

MaeSens Collects Record Donations, Cycling Initiatives, Lustration – Belarus Civil Society Digest

Cycling initiatives bloom in Belarus. MaeSens donations exceed \$300,000. New Homel campaign launches a hotline for residents on local issues.

European Intercultural Festival announces creative competitions.

Makei flies Brussels, Head of Lithuanian MFA – to Minsk. Belarus and United States reciprocally reduce visa costs.

Cycling in Belarus

[Velofreemarket is to be held in Minsk](#) on July 27. The agenda provides exchanging bicycle items in the best traditions of freemarket: you can bring nothing, but take a couple of useful features for free. The organizers also promise practical workshops on bike repair and tuning, film screening, panel discussion and presentations from Minsk Cycling Society, Bike kitchen Garage 38, Critical Mass initiative, Falanster NGO and EcoTopia Bike Tour.

[First Saturday bike event from IbikeMinsk project](#). On July 19, in the center of Minsk, a bike event under the project *I-bike-Minsk* took place, organised by a network of petrol stations A-100, Minsk Cycling Society, with the support of Green Alliance. The participants had an opportunity to demonstrate their ability in figure riding, send a postcard to friends, recalling the need for protecting the climate, as well as to rent a bike for "Thanks".

[Cycling race Susedzi attended by about 700 participants](#). On July 19, a traditional amateur cycling race *Susedzi 2014/Neighbors* took place at the August channel near Hrodna. This year the event was really a breakthrough both in the number of participants and volunteers. The youngest participant was 5 years old and the oldest 71. In total 693 people attended.

New Initiatives

[Homel activists open a public hotline on local issues](#). The campaign *New Homel* launched a hotline for Homel residents who have concerns regarding conditions of their houses, yards, etc. *New Homel* became a logical transition from the campaign *Novobelitsa* implemented by a group of activists headed by [Galina Kravchenko](#).

The campaign *Novobelitsa* achieved 20 victories in the city for eight months like installing new playgrounds, bicycle parking, etc. and that inspired activists to expand their activity for the whole city.

[Donations collected by the MaeSens project have exceeded 3 billion rubles \(about \\$300,000\)](#). MaeSens project is a social Internet platform, launched in October 2011. The main goal is raising funds for charity through charity auction meetings.

[New UNDP initiative to integrate people with disabilities into society](#). Under its new initiative 'Inclusive development agenda beyond 2015: Social inclusion of peoples with disabilities in Belarus', UNDP offers everyone to talk about real-life experiences of people with disabilities through a [special online platform](#). Once a sufficient number of stories are received, they will be processed with special software, and the results will form the basis of new programs and projects in the field of social inclusion.

[Trip to Kiev for ideas](#). On July 21-24, in Kiev, a group of Belarusian activists and journalists participated in the information trip titled *U Kraine Ideiau/In the Country of*

Ideas, organised by Belarus Watch. Participants had the opportunity to meet with leading organisations of today's Ukraine such as Public sector of Euromaidan, coalition 'Resuscitation reform package', Internet project Hromadske TV, Internews Ukraine, Centre UA. All meetings were broadcasted online.

[Round table discussion entitled 'The relevance of lustration in the contemporary post-Soviet space'](#) was held on July 18 by the public initiative 'Lustration for Belarus'. The range of issues for discussion included studying the Ukrainian experience, as well as examples of lustration in other post-Soviet countries, and possible options for the development of the Concept of Lustration in Belarus. The organisers came to the conclusion that Belarusian society must be prepared for the process of lustration in advance and invited those present to work together.

Culture

[Shuma-Library ornament](#). *Shuma* musical project together with researchers made ethnography collection of traditional symbols of Belarus with a description of their value. Shuma-Library ornament is an educational project implemented completely on a charitable basis. Shuma-Library aims to broaden knowledge of authentic Belarusian symbolism, print favorite ornaments, embroider, do tattoos, etc.

[European Intercultural Festival: contests](#). The European Intercultural Festival goes on to invite to participate in its contests, namely in [European Belarus](#) movie contest, children's drawing contest [My Europe](#), essay contest [My Favorite City in Belarus](#). The Festival is organised for the second time and to be held in Minsk on September 3-13, 2014 on the initiative of the Office for a Democratic Belarus, the Office for European Expertise and Communication and Fond of Ideas. The works for the contests should be submitted by August 30.

Presentations

[Monitoring violations of academic freedom of students for January-May 2014.](#) *Studentskaya Rada* Youth group in the framework of the Bologna Public Committee with the support of EuroBelarus presents the results of the Monitoring violations of academic freedom of students for the first five months of 2014. In particular, the authors note the increased pressure on students for their participation in CSO activities. The Monitoring is carried out in all Belarusian cities with the higher education institutions in order to obtain relevant information on the situation of academic freedom and the rights of students.

[Presentation of Ales Bialiatski's book.](#) *The Quicksilver of Life* is the first book by Chairman of the Human Rights Center *Viasna*, Ales Bialiatski, which was presented in Minsk on July 22 with the participation of the author. The former political prisoner was released a month ago, on June 21, when the book was already printed. The book consists of a series of essays, or rather, letters from Ales Bialiatski, which he sent to his colleagues during his detention in Babruisk colony.

Foreign Affairs

[Makei in Brussels.](#) The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei took part in the Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting, which was held in Brussels on July 22, 2014. Vladimir Makei met with top officials of the European External Action Service and the European Commission as well as ministers of foreign Affairs of the EU Member States and the EaP Partner Countries.

[Belarus and Lithuania foster dynamic cooperation](#) (video). The corresponding assessment was made by the PM Mikhail Myasnikovich at his meeting with the Lithuanian Foreign Minister. The latter is also persuaded that good neighborly relations should be developed. Foreign Minister of Lithuania

Linas Linkevicius pays [a working visit to Belarus](#) on July 24-25. Belarus-Lithuania relations, cooperation between Belarus and the European Union are on the agenda.

[USA reduces costs of visas for Belarusians on parity terms.](#)

After consultations between the Belarusian Foreign Ministry and the American side as of June 1, 2014 the universal consular fee for reviewing applications for issuing Belarusian visas of all kinds to USA citizens was set at \$160. The U.S. reduced the cost of visas for Belarusians on parity terms and will now levy a similar consular fee of \$160 for issuing a number of kinds of multiple-entry visas with the validity period of 12 months.

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.