

# Belarus Headlines

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Office for a Democratic  
Belarus

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We on the Web

[www.democraticbelarus.eu](http://www.democraticbelarus.eu)

## Belarus—the Struggle for Freedom of Expression



unbearable conditions Belarusian independent media has to operate in. She described repressions that her colleagues and she herself experience

every day.

Factual prove for what the Belarusian journalist was describing came this morning when KGB launched a large-scaled attack on offices and apartments of the remaining

In cooperation with the Office for a Democratic Belarus, the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted (Hamburger Stiftung für politisch Verfolgte) and the Hanse-office in Brussels organized an evening discussion on the difficult media situation and problems with freedom of expression in Belarus.

The event, scheduled on the next day after a large-scale demonstration in Minsk that was brutally dispersed by the riot

police, gathered large number participants eager to hear about the recent developments in Belarus. Representatives of the European Commission and the EU Council, members of the European Parliament, activists of non-governmental groups and various European media came to listen to Natallia Makushyna, a well-known Belarusian journalists currently working for the Deutsche Welle radio. Makushyna spoke about the



independent media outlets and journalists all over Belarus.

Natallia's presentation was followed by readings of writer Alhierd Baharevich, whose poems and short stories received international recognition and have been published in many European newspapers and magazines. Mr. Baharevich read his short story "The Art of Being a Stutterer" in Belarusian while the guests of the event were following the author with the help of the

English and German translations[1]. Baharevich's symbolic story tells about what may happen when a person is deprived of the possibility to express himself/herself freely. There is no politics in Alhierd Baharevich's stories. He left Belarus, nevertheless, over one year ago because of the "suffocating" environment, unacceptable for an artist.

Special guest of the evening, Vera Rich, a London-based journalist and translator, who has been involved in Belarus for over fifty years, read several "Poems of Freedom" from the book with the same title. She also read her own poem related to the discussion.

*Freedom is the soul*

*Soul in the body's mystery*

*Which has formed a dream  
of being*

*At liberty*

*Without suffering*

*Freedom cannot be...*

*(Ryhor Baradulin, translated  
Vera Rich)*

[1] Alhierd Baharevich's texts were presented in English for the first time. The "The Art of Being a Stutterer" will soon be posted on our web-site.

27/03/2008

## Belarusian Week in the European Parliament



On the initiative of the chairman of Delegation on Relations with Belarus in the European Parliament, Mr Jacek Protasiewicz (PL), and with support of the EPP-ED group in the Parliament and the Washington D.C.-based International Republican Institute (IRI), celebrations of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belarus Democratic Republic (BNR) took place in Strasbourg.

Sakharov Prize laureats of 2004 and 2006, Zhanna Litvina, chairwoman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), and Aliaksandr Milinkevich, former presidential candidate and currently leader of the Movement For Freedom, were invited to take part in celebrations as well as Ivonka Survika, the chairwoman of BNR Council of Exile and other Belarusian prominent democratic opposition figures.

The Belarus week was opened with the screening of "The Day of Freedom"—a new film by Yury Khashchavatsky, a well-known Belarusian film maker. Belsat TV, which is a new channel of the Polish TV working for the Belarusian audience, presented the movie.

Opening of the exhibition by Belarusian artists Aliaksej Marachkin and Ryhor

Sitnica, as well as a photo exhibit by Ihar Krasheuski, began with welcome speeches of the European Parliament's President Hans-Gert Poettering, EU Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner, chairman of the EPP-ED group Joseph Daul, and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski.

Zmitser Vajtsyushkevich, one of the best representatives of the Belarusian music scene and his band WZ-Orchestra performed during the cocktail reception that followed the exhibition opening.

**More photos can be found on our web-site at "Photo gallery session"**

14/03/2008

## Politics and Society

### Diplomatic Dispute between the US and Belarus



On March 12 the American ambassador to Belarus Karen Stewart left Minsk be-

cause of a diplomatic dispute. A spokesman at the embassy told that the ambassador had not been expelled and her absence was temporary. Earlier Belarus announced it was withdrawing its ambassador to Washington and asked the US to follow suit. The official Minsk accused the US of violating agreements aimed at normalising diplomatic relations and of tightening sanctions on the country's state-controlled oil-processing and chemicals company, Belneftekhim (last year the United States froze the company's assets and barred American companies from doing business with it.)

Later the Belarus intelligence service said it uncovered a US spy ring, amid renewed tensions between the US and official Minsk. A KGB official confirmed a report on Belarus state TV which said a US diplomat had recruited 10 Belarusians. The US em-

bassy in Minsk denied the allegation. Working under a Belarusian government threat to expel some of its staff the embassy stopped issuing visas.

The Belarusian government asked the Americans to withdraw some of its 35 diplomats to avoid expulsions and the US announced that it was cutting its diplomatic staff in Minsk from 35 to 17, in line with the request.



*Belarusian House of Representatives' Speaker Andrei Papou*

At the same time Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of Belarusian National Assembly Vadzim Papou said that U.S.-Belarusian relations will normalize in the future. "I think that the economic issues will prevail over po-

litical statements and everything else," Vadzim Papou told the news Agency Interfax.

In his statement the embassy's temporary head Jonathan Moore stated that, the release of all political prisoners would help to start the process of improving the relations between the US and Belarusian authorities.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry Head Syarghei Martynau said that "the key to the improvement of the Belarus-American relations is the abolition of US sanctions. If it happens, further steps will be made in an absolutely different light".

However on March 31 Belarus asked for a second reduction in staffing at the U.S. embassy in Minsk.

The Foreign Ministry said the U.S. measures had obliged them to reduce staff at Belarus' embassy in Washington and demanded new cuts at the U.S. embassy in Minsk.

12/03/2008-31/03/2008

**Sources: BBC, Reuters, Interfax**

## Politics and Society

### Belarus Riot Police Crush Belarusian People's Republic Demonstration



Dozens of Belarusian opposition supporters were detained after clashes with riot police during a peaceful demonstration hold in Minsk.

The government had vowed to prevent any demonstrations on Tuesday, but thousands of people attempted to gather in a central square that had been blocked off by heavily armed police.

March 25 is the anniversary of the 1918 declaration of the first, short-lived independent Belarusian state, and a traditional day of demonstration by the opposition.

Demonstrators waved the country's red and white striped pre-Soviet era flag and the blue and gold-starred banner of the European Union. They chanted "Long Live Belarus!" as police warned them through loudspeakers that the meeting was illegal and they should disperse. Authorities had only given protesters authorization to gather on Minsk's outskirts. Earlier the police closed off all roads leading to Yakub Kolas Square, and shut down nearby metro stations, shops and parking lots.

After about an hour, police began wading into the crowds, beating demonstrators with truncheons and violently hauling them away to waiting police trucks. One protester, a middle-aged woman, was tripped and tackled by riot police as she tried to run away. The police then dragged scream-

ing by her hair to a waiting police bus.

An Associated Press reporter saw dozens taken away by police; the Interior Ministry reported more than 80 people detained but an official from the Belarusian Helsinki Group, a human rights body, told the AFP news agency that the number was more like 100 activists.

Opposition groups reported that security agents arrested activists across the country before Tuesday's demonstrations.



*Photographer Andrey Lyankevich who was brutally beaten by the Police*

Those detained included a Lithuania TV crew and a Polish citizen who was released after several hours. Semyon Pechanko, a reporter for the opposition newspaper Nasha Niva, and photographer Andrei Lyankevich, who was badly beaten by the police, were each sentenced to 15 days in jail.

At least 20 people were sentenced to jail time ranging from three to 15 days, while another 21 were fined up to \$500, according to court records.

25/03/2008-26/03/2008

**Source: The Associated Press, The International Herald Tribune, The Al-jazira.net**

### Belarusian Journalists Searched



Security forces raided the apartments of journalists from independent and foreign news media, a days after the police

broke up an opposition rally in the capital, Minsk. Officers questioned at least 16 journalists, possibly in con-

nection with a 2006 cartoon video that was deemed offensive to President Aleksandr Lukashenka, said the Belarus Association of Journalists.

The searches were carried out by KGB agents acting on orders issued by the prosecutor's office. Searches occurred among employees of European Radio, Radio Racja, and Belsat television in Minsk, Gomel, Grodno, Vitebsk, Brest and Bobruisk. Computers and other equipment were confiscated.

Zhanna Litvina, head of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, suggested

that the real motivation for the searches were different. "Most likely, it is simply the authorities' revenge for objective coverage by journalists of the events in Minsk on March 25 [when a meeting of the opposition was broken up] and for truthful information about the situation in the country in general."

28/03/2008

**Source: The New York Times, kommersant.com**



## Politics and Society

### Tim Bell Takes on Belarus



Has the veteran spin doctor **Tim Bell** - the former Saatchi & Saatchi ad-man who was instrumental in getting **Margaret Thatcher** into Downing Street in 1979 - landed his toughest PR assignment yet? Lord Bell has been hired by **Alixander Lukashenka**, Belarus' autocratic president, to makeover the

country dubbed by US secretary of state, **Condoleezza Rice** as an "outpost of tyranny" for its dire human rights record.

Now Bell, who advised Mrs T on interview techniques, clothing and even hairstyle choices, has been invited to come up with a strategy to overhaul Belarus' dreary and despotic image. According to Lukashenka's website, the pair met last week at the president's office in Minsk.

Lukashenka hopes to court the west to boost his state's economy, Bell told the *Moscow Times* last week. "He would

like his country to be better understood, and his successes to be better grasped," he said. "Lukashenka doesn't see why Belarus can't be a friend to the west and a friend to Russia at the same time."

Other clients of Bell's agency, Bell Pottinger, have included former Thai Prime Minister **Thaksin Shinawatra** and Iranian leader **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**. Bell did, however, turn down Robert Mugabe.

19/03/2008

Source: The First Post

### Lawyer Zeltser Detained In Minsk



Emanuel Zeltser, a Russian-born U.S. citizen who sued the Bank of New York during the height of its Russian money-laundering scandal in the 1990s, was detained in Minsk, his brother told Forbes.

The reasons for his arrest just after exiting a plane in the authoritarian country are unknown, and news of the March 12 occurrence in the capital of

Belarus is just now reaching other countries.

The U.S. State Department, citing a law that requires missing persons to sign a waiver before information about them can be released, refused to comment or confirm that Zeltser had been detained.

Zeltser, outspoken and controversial, is a specialist on money laundering and organized crime. In 1999 he testified before the House Committee on Banking and Financial Services regarding the estimated \$10 billion money-laundering scheme at the Bank of New York, which is now known as Bank of New York Mellon (nyse: BK - news - people). He also sued the bank for \$2 billion on behalf of depositors who had lost money in an

affiliate.

There is speculation that the detention was on the orders of either the Belarus or Russian intelligence services, possibly in connection with the Bank of New York suit. "The KGB is in more than one country," remarked Zeltser's brother Mark.

Emanuel Zeltser had flown from London to Minsk, possibly to visit a Russian client with business in Minsk. "I know it wasn't for sightseeing," Mark Zeltser said. The detained American was travelling with his secretary, Vladlena Funk, who was also arrested.

19/03/2008

Source: forbes.com

### Russia Urges US to Lift Sanctions against Belarus

Russia is calling on the US to change its policy regarding Belarus and its corporations, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov told journalists in Minsk today. The PM noted that Russia viewed the US decision to impose new sanctions against Belarus's state-owned oil company Belneftekhim as unlawful and politically motivated. Instead of removing the sanctions, the US is putting further pressure on Belarus, Zubkov stated.

In November 2007, the US Treasury froze Belneftekhim assets in the US and prohibited US companies from cooperating with the Belarus corporation.

21/03/2008

Source: RosBusinessConsulting

## Politics and Society

### Trial over Andrey Kim Postponed



A judge of Minsk's Central District Court ruled that opposition activist Andrey Kim

should remain in jail and postponed his trial indefinitely. The judge rejected the defence's motion that the 22-year-old Kim be released on bail or on his own recognizance. Defence lawyer Tamara Sidarenka vainly argued that the defendant's mother, Tatsyana Kim, and business owners Alyaksandr Makayew and Ihar Lednik were ready to deposit a bail, that Andrey had no previous criminal record, and that he

had poor health.

Andrey Kim has been held in jail since January 21, when he was arrested together with more than 20 other people who participated in an unsanctioned demonstration in Minsk against the government's restrictive policy regarding small business owners. He was sentenced to 10 days in jail and a fine of 1,050,000 rubels (\$490) but was not freed on completion of his term, as a criminal charge was brought against him under Article 364 of the Criminal Code, which penalizes violence or threats of violence against a police officer." The charge carries a penalty of up to six years in prison. A police officer identified as

Ihar Sychow, who was said to be the victim, did not object to releasing the accused on bail, but the public prosecutor was strongly opposed to that.

It turned out that Mr. Kim was also facing a charge of "active participation in group actions grossly disturbing the public peace" under Article 342 of the Criminal Code. A total of 14 people, mainly youths, have reportedly been charged under the same article in connection with an unsanctioned protest that was staged in Minsk on January 10. Mr. Kim's case is now expected to be heard together with the cases of those people, who remain free on their own recognizance.

01/04/2008

Source: **BelaPAN**

### Belarus Stays away from NATO Summit



The Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers NATO's decision limiting the participation of Belarus in the Euroatlantic Partnership Council Summit to be inadmissible. The Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced it in its appeal. According to the Ministry, the Euroatlantic Partnership Council Summit will take place in Bucharest on April 3. Belarus was been informed that NATO had decided to limit its participation in this meeting.

02/04/2008

Source: **ERB**

## EU and Belarus

### European Commission and Belarus Sign Agreement on EC Delegation Office in Minsk Opening



"Today is an important day for Belarus and for the Commission. I am delighted that, following this signature, the Commission can now proceed to open its Delegation in Minsk.

This is a much awaited development. I sincerely hope that the presence of a Commission Delegation in Minsk will help create the conditions in which our relationship can grow.

I am convinced that it will also help the EU to reinforce its ties with the citizens of Belarus.

On this important day for us, I want to recall the EU's offer to Belarus.

We are ready to re-engage with you, and move towards normalization of our relations, provided that additional serious steps are taken in Belarus towards democratization".

07/03/2008

Source: **The European Commission Press Release**

## EU and Belarus

### Belarus Faces Increasing International Condemnation

Belarus is drawing strong international condemnation, following the crack-down against independent media and peaceful demonstrators in Minsk.

The presidency of the European Union, currently held by Slovenia, in a statement Friday called on Belarusian authorities to stop further arrests of local journalists with ties to foreign media, and to stop persecuting representatives of the country's civil society.

The Commissioner [Benita Ferrero Waldner](#) said she was more than "dismayed by the events, since we had recently seen some more positive actions by the Belarusian authorities: the release of 5 out of 6 of the internationally recognised political prisoners, suspen-

sion of the court case against the Belarus Helsinki Committee, and the final steps paving the way for the opening of an EC delegation in Minsk".

The President of the European Parliament, [Hans-Gert Pöttering](#), has expressed his strong concern about the intervention of the Belarusian authorities against a demonstration by the democratic opposition in Minsk and the detention of more than 80 demonstrators. "The use of violence by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful demonstrators and the harassment of independent journalists is in contradiction to the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression and is not compatible with democratic fundamental

rights," the President said.

The chairman of the Delegation for Relations' with Belarus [Jacek Protasiewicz](#) stated that "The government of Belarus knows very well that 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 therefore should make concrete and unwavering steps in this direction".

26-28/03/2008

Source: [consilium.europa.eu](#), EC, [euparl.europa.eu](#)

## Economic News

### National Bank of Belarus to Finalize Sale of 99% Stake in Paritetbank to Sistema by April

The National Bank of Belarus will finalize the sale of its 98.77% stake in Paritetbank to Sistema (RTS: AFKS) in March-April 2008, a source in banking circles said. "There are currently the necessary legal documents upon which both sides have agreed, a specific scheme for future action and a value appraisal of Paritetbank," the

source said. "An agreement for [the bank's] sale and purchase is being finalized, which will be ready in one or two months," he added. The source also said that the state's decision for the stake sale has been prepared, upon which all interested ministries and departments have agreed.

Both parties were continuing to discuss the size of the National Bank's premium for the almost 100% stake in Paritetbank. The sale price would exceed the value of bank's charter capital, which comes to 104.7 billion Belarusian rubles.

10/03/2008

Source: [Interfax](#)

### Iran to Build Commercial Centre in Belarus

Iran started constructing the first Iranian commercial, sports and administrative centre in the Belarusian city of Brest.

The centre also includes amphitheatres, administrative offices, conference halls and a permanent place for exhibition of



Iranian goods.

Sharing borders with the European Union, Poland and Ukraine are among the advantages of the centre. The building whose construction costs about 15 million dollars will be run by next two years.

Brest's mayor also encouraged Iranian investors to advocate funds in Brest possessing a unique status.

16/03/2008

Source: [ISNA](#)

## Economic News

### President of Korea's LG to Visit Minsk

President of Korea's LG Electronics will visit Minsk in March-April this year, Siargei Sidorsky, the Prime Minister of Belarus, said at a meeting with Lee Yun Soo, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Korea to the Republic of Belarus, in Minsk on March 19.

According to Siargei Sidorsky, Belarus started actively cooperating with LG in November 2007. Under the contracts with the company the research association Integral has been

supplied with LCD panels. "This is our successful joint project," Siargei Sidorsky said.

In 2007 trade between Belarus and Korea surged by 66% over 2006 to \$143.668 million. Exports grew more than twofold to exceed \$18 million, imports by 61.4% to \$125.634 million.

For the past three to five years Belarus' major exports to South Korea have been integrated circuits, semi-conductors, potassium, polyamides,

artificial fibres, fibreglass and glass-cloth, black fibres, optic and measuring tools, laser equipment, steel products, bearings, medical devices.

Among the largest exporters to the Korean market are Integral, Belarusian Potash Company (deliveries are not regular), Polotsk-Steklovolokno, BMZ, Svetlogorsk company Khimvolokno, Grodno Khimvolokno, Laser and IT, Eton.

19/03/2007

Source: BelTA

### Belarus to Pay \$128 For Gas

Russia will sell gas to Belarus at \$128 per 1,000 cubic meters in the second quarter of 2008, up from \$119 in the first quarter, news agencies quoted an Economic Development and Trade Ministry official as saying.

Deputy Economic Development and Trade Minister Andrei Belousov told reporters in Minsk on Friday that the price of natural gas would be calculated according to the same formula the two countries were using in the first quarter.

Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov said earlier Friday that Russia was not going to review the formula anytime soon. "The contracts were signed in December 2006. All the issues arising should be solved according to the contracts," Zubkov said after attending a Russia-Belarus government meeting in Minsk.

21/03/2008

Source: Reuters

### LUKOIL Implements Project in Belarus

Russia's oil giant LUKOIL has voiced readiness to set up lubricant production facilities at Naftan plant of Belarus. LUKOIL President Vagit Alekperov made the respective statement in Minsk on Friday after meeting with Belarus President Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

"We have discussed today the chance of committing the venture that produces additive compounds to implement the project of lubricant production," Alekperov said.

Belarus president backed up the project, Alekperov went on, specifying that a working group will be set up to prepare a feasibility study. Alekperov also promised that LUKOIL would fund creation of additional fuel stations. "We are the biggest player on the fuel market of Belarus. Over 4.5 million tons of oil will be supplied to republic's refineries this year. We are amid the five biggest taxpayers of Belarus," Alekperov said.

According to LUKOIL president, the company annually buys Belarus machinery for \$30 million to \$40 million. "Nowadays, this machinery of Minsk Automobile Works is well adapted to create special machinery for oil wells," Alekperov said.

28/03/2008

Source: kommersant.com

### Belarus Increases Oil Export Duty on April 1

On April 1, 2008, Belarus increases the crude oil export duty from \$333.8 to \$340.1 per tonne. The Council of Ministers issued relevant resolution No. 476 on March 28.

The oil export duty has been revised upward following a similar increase in the export oil duty in the Russian Federation effective from April 1. On April 1, the export duty on oil products will increase to the level of the duties valid in Russia. For example, duties on light oil products (light and middle distillates, liquefied gas, benzol, toluene and xylol) will grow from \$237.2 to \$241.4 per tonne. Duties on heavy petroleum products (engine oil, processed oil products, mineral wax,

oil coke, oil asphalt) will be increased from \$127.8 to \$130.1 per tonne.

In line with the intergovernmental Belarusian-Russian agreement, export duties on oil and oil products in Belarus are equal to the duties applied in Russia and are introduced on the same date.

In conformance with the Belarusian-Russian agreement, in 2008 the coefficient of 0,335 (instead of the previous 0,293) will be used for calculating the duty on oil supplied to Belarus from Russia.

01/04/2008

Source: BelTA



## Culture

### “Pesnyary” – Legends in Bell-Bottoms



For millions of people in the Soviet Union, every morning began to the accompaniment of “radiyokropka” – radio receiver, which was plugged into a special wall socket. The radio broadcast news about the nation’s accomplishments, cheerful instructions for morning gymnastics, and Soviet music (no western hits allowed). The news was mostly propaganda, the gymnastics were widely ignored, and the music... actually, sometimes the music wasn’t bad at all. Especially, when the morning broadcasts were filled with the sounds of “Pesnyary”.

Hardly anyone did more to define a distinctive brand name for Belarus in the Soviet Union, than “Pesnyary” (the name can be translated from the Belarusian as ‘singers’ or ‘bards’). The folk-beat-rock group gave the Soviet music scene of the 70s and 80s a major shake-up. In the late 60’s, rock-n-roll invaded (or, better to say, snuck into) the USSR. The first Soviet rock-n-rollers played cheap guitars and sang in poor English. “Pesnyary” were something all together quite different – they sang mostly in Belarusian and had a seemingly absolute pitch. Their songs became immediate hits – such as “Kasiu Yas’ Kaniushynu”, a rollicking song about a guy who is mowing clover, “Alexandryna”,

sad romantic love ballad, or “Belavezhskaya Pushcha”, hymn to the vast Belarusian Belavezha wood.

Amazingly, the founder of the most popular Belarusian music band of all times wasn’t even born in Belarus. Uladzimir Mulyavin, the long-time leader of “Pesnyary”, was born in 1941 in the Russian city of Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg), situated on the Eastern slopes of the Ural Mountains. He began music lessons under the tutelage of a political prisoner, who already could tell that young Uladzimir had a great future. The tutor and the pupil shared a common link of repression, as young Mulyavin was thrown out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at the Sverdlovsk music school for his “admiration of western music” (Uladzimir and his friends had formed a jazz-band).

In 1963 Mulyavin moved to Belarus. Minsk, the major Soviet western outpost, was generously supplied, unlike Sverdlovsk which was situated in the industrial backyard of the Soviet Union. Mulyavin’s daughter recalls that her mother was so impressed by the full shelves in Belarusian shops encountered during their family trips to Minsk that the Mulyavins made up their mind to permanently relocate to Belarus. In Minsk, Uladzimir Mulyavin continued his musical career and played guitar in the Philharmonic Society. During his military service he sang in the army quartet. Perhaps, this period of vocal and instrumental growth gave Uladzimir the idea to create his own

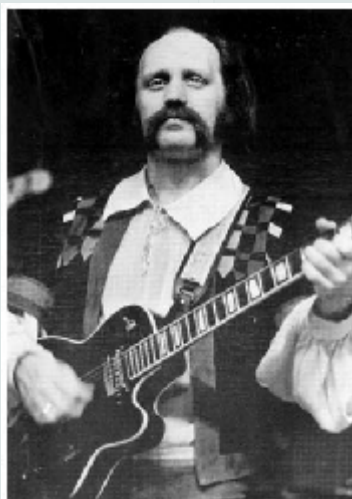
band.

This idea came to fruition in 1968. The newborn vocal band was called “Lyavony”. Uladzimir was fascinated with both folk music and the brand-new rock-n-roll culture. He fused them both into a singularly distinctive music style. In the beginning, Mulyavin tried to combine melodies of “three brotherly peoples” – Belarusians, Ukrainians and Russians. To his great surprise, this turned out to be impossible, as the music of these peoples was too different from one other. As a result, Mulyavin decided to concentrate on Belarusian folk music. The more he explored it, the more fascinated he became with the richness and beauty of its sounds. Mulyavin had an exceptional ear for sounds. He heard and appreciated the minor nuances of

Belarusian speech. With great talent, he interlaced it with the sound of traditional instruments and fused those elements again with contemporary sounds.

“Lyavony” (which was renamed to “Pesnyary” in 1969), began singing in Minsk cinemas before the screenings. Their performances were so

impressive, that the audience often demanded that the movie be cancelled and “Pesnyary” played instead. Uladzimir Arlou (the writer we have already written about him in “Uladzimir Arlou .The Belarusian Time Traveller” <http://www.democraticbelarus.eu/node/2635> ) remembers when he first saw “Lyavony” in his hometown of Polatsk;





## Culture

### “Pesnyary” – Legends in Bell-Bottoms

“I was a high school student, 10<sup>th</sup> grader, quite skeptical about domestically produced rock. I preferred “The Beatles” and “Rolling Stones”, he says. Local ideologists threatened to cancel the concert if “Lyavony” wouldn’t cut their scandalously long hair.



“Fortunately, Mulyavin agreed to go to the hairdresser’s. The concert was not just great – it actually turned me into a new person”, believes Uladzimer Arlou.

Mr. Arlou touches upon a very unique trait of Mulyavin. Ironically, the singer loved bell-bottomed jeans, had long hair and a splendid mustache, all of which was simply incompatible with the official image of a Soviet music star. Still despite these characteristics, “Pesnyary” were never forced into the shadowy world of a rock-n-roll underground. They were popular in every sense of the word. Mulyavin wasn’t a dissident, but an artist. He accepted the rules of the game and played during all kinds of ideological concerts and rallies, singing patriotic songs to the lyrics of Soviet poets. In return, they received high profile appearances and were even allowed to travel abroad to perform. A total of 12 millions of copies of “Pesnyary” vinyl disks were sold in the USSR. “Pesnyary” created scores of hit songs, dozens of which are still known today as classics. Mulyavin had a talent of expanding, with the help of music, the boundaries bestowed upon him.

However, the skies of “Pesnyary” were not always cloudless. As it

often happens, success was also a challenge. “Sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll” was not something “Pesnyary” haven’t heard of. (Perhaps, in their case it would be more accurate

to substitute “drugs” with “vodka and pickles”). “Pesnyary” weren’t too spoiled by money. For example, for the 2-million-copies of their disc, each member of the band received only 12 rubles in royalties (average monthly salary in the Soviet Union was about 100 rubles). Yet, it would be wrong to say that they experienced constant financial hardship. The more successful the



members of “Pesnyary” got, the more difficult it was to keep personal ambitions at bay. After a long crisis, “Pesnyary” broke up in 1998. Some members of “Pesnyary” moved abroad. Mulyavin, however, remained in Belarus. He never considered leaving his second mother-

land for his native Russia, let alone to go overseas, as some of his colleagues did.

Still, if you think it was the end of the band, you are wrong. Now, as the result of multiple breakups and reunions, there are 4 bands named “Pesnyary” and another one called “Belarusian Pesnyary”. All of them sing more or less the same songs and claim that they are the only legitimate heirs of the original “Pesnyary”. Uladzimir Mulyavin is unfortunately not part of this “Pesnyary” revival. In May 2002 he was involved in a car accident and died as a result of his injuries a half a year later.

But his voice is still with us – echoing in the morning through “radyjokropkas” that, like Uladzimir and his music, have aged but can never be replaced.

**By Ales Kudrytski for the ODB**

Some music by “Pesnyary”

<http://www.progarchives.com/artist.asp?id=2284>

<http://www.pakhmutova.ru/mp3/belovezh.mp3>

<http://www.pakhmutova.ru/mp3/belorus1.mp3>

“Pesnyary” on YouTube.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uO\\_LoO79Gvg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uO_LoO79Gvg)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYec5e4uWV4&feature=related>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul\\_g12ok6YY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul_g12ok6YY&feature=related)