

# Priest Freed, Oswald Remembered, LGBT Rights – Western Press Digest

Belarus' banks have dropped further in their ratings as a result of government policy that has led to a very low level of liquidity in their transactions.

The state has downgraded its asking price for their controlling share of the MTS mobile company in Belarus in hopes of finding a buyer and two Belarusian military instructors were killed in Yemen for reasons unknown.

A recent report released by human rights groups in Belarus says that workers' rights to reasonable work schedules and voluntary labour are routinely being violated by the authorities. A young Belarusian journalist wins an international award for her report on a young Belarusian homosexual.

A Catholic priest accused of committing treason against Belarus was released but is not allowed to leave Minsk while the investigation continues. All this and more in this edition of the Western Press Digest.

[State looking to sell its shares of mobile carrier, lowers price](#) – Reuters reports that the Belarusian government looks to sell the entirety of its 51 percent controlling stake in a Russian-Belarusian mobile company joint venture, and has lowered its asking price. Previously Belarus had sought \$1bn, but now has downgraded this amount to \$863m, hoping to attract a buyer. MTS, the mobile company which holds the remaining shares, has not made it clear if they are interested in buying the stock or not. The previous price was too high, according to Reuters.

**Belarusian Banks receive B- rating, but economic crisis not imminent** – The Fitch credit rating agency has downgraded Belarus' banks to a B- rating due to broader economic issues including higher interests on loans which has led to lower demand for them. In the report, re-published by Reuters, Fitch notes that while the economy is having issues, it was able to successfully avoid a sovereign default in 2011 through careful revaluation of its own monetary and economic policies.

The banks have regained some of their clients faith and, as a result, it has seen a steady increase in deposits. In general, the Banks are too constrained to act appropriately in times of economic duress and are at the mercy of government decisions, making them unable to effectively use their shareholders to deal with their issues.

**Authorities continue to oppress LGBT community** – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports that while homosexuality was officially decriminalised in Belarus in the early 1990s, government officials continue to violate members of the LGBT community's rights. When head of GayBelarus, an LGBT NGO, tried to officially register the organisation in Belarus, the authorities responded by routinely harassing him and reportedly making threats against him and his family.

RFERL also noted that another prominent LGBT rights activist had received harsh treatment from the authorities, even being pulled out of a hospital to be beaten by the police. Both have since left Belarus, though hope to return in the near future.

**Belarus routinely violates workers rights** – According to a report put out by the International Federation for Human Rights and the Vyasna human rights centre, RFERL is reporting that Belarusian authorities regularly violate workers' rights. The report discusses forced labour workdays, the absence of any mechanisms to report harsh working conditions and student labour as some areas of particular concern.

[Young Belarusian Journalist Wins German Media Development Award](#) – Belarusian Journalist Volha Malafeyechava received the German Media Development Word in recognition of her story about the life of a young male homosexual. In her interview with Deutsche Welle, Malafeyechava states that she decided to write the story because of the pervasive silence on the topic of homosexuality in Belarus.

While her work did not receive national coverage, it did provoke negative feedback from local readers. The young Belarusian journalist maintained that good journalism is important both for changing international perceptions of Belarus and solving domestic issues.

[Two Belarusian Military Instructors Killed in Yemen](#) – Reuters reports that two Belarusian military instructors hired on contract by government of Yemen's presidential security forces were gunned down in the street in Sanaa. There was initial confusion as to the origin of the two instructors, as they were initially reported to be Russian. The article notes that while there is still a strong al Qaeda presence in Yemen, this is the first incident in which someone from the former Soviet Union had been targeted. The motive behind the killings remain unclear.

[Catholic priest imprisoned for treason is released](#) – Uladzislau Lazar, a catholic priest, was arrested by Belarusian authorities in July 2013 has been released from prison. RFERL reports that a spokesperson from state security services has received a conditional release. Lazar will not be permitted to leave Minsk until the investigation has been completed.

[One of the oldest Synagogues in Europe badly damaged by fire](#) – In the western city of Hrodna, Belarus' oldest synagogue caught fire due to a malfunctioning heating system. The damage to the Great Choral Synagogue was contained to the second floor and did not spread further thanks to the fire

department's quick response.

The Times of Israel reports that the synagogue, which has a history dating back to the 16th century, was completely destroyed by fire in 1899. It was also a key site in Grodno, where the Nazis would gather its Jewish inhabitants before shipping them off to concentration camps.

[Lee Harvey Oswald remembered in Belarus](#) – Voice of America carried out a series of interviews with people who personally knew the assassin of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, including with the first post-soviet leader of Belarus, Stanislau Shushkevich.

The former leader of Belarus said that while Oswald already had a decent command of Russian upon his arrival to Minsk, he did not seem to have a particularly inquisitive mind. Another person who had met him said that he was rather ordinary, even boring at times. All three of those interviewed did not believe Oswald was capable of carrying out an assassination and believe that it was a conspiracy against a very normal man.

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