

# Lukashenka's Prize, \$100 Exit Fee Contested, Belarusian Programmers – Western Press Digest

Belarusian programmers are a hot commodity on the international market. Belarusian ruler Alexandr Lukashenka and the state police of Belarus were awarded the Ig Noble Peace Prize for 2013. A Belarusian physician who criticised the government on youtube says that he is receiving psychotropic drug treatments against his will.

The fall out over the Uralkali-Belaruskali split continued to dominate western press coverage. Russian authorities ordered its oil firms to reduce exports to Belarus in response to Minsk's actions in the dispute. In response Belarusian authorities report that an international warrant for the arrest of Uralkali's leading shareholder have been issued, while Interpol denies the existence of any warrants being issued in connection. All this and more in the Western Press Digest.

## [\\$100 Exit Fee for Belarusian Citizens Contested by Activists](#) –

A petition against the recently announced presidential decision to introduce a \$100 fee for Belarusians traveling abroad is circulating online according to RFE/RL. The Belarusian ruler announced the new fee as a means to have Belarusians buying domestic products, and not bringing back foreign products that are already being made in Belarus. RFE/RL reports that the activists principle argument is that such a fee violates their constitutional right to free movement.

## [Lukashenka Awarded 2013 Ig Noble Peace Prize](#) – The annual Ig

Noble prize ceremony recently took place at Harvard University. Ig Noble prizes are annual awards given to individuals or groups who have achieved unusual results and their honour achievements. According to the BBC's coverage the president and state police of Belarus got it for "making public applause illegal and having arrested a one-armed man for the offence."

[Belarusian Programmers Competitive with India](#) – Belarusian and other eastern European may have an edge in the programming world, as companies continue to look to outsource. Bloomberg's coverage focuses on how companies like Belarusian founded Epam Systems Inc. and Ukrainian-based Ciklum as part of a new generation of creative programming companies growing thanks to their focus on innovation and strong programming culture. Programmers from the region are also doing very well in a large number of international competitions sponsored by industry giants such as Google and IBM, taking a majority of the prizes.

[Detained Physician Receiving Psychiatric Treatment Against his Will](#) – Belarusian Physician Ihar Pasnou was detained and forcibly admitted to a psychiatric hospital in August where they are administering psychotropic shots to him without his consent. According to RFE/RL, Pasnou attracted the attention of the authorities after posting videos on YouTube that were critical of local officials for not doing anything to better health care in the area. An opposition activist recently visited the physician and managed to smuggle out an audio recording of Pasnou describing his situation. In the audio recording, the physician recounts how he is receiving the shots with increasingly large dosages.

[Disputed 2010 Presidential Elections the Subject of New Pro-Government Film](#) – The BBC covered a recent dispute that arose in Belarus over a controversial new film about the 2010 Presidential Elections. Nonstop Media is reportedly developing the new film. The company had previously produced the UNDP-

funded “Above the Sky”, who received a grant from the Belarusian Ministry Culture. According to the BBC, the film will tell the history of events in accordance with the official version. The news service described the events based on a recent article written by a former colleague of Nonstop Media’s producer (Sergei Zhdanovich), who had previously had a dispute with Zhdanovich while working on the “Above the Sky” series.

### **Russian Trade Dispute with Belarus part of a Growing Trend** –

The Financial Times reports on Russia’s efforts to dissuade republics of the former Soviet Union from getting any closer to non-Russian led economic and political entities. The publication cites the recent trade conflicts with Ukrainian chocolate and Moldovan wine as Russia’s approach to those countries whom are strengthening their economic and political ties with the EU. Belarus, a long-time ally of Russia, is being punished for its open attempts to secure financial support and investment from China, something that the Kremlin sees as an affront. The Financial Times also commented that the hard-ball politics that Moscow is using against its neighbours may backfire in November, where Ukraine and Moldova expect to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union.

### **Belarus Imprison Uralkali CEO and Seeks Largest Shareholder Next** –

The Washington Post reports that the arrest of Uralkali CEO Vladislav Baumgertner by Belarusian authorities was only the first step. Official Minsk is pursuing Russian billionaire Suleyman Kerimov of abuse of power in the aftermath of the joint Russian-Belarusian company’s split. The move to pursue Kerimov is seen as a response to Russia’s blocking of Belarusian exports and reduced level of oil imports into the country. While the Belarusian authorities stated that a warrant had been issued for Kerimov’s arrest by Interpol, but a [statement issued by the organisation](#) said that no warrants have been issued. The rift between two of the leading potash

producers in the world is seen as part of a growing divide between Russia and Belarus.

**Souring Russian-Belarusian Relations** – RFE/RL reports that the recent rift in relations between Belarus and Russia over the detention of Uralkali's CEO has significantly elevated tensions between the two nations. According to the publication, not only were the actions of the Belarusian authorities unexpected, but they have come as a genuine shock to both the Kremlin and Russian society. Russia's response to the detention was quick and calculated: ban the import of any pork products from Belarus, cut discounted oil exports to the country, and threaten to block other key Belarusian exports from reaching Russia.

The move to detain Baumgartner may work out in Belarus' favour, according to Andrei Suzdaltsev of the Higher School of Economics. According to the expert, Putin will be reluctant to have the Russian-led Customs Union be seen as weak or struggling, particularly while it tries to use it to bring countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia back under Russian influence.

**Despite Potash Row, Russia's Rosneft Moving Forward with Projects** – Reuters reported that Rosneft has no plans to abandon its energy projects in Belarus. Igor Sechin, a close Putin ally and Rosneft CEO, met with Lukashenka recently to discuss the plans of Belarus' largest supplier of oil. While cuts in the amount of oil that is exported to Belarus will see a decline, the reasons are not due to the current political situation, but rather due to infrastructure issues. According to Reuters, Sechin also remarked that the current rift around Belaruskali and Uralkali will not affect Rosneft's work in Belarus, since they have stable relations.

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