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# Belarus Headlines

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## Lukashenko Reiterates Desire to Improve Relations with EU

February 13



President Alexander Lukashenko said he counts on France's assistance in helping intensify the dialogue between Belarus and the European Union. "Belarus is interested in intensifying cooperation with the French Republic, primarily because of France's significant role in the political and economic life of Europe," Lukashenko said when receiving new French Ambassador to Belarus Mireille Musso.

The Belarusian president said that "France could be counted on to assume a balanced position in a comprehensive dialogue between Belarus and the European Union." "Our country has repeatedly stated its willingness for open cooperation with Europe on the basis of mutual respect and benefits," Lukashenko said.

For his part, the French diplomat told journalists that France, along with other EU countries, was ready to develop relations with Belarus. "We hope that each party would abide by the commitments that followed the meeting between Belarus and the European trio in December 2006," Musso said.

She also said that she hoped for "democratic developments in Belarusian society."

Lukashenko also received new Lithuanian Ambassador to Belarus Edminas Bagdonas. Lukashenko said that "in its relations with Lithuania Belarus will apply the principle of good neighbourly relations, mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs and is expecting the same from Lithuania." "If there are some problems, we should meet and talk. We should not communicate across fences," he said.

Source: Interfax

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## Milinkevich Says that he Cannot Take Part in Forthcoming Congress of Pro-Democratic Forces



February 14

Former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich said in a statement issued on February 14 that he could not

take part in the Second Congress of Pro-democratic Forces scheduled for March 17-18.

Mr. Milinkevich explained that he does not want to participate in "internal squabbling."

According to him, after the March 2006 presidential elections, he was confident that the opposition coalition should continue joint activities. "Moreover, I felt and feel the great support and expectations of our fellow citizens," he said. "And they want us to have a common strategy, one headquarters and one leader."

However, unity was not achieved and the Political

Council failed to accomplish its unifying mission, Mr. Milinkevich noted.

"An action plan could not be adopted for half a year and when it was ultimately in place, the Council failed to set up an executive committee to implement it," he said.

"Instead of organizing joint work, some party leaders began to compete for leadership and started months-long preparations for the Congress. A number of activists were so enthusiastic about struggling for a seat at this forum that they forgot the main thing, work with people, even during the local elections."

"To my great disappointment, initial agreements were



## Continue: Milinkevich Not to Participate in the Congress

annulled, the procedure of nominating delegates to the Congress was changed and tension inside the coalition, especially in the provinces, drastically increased because of certain manipulations with [nomination] signatures," said Mr. Milinkevich.

The politician noted that he would take part in a congress of pro-democratic forces if delegates were elected according to transparent procedures and there was "broad democratic representation."

He also said that he would take part in the congress "only if a new leader of united

pro-democratic forces with enough powers to organize efficient operation was elected at it."

Meanwhile, a month before the Congress, there is no consensus on its agenda and objectives, said Mr. Milinkevich. "The Political Council has recently decided that there is no need to have a single leader," he said. "This throws us several years back in creating an alternative to the existing regime. Now all party heads will be leaders, taking turns every few months."

"Democrats are often fairly criticized for the absence of real actions. I oppose competition among party leaders, as it would absorb the entire potential of the pro-democratic coalition," Mr. Milinkevich said. "That's why I announce that my participation in the forthcoming Congress in March is impossible because it will only result in a split among pro-democratic forces."

Source: BelaPAN

## Pro-democratic youth delivered Valentine's Day greetings to embassies of France, Germany, and the United States

Pro-democratic youths delivered a Valentine's Day message of love for European values to the Minsk-based diplomatic missions of France, Germany and the United States on Wednesday evening, BelaPan reported.

Up to 300 people took part in the walking tour



to the embassies, which began with a gathering near the historic Town Hall building on Liberty Square at the center of the city. Former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich told those present that with the help of the young people participating in this traditional Valentine's

Day march, "we'll achieve democratic change and live in a normal country of free Europe." Barys Haretski, spokesman for an opposition youth group Malady Front (Young Front), also made a speech saying that the authorities are afraid of pro-democratic youth because young people tell people the truth about the real situation in the country. He called on the government to release all political prisoners. Chanting "Zhyve Belarus!" (Long Live Belarus!), displaying a slogan "Act of Love" and disseminating Valentine's Day cards in the crowd.

Source: Charter'97

## Aliaksandr Milinkevich Writes an Open Letter to Aliaksandr Lukashenka

February 7

Aliaksandr Milinkevich, ex-candidate for the presidential election and the leading figure of the Belarusian opposition forces, recently wrote an open letter to the head of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Aliaksandr Lukashenka. In his appeal, Milinkevich expressed his concern about the situation in the country and possible economic implications of the Belarus-Russia conflict. He underlined the need for development of a dialogue between Belarus and the European Union and suggested support from the opposition in strengthening

contacts with the EU—but only if the government makes such steps as release of political prisoners, stops repression against political parties, NGOs and free press, and fulfills some other commitments. Full text of the letter can be found in English language under the following link:

<http://www.democraticbelarus.eu/node/743>



## American Citizens Deported from Belarus

10 US citizens have been deported from Belarus. Previously, Belarusian migration police charged them with violation of regulations on stay in Belarus. According to official statements, the foreign citizens carried out religious work and gave people English lessons illegally. All US citizens were fined fourteen US dollars each and now are banned entry to Belarus for five years.

The US citizens arrived in Mahilyou City on February 5 as guests of a Belarusian branch of "Stefanus", the organization providing social assistance all over the world to give free English lessons to the locals. The Emmanuil church, an evangelical Baptist group in Mahilyou, had been the site of the classes, and a Belarusian partner with the Stefanus group.

The church among other aid activities ran a training programme called "English for Every One," aimed at giving a basic understanding of English to students. On February 9, during classes, representatives of citizenship and migration department detained all foreign citizens and took them to a police department. After a report was drawn up and they warned about further activities, they were released.

On February 15 American citizens were told to leave Belarus.

Source: Earthtimes, February 16

## Kanstantsin Lukashou Sentences to 2 Years of imprisonment



February 20

Radio Liberty informs that democratic activist Kanstantsin Lukashou has been sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment with 2 years delay for the verdict to come into force.

A trial over Kanstantsin Lukashou started on February 16 in the court of the Lenin district of Minsk. He was charged with resistance to policemen, Radio Svaboda informs. On March 29, 2006 Kanstantsin Lukashou was picking up his brother, Mr. Siuchyuk from the third Minsk city hospital. On that day some unknown in civilian clothes with IDs issued by the Interior Ministry tried to detain Siuchyuk after he checked out from the hospital. His brother helped the activist to escape. As of December 19 Kanstantsin Lukashou is kept in custody.

He faces up to 6 years of detention.

Several dozens of people gathered in the court, including representatives of the OSCE and the US Embassy in Minsk. Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich, his wife and human rights activist, Ina Kulej, a filmmaker Yury Khaschavatski, a human rights activist Ludmila Hraznova, and many other well-known opposition figures are in the court building.

Source: Radio Svaboda

## Sudanese Lawmakers in Belarus to Boost Bilateral Ties



A delegation of Sudanese lawmakers, led by National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir, arrived in Minsk on February 18. The delegation was

met by Uladzimir Kanaplyow, chairman of the House of Representatives, in the national airport. Speaking to reporters in the airport, Al-Tahir described the purpose of his visit as strengthening the bilateral relationship, the Belarus. Kanaplyow, for his part, noted that "any visit always has a meaning, the more so as our country conducts a multi-vector policy." "We have recently attached a great importance to Non-Aligned Movement countries, with which we're developing both close political and economic relations," he said. "Sudan is a country that has good mineral resources that Belarus needs."

Source: Sudanese Times  
February 19

## Cybercafés' Owners Forced to Turn in Customers

Reporters Without Borders condemned a decree adopted by the council of ministers which forces owners of cybercafés and Internet clubs to report Internet-users looking at illegal websites to the police.

The new law, approved on 10 February 2007, also obliges owners to record the last year of Internet navigation on their computers.

"On the pretext of wanting to monitor pornographic or violent websites, the Belarus authorities are really seeking to censor opposition websites and independent media" the worldwide press freedom organisation said.

"The decree will force cybercafé proprietors to turn themselves into police officers. Internet-users will be pushed into self-censorship and none of them will dare to go on to websites which displease the authorities." "Moreover, since the state already has a monopoly on Internet access, through the company Beltelekom, cybercafés were the last resort of anyone wanting to post critical news without risk of arrest," the organisation added. The government said the step was needed to fight Internet crime, but in Belarus criticising President Alexander Lukashenko or other members of the gov-

ernment is considered a serious offence punishable by a prison sentence. Internet-users have to present ID when they go to a cybercafé. Information Minister, Uladzimir Rusakievich, said on 31 January 2007, that an Internet law was being drafted.

"We do not want to prevent the development of the Internet, but it is our duty to innovate in this field," he said. Belarus is on Reporters Without Borders' list of the 13 enemies of the Internet.

Source:  
Reporters without Borders



## Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus to Establish Alternative to Russian Oil Supplies

Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus said that they will establish an oil supply system that will serve as an alternative to Russian energy supplies to secure soft landing in case Moscow cuts deliveries.

The initiative came from the Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus who said it is necessary for the three countries to coordinate their actions and diversify energy supplies.

The idea was supported by the Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko. Speaking to the Ukrainian TV5 TV channel, he said: "I hope we will soon witness a special energy strategy of the European Union and Central Asia being developed. Certainly, as we repeatedly stress, in this context Ukraine and other transit countries should not be forgotten."

According to the TV report, the strategy upheld by three countries foresees acquisition of crude oil at the Rotterdam oil exchange, which will then be pumped through the Klaipeda terminal in Lithuania to Kiev or Minsk. The move would not offset the Russian oil supplies, but could provide security if Moscow cuts its deliveries.

Source: Interfax