



Belarus Headlines

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UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON BELARUS ADRIAN SEVERIN: I ALWAYS CHECK, DOUBLE CHECK AND CROSS CHECK

Interview with UNO special
rapporteur Adrian Severin
(series: *Face to face with
Europe*)

Adrian Severin is eloquent and at the same time - unlike many of his colleagues - able to hear the questions and give short, precise answers. He seems to be a passionate truth-seeker; this in the past caused heavy criticism of his reports both by the Belarusian authorities and the opposition. From his point of view, this fact testifies the impartiality of his work, and simply adds to his enthusiasm.

- Mr. Severin, you have been dealing with Belarus since 1995. Are you not tired of the country?

- One can't get tired if he/she cares about human rights and political freedoms. And I sympathise with Belarus.

- Is there still reason for sympathy?

- I can't say that last year brought about any dramatic change, by all means. In the course of last months Minsk showed its will to engage in some kind of dialogue and cooperation with the EU. Rental agreements of NGOs were renewed and they will be able to continue their work; opposition enjoyed broader freedom. But these are unfortunately no signals of a breakthrough. It is just a less irreverent trend; we can't

speak of any real change.

- Could you say you understand the Belarusians?

- I would still say I sympathise with them. To use the word *understand* could be misleading as it implies the acceptance of the situation in the country, in particular with human rights. Many Belarusians don't care, don't actively defend their rights.

But I can say I am well-informed and understand a lot of what's going on. Probably that's why I am not tired and I am not going to give up, although there are plenty of reasons to get frustrated.

First of all, I have hoped to establish a dialogue with the Belarusian authorities to improve human rights record of the country. But it is still not the case. I also have the expectancy that international community will mobilise its assets, will unify its voice to determine a positive change; and I still hope that Belarusian neighbours will speak in one voice for a democratic change in the country. I also don't lose a hope that Belarusian democratic



forces will stay united and work effectively. The frustration comes as many of these hopes can't turn into reality.

- The Belarusian authorities are not eager to cooperate. As an appointed Rapporteur you have never been granted a visa to come to Belarus. You use the official information as well as sources from the opposition for your reports. Are these sources not too different to be used? How do you know which ones to trust?

- It is not only the data provided by the opposition, civil society and state. There are third sources like international NGOs. Moreover, I always check, double-check and cross-check, trying to analyse facts and context.

Interview with Adrian Severin

Eventually, was the situation perfect, the Belarusian authorities would talk to me to prove me wrong. The reactions to my report during the discussion at the UN Council of Human Rights on June 12 in Geneva varied. Some agreed, some didn't. Criticising the report, the Belarusian ambassador to UN (*Sergei Aleinik, Belarus Headlines*) didn't even take a second to address its substance. The only specific he mentioned was that it contradicts the reports of other UN agencies that supposedly praise the state of human rights in Belarus. But he could neither give one single example nor quote any. Thus, I am not inclined to trust the figures of those who speak on behalf of the state.

- *What is the fate of your reports?*

- As my mandate has been prolonged every year since 2004 that shows that the reports were accepted by the UN Commission, which is now UN Council for Human Rights. There is no clear procedure to adopt it, presentation of a report ends with a debate. And the follow-up is extremely modest, the international community is not mobilised. It is probably Brussels where Belarus actually is on the agenda.

I should also warn that cancellation of the position of a Rapporteur on Belarus will affect the prospect of change.

- *The Belarusian authorities would like to benefit fully from economical cooperation with Europe but without interference with internal affairs of the country. Could you imagine such a situation?*

- Of course! But with the only reservation - human rights are not an internal but international matter as they are the question of sovereignty of an individual, not that of a state. Under the pretext of sovereignty the Soviet Union felt free to oppress civic rights and freedoms. Any state should be able to maintain its internal vision of its internal processes but human rights is, again, no internal affair.

And I hope that eventually people of Belarus will learn to value and defend their rights and authorities--to respect these rights.

Changes in Belarus should emerge from inside. And this will be the case

of long time to go.

Adrian Severin has been appointed a Special Rapporteur on Belarus in 2004. Member of the European Parliament.

Human rights are not an internal but international matter as they are the question of sovereignty of an individual, not that of a state

He was born in 1954, Bucharest, Romania. Was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania, member and Rapporteur of the Parliamentary

Assembly of the Council of Europe, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE. Was the head of the Ad-hoc Committee of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for Belarus (1995-1999). Author or co-author of several books on international commercial law, economic and political reform, international relations, etc. Won international and national awards. Speaks English, French, Italian, Russian and Spanish.

Prepared by Maryna Rakhlei for the Office for a democratic Belarus

12/06/2007

Belarusian Christian Democrats and Greens Visiting Brussels

On the invitation of the Office for a Democratic Belarus and the Slovak foundation Pontis, delegation of young Belarusian pro-democracy activists visited Brussels on June 12-14. Among participants were two co-chairmen of the Belarusian Christian-Democracy, Aliaksei Shein and Vital Rymasheuski, as well as chairman of the Belarusian Party of Greens Aleh Novikau.

The program of the visit included meetings with representatives of the EU institutions, missions of the EU countries based in Brussels, various human rights groups and the Belarusian diaspora in Belgium. One of the main aims of the visit was for the Belarusian parties to establish stronger ties with their respective European counterparts.

Among topics being actively discussed were such as the ongoing dialogue between the European Union and the Belarusian authorities and possible scenarios of its development; questions of further

human rights violations in Belarus, especially restriction of freedom of conscience and increased repressions against religious groups. Removal of Belarus from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and the state of reformist forces in the country after the second congress of democratic forces are cases that raised a lot of interest on both sides.

Young Belarusian leaders had an opportunity to hold a meeting with H.E. Adrian Severin, current rapporteur on the situation in Belarus at the UN Human Rights Council. The meeting took place on the day after Mr. Severin presented his report on Belarus in Geneva.

Members of the European Parliament, when talking with the delegation, expressed their concern over the lack of unity among the opposition forces and the inability of the latter to properly use the capital gathered during the presidential election campaign in March 2006.

In addition to the meetings, Belarusian activists had an opportunity to participate in a conference "Belarus and the European Neighbour-

hood Policy", which was organized by stagiers of the European Commission on June 12 and gather a great number of attendees interested in the situation in Belarus. Among speakers at the event was former vice-president of the European Parliament, member of the delegation on relations with Belarus Dr. Januzs Onyszkiewicz, Deputy Head of Unit for Relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus from the DG RELEX of the European Commission Ms Madeleine Majorenko, and the director of the Office for a Democratic Belarus in Brussels Olga Stuzhinskaya.

14/06/2007

The Office for a Democratic Belarus, the Pontis foundation and the Belarusian group of activists express their sincere gratitude to the government of Slovakia and the permanent mission of the Slovak Republic to the European Union for their support in organizing the visit.

For more details see: <http://democraticbelarus.eu/currentactivities>

Politics

Belarusian Pastor Arrested For Second Time in A Week

Belarusian police on June 3 arrested Antoni Bakun, the pastor of a Minsk-based Protestant community called the St. John Divine Church, Belapan and the "Nasha Niva" weekly reported. Bakun was arrested while conducting a religious service and subsequently placed in a pretrial detention center.



He is reportedly to stand trial on a charge of "organizing and conducting a religious meeting without permission." Bakun was arrested on the same charge on May 27 and fined \$290 by a court the following day.

In recent weeks, Belarusian authorities have taken action against a num-

ber of Christian believers, expelling a U.S. Protestant minister and annulling the residency permit of Polish member of an Evangelical Christian church.

04/06/2007

Source: Radio Free Europe

Pro-Government Trade Union Federation Accused of Forging Signatures on Petition against EU's Move to Suspend Belarus' Trade Benefits

Two major international organizations have accused the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) of forging foreign labor union leaders' signatures on a petition against the suspension by the European Union of Belarus' trade benefits.

Guy Ryder, secretary general of the International Trade Union Confederation, and John Monks, secretary general of the European Trade Union Confederation, have leveled the accusation against the pro-government trade union federation in their letter to EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mendelsohn.

In the letter, the international trade union leaders say that the FTUB was ordered by Minsk to win international support for its drive against the suspension of the benefits scheduled to take effect on June 21.

"The government clearly hoped thereby to persuade the International Labour Conference to support their position and for the ILO to inform the EU that matters have improved in Belarus, such that the EU decision should be reversed," Messrs. Ryder and Monks say

in the letter.

The FTUB claimed last month that its petition against the suspension of the benefits had been signed by trade union organizations representing 16 countries, including the Moscow-headquartered International Association of Metal Workers' Trade Unions (MOP) that affiliates Belarusian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, Moldovan, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian labor unions.

MOP Chairman Nikolai Shatokhin denied the report, saying that neither he nor other representatives of the organization had signed the appeal.

"Several of those union leaders whose signatures were included at the end of the statement have now stated categorically that they did not sign the statement and do not agree with it. Their apparent signatures were in fact scanned from other documents they had signed (such as participants' lists from meetings held in Belarus) and copied into the FTUB statement," Messrs. Ryder and Monks say in the letter.

"We are informing you of these devel-

opments in order to ensure that you are aware of the evidence of fraud in the FTUB statement, particularly in case you are in touch with member states that may not realise that this is not a genuine trade union statement. In a more general sense we felt it useful to appraise you of the extremes to which the Lukashenko government appears prepared to go in order to escape the application of the GSP Decision," the letter reads.

FTUB representatives declined to comment on the letter.

The suspension of the benefits comes as punishment against Minsk for failure to implement the International Labor Organization's recommendations.

The ILO Commission of Inquiry adopted them in late 2004 after considering a 200-page report compiled by a special commission formed to probe the Belarusian government's alleged interference in the activities of trade unions.

07/06/2007

Source: BelaPAN

Finkevich Denied Early Release

On June 4, political prisoner Artur Finkevich was denied an early release, Nasha Niva informs. Finkevich was asked to sign results of a commission session held on March 14, 2007. It is said in the document that conditional early

release cannot be granted to Artur Finkevich, as he was a malicious violator of discipline.

In May 2006 Artur Finkevich was sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment for doing graffiti. Since the summer of 2006 he was serving a sentence in Mahilyou special detention center.

07/06/2007

Source: Charter'97

Politics

UCPB Calls for Andrei Klimau's Release

Andrey Klimau, a member of the UCP national committee and the former MP, is in prison since April 3. It is his third time in prison for political reasons. This time many view it as a political assassination. Andrey Klimau has been in prison sick quarters for a couple of weeks already for serious heartaches. The authorities have no legal grounds to keep him in prison because Andrey Klimau is not charged of anything officially. At the same time the prosecu-



tors' extended the term of his detention up to 3 months more. Thus we have all the grounds to say that the authorities want not only psychologically break but physically destroy the politician. The United Civil Party demands an immediate release of political prisoner Andrei Klimau. The violation he is said to make, does not require imprisonment. The UCPB is ready to guarantee that Mr. Klimau will not leave the country until the investigation is completed. The United Civil Party urges the interna-

tional community, human rights organisations, international organisations, and foreign embassies in Belarus to be more active in demanding to release Andrey Klimau and all the other political prisoners. A threat to Klimau's health and life is dangerous.

The United Civil Party calls upon all those not indifferent to send letters to Lukashenko's administration demanding the release of Klimau and other political prisoners.

07/06/2007

Source: ucpb.org

Valery Shchukin Fined 1,5 Million Rubles

A well-known human rights activist Valery Shchukin has been sentenced to a fine of 40 basic units (1,240,000 rubles) by a court of Peshamajski district of Vitsebsk. Besides, Valery Shchukin is to pay 250,000 rubles of moral damages for a member of the



regional election commission Tatsyana Buevich allegedly insulted by him. A 65-year-old human rights activist is charged with violation of article 189 of Criminal Code for insult of members and workers of the election commissions during the campaign for election of deputies of local Councils of the 25th convocation. Human rights activist is charged with insult of a chairman of a district commission Ala Kalesnik, a deputy chairman of the district commission Tatsyana Ukrozhanika; a member of a district commission Nadzeja Aheeva; a member of a regional commission body Tatsyana Buevich.

After elections to local Soviets which were held in Belarus on January 14, 2007, the human rights activist distributed leaflets informing that members of election commissions had been taking part in rigging election results.

Besides, the court has stated that Shchukin is to pay a fine of 170,000 rubles which he allegedly hadn't paid in 1999 for taking part in Freedom March.

08/06/2007

Source: Charter'97

UN Official Says Belarus Not Making Progress On Rights

United Nations official says Belarus has country, despite the recent release of

Adrian Severin, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva today there

Severin said "systematic" rights violations what he said was the excessive use of the legal system, and "totally disproportionate" punishments imposed on convicted criminals.

The UN representative also pointed out Belarus is the last country in Europe to apply the death penalty.



failed to reverse the decline in human rights in the several political prisoners.

Severin said "systematic" rights violations what he said was the excessive use of the legal system, and "totally disproportionate" punishments imposed on convicted criminals.

tions continue to take place in Belarus. He criticized force by Belarusian police, the lack of independence

12/06/2007

Source: Radio Free Europe

Economics

Russia and Belarus Hike Oil Export Duties



Starting today, Russia's oil export duty will amount to \$200.6 per tonne, in line with a bill signed earlier by Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov. Before that the export duty amounted to \$156.4 per tonne. The duty on light oil

products will step up to \$147.5 per tonne today, and that on dark oil products to \$79.4 per tonne, up from \$117.7 and \$63.4 per tonne respectively. Belarus has also decided to raise its oil export duties to Russia's levels from June 1, 2007.

01/06/2007

Source: RBC

Belarus, Kazakhstan Decide to Increase Trade to \$1 bln in 2008

Belarus and Kazakhstan decided to increase trade turnover to one billion dollars in 2008, thus trebling it from the 2006 level. This task was set forth during the 4th meeting of the Belarusian-Kazakhstani inter-governmental commission on trade and economic cooperation in Minsk on Wednesday. It is planned that this aim will be reached, first of all, by expanding and developing bilateral contacts, Belarusian co-chairman of the commission, Deputy Prime Minister Ivan Bambiza said.

"Today we should go from simple export of goods to the joint production of those goods," the Belarusian vice-premier told. "We have been convinced that Belarusian machinery is as good as the European one," head of the Kazakhstani delegation, Emergencies Minister Viktor Khrapunov added.

In his words, Kazakhstan is seeking to create joint ventures for manufacturing Belarusian machinery. During the meeting of the commission, the parties paid specific attention to the delivery to and transit via Belarus of electricity and oil from Kazakhstan. "If Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia are able to solve all issues on the setting up of the Eurasian Economic Space, many problems will go away themselves," Khrapunov said, adding, "In this case, electricity and oil from Kazakhstan may be transported to Belarus without any limitations." With this in mind, Bambiza said the first important step forward has already been taken. Late in May, some countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, signed an agreement on the establishment of a common electrical power market.

07/06/2007

Source: Kazinform

Gazprom Pays for Part of Belarus Pipeline Ahead of Schedule

Russia's state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom Monday paid \$625 million to Belarus, the first 12.5% stake in gas pipeline operator Beltransgaz ahead of schedule, Belarusian state news agency BELTA said.

"OAO Gazprom paid the first stake ahead of schedule," BELTA said, citing a statement by the government property management agency. "The \$625 million ... will go to the republican national development fund." Belarus said the shares would be transferred to Gazprom on June 15.

The May 18 deal to buy 50% in Beltransgaz for \$2.5 million in four equal installments till 2010, acquiring a 12.5% stake in Beltransgaz at each stage, is expected to tighten Gazprom's operational control of the Yamal-Europe pipeline, so far its main export route to Central Europe running through Belarus.



The Russian energy giant said earlier that the Belarusian pipeline was worth \$3.3 billion, well below the \$5 billion valuation Belarus had long insisted on. The final deal was largely concluded late last year as Russia and Belarus became embroiled in an oil and gas dispute after Gazprom, keen to bring former Soviet republics in line with market rates for energy supplies, doubled the gas price to \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters.

05/06/2007

Source: BBJ.hu

Russia Urges Belarus to Repay Gas Debts by End of Year

Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov told journalists in Minsk on June 11 that Belarus needs to pay its gas debts to Russia by the end of this year, Belapan reported. Surikov said that under a deal on 2007 gas deliveries signed by Belarus and Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom on December 31, 2006, Minsk was required to pay just 55 percent of its gas bills in the first six months of 2007. At the same time, Surikov noted that Belarusian companies have paid the Belarusian Finance Ministry in full for gas supplies in 2007, and expressed confidence that the ministry has therefore "accumulated" funds to repay the debt to Russia. Last month Belarusian First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka said that Belarus owes Russia some \$400 million for gas supplies.

12/06/2007

Source: Interfax

Politics

Belarus Signs Pact for Nuclear Equipment



June 11 Russia's Exim-bank is ready to offer \$2

billion to finance a nuclear plant in Belarus, the Russian ambassador to

the country said.

The line of credit would be used to buy material from Power Machines, which manufactures nuclear power plant equipment, Interfax reported Monday. Russian ambassador Alexander Surikov said during a news conference in Minsk the Belarusian Energy Ministry signed a one-year contract with Power Machines.

Belarus officials said the country was planning to commission the plant's first unit in 2016-17 and the second in 2020.

The price of the project is between \$3 billion and \$4 billion.

12/06/2007

Source: Earthtimes

Military Expenditures Increase in Belarus Noticed by Foreign Analysts

According to the Stockholm institute of peace problems (SIPRI), the Belarusian military expenditures have increased by 56% over the last two years thus manifesting one of the world's highest indicators. And the American analytical center "Forecast International" remarks that Belarus is among the top arms exporting countries.

In their report the analysts of the SIPRI represent the long-term as well as the short-term development trends of arms expenditures in different countries all over the world, the Radio Svaboda informs. The highest development trend of military potential within the short period of time has been demonstrated by the post-soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Belarus. The third rank is assigned to the USA, and the forth –to Russia.

In the interim the American strategic center Forecast International in its latest research points out the phenomenon of the isolated from Europe Belarus. According to analyst Den Darling, Belarus is a considerably hard case for the researchers.

"Despite of the doubtful Luka-

shenka's regime the country actually hasn't participated in any war



with its neighbors and haven't got any aggressive territorial projects and so far as is known it neither gives shelter to terrorist groups nor gives them the possibility of conducting military exercises inside the country", Den Darling says.

The analyst also pays attention to the fact that the military potential growth is to be seen in Belarus. Now 30 enterprises and 15 planning and surveying departments of the State Military Industrial Committee are working for the Belarusian military sector. Belarus actively exports weapons to the so-called refugee countries.

Recently A. Lukashenka has devel-

oped close relations with China, Iran, and Venezuela. Several months ago

Minsk officially offered Karakas "surface-to-air" missile systems' deliveries through the Tetraedr firm, the western expert writes.

Reasoning of Den Darling from the Forecast International is commented by Belarusian military analyst Alyaksandr Aleksin.

"In this case the automatic anti-missile systems are meant here. Belarus specialized on this type of goods even in the Soviet times. These goods are also available only with the United States, Great Britain and France. These goods are offered by Belarus all over the world, including China, Iran and Venezuela. I mean the computer software for controlling the antimissile systems in those countries. Belarus also offers upgrade of the outdated "surface-to-air" missile systems such as "C-125" and "Pyachora". Obviously it is difficult to modernize them completely but with the help of Belarus these systems' performance can be sufficiently improved", Alesin reported.

13/06/2007

Source: SIPRI

EU and Belarus

EU External Relations Commissioner Meets with Belarusian Deputy foreign Minister in Brussels



Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Union (EU)'s external relations commissioner, met with Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Varanetski in Brussels on June 8.

"In the center of their discussion was, of course, the dialogue between the EU and the Belarusian authorities," Christiane Hohmann, spokeswoman for Ms. **Ferrero-Waldner**, told [BelaPAN](#). *"Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner basically explained what we*

expect from the Belarusian side to be able to move ahead. We engage with Belarus, which, of course, is our intention, but certain steps have to be taken before that's possible. These steps should include progress in the field of democracy, freedom of expression and the press, and the release of political prisoners."

"Certain progress has to be made and it has to be considerable progress," Ms. Hohmann noted, adding that Mr. Varanetski *"took note"* of the European Union's position.

The spokeswoman also said that the deputy minister raised the issue of the forthcoming removal Belarus from the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). According to her, the decision of suspend the GSP benefits for Belarus, which is to come into force on June 21, had

been initiated by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the possibility of revoking it depends on the ILO. *"We are not really the right address of that,"* Ms. Hohmann said. *"As far as we understand, the problem is*



that the ILO conditions have to be fulfilled."

08/06/2007

Source: BelaPAN

Belarusian Delegation Discussed Energy Problems with the European Commission

Belarusian delegation discussed energy issues with the European Commission's representatives. As the Belarusian Foreign Ministry press-service informs, the meeting took place in Brussels, June 12. The delegation was headed by energy deputy Minister Mihail Mihadziuk.



"The participants discussed several issues that deal with the EU-Belarus relations in the frames of the Baku Initiative, and also the security of energy supplies transit through the Belarusian territory, as well as energy sector's reforms and use of renewable sources of energy", the Belarusian Foreign Ministry press-service informs.

It was agreed to organize a series of consultations in the future.

The 'Baku Initiative' is a policy dialogue aimed at enhancing energy cooperation between the European Union and countries of the Black Sea, the Caspian Basin and their neighbours. The initiative began as a result of the conclusions reached at the Energy Ministerial Conference which took place in Baku on 13 November 2004.

Established as a new cooperation initiative, it is aiming at the progressive integration of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea region energy markets with the EU markets. Such a process implies progressively converging energy policies on issues of trade, transit and environmental rules as well as standards.

14/06/2007

Source: naviny.by

Culture

Lyavon Volski: the Voice of Revolution

The front man of the rock band "N.R.M." inspires the young generations of Belarusians



What does it take to make a revolution? If it has to take place in the hearts of a generation, then basically all you need is a guitar. Some talent won't hurt either. And if you have just a fraction of Lyavon Volski's charisma, then it should be enough to rock the nation.

But who exactly is this person with the curly ginger hair and the high-pitched voice? Lyavon Volski is more than just a song performer. He is a musician and an artist, an essayist and a poet, a comedian and a public figure with mighty influence. Born in 1965, Lyavon Volski has already brought up the second, if not the third generation of his fans. They still see Lyavon as a teenager pal although his older admirers already have their own children. Facing the court, the activists of "Malady Front" youth opposition organisation told the journalists that these were Volski's songs, which brought them into politics. As ever before, their idol is full of new ideas and energy like a small nuclear power plant.

Lyavon Volski was born into an artistic family. His father, Artur Volski, was a well-known Belarusian poet and writer. Lyavon studied in the College of Art in Minsk, where he founded the rock band „Mroya“ ('the dream') in 1981. The

Belarusian-language songs caused suspicion, rock music was seen as dangerous, KGB people were watching. Suddenly "perestroika" broke out, and "Mroya" got the chance to tour the country with its concerts. The popularity grew as an avalanche. In 1989 "Mroya's" hit "He'll Be Back" topped the chart of "Belaruskaya Maladziozhnaya", the biggest Belarusian radio station for the youth at that time.

The Soviet Union broke up in 1991, burying "Mroya" under the debris of the collapsed ideology. The new country was born, and it needed new music. „Mroya“ quietly seized to exist in 1994, giving way to „N.R.M.“ (sometimes translated as „Narodnaya Respublika Mroya“ – ,the People's Republic of Mroya'). It immediately became the sound and the voice of the new generation, which revolted against the comeback of the Soviet ghosts, embodied by president Lukashenka. Gone were opera-like vocals and the electronic keyboards from the 80's. It was the time for rugged sounds of electric guitars and metal notes in the voice. The texts changed as well – they became more sarcastic and



more furious. "N.R.M." was really pissed off, just as the whole younger generation, which felt it was being robbed of their freedom. Volski sang about the zombie

army, creeping into the houses of Belarusians ("Zombie") and about the spirit of time: "I've got a disgusting feeling in my soul, and I lack words to express it" ("La-la-la").

"N.R.M." openly mocked the regime, which reinstalled the Soviet-type state symbols. The emblem of "N.R.M." closely resembled the "new" Belarusian coat of arms, but the country's shape was changed to Jolly Roger. "N.R.M." fans picked up the idea and made the symbol of their club similar to that of BRSM, the pro-Lukashenka youth organiza-



tion – with the same Jolly Roger motive. All this was highly irritating for the authorities.

As the years passed, it became more and more obvious, that the authoritarian rule has settled in for a long time. With many artists retreating into the "inner immigration" and quitting music, "N.R.M." was doing its best to cheer up the free-thinking public. "I'm breathing the air of freedom", Volski sang in "The Balloon", the opposition anthem of the new century. "N.R.M." often performed at opposition rallies and, as a result, was banned from radio and TV stations in Belarus. Not that it prevented "N.R.M." to participate in the protests of March, 2006 in Minsk.

For the first time the "N.R.M." song made it to the top of a music chart 18 years ago. Today, their song "Miensk and Minsk" is on the 1st

Culture

Liavon Volski, continuation...

place again – according to rating of “Tuzin Hitou” (‘a dozen hits’), the major web-portal dedicated to Belarusian music. “We live by halves in two different cities – Minsk and Miensk” Volski sings, reflecting upon the ideologically biased Minsk and the free-thinking Miensk (Miensk is the old name of the Belarusian capital).

For Lyavon Volski being the front man of the most famous rock band in Belarus is just not enough. Parallel to „N.R.M.” he has launched another music project “Zet”, a fusion between performance art and politically charged rock. The musicians hide their faces behind white masks or wrap themselves into bandages like mummies. The songs of “Zet” are gloomy and politically aggressive.



Another music project, also the creation of Volski, is called “Krambambulya”. Opposite to “N.R.M.” and “Zet”, “Krambambulya” is innocent in its political context. It is aimed at a larger public, which likes to party and have a good drink. The music of “Krambambulya” is an easy ska hooliganism, its lyrics are often a mix of Belarusian and Russian (called “trasyanka”). The name of

the project derives from the old Belarusian alcoholic drink. In fact, the music of “Krambambulya” has become so popular, that the same strong drink reappeared in liquor shops after centuries of oblivion. The economic success of the trademark, however, didn’t seem to have had much effect on Lyavon Volski’s well-being, who is still driving a 13-year-old “Subaru”.

Calling Volski the idol of the Belarusian rock would not be enough. He is also a poet, with two books of his verses on a shelf. He is a writer, who publishes absurdist stories and visionary essays in *Nasha Niva*, the oldest Belarusian newspaper, now driven into the deep underground.

Lyavon Volski, is no novice with pencils and brushes. In the early 90’s his comics were published in “Byarozka”, the leading Belarusian magazine for teenagers. In 2007 Volski remembered his old hobby. His comic strip “Bulbman” (‘potatoman’) appears weekly in “Nasha Niva”, showing adventures of the Belarusian superhero and his faithful piglet assistant.

Volski is also an experienced media showman. In the early 90’s he hosted a popular radio show „Kvadrakola“ (‘squarecircle’) which was broadcast by „Belaruskaya Maladziozhnaya“ station. Perhaps, when Belarus becomes democratic, Volski might take a shot at conquering TV. This will be another Belarus, in any case. But however the country changes, Volski will remain constant.

As he sings in one of old hits of “Mroya”, “I’m ready to die on stage, I’m a rock musician”.

Photo: <http://nrsm.org/>

If you would like to listen to the songs of Lyavon Volski, try to visit “Tuzin Hitou” (<http://music.fromby.net/>) If you mark “Miensk i Minsk” in the list and then vote, you will be able to download the song (login: tuzin password: 117vabnotau)

You can also download the video of the “N.R.M.” song “Gadziuchnik” (‘the nest of vipers’) here: http://nrsm.org/video/nrm_hadzucznik.avi

More links here:

“N.R.M.”: <http://nrm.by.com/>

“Krambambulya”: <http://www.krambambulya.com/>



Funny pictures by Liavon Volski

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