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EDITORIAL

Assisting a Little-known Nation

*Without the history, language, art
Without the wisdom of the science
A nation will turn into a nameless land.
Marek Grechuta, Fatherland*

After twenty years of its independence, Belarus can hardly be characterized as a well-known country in the world. Indeed, many people do know that such a country exists, and many can name certain events, people or sport teams that are associated in their minds with Belarus. Probably the most internationally known Belarusian “brands” are Chornobyl and Lukašenka.

The Chornobyl tragedy brings empathy toward the Belarusian people from abroad but after 25 years it is fading from the media headlines.

The second Belarusian “brand” is its first and still current president Aliaksandr Lukašenka who has ruled the country for seventeen out of the twenty years of modern Belarusian independence. Lukašenka, who is often being called “Europe’s last dictator”, has brought the country quite dubious fame. Beyond any doubt, he has contributed to the recognisability of Belarus in the world but this recognisability is strongly linked with his apparently authoritarian ruling practices. Hence, Belarus is largely known abroad for its current political situation and thus is labeled as “Europe’s last dictatorship”, “European Burma” (T.G. Ash) or other similar names. Again, such recognisability brings nothing else but empathy toward the nation.

However, neither of these “brands” may really contribute to the in-depth recognisability of Belarus since neither underlines the distinctiveness of Belarus and the elements of this distinctiveness – language, culture, history. These “national” elements create a core for the nation’s recognisability abroad that goes deeper than just brief and often occasional fragments of knowledge that a foreigner may possess about Belarus.

But these “national” elements are virtually non-existent in the western discourse about Belarus. Hence, what kind of image can Belarus attain in the eyes of an ordinary European or American? Just another post-Soviet country where all speak Russian, that heavily suffered from the Chornobyl disaster and that seriously suffers because of the unwise ruling practices of its president Aliaksandr Lukašenka. It is normal for a person to see these two handicaps combined and feel compassion for this poor land. It is apparently believed that elimination of at least one of these challenges would ease the situation in the country.

Hence, elimination of the consequences of the Chornobyl disaster and democratization of the country seem to be sufficient to “restore” Belarus as a “happy nation”. However, this approach requires neither a deeper acquaintance with the Belarusian “background,” nor anything in

return. Hence, this approach per se fails to obtain (if it at all needs) comprehensive knowledge of the Belarusian society, its roots and contemporaneity. Thus, Belarus remains an unknown neighbor and the proper acquaintance with it has been postponed at least until the elimination of the political challenge, i.e. the current ruling regime.

But does such an approach make sense? In other words, how can Belarus be politically assisted in elimination its current ruling regime if the country remains unknown and is apparently treated as a denationalized historically contested area that has always been an object of politics, unable to create something valuable by itself?

It seems that the country is automatically allocated to the so-called “Russosphere” and apparently among the western analysts and politicians there is a belief that it is Moscow that may potentially influence official Minsk and take on the role of a mediator in the negotiations between the current Belarusian regime and the West. Such an approach creates a trap for both sides. For the West, this trap is both strategic and tactical – it simply becomes unnecessarily additionally dependent on Moscow, fails to do away with its settled stereotypes about Belarus and still treats the country as an object and not as a subject of politics. This approach is largely supported by the rhetoric of certain politicians who ask Belarus to make a choice – to ally either with Russia or with the West.

Indeed, the stereotypical approach toward Belarus focuses on the special role that Russia can play and its apparent influence on Belarus’ domestic and foreign policy as well as changes within the Belarusian society. For instance, the reintroduction of the Russian language as the official language in Belarus in 1995 led to discrimination against the titular Belarusian language not only within the country (closed schools, classes, a decrease in the presence of the language in the country’s public life, etc.) but also internationally. It is a quite frequent if not a general rule that the foreigners who deal with Belarus (with some exceptions) disregard the Belarusian language and its potential as a language for distributing information. They reason (or assume) that the Russian language is universally understandable in Belarus and is the main language of communication in the country. For instance, German international broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* uses the Russian language in its program about Belarus, but has a special service for Ukraine in the Ukrainian language. Also, it is quite common that transliteration of Belarusian personal and geographic names in the major international media appears from the Russian (for example: *Grodno* instead of *Hrodna* or *Mogilev* instead of *Mahilioŭ*).

Thus, this stereotypical approach of the West does not create any additional impetus for the development of the Belarusian language domestically or for the growth of the interest toward Belarusian culture, history and language abroad. Instead, the issue of the democratization in Belarus which has been put on the agenda by the West is not connected with Belarusian national culture, language and heritage, but is rather based on the indirect support of the already-settled stereotype of Belarus as a denationalized nation with a language that is all but extinct. Hence, by applying such a stereotypical approach the West leaves Be-

**For the West, this trap
(Moscow’s mediating role)
is both strategic and tactical..**

larus alone vis-à-vis its existing countries, further pushes Belarus even closer to Russia and creates potential for ultimately increasing Russia's dominance in Belarus.

This article's epigraph is authored by the famous Polish singer and songwriter Marek Grechuta who addressed it to his native Poland, the country with apparently the strongest national feeling in the CEE region. However, these words are equally relevant for Belarus – and its reach history, language and art are those “three flowers” (as Grechuta poetically calls them) to cherish, be proud of and to promote internationally.

Belarus has huge potential to offer the world through its historical roots and should not be treated just as a country to be pitied. This is not just another bunch of patriotic words but a quite conscious suggestion to concentrate upon this potential, in order to finally do away with the “historically settled” stereotypes about Belarus.

To this end, if the West learns these “three flowers” of Belarusian identity, it might get a clue about what Belarus really is. This knowledge could lead to a change in tactics and strategies in western policies toward Belarus and its society, treating it not as a nation for empathy but as a reliable and well-known equal partner. Hence, the key of the Belarusian enigma is quite simple, but the question remains whether the West is ready to settle it?

Kiryl Kaścian

From the Publisher

Legislation in support of democracy and human rights in Belarus has been introduced in Congress in the past. It has been well received by Belarusians around the world, including those in Belarus. The time has come to have similar legislation renewed. The House of Representatives has already passed it, and now it is up to the Senate.

Please send a note similar to the one below to your Senators:

“I am writing to urge Senate consideration of the Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2011, H.R. 515, which was passed by the House on July 8. The Senate bill S.735, as well as the House bill, reaffirms America's strong and sustained promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Belarus through sanctions targeting the dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenka. Like your bill, H.R. 515 reinforces the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 and Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006, both of which passed the House and Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support and were signed into law. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have put their provisions to good use.

While the current Senate version differs from the House version, there was common view among the House Members that H.R. 515 was the best that could have been passed in the current fiscal climate. Therefore, I respectfully suggest that the Senate consider passing the House-passed legislation in order to have it enacted and signed into law.

The passage by the Senate of the House passed legislation on Belarus would be especially timely, given Alexander Lukashenka's fraudulent December 19, 2010 election and the ongoing crackdown on democracy activists and independent journalists – the worst that Europe has witnessed in more than a decade. The pattern of gross and systematic human rights violations and anti-democratic actions that has characterized Lukashenka's 17-year iron-fisted rule needs to end.

The relevant addresses can be found on [www. Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org)

FEATURES

The Perils of Negotiating With Minsk

By David Marples

Events are moving rapidly in Belarus. The president is making more and more concessions in an effort to restore relations with the West, evidently in the hope that assistance and loans will then be forthcoming for his beleaguered regime.

In late August, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nikolai Mladenov was in Minsk for a meeting with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka that was not covered by the national media ([www. telegraf.by](http://www.telegraf.by), September 2). Subsequently, Mladenov sent a letter to Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, indicating the Belarusian leader's intention to release immediately a minimum of four political prisoners, and the liberation of all those remaining from the post-presidential election arrests (there are 28 in total) by the start of October. In addition, it was reported, Lukashenka invited his political opponents, Russia, and the European Union to a round-table discussion to resolve the current economic problems facing Belarus (www.naviny.by, September 3).

The release of prisoners began on August 11, with the freeing of nine men, and the president kept to his promise to pardon four more on September 1. For the most part these were young activists who took part in the confrontation in Independence Square after the presidential elections on December 19 last year. The timing of the meeting with Mladenov seems to have been carefully chosen, as it preceded a meeting of European foreign ministers in Sopot, Poland two days later. An unconfirmed Polish report in the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* stated that Bulgaria offered the Belarusian side \$2.7 billion from the European Union if the prisoners were released. Neither the Polish nor the Bulgarian foreign ministries would comment on the allegation, according to *Belapan* (*Belapan*, September 12).

It also indicates the scale of the Belarusian dilemma. Increasingly short of funds, suffering from hyperinflation and uncertain of its relationship with Russia, Belarus became reliant on a potential new loan of \$8 billion from the IMF. However, there is no indication that such a loan will be forthcoming. In addition, on August 30, the Royal Bank of Scotland, a key player in earlier efforts to raise money for Lukashenka, announced that it had severed all connections with his state after a meeting with the informal associations “Free Belarus Now” and “Index on Censorship” (*The Glasgow Herald*, August 30).

The anticipated second tranche of a \$3 billion loan from the Anti-Crisis Fund of the Eurasian Economic Community, worth \$440 million, is also in grave doubt. According to Russian officials, Belarus has failed to fulfill

its obligations to stabilize the hard currency market. The corporate finance director of the Eurasian Bank, Dmitry Krasilnikov, visiting Minsk on August 25, noted the lack of progress toward a common currency, the shortage of reserves, and the lack of faith of the population in the national currency, all of which have exacerbated the current crisis (*Belorusy i Rynok*, August 29-September 4).

Certainly Lukashenka is becoming desperate. He has proposed to expand the purview of CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (EDM, August 19) and has announced the freeing of the Belarusian ruble from state control starting on September 1 (*RIA Novosti*, August 30), which resulted in its further devaluation from the earlier BR 5,347 to the dollar to BR 8,600 against the US dollar (*Associated Press*, September 14). Regarding the former idea, which he has developed recently, Lukashenka commented with reference to states both outside and within the CSTO that "No one will unleash a war on us, but many are itching to stage a constitutional coup" (*RIA Novosti*, August 31). The statement is unusual in that the president has habitually suggested in the past that such a "coup" would be initiated by the West rather than from allies within the CSTO.

The Europeans have responded cautiously. The EU meeting in Poland reached a consensus that no talks with Lukashenka could take place without the release of all political prisoners. Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski declared this as a basic prerequisite while stating that "We will not engage in horse-trading for prisoners" (*Focus Information Agency*, September 3).

A similar opinion was voiced by the former chief of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Minsk in the late 1990s, the German diplomat Hans-Georg Wieck, who maintained that analogous discussions had taken place in November 1999, resulting in the Istanbul Declaration that gave the opposition some access to state media. However, such talks ultimately failed because Lukashenka did not abide by the declaration and created an alternative public forum under his personal control, abruptly ending the dialogue with his political opponents (*Narodnaya Volya*, September 2).

The attitude of the Belarusian opposition in 2011 is unlikely to be so compromising. Embittered by mass arrests and persecution, as well as the unraveling of human rights over the past eight months, many activists see little point in further talks with the Lukashenka regime. In an article published on the Charter 97 website, Anastasia Palazhanka, deputy chairperson of the Young Front, and Iryna Khalip, editor of the Minsk bureau of *Novaya Gazeta* and the wife of imprisoned presidential candidate Andrey Sannikau, commented that Lukashenka has broken promises in the past and can no longer be trusted. They warned the "Belarusian democratic community" "not to be fooled again" and stated that the first step must be the release of all political prisoners (www.charter97.org, August 30). Marek Bucko, the former deputy head of the Polish Embassy in Minsk, declared that trading in prison-

ers was "immoral" (www.charter97.org, September 13).

However, these objections notwithstanding, Lukashenka is already "horse-trading" in political prisoners, which likely was one of his goals when he imprisoned so many of the opposition leaders, as well as three former presidential candidates. Logically therefore the most sensible response would not be negotiations after their release, but the latter as the first of several preconditions before discussions can begin. The others, logically, would

be: equal access to the media, empowerment of the parliament based on the original 1994 Constitution, an end to the gross infringements of human rights that have destroyed civil society in Belarus and new presidential elections, since the interna-

tional community (other than the CIS) did not recognize the December 2010 version as free and fair.

If such conditions are not in place, the experience outlined by Ambassador Wieck is likely to be repeated.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 168, September 14, 2011

**"We will not engage
in horse-trading for prisoners."
Polish Minister Sikorski**

ECONOMY

Belarus On The Brink

By Tom Balmforth

MINSK -- Sviatlana Antaniuk, an elderly pensioner in Minsk, pours a cup of tea, opens a jam jar and fusses about the kitchen.

Like many in Belarus, Sviatlana and her 81-year-old husband Ivan have been hit hard by the price hikes for staples and basic services that have hit the country over the past five months.

With a hospital building looming ominously outside the couple's eight-floor window, Sviatlana explains that she can no longer afford imported medicine for her gallstones and heart condition. She is allergic to the more affordable domestically manufactured equivalent.

Ivan, a former soldier, is angry. "Essentially, we are not living -- we are surviving," he says. "The government is solving its own economic problems by robbing their people. The prices at the moment are unbelievable. They've gone through the roof. It's suffocating us."

And it's going to get worse -- possibly a lot worse. While many of the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe initiated painful reforms in the 1990s, retooling their command economies for a globalized free market, Belarus largely stood still.

Upon coming to power in 1994, the country's authoritarian president, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, maintained a Soviet-style economy providing basic goods and services to the public at low prices. He was able to do this because Russia was prepared to subsidize Belarus in exchange for Minsk's political fealty to Moscow.

Not Economic, But Political

But Russia has increasingly made it clear that those days are over. Lukashenka, meanwhile, has shown little

appetite for the kind of structural reforms that would bring the Western aid, investment, and credits necessary to turn the teetering economy around.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian ruble has fallen a staggering 36 percent against the dollar and fears abound that a further devaluation is in the offing. Imported goods are scarce and prices on basic consumer products rise daily under soaring inflation that is projected to reach between 55 and 75 percent in 2011.

The crisis has led to the most serious challenge to Lukashenka's 17-year rule, sparking antigovernment protests that are routinely put down by police.

Stanislaŭ Shushkevich, Belarus' first post-Soviet leader, pursued market reforms during his brief stint in power from 1991 to 1994. Now, he says, regime change is the only way out of the current crisis.

"There is still nothing stimulating the development of the economy. There has been no liberalization and this produces terrible conditions," Shushkevich says. "Today in Minsk you cannot obtain currency that is freely convertible, it's difficult to go abroad. Instead of the Iron Curtain, there is a de facto economic curtain. Without political changes, there cannot be any decent development in Belarus."

Currency Crash

Many meat producers prefer to sell their product in Russia, where prices are stable.

Basic staples like meat have disappeared from the shelves as producers opt to sell their products in neighboring Russia, where the currency is stable and retains its value.

When hard currency was available, lines at exchange booths stretched for hundreds of meters. They have seldom become unruly, although Interfax reported on August 16 that three masked men forced their way to the front of a line of 400, saying that "important people" needed currency.

But with the dollars, euros, and Russian rubles drying up, Minsk's currency exchange points have become mostly deserted, with only the most desperate people lingering in hopes of coming across a tourist trying to change money.

With each passing day, the pain consumers are feeling becomes more and more acute, Shushkevich says. "Not all crises are avoidable," he notes, "but the degree that it is being felt here when some food items have doubled in price in the space of only 20 days, this truly is a crisis for people."

Many Belarusians have taken to hoarding goods such as sugar and cooking oil, stocking up amid fears that the early onset of fall will also mean an early winter. Traditionally low gasoline prices continue to spiral, triggering grassroots protesters to drive in convoy through central Minsk, blockading Independence Street, to the applause and cheers of onlookers.

On August 22, police blocked traffic into the center of Minsk in an effort to prevent drivers from staging the latest in a series of demonstrations against rising gas prices.

'Could Still Get Worse'

But despite the new assertiveness among protesters, for many, the old fears remain. Sania, a taxi driver and father of two, told RFE/RL he never expected the protests to take place, adding that he would not participate, fearing that he could face "a big fine or worse."

Jaraslaŭ Ramanchuk, an economist at the Minsk-based Mises think tank and the vice president of the opposition United Civic Party, warns that Belarus's crisis is only in its initial stages, and that it's moving

from a currency crisis to one that is more "systemic."

Ramanchuk says that the situation "looks like the beginning of the crisis in the Soviet Union when the Soviet Union didn't get a lot of hard currency from selling oil."

In September, he adds, Belarusians can expect to see a serious drop in their incomes and further price hikes on utilities and transportation. Construction, meanwhile, has been frozen.

Price Of Reelection

Belarus's economic crisis was exacerbated by Lukashenka's lavish spending on populist measures like raising pensions and increasing salaries for government workers in advance of the December 2010 presidential election, in which he won nearly 80 percent of the vote amid widespread allegations of irregularities.

In the election's aftermath, presidential candidates, opposition figures, and those protesting the results were brutally beaten and jailed.

The United States and European Union responded with sanctions. Minsk, which prior to the election had been tentatively courting the West, then turned to Russia for assistance.

Was Aliaksandr Lukashenka's reelection worth the price?

But although Moscow did agree to provide gas at a relatively low price, it has balked at a large financial bailout unless Belarus privatizes large chunks of its energy infrastructure, presumably so it could be purchased by Russian companies. Such a development would severely undermine Belarus's sovereignty.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin may have revealed his intentions regarding Belarus on August 1 when he said the unification of the two countries was "possible and very desirable."

Fear Of Needed Reforms

But if accepting a bailout from Russia looks like a Faustian pact from Lukashenka's perspective, turning to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan doesn't look much better.

Siarhiej Chaly, an independent economist who worked for the Lukashenka team in the mid-1990s, is skeptical

As the economy teeters on the brink, the authorities — already spooked by the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa — are bracing for more unrest.

that any reforms will be implemented. "It's clear that the IMF would like to see some kind of advance" on economic reforms, he says. "I think the authorities in the next week therefore have to undertake some kind of reform if on the one hand they want to save the economic situation, and on the other if they are counting on partnership with the IMF."

Protests On Hold...For Now

And as the economy teeters on the brink, the authorities -- already spooked by the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa -- are bracing for more unrest.

Throughout the summer, grassroots "silent protests" organized on social-media websites, in which demonstrators would assemble and engage in innocuous activities like clapping before being rounded up by police, took place every Wednesday.

They have temporarily been put on hold until September 14, when the country's traditional opposition figures are expected to join.

Ramanchuk says he expects more unrest in the fall. "The risk of mass action and protests after utility bills go up, real prices go up, and incomes fall is very high," he says. "That's why I predict more social protests."

But Chaly, who claims to be the founding ideologist of the protest movement mobilized through social networks, played down the possibility of simmering public discontent boiling over.

"Of course there will be discontent and people will complain, but they will try and get by. It's unlikely there is a threat to the authorities, from these quarters at least," Chaly says.

"Of course it could happen that discontent within groups of authorities leads to a palace revolution, but I cannot see any other way of there being a change in power."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 23, 2011

Belarus Economy Digest: Retaining the Status Quo

The development of the crisis in Belarus has slowed down and the macroeconomic situation has been temporarily balanced. The state program of privatization struggles to achieve its goals because of the lack of buyers but the foreign trade balance is improving because Belarusian goods are relatively cheap. The government failed to adopt market rate for foreign currency exchange despite calls from the business community and its own ministries. More importantly, the government apparently plans no structural reforms of the economy.

Exchange rate

The government appears to have abandoned its plans concerning the revitalization of the foreign exchange market in the near future and bringing the official exchange rate to the market level. Moreover, to date, the preservation of restrictions on the free access to the foreign currency for importers and the public began to be openly considered by the authorities as an important factor of improving the foreign trade balance and preservation of the

gold and foreign exchange reserves. Currently, the non-cash foreign currency market has split into a number of interdepartmental centers of foreign exchange allocation.

Moreover, the right to buy foreign currency earnings flowing to the accounts of accountable exporters is distributed among the importers - members of a certain department (ministry, Konzern). In case if the department does not have large enterprises receiving currency earnings in its subordination (as, for example, in the Ministry of Energy), its importers will have problems with the payment for import, regardless of the degree of its criticality (the example of "Belenergo" unable to pay its relatively small debt in the amount of 53,5 million USD to the "Inter RAO UES" is very illustrative).

Organizations that are outside the state system of economic management can buy foreign currency from banks at the official exchange rate of +/- 2% (the banks offer this option only to very large customers or affiliated entities) or on the basis of bilateral deals with non-state exporters (based on the actual rate of 6800-7200 Br/USD with the extra payment added to the official exchange rate according to a certain scheme).

Inflation

In June the fight against inflation continued by means of administrative resources ("untwisting" of the petrol prices by the President, forcing the retailers to lower the prices and discounts for certain categories of citizens). In general, in June we can expect some deceleration of inflation, although its absolute indicator remains significant (for the first six months of this year the inflation is expected at the level of 33-34%). As a measure for prevention of the trade deficit due to the disparity of prices relative to neighboring countries, the Government introduced restrictions and even bans on the export of certain groups of goods outside the Customs Union (petrol, tobacco, certain foods, refrigerators, etc.).

We can say that there are no significant shortages of goods in Belarus yet, but as far as some commodity groups are concerned (cement, coffee, cocoa, meat and dairy products) there is a marked narrowing of the range of products and the decrease of the saturation of the market. It is caused both by the deterioration of conditions for importers and the priority export of domestic products to Russia.

Trade balance

As for the balance of the foreign trade, the most acute problem of the Belarus economy, there was a significant improvement of its dynamics (surplus in May in the amount of 154,4 million USD, which happened for the first time in 1,5 years). The mentioned dynamics is driven by both the devaluation of the national currency and the improvement of the external trade conditions in the mineral products trade (almost 33% of the total exports).

Banking

Despite the decline due to the devaluation of the assets of banks from 48,1 to 36,3 billion USD in the equivalent, the situation in the banking system remains relatively stable and is characterized by a low level of troubled debts. However, a particular threat is the further reduction of population's deposits (which is partially balanced by a lowering credit demand in the economy as a whole), as

well as the high level of debt of the National Bank to commercial banks. In ruble terms, the value of claims of commercial banks to the National Bank as of June 1 totaled 33,6 trillion Br (6,8 billion USD), exceeding the country's gold and foreign exchange reserves.

The National Bank will certainly seek to roll over this debt as it is unable to timely repay it. In general, the banking market of Belarus is significantly shrinking and losing its investment attractiveness. Interesting in this context is the invitation for banks to participate under the government guarantees in the provision of soft loans to agricultural enterprises within the 9 state programs with the reimbursable from the state budget lost revenue. Theoretically, such activity would help to minimize the losses from the shrinkage of the market, but in terms of the immature compensation mechanisms it shall increase commercial risks. By the end of the month it became clear that the Government embarked on the classical deterrent (restrictive) policies.

GDP growth

The forecasts of the annual GDP growth were lowered to 4-5% (in the worst case scenario even up to 1-3%), the program of preferential construction was reduced (the volume of housing construction through the use of budget funds in 2012 is expected to decline by 55%), the emission lending to the economy was suspended, the public sector wages and social payments were frozen (there is an increased targeting of social assistance).

According to the released list of economic policy measures the Government of Belarus is committed to perform the hard limiting of the budget deficit, as well as preserve until 2013 of the proportion of expenditure on salaries in the budget expenditures at the level of 2011, increase the compensation of utility and transportation costs by the population, reduce the net lending of the state programs to the level of 1% of GDP by 2013, define the refinancing rate at the level of the annual inflation etc. All these measures shall certainly help to stabilize the economic situation in Belarus; however they will predictably lead to the fall in GDP, unemployment, freezing or even lowering of population incomes. There is a danger that the growth of these problems will roll back towards populism, with the active use of emission credits in the public sector of the economy.

This material was prepared by Belarus Digest on the basis of materials provided by Belarusian Security Blog, operated by a group of young professionals in Belarus analyzing current political, economic and security issues.

Source: BelarusDigest, July 19, 2011

Quotes of Quarter

The press service of the regime-controlled Trade Unions of Belarus quoted on July 28, 2011 its long term chairman **LEANID KOZIK**, who stated:

"Lukashenka's idea of the need to build a socially oriented state deserves the awarding of the Nobel prize in economics."

That despite the near collapse of Belarus' economy..

Belarus' Forum

Sound Of No Clapping What if an Angry Autocrat Gave a Defiant Speech And no one Applauded?

By BBC Monitoring 6 July 2011

[Report by Yelena Chernenko: "Alyaksandr Lukashenka Made Everyone Keep Quiet.

Both Opponents and Supporters"]

Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka has accused external forces of waging war on his country using "weapons of mass information destruction." He made this harsh statement at the Belarusian Independence Day celebrations. Participants in the "Revolution Via Social Networks" campaign were unable to carry out their plans – to disrupt the president's speech with applause. However, even his supporters were afraid to applaud the head of state. So Mr. Lukashenka's speech in the square passed off in the silence of the grave.

A parade was held in Minsk on the occasion of Independence Day, involving military hardware, athletes, amateur artistic performances, and two tractors. A big yellow hat was fitted to one of them (the "boy tractor"), while the other (the "girl tractor") had red inflatable lips, cartoon eyes, and a giant garland. On the Internet people joked that President Lukashenka will try anything to attract the attention of potential buyers to the merits of his tractor industry, but the Belarusian leader himself was clearly not in a joking mood on this day.

After congratulating his fellow citizens on the anniversary of liberation from the German fascist occupiers, the president moved on to more topical subjects. "At the moment there is no military threat to our country. But history, including recent history, calls on us always to keep our powder dry," Mr. Lukashenka reminded us. He went on to explain what kind of threat Belarus faces today. "The strong of this world are using weapons of mass information destruction against inconvenient countries. Information intervention is being escalated. The aim of all this is diktat, to impose a political will, to standardize the world, to coerce the peoples into a new world order. This 'new order' envisages dividing the world into the 'golden billion' and everyone else – the poor and abandoned, without even the right to vote."

According to the Belarusian leader external forces are "intensively and deliberately" imposing on his country the "unscrupulous scenarios of 'color revolutions.'" "The aim of the attacks is to bring us to our knees and negate all the gains of independence," Alyaksandr Lukashenka explained, adding: "This will not happen! Every Belarusian can be confident that the national security system is always ready reliably to defend the constitutional principles, the sovereignty of the state, the clear sky over our country, and people's spiritual calm."

Meanwhile the atmosphere in the square where Mr. Lukashenka was speaking was strained. The authorities

had had to resort to unprecedented security measures to prevent the participants in the "Revolution Via Social Networks" campaign from staging the culmination of their antigovernment flashmobs on this day. The oppositionists were planning to break through to the president's platform and disrupt his speech by applauding.

However, they did not succeed in carrying out their plan. "There were a great many police and agents in civilian clothes there. They were searching people and photographing them; only those with invitations were allowed to cross the cordon. People clapping were immediately removed," Kommersant was told by Viačaslaŭ Dzianaŭ, organizer of the protest, who coordinates from Poland the actions of those who disagree with the Belarusian authorities' policy. According to opposition websites, during the president's speech yesterday about 50 people who applauded were detained.



The oppositionists acknowledged the failure of the protest, but they did manage to achieve something. Because of the fact that anyone who clapped immediately found the eyes of the law-enforcement agencies on him, even the president's supporters were afraid to applaud him. As a result, the silence of the grave prevailed in the square both before and after Aliaksandr Lukashenka's speech. "Even the most ardent Lukashenka supporters were afraid to clap, and as for mosquitoes, nowadays it is better to catch them [instead of slapping them]," oppositionists commented ironically on Twitter.

The dissenters were planning two more flashmobs: one at 1900 local time, the other at 2300. However, during the unauthorized "silent" protests (yesterday's was the fifth) the authorities have obviously learned to oppose them: with the help of traditional methods – the special police, mass arrests, and tear gas – and more modern methods – trolling on and limiting access to social networking sites, and disinformation. Yesterday they made lavish use of all of these.

BBC Monitoring provides in-depth news and comment from around the world, 24 hours a day, to help governments, businesses, policy makers, and analysts keep abreast of political, security, and defense-related developments worldwide.

Source: Kommersant website, Moscow, in Russian, 4 July 2011.

Taking Action against Inaction..

By Robert Coalson

Opposition protesters in Belarus have impressed the world for weeks now as they come up with one imaginative way after another to demonstrate against the regime of President Aliaksandr Lukashenka).

Now it is the turn of the government to impress with its creativity. The cabinet of ministers has submitted to the country's rubber-stamp legislature amendments to the law on demonstrations that would make it illegal for people to gather "for a previously planned action or inaction." In short, doing nothing in groups would be illegal in Belarus, if it were planned in advance.

Of course, the lack of a law against doing things like clapping one's hands in public has not prevented the authoritarian regime from arresting dozens of demonstrators and sentencing many of them to jail terms of up to two weeks. But now it seems the government is concerned about the problem these convictions pose for the rule of law in the country and are moving to fill the lacuna.

**Law would make it illegal
for people to gather
"for a previously planned action
or inaction."**

Sadly, it appears that already the protesters may have proven too clever for the government. After all, one recent protest involved having demonstrators set the alarms on their cell phones to ring at precisely 8 p.m. Judges will be hard-pressed to decide if having your alarm go off counts as either an action or an inaction.

The only result of passing this new law would be to make the government in Minsk look even more ridiculous than it already does. Needless to say, the bill has raised eyebrows at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which once again has had to remind Belarus of the "commitments" it has made to democratic development and human rights.

Laughable Legislation Is No Laughing Matter

This, of course, is not to in any way denigrate the courage of the protesters in Belarus. While the court proceedings in that country are farcical and this new legislative initiative is laughable, drawing the attention of the country's KGB is no laughing matter. And spending even a few days in a Belarusian jail is not a joke. One Belarusian citizen, Aliaksandr Lyalikov, wrote about his interrogations in an essay published by RFE/RL:

"I began to come unglued. My body somehow began to melt in my chair. My heart was beating out of control -- I could see it pounding in my chest under my sweater. My palms were covered in a cold sweat. My mouth went dry, and my breath began to stink. My voice wavered and cracked. After more than three hours, the interrogation came to an end.... As they were showing me out the door, they handed me a summons for the next day and promised they would give me 'a good talking to' if I continued 'with this farce.'"

As is always the case in totalitarian regimes, living according to one's conscience takes an effort of bravery that very few can muster.

Despite the humorous bent of many creative protests in Belarus, the potential consequences are no joke.

I was reminded of Lyalikov's moving essay when I read the draft law on action and inaction. He ended his piece with these words:

"It is so hard to be a man in an unfree country. If you do nothing, you are a passive participant. If you try to do something, you are broken and turned into a traitor. It takes incredible courage and spiritual strength to escape this fate. Courage and strength that I lacked."

The innovative, Internet-driven protest actions dreamed up by the opposition in Belarus have turned this calculus on its head. They have opened up new avenues through which an increasing number of people are becoming willing to make a statement. Silence, applause, requesting (repeatedly) a popular song on state radio, the ringing of an alarm -- all of these and more have become ways to say "No" to a government whose oppression has become so evident that the opposition no longer even needs slogans or demands.

The proposed law outlawing organized action or inaction will not change the legal situation. Activists have been harassed, arrested, and jailed without a law and the regime will continue to do what it feels it must as the situation changes, regardless of what is written in the Criminal Code.

And such an artful law will certainly only spur on the fertile imaginations of the protesters: one can almost imagine them now asking themselves: "How shall I mock thee? Let me count the ways."

But there is almost a refreshing honesty in this effort to bring utter lawlessness under the scope of the rule of law. The penalty for inaction will be the same as the penalty for action. With it, Lukashenka is admitting that his government sees as enemies all Belarusians who either take action or don't take action. The rest, I suppose, must be supporters.

Robert Coalson is a correspondent with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. The views expressed in this commentary are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of RFE/RL.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 02, 2011

Quotes of Quarter

As reported by Radio Liberty on August 30, 2011, the office of **STEFAN FUELE**, the EU Commissioner on questions of expansion and neighborly relations, issued the following statement regarding Alexander Lukashenka's apparent offer to hold a round table discussion with the opposition and other interested parties:

"We have noted President Lukashenka's yesterday's proposal...in which he indicated his readiness to convene a round table regarding the situation in the country... In general, any serious dialogue between the Government and the political opposition in Belarus requires the freeing and the rehabilitation of all political prisoners."

As State Media Loses Credibility, Belarus' Independent Press Struggles to Fill Void

By Tom Balmforth

MINSK -- Siaržuk Holik struggles to suppress a knowing smirk as he thumbs through a copy of "Sovetskaya Belarussia," Belarus's most widely circulated daily.

Crisis? What crisis? According to the paper's lead story, the country's GDP is up 9.8 percent since January and exports have hit record levels of \$20 billion over the past seven months.

This is followed by a piece about how ATM machines have been refitted to accommodate handicapped citizens, although it neglects to mention that the Belarusian rubles they disperse are already practically worthless and losing their value by the day.

Holik, a 25-year-old photographer, grimaces as he closes the paper, which has a circulation of 400,000, in disgust. "I don't believe state media, it's full of lies," he says. "I mostly read the independent mass media."

He is not alone. As Belarus reels from an economic crisis, which the country's authoritarian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka appears increasingly unable or unwilling to address, media consumption habits are changing.

And with the upbeat official media narrative increasingly diverging from the harsh realities Belarusians are enduring on a daily basis, it isn't just young, urbane, and Internet-savvy citizens like Holik who are looking for alternative sources of news and information.

According to the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Research, trust in state media has tumbled in recent months, dropping from 52 percent in December to 43 percent in March. As the crisis continues to deepen, this has led to a rise in demand for the low-circulation newspapers and news websites produced by the country's feisty, yet beleaguered, independent and opposition press.

Propaganda Tools

Indeed, observers say that Belarus's lavishly subsidized state-run media is so out of touch with the needs of the population that it would have long ago become defunct in a competitive market.

State media "are first and foremost tools of propaganda," says Andrej Bastunets, the deputy chairman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists. "Their informational product is orientated toward the person who orders it and not the consumer, the reader, or the listener. It comes from the presidential administration and is thus necessarily less interesting."

But for Belarus's independent journalists, meeting the needs of a population hungry for reliable information amid the sea of state-sponsored propaganda is an increasingly tall order.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists estimates there are fewer than 30 independent news publications in Belarus and many of these have effectively been driven underground or forced into closure.

They suffer constant harassment and are shunned by advertisers, who fear sanctions from the authorities, and therefore must survive on foreign grants and meager sales revenues.

In 2005, state kiosks simply stopped selling independent newspapers, while state printing presses terminated their contracts, forcing independent papers to print abroad, causing editions to be delivered late.

Zmicier Pankavets, deputy editor of the leading independent weekly *Naša Niva*, which has a circulation of 7,000, says KGB agents entered the paper's newsroom on December 29, shortly after the disputed presidential election that returned Lukashenka to power for a fourth term, and confiscated their computers, discs, and memory sticks.

But the paper nevertheless still managed to continue publishing, Pankavets adds, thanks to a little help from its readers. "Work in the office wasn't paralyzed even for one day," he says. "To our great happiness we have good readers and literally within two days, readers on their own accord brought in computers and what we needed so that we could carry on publishing the paper."

Back in 2008, when Belarus was tentatively initiating reforms in an effort to court the European Union, the authorities allowed *Naša Niva* and another leading independent paper, *Narodnaja volia*, to legally publish in Belarus and to be sold in official news kiosks.

Fears Of Closure

But the pressure resumed amid the crackdown on the opposition that followed the December 19 presidential election. In April, the authorities sought to close the two papers again, but backed off in the face of sustained criticism from the West.

Fears of closure, however, are always present according to journalists. Maria Eysmant, the deputy chief editor of *Narodnaja volia* maintains that the warnings her paper receives from the authorities are often frivolous -- and sometimes nonsensical:

"We publish excerpts from books and we end up being issued a warning," she says. "I'm sorry, but this book is published in Belarus -- it is not banned. We haven't done anything wrong."

"These warnings are completely dreamed up. We worry so much now. The editor gets cross over commas -- we worry we could get in trouble for a comma or a full stop or for anything as long as there were grounds at any moment to start a case against us and close us. This is the predicament we are constantly in."



Eysmant adds that *Narodnaja volia*, which publishes twice weekly and has a circulation of 26,000, would like to increase its print run to meet growing public demand:

"We get a lot of letters from our readers saying that they can't buy the paper anywhere," she says. "So we wrote an official letter to the Belarusian Printing Union, which owns the kiosks, with a request to increase circulation for the kiosks. They simply refused, without any explanation. They just fear that the circulation of our paper is going to go up."

Internet Is Increasingly Important

Other independent papers are also struggling to get by. *Novy čas*, for example, manages to maintain a circulation of 7,000 despite being banned from newsstands. It is distributed to subscribers by its own editorial staff.

The Internet, which is becoming an increasingly important part of the Belarusian media landscape as penetration increases, is proving more difficult for the authorities to tame. According to Internet World Stats, more than 46 percent of Belarusians are regular users.

Belarus's blogosphere, known locally as ByNet, is also booming in use, with LiveJournal, Facebook, and Twitter leading the pack of popular social-networking sites.

Siarhiej Chaly is a prominent blogger on LiveJournal and was the ideologist behind this summer's "silent protests," which were mobilized through social networking sites.

"Just like in Russia, [the blogosphere] is very political," he says. "Of course, we have bloggers who just talk about their lives or publish photographs, but in general it deals with sociopolitical and so-

cioeconomic issues."

"What's more it is extremely oppositionist. Now a blog is practically a full-fledged source of mass media. If you have over 100,000 followers, you are effectively an opinion maker."

The online versions of independent newspapers also do quite well. *Naša Niva*, for example, claims it gets around 25,000 hits a day on its site.

Andrey Bastunets believes the state media lags far behind independent news outlets in the battle for online users.

"Practically all major state and non-state news outlets have their own websites," he says. "But in the absence of administrative support and resources [for state media], non-state Internet mass media have clearly outstripped their state counterparts. In the top ten most popular media sites, eight of them are nonstate."

The Fight For The Mind

The trend clearly has the authorities worried, and grappling for some kind of countermeasures.

Mysterious denial-of-service attacks have hit blogging platforms and social networking sites were blocked on the night of December 19, when 30,000 Belarusians gath-

ered on Independence Square to protest perceived vote rigging in the presidential elections.

Moreover, Belarusians are required to present their passports to access the Internet in cafes, and popular opposition news websites like Charter 97 and Belarusian Partizan are blocked in state buildings. These news sites are also subject to pressure. Charter 97's editor fled the country in March.

The authorities can easily disconnect Belarus's single Internet provider. A legal mechanism for doing so was formalized last year, one of 12 laws recently passed in an attempt to regulate the web.

But despite the pressure, Belarus's web-based opposition and independent journalists believe they have the upper hand.

"When you're doing this as a hobby -- that is, from the heart, then it doesn't require financial resources," says Chaly. "But if it is work then of course it does. And it is also expensive -- especially expensive if it is to be of good quality."

"The authorities are losing the fight for the mind. They tried to create blogs that were meant to carry out this fight and discredit people. But the online community is very consolidated. They instantly figure out these people and isolate them."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 31.

The Prison Diary

is the title of a day-by-day account of the 15-day detention of a young Belarusian after the December 19, 2010 crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in Minsk.

Due to its length (15 pages) the Diary has been posted on our Web-page belarusianreview.org, on its Belarusian section — in its original Belarusian version. In our opinion, translation of this account into English would result in the loss of much of the event's unique atmosphere. Moreover, Belarusian is the mother tongue of many readers of the *Belarusian Review*.

Mr. **Siarhiej Doŭhušaŭ**, the Diary's author is a multifaceted artist: singer, musician on a variety of instruments, composer, writer, actor, folklorist. Produced CDs of music by ensembles *Frathez* and *Vuraj*. Staged concerts for the Philharmony and in the Akreščina detention center.



Siarhiej Doŭhušaŭ

Lukashenka's Friends

By David Marples

Since December 2010, the Belarusian leadership has abandoned any pretences of support for a democratic society, pursuing its internal enemies with unprecedented determination. At the same time, under pressure as a result of some internal unrest and economic difficulties, it has tried to exploit the few avenues open to it in terms of partnerships and agreements. During the first two weeks of August, evidence of this approach emerged both within and outside the country.

On August 4, the Belarusian authorities arrested Ales' Byalatski, the head of the Vyasna 96 association and deputy chairman of the International Federation for Human Rights, on charges of evading taxes (EAP Community, August 13). Byalatski is only the most recent of many detainees, but ostensibly he is the first to have been arrested following a request by the Belarusian government to its counterparts in Lithuania and Poland for details of his bank account information, as well as that of Vyasna lawyer Valyantsin Stefanovich, in those countries. The charge comes with a maximum sentence of seven years imprisonment. Stefanovich, who was not arrested, stated that funds held by Vyasna in Lithuania had been contributed to the organization by "foreign foundations" to support those people victimized by the Lukashenka regime in Belarus (www.naviny.by, August 11).

The incident caused a scandal and a lot of questions within the leadership of Lithuania. The request was made on the basis of a Lithuanian-Belarusian agreement of 1993, by which the two countries agreed to hunt criminals who had fled to the neighboring country. It was made directly to the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice rather than the Foreign Ministry. The former regarded the inquiry (made initially in February 2011) as routine, one of an average of about 500 it receives each year. The Minister of Justice, Remigijus Simasius, claimed that his ministry was unaware of the names of many people famous in Belarus and that the Lithuanians had no wish to harm a member of the democratic opposition. Since the arrest of Byalatski, the "flow of information" from Lithuania to Belarus has ended (www.charter97.org, August 10).

Another report, attributed to Nikolai Chalezin, the art director of the Belarusian Free Theater, suggests that upon request, Lithuania revealed to Belarus the bank account details of more than 400 leaders of the opposition and NGOs. Following the arrest of Byalatski, one of the most revered defenders of human rights in Europe, Audronius Azubalis, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, condemned the crackdown in Belarus, noting that only in June had the foreign ministry alerted him as to the potential problems of the inquiry. Chalezin, however, maintains that the ability of the Minsk authorities to access information from Lithuania stems from the "open support" for Lukashenka's policies by Lithuanian President, Dalia Grybauskaitė (The Baltic Times, August 10).

However, not only Lithuania was embarrassed by these events. The Polish Ministry of Justice also responded to Belarus' request, much to the chagrin of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who described the actions of prosecutors as "incompetent" and stupid. On August 12, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski apologized "in the name of

the Polish Republic” to Belarusian democrats on Twitter. Poland has since started an internal review as to how the Minsk authorities could have been allowed access to the bank accounts of Vyasna (PolskieRadio, August 12). The two incidents demonstrate that Belarus has been able to exploit existing agreements to target bank accounts held by the opposition, which had been moved for security reasons to supposedly supportive neighboring democratic states within the European Union.

The Minsk regime, beset by troubles and under acute pressure from Russia to sell its more profitable companies, has changed direction within a body composed of its “allies,” namely the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). It is a notable move since only two years ago the Belarusian leadership was avoiding any firm commitment, particularly on the issue of the rapid response forces. However, Belarus has now taken over the chair of the organization and, according to official Belarusian media, important initiatives have been made in several directions.

On August 12, the CSTO held an informal meeting in Astana, which was billed as a discussion of peacekeeping activities, partnership, and military aspects of the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (Vestnik Kavkaza, July 25). On July 25, Lukashenka held a preliminary meeting with CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha, at which the Belarusian President noted the “entire Muslim world is in turmoil” and that current issues needed to be debated in the context of “recent global developments” (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, July 25).

These issues are well known. And most of the issues under discussion precluded the period of Lukashenka’s chairmanship. However, what is new is the connection made by the Belarusian president between events in North Africa and the Near East to developments in the zone of the countries of the CSTO. And while his focus appeared to be on Kazakhstan and Central Asia, his mind was very much on Belarus in at least two areas.

The first concerned the “wide use” by the Arab revolutionaries of contemporary means of communication and the Internet. The latter has become, in his words, “a powerful instrument of political struggle” (SB-Belarus’ Segodnya, August 13). His implicit reference to the “revolution by social network” movement within Belarus this summer could hardly be clearer. The second is the need to transform the CSTO from a consultative-discussion organ into a full-scale military bloc that can respond to threats within its member countries. One of the first steps is the completion of the process of manning “armed collective forces” that can counter threats, “especially concerning information and cyberspace” (SB-Belarus’ Segodnya, August 13).

In short, Lukashenka has made a volte-face in light of his own predicament and now wishes to deploy the CSTO as a means to intervene in the event of a political crisis in Belarus. The summit was merely a discussion forum at which no agreements could be signed. But it demonstrated the desperation of the Belarusian authorities not only to eliminate all internal enemies, but also to maintain the status quo. In so doing, the “independent Belarus” policy of the recent past has been quietly shelved.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 161, August 19, 2011

NEWS BRIEFS

July 14, 2011

Belarus Drops Lawsuits Against Two Independent Newspapers

Authorities in Belarus have dropped lawsuits aimed at closing two independent newspapers at the request of the Information Ministry, RFE/RL’s Belarus Service reports.

The ministry filed the lawsuits in April against *Nasha niva* and *Narodnaya volya* after issuing three warnings over what it called “incorrect coverage” of recent events — including the April 11 subway bombing in Minsk.

The higher economic court in Minsk said the ministry had dropped its case against *Narodnaya volya* one day after dropping its lawsuit against *Nasha niva* on July 12. No reason was offered for the reversals.

Source: Radio Racyja

July 22, 2011

Moody’s Cuts Belarus Credit Rating to B3 from B2

°The international rating agency Moody’s downgraded on Thursday the sovereign credit rating of Belarus from B2 to B3 and does not preclude further decrease.

According to the agency, the decrease of the rating is associated with the reduction of foreign aid received by Belarus to cover the negative balance of payments. The agency also notes the impact of shortages of foreign currency and a significant devaluation of the Belarusian ruble.

Source: Xinhua News Agency

July 29, 2011

Belarusian Authorities will Punish Citizens for “doing nothing”

A draft bill submitted to the parliament envisages culpability for “the organized inaction” of silent protesters against President Aliaksandr Lukashenka’s policies.

If the new legislation, submitted on Friday, is adopted — as most assume that it will — then Belarusian citizens will have to get permission not only to act, but for their “organized inactivity” as well.

The new draft bill equates the organized “mass presence” of citizens in a place coordinated via the internet in advance to picketing. As a result, the organizers will have to ask the authorities for the apparent right to do nothing.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

August 5, 2011

Belarusian Rights Activist’s Arrest Condemned

MINSK -- There has been international condemnation of the arrest in Minsk of the head of the prominent Belarusian human rights group Vyasna, RFE/RL’s Belarus Service reports.

Financial police searched Ales Byalyatski’s apartment and dacha and Vyasna’s office on August 4 before remanding him in custody for 72 hours and formally charging him with large-scale tax evasion.

Vyasna has been active in reporting on the police crackdown on peaceful antigovernment protests. It also campaigns on behalf of political prisoners.



Ales Byalyatski

Meanwhile, Lithuania's Justice Ministry acknowledged today that it passed to the Belarusian authorities details of Byalyatski's bank account and those of hundreds of other people, under what it said was a bilateral agreement.

Vyasna said on August 4 that the data served as the basis for Byalyatski's detention.

The International Federation for Human Rights, of which Byalyatski is vice president, has also expressed concern and called for Byalyatski's immediate and unconditional release.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

August 12, 2011

Washington Says that Fresh Economic Sanctions are not Directed at People of Belarus

The United States' fresh economic sanctions against Belarusian enterprises "are not directed at the people of Belarus," the US Department of State said on August 11.

Earlier that day, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control prohibited US persons from engaging in commercial or financial transactions with oil refinery Naf-tan in Navapolatsk, the Hrodna Azot manufacturer of nitrogen fertilizers and the Hrodna Khimvalakno manufacturer of nylon and polyester yarns and fibers, both based in the western Belarusian city, as well as Babruysk-based Belshyna, one of Europe's largest tire manufacturers. Any assets that the companies may have under US jurisdiction are to be frozen.

The four companies were added to the blacklist pursuant to an executive order that targets "individuals or entities that are responsible for undermining, or have participated in actions that undermine, democratic processes or institutions in Belarus; that are responsible for, or have participated in, human rights abuses related to political oppression in Belarus, or that are senior officials, and others who are responsible for or have engaged in public corruption related to Belarus."

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

August 12, 2011

Belarusian President Pardons Nine Convicted For December Protests

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has pardoned nine of the 41 people convicted for taking part in the massive December 19 protests that followed his disputed reelection.

Reports did not name those amnestied by Lukashenka

RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports the nine freed had requested an amnesty, admitted taking part in the demonstrations, and pledged not to engage in such activities again.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

August 16, 2011

Medvedev Ordered Miller to Make a "Good Deal" with Belarus

Terms of the new contract on gas supplies to Belarus must be different, because Russia is going to buy the remaining 50% Beltransgaz shares from the official Minsk. This was stated by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev at a meeting with the chairman of Gazprom, Alexey Miller, in Sochi on August 15.

"Of course, this creates some other conditions of Russia and Gazprom's staying on the Belarusian market, and, I believe, it would be correct to mind this while preparing the contract. So here're my instructions: start working with the Belarusian partners. I hope we can prepare a good contract for future co-operation," said Medvedev.

According to him, the terms of gas supplies will also influence Belarus' entry to the Customs Union. "In this regard, our economies have become much closer and should be considered," said the head of the Russian Federation.

In turn, Miller said that "market conditions on the hydrocarbons market are very difficult to the consumers, while gas prices are quite high." "Of course, it is sensitive to the former Soviet republics, in particular, for Belarus," he said.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

August 16, 2011

Belarus asks Russia for help against US 'aggression'

Belarus on Monday called the latest sanctions imposed by the United States targeting manufacturing an "act of aggression" and turned to its neighbor Russia for help.

"The US sanctions are an act of aggression against the Belarusian people, a blow to the economy of our country and all sectors tied to cooperation with Russia," Belarusian Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikov said at a meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The United States imposed sanctions on August 11, which target four state-controlled manufacturers in the Belneftekhim conglomerate, one of Belarus' top exporters.

They have been pursued because of a crackdown in Belarus on protesters and activists opposed to the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, many of whom have been sentenced to years of jail time. "To a certain extent, this is a challenge to the allied state," Myasnikov said. "Russia has always supported Belarus, and a unified position will make our relationship even stronger."

"As Russian companies "widen their opportunities" in Belarus, they are ready to give something in return, the Russian premier said.

Source: Agence France-Presse, Moscow

August 20, 2011

U.S. 'Disappointed' After Belarus Quits Nuclear Deal

The United States has expressed disappointment after Belarus said it was suspending its involvement in a plan to get rid of its stockpile of highly enriched uranium with U.S. assistance.

The Belarus Foreign Ministry on August 19 said Minsk was withdrawing from the agreement reached with Washington last year because of what it called "illegitimate" U.S. sanctions.

Reacting to the Belarus announcement, the U.S. State Department said it was "disappointed" and said it hopes Belarus

still "intends to meet its stated objective of the elimination of all of its stocks of highly enriched uranium."

The State Department said this would be a "responsible contribution to global security."

Lukashenka has said Belarus has "hundreds of kilograms" of highly enriched uranium from Soviet times -- material that could potentially be diverted for use in a nuclear weapon.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

August 29, 2011

Belarus to consider simplifying visa regulations for foreign tourists

The Tourism Coordination Board under the Council of Ministers of Belarus is set to discuss simplification of visa regulations for foreign tourists in September, BelTA learnt from Director of the Tourism Department of the Sport Ministry Vadzim Karmazin who took part in the first gathering of tourism business professionals on 27 August.

In his words, the board is likely to convene after 9 September. Top on the agenda will be a possibility to ease visa requirements for foreign tourists, first of all, for tourists from the European Union.

"Easier visa regulations are needed, in particular, to promote the Aŭgustaŭ Canal as a tourist facility," Vadzim Karmazin said. To make the canal more popular among vacationers, Belarus needs to make an access to it easier for foreign tourists. So far, despite the efforts to promote the canal, the number of tourists coming there leaves much to be desired.

The Sport Ministry official noted that Belarus is ready to consider a possibility to introduce a Union State visa and the common CIS visa. "We uphold all the initiatives aimed at simplifying visa regulations for foreigners and promoting inbound tourism in Belarus," Vadzim Karmazin explained.

Source: BelTA

August 29, 2011

Lukašenka Plays Negotiations Card

Belarusian president Alyaksandr Lukashenka has invited representatives of the opposition, the EU and Russia to discuss the situation in the country in a round table manner. According to him, "the strength lies in unity", and the problems of Belarus should be addressed not in the squares and barricades, but through dialogue, "a normal human conversation" as he put it.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus, based on BelTA and Telegraf Reports

August 31, 2011

Opposition Names Own Terms for the "Round Table"

The Belarusian opposition appreciated the suggestion of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to hold a "round table" with representatives of democratic forces, the EU and Russia to find a way out of the economic crisis. However, opponents of the president name their own terms of their participation in the "round table."

Thus, the leader of the movement "For Freedom," Alyaksandr Milinkevich, said that despite being a supporter of changes, he believes it is impossible to carry them out at all costs.

"While the opponents of the regime are in jail, we can't sit at any table. Let them show respect for people with other views by letting them free. The authorities are to make the first step," *Nasha Niva* cites the ex-presidential candidate.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

August 31, 2011

EU Reacts Coolly To Lukashenka's 'Roundtable' Proposal

BRUSSELS -- The European Union has reacted coolly to a proposal by Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka for roundtable talks between the government and the opposition.

Lukashenka made the proposal on August 29, saying it was necessary to improve the situation in the country, which is mired in a deep economic crisis.

European Commission spokesman John Clancy told RFE/RL that the EU hoped Lukashenka's initiative was a positive sign.

But he added, "Any serious political dialogue between the government and the political opposition in Belarus on the situation in the country would necessitate the release and the rehabilitation of all political prisoners."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

September 5, 2011

Belarusian Opposition is Offered „Round Table“ without Authorities' Participation

Belarusian opposition is offered to independently develop and submit proposals to improve the situation in the country instead of the earlier script of „round table“ with representatives of the current government. „The word „negotiation“ is inappropriate in this case. Negotiations are of periodic character in any society: elections of the president, parliament – these are talks. All the rest is just work,“ said Chairman of the Board of „Second National Channel“ Ryhor Kisel.

„Surely, the president, when voicing his idea, had the following in mind: let the representatives of the left, right, absolute, supporting movements gather and make suggestions even without the participation of authorities. If the proposal is worthwhile, then no normal government, aware of the problems in the economy or finance, can't ignore it, as it is advantageous to the government,“ BelTA quoted Ryhor Kisel.

„Whenever the government - in this case the president - makes a promise, trying to stir up civil society, the cardinals of the left and right wing are the first to appear in the foreground, followed by the absolute forces looking out from their barricades, and, finally, foreign prompters,“ said Ryhor Kisel. According to the head of the channel, the opposition claims to be „the monopoly of ideas, suggestions and any actions“ which leads not to the development of civil society but to its strangulation.

In turn, chairman of the International Union of Youth "Unity" Vadzim Baravik said that Aliaksandr Lukašenka had addressed not only the opposition, but the public in general. According to the youth leader, only those politicians who are "conscious of the responsibility for the fate of country, who can't be guided by some kind of ambition, offences, and are incapable to bring rapid-fire demands" will be engaged in dialogue with the government.

Source: Telegraf.by

September 5, 2011

Belarusians can be proud of their national literature, says Latushka

Belarusians can be proud of the national printed word, Culture Minister of Belarus Pavel Latushka said as he opened the Alley of Written Language as part of the 18th Belarusian Written Language Day. The event was held in the town of Hancavičy (Brest Region) on 4 September, BelTA has learned.

Culture & Society

Neglected State Of Belarusian Language — A Danger Signal for the Nation

Interview with Zachar Šybieka

Recently the issue of national identity has been increasingly discussed in the Belarusian society, while Belarus' authorities speak a lot about the need to increase the number of foreign tourists in Belarus. These two issues are interconnected, because precisely what is being shown to foreigners from our country's historical legacy, and how it is being shown, forms their perception of Belarus. The issue of language is an important part of this perception, since, under the existing conditions of bilingualism in Belarus, it may provide a visual display of Belarus' distinctness. For this reason the issue of correct transliteration of geographical and personal names is highly significant. Despite the past twenty years of real political independence, in a cultural context many foreigners continue to perceive Belarus as a part of Russia. Yet, presenting Belarus and its cultural and historical distinctness is not a simple matter.

What should the role of language be for Belarusians' self-identification and for the external presentation of Belarus, and how generally should Belarus be introduced to foreign tourists? Professor Zachar Šybieka, a well-known historian and expert urbanist expresses his ideas in this interview. Professor Šybieka's scholarly interests include the social-economic and cultural development of Miensk and Belarus' cities in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the Belarusian national movement in the 19-20th centuries, and urbanization of the Belarusian society: its sources, course and results.

Belarusian Review: How would you evaluate the present situation concerning bilingualism in Belarus?

Zachar Šybieka: In Belarus there exists a practical bilingualism. The majority speak Russian, yet nobody prohibits also using Belarusian. But this right is being exercised only by a few among officials, teachers, creators, technical intelligentsia, let alone by the common people, who are using "trasianka." (Ed. - a Belarusian-Russian mixture, a pidgin language). My personal attitude toward bilingualism, trilingualism, etc. is normal, positive. The more languages we know, the better. Polylingualism has always been a characteristic of Belarusian territories. And this tradition is now being reborn. The English language is becoming very popular. Many people have command of Polish, which may compete with Russian. This development may be important in learning about our past.

Another matter is the language policy of the present state leadership. My attitude toward it is very negative. Many languages may be in use in a given country. However, a national state should promote only the language of its titular nation. It should be the only official language. This is the practice world-wide. Belarus' new leadership

"Belarusians can be proud of their historical and cultural heritage, their printed word," Paval Latushka is convinced. Belarus has an exceptionally rich heritage of Symon Budny, Francysk Skaryna, Yanka Kupala, Maksim Bahdanovich, Uladzimir Karatkevich, Vasil Bykau. "This is our contribution to the world culture," Paval Latushka said.

Belarus' Information Minister Aleh Pralyaskouski, in turn, said that Hancavičy has become an inexhaustible source of inspiration for Jakub Kolas. According to Aleh Pralyaskouski, the Belarusian Written Language Day is an evidence of the state's effort to promote national culture, education and print. "There are good conditions for the all-round spiritual development of a personality," said Aleh Pralyaskouski. He added that Belarus' primary objective is to promote book printing and publish books of classical authors. Thus, the state helps issue works of Yakub Kolas, Maksim Tank, Ivan Shamyakin. Next year there are plans to start publishing books which make up the creative heritage of Uladzimir Karatkevich. A number of interesting books will be published by the 120th anniversary of the birth of Maksim Bahdanovich. Moreover, publishers are gearing up for the jubilee of Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas which will be celebrated next year.

The Alley of Written Language in Hancavičy is dedicated to contemporary authors who were born in the district. There is also a monument to Yakub Kolas, an outstanding Belarusian poet. He started his creative career in the village of Lyusina.

The monument was based on a picture of the writer from the time he lived in the Hancavičy District. The monument is located at the end of the alley. It is made of granite and bronze. The sculptors are members of Belarusian Artists' Union Paval Herasimenka and Alesia Hrushchankova.

Source: BelTA

September 9, 2011

Lukashenka: IMF Demands on Political Prisoners Unacceptable

Embattled Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka sounded a note of defiance on Friday, saying he would not release political prisoners to obtain International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans or engage in reconciliation talks with the country's opposition.

Speaking at a Minsk press conference, Lukashenka accused the IMF, from which cash-strapped Belarus hopes to obtain as much as 8 billion dollars in emergency credits, of improperly demanding he release political prisoners as a preliminary loan condition.

"The West has never supported us and they are unlikely ever to do so," he said. "They are economists and financial specialists ... and here they are making political demands."

The Belarusian leader said he would not accept the IMF stipulation and that the country's economy would find capital elsewhere, particularly Russia and China.

Lukashenka also appeared to reverse a recent offer he made to hold talks including with the country's opposition, saying "I am have no intention of negotiating anything with any one," said Lukashenka.

Opposition leaders said they would participate in the conferences if Lukashenka released some of the political prisoners he jailed for participating in anti-government demonstrations in December. He refused.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

had no right to subject the language issue to a referendum in 1995. With consequent official support of Belarusian, it would have assumed in the society a more honorable position, than even Ukrainian in today's Ukraine. We have a smaller share of immigrants from Russia; many children from families of educated Russian military personnel are even now fond of speaking Belarusian.

With legalized bilingualism, when both Belarusian and Russian are official, the country's authorities do not create conditions for a real equality between these languages. Russian is being promoted over Belarusian at all levels of leadership, which actually violates the law on bilingualism. However, if the law on bilingualism were observed to the letter, then any Belarusian citizen who refuses to use Belarusian (on par with Russian) would also be committing a crime.

Belarusian Review: What is required for improvement/strengthening the status of Belarusian in the country?

Zachar Šybieka: However, I do not support the fight for equality of Belarusian and Russian languages. Even after declaring their equality, in our society Belarusian may become only ceremonial in nature, not functional. However, it is necessary for the national language to embrace all spheres of life.

Belarusian should become the only official language. In Belarus everybody should be able to speak Belarusian, just as English is spoken in England, Polish in Poland, etc. This is the logic of current national state life. Russian does not have any reason to be privileged. Russians are not native inhabitants of Belarus. Our country was never Russia's colony. The Belarusian language is sufficiently developed and has great potential for modernization, in order to replace Russian in all spheres of society's functionality.

However, in order to realize these changes, we need a genuine language policy. We do not speak here about prohibiting Russian. It would be enough to deprive it of support by the state, and to direct all efforts and means toward the support and development only of Belarusian. Of course, correction of the language situation is not a matter of a year.

The leadership is justifying its orientation on one language by the need to economize. It wants to save money for printing parallel official forms in both languages, etc. I also support economizing, but at the expense of Russian. The native language and other national values are simply priceless. For the preservation of national treasures one should pay any price. The basic problem of the Belarusian project, actually not only of its language, is that it is permanently under-financed.

Belarusian Review: What are the prospects for the Belarusian language, if the present language situation in the country does not change in the medium-to-near future?

Zachar Šybieka: The status of a language, its wealth and international recognition is not defined by itself, but rather by its carriers. A language may be most beautiful and mellifluous — yet, when its carrier nation is lacking in

national honor, is not sufficiently educated, is lazy and indifferent to its own legacy, then nobody will respect its language either. The prestige of English was created by Americans themselves. Therefore the fate of Belarusian depends on the success of the Belarusian people. If it manages to create an effective economy, original culture, developed science, or if it begins to treat with dignity all that has been achieved until now, then respect to itself and its own history will re-appear — and the native language will experience an inevitable comeback. However, if it does not find enough strength, then it will lose not only its language, but its statehood. It will then become a reservoir of cheap labor force for the world's developed countries, and nobody will need our language, like Lusatian in Germany...

The present neglected state of the Belarusian language is a strong danger signal for the entire Belarusian nation. And it should react to it in time, in order to remain a viable entity.

Belarusian Review: How would you evaluate the statement by Valiancin Akudovič to the effect that Belarus will never again be only Belarusian-speaking, but will remain bilingual?

Zachar Šybieka: Are you able to find today countries using only one language? They have all become multilingual. Multilingualism is required by an open economy and the global economic market. Of course, Belarus will never be only Belarusian-speaking, unless a Belarusian-speaking dictator isolates Belarus from the rest of the world. And why should Belarus remain only bilingual? I think we too will become multilingual. It is happening already.

In Belarus everybody should be able to speak Belarusian, just as English is spoken in England, Polish in Poland, etc.

Returning Belarusian to the status of the only official language is not only possible, but inevitable. I have no doubt that Belarusian is suitable for work in physics, chemistry, medicine and other sciences. Belarusian terminology exists. The process of perfecting it is simple: by introducing innovations and borrowings. The problem lies not in the limited nature of the language, but in the limited capabilities of our scientists and lecturers, who are afraid to exert intellectual effort teaching and writing scholarly works in Belarusian. When Belarusian assumes its due position in society, other languages will flower with it too. Belarusians should know the languages of their neighbors.

Belarusian Review: What, in your opinion, should be mandatory for visiting tourists in Miensk, and also in Belarus in general? Which dates, national heroes and memorials should they know?

Zachar Šybieka: Presenting Belarus and its capital is not simple. First of all, our country lost much as the result of many wars and robberies; secondly, little has been renovated and returned from Russia, Poland and other countries; thirdly, not all national heroes have been honored by monuments — not everything worth remembering, has been immortalized. There is a wide field for memorialization.

The foreigners should learn the date Miensk was established and see the foundation of the ecumenical church from the 11th century. They should know that at the end of the 15th century Miensk was governed by the Magdeburg Law, which connected it with the European tradition, and therefore they should visit the renovated Ratusa (City Hall) on Freedom Square. They should know that for a full century and a quarter (1820-1917) Miensk was the buttress point of czarist Russia's rule over Belarusian lands — and see the Piscalau castle. Foreigners should know that for over 70 years Miensk served as the Russian Bolsheviks' outpost in Belarus — and see the Kurapaty forest. It would be worthwhile to take a walk on the former Stalin prospect, and show them nearby monuments, museums and the National Library, still reflecting the local Soviet patriotism. Even if foreigners are not especially shown or told about anything, they would somehow still understand the city's remoteness from the European tradition. And at the conclusion of their visit, tired guests would do best to visit the Botanical Garden, which is simply beautiful and free of ideology.

The most important and prestigious places in Belarus are now towns, connected with Adam Mickiewicz and Marc Chagall, where there are sites worth seeing. Worth one's attention is also the monument to victims of the World War II in Chatyn. And if the guests visit the concrete city, now and then they might find something — but mostly ruins. And even this should not be hidden. Ruins too may be valuable and attractive.

Belarusian Review: How would you explain to foreigners the bilingual situation in Belarus? In terms of which language we should encourage them to learn, especially considering the use of Belarusian in everyday life?

Zachar Šybieka: Foreigners will not notice the bilingual situation. They will think they are in Russia or one of its provinces, since everywhere they hear the sound of Russian. It's necessary to explain the reason why it is so. The Belarusian language lost its official status in 1696. Since then it regained it for several months in the BNR period (1918), for several years in the BSSR (1920-1927), and for several years in the present Republic of Belarus (1991-1994). And that is all! Was it really possible to make the language suitable for general usage during such brief favorable periods? At first there was Polish, and then Russian, and only they were considered prestigious and gave people the opportunity to raise their social position. Even now in Belarus one may only build a career only in Russian. Higher education in Belarusian is practically non-existent; as is university instruction in Belarusian. The present state leadership is completely satisfied by this situation. Those not satisfied by this state of affairs comprise not more than 20% of Belarusian citizens, although their number keeps increasing with the growing young and educated generation.

Not everything is that tragic. The economy will put everything in its place. And the Belarusian language will become requested merchandise on the world's market. External factors will also force us to respect what is our own.

Hanna Vasilievič conducted the interview.

The "Directed" Version Of Belarusian History

Jakaŭ Traščanok passed away on August 14, 2011. He was a person associated with significant changes in the realm of historical education in Belarus. These changes may be regarded as the distinct evolution of the "directed historiography" in the context of the existing state ideology.

What is the significance of this loss for the official Belarusian historical science? In the consequence of this loss — is it worthwhile to expect any essential changes in the direction of its development? These are questions *Belarusian Review* addressed to the well-known Belarusian historian, **Dr. Aleś Smaliančuk**.

Aleś Smaliančuk: First, I would like to offer my condolences to the late Mr. Traščanok's next of kin...

Indeed, with his name we may associate the attempt of ideological structures to change the way of teaching Belarus' history from the "nation-state" approach to the "West Russian" one. However, I do not regard him as the initiator of this turn-off... The initiative in reviving certain features of the West Russian doctrine in its most anti-Belarusian form came from Aliaksandr Lukašenka's close milieu, possibly from him himself.

However, despite the massive publication of many textbooks and manuals, edited by Jakaŭ Traščanok, a complete turn-off has not taken place. At least, this may be deduced from results of sociological questionnaires... Also, there is no reason to state that his didactic notes had any influence on the development of the Belarusian historiography. They had nothing to do with science.

I believe, that Jakaŭ Traščanok's passing will change nothing: neither in the "directed" version of historiography, nor in the system of instruction. A "worthy" replacement has been already prepared from among younger historians...

Anatol' Taras: I am a Belarusian And Feel it in my Heart

By Hanna Vasilievič

The biography of **Anatol' Taras**, the well-known Belarusian writer and publisher of many books dealing with Belarusians' historical roots and their current national consciousness is multi-faceted.

Taras has arrived at his present occupation gradually. Before 1991 he was engaged in psychology and information technology. However, the demand for these scientific fields in Belarus decreased considerably after 1991.

The real impetus in developing his interests came from the manuscript by a Moscow writer, dealing with the history of relations between Russia and Poland. Taras became familiar with it while working as the editor-in-chief in the publishing house "Harvest." Analysis of the manuscript revealed its author's shallow knowledge of

Belarus' true history, which prompted Anatol' Taras to engage in popularizing the historical record. This new occupation left a significant imprint on Taras' world outlook — which he described in this way: "Before I KNEW with my mind that I am Belarusian. But at that moment I began to FEEL it in my heart. A change has taken place over the last 6-7 years."



Anatol' Taras

Books, published by Anatol' Taras, appear mostly in Russian. He explains this choice of publishing language by the fact that Belarusian-language books are slow to sell, appear in smaller quantities, and are commercially not competitive. Russian-language books also provide the opportunity to be sold beyond Belarus' borders, and even in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In addition, the commercial factor is of significance here: Russian-language books sell faster and allow the publisher — after the book is sold out — to make a profit and repay the money borrowed for publishing. Moreover, the current severe financial crisis has negatively affected the publication quantities in Belarus, as well as the purchasing abilities of readers.

Each book represents a carrier of information, targeted toward a certain segment of the public. However, despite 20 years of independence, Belarus remains a little-known country in the West. Conceptions about it are often reduced to stereotypes, both on an academic level (the country is often considered a part of the so-called "Russosphere"), as well as on a political level (the idea, that Moscow may be an intermediary in western relations with Belarus).

In Anatol' Taras' opinion, the solution to this really grave problem may be found in treating it as a commercial project. The original, independent Belarus in a certain sense represents a "brand." Yet practically no one in "Old Europe" has heard about us. Our "brand" is unknown. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically organize advertising campaigns about Belarus (Belarusian history, culture, language, arts, landscapes) — in newspapers, magazines, on radio, television, the Internet by publishing books in foreign languages, organizing appearances of Belarusian musicians, singers, dancers, and by staging weeks of documentary and artistic films etc.

Therefore, in Anatol' Taras' opinion, literature dealing with Belarus' history and Belarusians' current national

consciousness must be translated into English and other wide-spread western languages. An essential part of this project must be a successful advertising campaign, because without it, in today's world, saturated with information, no one will even notice such production. Anatol' Taras emphasizes that in the case of Belarus success is possible, yet everything depends on the financial factor (money), and the human factor (the coordinator).

However, achieving success with the brand "Belarus" would require **organizational methods** that differ basically from existing ones, **new personalities** willing to engage in and assume responsibility for this project, and **an institution**, whose activity would be directed exclusively toward advertizing the brand "Belarus," and which would enjoy substantial financial support.

Belarusian Internet Library

Belarusian Internet Library **Kamunikat.org** was launched in 2000 as a private initiative and within a few years acted on a voluntary basis. In time, a modest collection of publications of the Belarusians from the Bielastok area has grown into a big library, which today is one of the most popular Belarusian libraries in the Internet.

Today Library **Kamunikat.org** is a project of the Belarusian Historical Society in Bielastok (Poland); and within the site **Kamunikat.org** one can find more than 8,000 of the Belarusian publications - books, magazines, newspapers, mp3-files related to Belarus or Belarusians. The rich collections of historical literature and books which are not available in traditional libraries of Belarus, make **Kamunikat.org** the source of unique information for students and scholars.

Mr. Jaraslaŭ Ivaniuk is Library's founder and editor. .



The project "Belarusian authors" at **Kamunikat.org** provides the opportunity to create personal sites of Belarusian writers, journalists and researchers, whose books are at the Library's disposal. There are also several websites of Belarusian publishing houses and publishing series.

Quotes of Quarter

"The Collective Security Treaty Organization is to take under control law and order in social networks. It will be done in order to prevent a repetition of mass riots according to the Tunisia and Egypt scenarios",

the official news agency **BelTA** reported on September 13, 2011 with reference to a source in the CSTO. According to it;

"high-level experts are already at work on the task."

Question with the Known Answer

By Hanna Vasilievič

Reaction to the article “**National Identity Dilemma: the “Who Are We?” Case of Belarus**” by Liudmila Volakhava, published in the *Annual of Language and Politics and Politics of Identity*, Vol. IV (2010), pp. 31–44.

The article written by Liudmila Volakhava aims to raise the question of Belarusian national identity – an issue which has recently attracted a lot of attention from both Western and Belarusian researchers. While foreign researchers mainly see Belarusian identity as denationalized, divided, sudden or Sovietized (meaning denationalized or equal to Russified) (Marples, Ioffe, Sanford, Wilson), recent interpretation of Belarusian identity by Belarus-born researchers (Pershai, Leshchenko, Bekus) treats Sovietization as an integral part of Belarusian identity. This interpretation considers the Belarusian nation as mature enough, **but** undergoing certain development on the basis of already existing characteristics. If previously the national identity had a strong Soviet influence, today Belarusians to a significantly less extent regard themselves as Soviet, and to a larger extent as Belarusian (the older population is dying out and the ongoing Belarusian ideological education has to a large extent already covered and raised a new generation, who were born in the late 1980s and do not remember the Soviet Union at all).

In the author’s view, Belarus is torn between different visions of Belarusian identity. None of them, however, is clearly explained, but are mentioned only in a retrospective of the Belarusian reality just after independence when reassessment of national identity started.

While Liudmila writes about a complex approach to the notion of national identity (including the socio-economic aspect), she skips the important factor of the severe economic crisis that the newly-created state faced just after the collapse of the USSR. The economic crisis, rather than the development of a new / adopted national idea, became the central issue of the first presidential elections in 1994 (which were democratic, though the author certainly is not sure on that, stating at the beginning that Lukašenka is the “first democratically elected president” (p. 3). However, by page 8 those elections become “the first more or less democratic” elections resulting in Lukašenka’s “decisive victory”).

The article creates the impression that the author herself has not decided whether a Belarusian national identity exists at all, calling it an “inadequate national identity” and questioning why no considerable changes have occurred by now (the article was written in 2010, so I suppose that “by now” means “as of 2010”). She also ignores the generation change, the appearance of a state ideology and its affect on the younger generation, as well as deeper analysis of the data presented in her article. It is enough to have a look at data presented by the IISEPS: in the results of sociological polling, an absolute majority (almost 70 per cent) believe that Belarus has become a truly independent state that benefits from being independent (50 percent) and portray themselves as those who belong to the Belarusian culture (64.2

percent versus 13.6 percent to Russian and a further 13.3 percent to Soviet). From the data presented by the author, it is obvious that over 50 percent of Belarusians consider themselves as an independent, Belarusian, not Soviet, nation with a strong association with the territory. Thus, it is obvious that a change has occurred. These numbers openly contradict the author’s statement, mentioned without any reference or statistical data, that “the majority of the population doesn’t identify itself as a nation” (p. 9).

A closer look at the 2003 data shows that, for Belarusians, speaking Belarusian language and knowledge of the national culture represent an essential factor of belonging to the Belarusian nation (this number is as high as 25.6 percent). At the same time, the author states that only an “insignificant minority of Belarusians speak the titular language on a daily basis” (p. 9), marginalizing them to the politically-associated opposition and ignoring the official results of the 1999 census, according to which 37 percent of Belarusians used Belarusian as a primary language in their daily life.

Liudmila’s article contains lots of contradictions and inaccuracies; I will mention just a few of them:

- On page 5, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) is presented as “Belarus’s historic statehood experience” where “Belarusian lands were a constituent part of, and served as a solid local identity ground for a long period.” On the next page she presents a somewhat contradictory view, stating that “Absent consistent individual statehood experience, the Belarusian entity refers to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania period as the sole historically valid identity platform.” (p. 6).

- The author claims that the Belarusian People’s Republic (BNR) was established in 1918 “to last just a few weeks”. (p. 7) However, officially and also formally, the BNR on the Belarusian territories existed for at least ten months and went into exile in January 1919.

- In the conclusion, the author presents her vision of how the nation should be developed: “In other words, an updated national idea is to focus on the political content, instead of rigidly emphasizing the cultural dimension”. (p. 13) She ignores the fact that the existing national idea promoted by the current government (i.e. the president) is politically driven in the top-down dimension.

Finally, I have to address inconsistencies in transliteration. The author uses two versions to name one person: Lukashenko (from Russian, pp. 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14) and Lukashenka (from Belarusian, pp. 8, 13). Though for some it may seem not that significant, it is important to stay consistent to prevent creating two people. As for the geographical places situated in Belarus, there is internationally recognized documentation that regulates proper transliteration from the Belarusian language based on Belarusian Lacinka. So, there is no Mogilev and Orsha, (p. 5) but Mahilioŭ and Vorša.

Generally, the article does not answer the question in its title: Who are we? This question sounds somewhat strange, if not provocative, because it is not even a question. Belarusians are Belarusians. Additionally, the text does not clearly present the dilemma(s) existing in Belarusian society and instead creates blurry shapes of the discussion.

Gold Medal for Belarus In Women's Swimming

Belarusian swimmer **Aliaksandra Herasimienia** became the world champion in 100m freestyle competition during the championship, held in Shanghai, China in July 2011.

With her time of 53,45 seconds, Aliaksandra shared the champion's title with the Danish swimmer Janet Olesen, whose time was identical.



Belarus Wins two Medals In South Korea

Belarus won two medals at the World Athletics Championships that took place in Daegu, South Korea, between August 27 and September 4.

Nadzija Astapčuk won the silver in the women's shot put, while **Andrej Michnievič** came third in the men's shot put.

Belarus was 20th in the medal table. The United States topped the table with 12 gold, eight silver and five bronze medals, while Russia was second with nine gold, four silver and six bronze medals and Kenya third with seven gold, six silver and four bronze medals.

Source: BelTA

Interesting note:

Her own long hair robbed the Belarusian athlete of the gold medal.

In the women's long jump event, **Nastasia Mirončyk-Ivanova** of Belarus had the best performance — 690 cm, which would have qualified for a gold medal. However, the imprint of her ponytail in the sand measured 16 cm. less, which brought Nastasia only the 4th place.

Source: *Lidove Noviny*, Prague, Sept. 5, 2011

Tragic Loss for Belarus' Hockey

Outstanding players of the Belarusian National Team **Ruslan Salej**, **Siarhiej Astapčuk**, **Mikalaj Kryvanosaŭ** lost their lives on September 7, 2011 in the airplane crash near Yaroslavl, Russia.

There were 43 victims: the entire team of the KHL club Lokomotiv Yaroslavl, including the 3 Belarusians, 3 Czechs (members of the 2010 world champion team), 1 Slovak, 1 Latvian, 1 German, 1 Swede.

Source: *Lidove Noviny*, Prague, Sept. 8, 2011

Salej Played for Years in NHL

The Anaheim Ducks released the following statement when news of Salej's passing became official:

"The Anaheim Ducks organization is shocked and saddened to learn of the passing of Ruslan Salej 'Rusty' was a fan favorite and dedicated member of the Orange County community since being drafted by Anaheim in 1996. Our thoughts and prayers go to his wife and three children, along with all of the other members of the hockey community affected by this horrible tragedy."

Salej played nine seasons in Anaheim before leaving as a free agent following the 2005-06 campaign. Nicknamed "Rusty," he ranks fourth in team history (and first among defensemen) in games played with 594, and scored one of the biggest goals in Ducks history, an overtime game-winner in Game 3 of the Stanley Cup Final against New Jersey on May 31, 2003.

Source: <http://ducks.nhl.com/club/>

From Soccer Cinderella To Political Football

By Dan Wisniewski

When it qualified for the group stage of the UEFA Champions League in 2008, BATE Borisov (**Barysaŭ** in Belarusian) as the first soccer club from the independent state of Belarus to play in Europe's top club competition.

Now BATE is set to crash the elite party yet again, this time as Belarus is suffering through the most dire economic crisis of its young history.

While BATE manager Viktor Hancharenka, a former player who at 31 was the youngest-ever manager of a team in the Champions' League last time around, eschews politics, the same cannot be said of the club's chairman, Anatol Kapski, who is also the manager of the Barysau factory of Automobile and Tractor Electrical equipment (BATE) that sponsors the club.

Kapski campaigned for Lukashenka ahead of last year's presidential vote on the promise of a new \$20-million stadium in Barysaŭ, which is now under construction.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 25, 2011

Editor's note: In the 2011 season BATE is playing in the group H of the European Champion's League and will meet soccer "giants" AC Milan and FC Barcelona, as well as the Czech champion Viktoria Plzeň.

BATE met the Czech champion on September 13th, 2011 in Prague. The encounter ended in a tie 1:1. Goals were scored by Bakoš (Plzeň) in 45(+3) min., and Bressan (BATE) in 69th minute. Both teams played interesting offensive soccer, with many scoring chances; yet both had problems in scoring. BATE dominated in the midfield for long stretches of the game.

Rematch of the game will be played on November 23 in Minsk, Belarus

Russian Imperialist Policies In Ice-hockey

Kiryl Kaścian

A recent scandal concerning the name transliteration raised by a prominent Russian ice-hockey star Alexei Kovalev who has been transferred from the NHL club Pittsburgh Penguins to the Continental Hockey League (KHL) club Atlant Mytishchi raised many issues on the discriminatory policies applied by the Russian-based KHL officials. Kovalev successfully protested against the KHL rules which prescribe to write his surname as nothing but "Kovalyov" (he insisted that the only correct way of writing his surname is **Kovalev**). A reader should be reminded that apart from Russian teams the KHL has four non-Russian franchises: Barys Astana, Dinamo Riga, Dynamo Minsk, Lev Poprad. Additionally the affiliated Russian major league has two non-Russian teams: Donbas Donetsk and Kazanka Torpedo Oskemen.

This story prompted me to look more thoroughly into the KHL regulations on name writing. Another reason for that was the continuous "Russification" of the surnames of Belarusian players of the KHL club Dynamo Minsk as well as the same practice applied by other KHL clubs toward Belarusian players drafted by them. These regulations are set for 2011-2014, available online on the KHL website and are thus easily accessible for familiarization. They deal with the name writing of Russian and foreign (i.e. all non-Russian, incl. also Belarusian) names, as with providing rules how those foreign names should be transliterated into Latin letters and written in Russian. Thus, these two aspects will become the main focus of our analysis.

The regulations are unanimously applicable to everyone involved in the KHL activities, namely players, coaches, referees, clubs and the League management and other personalities (art. 1). Moreover, these regulations are obligatory for all structural units of the KHL holding (art. 2), including the Minor Hockey League (MHL) which includes two Belarusian clubs – Dynamo-Ščyrnik Babrujsk (previously known as Minskija Zubry Minsk) and Junactva Minsk.

The KHL officials recognize that the name writing according to these "regulations" may not always comply with other documents, for instance those issued by the Russian Federal Migration Service (art.3). The basic principle applied by the KHL is thus the "practical transcription" so that the foreign names are transliterated according to the historically vested orthographic system of the Russian language so that the method of including words from one language in another may preserve an approximate profile of those words and so that the writing in original and the settled traditions are being considered (art. 5). Any dispute that may arise from those regulations is a subject of a conclusive decision of the KHL officials (art. 6).

These provisions imply that the KHL applies its own provisions that might be different from the official documents. Hence, potentially a huge difference may be cre-

ated between the official name writing in the original document and on the KHL shirts of a certain player. It implies that the regulations create new personalities different from those known according to the official documents. This was one of the major arguments of Alexei Kovalev who argued that a person with the surname "Kovalyov" is just another person but not him. This is just a discrepancy within the transliteration system of the Russian language itself but it might be even greater if we deal with other languages.

The regulations distinguish between the Latin- and Cyrillic-based languages and apply different practices toward each group of languages in the case of writing relevant personal names in the KHL-related documents in Latin letters. Hence, names derived from some foreign languages ("Latvian, Finnish, Czech, etc.") are put as in the originals with the omission of any kind of possible diacritics (ex: Ozoliņš vs. Ozolins, art. 9) which still enables a considerable recognizability of this concrete personality. Another practice is used toward the personal names originating from languages based on the Cyrillic letters ("Belarusian, Ukrainian, etc.") which should be transliterated only according to the rules of the Russian language (art. 10). Hence, we get such personalities as "Kostyuchenok", "Meleshko", "Ugarov", "Goroshko", and the way of transliteration significantly alters the original Belarusian-names (Kastsichonak, Mialeshka, Uharau, Haroshka – note: here we apply Belarusian LOC as Belarusian passport issuing authorities do by default). Hence, we see per se discriminatory double standards practices when the Cyrillic-based languages (first and foremost Belarusian and Ukrainian, and also apparently Kazakh) are openly considered as subjects of Russification. These double standards are secured in art. 11 which stipulates that Russian personal names of the foreign nationals should be transliterated according to the titular language of their country of origin. The regulations provide an example of an ethnic Russian (or Ukrainian) Latvian national Aleksandrs Nīzivijs whose surname should thus be transliterated as "Nizivijs" but not "Nizhiviy". Hence, this favours Latvian (and any other Latin-based) language before Belarusian (or Ukrainian and any other Cyrillic-based) language.

The same approach is related to the usage of the personal names in the Russian-language. This issue is ruled upon the recommendations of three manuals listed in the regulations (art. 12). Here we face the same double standard-approach between the Latin-based and Cyrillic based languages. While the Latin-based languages imply the transliteration to the Russian language thoroughly considering the exact name-writing including possible diacritics (art. 13), the Cyrillic-based languages ("Belarusian, Ukrainian, etc.") are simply a subject of Russification (art. 16).

Thus, in the KHL practice the Cyrillic-based languages are subjects of Russification. Different approach toward Latin-based and Cyrillic-based languages in the KHL interpretation is a blatant example of the open discrimination — which means that no Belarusian player drafted by any KHL club is allowed to write his name either in Latin or Cyrillic scripts according to the rules of

the Belarusian language. For Dynama Minsk it implies that its players are forbidden to use Belarusian language or use Belarusian transliteration of their names on their shirts and in the official KHL documents. This look even more ridiculous since Dynama Minsk is positioned as the representative of the Republic of Belarus in the KHL and the club's Belarusian-language anthem sung by the well-know Belarusian folk-group "Palac" is being performed at every home game of the team. Hence, this discrepancy raises the question whether Dynama Minsk which is supported by the Belarusian officials of various levels as well as by the leading Belarusian businesses is in fact a Belarusian club or just a Belarusian-based Russian ice hockey franchise. Another important aspect is the non-conformity of this blatant discrimination with the provisions of the Belarusian constitutional legislation. Since the KHL games take place on the territory of Belarus, it implies that we face the situation when the Belarusian language is discriminated or even nearly banned on the territory of Belarus. A logical question might be raised than whether the above mentioned double standards of the KHL officials toward the Belarusian language should be tolerated and whether their efforts might be regarded as an attempt to impose the Russian cultural domination in the post-Soviet area, resulting in Belarusian being treated as the second-class language at the most?

Quotes of Quarter

Presidential candidate **ANDREJ SANNIKAU**, who was sentenced to five years in prison for organizing a protest demonstration against the rigged presidential elections, made an open statement from prison, published by Charter 97 on September 12, 2011. Excerpts follow:

"Only the handover of power in Belarus can lead the country out of the crisis. Moreover, only the handover of power can keep Belarus as an independent state, can save our language and culture. Today, we have a unique and real chance. After December 19, 2010, the whole world saw that the regime of Lukashenka is dangerous for Belarusians, that the people of Belarus do not support the authorities.... It's obvious to everyone that the economic crisis in Belarus is the result of the policy of the current regime. Further staying of Lukashenka in power will result in full economic collapse. We can and we must change our destiny and restore Belarus's good name in relations with our neighbors, Russia, Europe and the United States. We are expected to do it ourselves. This issue must be the key one for Belarusians today. The time to hold a dialogue with the authorities has passed...

I know that my views, my statements only prolong my prison term, but this proves the real intentions of the regime. We have all the preconditions for the change of power, for returning the right of vote to the people. We need decisiveness, courage and adherence to principles. History is being made today. We are making the history. We will win together!"

BELARUS ABROAD

Two Notable 85th Anniversaries In Diaspora



Dr. Jan Zaprudnik

Dr. **Jan Zaprudnik** is recognized in the academic world as a productive historian, politologue, writer and journalist. In addition to producing numerous works in historical research, he has been, and continuous to be an influential activist of the Belarusian diaspora in the United States. He is also a contributing editor of the *Belarusian Review*.

In order to properly observe his anniversary, Dr. Zaprudnik has invited his many friends and members of his immediate family to a get-together party, held at the Belarusian-American Center in South River, N.J. The event attracted over 60 persons ; some flew even from overseas...

Dr. Zaprudnik expressed his satisfaction and gratitude for what he called "family solidarity" in a special THANK YOU letter, which he sent via E-mail to his many friends, including those who could not attend.

Dr. Zaprudnik was born on August 9, 1926 in the historic town of Mir.



Rev. Aliaksandr Nadsan

Reverend **Aliaksandr Nadsan** has been serving as the Apostolic Visitor to Belarusian Catholics, and heading the Belarusian Catholic mission in London since 1959

The mission occupies a house in a quiet London suburb — the so-called Marian House (initially a mission of Belarusian Marian monks).

It also houses the well-known Francis Skaryna Library, established 40 years ago — another important anniversary.

Since the Černobyl nuclear disaster of 1986, Rev. Nadsan has undertaken many visits to the contaminated regions in Belarus and organized relief for the disaster's victims.

Rev. Nadsan was born on August 8, 1926 in the town Haradzieja (western Belarus).

Presentation of Paźniak's Books

20 years ago, on August 25, 1991, Belarus declared state sovereignty from the Soviet Union. Prompted by demands of the parliamentary opposition (the Belarusian Popular Front fraction), the Supreme Soviet* of the 12th convocation enshrined the country's independence into its constitution.

Then, in November of the same year, the leader of the formally independent Belarus, along with leaders of independent Russia and Ukraine, agreed to break up the Soviet Union.

On occasion of this anniversary Mr. **Zianon Paźniak**, one of the leaders of that opposition fraction, on August 27, 2011 visited the Prague's Belarusian community, and presented his latest books, describing that fateful period: *"The Independence Session," "Deputies** of Independence," "The Difficult Time"* and others. Most of the books were written in collaboration with Mr. **Siarhiej Navumčyk**, another opposition deputy, who was also present at the Prague meeting.

In addition to presenting the books, Mr. Paźniak, assisted by Mr. Navumčyk, embarked on his own recollections of those tense and nerve-wracking days. He pointed out that the independence-minded opposition fraction comprised only 8% of the parliament membership, whose communist majority became temporarily disoriented by the uncertainty, caused by the eventual failure of the anti-Gorbachev coup in Moscow.

The opposition recognized that it must take advantage of this possibly narrow window of opportunity; it had to act quickly and resolutely...

Finally, Mr. Paźniak fielded questions on this subject from the audience that consisted mainly of students and young people.

Notes: * **Supreme Soviet** was the official name of the parliament of the BSSR (Belarusian Soviet Socialist Repub-

Regional Conference of Belarusians

The extraordinary conference of Belarusians from Baltic states and Belarus has been held on August 27-28 in Vilnia (Lithuania). It was organized and conducted by the Association of Belarusian Culture in Lithuania (TBK-L).

The conference was attended by over 40 guests and representatives of Belarusian organizations: from the Bielastok region of Poland — **Jaŭhien Vapa**, from Latvia — **Viačka**

Celeš, from Belarus — **Alena Makoŭskaja**, **Aleh Trusaŭ**, **Hienadź Buraŭkin**, **Uladzimir Chilmanovič**, **Leanid Lyč**, and others.

The host organization was represented by its chairman **Chviedar Niuńka**, **Artur Jaŭmien**, **Aleś Trusaŭ**, **Aleh Abłažej**, **Aleś Adamkovič**, and others.

The Lithuanian society was represented by the well-known human rights defender, **Stasys Kaušynis**.

The event was moderated by Messrs. Niuńka and Jaŭmien.

Interesting and thoughtful speeches, delivered during the conference, concentrated on the following main topics:

- 20th anniversary of Belarus' Declaration of Sovereignty,
- the present catastrophic position of Belarusian language in Belarus,
- the threat of complete russification of Belarusians' ethnic homeland, and the possible threat of Belarus losing its statehood,
- violations of human rights and civic freedom in today's Belarus.

We are presenting below excerpts from the reflections by several speakers:

Aleh Trusaŭ — *chairman of the Belarusian Language Society:*

"Today our main task is to fight for the minds of our young people — to make them want to speak Belarusian. Otherwise, in 10-15 years there will be no Belarus, neither totalitarian nor democratic. It will become a Russian province."

"Hienadź Buraŭkin, poet and former Belarus' ambassador to the United Nations (1991-1994):

"... I consider the act of Declaration of Sovereignty 20 years ago (in 1991) one of the most important milestones in Belarus' modern history. Today's authorities are purposely ignoring many years of our fight for Belarus' statehood. Kalinoŭski's 19th century uprisings, Slucak Military Action of 1920, events of December 19th of last year — these are all links in the historical chain of our fight for independence, which continues..."

.. Today we face a great threat of losing our statehood. We just don't know what Lukašenka signed in our name in Moscow last year, when he begged for Medvedev's support in elections. Do you think he got it for free? He just sold us!"

Professor Leanid Lyč:

"The issues of losing a nation's language and losing its statehood are interconnected.... The Belarusian ethnos prevails in Belarus. This is why such a country cannot support bilingualism, because this feature usually serves as a transient stage to the general usage of one (more developed) language.

.... In the 1920s the communist leaders of the Belarusian Soviet Republic introduced even four official languages (Belarusian, Russian, Polish and Yiddish). Although short-lived, this system was more natural, since it did not discriminate any of these languages. On the contrary, the state was then promoting belarusization of public life."

Source: excerpts from article by Ales Adamkovič on <http://westki.info/> — translated from Belarusian

Editor's thoughts:

One must agree with observations by Mr. Trusaŭ, and Prof. Lyč. Yet, their reflections, as well as those by Prof. Šybieka (see article on p. 14) do not mention one important factor that may be considered the primary cause of today's neglected state of the native Belarusian language in Belarus.

What I have in mind, is the role of the Soviet education system, that has been functioning as a **powerful and efficient russification tool** for generations — actually since Stalin's crackdown on Belarusian nationalist elites in 1930s.

This system functioned in the following manner:

In all schools (from elementary schools to universities) in all republics of the Soviet Union, the primary language of instruction was Russian. It was mandatory, while education in native languages of non-Russian republics was reduced to an **option**.

In order to have their children educated in their native language — or even to study it as a separate subject — parents had to **ask for it**. Only when the number of applicants in a given location exceeded a certain minimum, was their wish granted.

BUT — since education in most universities was (and still is) conducted only in Russian, most parents concluded that knowledge of an optional language will put their children at disadvantage in pursuing further studies. In other words, it would be useless. The wish to spare their children the often traumatic transition from one language to a different one also played an important role.

After the 1995 referendum (considered illegal by many), after Russian resumed its official status, the above-described discriminatory system was restored to full extent — and resulted in a drastic decrease in the number of Belarusian-language schools and even individual classes .

Today's reality is such that for most young people, graduates of the russificatory schools system, it is easier and more comfortable to express themselves in Russian —being only familiar with Belarusian. It's not that simple to make them speak Belarusian.

Moreover, in contrast with the 1920s, the present government generally promotes the use of Russian in public life.

In my opinion, the Belarusian society (and primarily the government), should initiate a **complete revision** of the existing education system.

The proposed revision should consist of following main points:

Instruction in Belarusian (as the country's official language) should be **mandatory** , in **all subjects**, and in all public (state-supported) schools, **at all levels** — from kindergartens to universities. Teaching **all foreign languages** (Russian, Polish, English) in public schools should be **optional**, in response to requests from parents.

Private schools (those not supported by state) may conduct instruction in any language.

Implementing this revision may take a long time and encounter initial difficulties (shortage of teaching personnel), but will definitely restore the prestige of the Belarusian language among the general population...

Thoughts and Observations

Clinton Calls For Solidarity With Belarus Activists

By Robert Coalson

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has called for solidarity with protesters in Belarus, a day after Minsk detained some 150 people demonstrating against the regime and a worsening economic crisis.

Speaking in the Hungarian parliament building in Budapest today, Clinton said established democracies must "share their experience with the newly arrived democracies of the Middle East and North Africa, and to show solidarity with those in the streets in Belarus, in Libya, and around the world."



U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

Later today, Clinton travels on to Vilnius, Lithuania, for a gathering of the Community of Democracies, where she is also expected to urge European countries to increase the pressure on the government of Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

Some 30 people are appearing in court in Minsk today over the June 29 protest.

The Internet-driven demonstration featured no speeches or slogans; instead, some 1,000 demonstrators walked slowly through city streets and signaled their discontent by clapping their hands as sympathizers in passing cars honked their horns.

Police were out in force in response, cordoning off streets, blocking the marchers, and hustling dozens into awaiting vans. Similar, smaller protests were held in cities across the country, while authorities everywhere scrambled to disperse them.

It was the fifth straight week of demonstrations, and protest organizers have called for similar peaceful demonstrations against the authoritarian government of Lukashenka for every Wednesday evening. A major rally is also expected on July 3, Belarusian Independence Day. Some of those arrested at an earlier demonstration in the southeastern city of Homiel are expected to face trial today.

The events were the latest development in a harsh government crackdown on the political opposition that began with the December 2010 presidential election that has been widely denounced as unfair and rigged. Many of the candidates who opposed Lukashenka's reelection were subsequently arrested and sentenced to stiff prison terms.

The political tensions have been exacerbated by a growing economic crisis that has seen Belarus's currency repeatedly devalued as ordinary citizens have rushed to hoard hard currency and basic consumer goods.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 30, 2011

Poland Apologizes for Bank Information Leak

By Gregory Feifer

Aleś Byalyatski's arrest in Belarus last week on suspicion of tax evasion drew international condemnation. But it's since emerged that members of the European Union helped the case against him by providing the authorities in Minsk with his banking information.

Lithuania has already apologized to the family of Byalyatski, who heads *Viasna*, one of the most prominent human rights groups in Belarus. Now Poland — which has been a staunch defender of opposition groups in Belarus — has admitted it also divulged information about bank accounts in his name.

Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski apologized for the leak on August 12.

"I'm sorry on behalf of the republic," he wrote on Twitter, calling the disclosure a "reprehensible mistake" and vowing to redouble efforts to support democracy in Belarus. He said Belarus had "taken advantage" of international counterterrorism procedures to request information about Byalyatski.

Earlier, the Foreign Ministry said the information was given over by the Prosecutor-General's Office, after the ministry had advised government agencies against doing so. By way of explanation, ministry spokesman Marcin Bosacki told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that the prosecutor-general was "not under the government's authority."

"Unfortunately, our warnings had no effect in one institution — the Prosecutor-General's Office," Bosacki said. "Why not? That's a question for the Prosecutor-General's Office."

The Prosecutor-General's Office said it's conducting an internal investigation into who released the information to Belarus.

Embarrassment For Poland

The news is an embarrassment for Poland, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency and has sought to play a leading role in advocating democracy and shaping policy toward the EU's former Soviet eastern neighbors.

In the Czech Republic, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry denied reports that Prague also gave Belarus information about Byalyatski's bank accounts, but said the government is still investigating possible leaks.

Amnesty International has declared Byalyatski a prisoner of conscience. He faces up to seven years in prison and the confiscation of his assets.

In Minsk, news of the Polish leak drew outrage among the human rights community.

Very Frustrating'

Viktar Karnienka of the For Freedom movement said it was hard to believe the Polish move was accidental.

"The majority of bureaucrats in new EU countries have forgotten [what kind of regimes] they used to have and at what cost [they were brought to an end]," Karnienka said. "It's very frustrating."

On August 11, the government said Lukashenka had pardoned nine of the 41 people convicted for taking part in the protests. However, a spokesman for Lukashenka told RFE/RL's Kazakh Service that the government would not name those released.

Among arrested opposition leaders is Andrej Sannikaŭ, Lukashenka's closest rival in the election. He was sentenced to five years in prison in May.

News of the amnesty came shortly before the United States announced on August 11 that it would impose new sanctions against Belarus. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said the action was taken against four companies.

"The sanctions are a response to the continued incarceration of political prisoners and the crackdown on political activists, journalists, and civil society representatives," Nuland said.

The EU and United States previously introduced sanctions including travel restrictions against Lukashenka and other officials.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Aug. 12, 2011

Quotes of Quarter

In an interview published in Financial Times on August 2, 2011, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland **RADOSŁAW SIKORSKI** praised the European Union for not excluding Belarus from the Eastern Partnership (EP) program, despite the regime's post-election repressions against the opposition:

"We believe that the EP conditions and advantages will benefit the Belarusian people." He added: "The reason for Belarus' economic difficulties and political isolation lies in the system of 'Lukanomics' in economy and the political sphere. Therefore, I believe that the topic of discussion with Mr. Lukashenka should be transition to democracy and his stepping down from power... He should follow the 1989 example of Polish General Jaruzelski."

(General Jaruzelski resigned from office after the agreement with the opposition regarding democratic elections.)

Independence Day That Wasn't

By Tom Balmforth

MINSK -- When Belarus became an independent country on August 25, 1991, it seemed like a dream come true for Anatol Sidarevich.

A historian of the Belarusian national movement in the early 20th century, Sidarevich had hoped to see his country free from Moscow's grip since he was a teenager. As a university student he got into trouble with the KGB for speaking out against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

His white hair slightly disheveled and sporting a bristly moustache, Sidarevich was one of a couple of hundred Belarusians on August 23 who attended a wake and memorial service for Vital Skalaban, an archivist dear to the intelligentsia for his research into the Soviet repressions who died on August 20.

After paying his respects, he spoke to RFE/RL about those heady times when it seemed as though anything was possible.

His penetrating blue eyes tear up when he remembers his hopes of 20 years ago. "I didn't want to cry, but I cried," Sidarevich said. "Everything I'd striven for since I was 13 when I decided Belarus had to be independent was completed."

The 63-year-old Sidarevich will spend August 25 with friends somberly laying flowers at the graves of the deceased that he believes made Belarusian independence a reality.

Like It Never Happened

But other than such small private remembrances, the 20th anniversary of Belarusian independence -- which is not even a holiday here -- will pass largely unnoticed. There will be no parades, no speeches, no street parties, no revelry.

In fact, in this heavily policed land of five-year plans, political prisoners, and streets named after communist luminaries, one would be forgiven for not noticing that the Soviet Union has been defunct for 20 years.

Belarusians stand in line to buy food in Minsk on August 25 -- just like old times.

Belarus's authoritarian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka, a former collective-farm boss who came to power in the country's first and last free and fair presidential election in 1994, has outlawed vestiges of independence such as its white-red-white flag and has discouraged use of the Belarusian language.

This was not how Stanislau Shushkevich, a reformist who briefly served as Belarus's first post-Soviet leader from 1991 to 1994, imagined things turning out.

Speaking to RFE/RL from the front seat of his modest car, parked in downtown Minsk, Shushkevich says crushing the spirit of those who yearned for a free and independent Belarus was a central element in Lukashenka's drive to consolidate power.

"It's not a state national holiday, it's a normal working day. The authorities did this deliberately to once again fawn upon Russia," Shushkevich says. "July 3 has been made our Independence Day, a day that has nothing to do

with state independence. I don't think there will be any events or songs sung at home. I'm not aiming to mark it [August 25] at all."

A Soviet Past...And Present

August 25, 1991 was the day the Belarusian parliament enshrined the country's independence into its constitution. In the first several years after the Soviet break-up, however, Independence Day was formally celebrated on July 27, marking the day in 1990 when Belarus initially declared sovereignty from the Soviet Union.



August 25, 1991
Belarus declared a sovereign state

When Lukashenka came to power in 1995, he scrapped that holiday. Instead he inaugurated a new Independence Day holiday on July 3 -- marking the day in 1944 that the Red Army liberated the country from Nazi troops toward the end of World War II.

Shushkevich, who pursued democratic and market reforms during his brief stint as Belarusian leader, says that Lukashenka has largely succeeded in restoring a facsimile of the old regime -- at great cost to the country's people.

"The old cohort of communist authorities has returned in Belarus. Lukashenka is new in this cohort, but he was brought up in the communist spirit," he says. "A wild capitalism has been established here where the authorities encourage wildness because everything is in the hands of the authorities. Of course, there is no prospect for developing the country. We lag far behind all the countries around us."

'Betrayal' To Moscow

For people like Sidarevich, who thought they had reached the promised land in 1991, all of this represents a betrayal. "Lukashenka has created a mafia and corporate capitalism," he says. "The workers, and the wage earners in Belarus are exposed to more exploitation than any are exposed to in the West."

Speaking to RFE/RL at Skalaban's memorial service, journalist Aleh Hardzienka talks of his "euphoria" in August 1991 and his childish glee when new red-and-white textbooks subsequently appeared in school.

But his pride soured as Belarus descended into authoritarian rule under Lukashenka. And like many, he sees the current economic crisis, in which Belarus must

seek foreign loans to avoid a further devaluation of their currency, as a potential threat to the country's independence.

Many fear that Russia will only bail out its western neighbor if it's guaranteed controlling stakes in Belarus's prize national assets, such as its oil refineries and gas pipeline network -- a concession tantamount to a major loss of sovereignty.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin made his intentions clear on August 1 when he said the unification of the two countries was "possible and very desirable."

For Belarusians like Hardzienka, this would be unbearable. "We have been Belarusians since before antiquity and we are different from Russians," he says. "I want to look at the future with optimism. A lot has changed since 1991. [Now] I hope there will be [democratic] change."

'Everyone Knows What's Happening'

Meanwhile, protesters yearning for such change have been brutally beaten and jailed by police. This has led them to express their discontent in various creative ways to avoid repression -- such as clapping, setting their mobile-phone alarms to ring at a specific time in public, or in some cases, just going to the market en masse.

Siarhiej Chaly, a widely known blogger who claims to be the ideologist of the summer's so-called "silent" protests, says he drew his inspiration from an old Soviet anecdote.

"It was really important that, formally speaking, they weren't even protests. They were postmodern and stylized protests," he says. "In the Soviet Union there was an anecdote about a person giving out leaflets on Red Square. When the KGB arrested him, they saw that they were just sheets, blank sheets. They asked him what he'd been doing it for. He replied: 'Why do I need to write something down? Everyone knows what's happening.' That was the idea of the protests -- everyone knows what's happening."

For Andrej Kabanov, whose business has been seriously damaged by the economic crisis, the boundless optimism of August 1991 now seems like a distant dream. "We're back in the Soviet Union. We live in an economy driven by five-year plans," he says. "It's nonsense, total nonsense. Economic laws don't work. We've been cast away."

But he also sees similarities between the yearning for change many in Belarus are feeling today and similar sentiments in the Soviet Union two decades ago. "There was the hope that the Soviet Union would disintegrate, that we would take independence, have elections and that things would change," Kabanov says. "Right now, what we have is a mirror of those times. I am experiencing those very same feelings and emotions right now."

Source: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, August 25, 2011

MEDIA WATCH

Press Excerpts

Lithuanian Bank Information Leak

By Andrej Jelisiejū

Lithuanian journalists sharply criticize and shame the Lithuanian authorities because of the "Bialiacki's case".

Editor-in-Chief of the popular Lithuanian newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas* Rimvidas Valatka asks why the Minister of Justice has not been discharged yet. He writes the following in the article "Ministry of Justice - heaven for new liberal mankurts":

"Lithuania, the same as Austria, does not know what shame is. Several days ago Minister of Justice Šimašius was teaching European law and good behaviour to Austria, while at the same time his subordinates were giving the bank accounts of the Belarusian opposition activists to dictator Lukašenka."

Rimvidas Valatka wonders why the officials of justice refer to the agreement between Belarus and Lithuania and reminds about Minsk's unwillingness to extradite General Uschopčyk, accused of crimes against humanity by Vilnius.

"This fact alone should have forced the Ministry of Justice address to the MFA, if not to the government, for an estimation. It did not. Were they in a hurry to do a favour to the Father? Was it somebody's political will to help the Father? Whose then? The President's? The latter is stubbornly keeping silence. Maybe, she is picking mushrooms again"

The last sentence is a joke based on the similarity of Grybauskaitė's surname with the Lithuanian word "grybai" which means "picking mushrooms", and her hobby to pick mushrooms.

Another *Lietuvos Rytas* journalist Alexandras Zibas also sharply criticizes Dalia Grybauskaitė, comparing today's situation with the events which took place 20 years ago, when Lithuania fought with the totalitarian USSR for its own freedom.

Alexandras Zibas writes the following in the article "Will the Lithuanian President ask forgiveness from the Belarusian people?":

The Lithuanian law-enforcement authorities' last blow in the face of Belarusian democratic forces is something more than a red carpet, placed before Lukašenka by the Lithuanian President just before the so-called Belarusian presidential election. This is a betrayal of Belarusian people who believed that Lithuania would support them in hard times".

Lithuanian journalist admits that the question in the headline is a rhetorical one, as everyone knows the answer. He hopes that another Lithuanian leader will correct Grybauskaitė's mistake.

Source: European Radio for Belarus, Aug. 8, 2011

Additional Article Headlines

Wall Street Journal

Belarus scraps U.S. nuclear deal

19 August, 2011

The Washington Post

Alexander Lukashenko is playing at reforms

14 September 2011

Dear Friends!

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NOTE from the Editor:

Beginning with the Spring 2011 issue of the *Belarusian Review*, in articles written exclusively for our publication

Belarusian personal and geographic names are being transliterated from the Cyrillic into Latin script by means of the Belarusian Latin alphabet LACINKA.

This does not apply to reprints from other sources. In these texts the original Library of Congress (LOC) transliteration of Belarusian names is retained.

The COMPARISON table on p. 28 of this issue will help you getting acquainted with the LACINKA transliteration method.

COMPARISON of Transliteration Methods:		
Library of Congress (LOC)		LACINKA
Consonants		
CH		Č
KH		CH
SH		Š
ZH		Ž
TS		C
W - or U after vowels		Ů
Examples: kroŭ, rabiŭ		
Y		J
at beginning of words, after vowels, after consonants D, R , or after Ů		
Examples: jama, toje, nadvorje, zdaroŭje		
Y		I
after other consonants		
Examples: nie, siabra, piaro		
Soft (palatalized) consonants - marked by the 'soft sign' Ъ in Cyrillic script:		
Roman	Cyrillic	LACINKA
S	СЬ	Ś
Z	ЗЬ	Ž
Dz	ДЗЬ	DŽ
Ts	ЦЬ	Ć
N	НЬ	Ń
L	ЛЬ	Ł

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