

Belarus Headlines

Issue XXIII

January 31 — February 14, 2008



*Office for a Democratic
Belarus*

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Campaign in Support of the European Parliament's Initiative on Visa Costs Reduction for Belarusian Citizens

The Office for a Democratic Belarus expresses its support for the campaign initiated in the European Parliament and aimed at reducing the costs of Schengen visas for the Belarusian citizens.

Belarus remains the only country of the EU Eastern neighbourhood whose citizens have to pay €60 for a single-entry Schengen visa, which amounts to almost one third of the average monthly salary in the country. Lowering costs of the visa and easing the procedure of receiving it would help tremendously to avoid the isolation of the Belarusian people and to pursue the EU's policy of supporting the democratisation process, as well as facilitate people-to-people contacts between Belarus and the EU member states.

Information about the signature campaign has received a lot of attention in Belarus. Various non-governmental organizations, political parties and other associations responded to the call of the Office for a Democratic Belarus to send letters of support for the signature collection and encourage the EU to review the current regulations of issuing Schengen visas for Belarusians.

For the Declaration to be sent to the EU Council and the Commission, more than half of the European parliamentarians need to sign it.

**[Send an e-mail](#) to Members of the European
Parliament from your country and encourage them
to sign the Declaration on Reducing the Costs of
Obtaining a Visa for Belarusian Citizens.**

We on the Web

www.democraticbelarus.eu

Politics and Society

Lukashenka Lashes out at EU and US Ambassadors



President Alexander Lukashenka lashed out at ambassadors from the United States and the European Union, accusing

them of undermining his government's efforts to improve the external relations of his isolated country.

Last month, U.S. Ambassador Karen

Stewart said Washington could add to the existing sanctions if Lukashenka doesn't take more concrete steps. The Belarusian leader responding by threatening to throw the ambassador out if new sanctions are imposed.

"The role of an ambassador in the country of arrival in spite of everything is to establish normal, friendly relations. Most unfortunately, Western ambassadors do not have this wish," he said at a meeting with German Ambassador Gebhardt Weiss.

"I don't fully understand the role of the ambassadors of the European Union ... and the United States and I don't want to hide this. Therefore I am stating this harshly in order to stop those who are particularly mettlesome and to show that Belarus is a sovereign, independent state," he said.

31/01/2008

Source: The International Herald Tribune

Belarusian Justice Ministry Suspends Closure of Opposition Communists

Belarus' Justice Ministry has asked the Supreme Court to suspend its suit demanding the closure of the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (PKB). The ministry filed the suit against the PKB on January 4, accusing the party -- which was suspended for six months by the Supreme Court on August 2, 2007 -- of actions that are pro-



hibited during the suspension period. Representatives of the ministry and the PKB met in the Supreme Court on January 30 and presented new materials

relating to the case. "The Justice Ministry decided to study our report and filed a request for the suspension of the

suit in connection with this," PKB Deputy Chairman Valery Ukhnyalov said. He also said that after February 2 -- the expiration of the suspension period -- the PKB intends "to resume its full-scale activities and catch up with all events that took place in this period."

01/02/2008

Source: Radio Free Europe

Belarus Court Frees Jailed Opposition Activist

A court in Belarus ordered the release of an opposition activist on Tuesday after two Western ambassadors called for better ties

with Belarus which is preparing for an election, an opposition leader said.

The court in Maghilyou, eastern Belarus, freed Artur Finkevich, jailed for



two years in 2006 for painting anti-presidential graffiti on the eve of an election which handed President Alexander Lukashenka a landslide victory and a third term.

Finkevich later received an additional 1-1/2 years for violating prison rules.

"It is clear that these releases are the result of pressure by the international community on Belarusian authorities," Pavel Seviarynets, a leading opposition figure present at the sitting said. "For

the West, this is a thaw of sorts. In any event, what is happening is generating optimism."

Several such detainees have been released in the past year, prompting cautious praise from Brussels. And in recent days the ambassadors of Germany and France have said a September parliamentary election could lead to closer ties.

05/02/2008

Source: Reuters

Minsk is Ready to Enter into Talks with EU on Visa Matters

Minsk is ready to enter into talks with the European Union on visa matters, Andrey Papow, spokesman for the Belarusian foreign ministry, said on February 5.

"We have taken a number of unilateral steps in this direction, in particular abolished the invitation requirement for EU citizens who plan to stay in Belarus for no more than 30 days on a short-term guest or business visa; introduced lower visa fees for citizens of the EU countries that border on Belarus," he said. "We believe that we have the right to count on reciprocity on the part of the European Union under these conditions."

05/02.2008

Source: BelaPAN

Politics and Society

Government Toughens Rules for Operation of Foreign Priests

Foreigners seeking to carry out religious activities on the territory of Belarus are required to obtain approvals from the officials in charge of religious affairs, under a resolution of the Council of Ministers.

Uladzimir Lamaka, a deputy commissioner for religious affairs and nationalities, told the official news agency Belta that religious organizations have the right to invite foreigners to act as priests only upon approval by the Belarus government for the period of one year.

The term can be either extended or reduced. Foreign priests are banned from carrying out religious activities in the settlements which are not part of the territory of operation by the inviting religious organization.

08/02/2008

Source: ERB

Opposition Coalition Names 59 Parliamentary Nominees

The Political Council of United Pro-democratic Forces named 59 parliamentary nominees at a meeting on February 10.

A total of 110 seats on the House of Representatives are expected to be contested in elections this fall and the opposition coalition plans to field one candidate in each election district.

The Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and the United Civic Party (UCP) have the largest representation on the incomplete single nominee list, 17 members each. Ten parliamentary hopefuls are members of the Belaru-

sian Party of Communists (BPC) and eight represent the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada" (BSDP).

The list also includes activists of the unregistered Freedom and Progress Party, Labour Party and Belarusian Christian Democracy party, as well as the liquidated Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya."

United Pro-democratic Forces plan to field prominent trade union leader Al-yaksandr Bukhvostaw, UCP leaders

Anatol Lyabedzka, Alyaksandr Dabravolski, Valyantsina Palevikova and Stanislaw Bahdankevich, BPC Chair-

man Syarhey Kalyakin, BPF Deputy Chairmen Vintsuk Vyachorka and Ales Mikhalevich, and BSDP Deputy Chairman Ihar Rynkevich in the parliamentary elections in Minsk.

Speaking at the meeting, Mr. Lyabedzka said that some of the nominees may be replaced by "very strong candidates" but such substitutions would be very rare.

11/02/2008

Source: BelaPAN

Belarusian Foreign Minister Takes Part in Vienna Forum

Vienna forum on prevention of human trafficking started in Austria on February 13. The Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs Syarhei Martunau participated in it.

The forum has been organized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in the framework of a global campaign on prevention of human trafficking.

The main goals of the Forum are increasing people's knowledge of the problem of human traffic, searching new ways of solving it and exchanging advanced experience.

A number of bilateral consultations of Syarhei Martynau and the heads of

delegations taking part in the Forum are planned alongside with a meeting with the Director General of the UN Vienna Office, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Antonio Costa.



13/02/2008

Source: BelTA

BELAVIA Plane Crashes

Four people were hospitalized after a passenger plane crashed on takeoff at an airport near the capital of Armenia, early on Thursday, a spokesperson for the country's civilian aviation authority said.

"All the passengers and crew were rescued from the blazing plane," Belavia spokesperson said.

The representative said most of those injured in the crash had received medical assistance on the spot. Sixteen of the people on board were reported to be Armenians. The nationality of the others has yet to be announced.

14/02/2008

Source: PanArmenian.net

EU and Belarus

CSTO and EU to Address Security Issues in Central Asia Together

The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the European Union plan to cooperate in addressing security issues in Central Asia. CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordiuzha met with European Union's Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel in Moscow on February 6. The talks took place following a request made by representatives of the European Union.

The sides shared opinions about the situation in Central Asia and views on resolving the existing problems.

Pierre Morel remarked, ensuring security and stability, economic development of the region, development of the energy industry, environmental protection, education and support for democracy are the main goals of the European Union strategy in Central Asia. The European Union's Special Representative drew specific attention to coordinating international efforts aimed at combating terrorism, extremism, human trafficking, illegal trade in arms and drugs.

According to Pierre Morel, during the EU ministerial meeting it was decided

to step up contacts with regional organisations, which work in Central Asia. In view of this he spoke in favour of promoting dialogue with the CSTO.

Nikolai Bordiuzha informed the European Union's Special Representative about efforts taken by the CSTO to counteract Afghani drugs threat, illegal migration, to form the CSTO peacemaking forces and the collective potential for responding to emergencies.

07/02/2008

Source: BelTA

EU Condemns Executions in Belarus

Council of Europe Secretary General Terry Davis Condemned the executions in Belarus.

"I am saddened by the stubborn determination of the Belarus authorities to isolate their country from the rest of Europe. With the three executions carried out yesterday, they continue to flaunt their blatant disregard for the human values and achievements common to all other European countries," he said on February 6. "Belarus is not a member of the Council of Europe, which has banned the death penalty on the basis of Protocol 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights, but Belarus is a member of the United Nations. The executions of Siarghei Morozau, Valery Garbaty and Igar

Danchanka go against the letter and the spirit of the recent Resolution of the UN General Assembly, which called for a worldwide moratorium on executions."

Later Joseph Daul, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament admitted "The death sentence is a cruel punishment which degrades human dignity. We rigorously condemn its application, wherever it is still used, regardless under which circumstances. Belarus must respect the fundamental principles of human rights. The 27 Member States of the European Union and the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe stand united in their rejection and non-application of the death penalty. We wish for a free Bela-

rus to soon join the community of democratic nations respectful of human rights. For this reason the EPP-ED Group fully supports the political opposition in Belarus and its political leader, the 2006 Sakharov prize winner Alexander Milinkevitch".

06-09/02/2008

**Press Release of Council of Europe
Press Division**

EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament Press Release,

Valery Varanetsky to Sign Agreement on Opening Delegation of European Commission in Belarus



By his decree, the President of Belarus approved the signing of the agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Commission of the European Communities on establishing, privileges and immunities of the Delegation of the Commission of the European Communities in Belarus. Valery Varanetsky, a Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus, has been authorised to sign the agreement. The agreement will be effective on a

temporary basis from the moment of its signing until it comes into force.

13/02/2008

Source: BelTA

Economics

Belarus to Give Itera Concession on Dobrushskaye Chalk Deposit

Belarus will give Itera Oil & Gas Company a concession on the Dobrushskoye chalk deposit, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Minister Leonty Khoruzhik said Wednesday.

"The contracts to give the development rights to the Dobrushskaye chalk deposit to Itera and the Khatislauskaye chalk deposit to Traipl are ready," he said.

He also said work is being finalized on the preparation of business plans for the participation of Russian firms Inter-Tekhn and Lotos in the development of deposits of sand and gravel materials and silicate sands. Each of these projects will cost an estimated

\$3 million. Kharuzhik also said the country has begun implementing projects to develop brown coal and shale deposits, with a total cost of \$4 billion.

"Considering the growing interest of foreign investors in our natural resources, we should conduct an appraisal of our deposits and prepare a regulatory foundation for the transfer of deposits for development on the basis of investment agreement," the minister said.

He said Australian firm Mineralogy is interested in developing iron ore deposits in Belarus.

"We are now looking for investors to develop the Akolauskaye and Navaselkauskaye iron ore deposits. Aus-

tralian company Mineralogy has expressed an interest in participating in this project," Kharuzhik said.

Exploration of the Navaselkavskaye deposit in the Grodno region was continued last year, and it was established that the ore was close to commercial condition, he said.

Detailed exploration of Akolauskaye confirmed its potential, he said. A technology has been developed to enrich the ore, producing a quality magnetite concentrate that can be used at the Belarusian Steel Works.

31/01/2008

Source: Interfax

Venezuela is Expected to Decide on Loan to Belarus in February

Venezuela is considering providing a loan to Belarus, Dias Nunes, the Venezuelan charge d'affaires in Minsk, told.

A decision on the matter is expected to be made in February, when a Belarusian delegation led by Viktor Sheyman, state secretary of the Security Council, will be on a visit to Caracas,

he said.

According to him, the amount of the loan is classified information, but it is going to be a large sum.

First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka said last year that Venezuela was ready to give Belarus a \$500-million loan for 15 years at an

annual interest rate of three percent.

As Mr. Nunes said, before Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's visit to Belarus in March, the countries are expected to exchange visits of experts.

31/01/2008

Source: BelaPAN

World Bank to Carry out \$150-million Power Generation Project in Belarus

The World Bank plans to carry out a \$150-million power generation project in Belarus, Elena Klochan, operations officer at the World Bank Office in Minsk, told reporters on February 1.

The project is provided for by the World Bank's 2008-11 country assistance strategy for Belarus, which was adopted last December, she said.

Officials at the energy ministry and at the energy efficiency department of the State Standardization Committee, managers of the Belarusian State Energy Concern (Belenerha) and representatives of the World Bank currently consider specific steps that will be

taken to carry out the project, Ms. Klochan said.

According to her, there are now plans to convert heating boiler houses into small power and heating plants, modernize power lines and promote power generation by the private sector. "We are just starting out with the project," Ms. Klochan noted.

In May, the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors is expected to authorize a water supply network modernization project estimated at \$60 million, she said, adding that the project has been submitted to Belarusian governmental agencies for considera-

tion. "We hope to start implementing this project this summer," she said.

Belarus became a member of the World Bank in 1992. Since then, the bank has provided Belarus with \$258 million in loans and funded 30 grant programs worth a total of \$18 million. Under the newly adopted country assistance strategy, the Bank is to annually provide about \$100 million in long-term loans to Belarus to support the country in addressing global environment and energy challenges.

04/02/2008

Source: BelaPAN

Economics

Russia and France Ready to Issue Loans to Belarus for Nuclear Power Plant



Belarus counts on foreign loans in order to build the first nuclear power plant, Belarus Par-tisan quotes Viktor Marakhin, the dep-

uty chairman of the Budget, Finances and Tax Policy Committee at the House of Representatives, as saying.

He noted that Belarus would announce a tender for the construction of a nuclear power station.

"Russia, France and, possibly, Germany

are expected to take part in the tender. Moreover, Russia and France are ready to give loans to Belarus for this project," said Viktor Marakhin.

11/02/2008

Source: ERB

Gazprom Raises Stake in Belarus Pipeline Operator to 25%



Russian energy giant Gazprom [RTS: GAZP] said on Wednesday it had raised its stake in Belarus' natural gas pipeline operator Beltransgaz to 25%, in line with previously reached accords.

In mid-May 2007, Gazprom signed a deal to purchase a 50% stake in Beltransgaz for \$2.5 billion. Gazprom will make equal payments in four stages from 2007 to 2010, ac-

quiring a 12.5% stake in Beltransgaz at each stage, giving the Russian gas monopoly greater control over supplies to Central and Western European consumers.

A spokesman for the Belarus State Property Committee said Gazprom had paid \$625 million to raise its stake to one quarter.

Russia and Belarus had been unable to agree on the sale of Beltransgaz' shares to Gazprom for several years due to

disagreements over the value of the Belarusian pipeline operator. An agreement on the share sale was reached in late 2006.



13/02/2007

Source: Charter'97, nn.by

Belarus to Attract \$1.4 Billion of Direct Foreign Investments in 2008

Belarus plans to attract \$1.4 billion of direct foreign investments in 2008, Economy Minister Mikalai Zaichenka told reporters on February 13.

Mikalai Zaichenka noted that in 2007 Belarus attracted more than \$5 billion of foreign investments, of them only \$280 million was direct foreign investments. "We have very insignificant direct foreign capital investments. We have to address this issue. The task is overambitious – to attract \$1.4 billion of direct foreign investments. We will, probably, adopt new regulations to accelerate the process".

Mikalai Zaichenko reminded that Belarus has recently adopted a set of documents to improve the investment environment in the country. "We hope the investors will start coming. For that we have to work much," he added. In 2007 Belarus' capital investments totalled Br25.3 trillion, or 15.1% up to 2006.

14/02/2008

Source: BelTA

Commerzbank May Take Majority Stake in Belarus's Belinvestbank - Report

Germany's Commerzbank AG is interested in buying a controlling stake in Belarusian bank Belinvestbank, an industry source told.

"Though this purchase by no means a certainty, the German bank is expressing cautious optimism," the source said.

"If there will be a purchase, then Commerzbank expects to receive a controlling packet."

Belinvestbank head Alexander Rutkovsky confirmed that negotiations had been under way, without providing further details. A Commerzbank spokesman declined to comment.

14/02/2007

Source: Thomson Financial

Culture

Poetry on Tiptoes

Andrey Khadanovich attracts hundreds of people with his poems and believes that Lukashenka has saved Belarusian literature

If you want to come to the poetry reading by Andrey Khadanovich, it's not a very good idea to arrive on time. Try to be there half an hour in advance, otherwise you may find yourself spacked into the aisle between other fans, who try to get a glimpse of the figure reading poems from the stage, standing on their tiptoes. On February 7, 2008 the main concert hall of the Belarusian Academy of Arts in Minsk was crammed with about half five hundred people. A couple of dozen more waited in the hallway, unable to get inside. All of them wanted to be there when the new book of poems "Berlibry" was presented. Who is Andrey Khadanovich, the poet, who attracts such enormous audiences in Minsk and elsewhere in Belarus?

Often called the most vivid discovery of Belarusian modern poetic scene, Andrey Khadanovich was born in 1973. He teaches French literature at the Belarusian State University, as well as in the Belarusian Lyceum, school that was closed down by the authorities several years ago.

Khadanovich's poetry is clearly post-modernistic. He rhymes his lines in perfect manner, creating some kind of DJ-mix out of his own thoughts and well-known quotations from the classic Belarusian and Soviet poetry or lyrics of Western rock hits. He skillfully weaves the web of elaborate word games, which will inevitably catch your attention. Unexpected combinations of familiar sayings create numerous

new meanings.

This, however, makes it extremely difficult (if not to say - impossible) to translate his poems into other languages. "If you want to define poetry, then this is what goes lost in translation," Khadanovich likes to say.

Nevertheless he is fond of translation himself, and even teaches a translation workshop in the Belarusian Calegium (semi-underground independent education community in Minsk). On February, 7 Andrey Khadanovich has presented a book of his vers libre. He has finally turned to this new genre, not bound by the rhymed form, which gives us hope that some day we may have a decent translation of his works into English.

Andrey Khadanovich is a one-man orchestra. If you want to save the most boring literature presentation from failure, invite Khadanovich as a guest. He reads poems, sings songs and plays his guitar, and chats with the audience in between. Andrey even raps his poem "Christmas Rap" together with listeners, who eagerly clap their hands in tact. Khadanovich also has a creative partnership with Belarusian rock-band "Indiga" and Belarusian chansonnier Zmitsier Vajtsiushkevich, supplying them with lyrics. He is the first Belarusian poet to have issued his own audio CD. It is titled "Abmennik" ("Currency Exchange Office"), and features jazz-poetic improvisations with Belarusian musician Siarhey Pukst.

Surprisingly, the very first book by Andrey Khadanovich ("Letters from under the Blanket") was published in Kyiv – in Ukrainian. His another book "From Belarus with love" was a bold experiment –



printed in Ukraine in Belarusian (!) language, it was actually sold in Ukrainian book shops. Books printed in Belarus followed, but they are not always easy to find in the country.

Andrey Khadanovich is one of those writers, whose books are allowed to be printed by private publishers, but are often prevented from being disseminated in Belarus. These authors are allowed to write, but discouraged to meet with their readers. In fact, the reading of Andrey Khadanovich on February 7 should have originally taken place in the House of Writers in Minsk, but Belarusian authorities prohibited it. Andrey Khadanovich was able to find another room in the Belarusian Academy of Arts only with the backing of the Goethe Institut, which, among other cultural activities, also promotes his work.

However, such a grave situation has its advantages. Andrey Khadanovich believes that, in fact, these are rather favourable conditions for a writer. At times, when there is little truth to be found elsewhere, people tend to look for it in literature. "Perhaps, that is why poetry readings in Belarus attract much larger audiences than in more stable Western democracies", Andrey Khadanovich said in his interview to the radio station "Deutsche Welle".

In another interview to the Ukrainian newspaper "Dzerkalo Tizhdnia" Andrey Khadanovich recalls a conversation with a young western author

Culture

Poetry on Tiptoes

during a literature conference in Amsterdam. "I spoke mostly about human rights, and he told me about copy rights", he says. Andrey Khadanovich dreams about times when Belarusian literature market will take a civilized form, but right now everyone who considers himself an artist in Belarus can't help being pre-occupied with more vital problems.

"Coming to events such as a literature reading or artistic performance becomes some kind of protest", says Andrey Khadanovich. "People use it to demonstrate their critical position, to interact with the like-minded". The authoritarian regime has created the new "union of writers", whose members have a monopoly of visiting schools and universities as guest lecturers. Independent literature is banned from the state-owned literature magazines. Non-state cultural periodicals like "ARCHE" or "Dzeyaslou" find it very difficult to exist in Belarus. They are thrown out of kiosks, you often have no chance to subscribe to them, and it is mostly the untamed energy of their editors, which helps to keep these magazines coming to people. "The sphere of freedom is shrinking in Belarus, but it also fuels optimism. Take a look at a brook. The stronger you wind it up, the more power it will release some day. Here the laws of physics and psychology come together, and I hope it will work in Belarus some day", believes Andrey Khadanovich.

In fact, Andrey Khadanovich is confident, that in some way Lukashenka has saved Belarusian literature. "He created such harsh conditions for its existence, that

only writers who are most talented, energetic and genuinely interested in Belarusian literature remained faithful to it."

When opposition protest flared up in Minsk in March 2006, the wife of Andrey Khadanovich burst into tears after the conversation with her father, who believed every single word of lies which were broadcast on the state-owned television. "I realized that I simply couldn't stand such situation and went to October square", says Andrey Khadanovich. He doesn't consider himself to be a hero or a revolutionary, but he was indeed one of active participants of the protests. One could often see him in the tent camp, talking to people, reciting poems or even organizing an improvised poetic workshop. Quite a daring thing to do for a professor who teaches at a state university!

According to Andrey Khadanovich, his political point of view and his poetry meet on some kind of neutral territory inside of his soul. "Fortunately, I have enough political views which I try to keep away from my poetry. There are also some poetic things, which I wouldn't like to mix with my position as a citizen. But there is a narrow stripe of territory in my heart, where poetry and political beliefs come together. It gives me space for maneuvers. I can write rap-like poems, for example. Someone would think they simply echo some political slogans. But for me they are new poetic experiments".

14/02/2008

By Ales Kudrytsky for the ODB

More information about Andrey Khadanovich:

<http://khadanovich.livejournal.com>
- blog of Andrey Khadanovich

<http://www.lyrikline.org/index.php?id=59&L=1&author=ak03&cHash=9379ed5f37> - (Here you can listen to audio recordings of Andrey Khadanovich's poems as well read their translations into German and Lithuanian.)



Andrey Khadanovich performing in a Mnsk Street



Book Cover (translated into Ukrainian)