

Grassroots leaders' stories, London conference, corruption in public procurement – Belarus civil society digest

The Second Annual London Conference on Belarusian Studies will take place on February 25, while the 7th International Congress of Belarusian Studies announces a call for sections.

SYMPA releases a social advertising video on corruption in public procurement. REP independent trade union starts appealing electronic and written signatures to abolish the decree on freeloaders. Media release new grassroots leaders' stories.

Belarus in Focus 2016 opens online voting for best article. Informal education courses for elderly kick off in Homiel.

This and more in the new edition of Belarus civil society digest.

Grassroots and local communities

[Sakavitskiya Sustrechy invite volunteers](#). On 4-5 March, *Sakavitskiya Sustrechy/March Meetings* of Belarusian CSOs will take place in Minsk. The forum will focus on the participation of CSOs and citizens in the local communities' development and gather over 150 practitioners from around the country. The organisers – Office of European Expertise and Communications (OEEC) and New Eurasia – invite volunteers to help during the event.

[Grassroots leaders' stories](#). OEEC together with media CityDog.by, [34mag.net](#), Zautra.by, *Imena* magazine and platform Talaka.by continues a series of publications about active people who change the life of their communities. The recent stories tell about [Falanster](#) youth NGO that motivates IT-specialists to work for free for non-profit initiatives and a [photographer](#) from Braslaŭ who triggered a wave of activism in his native town.

[The City-2 calls for fellows](#). The City-2 is a continuation of the [City](#) project, implemented by the Centre for Cultural Management last year: the project presents civic activism in an attractive, inspiring manner of a professional reality show and motivates a wider audience to be active in community life. Grand Prix is a thematic study visit to Brazil. Deadline for applications is February 28.

Human rights and good governance

[Corruption in public procurement in Belarus](#). School of Young Managers in Public Administration (SYMPA) released a video that demonstrates how much Belarusians could make out of the money stolen in public procurement in Belarus yearly. The video calls to stop the corruption and join watchdogging public finances at [koshturada.by](#) and public procurement at [opentenders.by](#) websites.

[Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2016](#). According to Human Rights Centre *Viasna*'s annual review, the year saw a continuation of the policy of 'soft practices', which began in August 2015, as the authorities kept abstaining from detention of protesters. At the same time, the year was marked by a nearly sevenfold boost in the number of cases when citizens were fined for exercising freedom of peaceful assembly and

expression, as compared to the previous year.

Conferences and discussions

[The Second Annual London Conference on Belarusian Studies](#) will take place on 25 February. It is organised by the UCL School of Slavic and Eastern European Studies, the [Ostrogorski Centre](#) and the [Belarusian Francis Skaryna Library and Museum](#). The speakers from Belarus, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, the US and other countries will come to London to present and discuss Belarus-related research.

[Congress calls for sections](#). The 7th International Congress of Belarusian Studies announces a call for sections (panels). The Congress that will take place on 15-17 September 2017 in Warsaw is the most representative annual academic event, which unites all major centres of research on politics, society, and culture of Belarus. Application deadline is 10 March 2017.

[Intellectual club by Svetlana Aleksievich presents its next guest Rūta Vanagaitė](#), a Lithuanian writer. The lecture will be held on 2 March at the Embassy of Lithuania; around 150 people will be invited to attend. Meanwhile, TUT.by [posted](#) the record of the 2nd meeting of the Nobel laureate, [Svetlana Aleksievich Club](#) with the participation of the Russian journalist Stanislav Belkovsky.

Policy initiatives

[For the abolition of the decree on freeloaders](#). On 1 February REP independent trade union started appealing electronic and written signatures to the state bodies for the abolition of the decree "On Freeloaders" that provides unemployed Belarusians to pay an annual tax of \$190. The topic is also actively discussed by other civic and political forces: [Dzeya](#) initiative provides legal consulting, [Havary Praudu](#) campaign

holds a freeloaders' meeting in February, [UCPB](#) and [BSDP](#) – street protests.

[Working group on the improvement of the foreign gratuitous aid legislation established](#). It happened in late January at a meeting of CSO Council at the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The group will develop proposals on improvement of the legislation on foreign gratuitous aid.

Media initiatives

[Imena magazine launches a new crowdfunding campaign](#). The goal is to collect around \$90K to provide the annual magazine activity. Launched in 2016, *Imena* is the first Belarusian public media that exists only due to the readers' donations. The magazine tells about people in need and helps raise money and attract volunteers to address social problems.

[Belarus in Focus 2016: Online voting for the best article](#). Belarus in Focus 2016 – a contest for journalists writing about Belarus – announce the start of the online voting for the best article by the readers. The texts of the nominees are available on the contest page. The author that will receive the most votes will be awarded a valuable prize.

Education

[Golden Age University launched in Homiel](#). From early January, the Regional Resource Centre in Homiel hosts classes for Homiel seniors of 55+ years old. The most demanded skills among the pensioners are computer and mobile literacy, knowledge about non-traditional approaches to health as well as history and art. Such non-formal Universities for seniors are organised in Hrodna, Viciebsk and Minsk.

[TechMinsk International Accelerator invites participants](#).

TechMinsk the first International Entrepreneurship School in Belarus. TechMinsk prepares the next generation of global entrepreneurs and changemakers from Eastern Europe and helps them build rapid high growth companies and go global. The School is paid. Deadline for applications is 10 February.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.