



OFFICE FOR A
DEMOCRATIC BELARUS
BRUSSELS

Belarus Headlines

April 20 —
May 2



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May 2

Chernobyl Information Evening in Brussels

On April 27, the Office for a Democratic Belarus in Brussels, in cooperation with Hanse-Office (Germany), organized an information evening dedicated to the 21st anniversary of the Chernobyl



disaster.

Organizers of the event presented a report on the consequences of the nuclear catastrophe and the current policy of the Belarusian government towards the liquidators and the population of the contaminated areas.

You can find a full version of the report on our web-site:

www.democraticbelarus.eu (our current activities).

The evening attendees also had



chance to see two documentary films on Belarus—"Once Upon a Time" (2006, 10 min) and "As Is Their Wont" (2006, 20 min) (director Galina Adamovich).

The discussion that took place after the movies' screening was dealing with various aspects of the Chernobyl problem and the current situation in Belarus in general. Special attention was paid to how authoritarian and totalitarian regimes deal with the situations like the given one.

Guests of the evening had a chance to see some pictures from the Chernobyl area (Gomel region contaminated areas in Belarus) kindly provided by a freelance photographer and a journalist Jacky



Delorme. Some of his works can also be found on our web-site.

The discussion and the exhibit presentation were followed by a slide-show on the Chernobyl March in Minsk on April 26, 2007, which is a yearly opposition rally.

27.04.2007

Office for a Democratic Belarus

Inside this issue

Chernobyl information evening in Brussels 1

29% of industrial enterprises operated at loss, 2

Belarus to lose most precious 2

Contaminated farmland is used in agriculture 3

Belarus interested in single market. 3

Negotiations with Azerbaijan 3

Criminal action against one more young activist 4

Milinkevich visits polluted area 4

Reporters without borders statement 5

US warns about sanctions. 5

New foreign policy 5

Visit to China 5

Chernobyl rally 6

Regional conferences. . . . 6

Commission o. in Minsk . 7

EU won't trade sanctions 8



Economics

More than 29 % of Industrial Enterprises Operated at Loss in First Two Months, Official Statistics Say

The share of unprofitable industrial enterprises in Belarus shrank by 2.9 percentage points year-on-year in January and February 2007 to 29.3 percent of the total number, according to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis.

As many as 629 enterprises operated at a loss in the first two months and their losses reportedly totalled 125.1 billion rubels.

Food industry enterprises showed the poorest performance. Their net losses amounted to 27.6 billion rubels, the ministry said. Next came fuel industry companies with net losses of 26.7 billion rubels, machine-building and metal working enterprises with total net losses of 23.1 billion rubels, light industry enterprises with 19.3 billion rubels and forestry, woodworking and paper industry enterprises with 13.4 billion rubels.

The share of enterprises operating at a loss accounted for 52.8 percent in the fuel industry, 40.3 percent in the construction materials industry, 35 percent in the light industry, 29.3 percent in the forestry, woodworking and paper industries, 26.7 percent in the metal working and machine-building chemical and petroche-



mical industry, and 25 percent in the iron and steel industry.

The industrial sector's profitability rate was 11.8 percent compared with 15.7 percent in January and February 2006, whereas the profitability of sales was 8.8 percent compared with 12.2 per-

cent in the first two months of 2006. The highest profitability rates were reported in oil production (52 percent), the petrochemical industry (34.4 percent), the chemical industry (23.7 percent), the medical equipment industry (18.5 percent) and the printing industry (14.5 percent).

The microbiological and fishing industries ended February with a negative profitability of 8.8 and 4.5 percent, respectively.

20/04/2007

Source: BelaPAN

Belarus to Lose Most Precious



Russia is ready to lend up to \$1.5 billion to Belarus but claims as security the stocks of its state-run gas transport enterprise, Beltransgaz, in an attempt to speed up creation of Gazprom-Beltransgaz venture. But Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko will hardly yield to this requirement – the emergence of such venture will bring the country's main gas pipelines under control of Russia's gas monopoly.

Gazprom BOD will deliberate on "having an interest in Beltransgaz" at April 25 meeting, the news service of Russia's gas monopoly announced past Friday.

The decision to set up a venture based on Beltransgaz, where Gazprom will buy out 50 percent plus a stock, was one of the core provisions of agreement on gas sales to Belarus in 2007.

Gazprom agreed to the price of \$100 per a thousand cu meters instead of the initially requested \$200 per a thousand cu meters once Belarus undertook to set up a venture based on Beltransgaz assets prior to June 1, 2007.

But the parties have failed so far to come to terms about the deal provisions. Gazprom yielded to the HI price for Belarus in amount of \$55 per a thousand cu meters instead of \$100 per a thousand cu meters, i.e. it will derive just \$1.155 billion from delivering 21 billion cu meters to the neighbor in 2007. The remainder of \$0.945 billion will be settled via the loan granted by Russia's Finance Ministry to Belarus.

Belarus, however, is dragging out the venture's creation, blaming the delay on official circumlocution and the lack of time to agree on the deal by Alexander Lukashenko.

23/04/2007

Source: Kommersant

Economics

Contaminated Farmland Used by over 600 Agricultural Enterprises in Belarus

Farmland contaminated by the nuclear fallout from the Chernobyl accident is used by more than 600 agricultural enterprises in Belarus, Mikalay Tsybulka, deputy head of the emergency management ministry's Chernobyl relief department, told reporters in Minsk on April 24.

According to the official, crops are grown and farm animals graze on a one-million-hectare area contaminated by cesium-137. An area of 200,000 hectares that was contaminated by strontium-90 also is used as farmland. Farms apply extra amounts of phosphorous and potash fertilizers to grow cleaner produce on the

Chernobyl-hit farmland, he said.

Milk with excessive cesium levels is produced by some households, not farms, and does not end up in stores but is turned into radiation-free food-stuffs at dairy plants, Mr. Tsybulka stressed.

The official acknowledged that farms in the worst-hit Brahın, Khoyniki and Narowlya districts had problem growing grain with low strontium levels. To solve the problem, the government has ordered the construction of a distillery in the Brahın district. All grain grown in the area will be used for alcohol production, he stressed.



Twenty-one percent of Belarus' territory is contaminated by the Chernobyl fallout at present.

24/04/2007

Source: **BelaPAN**

Belarus Interested in Formation of a Single Energy Market of Europe

Belarus speaks in favour of formation of the single energy market of Europe which would allow for interests of producing, consuming and transiting countries. Such a standpoint was voiced by the Belarusian delegation in Geneva at the jubilee session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, BelTA learnt in the permanent mission of Belarus to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva. Founded in 1947, the UN Economic Commission for Europe marks its 60th anniversary this year.

The Belarusian delegation includes Minister of Transport and Communications Vladimir Sosnovskiy, Deputy Energy Minister Leonid Shenets, representatives of the permanent mission to the UN.

The Belarusian side drew attention to the special interest of Belarus in a multilateral dialogue on diversification of suppliers and types of energy and to issues on energy and transport cooperation. Vladimir Sosnovsky

and Leonid Shenets articulated the Belarusian stance on the issues on improvement of transport and energy policy within the zone of the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

During the session the Belarusian delegation conducted bilateral meetings with UN Deputy Secretary General – Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe Marek Belka, Executive Director of the International Energy Agency Claude Mandil, Secretary General of the Energy Charter Secretariat Andre Mernier, representatives of foreign countries. The negotiations focused on joint projects and measures to boost cooperation.

28/04/2007

Source: **BelTA**

Alexander Lukashenko to Hold Negotiations with President of Azerbaijan Today

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko will conduct negotiations with President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev today.

The Presidents are expected to discuss prospects of the bilateral cooperation in various spheres, as well as opportunities to boost the bilateral trade.

Intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements will be signed as well in Baku, including an agreement on labour activities and social security of people temporarily working in the two countries, agreements on cooperation in the areas of quarantine and plant protection, veterinary, state property management and privatization, standardization, metrology; BelTA learnt in the presidential press service.

The trade turnover with Azerbaijan in 2006 grew by 24% as against 2005 to \$37.2 million, with the Belarusian exports and imports up 22.9% and 39.4% respectively. The foreign trade surplus was at the level of \$31.7 million.

02/05/2007

Source: **BelTA**

Politics

Criminal Action Filed against One More Activist of "Young Front"

Young Front activist from Baranavichy Yaraslau Hryshchenya has become the 7th member of the Young Front against whom a criminal action had been filed for participation in an unregistered organization.

Criminal cases against Anastasiya Palazhanka, Al-yaksei Yanusheuski, Barys Haretski and Zmitser Fedaruk were sent to the court of Savetski district of Minsk. A case had been brought up against Aleh Korban. The Young Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich serves the sentence in Shklou colony.

20/04/2007

Source: Charter'97

Milinkevich visits Chernobyl-hit Brahın, Khoyniki districts



Former presidential candidate Al-yaksandr Milinkevich on Tuesday visited the Brahın and Khoyniki districts, areas affected worst in Belarus by the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

The opposition politician intended to visit three pre-school institutions for children to donate sporting equipment. However, he managed to visit only one kindergarten in the village of Barysawshchyna in the Khoyniki district, being barred from the other two.

"When we arrived at a kindergarten in Khoyniki it surprisingly turned out that it was closed for quarantine. We not allowed to pass anything for children," local opposition activist Leanid Sudalenka told. "A similar thing happened in Brahın."

While in Brahın, Mr. Milinkevich laid flowers at the monument to Chernobyl cleanup worker Vasil Ihnatsenka and visited a local museum.

In the evening, he met with opposition activists in Homyel.

24/04/2007

Source: Milinkevich.org

Reporters Without Borders: Opposition activist arrested for article posted online



Reporters Without Borders today condemned the arrest of writer and political activist Andrei Kilmau on 3 April on a charge of "inciting the regime's overthrow" in an article posted on the Internet in which he was very critical of President Lukashenko and looked at options for changing the political system in Belarus. The organisation is also concerned about a parliamentary committee's bill that could require all online publications to register.

While acknowledging that some of Kilmau's comments were extreme, Reporters Without Borders stresses its opposition to any use of imprisonment as a punishment for the expression of opinions or for press offences.

"This is the first time that an opponent of the Belarusian government has been arrested for an article posted online," the press freedom organisation said. "The charge of 'inciting the regime's overthrow' is being used to silence a dissident. Kilmau's arrest highlights the almost total control exercised by the government over information in Belarus."

The organisation added: "We also fear that making websites register with the authorities will increase the pressure on independent online public publications, including blogs, and will encourage self-censorship."

Kilmau has been charged under criminal code article 361 for the essay he posted on the website of the Union for a Civic Party on 25 January. Article 361 punishes any "appeal for subversion

or change of the constitutional system of the Republic of Belarus, or for accomplishment of crimes against the state, public appeals for violent seizure of power or change of the constitutional system of the Republic of Belarus, or betrayal to state, or accomplishment of terrorist act or sabotage, or distribution of materials, which contain such appeals realized with mass media usage."

Kilmau faces up to five years imprisonment. He has had several spells in prison in the past including a year and a half in 2005-2006 for organising a demonstration against the government.

The Belarusian press freedom group BAJ held a news conference on 12 April to issue a warning about the parliamentary committee's proposed law on Information, Information Technology and the Protection of Information, which proposes creating a system for registering all media, including online publications. It has not yet been made clear whether registration will be obligatory or just recommended. But such a law is very disturbing in a country such as Belarus, which is on the Reporters Without Borders list of "13 Internet Enemies."

Belarus, however, is dragging out the venture's creation, blaming the delay on official circumlocution and the lack of time to agree on the deal by Alexander Lukashenko.

20/04/2007

Source: Reporters without Borders

Politics

U.S. Warns of More Sanctions on Belarus politics



A top U.S. diplomat on Wednesday warned of new sanctions against Belarus if the Belarusian authorities refuse to release political prisoners. David Kramer, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, told reporters the

Belarusian government must take concrete steps to avoid a further deterioration in U.S.-Belarusian relations.

After talks with diplomats, government officials and opposition leaders, Kramer called for the "releasing of all political prisoners, and I mean all political prisoners, and dropping charges against others."

"In absence of those steps I fear that relations could deteriorate," he told reporters. "We have additional steps

upon the government. I hope they won't be necessary."

Last year, the United States and the European Union slapped travel sanctions on President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled the former Soviet republic with an iron fist for more than a decade, and other top government officials.

25/04/2007

Source: The Associated Press

Belarus Announces New Foreign Policy



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said in an annual address on Tuesday

that his country needs a "multi-faceted" foreign policy. Mr. Lukashenko added that Belarus will support strong ties with the East and the West alike.

Alexander Lukashenko opened his annual address to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly by offering condolences to Russia over the death of the first Russian president Boris Yeltsin.

The Belarusian president underscored that Russia continues to be one of Belarus' "most important priorities". But he criticized what he called "openly unfriendly actions" from Moscow which have "dealt a painful blow to our relations".

Minsk's traditionally close relations with Moscow have cooled since Russia raised energy prices earlier this year. Alexander Lukashenko said his country needs to expand its cooperation with other countries to preserve its independence.

"Maintaining our country's independence and stable development is possible only by pursuing a dynamic, multi-faceted foreign policy," the president told the legislature. "Belarus is involved actively in international trade and bilateral relations with many countries, and that has a direct impact on the condition of our domestic markets and the social and economic spheres."

Mr. Lukashenko said Belarus plans to seek alternative energy supplies from Venezuela, Iran, and Azerbaijan. He also said Belarus wants to develop stronger ties with India, China, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

25/04/2007

Source: kommersant.com

Secret Visit of Defence Minister to China

On April 25 ended a three-day visit of the Belarusian Defense Minister Leanid Maltsau to China. Details of the visit and talks are not revealed by agreement with the Chinese side.

Earlier, the press-service of the Belarusian Defence Ministry informed that "during the visit negotiations with Chinese defense minister on mutually interesting issues are to take place".

The Belarusian delegation which accompanied I. Maltsau during his trip, included his Assistant Secretaries Ivan Dyrman Alyksandr Balihatau.

As the agency has found out, on April 27-May 1 an official visit of L. Maltsau to Qatar is planned. This information has not been commented by Belarusian military ministry.

26/04/2007

Source: BelaPAN

Politics

Up to 3,000 Opposition Supporters March in Minsk on 21st Anniversary of the Chernobyl Disaster

A crowd estimated by reporters at up to 3,000 people walked some two miles in a march staged by the opposition along central Minsk streets on April 26 on the occasion of the 21st anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Participants, mostly youth, gathered on the square in front of the National Academy of Sciences at 6 p.m., displaying signs "No to Second Chernobyl!" "Only the Dead don't Fear Radiation!" and "Hands Off Chernobyl Benefits!" as well as numerous European Union flags and Belarus' historically national white-red-white flags, currently a symbol of opposition to Alyaksandr Lukashenka's government.

A police vehicle uninterruptedly warned the crowd through a loud-speaker system that no rally had



been allowed to be held there and suggested walking to Peoples' Friendship Park near remote Bangalore Square, the place where a rally had been sanctioned. Foreign diplomats, including ambassadors of Britain, Germany, Poland, and the United States were present.

As Alyaksey Yanukevich, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front, told BelaPan, the police seized the organizers' sound-amplifying equipment. After standing there for more than half an hour, with no speeches made, the crowd headed along the route previously designated by the city government, chanting "Long Live Belarus!" "We Believe, We Can, We'll Overcome!" and "Join Us!" The march, which had been allowed by the Minsk city government, was supposed to be in mourning for the Chernobyl victims but turned out to be a demonstration against Alyaksandr Lukashenka's rule described by oppo-

sition leaders as a political Chernobyl.

Participants included prominent opposition leaders such as Vintsuk Vyachorka, chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front; Anatol Lyabedzka, chairman of the United Civic Party; and Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists. Although initially present, former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, chairman of the opposition coalition's Political Council, did not join the march. "It was a firm stance of Alyaksandr Milinkevich not to march to Bangalore Square," his spokesman, Pavel Mazheyka, said.

The marchers passed by the Bangalore Square to reach the nearby Chernobyl Chapel where they honoured the memory of the Chernobyl victims by 21 beats of a bell.

A clash with riot police occurred after a crowd of some 100 young people waving white-red-white flags set to march further after the ceremony. Up to 20 people were reportedly arrested but were soon released after their fingerprints had been taken.

27/04/2007

Source: BelaPAN



Opposition Starts Regional Conferences as Part of Preparations for the Congress

Opposition groups on April 19 started holding regional conferences of delegates to the Second Congress of Pro-democratic Forces preliminarily scheduled for May 26 and 27.

According to the organizing committee for the Congress, such conferences are to be held on April 29 in the Minsk and Homyel regions, on May 4 in the city of Minsk, on May 6 in the Hrodna region, on May 12 in the Brest region, and on May 13 in the Mahilyow and Vitsyebk regions. At a meeting held in Minsk on April 23, the Political council of

UDF a ballot form for secret votes at the regional conferences was adopted. The ballot contains five questions, including a question about the status of the Political Council's chairperson and co-chairpersons, the formation of the Political Council and its board, and the functions and powers of the board. The organizing committee for the Congress will sum up the results of the votes. The agenda of the Congress will be drawn up in accordance with the results of the votes at the regional conferences.

30/04/2007

Source: BelaPAN

EU and Belarus

Belarus to Allow EU Commission Office in Minsk



Belarus' authoritarian government on Wednesday reversed a long-held position, allowing a key branch of the European Union to open an office in the country. Belarus had for two years ignored the EU Commission's request to set up a representation in the capital of the former Soviet republic. The European Commission is the executive body, and one of the three major governing branches of the European Union.

A need for closer relations between the EU and Belarus as well as possible assistance, provided by Europe to the former Soviet republic, were the reasons which led to that decision, said Andrei Popov,

spokesman of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry.

EU officials in November 2006 offered Belarusian President Aleksander Lukashenko a substantial increase in assistance programmes in exchange for Belarusian efforts to promote democracy.

Lukashenko at that time rejected the offer as he considered it useless to Belarus.

During his eleven-year reign of the country, he repeatedly attacked foreign country's diplomatic legations claiming they were trying to undermine his government.

In 1998, Lukashenko notoriously evicted hundreds of Western diplomats from their Minsk residences, using the pretext of building maintenance and completely ignoring the fact that they were foreign territory under international law.

In a parliament speech held on Tuesday, Lukashenko remained true to himself, saying Belarus "will not compromise on its principles...or enter into any new agreements against Belarusian national interests."

However, giving the EU permission to open a representational office in Minsk marks a distinct step away from the hard line taken by Lukashenko against Western governments in recent years, diplomats in Minsk said.

Lukashenko began overtures to Western nations shortly after in January 2007, the Kremlin had ended most subsidies to fuel exported to Belarus and had announced it would no longer give Belarusian exports state assistance in Russian markets.

Benefits Lukashenko can expect if he opens up his country towards the EU include a loosening of visa restrictions on Belarusian citizens visiting the EU, and a reduction of excise barriers to Belarusian products sold in EU markets.

25/04/2007

Source: Interfax

EU will not Trade Sanctions for Embassy in Belarus

EU diplomats have made clear to Belarus that its decision to let the European Commission open an office in Minsk will not help the country duck trade or diplomatic sanctions, amid a crude pro-EU charm offensive by the isolated dictatorship.

"We told them - do not expect GSP in exchange, it's a totally separate issue," one EU diplomat told EUobserver on Friday (27 April), referring to EU plans to expel Minsk from its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) on trade on 21 June, in a move set to cost Belarus €400 million a year.

"It [the commission office] is a good step. But they should not take it as a huge breakthrough. If they started to release political prisoners, yes, that would be a big step," he

added, on the prospects of the EU relaxing a travel ban on 35 Belarus officials, including its leader, Aleksander Lukashenko.

The remarks come after Belarus last week agreed to start negotiations on the new commission office, over one year after Brussels put in a formal request in 2005. If talks go smoothly, the Minsk delegation could open in late 2007 or early 2008 and host between 20 to 40 EU officials.

The EU outpost would pro-

nomie and political situation in the country and manage about €5 million a year's worth of European Commission-funded projects. "You can talk to civil society much better if you are there on the ground," a commission spokeswoman explained.

Lukashenko on Friday told press the EU embassy move "is an act of goodwill on our part...in turn, we expect the Europeans to take appropriate measures," Russian news-wire Ria Novosti reported.

Delicate talks ahead

Belarusian diplomats declined to speculate if the GSP move in June could set back the embassy talks. "I could not predict the pace of the negotiations," one Belarus official

EU and Belarus

EU will not Trade Sanctions for Embassy in Belarus



told EUobserver. "We expect to continue our dialogue and to normalise relations further in future."

The negotiations will centre around a so-called "accord de siege," which is to stipulate how many staff the commission can send and what kind of diplomatic immunity they will enjoy. The commission's agreements with third countries are usually modelled on the UN's 1961 Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations.

EU-Belarus relations are far from normal

today, despite Minsk's PR push to relax EU sanctions ever since Russia spiked Belarus' oil and gas rents in January in a long-standing spat over pipeline ownership and potential future state union.

Every few weeks in the past three months Lukashenko has made statements saying the time has come to improve relations with Brussels. His last speech, to the Belarusian parliament on 24 April, talked about being "ready to be an equal partner, a responsible partner" for the EU.

Lukashenko not a credible partner

But his actions make it hard to take the 52-year old, ice hockey-loving dictator seriously: on 26 April his police beat up peaceful protestors on the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster; on 25 March police beat up

peaceful protestors on the country's independence day.

In the meantime, young pro-democracy campaigners keep getting thrown in and out of jail; senior dissidents continue to face years behind bars and questions over several cases of vanished persons under the Lukashenko regime remain unanswered.

"What we are really interested in is finding [other] partners to talk to in the establishment," another EU diplomat told EUobserver. "You know, Minsk is not controlled by 5,000 Lukashenkos."

27/04/2007

Source: EUobserver.com



DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH BELARUS

**DELEGATION TO THE EU-RUSSIA
PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION
COMMITTEE**
**DELEGATION TO THE EU-UKRAINE
PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION
COMMITTEE**

(briefly)

Strasbourg, 24 April 2007. Today we held a joint meeting of our three delegations to address the strategically important issue of energy security and together with Mr Andris PIEBALGS, EU Commissioner on Energy, to assess the developments in the EU energy relations with the major energy supplier Russia and the main transit states of Ukraine

and Belarus.

We have reaffirmed the central role of energy in EU's relations with Russia and Ukraine as well as in its policy towards Belarus and underlined a vital need for a common European energy policy.

The external common energy policy should take into account the political and economic interests of all the Member States and should aim to reduce EU's dependence on fossil fuels from a few big suppliers and to diversify the sources of energy. The recent plans of the gas exporting countries to create a "gas Opec" make the necessity of a joint European approach even more urgent.

It is also essential to avert in the future similar situations as the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis in Janu-

ary 2006 and the most recent energy dispute between Russia and Belarus in January 2007. In this regard the EU should intensify its energy cooperation with its neighbours in order to enhance in particular the security of energy supplies to the European market. Harmonized energy policies with those neighbours are to be considered and promoted <...>

As for Belarus, the EU should take note of the indications from the Belarusian government about its willingness to engage in an energy dialogue, following the energy crisis between Belarus and Russia earlier this year. However, the EU should not compromise on its values and should renew the dialogue with Belarus only under clear conditions, as laid out in the EC Non-Paper on Belarus of November 2006, which include release of all political prisoners, assurance of free media, independence of the judiciary and respect for democratic values and for the basic rights of the Belarusian people.