

Politics & Civil Society Digest: 24 June – 1 July 2011

Over the last week Belarus authorities strengthened pressure on journalists and generally tried to limit the spread of uncensored information. Although the number of protesters remains relatively small, they are surprisingly persistent and attract more people in Minsk and elsewhere. Authorities began to rely more on plain-clothed agents for arrests and intimidation.

Independent public opinion polls show that Belarusians are increasingly unhappy about the deteriorating economic situation and tend to blame authorities for the crisis. On the positive side, the Second Festival of Belarusian-language advertising and communication *AD.NAK!* took place in Minsk.

POLITICS DIGEST

A sentence to Andrzej Poczobut will be announced on 5 July. The trial in the criminal case against the journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza* Andrey Poczobut is going on in Hrodna. Poczobut is [charged](#) under two articles of the Criminal Code: 368 ("insulting the President") and 367 (slander against the president). The Prosecutor asks for Poczobut 3 years of the colony.

Penalty for posting in VKontakte. On 27 June a young Gomel democratic activists Peter Philon was [arrested](#) in his apartment after he posted in social network VKontakte an invitation to meet with his friends on Monday. The court fined Philon on Br105 thsd (\$20) for an "attempt to organize the unsanctioned mass event".

"Revolution through a social network". On 29 June the regular action "Revolution through a social network" was held. The

idea is to gather democratically oriented people weekly at a certain time (Wednesday, 7 pm) on the main square of the cities, without flags and other symbols. Throughout Belarus police undertook enhanced measures to prevent the action: almost all the central squares of major cities were occupied by official events, fenced with turnstiles and limited to access.

According to observers due to heavy rain and counter security forces only 1.5 thousand people participated in the action – less than a week ago. In Hrodna, Brest and Homel, compared with the previous weeks, much more participants gathered: around 1500, 600 and 800 people respectively. Because the the authorities blocked central squares of these cities people marched through the main streets. The distinctive feature of June 29 was that people were arrested by men in plain (sporting) clothing without distinctive insignia. Belarusian photographer Anton Motolko published a photo [essay](#) on this.

In various cities across the country 269 people were detained, including 13 journalists. Moreover, three journalists were beaten (including two foreign reporters), at least three pieces of professional equipment were damaged. 130 people were drawn up for disorderly conduct, disobeying to police, and participation in an unsanctioned action. According to data on July 01, participants of the "silent action" were fines ranging from Br105 thsd to Br875 thsd (total Br12.5 million of fines, or \$2500) and administrative arrests from 5 to 15 days (total 145 days in jail). Others trials have been moved to July 6 and 7.

The Belarusian opposition tries to unite once again. On 29 June at the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) office the opposition representatives [announced](#) the signing of a joint platform. Among the structures that have signed the document, there are the movement "For Freedom", the campaign "Tell the Truth", BPF, the Belarusian Party of the Left "Spravedlivyi Mir", United Civil Party, Belarusian Christian Democracy.

According to the signatories, now the main tasks of the Belarusian opposition are the release of all political prisoners and holding free elections.

A new public opinion poll. In June 2011 the Independent Institute for Sociological and Political Studies (IISEPS) conducted a [survey](#) on the most important issues of Belarusians' life. Deterioration of the "economic well-being" of Belarusians can be characterized as a true landslide. Thus, the number of respondents who said their financial situation over the past three months has worsened, increased from 26.9% to 73.4%. 81.5% believe that "the Belarusian economy is in crisis", and lay the blame primarily on the president (44.5%) and government (36.7%), but not to the world crisis (27%) or speculators (16.6%). The number of those who are ready to vote for Lukashenka again in the presidential election for the first time since March 2003 has fallen below 30% and amounted to 29.3% (December 2010 – 53%, March 2011 – 42.9%).

CIVIL SOCIETY DIGEST

AD.NAK! Advertising Festival. On 23 June the ceremony of awarding of the Second Festival of Belarusian-language advertising and communication More – [AD.NAK!](#) was held in Minsk. The Festival purpose is to pay attention to the advertising and other marketing communications tools, made in the Belarusian language. The idea of the Festival belongs to the campaign "Budzma!" In the category "Civil important projects in the arts and culture" the Grand Prix went to the animated movie "Budzma Belarusians!", in the "Media or Media Projects"- to 34 Multimedia Magazine, in the "Social Advertising"- to the BAJ animation "Specialty is journalism".

Office on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities starts working. On 28 June the presentation of a new human rights institution "Office on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" was [conducted](#) in Minsk. Its founder is Sergei Drozdovskiy, Deputy Head of the NGO *Invalids-wheelchairs*.

Partners are well-known Belarusian human rights activists and NGOs. The main task of Office is a legal and advocacy support for people with disabilities. In December, for the first time the Office will prepare an alternative report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Belarus.

Press Club of Belarus in Warsaw was [launched](#). The Club's purpose is to help the Belarusian journalists and other media in their work for the sake of democratic Belarus and media freedom. Among the Club's founders there are only Belarusians – prominent journalists, editors and publishers: Julia Slutskaya, Dmitry Novikov, Alexander Starikevich, Ales Lipai, Alexander Ulitenok, Alexey Dzikavitski, Piotr Martsev, Viktor Martinovich.

Conference of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership. On 5 July 2011 in Minsk Conference of the National Platform of Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership will be [held](#). The Conference is aimed at discussing current and future activities of the Civil Society Forum as one of the major institutional players of the Eastern Partnership program as well as at future ways of further developing and strengthening the Eastern Partnership program in Belarus as well as at European level.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. Politics & Civil Society Digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. The digests often go beyond the hot stories already available in other English-language media.