

Belarus Headlines

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PACE: Pourgourides Line vs. Rigoni Line towards Belarus

Active discussions on Belarus at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) stopped in 2004, following release of the well-known Pourgourides Report (1) and, consequently, adoption of the Resolution on Disappeared Persons (2), as well as the Resolution on Persecution of the Press in the Republic of Belarus (3). In the course of 2004-2005, PACE continuously made statements condemning the grave situation with human rights, political freedoms and independent media, and called on the Belarusian government to improve the state of affairs: release political prisoners, conduct free, fair and democratic elections, ensure favourable conditions for existence and functioning of the independent press, allow freedom of assembly.

The Pourgourides Report on cases of politically-motivated disappearances and allegedly involvement in this crime of some Belarusian high-level state officials, his tough position based on non-engagement with the Belarusian government until investigation of the disappearances takes place and the human rights situation improves, led to establishment of so-called *Pourgourides Line* in the Parliamentary Assembly.

PACE President Rene van der Linden was among first to suggest more engagement with the government of Bel-

arus. He voiced his suggestions in February 2006 at a conference in Prague: "We need to break the isolation of the Belarusian people. We must strengthen direct contacts with Belarusian democratic forces and civil society. We need to reinforce our presence in Belarus. Our Assembly has suggested establishing a Council of Europe Information Centre in the country" (4). Few months later, Mr van der Linden welcomed some new approaches in the EU policy towards the official Minsk, underlining more openings for possible dialogue with the government: "I believe the only way to improve things is through dialogue" (5), said PACE chairman. Around the same time, preparations began for the official visit of van der Linden to Minsk, which, allegedly, was coordinated not only with Belarusian officials, but also with the Kremlin (6). Concluding his three-day trip to the country in January 2007, PACE chief has called to start fresh cooperation with Belarus. In his view, situation after the Russia-Belarus gas crisis had changed substantially and there was more willingness on the side of the Belarusian authorities to "move closer to European structures". According to him, the positive reaction on the Belarusian Parliament's invitation and visit to Belarus showed readiness of the Council of Europe for dialogue. However, the dialogue is to be conducted only with



acceptance of the Council of Europe commitments by the Belarusian side.

Van der Linden's statements when in Minsk (although misinterpreted by the state run TV) were clear. By the time of his visit, general agreement among various bodies of the international community was reached on the need of some engagement with the official Belarus: the dialogue on conditions, such as release of political prisoners, respect of the international electoral standards, political pluralism and existence of a strong civil society. What is more interesting and catching attention is van der Linden's understanding of Russia's role in promotion of European values in Belarus. Positive influence of the "friendly" Kremlin was suggested by the PACE chairman in his interview for the *"Эхо Москвы"* radio station in May 2006 (7) when he insisted on Russia's very important role helping to put Belarus on the pro-European track. Using its special relations with Belarus, Moscow, according to the politician, could serve as an intermediary and persuade the Lukashenka government to change its attitude towards values of

We on the Web

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of the democratic European family. This statement raises a question of how the Kremlin, rapidly slipping towards the totalitarian style of governance itself and with its worsening relation with the West, would help Minsk to better understand basic principles of democracy and human rights. Van der Linden, however, expressed his hope that during Russia's chairmanship in the Council of Europe (May 19-November 15, 2006) Belarus would have more opportunities to participate in activities of the 47-member organization (8).

Appointed by the Political Affairs Committee in February 2007, new rapporteur on Belarus Andrea Rigoni (Italy, ALDE), carried out a fact-finding mission to Belarus in October of the same year as part of the report preparation on the situation in the country. In his later comments, he reiterated that political "dialogue with Belarus must start again" (9). "It is essential for the Council of Europe to start thinking seriously about what it can do to promote democratic values in Belarus. I am against severing all contact with the Belarus authorities – as we have seen, that has no effect on the situation in the country, and simply makes it harder to get through to the people" (10), declared the rapporteur on Belarus. His views and strong favour of a dialogue despite the continuously difficult situation with human rights in the country became known in PACE as the *Rigoni Line*.

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly faces the same challenges in its relations with Belarus and the same dilemma of engagement or non-engagement with the government as other organizations do. On one hand—and this has been confirmed by many members of the Belarusian democratic forces—the dialogue is needed, both internal, between the government of Belarus, the opposition and the society as such, and external, between the government representatives and the international community. On the other hand, continuous repressions of political parties and civil society activists, interrogations by KGB officers, mass arrests during and after peaceful street protests, as in case of the recent entrepreneurs strike, do not provide much

proof of the Belarusian officials' wish to move closer to Europe. What differs PACE from other European structures coping with the Belarus dialogue dilemma, is the almost completed, but successfully contained during the recent meetings in Strasbourg Kremlin's mission of supervising the decision-making process, that, in prospect, could lead to establishment of yet another, the "*Margelov Line*" towards Belarus. Mikhail Margelov, appointed by the United Russia party and the Kremlin (11), if elected the new chairman of the Assembly and in search for more supporters of the Russian "managed democracy" in Strasbourg, would offer extended opportunities to the government of Belarus. The dialogue on conditions, the step-by-step approach could have turned into a less-conditioned one-step move. Minsk would find itself much closer to the European structures with less effort and improvement than discussed currently. However, the election of Spanish MP, Lluís Maria de Puig instead of Margelov to succeed René van der Linden as the PACE President, despite the enormous efforts of the latter to lobby for the Russian politician gives better hope for a united European policy towards Belarus. Thus, there will be no "*Margelov Line*": one complication less in the already complicated issue of communication between Belarus and the rest of Europe.

Views and arguments of both Christos Pourgourides and Andrea Rigoni deserve attention and encouragement. The stalemate situation with Belarusian presence on the international scene has to be resolved. The dialogue with Belarus and more engagement is needed, but the cases of political disappearances and the every-day persecutions, especially of youth activists, have not gone away. The dialogue with no substance can not cure the situation and is not worth implementation unless the agenda for it is clear and involves real pre-conditions, not technicalities, such as, for example, abolishment of the death penalty by Belarus. Release of all political prisoners has to be an absolute bottom line before any serious talks with the current Belarusian government begin. This month release of three prisoners is an encouraging step made by the official Minsk and hopefully will lay a ground for further liber-

alization. Most probable and realistic scenario, however, is that Belarus, in the course of the year, will see a fusion of government's gestures towards liberalisation with even more "sophisticated" and sometimes brutal repressive actions. Demonstrations of the entrepreneurs and the Freedom Day peaceful celebration on March 25 will probably end the same way they usually do. There is very little chance that parliamentary elections in the autumn will be conducted in accordance with the OSCE standards. PACE, being an inter-parliamentary organization, should closely follow and focus its attention on developments around this event, however.

The international community has to be ready to the official Minsk's swings back and forth by pursuing a well-coordinated, in first place, policy line, and implementing a step-by-step conditioned dialogue with the authorities in Minsk. Coordination of efforts by the EU and the Council of Europe, as well as other European bodies is essential in order to avoid disunity on the policy towards Belarus—so much desired by both the officials in Minsk and their allies in the Kremlin.

1 http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/NewsManager/EMB_NewsManagerView.asp?ID=50

2 <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/TA04/ERES1371.htm>

3 <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta04/eres1372.htm>

4 <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Press/StopPressView.asp?ID=1737>

5 http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/NewsManager/EMB_NewsManagerView.asp?ID=2186

6 RFRL, January 17, 2007

7 http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2006/05/28/ic_news_112_230647/

8 Ibid.

9 http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/NewsManager/EMB_NewsManagerView.asp?ID=3497
Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Vladimir Socor, Two setback of the Kremlin at the Council of Europe, January 23, 2008

By Olga Stuzhinskaya

28/01/2008

Politics and Society

Belarus Considers Buying Advanced Russian Air Defence System



Belarus is looking to buy the advanced S-400 Triumf (SA-21 Growler) air defence system from Russia, the chairman of the Belarusian State Military-Industrial Committee said.

The S-400 Triumf is a new air defence missile system developed by the Almaz Central Design Bureau as an upgrade of the S-300 family.

Nikolai Azamatov said Russia could start exporting the S-400 in 2009 and that Almaz executives were ready for negotiations.

According to some sources, Belarus submitted last year a formal request for two S-400 battalions to be made available by 2010.

Almaz General Director Igor Ashurbeili previously said that production and the subsequent export of S-400s could start in 2009. Belarus currently has three S-300 complexes on combat duty.

The S-400 is designed to intercept and destroy airborne targets at a distance of up to 400 kilometres (250 miles), or twice the range of the U.S. MIM-104 Patriot, and 2.5 times that of the S-300PMU-2.

The system is believed to have high capability to destroy stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles with an effective range of up to 3,500 kilometres (2,200 miles), and a speed of up to 4.8 kilometres (3 miles) per second.

16/01/2008

Source: Ria Novosti

Editor Jailed over Muhammad Cartoons



Minsk City Court in Belarus imprisoned Aliaksandr Zdzvishkou, an editor at the now-shuttered independent weekly Zhoda (Consensus) newspaper, for reprinting controversial Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2006. Zdzvishkou was charged with "incitement of religious hatred" and sentenced to three years in a high-security prison.

Zdzvishkou was arrested on November 18 and his trial began on January 11 in Minsk, according to local news

reports. He was tried behind closed doors.

"Clearly this is just a pretext to punish an independent journalist even after shutting down his publication," said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon. "We call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately release Aliaksandr Zdzvishkou."

Aliaksei Karol, the Zhoda's former editor-in-chief, told CPJ he was shocked by the sentence given to his former colleague. "The court ruling is disproportionate to his actions," said Karol, whose recently established newspaper Novy Chas-Zhoda's successor has also been subject to government persecution. Karol said he disagreed with Zdzvishkou's decision to reprint the cartoons alongside the paper's article chronicling the uproar, adding that Zhoda's staff apologized to the Belarusian Muslim community at

the time. Belarusian Islamic leader Ismail Varanovich said he wanted authorities to reprimand the journalist, not jail him. "I thought that this case was closed and the newspaper was back working," The Associated Press quoted Varanovich as saying today.

Zdzvishkou reprinted controversial cartoons in the Zhoda in February 2006, prompting authorities to begin an investigation into possible "incitement of religious hatred"; a month later, the paper, which had also given coverage to an opposition candidate in the 2006 presidential election, was shuttered. Zdzvishkou fled Belarus to avoid imprisonment and returned last November to attend his father's funeral. While in the country, the Belarusian Security Service arrested him.

18/01/2008

Source: cpj.org

Belarus Police Beat Business Demonstrators

Belarusian riot police violently dispersed a demonstration of about 2,000 people protesting against new regulations for small businesses. Police beat protesters who had gathered near the presidential palace, then marched to another square near the government headquarters and later back to the presidential palace.

"We are demanding civilized legislation," cried Viktor Krival, one of the leaders of the loose-knit opposition movement, which is formed mainly of small-scale entrepreneurs.

About 20 demonstrators were arrested, while Krival said more than 50 activists had been detained earlier this month.

21/01/2008

Source: AFP

Politics and Society

Imprisoned Opposition Youth Leader Zmitser Dashkevich Released

Zmitser Dashkevich, leader of a youth opposition group Malady Front, has been granted an early release from prison. Dashkevich said that the release came to him as a complete surprise.

The prison administration reportedly explained to him that his prison term had been reduced by a court ruling.



Dashkevich's term was expected to expire on March 15, 2008.

Political prisoner was thought to be ineligible for amnesty and release on parole because of alleged misconduct while in prison. In early June, he was denied release on parole exactly for this reason.

In November, he was sentenced to a \$870 fine for refusal to testify in a criminal case against another young opposition activist.

Dashkevich was arrested on September 15, 2006. At a closed-door trial, he was found guilty of acting on behalf of an unregistered organization, Malady Front, and sentenced to 18 months in a minimum-security correctional institution.

International observers condemned the sentence as politically motivated. Amnesty International declared Dashkevich a prisoner of conscience.

Photo by Julia Darashkevich

23/01/2008

Source: BelaPAN

Belarus Introduces Cheaper Visas for Citizens of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland

Belarus unilaterally introduced visas for citizens of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland cheaper, spokesman for the Foreign Ministry of Belarus Andrei Papou said at a briefing on January 24.



A single entry visa will cost €25 for the citizens of the mentioned above countries, a single transit visa – €10 and a multiple entry visa for a year – €150. Additional €25 will be charged for the simplified visa issue procedures.

Citizens of Belgium, Slovakia and the

Czech Republic will have to pay €60 for a single entry visa, €20 – for a single transit visa and €150 for a multiple entry visa. The cost of visas for the citizens of the "old members" of the Schengen zone was not changed.

Belarus preserves simplified visa issue procedures for citizens of the whole Schengen zone. As before, business and guest visas, which term of validity is 30 days, will be issued without invitation; the term of consideration of an inquiry should not exceed 5 days.

According to the spokesman, the Foreign Ministry again confirms its readiness to conduct a dialogue with the EU relating to the simplification of visa procedures. "We urge our European partners to stop using visas as an instrument of restricting mutual contacts and to take necessary measures aimed at ensuring the right of citizens to free movement," Andrei Papou underlined.

24/01/2008

Source: BelTA

Two More Political Prisoners Released



Entrepreneur from the Belarusian town of Vaukavysk, Yury Liavonau, has been released from the Baranavichy

prison today. On January 21, the Department of Punishment Execution of the Belarusian Interior Ministry sent a letter to the prison administration asking to consider a possible release for Mr Liavonau before the end of the imprisonment term.

According to the Belarusian legislation, the right to be released ahead of schedule belongs to those convicts who have already spent a half of their term in prison. Mr. Liavonau was sentenced to 3 years and a half on July 7, 2006 that means that the half of his terms

expires on March 21, 2008.

Liavonau was told that the term in jail was replaced by corrective labour.

Yury Liavonau, one of the entrepreneurs' movement leaders, was accused of tax fraud together with Mr. Autohovich, who was released on January 18. His term in prison was replaced with corrective labour.

25/01/2008

Source: Charter'97, nn.by

Economics

National Bank of Belarus Increases Net Foreign Assets 160% in 2007

The National Bank of Belarus' net foreign assets, as of January 1, 2008, came to \$4.197 billion, an increase of 160% since the start of 2007, the National Bank said in a statistical report.

In December, the National Bank's net foreign assets grew by 47.5% following the issue of a \$1.5 billion stabilization loan, following growth of 10.7% in November.

Net foreign asset growth in 2007 was

driven by a threefold increase in gross foreign assets to \$4.802 billion against a 4740% boost in gross foreign liabilities to \$604.8 million.

The report said that the National Bank's total foreign assets in freely convertible currency, as of January 2008, came to \$3.887 billion, an increase of 160% since the start of 2007, including an increase in December of 47.8%. Total currency with restricted

convertibility increased 130% in 2007 to the equivalent of \$309.6 million.

The National Bank of Belarus' net foreign assets increased 16.6% in 2006 to \$1.614 billion following growth in 2005 and 2004 of 60.4% and 43.5%, respectively.

14/01/2008

Source: Interfax

Belarus Wants to Draw \$2 Bln Credit from Russia

Belarus is interested in getting a \$2 billion Russian state credit, First Deputy Finance Minister Andrei Kharkovets told Interfax.

"We are interested in drawing one more Russian credit - \$2 billion," he said.

Kharkovets explained that, "from the point of view of the value of resources, no cheaper credit can be found now. The repayment sched-

ule is especially favourable and effective."

A \$1.5 billion Russian credit was drawn in December 2007 on very favourable terms. "It would be wonderful if the new credit were extended on the same terms," Kharkovets said

22/01/2008

Source: Interfax

Belarus in Talks with EU over WTO

Belarus has entered into negotiations with the European Union over the conditions of joining the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The Belarus' Foreign Ministry said the EU member states would play a decisive role in this issue. Belarus has already signed the bilateral protocols on the WTO membership with ten nations.

22/01/2008

Source: ERB

EU Annuls Anti-Dumping Duty on Belarusian Fertilizer



The European Union has annulled anti-dumping duties on carbamide exported by Belarus, an official with the Belarusian Foreign Ministry has said.

"We've just received a letter saying that the European Union has annulled anti-dumping duties on Belarusian carbamide," Anton Kudasou the deputy director of the Ministry's Foreign Trade Department, said at a second conference of Belarusian company

managers on Wednesday.

This decision will help expand the export capabilities of Grodno Azot, the monopoly producer of carbamide, he said.

Kudasou also said that the European Union had earlier lifted anti-dumping duties on Belarusian polyester and fibre.

Ukraine, meanwhile, reversed the plan to introduce anti-dumping duties for Belarusian tires following a probe, he said.

The EU imposed anti-dumping duties on Belarusian carbamide imports in 2000.

23/01/2008

Source: BelTA

Belarus' Customs Department on Polish Colleagues Strike

Belarus' customhouses are taking every possible measure to "localize the situation" and minimize the losses from the Polish customs officers' strike, the State Customs Committee said in a statement.

Huge traffic jams paralyzed the Polish-Belarusian border as the strike stretched into its eighth day on Monday.

Belarus' State Customs Committee has recommended that the transport companies sustaining losses from the strike should send their complaints to the appropriate agencies of the European Commission. The Committee has requested the customs department of the Polish finance ministry to inform Belarus about the "expected time of normalizing the situation."

28/01/2008

Source: naviny.by

EU and Belarus

EP: Statement of the Delegation on Relations with Belarus Chairman on Recent Arrests



On behalf of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, I strongly condemn arrests of ten young activists of the Young Front (Malady Front) and of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) Youth, who were detained following peaceful demonstrations yesterday in Minsk to mark the day of solidarity with the imprisoned Belarusian opposition activists and the families of missing prominent Belarusians.

These ten brave young people - Franak Viachorka, Anton Kalinouski, Yuras Stankevich, Uladzimir Syarheew, Kasya Krasnova, Lyudmila Atakulava, Kasya Halitskaya, Maksim Vyarnyanski, Pavai Kuryanovich and Volha Kulyakevich - who took courage yesterday to defend their fundamental rights

to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, are standing trial today in Minsk and several have been already sentenced up to 15 days in prison.

I am furthermore dismayed by the recent conviction to two weeks in prison of Anatol Liabedzka, leader of the United Civil Party (UCP), and of other fifteen organizers of the demonstration held by sole entrepreneurs on 10 January in Minsk.

I demand for the immediate release of all these activists of the democratic opposition and of the civil society of Belarus.

These recent arrests and politically motivated prosecutions as well as the continued imprisonment of Alyaksandr Kazulin, Artur Finkevich, Zmitser

Dashkevich, Andrey Klimaw and other political prisoners, blatantly contradict the recent rhetoric of the Belarusian leadership of their wish to improve the relations with the European Union (EU).

The release of all political prisoners is one of the key conditions for Belarus to renew its relationship with the EU within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and it is therefore up to the government of Mr Lukashenko to finally take concrete and unwavering steps in this regard without any further delay.

17/01/2008

Source: europar.leuropa.eu

Situation in Belarus was Discussed at the PACE Session in Strasbourg

Several discussions on Belarus took place in the course of the session (January 21-24) with participation of both the deputies of the Belarusian Parliament and the democratic opposition representatives.



Andrea Rigoni, PACE's special rapporteur on Belarus, presented a draft report at a meeting of the organization's Political Affairs Committee earlier this week. "It is essential for the Council of Europe to start thinking seriously about what it can do to promote democratic values in Belarus. I am against severing all contact with the Belarus authorities – as we have seen, that has no effect on the situation in the country, and simply makes it harder to get through to the people", declared Andrea Rigoni.

However, **Vintsuk Viachorka**, of the BNF opposition party, said that the situation regarding human rights and the rule of law had worsened noticeably since the beginning of the year.

During the meeting of the sub-



committee on Belarus, new chairman was elected. The sub-committee is now headed by **Sinika Hurskeinen** – a Finnish deputy of the EC Parliamentary Assembly, who replaced an Estonian parliamentarian, **Andres Herkel**, in this position.

Civil society representatives from Belarus attended a round table on the country situation, which was organized in the framework of the INGOs conference on January 22. They presented reports about the current situation and welcomed the resolution text, in which the conference expresses concern with the worsening human rights situation in Belarus, namely with the situation of the political prisoners, restrains on freedom of speech and assembly, and the arrests of more than twenty persons after the peaceful demonstration on January 10.

The media subcommittee of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

committee on Belarus, new chairman was elected. The sub-committee is now headed

(PACE) at its meeting in on January 24 decided to look into opportunities for organization of an international conference regarding the situation with independent media in Belarus. The proposal was also backed by **Miklos Haraszti**, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media.



Representatives of various civil society groups from Belarus carried out meetings with chiefs of PACE divisions and directorates, as well as ambassadors to the Council of Europe from EU member states. During the meeting hosted by the Polish Permanent Representative **Piotr Antoni Switalski** and attended by several members of the Senat of the Republic of Poland, numerous ambassadors and members of parliaments, guests were presented a documentary "Belarus Today" that was recently produced in Poland with the aim of "opening" Belarus to a wider European audience.

29/01/2008

Source: ODB

Culture

Adam Hlobus: the Naked Belarusian



If you go by train from Warsaw to Minsk, you won't miss a small

station of Kojdanava. The town to which the station corresponds, is now called Dzerzhinsk. Its name commemorates the bloodthirsty founder of *Cheka*, the predecessor of the infamous KGB. Soviet authorities renamed Kojdanava, but, for some reason, left the station with its old name creating the feeling that the town and the station exist in two different dimensions. Maybe this explains the nature of Adam Hlobus, an outstanding contemporary Belarusian writer who was born in Dzerzhinsk but wrote his best poems and stories about his native town Kojdanava.

Adam Hlobus is a pseudonym of Uladzimir Adamchyk. Perhaps he has inherited fondness of literature from his father, writer Viachaslau Adamchyk. However, instead of enrolling into a philology school, the usual career starting point for many writers during Soviet times, he studied visual arts in Minsk. After his graduation, Adam Hlobus worked as restorer and designer, combining his work with first literature attempts.

It was the late 80s, the time of change. The Soviet system was slowly falling apart. Adam Hlobus found himself at the core of the underground literature group "Tutejshyja" ('the locals'), which united most non-conformist young Belarusian writers of the time. As it often happens, two rival factions were soon formed within "Tutejshyja". One of them, the so-called "patriots", was headed by gifted poet Anatol Sys. With a lot of pathos, they stood for love towards motherland and the struggle for Belarusian independence. Another faction, "the cosmopolites", was headed by Adam Hlobus. He advocated pragmatic approaches and urged writers to create genuinely Belarusian mass culture, write detective novels and publish comic books. "Tutejshyja"

soon fell apart, but the group's energy fueled many other developments in Belarusian culture. Adam Hlobus managed to become a professional player with mass consciousness, simultaneously pursuing his career as an artist.

When Mikhail Gorbachev launched his "Perestroika" policy, the communist party allowed people access to free information. In Belarus, the magazine "Krynitsa" ('spring') was created. In its best times, the circulation of "Krynitsa" reached half million copies. If one looks at the list of its editorial board members, it is surprising to find there people who are now on two different sides of the "barricades", for example Uladzimer Niaklaeu (the poet, who later had to go into political exile) and Mikalaj Charhinet, today's chief of the notorious pro-government Union of Writers; Henadz Buraukin who is prevented from reading his works to schoolchildren, and Pavel Yakubovich, presently working as editor-in-chief of the "Belarus Segodnya", the biggest pro-presidential daily newspaper. "Krynitsa" was the magazine where Adam Hlobus worked as editor and published his first essays. „Krynitsa“ was my first experience of palying with mass consciousness, and the first experience is always unforgettable“, he told in an interview to the Belarusian cultural magazine „Arche“.

In 1991, Adam Hlobus published a comic book after the novel of Uladzimir Karatkevich „The Wild Hunt of King Stakh“. It was his idea to create a genuinely Belarusian style of comic books. „There are people who believe that one can earn money by selling here American comics. Nonsense! You can not transmit American comics into our mentality“. „The Wild Hunt of King Stakh“ was published by a state printing house in 250,000 copies – the unprecedented number for a Belarusian-language book.

1990's business in Belarus was booming. Adam Hlobus tried various schemes of earning money by publishing detective stories and even packs of playing cards. 90's was the time, when the whole Soviet and post-Soviet area was mesmerized by the American mass

culture. Adam Hlobus and some of his friends decided to publish (in Russian, to be sold everywhere where Russian is a spoken language) novels based on TV series like "Twin Peaks" or "Santa Barbara". When his friends asked "What should we do about the copyright?" he replied: "If Van Gogh makes a picture of a chair, he doesn't have to pay the person who has made this chair, does he?" However, the plan hit its snag when the friends published a sequel to "Gone with the Wind". True, their novels like "The Childhood of Scarlet" or "Scarlet's Secret" were selling well, but the American copyright holders have launched a huge campaign against "Russian pirates".

Such daring experiments gave Adam Hlobus financial independence and an opportunity to see the world. In fact, he quickly gained popularity as writer producing travel notes with description of explored foreign cities as a keen but somewhat arrogant traveller, who takes his freedom of movement for granted. For Belarusians, many of whom never got a chance to look out on the other side of the iron curtain, this was something new. For example, this is how Adam Hlobus describes an eclipse of 1999 in Rome: "Rome is a heavy city. It is heavy as marble, as heat, as death. Rome belongs to Rome only. It is full of sun, infernal heat and ancient civilization. It became three times heavier during the solar eclipse. People stopped and peered at the sky through pieces of black glass. A piece of Sun remained, resembling a crescent. All the rest of the existing world became wretched, purposeless. But the Eternal City has only increased its importance".

In his "Travel Notes" Hlobus, who once worked as fresco restorer in a catholic church, often speaks to God. This creates a sharp contrast to his other book, "Damavikameron", published in 1994. The title results from a word game, uniting "Dekameron" and *Damavik*, the mythic Belarusian house spirit. The book shocked Belarusian readers with its sexual scenes. To be exact, it was not only shock, but also surprise – it turned out, that Belarusian language can be used to write about sexual matters. In "Damavikameron" Adam Hlobus creates a hord of new urban mythic creatures,

Culture

Adam Hlobus: the Naked Belarusian

such as mermaids, which can be found in bathrooms by men returning home after business trips, or Tuman-nik, a fog creature, which observes lovers who are lost in the mist.

Texts of Adam Hlobus are often caustic if not to say cynical. In his „Russian Cabinet of Curiosities” he mocks and defames many Russian values and Russian literature icons in short passages, often showing them in banal situations. For example: “During the carnival in a town near Barcelona I saw poet Andrey Voznesensky. He was looking at a shopping window and told some old woman: “Forty bucks. Just look at that... This trifle costs forty bucks!”

In his “Contemporaries”-- short portraits published both online and on paper, Adam Hlobus turns to fellow Belarusians depicting the people he met in rather delicate situations. Many of them get offended, but he doesn't really seem to care. Finally, he even published the diaries of his father, another renowned writer, without changing a word. Does this public literature strip show have any sense? Hanna Kisilitsyna, Belarusian literature critic, once asked Hlobus this question in “Nasha Niva” weekly newspaper. “The history of literature is full of dressing and undressing”, answered Adam Hlobus. “When you undress, you should always think about the clothes you'll be putting on afterwards. All these embroidered shirts, straw hats, felt boots... I wish you knew how sick I am of all these national features, folk idiotism, souvenir shops of pseudo-traditions”.

Adam Hlobus believes that the development of Belarusian literature is similar to the development of the literature in Japan at the end of the 19th century when the values of European civilization found their way to the faraway islands. “The diaries of Akutagava and Takuboku show us how difficult and painful it was for a Japanese to tear off his worn kimono and put on a European suite. There was a host of Japanese writers who tried to struggle into a tuxedo without taking off their traditional clothes. By

doing so they meant to preserve their identity. However, they simply showed themselves as pitiful untalented clowns. This continued until everyone became convinced that the Japanese remains Japanese, even if he wears European clothes. The same with the Belarusian: he remains Belarusian even if he is naked. An embroidered shirt doesn't make you more Belarusian: on the contrary, it degrades the sense of being Belarusian to the level of cheap souvenir ethnography”.

Recently, Adam Hlobus actively writes for his internet blog posting not only short stories but also his own drawings. He also publishes chapters of his novel “Home” in... “Belarus Segodnya”, the pro-presidential newspaper, which is headed by his former “Krynitsa” colleague Pavel Yakubovich. This fact, however, doesn't prevent him from speaking freely on any matters he chooses and even giving out his “Golden Letter” annual literature award to the author of a freshly-printed book he likes the most. Every year Adam Hlobus invites nominees to a small café in Minsk where he presents one of them with 111 euros – this is what the award is worth.

Adam Hlobus began his career as a poet. Critics like to say that his prose is better than his verses. Nevertheless, rock groups “Novaje Neba”, “Bonda”, “Harackija”, and even such renowned performers as “Pesniary” (sometimes called “Belarusian Beatles”) often put his poems into music. No wonder one of the best songs of rock-band “Bonda” is called “Kojdanava” – the small station, to which, according to Adam Hlobus, all the roads lead.

More information about Adam Globus can be found here:

<http://www.adamhlobus.com/>

<http://adam-hlobus.livejournal.com/>

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by Ales Kudrytski for the ODB

Some works by Adam Globus



Christian symbol - 1986



Late summer – 1989



A ram under colourful snow—1989



Toma in red mood – 2008