

Mass Protests, Media Activism, Expert Club – Civil Society Digest

Stallholders gather outside Tax Ministry's to demand abolition of new rules – no breakthrough though. Authorities suspend criminal case against former presidential candidate Alieś Michalievič.

Press Club Belarus holds official opening ceremony in Minsk. Decree 98 will not affect calls inside Skype and Viber. BISS and Press Club launch Analytical Club governed by Chatham House rules. Liberal Club held a round table devoted to the reform of the pension system in Belarus.

Mass protests

[Freedom Day opposition action is held in Minsk on March 25.](#)

Minsk authorities allowed to conduct the march. The Belarusian democratic community celebrates Freedom Day (March 25) every year. The independence of the Belarusian People's Republic was announced on this day in 1918. This is considered to be the most important date in the modern Belarusian statehood.

[Court tried to convict Uladzimir Mackievič for participating in a rally, who, meanwhile was outside Belarus.](#)

The philosopher [Uladzimir Mackievič](#) presented the plane tickets and a stamp in the passport, which confirm that on the day of the rally he was in Warsaw, though the riot police, who were testifying in court claimed to have seen Mackievič at the demonstration. The Central district court of Minsk sent the case for additional investigation.

[Minsk court considering 17 cases of protesters during one day.](#)

On March 24, judges of Centralny district court of Minsk considered 17 administrative cases opened against a number of participants in unsanctioned protest rallies, which were held by Belarusian entrepreneurs in February and March. Almost all protesters were [punished](#) by fines up to 50 base units (around \$520).

[Minsk Spring – 20 years. The history of street protests in Belarus](#). The webportal TUT.by in its infographics traces the history of the Belarusian notable protests since the late 1980s. *Minsk Spring* 1996 took place on the eve of the signing of the integration agreements with Russia and raised the largest protest activity in Belarus when the number of participants reached 30-60 thousand people.

[Criminal case against Michalievič suspended](#). However, the case can be reopened any time. [Alieś Michalievič](#), as well as other presidential candidates, was arrested on December 20, 2010, on charges of organising “mass disorders”. After 4-year political asylum in the Czech Republic, he returned to Belarus in September 2015.

Media activism

[Press Club Belarus opened up officially in Minsk](#). The opening ceremony on March 15 was attended by more than 60 guests, including Jarosław Włodarczyk, General Secretary of the International Association of Press Clubs. Press Club Belarus' headquarters are now located on Viery Charužaj str. 3/601. This week, the new space hosts a meeting and a master class of [Tatsiana Repkova](#) from Slovakia, founder of Media Managers Club.

[Calls inside Skype and Viber not affected by decree 98](#). The Operational and Analytical Centre has published answers to questions about the effect of the new Decree 98 "On Improving the Transmission of Electronic Messages." It became clear that

the calls between subscribers of programmes like Skype and Viber are not covered by the ban. The same is true about CLIR, anonymisers and VPN. The main purpose of the decree is to fight with the gray traffic.

[MediaBarCamp 2016](#). On May 26-29, Lithuania will host MediaBarCamp, a unique international non-conference on New Media and media activism. The main purpose of the MediaBarCamp is to stimulate New Media projects development in Belarus. Organised by Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC), the non-conference is conducted to arrange coordination between existing projects and to establish new contacts. Participation is free of charge.

[The first issue of the newsletter 55+News dedicated to the upcoming conference on ageing](#). The newsletter aims to exchange experience and best practices between organizations and enthusiasts on improving the quality of life of seniors in Belarus and other countries. The first issue is dedicated to the International conference that is to be held on April 8-9 by Practical Competences Studio (Golden Age University) and Vzaimoponimaniye NGO with the support of USAID, UNFPA, The Foundation «Remembrance, Responsibility and Future» and DVV International.□

Expert meetings

[Expert-analytical club launched in Minsk](#). The first meeting was devoted to the Belarusian-Russian relations and organised by BISS and Press Club Belarus. The Club is regulated by Chatham House rules – all information articulated at an event can be used without any personification. The meeting was attended by independent experts, journalists, representatives of state bodies and Embassies. It is planned that the Club's meetings will take place on a monthly basis.

[Liberal Club held a round table devoted to the reform of the](#)

[pension system in Belarus](#). The meeting on March 16 aimed to discuss the changes in the Belarusian pension system that anyway have to happen in the coming years. The experts were [Anton Boltačka](#), Liberal Club, [Kaciaryna Barnukova](#), BEROC, as well as economist Uladzimir Paplyka who presented his vision of the pension reform in the country.

[Year in the Bologna Process: What do Belarusians think?](#) The next debate in the series *What Do Belarusians Think?* will take place on March 28, in the Minsk Gallery [TUT.BY](#). The discussion is organised by the Office for European Expertise and Communications (OEEC) and dedicated to the quality of higher education in Belarus and the role of students in university governance. The live broadcast will be available.

Reforms Review

[Economic preferences of Belarusians under the economic crisis have changed slightly](#). According to the IISEPS March national poll, the crisis in the country is recognized by 87.8% of Belarusians, but the collapse of the Belarusian model – only 24%. The crisis has not led to a reassessment of the economic ideas of Belarusians – In particular, they do not lose their trust in the effectiveness of state property.

[What reforms the Belarusian authorities will hold in exchange for a Eurasian credit](#). On March 28, the Eurasian Fund for Stabilisation and Development (EFSD) approved the provision of a [new loan of \\$2 billion](#) to Belarus. Director of the EFSD Project Group on financial loans, Alisher Mirzoyev explains what reforms the loan is intended to support in Belarusian economy.

[IBRD loan agreement to improve public finance management in Belarus signed](#). A \$10 million loan agreement between Belarus and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) was signed in Minsk on April 1. The loan has been

provided to increase the effectiveness and transparency of public finance management in Belarus in line with a government-approved strategy.

[Lukashenka: No need of reforms in education, we must improve what we have](#). According to the Belarus' president, "we got good education system since the Soviet times. We transformed it, returned to it several times, to write new textbooks, etc."

[Strategy of reforming of state organizations will be ready by September 1](#). By an order of the Belarus' Prime Minister, an inter-departmental coordination group on the reform of public administration and management of state assets has been established. The group should draft a related comprehensive strategy by September 1.

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.