

Belarus Headlines

Issue IX

May 17 –30, 2007



Office for a Democratic
Belarus

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EU COMMISSION AMBASSADOR IAN BOAG: OUR RELATIONS WITH BELARUS ARE DESTINED TO IMPROVE

Interview with EU Commission ambassador Ian Boag (series: *Face to face with Europe*)

Ambassador Boag, are the relations between Brussels and Minsk developing positively? Is Belarus making any steps forward?

The decision by the Belarusian authorities to agree to the Commission's proposal to open a Delegation in Minsk is, I hope, a sign that relations are destined to improve. The European Union has made it clear that it is willing to engage with Belarus provided that the authorities take positive steps. The 12 points set out in the European Commission's "non paper" indicate the sort of progress we look for if our relations are to improve.

What changes could be brought about after the opening of the Delegation of the European Commission in Minsk?

The opening of a Commission Delegation in Minsk will enable the Commission and the Belarusian authorities to maintain a more consistent dialogue on matters of concern. It will also enable the Commission to manage more closely its financial co-operation with the Belarusian authorities within the framework of TACIS and now the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.

At the same time it will enable us to maintain contacts and co-operate with a much broader range of Belarusian society than is possible at present.

What will be the format of the Commission Delegation?

The Commission will be represented in Minsk by a Chargé d'affaires. The Head of Delegation in Kyiv will remain accredited to Minsk. We very much hope that the negotiations for the Establishment Agreement of the Delegation can be concluded quickly.

Does this agreement presuppose that Chargé d'affaires and the Head of Delegation will be reappointed?

In the foreseeable future there will be no change of personnel.

What should the head of the EC Delegation to Belarus be like?

I think any Head of Delegation needs to be able to communicate both with those to whom he is accredited and with those by whom he is sent. This is



essential to creating a better understanding. From such understanding can come some progress.

How important could be the work of Special representative of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry Sergey Gaidukevich?

There are already well established communication links between the Commission and the Belarusian authorities. There is a Belarusian Mission in Brussels and there will soon be a Commission Delegation in Minsk. Diplomatic contacts are an essential part of developing and, we hope, improving relations between the Commission and third countries.

Politics aside, what could

Interview with Ian Boag

be the three words for you to describe Belarus with? Any qualities you would consider typically Belarusian?

Three words are a bit short for a country of 10 million people. I would describe Belarus as a country which has the potential to become part of the European family of nations. I am not sure that there is such a thing as a typical Belarusian. I meet many different types.

Have you seen much of Belarus? What are your impressions of the country?

Unfortunately I have seen little of Belarus apart from my official visits to Minsk. However my last trip to Belarus was to Brest which I much enjoyed. To visit the Belavezhskaya Pushcha and its Museum was a great experience.

What is your wish for Belarusians?

My wish for the Belarusians is that it will be possible for them to benefit from the possibilities offered by the European Neighbourhood Policy, in particular democracy, good governance and economic progress. For this to happen we look to the Belarusian government to adhere to the values that underlie that policy.

Ian Boag has been Ambassador, Head of the Delegation of the European Commission in Kyiv since September 2004. Accredited to Minsk since June 2006.

He began his career in the British Diplomatic Service and, after several

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years, switched to the private sector where he was an international reinsurance broker for nearly five years. In 1978 he joined the European Commission. Apart from various posts in the Directorates General for Development and for External Relations he was a member of the Cabinet of Claude Cheysson (1985-1987) and Head of Delegation in Morocco (1987-1991), Brazil (1991-1994) and Egypt (2001-2004).

The interview was conducted by Maryna Rakhlei for the Office for a Democratic Belarus

21/05/2007

Office for a Democratic Belarus Supports Belarus Studies in the Technical University of Dresden, Germany

The Institute of Slavic Studies at the



Technical University of Dresden is a place where the whole Slavonic world can be found under the same roof. The emphasis is being placed on Russian, Polish and Czech languages and culture. However, increasingly more attention is given to other Slavonic cultures, especially to those, which are barely known even among the Slavicist scientific community. Thus, this year, a semester-long seminar "Belarusian Language and Culture" was organized. The special emphasis was placed on the interaction of the Belarusian national culture with other

cultures and languages which are present in the region.

The highlight of the seminar is a week-long tour to Belarus, which is currently taking place (the 27th of May – the 3rd of June, 2007). Before going on a trip, the seminar participants have prepared themselves by studying Belarusian history and language, reading Belarusian literature and discovering Belarusian art and culture.

The Office for a Democratic Belarus was approached by the organizers of the seminar, who were eager to discuss the political and cultural context of the present day life in Belarus with the students. On the 23rd of May, Alexander Kudrytski, Project Manager at the Office, went to Dresden where he met with a group of students and delivered a lecture about the state of culture in Belarus and its interconnection with politics. The lecture was preceded by the screening of the documentary film "Monologues" (by Aleh Dashkevich), and followed by the lively discussion

with the seminar's participants.

"I presented the view of the independent Belarusian society to the students", says Alexander Kudrytski. "It is very much likely, that they will also learn contradicting viewpoints, when they come to Belarus. Hopefully, by comparing them, the students will be able to judge independently and analyze the situation in Belarus based on the versatile information they have received".

Office for a Democratic Belarus has also donated 12 DVDs with the films of different Belarusian directors to the Institute of Slavic Studies. This video collection will be available to all the students of the University, interested in the Belarusian culture. Hopefully, this will also be a first step to creating a small Belarusian information centre in the Technical University of Dresden.

Prepared by the Office for a Democratic Belarus

24/05/2007

Politics

U.N. Rejects Belarus for Seat on Its Rights Panel

Belarus, one of the world's most repressive states, was blocked Thursday from gaining membership on the United Nations Human Rights Council after being outvoted in favor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a late entry.

Human rights groups had been campaigning for weeks to head off the once seemingly assured choice of Belarus after the Eastern European group submitted only Belarus and Slovenia as candidates for the two seats from its region.



Western countries persuaded Bosnia to enter last week and then lobbied General Assembly members vigorously as the only way to reject the bid by Belarus.

In the first round of voting, Slovenia won handily. Bosnia came in second and Belarus third, setting up an immediate runoff that then secured Bosnia's position.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the American ambassador, hailed the outcome as "heartening." He said, "Some have called Belarus the last dictatorship of Europe."

The decision avoided what would have been a serious embarrassment for the rights council, which in the

past has inspired scorn for permitting countries like Cuba and Libya as members.

Last week, the United Nations came in for renewed criticism on a similar front when it elected Zimbabwe, a country with one of the most battered economies and worst rights records, to be chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Thursday's election in the General Assembly chose 14 new members for the Human Rights Council, which has 47 members and was formed last year to replace the discredited Human Rights Commission.

The countries elected were Angola, Bolivia, Bosnia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Italy, Madagascar, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Qatar, Slovenia and South Africa.

The only other contested race was for one of the Western European seats, where Italy defeated Denmark in a runoff.

The United States decided not to be a candidate for the council last year and again this year, saying it thought that the body, while better than its predecessor, fell short of being credible and effective. There was also concern that given the hostility in the United Nations to American actions in Iraq, the

United States might not win a place if it ran.

Steve Crawshaw, the United Nations advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, said his group had been particularly galvanized by the prospect of Belarus on the council.

"Belarus's track record is frankly appalling," he said. "It has no real civil society, no freedom of expression; its elections have been deemed absolutely not to be free or fair. There is no breathing space, and the U.N. special envoy to Belarus has been blocked from visiting the country."

Asked why Bosnia, a country with a recent past of rights abuses, was a better candidate, he said: "Bosnia's record is far from perfect. Human Rights Watch has repeatedly criticized it on a number of issues, but Belarus is simply in a league of its own."

Earlier this month, two watchdog groups, UN Watch and Freedom House, expressed disapproval of Angola, Egypt and Qatar, which won seats on Thursday. All of them, the two groups said, "are authoritarian regimes with negative U.N. voting records on rights issues and are not qualified to be council members."

Source: New York Times

18/05/2007

Valery Shchukin's Trial to Start 6 June

A trial on the case of the well-known human rights' defender and journalist Valery Schukin is to start on 6 June at 14.30 in the Pervomaisky district of a court in Vitebsk.

Valery Schukin is charged with insulting members of the Vitebsk regional electoral commission and members of a district commission 52 of Vitebsk.



After the local elections, which took place in Belarus on 14 January 2007

Schchukin distributed leaflets with the information that members of electoral commissions participated in falsification of the elections' results.

The criminal case was brought by the public prosecutors of the

Zheleznodorohny and Pervomaisky districts of Vitebsk.

According to Valery Schukin, the public prosecutors had no right of opening the criminal case. This Article of the Criminal Code requires existence of a claim presented by an insulted person, the human rights activist said.

Source: Charter'97

18/05/2007

Politics

Alyaksandr Milinkevich Becomes Leader of "For Freedom!" Movement

Alyaksandr Milinkevich has been elected leader of the public organization "For Freedom!" during a founding meeting of the organization in Hrodna. Despite the police attempts to interfere, delegates managed to carry out the procedures necessary for registration of the organization – the approved the Statute, elected the chairman and other governing bodies. About 100 public leaders and political activists from all over Belarus have been present at the meeting.

One hour after the beginning of the meeting policemen burst into the hall. They ordered all present to leave the place which had been supposedly mined. Despite the interruption, the delegates managed to carry out the election. Policemen taped participants



of the congress when the latter were leaving the hall.

In the yard of the "mined" building the leader of the democratic forces Alyaksandr Milinkevich stated: "The movement has been created for uniting people who want to act, and not to sit at round tables, discuss and

be engaged in different dialogues. Our main objective is creation of a civil society and the rule-of-law state, holding free and democratic election in Belarus. We unite activists, party members, all people who want to work. We shall work together".

The delegates could not continue the meeting on that day. As the police informed, search for explosives could last for up to two days.

The general Consulate of the Polish republic is situated in the next rooms. All the staff of the Consulate was evacuated.

21/05/2007

Source: Charter '97

Belarusian Authorities Release Two Political Prisoners But Refused to Free Third

Belarusian courts on May 22 decided to release on parole opposition politician Mikalay Statkevich and opposition youth leader Pavel Sevyarynets, two and three months before their respective prison terms are due to end,



Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Statkevich and Sevyary-

nets in May 2005 were each sentenced to three years in prison for staging a series of unauthorized demonstrations in Minsk in the fall of 2004 against the official results of the 2004 parliamentary elections and referendum, which are widely believed to have been rigged. The sentences were subsequently reduced by one year under an amnesty law. Both Statkevich and Sevyarynets believe that the authorities decided to release them ahead of schedule in order to curry favor with the EU as it considers the trade benefits Belarus receives under the bloc's Generalized System of Pref-

erences. the EU threatened last year to suspend Belarus's benefits this coming June if Minsk fails to observe trade union rights. The suspension might cost Belarus an estimated 400 million euros (\$536 million) per year. "No matter how I tried to persuade the judge and the prosecutor [on May 22] that my trial was illegal, they did not pay any attention," Sevyarynets told RFE/RL. "I made the conclusion that they had simply been ordered to free me. I link this move to the voting on the suspension of [EU trade] preferences for Belarus that is to take place soon. So, my release was a political decision and has no relation whatsoever to either justice or a law-governed state." JM

Belarus's Supreme Court on May 22 rejected an appeal from former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison in 2006 on charges widely believed to be politically motivated, Reuters and Belapan reported. Kazulin, who was arrested during a post-election opposition protest in March 2006, was found guilty of hooliganism and organizing group activi-

ties disturbing the public peace. The appeal by Kazulin, the rector of Belarusian State University from 1996-2003, can only be further examined by the prosecutor general or the chairman of the Supreme Court. Kazulin's release is a key demand by Western



groups pressing for reforms in Belarus. "Kazulin's release is now linked strictly to a change of political regime in the country. By using Kazulin as an example, the court has given a stiff rebuke to any optimists hoping for some sort of liberalization," Kazulin's lawyer, Ihar Rynkevich, told journalists.

23/05/2007

Source: Radio Free Europe

Politics

Opposition's Congress of Pro-Democratic Forces Reveals Differences among Leaders on Course of Action



The first day of the much-talked-of second Congress of Pro-democratic Forces, which opened in the Culture Palace of the Minsk Automobile Factory on May 26, revealed serious differences among opposition leaders on a course of action reported.

Mikalay Statkevich and Pavel Sevyarynets, who had been released from prison on parole a few days before, suggested that the opposition should choose fighting to come to power.

Mr. Statkevich, chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Hramada), described the course proposed by the Congress' organizing committee as a "strategy of fear and fatigue."

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who was elected chairman of the Political Council of United Pro-democratic Forces at the first congress held in October 2005 and was the opposition coalition's candidate in Belarus' presidential election the following year, spoke against co-chairmanship in the council. He suggested that there should be one leader, not necessarily him, for efficient activities. If there are co-chairpersons, the chance of winning will be lower, he said, adding that the "fight for power in the country has been replaced by a fight for power among the opposition."

He noted that a coalition is an excellent thing, but it should not be a sacred cow. It should be a tool, not an end in itself, he stressed. "The simulation of activity will not be met with support from the public," he warned.

He said that he sides with Mr. Statkevich, who proposed a "strategy of fight" based on European values and rejected any negotiations with authorities if they did not seem to yield a specific result. He said that this strategy is similar to that of his "Movement for Freedom" currently in formation. He noted that the Movement should not be viewed as an alternative to the Congress but as an "attempt to give the opportunity to act to those who want to work quicker."

Mr. Milinkevich stressed that he would not propose his candidacy if an election for co-chairmanship was held.

Mr. Sevyarynets, a former long-time leader of an opposition youth group called Malady Front, said that he was taking part in the Congress to discuss how to win. "But we are told now that we should negotiate, not fight," he said. "Maybe, someone believes that if the opposition had five heads [five co-chairpersons as proposed by the organizing committee], Alyaksandr Lukashenka would at once decide to enter into negotiations with them. But that's all wrong. That's why we should in the first instance adopt a strategy of fight, a strategy of national unity and the national idea."

Anatol Lyabedzka, chairman of the United Civic Party, suggested that the opposition forces should try to preserve their unity. He noted that there had been four months to develop a strategy, and that all members of the coalition had worked on the "open doors" principle. That is why he said all those who wanted to propose a course of action, had the opportunity to do that.

"I pretty much expected Alyaksandr Milinkevich to come to the Congress and say that it is not our path to divide people into rightists and leftists, Communists and Malady Front members, those under the red flag and those under the white-red-white flag," Mr.

Lyabedzka said.

He noted that he did not like the co-chairmanship principle either, but there should be specific elected persons responsible for certain areas of activities.

"We should adopt a common strategy, a common plan of action and not be hung up on the election of a leader, because there is no recognized leader even in this hall," he said.

Vintsuk Vyachorka, chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front, said that his party had also developed a strategy and it was a strategy for a coalition. He spoke for the co-chairmanship principle but noted that Alyaksandr Milinkevich should continue representing Belarus' pro-democratic forces in the international arena. The opposition has made a diplomatic breakthrough over the period since the 2006 presidential election, he said.

According to Alyaksandr Bukhvostaw, head of the organizing committee, out of 916 authorized delegates to the two-day Congress, 568 were present. In addition, in attendance were the heads of the diplomatic missions of Germany, Britain, France, Latvia, Lithuania, the United States and Sweden, other foreign diplomats, and about 100 reporters representing 45 media outlets in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and the USA.

"Hundreds of advocates of change expect real purposeful activities from the leaders of the pro-democratic opposition, which should lead to the democratization of Belarus," Mr. Bukhvostaw said.

Apart from the leadership issue and a strategy, the forum is to decide on a so-called small constitution and an economic platform.

26/05/2007

Source: BelaPAN

Politics

Belarus Youth Activists Fined, Warned; Defendant Says Lenience Politically Motivated

A court in Belarus on Tuesday convicted four young activists of participating in an unauthorized opposition group, fining three and letting one off with a warning

- lenient punishments that one of the defendants contended were motivated by the president's desire to appease the West.

The activists had faced sentences of up to two years in prison for taking part in activities of the Young Front, an opposition organization that authorities in the tightly controlled ex-Soviet republic have refused to grant official registration.

Before March 2006 elections marred



by widespread arrests and harassment of government opponents, authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko initiated legislation criminalizing participation in unregistered organiza-

tions. Young Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich is serving an 18-month sentence handed down in November.

Three young men were ordered to pay fines ranging from 930,000 to 1.25 million Belarusian rubles (USD 435 to USD 580; USD 320 to USD 430), while a 16-year-old girl, Nasta Polozhanko, received a warning.

"Such soft sentence can be explained by Lukashenko's desire to make peace with the European Union and the

United States," Polozhanko said outside the courthouse, where the defendants were greeted by about 100 supporters. "There is no justice in Belarus, there are only the interests of Lukashenko."

Lukashenko has made Belarus into one of Europe's most repressive societies, quashing dissent and closing down opposition media. The U.S. and the EU have imposed sanctions on Lukashenko and top members of his government, and he has shown some signs of seeking to improve relations with the West amid strains in ties with Russia.

Two opposition activists whose three-year prison sentences prompted condemnation by the U.S. and EU were freed a year early last week.

29/05/2007

Source: Associated Press

EU and Belarus

EU Presidency Statement

on the Release of Members of the Opposition in Belarus



The Presidency welcomes the recent release of two prominent members of the Belarusian opposition, Nikolai Statkevich and Pavel Severinets. It also welcomes the earlier release - although subject to conditions - of the four members of the organization Partnerstvo convicted in autumn 2006. Presidency welcomes

the recent release of two prominent members of the Belarusian opposition, Nikolai Statkevich and Pavel Severinets. It also welcomes the earlier release - although subject to conditions - of the four members of the organization Partnerstvo convicted in autumn 2006.

The Presidency calls upon the Belarusian Government to release all other political prisoners without delay.

The Presidency also calls for a stop to the repression of opposition youth groups. Following today's judgement against "Malady Front" it appeals to the Belarusian Government to release the already convicted "Malady Front" member Dmitri Dashkevich.

The Presidency reiterates the offer to enter into a full partnership with Belarus within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, this cooperation is contingent upon the Belarusian Government professing its strong commitment to democratic values, human rights and the rule of law and initiating democratic reforms. offer to enter into a full partnership with Belarus within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, this cooperation is contingent upon the Belarusian Government professing its strong commitment to democratic values, human rights and the rule of law and initiating democratic reforms.

30/05/2007

Source: EU2007.de

Economics

Gazprom Buys Half of Beltransgaz for \$2.5 Billion

Gazprom and the State Property Committee of Belarus signed on Friday in Minsk the agreement to purchase and sell Beltransgaz shares, RIA-Novosti news agency reported with reference to Gazprom's press service.

Gazprom will pay \$2.5 billion for 50 percent of Beltransgaz. The Russian holding will acquire Beltransgaz's shares in four stages by 12.5 percent from 2007 to 2010.

The companies have also agreed to gradually raise the wholesale extra charge on natural gas sold by Beltransgaz. Another agreement they



reached is that the state will not have privileges in managing Beltransgaz.

Gazprom's spokesman said on Friday morning that the agreement's signing is postponed till a later date, approximately June 1st.

The agreement on Russian gas supplies to Belarus signed on December 31, 2006, obligates Gazprom to supply 21.8 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Belarus in 2007, at the price of \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters. Afterwards, the price on Russian gas for Belarus will be calculated according to the formula used for European consumers.

Nearly 45.8 billion cubic meters of Russian gas will be transported through Belarus' territory in 2007.

19/05/2007

Source: Kommersant

Belarus to Develop Iranian Oil Field

Belarus will develop an oil field in Iran under an agreement announced by President Alexander Lukashenko during a visit by his Iranian counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Announcing plans to develop the Jofeir field, Lukashenko told Ahmadinejad: 'You have sought to satisfy all the wishes of the Belarussian side and have allocated to us the deposit we were hoping for.'

'Our experts have examined it and today are ready to extract oil on Iranian territory,' Lukashenko said in comments carried on state television.

The Jofeir field is located close to Iran's border with Iraq and could potentially produce 30,000 barrels of oil per day, Iranian officials were reported as saying by Interfax news agency.

Crude oil extracted from the field would either be processed in Iran or sold elsewhere, Lukashenko said.



Belarus has only negligible oil reserves of its own but does have major oil refineries, which are used for processing Russian oil for further export.

However, in recent months Belarus and Russia have fallen out over Belarus' role as an oil transit route.

Lukashenko has repeatedly said he wants to find alternative energy resources for this country of 10 mln people,

which lies sandwiched between Russia and European Union and NATO members Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

The agreement on the Jofeir field came during a two-day visit by Ahmadinejad to Minsk

21/05/2007

Source: Thomson Financial

Belarus Cancels Benefits for Elderly, Impoverished Citizens, Students

Belarusian lawmakers on Wednesday backed legislation stripping hundreds of thousands of disabled and retired people and students of social benefits and other state payments.

In an unusual move, the 110-seat lower house of parliament passed the bill in its first and second readings, 101-1, sending it on to the upper chamber which is also likely to pass it and send it to President Alexander Lukashenko for his signature.

Analysts said the measure - which officials hope will save some 30 percent of the country's budget - was prompted by Russia's sharp rise in oil and natural gas prices this year. Belarus' economy remains largely state-controlled and heavily reliant of cheap Russian energy supplies.

Some 67 percent of Belarus' 10 million people, including pensioners, students, disabled persons, Nazi victims and others, receive benefits and other subsidies for transport, medication and housing utilities.

Several dozen students, meanwhile, tried to stage a protest outside parliament in the capital Minsk, but security forces quickly broke up the protest and detained several participants.

24/05/2007

Source: Kyiv.post

Politics

Russia Denies Arms Sales through Neighbour Belarus

A senior Russian arms official on May 23 denied any suggestion that Moscow was violating international agreements by selling weaponry through ex-Soviet neighbor Belarus to countries subject to embargos.

Western countries, harsh critics of Belarus' human rights records, have accused Minsk of engaging in illegal arms sales, sometimes on behalf of Russia. Some media have said Belarus supplied weapons illegally to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein before his overthrow in 2003.

And Russia's Kommersant newspaper reported in March that Moscow may have sought to sell arms to Iran via Belarus.

"There have been no instances of selling arms and material to countries subject to an international embargo through our (Belarusian) partners," said Vladimir Paleshchuk, deputy head of Russia's federal service for military technical cooperation.

"Nor will this ever occur. There will be no secret acting behind the back of the international community," Paleshchuk told Reuters at the MILEX-2007 fair of weapons and military equipment.



Russia will boost arms sales to a record \$7.5 billion in 2007 as the Kremlin breaks into new markets for its military equipment, top military officials have said.

Moscow's drive to boost arms exports have raised tensions with the United States as the two former Cold War foes are often now in direct competition for major arms contracts.

The most prestigious exhibit at the Belarus arms show was organized by Russian state arms exporter Rosoboronexport, which put on a display the state of the art Pechora missile system and various models of tank.

Forty-three military delegations vis-

ited the fair -- including senior officials from China, Iran, Sudan, Syria and Venezuela -- but neither Belarusian nor Russian exhibitors were announcing any deals clinched.

"There was considerable interest in our production. Nearly all the delegations visited us," said Valentin Kopitev, general director of BelOMO, which produces optics for a wide variety of weaponry, including Kalashnikov automatic rifles.

"But in general a lot of time passes between an expression of interest and signature of a contract. And as a rule, only one in five contacts culminates in a contract being signed."

Arms exports have declined sharply in recent years in Belarus, which has only a small number of its own producers.

The country ranked among the top 10 world exporters at the end of the 1990s, when it was selling off surplus equipment and models left over from the Soviet era. Belarus does not disclose details about its arms exports.

24/05/2007

Source: Reuters

Syamashka: Belarus is Ready to Sell Some Shares of Profit-Making Enterprises



Belarus is ready to sell a part of its shares of highly profitable enterprises to foreign investors, told the first vice Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka. "We are ready to sell

part of our shares, but on conditions we are interested in," Syamashka told on May 29 at the annual meeting of the Union of Non-Commercial organizations "Confederation of manufacturers and entrepreneurs".

As said by him, at the moment "the state is intentionally opting for the process of privatization which is not an avalanche-like, but a civilized one".

"We do not need an investor who would come and pump out everything from an enterprise and than

leave it; we need an investor who would develop an enterprise," the BelTA cites the first prime minister.

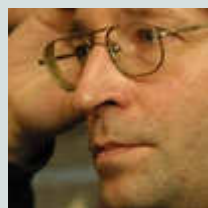
As said by Syamashka, each two or three years equipment should be updated in the petrochemical industry of Belarus which interests foreign investors a lot. "Belnaftakhim enterprises are in a crouch start position now ready for selling shares on civilized terms," Syamashka said.

30/05/2007

Source: BelTA

Culture

Dear readers of “Belarus Headlines”, with this article we begin the series of publications, which will present you the most outstanding and trendy examples of the modern Belarusian culture. Ales Kudrytski, Cultural Manager at the Office for a Democratic Belarus and an experienced Belarusian journalist, will guide you through the exciting labyrinth of the Belarusian artistic world. If you have any questions about Belarusian culture, feel free to contact the author, who will always be happy to answer them.



Minsk: the Sun City of Dreams

The new book by Artur Klinau scrutinizes the Belarusian capital.

There is a sea in Minsk. No, it's not this pitiful lake on the north-western outskirts of the Belarusian capital. There is a real sea, which is filling the broad Avenue of Independence with its mighty blue waters. You can even see a snow-white sea cruise liner casting anchor near the Empire-style tower of the KGB headquarters. And still, this sea is framed, put behind glass and hung on the wall in a small exhibition room of an independent art gallery “Padzemka”, which is situated literally under ground, one storey below the main Minsk street. Artur Klinau, a tall man in elegant spectacles, the author of this photo collage, is drinking coffee in a tiny back room of the gallery. He is leafing through his new book titled “Minsk: die Sonnenstadt der Träume” (‘Minsk: the Sun City of Dreams’).

“Padzemka” is one of few places in Belarus, where the independent art, like Klinau's, can be exhibited. This is particularly sad, since Artur Klinau is gradually becoming quite a prominent figure abroad. Having studied architecture in Minsk, he has become known as one of the leading Belarusian conceptual artists, especially famous for his “total installations”. Then he founded an art magazine “pARTisan”, which is undoubtedly the most splendid periodical dedicated to the issues of contemporary Belarusian art. Finally, Most recently Artur Klinau

turned to photography, and created a “visual poem” about Minsk.

During a reading in Berlin a couple of years ago, Klinau's photos and ideas appeared to be so fascinating to the Western public, that the German publishing house „Suhrkamp“ commissioned him a text version of the visual poem titled „Minsk: the Sun City of Dreams“. As a result, the art project of Klinau has grown into an exciting account of Minsk as a city, where the utopia turned into the reality, and the dream was embodied in stone and asphalt.

If you wish to look deep into the soul of the Belarusian capital, this is the book you should turn to. Its name hides a tricky word game. In Belarusian it is titled “Mensk: Horad SONca”, where “sonca” is translated as “the Sun”, and “son” – as “dream”. In Klinau's mind, the history of the city is developing together with his own personal story. „I was born in the Sun City of Dreams“, reads the first sentence of the book. „The first thing I remember about it is an enormous concrete slab, which I am trying to clamber“. This is how the author recalls himself being a child, climbing up the stairs of his apartment building.

„We live in a dream, which has come true“, writes Klinau. He shows Minsk as a huge experiment, similar to the “The City of the Sun”, depicted by the Italian philosopher Tommaso Campanella four centuries ago. The new Minsk was a project, created by the Empire, with the Metaphysician as its ultimate ruler. The soviet symbols, which can be found everywhere in Minsk, turn into religious symbols of a pagan cult.

This new, soulless city destroys the old one, the city of small houses and curved streets filled with the aroma of coal being burned in countless stoves.

According to Klinau, the creators of the new Minsk merely intended to turn it into a gate, which would decorate the way to the actual City of Sun – Moscow. However, when it came so far as rebuilding Moscow, the gods and demiurges of the Empire have not dared to destroy their own city of childhood. Thus Minsk remained the only realization of their dream, both grand and inhuman.

So far no author has created such a detailed account of the present-day Minsk. Klinau has managed to look into the face of this city, which does not exist, of these people, who do not exist, of this place, which does not exist – Utopia called Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

Artur Klinau has already had a number of readings in German cities, and is preparing to go on a literary tour through Austria. Unlike the German-speaking public, Belarusian readers have to remain patient: the Belarusian version of Klinau's book still has to come. There is some irony in the fact, that the German publication of “Minsk: The Sun City of Dreams” precedes the Belarusian one. However, this is a good sign, proving that the Belarusian literature is able to catch attention of the Western readers even before the fellow Belarusian publishers open their eyes.momimosdfdf

by Ales Kudrytski

Prepared by the Office for a Democratic Belarus