

# Belarus Headlines

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Office for a Democratic  
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## “Minsk. The Sun City of Dreams” in Paris and Brussels



**Belarusian writer Artur Klinau presented his new book to the French and Belgian audience**

On November 7 – 12, 2007 the Office for a Democratic Belarus organized a literary tour of Artur Klinau, Belarusian writer and artist. The author presented his new book “Minsk. The Sun City of Dreams” in Paris and in Brussels.

Artur Klinau is a new star



of the Belarusian cultural scene, but certainly not a newcomer in the art sphere. He is an architect, conceptual artist, photographer, writer, and publisher of the

cultural magazine “pARTisan”. In his project “Minsk. The Sun City of Dreams” Artur Klinau combines literary texts with photography experiments. His ultimate goal is to present a new, unexpected image of the Belarusian capital as a city which embodies the utopian idea of the society of happiness. In 2006 “Minsk. The Sun City of Dreams” was printed in German language by the *Suhrkamp* publishing house.

The reading of the book in Paris took place on November, 7 and was organized in partnership with associations **Belprojet, Perspectives Bielorussiennes and the cultural center Maison d’Europe et d’Orient**, which hosted the event. The reading gave a start to the Month of Belarusian culture in Paris at Maison d’Europe et d’Orient. It was also the first time when translation of the „Minsk. The Sun City of Dreams“ into French was presented to the public.

On November 12 the book was presented in Brussels.

The reading took place at the **Hanse-Office**, joint representation of Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein to the European Union. Artur Klinau presented his book together with a slide show of his photos.

Majority of the cultural pro-



jects of the Office for a Democratic Belarus, including the literary tour of Artur Klinau, were possible due to the support by the Robert Bosch Foundation (Germany).

13/11/2007



## “Spark of Bravery” in Brussels

The photo exhibition “Spark of Bravery”, which was officially launched on November 8 at the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union in Brussels, gave a unique opportunity to look into faces of Belarusians who continue their struggle for democracy and freedom in the country. The event was organised by the People in Need

(Prague) and the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels).

During her trip to Belarus, photographer Alexander Polo made 15 portraits of free-thinking people, who have the courage to resist the pressure of the authorities: political activists, journalists, cultural actors,

## SPARK OF BRAVERY in Brussels



relatives of the repressed and disappeared persons.

The documentary film "Lesson of Belarusian" (2006) was also presented to the public. Miroslaw Dembinski, director of

the film, shows the everyday life and struggle of young activists of the Belarusian democratic opposition.

More than 70 people attended the event. Following the screening, a lively discussion with guests and organizers of

the event took place.

"Spark of Bravery" will remain on display at the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union in Brussels (15 Rue Caroly, 1050 Brussels (Ixelles)). The exhibition has already been shown in Prague and a vernissage in Paris is planned.



09/11/2007

## EU and Belarus

### EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner Makes Statement over Dashkevich's Trial

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner said: "I am concerned by reports of Mr Dimitri Dashkevich being fined by the Belarusian court for refusing to testify in a case against a fellow-member of an NGO, Mr Ivan Shilo.

Mr Dashkevich himself is being detained on political grounds for membership of an unregistered youth organization. This is his second condemnation and it utterly contradicts the principles and values laid down in the EU's message to Belarus which I re-

leased a year ago. I urge the Belarusian authorities to immediately release all political prisoners, including Mr Dashkevich and stop harassing members of civil society.

I emphasize again the EU's offer to Belarus to engage into a full partnership once Belarus has taken convincing and irreversible steps towards democratization and respect for human rights, including the right of the Belarusian people to freely express their views and enjoy the freedom of assembly."



12/11/2007

**Source: Press release from the European Commission**

### European Commission's Mission Visits Minsk



A European Commission's mission led by Jean-Eric Holzapfel, coordinator for Belarus at the Kiev-based Euro-

pean Commission's Delegation to Ukraine and Belarus, today begins a three-day visit to Minsk to discuss cooperation projects in the framework of the 2008 National Action Program.

According to the TACIS Office in Minsk, the mission will comprise experts from Brussels and Kiev who will meet with officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several NGOs, re-

ports Belapan.

The sides are planning to discuss the implementation of environmental projects in the framework of the 2008 National Action Program. The European Commission has allocated Euro 5 million for those projects.

19/11/2007

**Source: ERB**

## Politics and Society

### EU Diplomats Call on Belarus to Release Political Prisoners

The Slovak Embassy in Minsk has issued a statement calling on the Belarusian authorities to end their "repressive practices" against civil society, respect the human rights of Belarusians, and release all political prisoners. Slovakia acts on behalf of the EU presidency, currently held by Portugal, in Minsk, where Portugal does not have diplomatic representation. The Slovak Embassy issued the statement after a November 7 meeting between the heads of EU countries' diplomatic missions in Minsk and Alyaksandr Milinkevich, a former presidential candidate and the leader of the unregistered Movement for Freedom. Milinkevich drew attention to the situation of Alyaksandr Kazulin,

Artur Finkevich, Zmitser Dashkevich, and Andrey Klimau, all described as political prisoners. Milinkevich noted Klimau's deteriorating health, and added that Dashkevich is currently on trial behind closed doors. "The EU's local presidency expresses the deep concern of European diplomats in Minsk over the situation of Belarusians who are believed by the international human rights organizations to be political prisoners," the Slovak statement reads.

08/11/2007

Source: Radio Free Europe

### Bush Blacklists Oil Chemical Giant

The Bush administration moved Tuesday to clamp down financially on Belarus' largest oil and chemical company for allegedly being controlled by authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko.

The Treasury Department's action is against Belarusian State Concern for Oil and Chemistry and covers its offices in Germany, Latvia, Ukraine, Russia and China and its wholly owned U.S. subsidiary, Belneftekhim USA. Any assets found in the United States that belong to the company must be frozen. Americans also are prohibited from doing business with the company and its designated offices.

The government took the action under an executive order President Bush issued last year considering

what the United States called "oppression" by Lukashenko and key members of his administration.

Tuesday's action "tightens our sanctions against Lukashenko and his cronies by imposing financial sanctions against a massive conglomerate under the regime's control," said Adam Szubin, director of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, known as OFAC. The agency administers and enforces the government's financial sanctions program.

13/11/2007

Source: the Associated Press

### Belarusian Youth Activist Fined For Refusing To Testify

The district court of Shklow on November 9 fined Zmitser Dashkevich \$870 for refusing to testify against his friend. Dashkevich, who is currently serving an 18-month term for heading an unregistered organization, the Youth Front, has refused to give testimony in a similar case against another Youth Front activist, Ivan Shyla. Dashkevich claimed that the law gives him the right not to testify against himself or those close to him. The trial was held behind closed doors in the correctional facility where Dashkevich is incarcerated. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Union's commissioner for external relations and neighbourhood policy, has condemned the fine imposed on Dashkevich, adding that it "utterly contradicts the principles and values laid down in the EU's message to Belarus which I released a year ago."

13/11/2007

Source: Radio Free Europe

### Russia Responds to US Anti-Rocket Shield: Rockets in Belarus

Russia will place Iskander rockets in Belarus as a response to the US plan to install anti-rocket shield in the Central and Eastern Europe countries. The information was made public by the Russian Army's rocket and artillery commandant, general Vladimir Zaritzki.

Up to this moment, there aren't any other confirmations on discussions between the two governments, except for another similar statement made by a Belarusian general, Mikhail Puzikov, who said that Iskander rockets may be soon acquired by the national army.

This is just the latest evolution in a declaration war between

the US and Russia, centred on the anti-rocked shield to be installed in Poland and the Czech Republic. Moscow repeatedly demanded that the project is dropped.

Three weeks ago, the US Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, announced that the US may postpone the installing procedures in Poland and the Czech Republic, in case Russia co-operates.

14/11/2007

Source: Hot News.ro

## Politics and Society

### Delegation of NATO's Allied Air Component Command Headquarters Ramstein Visiting Belarus



A delegation of NATO's Allied Air Component Command Headquarters Ramstein (CC-Air HQ Ramstein) arrived in Belarus on a working visit, said the press office of the Belarusian Defence Ministry. The purpose of the November 12-14 visit is to discuss issues concerning the partnership objectives for the country's Air/Air Defence Forces in the framework of the Planning and Review Process under the Partnership for Peace program.

The guests are expected to talk with Belarusian officers about the mission of CC-Air HQ Ramstein, the doctrine and procedures of the Alliance, and some aspects of the PfP strategy, the press office said.

On November 13, the NATO delegation visited the 50th Mixed Airbase at Machulishchy near Minsk, where the group could see the Ilyushin IL-76MD (Candid-B) military freighter aircraft that Belarus has provided for participation in the Planning and Review Process.

While meeting with representatives of the Belarus' Air/Air Defence Forces, members of the NATO delegation discussed issues related to aircraft combat survivability, self-protection, navigation and radio communication equipment, the press office statement said.

14/11/2007

Source: BelaPAN

### Belarus to Let Israelis in without Visas

Belarus on Thursday announced that Israelis can travel to the country for a period of one month without an entry visa.

"The Belarusian side has made a unilateral decision to cut down the list of documents necessary for the issue of Belarusian entry visas," the Belarusian Embassy said in a statement. "From now on, citizens of the State of Israel who wish to travel to Belarus and stay there up to 30 days do not need to present letters of invitation and other explanatory documents."

The embassy called it a "goodwill gesture" to immigrants from Belarus and other Israelis wishing to visit the country.

16/11/2007

Source: The Jerusalem Post

### Pupils Protesting against Benefits Cancellation Detained in Mazyr

22 school and university students have been detained during an unauthorized protest action against the cancellation of social benefits in Mozyr today.

According to an activist of one of the youth democratic movement, Yury Charankou, rally participants went to the town's central square with banners containing protest messages against the benefits cancellation.

High school students and attendees of the Mozyr pedagogical university took part in the demonstration.

17/11/2007

Source: ERB

### Education Minister Radzkow Elected Chairman of the Pro-Presidential Belaya Rus Movement

According to him, it is evident that the government's domestic and foreign policies are dictated by the "wishes of the individual." Nonetheless, he noted, there still exist problems and the "social unity of society" is needed to solve them. The significance of this goal allows Belaya Rus to involve "representatives of very various social groups of the population," he said. "We'll form a positive force aimed at supporting the government's course."

The movement took origin from an association called Belaya Rus that was founded in Hrodna three years ago. The organizing committee was established this summer in order to transform the association into an organization that would have its branches throughout the country. The committees included Pyotr Prakapovich, head of the National Bank of Belarus; Mikhail Pawlaw, chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee; Mikalay Charhinets, chairman of the Committee on National Security in the upper parliamentary chamber; popular pop singer Iryna Darafeyeva; and renowned Belarusian athletes Ivan Tsikhan, Natalya Tsylynskaya and Yuliya Nestsyarenka.

19/11/2007

Source: BelaPAN

## Economics

### Belarus Potash Venture Resumes Sales and Ups Prices

Russian potash producer Uralkali said on Wednesday that its Belarusian export venture, which is the world's largest, was resuming sales and increasing prices.

Uralkali said in a statement that the Belarusian Potash Company had raised prices with immediate effect for sales in spot Asian markets to

\$400 per metric tonne from \$360 previously.

BPC is also upping the price it charges for delivery after Jan. 1, 2008 in the Brazilian market to \$400-\$410 from \$345-\$355, depending on customer size.

"BPC has informed Uralkali that the

price increases are driven by strong demand for potash in its major markets versus tight supply characteristics and also as a result of increased freight rates," Uralkali said.

07/11/2007

Source: Reuters

### Russia Raises Oil Duty for Belarus



Russia has increased an oil duty for Belarus up to \$80.7 instead of the current \$73.3 effective from December 1, 2007.

The tariff of export duty for the Russian crude is raised up to \$275.4 per ton against \$250.3 previously, according to a resolution signed by Russian PM Victor Zubkov.

15/11/2007

Source: AFN News

### Gazprom: Gas for Belarus in 2008 to Cost 67 % of

The cost of gas for Belarus in 2008 will be tied to the price of the Russian gas for Poland, Russian gas monopoly Gazprom today said in a statement. Under the gas deal between Belarus and Russian signed on December 31, 2006, the cost of gas for Belarus will amount to 67 percent of the gas cost at the European market; 80 percent in 2009 and 90 percent in 2010. By 2011, Belarus will have to pay for the Russian gas at the price level that consumers in Europe are now paying. Gazprom also said that every European country pays its own price, although there is a notion of "average European costs, but they are not voiced".

19/11/2007

Source: ERB

## Culture

### Virginie Symaniec: "Each regime wants to have its own Belarusian language"



Virginie Symaniec is co-founder of the association Perspectives Biélorusses, which promotes Belarusian cul-

*ture in France. Mrs. Symaniec was born in France, but speaks Belarusian fluently. Together with Larissa Guillemet she translated selected chapters of the book "Minsk. The Sun City of Dreams" by Artur Klinau into French. Belarus Headlines talks to Virginie Symaniec about her work and the situation Belarusian culture has found itself today.*

**Belarus Headlines: What impression do you have about the reading by Artur Klinau in Paris on 7.11.2007?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** It is very important for us, because we rarely have an opportunity to hear the Belarusian language in Paris. It is great to have such

a place as the Maison d'Europe et d'Orient, the cultural center that can bring together various organizations working for Belarus in Paris. I got involved into pro-Belarus activities more than 10 years ago. This is the first time I feel that there are associations that want to work together instead of being rivals.

**B. H.: What is the reason for such a change of attitude?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** I think, it happened in 2006, during the last presidential elections in Belarus. Our people saw how violent the Belarusian regime is. They also saw people, who resist the brutal system with flowers in

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### Virginie Symaniec: “Each regime wants to have its own Belarusian language”...



their hands. Many friends of us were arrested. We were shocked. At this moment something clicked – we began to communicate with each other, discuss what we can do together.

**B.H.: Are you saying that the protests in Minsk in March 2006 have influenced the public opinion in France?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** Of course they did - not only in France, but generally in Europe. Two days ago some person from Switzerland contacted us. People from Germany, Belgium, other parts of Europe want to work with us. We'll see which results this will bring in the future. In 1996, when we just began to promote and study Belarus in Paris, we were just three people. We looked into each other's eyes and said, “Let's do it!” Now there are other associations, such as **Belprojet**. There is Maison d'Europe et d'Orient in Paris, where we can organize joint projects. Our organizations try to complement each other. Rivalry is not something we aspire to.

**B.H.: How was Perspectives Biélorusiennes created?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** Our association was formed more than 10 years ago. As its founders, we were in a strange situation. We looked for information about Belarus, but couldn't find much. We met Polish people and asked them about Belarus, but they told us Belarus didn't exist. We consulted Russians, and they said the same. We were in some kind of vacuum until we actually traveled to Belarus.

There were Belarusian associations in France before. These people spoke Belarusian, wrote in Belarusian, and addressed their work to Belarusian-speaking people. It was like a small ghetto. At the same time they complained that local people didn't understand them. But the French people don't know Belarusian language. In order to change their perception of Belarus you have to use French as well.

You cannot imagine what stereotypes the French had about Belarus. If they only considered Belarus part of Russia, it wouldn't be too bad – but many were convinced that such country didn't exist at all. Or we sometimes would read articles in which authors claimed that it is constantly raining in Belarus, that this is a country without sun, that it is populated by sad people, and offers nothing exciting. But we felt that this was not true.

**B.H.: What does your association do today?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** Perspectives Biélorusiennes issues a quarterly bulletin in French. We try to adapt to the new situation. We will try to be more present in the Internet, but I also believe that it is time to start publishing a real magazine, which will be dedicated to Belarusian issues. Alternatively, it can be very useful to set up working groups of experts doing research on a wide range of topics – from politics to art. We are currently looking for opportunities to make this possible.

**B.H.: Where did you learn to speak Belarusian so well?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** My grandparents were Belarusian, my father was born in Belarus. I always lived in the family, which followed events in Belarus with keen interest. My grandparents spoke Belarusian, I have heard this language since my childhood. Unfor-



tunately, I didn't speak Belarusian with them. Only after the “iron curtain” fell, I was able to visit Belarus and tried to learn Belarusian. I am still working on my vocabulary.

**B.H.: Do you have difficulties while using Belarusian language in Belarus?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** For example, if you work in an archive, and ask someone a question in Belarusian, you'll get the answer: “Let's go for a smoke”. Later, when you are in the restroom, or in the basement, where no one “unwanted” can listen to your conversation, the person will speak Belarusian to you. I could never imagine that people could have so much fear.

However, there is another aspect – Belarusians still have to do a lot to become truly tolerant to other people. When I came to Belarus, I experienced absurd situations, which, I think, are familiar to anyone who tries to learn Belarusian. You talk to people, you are not sure whether you say everything right, you surely make mistakes. You say farewell to someone and tell him “ok, I will call you”. Then the person you talk to jumps up and says “only Russians say “to call”, you should say “to phone”. Another person, if you tell him “I will phone you”, claims that this word is Polish, and you should say

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“to phone”. Another person, if you tell him “I will phone you”, claims that this word is Polish, and you should say “to call” instead. How can you learn the Belarusian language when you encounter people with such anti-pedagogic attitude? No wonder many people in Belarus are not able to learn their language. In Belarus you often feel as if you had no right to make a mistake. However this is one of the most basic rights of any human being – to be able to correct him or herself.

**B.H.: What do you think about the recent plans of the Belarusian government to reform the Belarusian language?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** Every regime wants to have its own Belarusian language. It is important to realize how the government uses language reforms. Does it want to enable free communication among people, or does it want to hinder it? You can implement a reform only if you have authority. But by reforming a language you intrude into a very intimate sphere of people. Also, no language reform can have immediate effect, it is always a long-term plan. Each language reform has a social plan behind it. The language of the early days of Belarusian independence is one thing, the Soviet Belarusian language is something different. The new official Belarusian language will also represent some social project. I am very interested to find out what this project is.

In Belarus, the language issue is often used to manipulate people. The referendum of 1995 was a great example of such tactics. The question whether Russian language should have the same status as Belarusian appeared on the ballots with the sole purpose of outshadowing another, much more important question of whether the Belarusians agree with the new Constitution, proposed by Lukashenka. You can't solve all the problems in the country by dealing with the language and culture only. I probably shouldn't say this as someone working in the

sphere of culture, but this is what I think. So far there are no political and economic conditions in Belarus to create culture.

**B.H.: When was the last time you visited Belarus?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** Three years ago, which is quite a while. I miss Belarus a lot, but now I also have to take care of my newborn son. That is why I try to do useful things here, in Paris. For example, together with Larissa Guillemet we translated the play “Tutejshyja” by Yanka Kupala into French.

(The comedy play “Tutejshyja”, or “The Locals”, was written by Yanka Kupala, a prominent Belarusian poet and playwright. The action takes place during the turbulent years of 1918 – 1922, when Minsk keeps changing hands of foreign invaders. The characters of the play are Belarusians who try to find their place in the country torn between Eastern and Western ideologies of the time. Today, the play is just as topical for Belarus as it used to be in the first half of the 20th century.—*BH*).

**B.H.: Wasn't it difficult to translate “Tutejshyja” into French considering the fact that the text is a patchwork of all kinds of languages and dialects?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** I was always convinced that one can find ways to make “Tutejshyja” understandable for the French readers. But of course, this play is very difficult to translate. Belarusian language of the 1920s, language of the Russian orthodox church, German language, Yiddish, Polish, and the mix of all of them... People who translate the play have to be familiar with these languages. But we are from a younger generation, and it is difficult for us to understand the language of the 1920s. We went to Belarus in order to find good dictionaries. A non-formal team was formed, which helped to solve

such puzzles as, for example, the meaning of the word “hertzum sroliki”. We have found four ways to translate this word, but were not sure which one was the most appropriate. We had to use the Internet to look for the researchers in Israel, who still speak Yiddish. (In the end we learned that “hertzum sroliki” means a special type of a horse-driven cab). We looked for Poles in Paris who could explain us some Polish terms. This work was fantastic. For the first time so many people came together in order to get a Belarusian book published in France. It simply makes me happy!

**B.H.: What are your plans for the future?**

**Virginie Symaniec:** I want to finish my book about language. This is the most important goal for me. I want to understand how the language issue was used in formation of the Eastern Slavic nations. I have to sift through a huge pile of documents written in Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, French, English... I think I have never worked so hard before in order to understand something. When I'm done with my book, a new life will begin for me. Of course, I will be doing new things – maybe this time not as difficult ones.

20/11/2007

Recorded by Ales Kudrytski

Photos by  
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