

# Belarus Round Table at the German Marshall Fund of the United States

President Alexander Lukashenko somewhat softened pressures on the democratic opposition in Belarus over the past year, releasing political prisoners in August 2008, and allowing some space for opposition parties during the September 2008 parliamentary elections. At the same time however, electoral manipulations and continued repressions against civic activists indicate that the regime is far from allowing substantial freedoms to its citizens. Additionally, the global financial meltdown has forced Minsk to undertake several steps that seemed unthinkable a few years ago, including cutting a number of social benefits, devaluing the Belarusian Ruble, initiating further privatization of key state-owned assets, and seeking loans from Russia and the IMF. On the international stage, Lukashenko continues to maneuver between East and West, though it remains to be seen if improved ties with Western Europe will lead to a liberalization of the political situation in Belarus.

Against this background, it is important for democratic opposition and civil society throughout Belarus to seek an active and constructive role, address the mounting economic, political, and social problems, and propose alternative policies to tackle these challenges in the coming year. Please join **Pavol Demes**, director of GMF's Bratislava office, as he leads a discussion with **Irina Krasovskaya**, president of the We Remember Foundation, and **Pavel Marozau**, coordinator of the Third Way of Belarus, on recent changes in Belarus and possibilities for future development. The roundtable event will be held at GMF's offices at **1700 18<sup>th</sup> Street NW on Thursday, February 12, from 3:30pm to 5:00pm.**

This roundtable will be followed by the opening of the [exhibition "Art Against Dictatorship,"](#) organized by the Third Way of Belarus and the Belarusan Museum in New York – in cooperation with several local and global initiatives. This traveling exhibition addresses the integral part that the alternative arts scene plays in preserving and enhancing Belarusian culture, particularly in the face of political pressures that marginalize their mainstream presence, and will provide unique insights into contemporary Belarusian art. The reception will be held from 5:00 – 6:30pm.

**Please RSVP for both events to Carolyn Colome by email ([widereuropeintern2@gmfus.org](mailto:widereuropeintern2@gmfus.org)) or phone (202 683-2655) by**

**Tuesday, February 10<sup>th</sup>.**