

# Belarus Headlines

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Office for a Democratic  
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[www.democraticbelarus.eu](http://www.democraticbelarus.eu)

## Belarusian Poster Art Travelling Exhibition Opens in Warsaw



On 7 October 2008, “Visual code of the time: post-Soviet poster art in Belarus” opened in Warsaw’s *Zoya* gallery. The Polish capital is the first European city that hosts the travelling exhibition, organised by the Office for a Democratic Belarus with the help of the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

In the framework of this project, works of prominent Belarusian designers are going to be seen by audiences in various cities across Western Europe and will, hopefully, travel to North America.

The exhibition focuses on posters of fifteen prominent masters of the genre whose works received numerous awards and critical acclaim in various international competitions and festivals.

Among the authors whose posters are presented in this exhibition are Uladzimir Tsesler, Sergei Voichanka, Tatsyana Hardashnikava, Zmitser Sur-ski, Uladzimir Krukouski, Alena Kitaeva and many others.

In selecting works for this exhibition the organizers focussed on those of the 1980s and 1990s to demonstrate the im-

pact the important socio-political transformation taking place in Belarus at that time had on poster art, leading to the creation of new artistic techniques and forms.

The exhibition has attracted great attention. Familiar symbols of the countries’ communist past have evoked memories and generated vivid discussions. The audience show special interest in works on the Chernobyl catastrophe.

On Thursday, 9 October, the organisers of the exhibition presented a catalogue featuring forty-three posters accompanied by an additional explanatory text about each work.

The exhibition is on display in Warsaw until 21 October and will then travel to other venues in Europe, including Berlin, Dresden, Brussels, Amsterdam, Paris, Trieste, and some other cities.

The Office for a Democratic Belarus expresses its gratitude to all partner organisations who helped make this project possible. ODB extends our special thanks to the Belarusian Union of Designers and the *Zoya* gallery that has agreed to host the exhibition.

09.10.2008

**Source: ODB**

## EU and Belarus

### Press-Conference of Milinkevich and Kazulin at the European Parliament



*Photo: at the press-conference in the EP*

On 8 October 2008, the Office for a Democratic Belarus attended a press conference of the leader of Belarus' Movement for Freedom Aliaksandr Milinkevich, and a former presidential candidate and political prisoner Aliaksandr Kazulin, which took place in the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium. In the opening statement, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, the chairman of the meeting and the EP Committee on Foreign Relations, stressed that despite lack of major improvements in Belarus, the EU considers to lift certain sanctions imposed on Belarus in order to facilitate the development of the civil society and pro-democratic forces in that country. In his address, Mr. Milinkevich noted that Belarus, as many other countries, faces a financial crisis that would have the most detrimental impact given the dismal state of the Belarusian economy. In his opinion, only the EU can help modernise the country. Mr. Milinkevich further noted that the release of political prisoners,

which was one of the conditions set forth by the EU, is not a sufficient reason for lifting all the sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. In particular, it was stressed that no major improvements have been recorded in the conduct of the last parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, Mr. Milinkevich said he

is in favour of a dialogue between the EU and the Belarusian government, which, in his opinion, could be used as an instrument to demand more concessions from Lukashenka's government on human rights.

Aliaksandr Kazulin agreed with Mr. Milinkevich on the necessity of initiating a dialogue with the Belarusian authorities. Yet he believes this dialogue should take place with the participation of the country's democratic forces. Mr. Kazulin then noted that the resolution on Belarus drafted by the European Parliament clearly identifies the priorities of the Belarusian society. In his opinion, it presents an accurate assessment of the country's problems as well as the future perspectives. He said the last parliamentary election, as a result of which not a single representative of the opposition received the necessary vote, was the lost opportunity for Lukashenka. While addressing the question of political prisoners, which he

believes was an important step forward on the part of the Belarusian authorities, he stressed that the problem of persecution for political reasons has not been eliminated. Major institutional changes, particularly amendments of the Penal Code, are necessary to prevent the government from carrying out political repressions in the future. Mr. Kazulin also raised the question of lowering the fee of the Schengen visa for the Belarusians. He believes this would be an important step facilitating the country's democratic transition in the future.

In his address to the audience, Jacek Protasiewicz, head of EP Delegation for Relations with Belarus, presented his assessment of the EP resolution.

He also mentioned that the EU is considering lifting travel ban for some Belarusian politicians. In this regard, Mr. Milinkevich said the measure should apply to certain officials in the current administration that would provide for the establishment of a dialogue with the EU. For his part, Mr. Kazulin was more sceptical about the impact this step would have on the Belarusian government. In his opinion, a more feasible step would be to suspend the sanctions, as was done by the United States.

08.10.2008  
Source: ODB

### EU Parliament Supports Easing Belarus Sanctions

European Union nations should ease their sanctions against Belarus, the European Parliament urged on 8 October, just days before the 27 foreign ministers met for talks in Luxembourg.

The lawmakers voted 597 to 31 for a re-examination of the sanctions imposed on Belarus, still close to Moscow, with a view to an eventual suspension of "existing restrictive measures."



The parliament called on the member states and the European Commission, the E.U.'s executive arm, to consider a six-month sus-

pension of visa bans imposed on some of the Belarusian figures currently not welcome in the bloc.

At the same time it stressed there

would be no easing of the visa ban for "those directly involved in violating democratic election standards and human rights."

During the six-month period Belarus' restrictive media laws should be changed, the Euro deputies agreed.

08.10.2008  
Source: AFP

## EU and Belarus

### EU Suspends Visa Ban on Belarusian Officials



*Javier Solana and Syirhei Martynau*

Belarus' President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is once more free to enter the EU. The European Union is suspending a travel ban which targeted him and other officials. The bloc imposed the sanctions after critics internationally accused Lukashenka of rigging his re-election in 2006. Belarus' top diplomat, Syarhei Martynau,

has been attending the EU foreign ministers' meeting in Luxembourg. The warming of relations followed the release of political prisoners in Belarus.

The suspension of the travel ban does not apply to those involved in the "disappearances" of government opponents in 1999-2000 or to the president of the national election commission, who is excluded because the EU was dissatisfied with the fairness of last month's parliamentary elections in Belarus. The EU has kept the regime's top election commissioner blacklisted to show it disapproves of last month's parliamentary election in Minsk, in which no opposition candidates won seats.

*"The Council notes that, despite*

*some improvements, the parliamentary elections held on 28 September 2008 in Belarus failed to meet the democratic criteria of the OSCE. The Council calls on the Belarusian authorities to remedy the shortcomings observed and to cooperate fully to that end with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights"* reads the Council conclusions on Belarus.

Some EU countries are more determined to keep up pressure on Minsk. Financial measures against the Belarus administration have not been lifted. Extending the six month suspension of the visa ban would require the support of all the EU states.

13/10/2008

**Source: [consilium.europa.eu](http://consilium.europa.eu),  
euronews**

## Politics and Society

### OSCE: Parliamentary Elections in Belarus Fell Short of OSCE Commitments in Spite of Minor Improvements

Despite some minor improvements, the 28 September parliamentary elections in Belarus ultimately fell short of OSCE commitments for democratic elections, international observers from the OSCE concluded in a preliminary statement issued on 29 September.

The election took place in a strictly controlled environment with a barely visible campaign, said the observers from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA).

Voting was generally well conducted, but the process deteriorated considerably during the vote count. Promises to ensure transparency of the vote count were not implemented. The count was assessed as bad or very bad in 48 per cent of polling stations visited. Where access was possible, several cases of



deliberate falsification of results were observed. OSCE monitors were prevented or hindered from observing the vote count in 35 per cent of cases. This compromised the transparency of this fundamental element of the election process.

"The clear signals to improve the election process were not implemented and substantial improvements are required if Belarus is to conduct genuinely democratic elections in line with our common OSCE commitments. Unfortunately the repeated signals of good will did not seem to have been correctly given or received. Consequently the significant progress we hoped for in the democratic development of Belarus did not materialize," said Anne-Marie Lizin, Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE

short-term observers.

"I'm hopeful and disappointed at the same time. Hopeful because when we came here it seemed that there was some wind of change in the election environment; disappointed because we were unable to see a problem solved that has been with election observation in this country for a long time, and that is the non-transparency of the vote count. But we hope that the improved co-operation we have experienced during this election can be the basis for a genuine dialogue on implementing our recommendations", said Ambassador Geert Ahrens, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission. Positive developments included the slightly increased access of opposition representatives to election commissions, the decision to rebroadcast once the five-minute candidate spots during prime time, and the recommendation to seal ballot box slots overnight during the five-day early voting period.

**Please see the next page:**



## Politics and Society

### OSCE: Parliamentary Elections in Belarus Fell Short of OSCE Commitments in Spite of Minor Improvements

Some opposition candidates noted progress in their ability to conduct meetings in authorized locations without interference.

The legislative framework continues to present obstacles for elections in line with OSCE commitments. The media coverage of the campaign did not provide meaningful



information for voters to be able to make an informed choice. Political parties played a minor role, and restrictions imposed by the state authorities did not allow for a vibrant campaign with real competition.

The OSCE deployed some 450 international observers from 43 countries, including more than 320 short-term observers and 58 experts and long-term observers fielded by ODIHR, as well as 66 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA.

29/09/2008

Source: osce.org

### Belarus and Russia to Sign Air Defence Pact

Belarus and Russia are set to sign an agreement for a regional joint air defence system to counter NATO's eastward expansion, officials said.

The agreement, expected to be signed November 2 by the Supreme State Council of the Belarus-Russia Union State, would involve the coordination of existing



Belarusian S-300 surface-to-air missile systems and as well as the possible purchase of advanced S-400 systems from Russia, RIA

Novosti reported. State Secretary of the Union of Bela-

rus and Russia Pavel Borodin said the new agreement was a vital counterweight to efforts by NATO to woo other former Soviet republics.

"Military speaking, it is virtually a shield against NATO," Borodin told RIA Novosti.

08/10/2008

Source: UPI

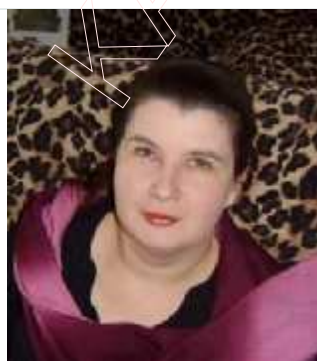
### Opposition Activist Yana Palyakova Assaulted in Salihorsk

Opposition activist Yana Palyakova was attacked by an unidentified man near her home in Salihorsk, Minsk region, on Thursday night.

As the woman's associate Ihar Rynkevich said the man grabbed her by the hair and slammed her head against the wall as she was unlocking her apartment door.

The man reportedly told the activist that "this will be the last warning if you don't keep quiet."

Ms. Palyakova was rushed to a hospital for treatment and then brought to a po-



Yana Palyakova

lice station, where she wrote a complaint about the attack. The activist claims that she was mistreated at the police station. A policeman grabbed me by the jacket and pulled it with so much strength that I wound up sitting on the floor. I was sitting and could not stand up because of acute pain in the lower back, and my leg hurts now so much that I cannot stand on it," she said.

The woman linked the attack to her attempts to have criminal proceed-

ings instituted in connection with what she described as her beating in the Salihorsk district police department in August.

The woman said that she had been beaten by police officers. She complained to the district prosecutor's office but the latter refused to investigate the incident.

Ms. Palyakova was a campaign aide of Volha Kazulina, a daughter of opposition politician Alyaksandr Kazulin, in the parliamentary elections earlier this year.

10/10/2008

Source: naviny.by

## Politics and Society

### Belarus-Kyrgyz Talks Result into 8 Joint Agreements

Bilateral talks held between the Kyrgyz and Belarus Presidents Kurmanbek Bakiev and Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Bishkek on Saturday, October 11, 2008 resulted into eight joint agreements.

The documents signed oblige the both parties to develop cooperation in economic, trade, culture, science and humanitarian spheres, as well as "grow constructive foreign policies' collaboration on the bilateral bases," namely under such interstate alliances as CIS, EurAsEC, CSTO, UN and OSCE - "in the name of peace, stability



*Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Kurmanbek Bakiev*

and security."

The cooperation agreements have

been also signed between the finance, culture, foreign affairs, labour and social development ministries of the both countries.

The presidents have also agreed to develop cooperation in the sphere of information. Therefore the Kyrgyz national news agency Kabar and the Belarus telegraph agency have signed information exchange agreement.

11.10.2008

**Source: 24 press club**

### Czech Foreign Minister Meets with Milinkevich



Belarusian opposition politician Alyaksandr Milinkevich met with Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg in Prague, said the press office of the former presidential candidate.

"The Czech government is carrying out consistent policy of supporting Belarusian civil society and has always backed the use of ethical policy regard-

ing Belarus," Mr. Milinkevich was quoted as telling the minister. Mr. Milinkevich said that it was very important for Belarusian civil society to maintain contacts with "Czech partners" especially during the time when the Czech Republic will preside over the European Union between January and July 2009.

On Sunday, Mr. Milinkevich attended an opening ceremony for the 12th Forum 2000 Conference, officially titled Openness and Fundamentalism in the 21st Century. Apart from Mr. Milinkevich, Russian opposition

leader Gari Kasparov, Polish journalist Adam Michnik and Czech economist and presidential adviser Jan Svejnar are participating in the conference founded by Vaclav Havel, former Czech president. The Belarusian opposition leader is scheduled to submit a report on relations between the government and civil society in Belarus and meet with the Czech prime minister, said his press office.

13/10/2008

**Source: BelaPAN**

### Russian Combat Aircraft to Join Military Drills with Belarus

Russian military aircraft and helicopters will conduct joint exercises with the Belarusian Air Force, a Russian Air Force spokesman said on Wednesday.

Lt. Col. Uladzimir Drik said Russian MiG-29 Fulcrum fighters, Su-25 Frogfoot close-support aircraft and Mi-24 Hind attack helicopters had landed at three Belarusian airbases on October 13 in preparation for the Fall-2008 operational and tactical exercises with the Belarusian Armed Forces.

The Fall-2008 exercises will involve around 8,500 personnel, military and special hardware, including over 40 aircraft, more than 60 tanks, around 250 armoured vehicles and up to 40 artillery pieces.

The participation by Russian aircraft in the exercises is part of the ongoing Russia-Belarus Stability-2008 drills, Drik said. The Stability-2008 exercises will last until October 21 across various regions of Russia and Belarus with the goal of practicing the strategic deployment of the Armed Forces, including the nuclear triad, to counter potential threats near the Russian border. "The exercise will involve the majority of personnel and strategic aircraft in service with strategic aviation units," Col. Gen. Alexander Zelin earlier said. "The crews will deploy the entire range of on board weaponry."

The Russian Air Force combat training program has scheduled more than 200 exercises with 350 live firing drills for the second half of 2008.

**5.10.2008**

**Source: RIANovosti**

## Finance and Economics

### World Bank Approves New Financing to Assist Belarus in Improving Delivery of Water Supply and Sanitation Services

The Board of Executive Directors of the World Bank today approved a US\$60 million loan to the Republic of Belarus for a Water Supply and Sanitation Project. The project aims to increase the efficiency, quality, and sustainability of water supply and sanitation services to 1.7 million people living in 20 rayons across the country. This is the first operation under the recently approved World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy for Belarus (2008-2011) targeted at areas that improve people's livelihoods and contribute to protecting the environment.

The project consists of three components. The first component with an allocation of US\$53.60 million will finance water supply development through rehabilitation and construction of deep wells, pumping stations, transmission mains, distribution net-



work, ground and elevated reservoirs, and iron removal plants. This component will also finance rehabilitation of the wastewater collection system and wastewater treatment plants including the installation of pumping stations,

sludge dewatering systems, collection networks, and monitoring stations and small laboratories.

The second component, in the amount of \$6.05 million, will finance engineering and construction management activities needed in order to undertake the investments in component 1. These include engineering preparation, preparation of feasibility studies and designs as well as bidding documents. It will also include advisory services and construction supervision, as well as, monitoring and evaluation and reporting on audits.

The third component, worth US\$0.20 million will ensure project monitoring

as well as training to enhance technical capacity and competence of the participating utilities. The project will be implemented by a Project Coordinating Team within the Republican Unitary Enterprise Zilkommuntekhnikha reporting to the Ministry of Housing and Utilities.

According to Kanthan Shankar, World Bank Task Team Leader for the project, "The Belarus Water and Sanitation Project complements the government's own National Water Development Program 'Chystaya Vada'. We hope our collaboration contributes to furthering innovation, modernization, and capacity development of the Belarus water sector."

The project will be financed through a Specific Investment Loan with the Variable Spread Loan in US dollars including five years' grace and level repayment of the principal.

01/10/2008

Source: Interfax

### Belarus '09 Budget Overhauls Tax, Cuts Deficit

Belarusian Parliament gave initial approval on Thursday to next year's budget which will overhaul the tax system and reduce the deficit to 1.8 percent from 1.9 percent in 2008.

The draft, still to be passed in a second reading, got rid of a graduated income tax system of between 9-30 percent. Instead, there is to be a flat rate of 12 percent.

Finance Minister Andrei Kharkavets later told journalists that the change

was aimed at raising living standards. The draft indicates that Minsk wants to try to borrow \$200 million abroad next year to cover a deficit of \$1.4 billion. The remainder will be covered by existing funds.

Belarus is in talks with Moscow to receive a credit on favourable terms of \$2 billion, similar to the \$1.5 billion it received last year which helped Minsk pay for a sharp increase in gas imports from Russian monopoly Gazprom.

Belarus now pays \$129 per 1,000 cubic metres, far below the \$500 that Gazprom says its Western European clients pay.

The budget draft assumes a gas price of \$140 next year, but that is far below a level of \$200-250 mooted by Moscow.

02/10/2008

Source: Reuters

### Owner of Estonia's No. 2 Brewery Invests in Belarus

Olvi plc, Finnish group that owns A. Le Coq in Estonia, has acquired a majority holding in the Belarusian brewery Lidskae Piva. The company that is the third largest brewery and soft drink company in Finland said in a statement



that Belarus was a natural direction for Olvi's expansion since Olvi already has brewery operations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Lidskae Piva is in private ownership. After the transaction, Olvi plc is the majority shareholder with a 51

percent holding, while the remaining 49 percent is distributed evenly among the brewery's personnel. The acquisition price is approximately USD 16 million.

03/10/2008

Source: Baltic business news



## Finance and Economics

### German Companies Suggest Renewable Energy Projects to Belarus

German companies suggest implementing joint projects in Belarus in the area of renewable energy sources, head of the German economy representation in Belarus Uladzimir Augustinsky said at the German Economy Day in Minsk on October 1. In his words, several German companies present their proposals for using renewable energy sources, including a project for setting up a hybrid power plant. Investments in the project may exceed 200 million euro. The companies will hold negotiations with interested Belarusian state agencies to discuss the possibility of implementing the project in Belarus, said the source. He specified, the project was initiated at the Belarusian-German energy forum in May 2008. Uladzimir Augustinsky underscored,

the interest of German business circles in Belarus is on the rise. It is the fifth delegation of German businessmen that has visited Belarus this year, with visits planned for the next year as well. The present delegation includes around 35 representatives of over 20 German companies, which operate in power engineering, chemistry, electronics, instrument making, transport and consulting. While in Belarus members of the delegation are expected to discuss opportunities for manufacturing cooperation. Measures taken to liberalise the economy and Belarus' advancement to the number of leading legislation reformers provided a positive influence on the rising interest of German investors, remarked Uladzimir Augustinsky. "I think the possibility of partaking in the

privatisation programme adopted by the Belarusian government will invoke a lot of interest of investors," he added. The German Economy Day is arranged by the German-Belarusian Economic Club and the representation of the German economy in the Republic of Belarus with assistance of the German embassy. The event is supposed to inform the general public about the operation of German companies in Belarus and to expand contacts with Belarusian partnering companies. It is the second German Economy Day organised by the German side in Minsk. Entrepreneurship culture, various aspects of which are considered during events and presentations, is the theme line of the German Economy Day.

06/10/2008

Source: Your Industry News

### Russia Offers Belarus Its Ruble



*Alyaksandr Lukashenka*

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stated yesterday that he has suggested that Belarus create a "currency pool" with Russia, its partner in the Union State, and use the Russian ruble for settlements in energy trades at least until the instability on the financial markets passes. Putin was in Minsk for negotiations with the Belarusian Prime Minister Sergey Sidorenko. "The problems the American economy and American currency system have encountered today are well known to us," the Russian prime minister said. "In that connection, there are grounds to think about what I said. For the Russian

national currency, it's important." "Currency pool" is a term used in Great Britain in the 1940s and in Southeast Asia in the 1990s. It is the partial unification of current exchange regulation, including through international reserves. In practice, it is a unification of parts of national reserves. In Russia's case, the changes would be mainly a matter of image. Russia's international reserves exceed \$540 billion. Those of Belarus consisted of \$4.58 billion as of September 1, as determined by the International Monetary Fund, and \$5.6 billion according to the Belarusians. The Belarusian National Bank does not make public the amount of its reserves it keeps in Russian rubles, but it acknowledged in its 2007 annual report that 80.1 percent of its reserves were in "currency with limited convertibility." The Russian ruble was considered such a currency at the beginning of 2007. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has motivation to accept Putin's proposal. Belarus's balance of trade with Russia in the first half of the year was negative. Export from Belarus to Russia totalled \$6 billion, and import



*Vladimir Putin*

to Belarus from Russia was \$12.7 billion. The creation of a pool would more closely tie the Belarusian rubles to the Russian one, but there have been several suggestions that Belarus simply convert to the use of the Russian ruble, which Lukashenka rejected. The move would limit the Belarusian National Bank's ability to regulate macroeconomic processes in the country and require greater transparency of it.

07/10/2008

Source: [kommersant.com](http://kommersant.com)

## Culture

### Nasha Niva: Sprouting Field

#### *Retracing the path of the first Belarusian newspaper*

It was a cold day of November 10, 1906. The air of Vilnius was filled with the odours of burning coal, fallen leaves and the gentle scent of snow, which was just about to start falling. Two men were walking down the street, clutching a sheet of paper and reading it so intensively as if it were a prophecy or a map of the island full of treasures. In a sense, it was. Two brothers, Ivan and Anton Lutskevich, were holding in their hands the first issue of the first full-fledged newspaper in the Belarusian language. Something, this land has never seen before.

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At the beginning of the 20th century, Vilnius was a bustling multicultural city, situated on the European outskirts of the senile and weary Russian Empire. For ages, Russia and its conquered provinces had been kept more or less solidly together by brutal force. Uprisings of the suppressed nations, czarist crackdowns and liberalization periods changed each other. Combined with the social unrest, all this finally brought about the first Russian revolution in 1905. The monarchy survived, but had to make some liberal concessions. This, in turn, stirred up various national intellectual circles to activity, which later resulted in the birth of new modern European nations, such as Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and, of course, Belarusian.

“Don’t you think that we want to serve just the aristocrats, or exclusively the common folk. No, never! We shall serve all deprived Belarusian people, we shall try to become a mirror of life, reflecting the sunlight into the darkness”, read the first editorial of Nasha Niva. Until 1905, printing books and newspapers in the Belarusian language in the Russian empire was illegal. No wonder Nasha Niva was like a ray of light for people all over Belarus, especially in small towns and villages. The newspaper

spoke their language! It was all the more helpful that the newspaper was published in two versions – one in Cyrillic and another in the Latin alphabet, so that the Belarusians used to reading Russian or Polish could understand it.

Together with Aliaksandar Ulasau, a big amicable man with a splendid moustache and a small country estate, which gave him some financial independence founded Nasha Niva.

In Belarusian, “Nasha Niva” means “Our Field”. In the field of Belarusian culture there was a lot of work indeed. Unlike with previous attempts to create the Belarusian-language press, Nasha Niva was not directed against the regime in the first place, but aimed at bringing up the modern nation with the help of information, culture and education. As a result, Nasha Niva became much more than just a newspaper. Soon it has grown into an extensive network of subscribers and correspondents, united most of the prominent Belarusian intellectuals and writers of that time, and largely contributed to the development of the modern Belarusian language. Nasha Niva covered a whole range of the topics and themes, from the elections of the Russian parliament (Duma) to new tips on farming that were borrowed from Denmark. A special place was given to literature. Many young authors, who published in Nasha Niva, later became Belarusian classics, including Maxim Bahdanovich and Yanka Kupala who also was the newspaper’s Editor-in-Chief in 1914-1915.

For Lutskevich brothers Nasha Niva was a tremendously important project, but it was not the only project they managed. Being the founders of the Belarusian social-democratic party Hramada, they

were also the driving force behind the proclamation of Belarusian independence in 1918. Without Nasha Niva and its enormous political and cultural influence over the emerging nation, this would have hardly been possible.

However, the Belarusian People’s Republic shortly fell under the heavy steps of Soviet Russia. The communist ideology labeled Nasha Niva a “bourgeois-nationalistic mouthpiece” and locked its remaining copies in secret archives. The circle

of Nasha Niva authors literally melted in the merciless fire of Stalinist purges and the two world wars. It appeared like the story of Nasha Niva, as well as of independent Belarus, was finally

over. Still, the roller-coaster of history made another breathtaking twist. In 1991 Belarus regained its independence and Nasha Niva revived again.

Similarly to 1906, Nasha Niva was reestablished in Vilnius in 1991 by the group of Belarusian-speaking intellectuals. With the famous literature critic and essayist Siarhey Dubavets as its

Editor-in-Chief, Nasha Niva of the 1990’s was more of a magazine than a newspaper, less centered on current events, and more concerned with the large-scale problems of nation-building. It featured sophisticated essays, literary works – both Belarusian and foreign, and became a testing field for ideas of new Belarusian intellectuals.

“When my colleagues and I began to revive Nasha Niva in 1991, we had to follow the footsteps of Lutskevich brothers”, says Siarhey Dubavets in his Radio Liberty program “The thing is, that the newspaper was being revived in the still-existing USSR, which was a Soviet sequel to the Russian empire... The whole situation was not much different from 1906.”



Anton Lutskevich



Ivan Lutskevich



Aliaksandr Ulasau



## Culture

### Nasha Niva: Sprouting Field

After the Soviet Union finally broke up in the late 1991, the newspaper moved from Vilnius to Minsk, the capital of the newly independent Belarus.

In 2000 Andrey Dynko became a new Editor-in-Chief of Nasha Niva, which also marked a rather significant change in

the newspaper's editorial policy. Nasha Niva evolved to a weekly newspaper with a strong interest in politics and other current affairs, although retaining a significant emphasis on culture in general and literature in particular. According to the new concept, Nasha Niva should reflect all sides of life of Belarusian life just like it did in 1906, from politics to sports, from stock prices to art exhibitions. This policy is being continued by the present Editor-in-Chief Andrey Skurko.

When you compare the circumstances in which "the original" and "the renewed" Nasha Niva existed, you will find striking similarities. Today, just as in the 1910's, Belarus struggles under the authoritarian regime. Back in the 1910's and now, Nasha Niva, despite its legal status, have always been under the tremendous pressure from the state. In the czarist Russia the issues of Nasha Niva were confiscated on a regular basis. In Belarus, the newspaper struggles under a ban on distribution and subscription. Aliaksandar Ulasau, the Editor-in-Chief of the "old" Nasha Niva, spent two months in prison in 1910 on charges of publishing an article, which was "dangerous to the state order". In March 2006, Andrey Dynko, the Editor-in-Chief of the renewed Nasha

Niva, was sentenced to 15 days in prison on falsified charges – in reality, together with other journalists of Nasha Niva, he



*Opposition activist Viktor Ivashkevich reading Nasha Niva*

was just bringing warm food and clothes to the people protesting in the center of Minsk against the manipulated presidential elections. Among the present staff writ-

ers of Nasha Niva most have already spent some time in prison on political charges.

Then and now, Nasha Niva was and remains anything but a lucrative enterprise. Back in the 1910's Ivan Lutskevich, who was a passionate collector of antiques, could not only make his own living and create a unique collection of Belarusian rarities through his operations, but also struggled to provide additional funding to Nasha Niva. Today, the newspaper has to rely mainly on donations from its readers and sympathizers in Belarus and all over the world, since private firms are afraid to advertise with the free press, fearing governmental crackdowns.

However, some things are also different from 1906. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was no internet. Today the newspaper's website [www.nn.by](http://www.nn.by) is the leading Belarusian-language source of information on the internet. Belarus is independent now, unlike in 1906, when the full sovereignty was something one could barely dare to dream about, let alone publicly write about it. And, finally, the renewed Nasha Niva outlived its predecessor by almost two times, which gives hope that things do change to better, and that the work of people who created Nasha Niva 100 years ago was not in vain.

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It was a cold day of September 10, 1939. Anton Lutskevich tried to make his hands warm by breathing on them, but didn't work. The air, which entered his prison cell through the iron bars, was filled with the odours of burning coal, fallen leaves and the sharp scent of snow, which had already started to fall. Anton thought about his brother Ivan who died of tuberculosis in the Polish mountain town of Zakopane in 1919. Could they imagine, walking down Vilnius streets back in 1906, that everything would turn out that way? That all their precious dreams, Nasha Niva, independent Belarus, their friends and their lives, will be swept away by the bloody communist tide? Anton knew that Gulag would be his next destination, and realized he might never make it back home. "This will probably be a very long winter", he whispered. Their field might not sprout for a long while, despite of all the seeds which had been planted there. "I guess we'll just have to wait for another spring to come", Anton thought and closed his eyes.

14.10.2008

By Ales Kudrytsky



*Andrey Dynko released after 15 days of arrest*