

# Belarus Headlines

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Office for a Democratic  
Belarus

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### HEAD OF THE EU PARLIAMENT DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH BELARUS BOGDAN KLICH: AMNESTY IN JULY IS A TEST FOR POLITICAL GOOD WILL OF MINSK

Interview with the EU Parliament delegation for relations with Belarus head (series: *Face to face with Europe*)

Bogdan Klich does not mind to start his day talking about Belarus even if he is on vacation with his family. He is one of those who consider the phrase *Belarusian Parliament* to be a euphemism and insists that the nature of the Belarusian regime is dictatorial. Polish MEP takes his responsibilities seriously and is consistent in his statements and decisions.

- Mr. Klich, do you like Belarusians?

- Of course. Poles and Belarusians have strong ties and very much in common both culturally and historically. We have similar fates as nations: in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries we were oppressed. Both Poles and Belarusians are proud of their heritage and achievements; neither of us is too pragmatic. Sure, I like the people of Belarus and feel close to them, which has always been the reason for me to engage in the dialogue with them.

- Have you been often in Belarus?

- Oh yes, but some time ago. My political contacts with this country started in the mid 90s, when, together with Stanislav Shushkevich and a Russian politician Galina Starovoytova, I co-organised a seminar on democratic per-



spectives for Belarus. That was actually my first meeting with the opposition when what I learnt about the situation in Belarus as a student. This meeting confronted the reality and awoke my interest in the country.

Later on I promoted the dialogue with Belarus in *Zagranica Group*, an association of Polish non-governmental organizations that through various projects transferred the democratic know-how. This period added up to my knowledge about Belarus, its people, opposition in the country. In 2002-2003 as the deputy head of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Polish Parliament I helped to organise the visits of Belarusian democratic opposition and the widows of the disappeared to Poland. The most fruitful and interesting meetings we had in

Belarus were in 2003 when with a group of Polish parliamentarians we observed local elections and travelled a lot through the country.

Last time I was allowed to come to Belarus was 2004 before my election to the European Parliament.

- Would you describe the work of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Belarus that you head as effective?

- Well, paradoxically enough, the biggest success of the Delegation is a non-paper that was presented by the Commission in November 2006. Our strategic goal was to persuade the EU Council and the Commission to take a more assertive approach to Belarus. Frankly speaking, the means of the Parliament to interfere in domestic affairs are limited, the Coun-

## Interview with Bogdan Klich

cil and the Commission to take a more assertive approach to Belarus. Frankly speaking, the means of the Parliament to interfere in domestic affairs are limited, the Council and the Commission have more instruments. Their non-paper clearly illustrates the spectacular prospects of co-operation, draws a tempting road map of the future relations. And condition for them.

- Recently UN Human Rights Council abolished the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus. Could something similar happen with the Delegation?

- Actually, the case with the Delegation might be that its policy would change. After the proposal of the Council and Commission, meetings with the Belarusian ambassador to Brussels Vladimir Senko, split in the democratic camp in Belarus, decision of the Administration to establish a representation office of the EU Commission in Minsk, we began to think about sending a fact-finding mission to the country and wouldn't exclude a dialogue with authorities. If the delegation is to go to Minsk, we would have a broad agenda, meetings with both wings of the democratic camp, representatives of NGOs, newly created parties like the Green party, as well as representatives of the Administration of President and, so to say, Belarusian parliamentarians.

We would like to learn more about the

situation in Belarus, meet people that we have never had a chance to meet. It depends on Belarus though. In the last years we were either refused visas or not allowed to visit. Moreover, Minsk should make another significant step towards the West. We could test its good political will already in July – whether Belarusian authorities will use the next amnesty to release political prisoners.

- Don't you think Minsk has already started this dialogue?

- There have been several declarations made, for instance concerning the new policy and openness towards the West. But these are declarations. There were first small political steps taken that seem to confirm the statements, and the most important was the positive reply to the opening of the EU Commission representation. But these steps are still below the level of our expectations. The non-paper clearly shows that we need improvement in at least 4 areas: release of political prisoners and creating opportunities for a public dialogue – which is freedom of speech, assembly and association. Without these improvements we can't talk about cooperation.

- Would you bring your family to

*I like the people of Belarus and feel close to them, which has always been the reason for me to engage in the dialogue with them*

*Belarus on vacation?*

- I would really love to. It would be a pleasure to spend a week in the Belarusian part of Belovezhskaya Pushcha. I also heard a lot of the Lake District in Belarus. You have a very beautiful country!

Bogdan Klich is a Polish Member of the European Parliament and the chairman of Delegation for relations with Belarus since 2004.

Born in 1960, Krakow. Krakow Medical University, Masters in the History of Art, Jagiellonian University (1987). Was Advisor to the Chief Negotiator of the Republic of Poland with the European Union (1989-1999), was Deputy Minister for National Defence (1999-2000), Member of Parliament of the Republic of Poland, Polish representative and member of the Policy Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2001-2004). Member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies, London.

**Prepared by Maryna Rakhlei for the Office for a Democratic Belarus**

21/06/2007

## Belarusian Movie Evening in Brussels

On July 12, 19.00 the Hanse-Office and the Office for a Democratic Belarus would like to invite you to a Belarusian movie evening

You will see:

“**Monologues**” a documentary by Aleh Dashkevich, which describes a day of life of a boxer and a journalist. Two inner monologues of people who try to find their own way in authoritarian Belarus (length: 30 min,



language: Belarusian, subtitles: English). The second movie will be “**Colour of Love**” a comedy by Aliaksandr Kananovich (year: 2005, length: 20 min, languages: Belarusian, Russian subtitles: English).

The film is set in Belarus at the end of the 19th century. Leonard, the young and poor Russian-speaking aristocrat, wants to marry the daughter of a Belarusian “leech tycoon”. However, there are

many obstacles on the way to Leonard's happiness: a flying cow, an amorous lady, and the intolerant father-in-law.

**Free entrance and snacks** Directions:

Avenue Palmerston 20

B-1000 Brussels

Please, confirm your participation

by email: [info@democraticbelarus.eu](mailto:info@democraticbelarus.eu)

or by telephone: + 32 2 401 61 41 (42)

## Politics and Society

### Bush Extends U.S. Property Blocking Order against Belarus' President & Other Officials

President George W. Bush extended a national emergency declaration Thursday involving Belarus that enables the U.S. government to freeze any property in the United States owned by Belarus' president and selected other officials.

Bush's declaration of last June mentioned the undermining of the former Soviet republic's "democratic processes or institutions" and

"human rights abuses related to political repression, including detentions and disappearances.

Specifically, the declaration criticized March 2006 elections won by President Alexander Lukashenko, which the United States and others decried as fraudulent. Lukashenko had organized a referendum in 2004 to allow him to run for a constitutionally forbidden third term.

Lukashenko and his chief deputy, his justice and internal affairs ministers and other senior officials are named in the blocking order. It means they lose access to any property they own within the United States or in the possession of U.S. citizens or companies outside the United States.

15/06/2007

Source: PR-inside.com

### UN Rights Council Drops Belarus and Cuba Monitors

Reports say the United Nations' Human Rights Council has agreed that Belarus and Cuba will be taken off a list of countries whose rights records receive special scrutiny.

At a meeting of the 47-nation council in Geneva, independent monitors who studied the human rights records of Belarus and Cuba were not reappointed.



Russia is reported to have led demands for the end of the mandate of the monitor for Belarus.

Belarus and Cuba are accused of human rights abuses, particularly of political rights.

Reports said the council has backed continued annual human rights reports on places including Haiti, Somalia, Congo, Sudan, Cambodia, North Korea, and the

Palestinian territories.

The Human Rights Council last year replaced the UN Human Rights Commission, which was widely criticized for ignoring rights abuses in some of its members.

But the new council has also come in for criticism, most recently when it decided in March to end scrutiny of Iran and Uzbekistan.

19/06/2007

Source: Reuters

### Prosecutor's Office Demands Tougher Sentence for Shchukin

The Prosecutor's office of Pershamajski district of Vitsebsk has appealed against a verdict to a well-known human rights activist Valery Shchukin, demanding to remand the case for a new trial, the human rights activist told.

A well-known human rights activist Valery Shchukin was sentenced to a fine of 40 basic units (1,240,000 rubles) by the court of Pershamajski district of Vitsebsk. Besides, Valery Shchukin is to pay 250,000 rubles of moral damages. Valery Shchukin had been accused of inflicting moral damage to a member of the regional election commission Tastyana Buevich.

A 65-year-old human rights activist is charged with violation of article 189 of Criminal Code - insult of members and workers of the election commissions during the campaign for election of deputies of local Councils of the 25th convocation now.

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

"The Prosecutor's office brought up a criminal action against me without any grounds for that. Initially they brought up a criminal case for "damaging the interests of the state and society". And I was tried for alleged insult of election commission members. Now the prosecutor's office is trying to get out of a scrape. The sentence is most likely to be reversed," Valery Shchukin said commenting on appealing against the verdict by the prosecutor's office.

21/06/2007

Source: Charter'97



## Politics and Society

### Global Watchdog Includes Belarus in 10-Country List of "Worst Press Freedom Abusers"

In its survey looking at the situation in 195 countries, the US-based global human rights watchdog has blasted the Belarusian government's move to pass a bill criminalizing efforts to "discredit Belarus in the eyes of international organizations and foreign governments" and introducing a two-year

prison sentence as punishment for the offence. "The same prison terms apply to those convicted of distributing "false information" about Belarus' political, economic, social, or international situation," Freedom House says.

The watchdog also has accused Minsk

of moving to control the Internet, in particular regularly block the websites of independent media outlets, opposition parties and non-governmental organizations.

24/06/2007

Source: BelaPAN

### Opposition Activists Condemn Report Aired by Belarusian TV

The channel reported that Barys Haretski, a leader of an unregistered youth group called Malady Front, and three members of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) had been detained at the Polish border. Two laptop computers with files containing information on explosive devices and the perpetration of terror attacks were said to have been seized from the activists.

As Anastasiya Palazhanka, a Malady



Front member, told, Sunday's report featured footage of Mr. Haretski's arrest six months ago. "Barys Haretski was indeed detained at the border and had his laptop seized then. There was no detention on June 23 or 24. The more so as Mr. Haretski was to leave for Strasbourg on Sunday to

attend an international conference of non-governmental organizations under the Council of Europe. The conference is held between June 25 and 29," Ms. Polazhanka said.

BPF leader Vintsuk Vyachorka de-

scribed the report as a "provocation." "This is how secret services and authorities are taking their revenge on the BPF. I also believe that this is the government's nervous response to the abolition of Belarus' preferences in trade with the European Union and a signal that the period of liberalization is over," the politician said.

The First Channel press office declined to comment on the report.

25/06/2007

Source: naviny.by

### Belarusian Oil Executive Charged With Corruption

Prosecutors in Belarus say they have charged the former head of the country's state-run oil processing company with corruption and other offenses, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported.

Belarusian Prosecutor-General Pyotr Miklashevich said Alyaksandr Barouski, who headed the Belarusian State Petrochemical Industry Concern, Belnaftakhim, had been charged with embezzlement, abuse of office, and disclosing state secrets.

Miklashevich told a press conference in Minsk that the charges were related to crude and petroleum deliveries.

Barouski was arrested last month along with several other heads of state-run and private companies.

Belnaftakhim accounts for more than one-fourth of Belarus's exports.

In a separate case, Miklashevich said two officers in Belarus's KGB and one police officer had been arrested and charged with taking bribes.

25/06/2007

Source: Radio Free Europe

### Amnesty Postponed for Later Period

The draft law on amnesty is being studied by the presidential administration for a few months already, Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau told while speaking in the Chamber of Representatives. The minister explained the reason for delay: "There is no understanding in presidential administration on exact definition of certain categories of citizens who could be granted amnesty".

The minister did not specify with which categories of citizens the administration has no clarity.

Earlier unofficial sources informed that the amnesty would be timed to July 3, the official state holiday of the Republic of Belarus.

26/06/2007

Source: Charter'97

## Politics and Society

### Belarusian Authorities Block Initiative to Amend Labour-Contract System



The Central Election Commission (TsVK) on June 26 denied registration to a group that hoped to change the country's fixed-term labour-contract system, Belapan reported. The

group -- led by Henadz Fyadynich, leader of the Belarusian Union of Electronics Industry Workers -- needed TsVK registration to launch a campaign to initiate changes to labor laws that would scrap the fixed-term contract requirement for employees. The group planned to collect 50,000 signatures, which would make it possible to put the issue on the agenda of the Chamber of Representatives, Belarus's lower legislative chamber. The TsVK argued that the group's founding conference

conference in May was attended by 246 people, while at least 248 were required for the 495-strong group to be registered. The TsVK also said the changes to labour laws proposed by the group are inconsistent with the constitution and other regulations. Fyadynich told journalists later the same day that he will continue pushing amendments to the contract system, which he described as "slave-like." President Alyaksandr Lukashenka introduced a short-term contract system for employees of state-owned businesses in 2004, replacing the previous life-term one. The system has been extensively criticized by the Belarusian opposition and independent trade unionists, who assert that the government uses it to dismiss independent union members and opposition political activists.

27/06/2007

Source: Radio Svaboda

### Venice Commission of Council of Europe to Examine Opposition's "Small Constitution"

The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe will examine the "small constitution," a document that was adopted at the May 26-27 Congress of Pro-democratic Forces.

Thomas Markert, deputy secretary of the Venice Commission, told a delegation of Belarusian opposition parties and NGOs about this in Strasburg this week, said Katsyaryna Tkachenka, spokeswoman for the United Civic Party.

The "small constitution" was drawn up by the National Pro-democratic cabinet established by a group of Belarusian opposition parties and



NGOs known as United Pro-democratic Forces. It is a draft constitution for a period of transition from Belarus' present authoritarian rule to democracy, its authors claim.

The document was submitted to the Council of Europe this past April.

Ms. Tkachenka said that the Belarusian delegation was scheduled to meet with PACE President Rene van der Linden on June 27.

The Venice Commission is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters. It is composed of independent experts who have achieved eminence through their experience in democratic institutions or by their contribution to the enhancement of law and political science. Belarus is an associated member of the commission.

28/06/2007

Source: BelaPAN

## Economics

### Belarus Joins Burma as EU Trade Outcast

Belarus at midnight on Thursday (21 June) became the second ever country to be kicked off the EU's 36-year old "GSP" trade scheme, but some EU states believe the move is ill-judged.

The suspension of Belarus from the 1971 Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) on trade will see extra tariffs of up to 3 percentage points imposed on imports to the EU of products such as forestry and textile goods.

The move comes after the Geneva-based International Labour Organisation (ILO) said Minsk had fulfilled just four of 12 necessary pro-trade union reforms, with the extra tariffs set to cost the country around \$400 million a year.

Asian dictatorship Burma in 1997 was the only other country ever to have faced GSP sanctions, despite the fact that other GSP beneficiaries - such as Uzbekistan - have worse workers' rights records than Belarus.

The GSP suspension is reversible, but it is much harder to get back into the system than to stay in: the months-long process would involve a new ILO report, a new European Commission recommendation and a new EU

state decision.

Minsk in a statement said the "short-sighted step taken by the EU towards its immediate neighbour affects in the first place the interests of ordinary Belarusian citizens" and called for the EU to "reverse it immediately."

Belarus has also queried Brussels' claim the decision was a purely "technical" process based on ILO compliance. "It was a political decision - the ILO said we made progress, but this was not taken into account," a diplomat said.

The position has been echoed by Belarus' EU neighbours, Latvia, Poland and Lithuania, who had fought the move at EU-level, saying the Belarusian nomenklatura's income comes from arms and energy sales - not covered by GSP.

An EU official said that close personal ties between senior ILO and EU officials have helped Brussels get the kind of ILO reports it wants, with other issues such as political prisoners also impacting the reading of ILO texts.

"It's well known that if they had released all the political prisoners,

things would have been different," the EU contact said.

First millionaire

Ordinary Belarusians live on \$170 a month. But Polish daily Dziennik reports the country's tax authorities this week saw an unnamed Belarus citizen post an income of \$9 million - the first official millionaire in the country's history.

The US state department believes that president Aleksander Lukashenko has skimmed off a personal fortune of over \$1 billion, part of which had been stashed in Serbia but is now kept in unknown locations.

Another Polish paper, Rzeczpospolita, writes that senior Belarus official Viktor Sheiman could be posted to Venezuela in order to transfer Lukashenko's fortune to Caracas, should the Belarusian president one day seek asylum.

"Our number one interest in Venezuela is in the energy sector," the Belarusian diplomat said, calling the Rzeczpospolita article "fantastic speculation."

21/06/2007 Source: EU Observer

### Belgazprombank Raises \$35-Billion Syndicated Loan

Belgazprombank, a Minsk-based financial institution in which Russia's natural gas giant Gazprom and Gazprombank hold a majority stake, has drawn a \$35-million syndicated loan for financing trade.

As a source at the bank told the loan was arranged by Germany's Bayern LB and Russia's Gazprombank and Vneshtorgbank. Contributions were made by banks in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Latvia, the United States, Hungary, Slovenia, Portugal, Russia, Germany and



Britain.

The loan, which has been extended for a period of one year and can be prolonged

for another year, is to be used to finance trade transactions of Belgazprombank's major clients.

Founded by a group of private stockholders under the name of Ekorazvitiye in 1990, the bank was renamed

Olimp in 1993 and Belgazprombank after Gazprom acquired the controlling interest in 1997. Britain's The Banker included Belgazprombank in the top 50 fastest-developing banks in Central Europe and the CIS in 2004.

The bank has been servicing all operations of Gazprom in Belarus since 2003. It has branches in all the five regions of the country.

27/06/2007

Source: BelaPAN

## EU and Belarus

### OSCE Minsk Office Organizes Seminar on Alternative Energy Sources



Creating legal conditions for developing renewable alternative energy sources is the focus of a seminar organized by the OSCE Office and the National Law Drafting Centre in Minsk today.

It brought together key stakeholders from the energy and economics sectors, environmental experts and regional policy-makers.

"We support the development of policies in Belarus on renewable alterna-

tive energy sources," said Ambassador Ake Peterson, the Head of the OSCE Office.

"All initiatives in this respect should be welcomed, and close consultations with academics, civil society and foreign partners are needed."

Belarus is highly dependent on imported oil and gas, and is now eager to diversify energy sources as well as to increase energy efficiency.

The OSCE Office in Minsk is developing two more projects with the Ecological International Sakharov Environmental University in Minsk. They focus on capacity-building for the education specialists and on raising awareness of students in Minsk and the Mogilev region.

Ambassador Peterson added that the

OSCE Office stands ready to further assist the Government of Belarus in achieving its ambitious targets in the field on renewable energies, by bringing in foreign expertise and technologies.

The OSCE will also look into the possibility of launching larger scale projects related to energy security and alternative energies included in the portfolio of the Environment and Security initiative ENVSEC jointly managed with UN partners.

The National Law Drafting Centre was represented at today's seminar by Deputy Director Valery Doroshkevich.

19/06/2007

Source: Trend News Agency

### Special Rapporteur on Belarus at Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly to Visit Minsk in October

Mario Andrea Rigoni, special rapporteur on Belarus at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), will visit Minsk in October, the press office of the Council of Europe told.

On June 21, Mr. Rigoni met in Rome with Syarhey Haydukevich, the Belarusian foreign minister's special representative for relations with European parliamentary organizations.

According to the press office, Mr. Rigoni reiterated his concern about the existence of political prisoners in Belarus. Mr. Haydukevich argued that there are no political prisoners in Belarus, but there are criminals who call themselves political prisoners. Mr. Rigoni asked for the lawmaker's assistance in arranging meetings with these people during this forthcoming visit.

Mr. Haydukevich reportedly noted that the Belarusian government is ready to cooperate with the European Union. Mr. Rigoni stressed that Europe does not expect

Belarus to become a democratic country overnight, but the government could start with reforming its Criminal Code and legislative system.

In an interview with, Mr. Haydukevich, chairman of the Liberal Democratic

Party, described his meeting with Mr. Rigoni and talks at the Italian foreign ministry as "very fruitful, positive and useful."

"I'm sure that the content of my conversation with the foreign ministry's representatives would be reported to their leadership," he said.

According to Mr. Haydukevich, he will have a meeting with PACE President Rene van der Linden in Strasbourg on June 23.

23/06/2007

Source: BelaPAN





## Culture

### Uladzimir Karatkevich: Belarus as a Bestseller



Belarusian literature is a school subject which is quite easy to hate. Especially if you are a teenager, the sun is shining brightly through the classroom window, and the teacher is humming like a drowsy bee. The major source of boredom, however, is the textbook itself – an assortment of poems, prose extracts, and short biographies of the authors. The traditional piece of Belarusian literature is a constant lamentation about the „bitter fortune“ of the poor folk, accompanied by vivid verbal images of a typical Belarusian fellow – a barefooted peasant with the matted greasy hair. Perhaps such motifs were quite topical on the verge of the 19th and the 20th century. To be honest, today this image is simply not sexy.

The pastoral aesthetics has spread through the Belarusian literature like a long-lasting epidemic, rivalled, perhaps, only by the literary recollections of the World War II. Used to cliché-laden stories, the school pupils are usually quite reluctant to get their hands on the first book of the epic „The Ears of Rye under Thy Sickle“ by Uladzimir Karatkevich. However, what sounds like a good title for a kolkhoz love

story, appears to be an elaborate trap. Having once opened the book, one has a real difficulty shutting it.

Let's hear how Andrey Khadano- vich, one of the most successful modern Belarusian poets, describes his first encounter with Karatke- vich:

“It was 1989. I was 16 years old. I unfolded the freshly printed vol- ume of Uladzimir Karatkevich with the first part of “The Ears of Rye under Thy Sickle”. It was an incredible experience. I lost the feeling of time and came to my senses only after the first book had been swal- lowed. I was looking for reading its sequel just as impatiently, as today's kids crave for reading another Harry Potter book”.

“The Ears of Rye under Thy Sickle” is an exciting life story of Ales Zahorski, the young Belarusian duke, who would

later take part in the Belarusian uprising of 1863-1864 against the oppressive Russian tsarist rule. Unlike heroes of many previous books by Belarusian authors, be- wildered and naive countrymen, who feel themselves utterly un- comfortable outside of their native village, Ales Zahorski is smart and flexible, honest and brave. He is similarly skilled in riding an un- saddled horse, as in speaking French or German.

The traditional socialist realism literature would never tolerate a character like Ales Zahorski – at most he would be shown as a class

enemy. The Soviet regime had never revered for the Tsar re- gime, but the very idea of Belaru- sians rebelling against the Russian rule was nevertheless highly suspi- cious. No wonder Karatkevich had to fight censors while working on this novel.

Having turned over the last page of „The Ears of Rye under Thy Sickle“ one can't help looking for some- thing else by this author. Indeed, Karatkevich has a lot to offer. „The Wild Hunt of King Stakh“ is a novel with an aura of a Dracula hor- ror story. The narrator is a young folklorist who travels all over Bela- rus, looking for folk songs and po- ems. On a stormy night he finds himself in the ancient manor, situ- ated in the midst of vast swamps and gloomy woods in a faraway corner of the country. One night is enough to realize that the house is haunted and its owners and neighbours suffer from the old curse – the Wild Hunt, the herd of dead horsemen, who used to go after the traitors in the deep past, but now chase down fair people. The narra- tor unravels the tangle of mysteries and finds his love in the end.

The novel is a great example of Karatkevich's skill to fool the cen- sors. The Wild Hunt is often inter- preted as a subtle reference to „Pahonia“ („pursuit”), the ancient Belarusian symbol – an armed horseman, who chases away the enemy. The very mentioning of „Pahonia“ was virtually prohibited in the Soviet Union. By writing the „Wild Hunt of King Stakh“ Karat- kevich showed the old symbol of upper justice misused by villains. „I awake and think that the Wild Hunt's time is not over, until dark- ness, injustice, and wicked horror exist on this Earth,“ he writes in the conclusion. This line allows double





## Culture

### Uladzimir Karatkevich ...

reading – the Wild Hunt as the evil, or the Wild Hunt as the opposition to the evil. A metaphor which is not easy to be cracked by a censor, but quite obvious to a careful mind.



*Belarusian ancient emblem  
"Pagonia"*

Another novel by Karatkevich, „The Black Castle of Alshany“, makes Dan Brown's „The Da Vinci Code“ look as a dull screenplay. Anton Kosmich, 38, historian and a habitual bachelor, inherits a medieval book from his friend, who dies in a mysterious way. Having vowed to find the murderer, Anton sets off for the small town of Alshany, where the book was found, deciphering one ancient puzzle after another. Medieval history, the WWII events, and the present time are tied into an exciting knot of love, death and mystery. The language Karatkevich uses is not mannered, but genuine, natural, and strikingly modern. The novel presents him as one of the few Belarusian authors, who, being romantic, don't lose the touch with reality.

As talented in prose as he was, Karatkevich came into literature as a poet with his distinctive style.

Today his poetry is not less appealing than his prose – Karatkevich's poems were put into songs by „Neuro Dubel“, a punk group famous in Belarus, and by Zmitsier Wajtsiushkevich, who is a distinguished Belarusian chansonnier.

Karatkevich is also the author of a classic metaphor of Belarus as „the land under white wings“. This is a title of its book, a guide to Belarus written explicitly for Belarusians. Karatkevich created it in 1971, when the country was slipping into the era of the communistic stagnation. One cannot help noticing how many concessions Karatkevich had to make while writing „The Land under White Wings“. He mentioned the banned names of repressed Belarusian intellectuals, but couldn't name Stalin as their butcher. „There were Swedes and other rogues, but that's a long and difficult story,“ Karatkevich wrote about the invaders of the city of Mahiliou (Mogilev) in the Middle Ages. Of course, he couldn't say, that it were Russian troops, which drowned the city in blood in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

*Karatkevich died in 1984, at the age of 54. One can only guess, how his talent would develop, if he lived to see the Belarusian independence, and wouldn't be bound by the ideology and censors. Most previous Belarusian authors inspired love to Belarus, which could hardly be distinguished from pity. The love to Belarus inspired*

*by Karatkevich is more close to respect and pride. He teaches the reader to love Belarus not **in spite of**, but **because of** the way it is.*

*“There is another Belarus,” writes Andrey Khadanovich. “A virtual country, which, probably, have never existed. But you can't resist the temptation to apply for its citizenship. This is an ideal Belarus of Uladzimir Karatkevich, which is populated by the noble knights, likeable rascals, merry drunkards, and patriotic aristocrats with a talent for poetry. There is no wonder why yet another generation of Belarusians queues up for getting visas for this land”.*

**Prepared by**

**Ales Kudrytski for the Office for a Democratic Belarus**



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