of pre-served landmarks, nice river, and the air of an ancient capital, which now humbly accepts its status as a provincial centre. This is where Francysk Skaryna was born. The exact dates of his birth and death are unknown; the two most probable estimates are 1485–1540 and 1490–1551.

Luka, the father of Francysk, was a respectable merchant who traded in furs. Francysk probably received his first schooling in Polatsk, and then went off to Krakow University. Most likely, it was in Krakow where Skaryna first saw a printing machine (the city's first print shop had been set up in 1496). He received his bachelor's degree in 1506, and about seven years later gained his doctorate in medicine at the University of Padua in Italy. In the interim time he became secretary to king Hans of Denmark (1481–1513) and acquired a thorough knowledge of liberal arts, the Classical languages, botany, astronomy, law and heraldry. Skaryna also mastered the south German style of woodcut and studied printing in northern Italy. There he moved in circles which enjoyed the protection of the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian. It is therefore very possible that his path could have crossed with Albrecht Dürer and many of his other famous contemporaries. According to one hypothesis, Raphael depicted Francysk Skaryna in his fresco “The School of Athens” in Vatican. The fresco contains Raphael's self-portrait together with an unknown person right next to him. If you look into the plump features of Skaryna on his own woodcut self-portrait, and compare it to the unidentified image on Raphael's fresco, you may think that the hypothesis might not be groundless.

The University of Padua still cherishes the memory of Skaryna. His portrait can be found in the Room of Forty, where other pictures and memorabilia pertinent to forty most prominent alumni are exhibited, including the chair of Galileo, who taught in Padua from 1592 to 1610.

After his graduation, Francysk Skaryna began to practice medicine, but he never abandoned his dream of printing books in his native language. At that time book printing was like a dot-com boom of 1995-2000 (except that it never turned out to be a bubble). Northern Italy resembled some kind of Silicon Valley where adventurous young entrepreneurs were massively setting up print shops like software development garages. Having learned that the Czechs had their first book printed in Venice in 1506, Skaryna thought, “The time has come”. As a result, the Belarusians became the second people in the Slavonic world, who had their Bible printed in their own language. In 1517, Francysk Skaryna established a printing press in Prague, where he published his first book entitled “The Psalter” in the old Belarusian language on August 6, 1517.

Skaryna spent two years in Prague, where he translated and printed the Psalter and some 22 books of the Old Testament. These were magnificent books. He used a handsome typeface interspersed with rebuses and illustrated with a series of woodcuts and arcane decorated initials. In total, he printed about 10 000 books in his print shop (one book amounted to about 500 printed copies). For the Belarusian nation, it was an enormous leap forward. The Bible was becoming understandable and affordable. Before that, only the richest aristocrats and monasteries were capable of buying hand-written books. Skaryna was also a very practical innovator. He printed his Bible in a handy “tabloid” format – four times smaller than the traditional size, which made it more comfortable to read.

Around 1522 he moved to the city of Vilnia (now known as Vilnius) and established there he first print shop in his native country, the Grand Duchy of Litva (Lithuania). Owing to Skaryna, Belarusians received an opportunity to buy and read the affordable printed Bible in their own language even before Germans, English, French did. Skaryna was working ahead of time – perhaps, too far ahead in some cases. For example, he took a big batch of his books to Moscow, proposing local authorities and church to establish the first print house. For Skaryna it was also a smart business project: he would have been the first to tap into the enormous market of the Russian Empire – compare it to becoming the first Internet provider in modern Russia. However, the Moscow authorities were not ready for such a proposal, and made a spectacular bonfire with Skaryna's “devilish” books. Only about half a century later, Ivan Fedorov (arguably, also a man from Belarusian lands) set up the first print shop in the Russian Empire.

Skaryna also laid groundwork for the development of the Belarusian language. Actually, he called his Bible “Biblia Ruska”, which often leads to misunderstandings. In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania the term “Ruski” referred to the local Slavic proto-Belarusian culture, while people living in what later became Russian Empire were called “Muscovites”. In any case, even the most biased linguist would not deny that Skaryna's Bible is printed in an Eastern Slavonic language, which is heavily saturated with genuinely Belarusian lexica.

Skaryna did not merely translate the Bible – he also extensively interpreted it. He wrote elaborate and yet

precise and clear prefaces to each book he printed. He also provided in-depth margin commentaries, explanations and translations of complicated and foreign words. Combined, his remarks form some kind of book hypertext. He would have probably created a multimedia Bible, if he had a chance to put it online.

Historians estimate that the Inquisition could have burned Skaryna not less than 13 times for heresy. Not only had he added prefaces and comments to the Holy Script, but he also included his full-size self-portrait! It is probably no coincidence that Skaryna began to print his Bible the same year Martin Luther hammered his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of a church in Wittenberg. Skaryna was a true man of Renaissance and Reformation. He never mentioned which branch of Christianity he adhered to, preferring to describe himself as a Christian, rather than a Catholic or Orthodox.

Skaryna's edition of the Bible turned out to be a splendid book with numerous woodcuts and rich vignettes, which are not just beautiful, but also full of mysteries and symbols. One should not forget that he printed his books in Prague, not too far away from the Altneschul (Staronová) Synagogue, with Golem's heavy ceramic pieces hidden somewhere in its basement. It was a famous centre of allegory and cabbala studies, a fashionable trend among young educated Europeans of that time. It turns out, that Skaryna followed the fashion and actually experimented with encoding encrypted images into his Bible illustrations.



Ryhor Ravyaka, Associate Professor at the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radio Electronics, scanned the woodcuts of Skaryna's Bible and ran them through a special computer program which made it possible to reveal hidden images. Professor believes that Skaryna used the "mirror trick" in order to hide information. If you hold a mirror perpendicularly to the picture, in some places new images are formed out of

chaotic lines and dots, with one half of the image visible on paper, and another one in the mirror. For example, Professor Ravyaka discovered a human figure concealed in an ornamental pattern; a miniature with the letter "P" contained a reversed picture of a two-headed eagle, possibly symbolizing the Russian Empire which was then not too successful in its military endeavors; Skaryna included the portrait of Kanstantsin Astrozhsky, his rich patron, into the letter "A"; and in the letter "M" one can discover the image of Medusa, a beast from the ancient Greek mythology, which was defeated by Perseus who avoided Medusa's deadly stare by looking into his (sic!) mirror-polished shield.

"The printed word has power", said Martin Luther, prominent contemporary of Francysk Skaryna. However, not only Belarusian historians like to create hypotheses

about possible encounters of these two great people. In the 1990's a play "Vita Brevis, or the Pants of St. George" by Belarusian playwright Maxim Klimovich was staged at the "Volnaya Scena" theatre in Minsk. Traditionally, Skaryna is shown as an idealistic and devoted national hero. This frivolous piece, however, depicts not only theological debates between Luther and Skaryna, but also their romantic adventures with various women. Oh well, it was the period of Renaissance...

Skaryna probably valued a good sense of humor; otherwise, it would have been too difficult for him to go through such a turbulent life. In 1529, his brother Ivan died in Poznan, Poland, while trying to launch a leather-trading business. Skaryna went to Poznan in order to return the money his wife invested into his brother's failed enterprise. However, in a strange twist of fate Francysk was thrown into Poznan's prison. A rich merchant from Warsaw who is referred in archival documents under the name Old Moses (Moses Antiquus) demanded his arrest until he repaid a debt of his brother. However, when the King Sigismund I found out that Skaryna was jailed, he ordered his release and even granted him rights that made the publisher immune to further prosecution.

Francysk Skaryna spent the last years of his life in Prague, working as a gardener in the Royal Botanical Gardens. However, the seeds he had been planting in the Czech capital gave their best crops at home, where new book printers – and readers – were emerging.

The name of Francysk Skaryna has a tremendous weight in today's Belarusian culture and national conscience. Perhaps, fearing it may eclipse his own, President Lukashenka made a strange and abrupt move by ordering to rename the main Minsk street – Skaryna Avenue – into the Avenue of Independence in 2005. A number of protests took place. People took to the streets with self-made printouts from Skaryna's Bible. Fortunately, one does not need to set up a print press to make them anymore – a computer printer will do. As usual, police chased people away, which, sometimes, led to anecdotic incidents. Thus, during a flash-mob on May 10, 2005 the police unit stopped a group of protesters. A banner that was confiscated contained the most well known patriotic abstract from Francysk Skaryna's preface. To a great delight of the crowd, the poor policeman, holding a walkie-talkie to his mouth, had to read out the whole passage in the old Belarusian language to his chief: "From their birth, the beasts rambling in deserts know their holes, birds flying in the air know their nests, fishes swimming in the sea and rivers sense their whirls, bees and the like defend their hives - and so do people. Where they were born and raised with God's will, they take much liking to that place". For the Russian-speaking police officer that passage was a tongue-breaker, but also a very nice example of practical education. It turned out, that Francysk Skaryna had a talent of bringing wise words to all kinds of people – from Kings to cops. "What should I do with these people?" asked the police officer in bewilderment after he had finished the reading. "Bravo! Wish'em good luck", the commander's voice in the walkie-talkie grumbled.

Source: Belarus Headlines, Issue XXXVIII, February 24, 2009

BELARUSICA

A German scholarly journal *Osteuropa-Recht*, in its September 2008 issue, published an article written by **Kirył Kaścian**, a Belarusian researcher of European law, who is pursuing his PhD thesis at the University of Bremen (Germany), entitled **“Die Litauische Verfassung und die Auslegung des Begriffs “Volk” in historischer Perspektive”** (*Constitution of Lithuania and its Interpretation of “Nation” in a Historical Perspective*, „Osteuropa-Recht“, 5/2008, pp. 290-297).

Editor’s note: The article is somewhat long to be printed in full in our limited page publication. Here, we are limiting ourselves with the Conclusion, preceded by our Introduction which lists some of the key points. The complete article can be found on our website: www.belarusianreview.org.

- Starting with its proclamation of independence in 1918, the Lithuanian Republic (Lietuvos Respublika) has positioned itself as the direct heir of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). The international scholarly establishment has simply adopted the Lithuanian view on the issue. The aim of the article is to reveal the weak points of the Lithuanian argumentation on the matter of historical succession.

- This view has been enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania on basis of “historical rights”. The one way to question the legitimacy of the Lithuania point of view is to analyze the ethnic composition of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The provisions of the 1529 Statute were applicable to the state comprised of three parts: Lithuania, Ruthenia and Samogitia, implying that the GDL political state consisted of these three ethnic components.

- The ethnically Baltic territory of Samogitia became a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania only in 1411 (two centuries after the formation of GDL – **editor**), and remained a separate administrative unit with clearly defined borders, until its conquest by Russia in 1795. The official language of the GDL was Old Belarusian, until it was formally replaced by Polish in 1696. Until the beginning of the 20th century the term Lithuanian was applied equally to Baltic speaking Samogitians and Slavic speaking Belarusians.

Conclusion (of the article by Kirył Kaścian)

The Lithuanian interpretation of the country’s statehood concept is laid down in the Constitution of the Lithuanian Republic. Applying the method of “historical rights” in its legal documents the modern Lithuanian state represents itself as the sole legal successor of the GDL. This view is accepted internationally both by politicians and academicians. The current Lithuanian foreign policy actively refers to the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). Practical evidence of this approach became even more visible after Lithuania’s accession to the EU and NATO.

The core of the Lithuanian concept of legal continuity is the Lithuanian nation (*tauta* in Lithuanian). The Constitu-

tion states that the Lithuanian nation “created the State of Lithuania many centuries ago” and has “based its legal foundations on the (medieval) Lithuanian Statutes.” It means that according to the Constitution the GDL and the modern Lithuanian Republic are regarded equally as Lithuanian nation-states.

Both current and inter-war Lithuanian statehoods qualify for the concept, according to which “(T)he State of Lithuania shall be created by the (Lithuanian) Nation” as is provided by Article 2 of the Lithuanian Constitution. However, the Lithuanian argumentation concerning the legal continuity from the GDL to the Lithuanian Republic has weak points, should the term Nation (*tauta*) be interpreted according to the definition of this word in the Lithuanian language. This definition names territory, language and cultural life as determinant elements of any nation.

We may conclude that the Lithuanian nation of the Lithuanian Republic is not equal to the Lithuanian nation of the GDL.

- First, the latter consisted of Lithuanians, Ruthenians, and Samogitians.

- Second, in territorial terms the Baltic Lithuanian nation is not equal to the area of Lithuania in its historical sense. It means that only Samogitia may be regarded as ethnically Baltic. Lithuania in its historical sense had a Ruthenian-Belarusian majority that dominated the Baltic minority.

- Third, culturally and linguistically the Lithuanian nation of the GDL is not equal to the Lithuanian nation of the Lithuanian Republic. We may define two Lithuanian cultures existing in the GDL: the dominant Belarusian-Lithuanian of the ethnic majority, and the subordinated Baltic Lithuanian of the ethnic minority. Moreover, we may speak about the existence of two different Lithuanian languages in the GDL: Baltic Lithuanian with a rather marginal status, and the official Belarusian-Lithuanian.

Hence, the vision of the Lithuanian nation, provided by the current Lithuanian Constitution, and referring to the GDL, is inconsistent. In this case, the term nation should refer equally to its Baltic Lithuanian and Belarusian Lithuanian components. Therefore, both the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Lithuania should be treated as equal successors of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL.)

Editor’s Note - on the origin of “Lithuania.”

- On March 11, 2009 the US Senate adopted a resolution, congratulating the people of Lithuania on the “1000th anniversary” of Lithuania.

Quoting the second paragraph of the resolution:

Whereas the name “Lithuania” first appeared in European records in the year 1009, when it was mentioned in the German manuscript “Annals of Quedlinburg.”

Actually the annals referred to **LITUA**, the latinized form of which became “Lithuania,” a term currently used in most Western European languages (English, French, Italian, Spanish). The German language uses the term “Litauen” - also derived from LITUA.

Continued on p. 20

• In Old Belarusian, the official language of the GDL, the term used to denote the medieval Lithuanian state was **LITVA**. This name has been used in all Slavic languages ever since, for today's Lithuania as well. Only the modern (Baltic) Lithuanian adopted a different (even though similar) name: **LIETUVA**.

The modern Lithuanian republic is now celebrating its 1000th anniversary by issuing a logo shown below:



Yet it was **LITUA**, that was first mentioned in 1009, not **LIETUVA**!

NEWS BRIEFS

January 27, 2009

Belarusian Government Creates Human Rights Council

The Presidential Office of Belarus has announced the establishment of a consultation council for human rights.

The chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC), Aleh Hulak, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that the administration has asked for the nongovernmental organization's assistance in creating the human rights council.

Hulak said the fact that the government has asked for the help of a human rights watchdog is a good indication that Minsk is seeking to improve its record.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

January 30, 2009

Young activists arrested, drafted

Police in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, have taken two young opposition activists into custody and transferred them to military recruiting stations, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports. RFE, Jan 30, 2009

Both Ivan Shyla of the Youth Front movement and Franak Vyachorka of the Belarusian Popular Front had medical deferrals that exempted them from military service. The deferrals were suddenly reversed.

Belarusian Helsinki Committee Chairman Aleh Hulak told RFE/RL that the incident could be classified as an illegal arrest.

Hulak said the secret services should not be involved in army recruiting, and activists were supposed to get letters telling them to report to military recruiting stations, which was not the case.

Yuras Hubarevich, a Belarusian opposition politician, told RFE/RL that officials are simply removing the two activists from society.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

February 3, 2009

Russia, Belarus to Sign Integrated Air-Defense System Agreement

Russia and Belarus will sign an agreement on the joint protection of the Union State airspace and the creation of an integrated regional air-defense system, a Russian presidential aide has said.

Sergei Prikhodko said the documents would be signed at a meeting of the Union State Supreme Council, which would be co-chaired in Moscow by Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Prikhodko added that the agreements would significantly strengthen the countries' defense capability and advance their military cooperation.

Col. Gen. Alexander Zelin, commander of the Russian Air Force, previously said the integrated air-defense system would comprise five Air Force units, 10 anti-aircraft units, five technical service and support units and one electronic warfare (EW) unit.

The system will be placed under the command of a Russian or Belarusian Air Force or Air Defense Force senior commander, at the presidents' discretion.

Source: RIA Novosti/Office for Democratic Belarus

February 3, 2009

Police Detain Youth Leader Alyaksandr Barazhenka

Alyaksandr Barazhenka, an activist with the European Belarus public campaign, was today detained in Minsk.

The young man was arrested today at 1300 near the Victory Square in central Minsk by police officers Ihar Harkush and Uladzimir Anishchuk. Alyaksandr Barazhenka was taken to a police station on Masherau Avenue. The detention was not justified.

Alyaksandr Barazhenka is one of the defendants in the notorious Case of Fourteen which was opened under Article 342 in the Penal Code of Belarus for taking part in a protest of entrepreneurs on January 10, 2008 in Minsk.

He was released after several hours without writing up a report.

Mr. Barazhenka was arrested on October 27, 2008 in the office of the Interior Ministry's Investigation Department where he showed up for interrogation. On December 9, 2008, Minsk's Central District Court sentenced the youth activist to one year of restricted freedom without corrective labour.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

February 6, 2009

Belarusian Police Detain Five Activists

Minsk police have detained five activists from the European Belarus campaign.

European Belarus representative Alyaksandr Atroshchankau told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that the activists were arrested today in an apartment rented by one of the activists, Paval Yukhnevich.

Atroshchankau said the police searched the apartment and confiscated posters, CDs, and notebooks.

Police said the detention of the activists and search operations were held due to information about a theft, but did not elaborate.

The European Belarus is a campaign organized by young activists to propagate democracy and European values in the country

Source: Radio Free Europe

February 9, 2009

Mikalai Autuhovich and Yury Liavonau Have Been Detained in Belarus

On Sunday, 8 February 2009, former political prisoners Mikalai Autuhovich and Yury Liavonau were arrested by a special police force in the Belarusian city of Vaukavysk.

The arrests were sanctioned by an order of the Prosecutor General of Grodno. The police conducted searches in the office of the company where the two men work as taxi drivers, in their apartments and even in their gardens. Despite the fact that no compromising evidence was found, Autuhovich and Liavonau were detained and brought to a Minsk detention centre on the Akrestina Street. Later it was learned that one of Autuhovich and Liavonau's colleagues was also detained. Reportedly, the searches were also conducted in the apartments of other opposition activists in the town of Vaukavysk.

According to human rights activist Aleh Vouchak, Autuhovich and Liavonau have been suspected of committing a crime under Article 218 (2) (i.e. intentionally destroying or causing serious damage to a property). This article carries a punishment of up to 5 years of limitation of freedom or 3 to 10 years of imprisonment.

Vouchak explained that, in 2005, a house of a police officer (Katsuba) from Vaukavysk was set on fire. Two people have already been found guilty of committing this crime and imprisoned.

The aggrieved party is reported to have no claims, and Autuhovich and Liavonau's lawyers believe there are no legal grounds to restart the case. They think Autuhovich and Liavonau will either be released or charged with other "crimes".

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.

In January 2008, as a result of the pressure from the international community the imprisonment sentence was replaced with corrective labour for both of them.

Sources: BelaPAN, *Nasha Niva*, Office for Democratic Belarus

February 9, 2009

New Media Law takes effect in Belarus

A new Media Law, which is described by some critics as draconian, took effect in Belarus on February 8. The law was passed by the National Assembly in June 2008 and signed by Alyaksandr Lukashenka on July 17.

The law bans media outlets from receiving money and property from foreign persons and legal entities and from "anonymous sources," as well as restricts the maximum share of foreign capital in a media outlet's authorized capital stock to 29 percent.

In addition, the legislation prohibits journalists from working for foreign media outlets without accreditation and provides for sanctions for "the distribution of false information that may cause damage to state and public interests."

The law has been criticized by media freedom advocates who have urged the government to bring it into line with international standards.

Speaking at a news conference last week, Deputy Information Minister Liliya Ananich claimed that the new legislation would "considerably" simplify the registration of new media outlets and "provide for a well-defined mechanism of responsibility."

"A media outlet will be punished only for a violation of media regulations, not a violation of laws in general. There is an

exhaustive list of grounds for issuing a warning to a media outlet or suspending it," the deputy minister said.

She reiterated that online news sources would not be required to apply for registration after the entry of the law into force.

The new Media Law was discussed at a round-table conference attended by government officials, journalists, representatives of the OSCE and the European Commission in Minsk on February 4.

Source: [http:// naviny.by](http://naviny.by)

February 9, 2009

Young Opposition Activist Artsyom Dubski Arrested in Homiel over Failure to Serve «restricted freedom» Sentence

Young opposition activist Artsyom Dubski, who is seeking political asylum in Ukraine and faces a criminal charge in Belarus, was arrested at the Homiel railroad station on Friday.

Police apprehended the 22-year-old Dubski on a train on his way from Ukraine to Minsk. He was taken to a Homiel transport police station and was expected to be driven to his home city of Asipovichy later in the day.

Mr. Dubski, a member of Malady Front, planned to take part in a Valentine's Day march that the youth opposition organization plans to stage in Minsk on February 14, the Belarus Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported with reference to his associates.

Mr. Dubski is one of the young people who were found guilty in the spring of 2008 of participating in an unsanctioned demonstration in January.

He received a two-year "restricted freedom" sentence, which required him to stay at home between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. on weekdays and never leave his home city. Criminal proceedings were instituted against Mr. Dubski later in the year over his failure to comply with these requirements. The young man was put on the wanted list in Asipovichy.

He moved to Ukraine and applied for political asylum in that country.

Source: [http:// naviny.by](http://naviny.by)

February 15, 2009

Police Break up Peaceful March in Minsk

Officers of a special task force broke up a peaceful march that a hundred young opposition activists attempted to stage in downtown Minsk on February 14 on the occasion of St. Valentine's Day.

Around 50 people gathered on Saturday evening on Yakub Kolas Square, defying the city authorities' ban on the St. Valentine's Day march of the opposition youth group Malady Front. Fifty people more joined them later.

Holding white and red balloons, Belarus' historically national white-red-white flags and flags of Malady Front and the European Union, participants distributed among passers-by small Malady Front flags featuring words, "Demonstration of Love."

Many plainclothes police officers were seen on the square.

After staging a short performance, the demonstrators headed along Independence Avenue toward Freedom Square. At the first crossroad, they confronted the riot police who blocked the road. The police warned that they would use force and "special means" to disperse the unsanctioned march.

As soon as the demonstrators started singing Belarus' national anthem *Mahutny Bozha*, officers began to push them violently back to the square. The police were tearing out flags from youths

and smashing the staffs. Malady Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich was beaten. His associates helped him reach the subway station.

No arrests were reported.

"The police breakup of the peaceful demonstration staged in Minsk on the occasion of St. Valentine's Day shows the real content of the authorities' declared liberalization," Mr. Dashkevich commented to BelaPAN. "Their liberalization boils down to



showy changes that target foreign consumers. No fundamental changes are taking place. Malady Front wanted to stage a legal, peaceful and fair demonstration, but the police preferred the cleanup operation."

On Friday evening and Saturday morning, police raided the homes of several Malady Front members, seizing flags and signs intended for the march.

The breakup of the peaceful march comes amid the ongoing thaw in relations between Minsk and the European Union that has begun after the Belarusian authorities pledged to carry out liberalization.

Source: <http://naviny.by>

February 18, 2009

Lukashenka Says Ready To Work With EU on His Own Terms

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said Tuesday he was ready to work with the European Union but only on his terms, criticizing what he said were opposition attempts to interfere.

"I don't want to make the West happy. I do what is best for the Belarusian people," he told a Belarusian public radio station.

"Is it advantageous to have close relations with the European Union, as we do with Russia? Extremely advantageous," he said.

But he dismissed a bid by the country's opposition to appeal directly to the EU.

"They wrote a whole petition to the Czech presidency of the EU, I have the document on my desk," he said.

"And the Czech presidency is beginning to draw up the order of business for EU-Belarus relations based on the demands of a so-called opposition, which is scarcely visible, even under a magnifying glass."

That kind of approach would lead nowhere, he warned.

"The opposition is not going to impose anything on us via the European Union and the United States," he said.

In October 2008, the E.U. decided to lift a travel ban on Lukashenka and several associates and review the decision in six months.

The move was designed to encourage democracy in the wake of legislative elections the previous month in which opposition parties failed to win a single seat in the country's lower parliamentary chamber.

The polls were widely condemned by the U.S. government and Western observers.

Source: Easy Bourse/Office for Democratic Belarus

February 19, 2009

EU Foreign Policy Chief Meets with Opposition Politicians, Civil Society Activists

Javier Solana, the European Union's high representative for the common foreign and security policy, met with opposition politicians and civil society representatives in Minsk on Thursday morning.

The EU foreign policy chief had arrived in the Belarusian capital late on February 18 on a 24-hour visit.

The meeting was attended by former presidential candidates Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin, human rights defender Aleh Hulak, economists Alena Tankachova and Pavel Daneyka, Alyaksandr Yarashuk, leader of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, and Zhanna Litvina, chair of the Belarusian Association of Journalists.

"The meeting took place in a good atmosphere," Mr. Milinkevich said in an interview with BelaPAN. "The conversation focused on the situation in Belarus and most participants spoke for dialogue [between the Belarusian government and the EU], but the terms of this dialogue invite questions. We told Javier Solana about what is going in Belarus now, in particular recently."

Mr. Milinkevich said that the EU official had been told about the controversial recruitment of opposition youths into the army, the arrest of dissidents Mikalay Awtukhovich, Yury Lyavonaw and Uladzimir Asipenka, and the violent break-ups of two opposition protests earlier this month.

Under discussion also were media freedom and calls for the abolition of the Criminal Code's articles that allow the government to prosecute opposition activists.

"We believe that Europe must devise a specific plan of action regarding Belarus and give the Belarusian leadership the 'carrot' based only on a balanced assessment of the situation; improve relations with Belarus only in exchange for specific improvements in Belarus itself," Mr. Milinkevich said.

According to the politician, Dr. Solana said that Brussels was following the situation in Belarus closely. "He emphasized the importance of dialogue and noted that he would like to make changes in Belarus nearer. This, according to him, might be done if Belarus joined the Eastern Partnership program. However, even such accession requires changes in the country's political life," Mr. Milinkevich said.

Source: <http://naviny.by>

February 19, 2009

PACE delegation finally met with oppositional youth

Delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe met Belarusian youth leaders on February 18.

The meeting was held on February 18 in the evening. The head of the delegation Göran Lindblad and PACE delegates Sonia Sirtori-Milner and Sinikka Hurskainen met with the leader of "Jeans for Freedom" campaign, an activist of the "European Belarus" Yauhen Afanagel and leaders of the "Young Front" Anastasiya Palazhanka and Valer Matskevich.

The young oppositionists told the PACE deputies that Lukashenka's regime has recently intensified crackdown on the opposition considerably, having chosen the youth as the main target for that.

"We have informed about all the facts of crackdown over the last 4 months, about disband of rallies on February 14 and 16, beating of peaceful protesters, searches in the apartments of

oppositionists, forcible and illegal drafts of young activists to the army, confiscation of office equipment, printed materials; facts of detention for distribution of newspapers, leaflets, stickers and European symbols. Members of the PACE delegation were particularly shocked that the Belarusian police destroy flags of the European Union seized from oppositionists, and in general, that people are arrested for European symbols,” Yauhen Afanagel to the Charter’97 press-centre.

The leader of “Jeans for Freedom” campaign gave the PACE deputies a monitoring of human rights violations in Belarus.

“We have informed that the concept of repressions in Belarus has changed, but repressions haven’t reduced. There are political prisoners in the country still, and their number is growing. They include participants of the Process of Fourteen, convicted for peaceful protest rallies, and recently arrested leaders of entrepreneurs Mikalay Autukhovich, Yury Lyavonau and Uladzimir Asipenka; as well as “Young Front” activist Artsyom Dubski, rearrested in the Process of Fourteen,” stated the youth leader.

Deputies of the PACE in their turn were interested in the attitude of the youth leaders to a possible return of the special guest status in the PACE to the Belarusian “chamber of representatives”.

“We said we are totally against that, stressing that essentially we stand for the dialogue between Belarus and Europe, but it shouldn’t be a monologue of dictator Lukashenka. We think that real actions on democratization of the country should be demanded of the Belarusian regime, and hollow promises shouldn’t be believed,” the oppositionist is convinced.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

February 20, 2009

European Parliament’s Delegation Visits Belarus

A delegation of the European People’s Party of the European Parliament headed by a Briton Christopher Bisley has arrived in Belarus today, on February 20.

The delegation also consists of European deputies Laima Andrikiene who initiated the visit, José Xavier Pomés-Ruiz (Spain) and Jacek Protosevich (Poland), head of the European Parliament’s delegation on connections with Belarus.

The one-day visit is necessary to meet representatives of the Belarusian civil community, political parties and diplomats.

Meetings with the Belarusian President, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, and Foreign Minister Syarhei Martynau were also planned. However, the sides have not officially confirmed it yet.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

February 23, 2009

Trials of People Detained on Mother Tongue Day to Take Place in Homiel .

Seven participants of the action conducted by activists of the democratic youth movement on Mother Tongue Day in Homel will take place on February 23.

Members of the steering committee on creation of the “Belarusian Christian Democracy” party and other civil activists tried to organize a flashmob. Participants went to the city’s main street with posters where the inscription “Belarusian Language” was crossed.

They were going to draw people’s attention to problems of our mother tongue. Young people were going to proceed as far as the monument of Kiryla Turauski and to place flowers on it.

Seven participants of the action and two independent journalists were detained by people in plain clothes and delivered to Homel Central District Department of the Interior. All of them were let off after an interrogation. Protocols were drawn up.

The activists are accused of an unauthorized manifestation and their protocols were drawn up on the basis of violation of the terms of organization of mass actions.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

February 24, 2009

EU Presidency Denies Report that Belarus Was Included in Eastern Partnership Programme

A spokesperson for the Czech presidency of the European Union has denied Monday’s reports that the 27-nation bloc included Belarus in its Eastern Partnership program.

Russia’s RIA Novosti news agency reported that the EU foreign ministers had decided to involve the country in the program at a meeting in Brussels on February 23.

When reached by on Tuesday, Jan Sliva said that in fact no decision had been taken and the matter would be “probably discussed in March.”

The EU foreign ministers discussed “preparations for the launch” of the Eastern Partnership. The program is expected to be approved by the EU heads of state in March and is expected to be launched at a summit in Prague on May 7.

The Eastern Partnership, originally proposed by Poland and Sweden in May 2008, was aimed at strengthening the EU’s ties with Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and, possibly, Belarus.

The proposal called for increased cooperation with the post-Soviet states in four key areas: democracy and the rule of law, the harmonization of economic systems and rules, energy security, and people-to-people contacts, including visa liberalization.

A total of euro 350 million is to be provided to the countries under the Eastern Partnership program before 2013, according to Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU’s commissioner for external relations and European neighborhood policy.

Source: [http:// naviny.by](http://naviny.by)

February 24, 2009

Issue of ARCHE magazine found “extremist”

Today morning a trial has started in Brest. It is to recognize the 7-8th issue of the independent “ARCHE” magazine extremist.

Judge has announced that the session of the court is to be held behind the closed doors, so only a KGB representative and the lawyer of the magazine are present at the hearings.

People who have gathered to support the magazine and its editors haven’t been allowed to be present in the court room.

As a result, the issue number 7-8 of “ARCHE” has been recognized extremist. Judge hadn’t asked any questions. Lawyer Pavel Sapelka states that the ruling is illegal.

The editor-in-chief of the magazine Valer Bulhakau has called charges absurd. As said by him, there is a practice of one hand washing the other in state agencies, and the KGB wants to assume functions of an ideological censor.

As we have informed, on October 24 last year an officer of Brest customs office Renata Nyadbaeva decided that information in the issue number 7-8 of “ARCHE” “could damage to national interests of the Republic of Belarus”. 10 copies of the magazine found in the things of historian Ales Pashkevich were seized for expert examination. The regional KGB department asked to

recognize confiscated magazines extremist materials and destroy them.

The issue of the magazine was dedicated to “parliamentary elections” last autumn, which was called not democratic and not free by the OSCE.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

February 25, 2009

Javier Solana sets conditions to Belarusian regime too

Belarus will be able to take part in the Eastern Partnership project only if all conditions of the European Union are implemented.

The spokeswoman for the EU’s High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Secretary General of the EU’s Council, thus commented on remarks of Alyaksandr Lukashenka at his meeting with Javier Solana in Minsk on necessity to have a dialogue between Belarus and the EU without mediators.

Ms. Gallach said that it was absolutely clear that the EU didn’t only respect, but also welcomed the activity of political opposition leaders in Belarus, who are engaged in a difficult political struggle. According to her, attitude of the EU towards the Belarusian opposition is demonstrated by the fact that the Secretary General of the EU’s Council met with opposition leaders first during his visit to Minsk.

As Gallach noted, the representatives of the Belarusian opposition emphasized the problem of the freedom of press in Belarus and informed about the facts of human rights violations, including arrests of young opposition activists on February 14. At the meeting J. Solana guaranteed that statements of the opposition would be considered by the EU.

Solana’s spokeswoman stressed that Belarus would be able to take part in the Eastern Partnership program only if the EU’s conditions were implemented. In particular, Belarus should stop violating human rights, establish a dialogue between the opposition and the government, provide the freedom of press.

According to Gallach, Solana regards his visit to Belarus as good and notes some positive moves in fulfilling of the EU’s conditions. A final decision on whether Belarus will be included into the Eastern Partnership program is to be taken at the EU’s summit in Brussels on March 19–20.

Gallach thinks participation of Belarus in the project shouldn’t evoke negative reaction of Russia, Belarus’s ally. Russia can only gain by improving relations between Belarus and the EU, because good relations are profitable for everyone, Solana’s spokesperson states.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

February 24, 2009

One More Activist Placed in Jail in Connection with the Case of 14

On February 23, Maksim Dashuk, one of the participants of the so-called trial of 14 was summoned to a local police department where he faced new criminal charges under article 415 – breaking the rules of serving a sentence.

Maksim Dashuk who was the only under age convict in the process of 14, was sentenced to a year and a half of freedom limitation.

The neighbourhood police inspector claims he has failed to find him at home during several inspections.

Earlier Mr Dashuk told journalists that he tried to find a job himself as the police who were supposed to help him with it did nothing. The youth had to help his mother who works as an entrepreneur as the father of the family passed away not long before the trial last year.

Source: *Nasha Niva*

March 2, 2009

Belarusian Christian Democracy Party Holds Founding Conference

A founding conference for the Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD) party was held in Minsk on February 28, with the gathering electing four co-chairmen and adopting the party’s charter and political platform.

Ryhor Dzmitruk, Vital Rymasheuski, Pavel Sevyarynets and Alyaksey Shein were elected in an open ballot to co-chair the party.

The party’s governing body, National Council, will consist of 10 “landmark VIPs” and 10 persons representing provinces, Mr. Sevyarynets said.

The 10 “VIPs” include, among the four co-chairmen, Malady Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich, prominent young opposition activists Andrey Kim and Artur Finkevich, Protestant priest Ernest Sabila, singer Andrey Melnikau and BCD activist Dzyanis Sadouski.



The group has a month after the founding conference to file an application for registration to the justice ministry, which is required by law to issue a reply within a month.

In his opening speech, Mr. Sevyarynets said that the list of founders featured 1,060 people.

As many as 211 people were delegated to the conference, with five founders each proposing one person, Mr. Sevyarynets said.

In attendance were prominent opposition figures, including former presidential candidates Alyaksandr Kazulin and Alyaksandr Milinkevich, small business activists Alyaksandr Makayew and Ihar Lednik and the chair of the Belarusian Popular Front, Lyavon Barshchewski.

Mr. Sevyarynets said that following the conference, participants would lay flowers at the Blessed Virgin church where the Belarusian Christian Democratic Union held its founding conference in 1917.

“This is an instance of continuity,” Mr. Sevyarynets said. “We do not start Belarusian Christian Democracy from scratch.

Source: [http:// naviny.by](http://naviny.by)

March 6, 2009

Putin Orders \$500 Mln Loan to Belarus

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has signed a resolution to make a \$500 million loan available to Belarus.

"At Belarus' request we will make one more loan worth \$500 million available to Belarus. The relevant resolution has been signed. I would ask the Finance Ministry to fulfill it quickly," Putin told the government presidium on Thursday.

The prime minister said that in 2008 Russia extended a \$1 billion stabilization loan to Belarus, while Gazprom paid over \$1.2 billion for Beltransgaz shares.

Source: Interfax

March 9, 2009

Authorities had no moral right to try Yana Paliakova

Who initiated a criminal case against Yana Paliakova? What did Yana say one day before her death? What was on the tape that allegedly confirmed Yana's guilt?

Shortly before the trial, Yana Paliakova ended up in coma in an intensive care unit. She recovered soon and was discharged home, according to her mother. However, Yana had to be admitted to the cardiology department because of her complications. She hardly reached home, as she fainted several times on the way back... The mother managed to get help from doctors and tried to ask prosecutors and judges to postpone the trial for at least two weeks. She faced refusal everywhere. Who was pushing the case?

The tragedy occurred in the morning of March 7 in Paliakova's apartment. The beautiful and educated young woman hung herself in the front room.

On March 3, a court in Salihorsk presided by Judge Burausou found Yana guilty of the false report against an official and sentenced to two and a half year in exile.

The official in question is the police captain Puhachou. In early September, a statement was filed with the local office of the prosecutor in which Yana Paliakova accused Puhachou of beating her in the building of a police station. She requested that the prosecutor react to this report and stated that the policeman was harassing her for gathering signatures in favor of Volha Kazulina during the 2008 election campaign.

The office of the prosecutor rejected Yana's facts. Some time later, police captain Puhachou demanded that Paliakova face criminal prosecution for libel.

But it was not him who was behind this malicious criminal case. During the hearing, the state prosecutor stated that the criminal case had been opened following the order of the Minsk Regional Prosecutor's Office.

During the trial, the main evidence to support that Puhachou was not guilty was a video tape from the surveillance camera near the Salihorsk police department. The tape showed Yana sitting alone on the visitors' bench and then leaving the police department building alone. Puhachou was never seen close to the girl.

On the other hand, the court did not make an expertise of the tape. The authenticity of the tape was not confirmed. Captain's alibi was also confirmed by a group of police officers. However, civil activists are routinely skeptical about testimonies made by police officers in the administrative and criminal cases with political coloring.



Yana Paliakova

She was a lawyer and knew for sure that the prosecutor's office and other agencies were filled with complaints. It is impossible to find the truth in this country...

But can someone sentence a person to 2.5 years in exile only for daring to complain? The case with Yana is apparently a new technique used by officials enabling them to sit quietly in their offices. Perhaps, they wanted to use Paliakova's example of in order to discourage others from filing complaints?

Even if we admit that Puhachou did not beat Paliakova and that the tape is authentic, why should she be sent to exile?

Kozulin, Parsiukevich, Kim, Marynich... This list in Belarus is long. Their guilt is not convincingly proved.

Young, educated, energetic Yana Paliakova was unemployed for over 10 years. Why? Only because local officials did not like her principal civic position.

Most likely, if Yana Paliakova had a permanent job and not harassed for her civil activities, she would have been alive now.

Source: www. Regions.by, Larysa Nasanovich

March 12, 2009

Uta Zapf: Belarusian authorities have not met 12 EU's democratization conditions

Belarus has not fulfilled twelve EU's democratization conditions so far. The head of the PA OSCE work group in Belarus Uta Zapf informed about it making a speech at the end of the seminar "Improving climate to attract foreign investments" in Minsk on March 11.

"We should remember that it is a long-term process. However, we have to cooperate in order to comply with these conditions". She stressed that both sides should aspire to the dialogue.

Let us recall that organization of free elections, provision of freedom of trade unions, freedom of speech and assembly are among the 12 terms of the EU.

Source: BelaPAN news agency

BELARUS ABROAD

CZECH REPUBLIC

Lukashenka at EU Summit in Prague?

On February 15, 2009 representatives of the Belarusian expatriate community and political emigrants from Belarus voiced their protest against inviting Alyaksandr Lukashenka to the European Union summit in Prague.

The rally was held on initiative of the Belarusian Popular Front's Youth Movement "Maladze Adradzhenne", registered in the Czech Republic as an international NGO.



For about an hour the protesters were handing out leaflets containing the appeal by Belarusians residing in the Czech Republic to the citizens of European countries. The appeal expressed protest against Lukashenka's possible participation in the EU summit, against the agreement on the integrated regional air defense system between the illegitimate Lukashenka's regime and Russia, and against the crackdown on the Belarusian opposition.

Excerpts from the statement by participants of the rally in Prague:

"Recent declarations by Belarus' illegitimate regime that it has radically changed in the last five months, have no logical confirmation. Mass arrests and crackdown on opposition continue. Moreover, young oppositionists are being expelled from universities and schools due to political reasons. They are immediately and by force drafted into the army, even those who are have been declared unfit to serve due to poor health. In the last months five most active youth opponents of the regime have been thus drafted.

Last week the Belarusian authorities signed an agreement with Russia on integrated regional air defense system, seemingly as counterbalance to the US-Western European ABM system that also includes the Czech Republic. It means that the regime in Belarus openly opposes the European Union, namely in the military sense.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH A DICTATOR!

The aim of our protest is to prevent another mistake. It concerns not only the Czech Republic, but the whole of free Europe. Betrayal of democratic principles is the first step towards the European Unions' collapse.

SAY NO TO INVITING THE DICTATOR!!!

The pro-democracy community of Belarusians in the Czech Republic".

UNITED STATES

Art Against Dictatorship

An exhibition of works by Belarusian artists entitled "Art Against Dictatorship" opened in Washington, D.C. on February 16, 2009

According to Pavel Marozau, coordinator of the association "The Third Way", this exhibition is a joint project of a number of Belarusian foreign initiatives. The exhibition of 30 works of Belarusian artists and sculptors was designed as a portable display, that has been demonstrated in the Parliament of Estonia and will be shown in the United States, Canada, and Scandinavian countries. It is organized by The Third Way, the Belarusian Youth Movement of America, and the Belarusian Museum in New York. The exhibition was made possible thanks to the support by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), German Marshall Fund of the United States, Estonian NGO Valgevene Uus Tee, and the Free Estonia Foundation.

The opening discussion focused on policies of the EU and the US towards Belarus. The participants included Belarusian artists Ales Shaternik and Alyaksei Marachkin, Pavel Marozau, human rights activists Iryna Krasouskaya and Protska, Bishop Sviataslau of the Belarusian Autocephalic Orthodox Church, and the first US ambassador to Belarus David Swartz.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Marachkin Exhibition in New York

The Belarusian Museum of New York announced a personal art exhibition "Dreams" by Alyaksei Marachkin. The exhibition opened with a reception for Marachkin on Sunday, February 15, 2009.

Alyaksei Marachkin has been a member of The Belarusian Union of Artists since 1977. He has been participating in exhibitions since 1966. His works have been presented in Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland, Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia.

He experiments with different genres in painting and graphic drawing. His art is characterized by associative allegoric vision and understanding of Belarusian history and traditions. He has made a string of vivid portraits of prominent figures of Belarusian history and culture,

"Painted Rugs", series "Stories and Legends of Belarus", paintings with social and political connotation, still lifes, landscapes



Mr. Marachkin is a founding member and the first chairman of the art society "Pahonia" (Chase), created within The Belarusian Union of Artists (The BSH), which has awarded him the silver medal of Belarus' Rebirth. For his remarkable achievements in national renaissance and promotion of cultural heritage of Belarusian people, he has been awarded the state Medal of Francisak Skaryna.

Source: <http://belmuseum.org>,
the web-site of the Belarusian Museum in New York

SPORTS

Achievements of the Belarusian Tennis Player

Viktorija Azaranka, the 18-year-old Belarusian tennis player, has been quite successful lately:

- winning on February 22nd the Cellular South Cup tournament in Memphis, Tennessee (USA) by defeating in the final the Danish representative Caroline Wozniacki.



- In January 2009 Viktorija participated in the Australian Open, where she reached the 1/8 finals and had to scratch her match with the American Serena Williams due to stomach cramps, after having won the first set 6:4. Serena eventually won the entire tournament.

SWEDEN

Free Theater's Success in Sweden

In the Swedish city of Lund a world premiere of "Eurepica.Challenge" has taken place.

The Belarus Free Theatre has created it in cooperation with the city council of Lund which can become the "Cultural capital of Europe-2014".



Other participants of "Eurepica.Challenge" coproduction are Mantearthen, responsible for technical support of the play; the European Cultural Foundation which has financed the project, and Trans Europe Halles, a network of Europe's cultural centres...

Preparation of the 3-hour performance within an extremely short time period of time had put the stage director **Uladzimir Shcherban** in a difficult situation, when the day of premiere cannot be shifted considering the number of rehearsal days. "We always stage a play according to European standards, in 3-5 weeks. Our actors have been accustomed to such a regime, so we had no problems in that, even considering that the play is mostly in English..."

Sharing impressions about the work done, the theatre's art director and producer **Mikalai Khalezin**, couldn't contain his satisfaction: "It was a rather difficult process which lasted a year and a half, and its result has exceeded all expectations. Judging by the first comments and proposals I see that this project can have a very interesting future"...



Exhibition "Belarus today/Belarus always"

The first shows are accompanied by a number of other events. In the same place, in Folkparken, an exhibition "Belarus today/Belarus always" is taking place. Photos

made in the streets of Minsk in recent years and paintings by Belarusian artist **Alyaksei Fiodarau**, are exhibited there...

First shows and public discussions attract to Folkparken not only theatre goers but Swedish politicians as well. Leila Freivalds, a former Foreign Minister of Sweden, who takes an active part in discussions on Belarusian issues, has spent two days there.

The theatre's director and "Eurepica.Challenge" producer **Natallia Kalyada** believes that this project can give Belarus chances for fulfilling its potential: "I think that "Eurepica.Challenge" project is unprecedented and significant for Belarus. Belarusian artistic teams haven't taken part in co-productions of such a level, and certainly they have never presented a European city for a nomination of "Cultural Capital of Europe". We have created an important precedent, and have opened the "window to Europe" wider. Now we are simply to turn its window into a door and enter it".

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, March 2, 2009

LITHUANIA

Yakub Kolas Cultural Center Established in Vilnia

A Yakub Kolas Cultural Center has been established in Vilnia (Vilnius, Lithuania).

A building to accommodate the center will be constructed where the house of the great Belarusian writer's wife, Maryya Kamenskaya, had once stood, said Khvedar Nyunka, chairman of the Belarusian Culture Society in Lithuania who is director of the center.

The house was demolished after World War II, and most of the surrounding land was distributed to private owners, he said.

Mr. Nyunka noted that he had pressed the city government to hand over its part of the land to the Belarusian Culture Society for more than two decades. To secure a favorable decision, the Society first established a Yakub Kolas Museum, then drew up a detailed plan of the 0.4-acre land plot, and finally signed an agreement with the mayor on the establishment of the Yakub Kolas Cultural Center. The Society now needs to draw up a catastral plan of the land plot, Mr. Nyunka said.

The main problem now is to find a sponsor in Belarus who would finance the construction project and the operation of the center, he added.

Source: <http://naviny.by>, February 19, 2009

HISTORICAL DATES

February 1, 1661

Inhabitants of the city of **Mahileu** rose against the Muscovite occupying army. Assisted by troops of the Grand Duchy of Litva, they liberated their city for the duration of the 1654 war.

February 2, 1838

Birthdate of **Kastuś Kalinouski**, leader of the anti-Russian national uprising of 1863-1864.



Kastuś Kalinouski,

March 21, 1840

Birthdate of **Francishak Bahushevich**, poet, lawyer and pioneer of the Belarusian national revival.

March 22, 1864

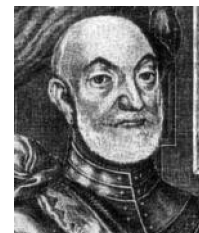
Kastuś Kalinouski, the leader of the anti-Russian uprising was executed by Russian czarist authorities, in Vilnia.

March 25, 1918

Belarus' Independence Day (Day of Freedom) — Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) was declared an independent state by the Executive Council of the First All-Belarusian Congress, in Miensk.

April 4, 1557

450th anniversary of birth of Leu Sapieha, a renowned statesman, chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Litva, and compiler of Litva's collection of laws - the Lithuanian Statute.



chancellor Leu Sapieha

EU Sends Belarus A Mixed Message

By Ahto Lobjakas

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner: "I do regret the need to reschedule my visit to Minsk, as it would have given me, I think, a clear chance not only to discuss with all sides the situation in Belarus five months after the suspension."

BRUSSELS -- All the members of the European Union agree on one thing: the bloc wants a better relationship with Belarus.

And that is what the EU will keep trying for, according to Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, whose country current holds the EU chair, after a grueling series of discussions last week that culminated in the March 16 foreign ministers' debate in Brussels.

"We agreed that the European Union must continue its engagement and the support of positive developments in Belarus," Schwarzenberg said.

The decision made is complex. On one hand, it extends an existing travel ban and asset freeze on 41 top Belarusian politicians and officials for another year. On the other, it extends for nine months the suspension of the same travel ban, which is already in force.

Instituted in 2006, the ban was temporarily lifted in October 2008 for most of the 41 figures, except the chairwoman of the Central Election Commission and a handful of officials suspected of personal involvement in disappearances of opposition figures in 1999 and 2000.

Skeptics vs. Dialogue

At stake are not the travel rights of Belarus's political elite, but the future of the EU's "Ostpolitik." As the bloc mulls how far it should go in encouraging Belarus to embrace its ties with the West, it must also consider the potential dangers in alienating Minsk if it does not go far enough.

On this point, views differ widely within the EU. There are two broad groups -- those who believe further engagement and dialogue are the only way to go, unless there is a drastic reverse by Minsk, and those who feel at least some conditionality is essential for further shows of EU goodwill to take place.

Czech Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg aligns himself with the former camp, arguing that what amounts essentially to a show of leniency by the bloc will lead to an improved rights situation in Belarus.

"We strongly believe that this decision will encourage measures to strengthen measures towards democracy, respect for human rights, and fundamental freedoms in Belarus," he said.

Others differed -- none more strongly than Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhaegen, who argued that the reforms undertaken by Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka are no more than window dressing.

The Netherlands wants the upcoming EU summit on March 19-20 to set out a list of clear conditions Belarus must meet before it can join the Eastern Partnership initiative, which will be unveiled at the same meeting.

This is the heart of the issue for most EU members. The Eastern Partnership -- which holds out the promise of eventual free trade, open borders, more funding, and legal approximation -- is the EU's highest-profile overture thus far to countries in the former Soviet east.

The bloc hopes to host the leaders of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in Prague at a joint summit on May 7 to formally launch the project.

Belarus's constructive participation is essential for the credibility of the Eastern Partnership, if only because it has been publicly vaunted by the bloc's leaders as an alternative to Russian influence in the post-Soviet space.

Price Of Engagement

One group of countries, led by Britain, Sweden and Poland, and the Baltic states, is naturally sympathetic to the Dutch concerns. But these countries also believe that the Russian factor means the stakes are high enough for the EU to justify a continued partial suspension of its standards in a bid to engage the Belarusian leadership.

Speaking to journalists ahead of the March 16 meeting, the bloc's external relations commissioner, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, said there has been progress on the Belarus issue. She highlighted Minsk's recent willingness to talk with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) about electoral reform, enhanced debate with civil society representatives, and the fact that two opposition newspapers have been granted free circulation.

But she also noted that five activists have recently been arrested on what appear to be political grounds. Some young activists have been conscripted into the Belarusian armed forces. Ferrero-Waldner said Minsk should do more to lift restrictions on domestic and foreign media and nongovernmental organizations.

A declaration adopted by the EU foreign ministers also says recent cases of human rights violations have caused "concerns" within the EU that must be addressed.

But countries concerned with Belarus's rights record acknowledge that an uncompromising EU has little to gain in the present situation, with Russia working intensively to maintain its grip on its ex-Soviet neighbors.

Explaining the thinking of this group of countries, Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet says sanctions, even if justified, would yield few gains for the EU.

"Because what's the alternative? It's clear Russia is today putting massive pressure on Belarus, to get it to recognize [the breakaway Georgian regions of] Abkhazia and South Ossetia, for one thing," Paet says

"And the steps taken by the Belarusian leadership [that is, concessions to the EU] are liable to be motivated largely by a desire to avoid falling completely under Russia's sway."

This calculation was sufficient for Britain, Sweden, Poland, and their backers to find common ground with another camp of mostly Western European countries led

by Germany and France. Keen to establish the EU as an autonomous regional and global player, these countries have somewhat contradictory motives. Russia is certainly seen as a competitor, but the driving force for most in seeking dialogue with regimes like Minsk is a pragmatic preference for interests over values and a deep-seated skepticism for the utility of sanctions in this context.

Here, Uzbekistan provides something of a blueprint: At the insistence of Germany and France, most sanctions on Tashkent were dropped on the same date, October 13, 2008, as the suspension of the travel ban on top Belarusian officials entered into force.

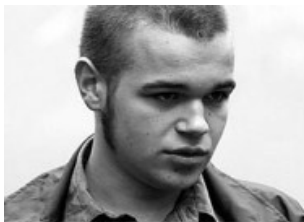
What Minsk makes of the EU's outstretched hand remains anyone's guess. The bloc's officials have little or no direct contact with their counterparts in Minsk and Lukashenka's motives are a matter of guesswork in Brussels.

A path-breaking visit to Minsk on February 18-19 by the EU's foreign-policy chief, Javier Solana, was followed by a snub to External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, who was forced to call off a long-scheduled visit on March 12-13 when it emerged Lukashenka would not be in the country to welcome her.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 16, 2009

More Political Prisoners

An activist of the civil campaign European Belarus who was involved in the Process of Fourteen, was arrested on February 23. 17-year-old **Maxim Dashuk** was summoned to the police department of Maskouski district of Minsk. He was accused of violating the house arrest sentence of last April, he received as the result of participating in protest rallies of market vendors.



"Today Maxim was interrogated in connection with violations of the house arrest sentence," stated his attorney **Pavel Sapelka**. "Maxim's mother is an individual entrepreneur, he has no father. In connection with difficult financial situation of the family Dashuk helped his mother in her work. Maxim faces up to 3 years of restriction of freedom without an alternative"

Shortly before his arrest, Maxim Dashuk spoke to the Charter'97 press-centre. "I had a difficult situation in my family. I was simply forced to violate the rules and help my mother. When you are under house arrest, you are allowed to leave the house only from 10 a.m. till noon. When they checked, I wasn't home. In fact, I was checked every day, even several times a day."

In the Process of Fourteen, 14 opposition activists who were involved in protest actions of entrepreneurs on January 10, 2008, had criminal charges initiated against them. Youth activist Andrei Kim was sentenced to one and a half years in a penal colony by the Central district court of Minsk. As a result of EU and US pressure, he was released in August 2008. Other participants of the "Process of Fourteen" – **Alyaksei Bondar, Artsyom Dubski, Mikhal Kryvau, Mikhal Pashkevich, Ales Straltsou, Ales Charnyshou, Tatsyana Tsishkevich, Mikhail Subach and Pavel Vinahradau**, were sentenced to restriction of freedom for 2 years without sending them to penitentiary institutions. Minor Maxim Dashuk got 1 ½ years of restraint of liberty. Now all of them in fact are under house arrest, under close surveillance, and can be imprisoned for any violation of rules at any moment.

There are five new political prisoners in Belarus jails today. The leaders of private entrepreneurs **Mikalay Autukhovich, Yury Lyavonau and Uladzimir Asipenka**, as well as another participant of the Process of Fourteen, **Artsyom Dubski**, were arrested in February. The Young Front activist faces up to 3 years of imprisonment for violating his house arrest sentence. He was arrested when he returned to Belarus from a visit to Ukraine. Yury Lyavonau and Mikalay Autukhovich are former political prisoners who two years ago were sentenced to imprisonment for defending the rights of entrepreneurs. The crackdown in Belarus became particularly severe during the visits to the country of EU officials and members of the European Parliament, as if to demonstrate the regime's arrogance.

Source: Charter97 Press Center, February 23, 2009

MEDIA WATCH

Scientists Fear Visa Trouble Will Drive Foreign Students Away

By **CORNELIA DEAN**

EXCERPTS from The New York Times, March 3, 2009

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — When Alena Shkumatava opens the door to the "fish lab" at the Whitehead Institute of [M.I.T.](#), she encounters warm, aquarium-scented air and shelf after shelf of foot-long tanks, each containing one or more zebra fish. She studies the tiny fish in her quest to unravel one of the knottiest problems in biology: how the acting of genes is encouraged or inhibited in cells.

The work, focusing on genetic material called micro-RNAs, is ripe with promise. But Dr. Shkumatava, a postdoctoral researcher from Belarus, will not pursue it in the United States, she said, partly because of what happened last year, when she tried to renew her visa.

What should have been a short visit with her family in Belarus punctuated by a routine trip to an American consulate turned into a three-month nightmare of

bureaucratic snafus, lost documents and frustrating encounters with embassy employees. "If you write an e-mail, there is no one replying to you," she said. "Unfortunately, this is very common."

Dr. Shkumatava, who ended up traveling to Moscow for a visa, is among the several hundred thousand students who need a visa to study in the United States. People at universities and scientific organizations who study the issue say they have heard increasing complaints of visa delays since last fall, particularly for students in science engineering and other technical fields

The official said that time limits for visas were ordinarily a matter of reciprocal agreements between nations. Dr. Shkumatava's case, he said, may have been further complicated because Belarus severely limits the number of foreign service officers the United States can have there at any given time....

Dr. Shkumatava said she will probably return to Europe. Her husband, a computational biologist from Germany, left the United States last fall for a job in Vienna. She might have tried to stay on, she said, if entering and leaving the country were not such a "discouraging" process.

"I got the visa and so I am back," she said. "But it's for only one year, so next year in December if I am going to stay here I am going to have to reapply for this stamp."



E.U. Continues to Reach out to Belarus

By Stephen Castle
Monday, March 16, 2009

EXCERPTS from the International Herald Tribune
BRUSSELS: European Union foreign ministers agreed Monday to continue reaching out to Belarus, one of Moscow's closest allies, by suspending for a further nine months a travel ban on the country's president, Aleksandr Lukashenko, despite worries about his human rights record.

The decision paves the way for Belarus to play a part in a new aid and trade partnership between the European Union and a group of eastern countries seen as falling within Russia's sphere of influence.

Concerned about Moscow's political and economic hold over key energy transit countries on its doorstep, Europe is seeking to offer these nations the chance of closer ties to the E.U. within a new grouping called the Eastern Partnership.

On Monday, E.U. foreign ministers prolonged for nine months the suspension of the visa ban, saying they aimed

"to encourage the adoption and implementation of further concrete measures toward democracy and respect to human rights."

But as a precaution they also extended the original political sanctions for 12 months, which means they could be reimposed when the nine-month suspension expires.

E.U. foreign ministers also left themselves the option of taking a tougher line if Belarus bows to pressure from Russia to give diplomatic recognition to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which declared independence from Georgia following the military conflict there last year.

No decision was made on whether to invite Lukashenko to Prague in May for the meeting to start the Eastern Partnership. The E.U. is likely to postpone any invitation until closer to the event in case it becomes clear that Belarus intends to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia, or commits blatant human rights abuses.

A "Grand Bargain"?

By David J. Kramer
Friday, March 6, 2009
EXCERPTS from the Washington Post

Russian officials should like what they are seeing from the Obama administration: President Obama has exchanged public comments and personal letters with President Dmitry Medvedev. **Vice President Biden declared last month that we ought to press the "reset button" on U.S.-Russian relations. In her meeting today with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is expected to continue ratcheting down tensions. But while improved ties with Moscow are desirable, the Obama team should rein in expectations and avoid the "grand bargain" that some in the United States and Europe have recommended.**

The "bargain" is simple: In exchange for Russian cooperation on containing the Iranian nuclear threat and other strategic issues, the United States would, to varying degrees, scale back its relations with Russia's neighbors, pause on missile defense plans and stay quiet about Russia's deteriorating human rights situation. For the United States to hush up about the crackdown would have been unthinkable before Clinton's disappointing suggestion in China last month that we should not allow human rights problems to "interfere" with more important matters. If they are smart, the Russians will seek a similar arrangement.

Many questions are raised by such a trade-off: What price would secure Russian cooperation on Iran? Who exactly is going to tell Ukraine or Georgia that we have returned to a "Russia first" policy? Does anyone believe that saying nothing about Kremlin crackdowns on domestic opponents would keep Moscow on board? And what if all this isn't enough? Moscow is likely to keep raising the fee for its cooperation -- in effect, extorting the United States.

Moscow sees its surroundings in revisionist, zero-sum terms. Russia has tried to maintain a "sphere of influence" along its borders, regardless of neighboring states' desires to lean westward. Moscow is threatened by Ukrainian and Georgian ties with NATO, even though NATO's eastward growth has been a source of stability over the past decade. Russia views multiple pipeline routes from Central Asia and

the Caucasus as a risk to its monopolistic hold on regional energy resources. Moscow's thinking must change if the principal source of friction between Russia and the West and Russia and its neighbors is to disappear.

Any "grand bargain" the United States makes with Russia would be viewed in Moscow as a sign of U.S. desperation. A major American shift in missile defense policy absent a real retreat by Iran would be seen as a sign of weakness and would undercut friendly governments in Warsaw and Prague. Yes, the United States should work with Russia on issues including Iran, North Korea, counterterrorism, arms control and Afghanistan. But both sides must show interest in cooperation; above all, we must not bargain away our relations with Russia's neighbors or our own values.

The writer was assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor as well as deputy assistant secretary of state responsible for Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in the George W. Bush administration

Do-It-Yourself Censorship

U.S. firms, spooked by export rules, seem to be practicing a kind of self-censorship oddly similar to what Chinese firms do

NEWSWEEK -- Excerpts

From the magazine issue dated Mar 16, 2009

By Evgeny Morozov

Yaraslau Kryvoi was no stranger to censorship. After all, he grew up in Belarus, one of the last "outposts of tyranny" in Europe, as former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice once put it. On Feb. 20, he got a notice from his Web-hosting firm that his account was being suspended and that he had 10 days to remove his content. Like many citizens of authoritarian states, Kryvoi had found himself on a blacklist.

Trouble is, this story takes place in Washington, D.C. Kryvoi, a 29-year-old graduate of Harvard Law School, works at a reputable law firm. In his spare time, he administers a blog for the local chapter of the Belarussian American Association (BAA). Since the government of Belarus is subject to U.S. trade sanctions,

Bluehost, the Provo, Utah, company that hosts Kryvoi's Web site, decided to cut him off...

So why the ban? Although Bluehost is one of the world's biggest hosting companies, it probably doesn't have the time or resources to match the OFAC (Office of Foreign Assets Control) list with its own customer ranks. Banning everyone from

Belarus takes much less time and effort. Indeed, Bluehost's contract with customers—the "terms of service" to which all users must agree when signing up, but which few ever read—states that the firm won't do business with citizens of Belarus, Burma, Cuba, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, Zimbabwe and the Balkans. Kryvoi might have triggered an alarm when he paid his Bluehost bill by credit card while visiting his family in Belarus...

The situation is not doing much to advance the interests of the United States abroad. For instance, Kubatana, a portal in Zimbabwe known for its ardent stance against President Robert Mugabe, got a cutoff notice from Bluehost in February. Eventually the U.S. Embassy in Zimbabwe contacted officials at

not subject to sanctions; Bluehost then reinstated the service. But this is not a smart way to promote democracy. Purging customers from Belarus or Zimbabwe raises hurdles for pro-democracy groups—many of them funded by the U.S. government—while allowing dictators to broadcast their propaganda unabated.

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