

U.S. Will Not Lift Sanctions if Situation in Belarus Doesn't Change



The United States chargé d'affaires in Belarus Jonathan Moore commented on the situation with U.S. sanctions against Lukashenka's regime.

When taking a decision on sanctions against Belneftekhim Belarusian state-owned company in March 2009, the US will take into consideration the fact the situation in Belarus hasn't changed over the last six months," the US chargé d'affaires in Belarus told in an interview to PRIME-TASS.

Earlier, in September 2008, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) decided to allow transactions between US persons and entities and Lakokraska OAO and Polotsk Steklovolokno OAO for a period of 180 days.

Washington hasn't yet decided on sanctions (after March 2). But if the situation in Belarus remains the same it was in September 2008, a decision won't most likely change, the diplomat said.

Mr Moore stresses that if the Belarusian authorities took more active positive steps, reaction of the US administration would be far more positive.

The chargé d'affaires also noted that the information about US sanctions against Belneftekhim state-run company would be issued by the US Department of the Treasury. Jonathan Moore

added it would happen by March 2.

The US suspended sanctions against Lakokraska OAO and Polotsk Steklovolokno OAO in September 2008, because the Belarusian authorities released three political prisoners.

On November 13, 2007, the US Department of the Treasury froze accounts of the company in the United States and its branches in Germany, Latvia, Ukraine, Russia and China, as well as accounts of Belneftekhim USA Inc.

In response, Belarus recalled Belarusian ambassador to the US Mikhail Khvastou for consultations on March 7, 2008. At the same time Belarus strongly recommended US ambassador Karen Stewart to leave Belarus. She did it on March 12.

Besides, Belarus demanded that the US should reduce its embassy staff in Minsk and cut the staff of the Belarusian embassy in the United States.

Source [Charter97](#).

**“Art against Dictatorship”
Attracted More Participants
than the Organizers Had
Planned**



WASHINGTON – The turnout at the Washington exhibition of Belarusian artists “Art against Dictatorship” was unexpectedly high. The German Marshall Fund was initially planning a small round-table discussion on a little-known European country. Instead, what happened in Washington on February 12 looked more like an academic conference.

Iryna Krasouskaya was the keynote speaker at the round table on Belarus. In her opinion, there is no evidence of real improvements in the country. Everything remains the same – there are political prisoners once again, complete domination of state-controlled media, and all advisory bodies created by the regime work only as window-dressing. According to Iryna, the political prisoners are used by the regime as hostages and the only reason for everything that is going on in Belarus is to maintain the personal power of President Lukashenka. Belarusian participants in the round table were almost unanimous in sharing Iryna’s skepticism, while Pavol Demes of the German Marshall Fund and some other European guests were more optimistic. According to them, several decades ago, western Germans were successful in talks with Communists in Poland and other countries of the Eastern block, which bore fruit.

Therefore, it is important to keep trying to engage the regime by showing the benefits of democracy. Another dilemma the round table participants discussed was the relationship between the independence of Belarus and democracy. Some guests

shared the view that because Belarusian independence was more important than democracy it was necessary to cooperate with whomever rules Belarus. According to this view, if Belarus is brought to its knees, it could easily be absorbed by Russia. Most Belarusian participants disagreed, saying that this was one of the myths exploited by the regime.

As a matter of fact, today Belarusian independence and statehood are very fragile because everything is in the hands of one man. What will happen to the country if something happens to this man? Civil society, a real parliament and other democratic institutions would be a much better guarantee of Belarusian independence than the whim of one person. Following the round table discussion, Ales Marachkin and Ales Shaternik spoke on behalf of the Belarusian artists whose paintings were displayed throughout the German Marshall Fund building. Mr. Marachkin was especially concerned about the state of the Belarusian national identity. According to him, the current Belarusian regime is not just a non-democratic regime, but also one which eliminates the Belarusian culture and language.

Currently, the number of schools with Belarusian as the primary language of instruction is almost twenty times less compared to the number in early 1990s. The artist from Belarus emphasized that it was equally important to build democracy in Belarus and to revive its national culture and identity. These two processes should go hand in hand. The success of the Belarusian exhibition "Art against Dictatorship" serves as evidence that Ales Marachkin was right – it is indeed possible both to support Belarusian culture and democratization at the same time.

Euronews: What Belarus wants from Europe

Euronews analyzed the most recent developments in Belarus-EU relations. The video report concluded that the main reason for what Belarusian authorities turned to the West is because Minsk is short of cash.

There are signs Belarus is opening up. But the opposition advises caution, suggesting President Lukashenko just needs Europe to help Belarus weather the global economic storm. [Watch the video.](#)

The Jamestown Foundation: Will Lukashenka Be Welcomed in Prague?



WASHINGTON – David Marples has written on the most recent developments in EU-Belarus relations in the Jamestown Foundation's Eurasia Daily Monitor.

Since last October, the European Union, through an Eastern Partnership Program originally initiated last summer by Poland and Sweden, has taken several steps to normalize relations with Belarus. For some members of the opposition, the maneuvers appear to abandon the EU's former insistence on democratization prior to the renewal of relations and the end of Belarus's isolation.

The EU thus appears to be establishing a buffer zone of

friendly countries on its eastern border while ignoring some of the more unsavory aspects of the Belarusian state. A particular source of interest to many observers is whether Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka will be invited to the forthcoming EU summit in Prague in April (the Czech Republic holds the chairmanship of the EU until June), in what is called the 27+6 format, that is, the full members of the EU, plus Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, and, possibly, Belarus.

Speaking in Minsk on January 26, Lukashenka linked the closer political relations with the development of business, welcoming the opening of a European Commission office in Minsk and the invitation to his country to participate in the Eastern Partnership Initiative [EPI] (Interfax, January 26). He had declared a few days earlier that "Belarus is a predictable, honest, and consistent partner in the international arena and makes a serious contribution to security and stability on the European continent" (Zvyazda, January 20).

To facilitate and hasten the improvement of relations, on October 13, 2008, the EU issued a six-month suspension of the travel ban on Lukashenka and 35 leading officials (Reuters, October 13, 2008). It has now reduced its original 12 requirements for improving relations with Minsk to five: an end to the detention of political prisoners; changing the electoral code; resolving the issue of restrictions on independent newspapers and the law on the mass media; improving working conditions for NGOs; and freedom of assembly and political associations (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii, January 23).

Several steps have been taken to date by Minsk, including the release of political prisoners (so designated by the United States), signing the Framework Agreement and Protocol of the EPI, consulting with the OSCE about changes to the electoral

code, and the registration on December 17, 2008, at its fourth attempt, of the "For Freedom" movement led by former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich (www.by.milinkevich.org, December 18, 2008). Two leading opposition newspapers, *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Volya*, are now sold in kiosks, although they are still difficult to find even in central Minsk, minimal copies are available, and the prices have been raised substantially by state agencies.

The EU has chosen to drop or shelve seven other requirements for Belarus, including investigations of the disappearance of several prominent figures in 1999 and 2000, the abolition of the death penalty, ending arbitrary arrest and detention, and guaranteeing the rights of national minorities. Several opposition figures have expressed their anger at such apparent largesse, including Stanislav Shushkevich, a former parliamentary chairman; Lyavon Barcheuski, the leader of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front; and Andrei Sannikau, the international coordinator of Charter 97 (for example, www.charter97.org, Jan 26).

In an interview with the Ukrainian newspaper *Zerkalo Nedeli*, Shushkevich commented that "Some politicians in the West are indifferent to whether we have democracy" and stressed that Lukashenka should not be invited to Prague (*Zerkalo Nedeli*, January 24-30). Likewise, Volha Kazulina, daughter of former political prisoner Alyaksandr Kazulin, maintains that the regime's measures have thus far been merely for the sake of appearances and do not represent any fundamental change (www.charter97.org, Jan 29).

Other opposition figures are prepared to give the new relationship a chance to succeed, including Anatol Lyabedzka, the leader of the United Civic Party, and Milinkevich, who has already announced his candidacy for president in the elections scheduled for 2011 (www.naviny.by, January 14). Ending the isolation of Belarus within Europe could open up potential opportunities for opposition politicians. It could,

however, also serve to maintain the authoritarian regime in power indefinitely without addressing most of the issues that led to European and international concern about the political environment within Belarus.

Despite pressure from the EU for improvements, the parliamentary elections of 2008, like all elections since 2001, were seriously flawed according to monitors from the OSCE (RIA Novosti, September 29, 2008); but the EU has decided to reassess the suspended Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Belarus that has been shelved since 1996, when Lukashenka amended the constitution to enhance presidential powers.

Moreover, the talks and discussions between Minsk and Brussels may founder on the issue of Belarus's tightening economic and military-security links to Russia. Numerous questions arise. Will Belarus abandon its commitments to the Eurasian Economic Community with its free trade zone, the CIS, the generally dormant but not yet defunct Russia-Belarus Union, dismantle the two Russian military bases on its territory, and cease to purchase Russian weapon systems? Will the struggling Belarusian ruble be devalued further, or will Lukashenka finally succumb to using the Russian ruble in Belarus? Although Belarus trades as much with the EU as with Russia, the latter is the chief buyer of Belarusian manufactured goods and sugar as well as the country's chief creditor and supplier of energy resources.

In short, can the EU really extract Belarus from the Russian orbit into which it is increasingly drawn despite official rhetoric from the president and Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski? Partnership, after all, is an alternative to, rather than a form of preparation for membership, which has never been on the table. Finally, if Lukashenka is invited to Prague, will this "erase" his past misdeeds?

Source: www.jamestown.org

Belarus Round Table at the German Marshall Fund of the United States

President Alexander Lukashenko somewhat softened pressures on the democratic opposition in Belarus over the past year, releasing political prisoners in August 2008, and allowing some space for opposition parties during the September 2008 parliamentary elections. At the same time however, electoral manipulations and continued repressions against civic activists indicate that the regime is far from allowing substantial freedoms to its citizens. Additionally, the global financial meltdown has forced Minsk to undertake several steps that seemed unthinkable a few years ago, including cutting a number of social benefits, devaluing the Belarusian Ruble, initiating further privatization of key state-owned assets, and seeking loans from Russia and the IMF. On the international stage, Lukashenko continues to maneuver between East and West, though it remains to be seen if improved ties with Western Europe will lead to a liberalization of the political situation in Belarus.

Against this background, it is important for democratic opposition and civil society throughout Belarus to seek an active and constructive role, address the mounting economic, political, and social problems, and propose alternative policies to tackle these challenges in the coming year. Please join **Pavol Demes**, director of GMF's Bratislava office, as he leads a discussion with **Irina Krasovskaya**, president of the We Remember Foundation, and **Pavel Marozau**, coordinator of the Third Way of Belarus, on recent changes in Belarus and possibilities for future development. The roundtable event

will be held at GMF's offices at **1700 18th Street NW on Thursday, February 12, from 3:30pm to 5:00pm.**

This roundtable will be **followed by the opening of the [exhibition "Art Against Dictatorship,"](#)** organized by the Third Way of Belarus and the Belarusan Museum in New York – in cooperation with several local and global initiatives. This traveling exhibition addresses the integral part that the alternative arts scene plays in preserving and enhancing Belarussian culture, particularly in the face of political pressures that marginalize their mainstream presence, and will provide unique insights into contemporary Belarussian art. The reception will be held from 5:00 – 6:30pm.

Please RSVP for both events to Carolyn Colome by email (widereuropeintern2@gmfus.org) or phone (202 683-2655) by Tuesday, February 10th.

Forbes: Currency devaluation a shock for Belarussians



MINSK, Jan 8 (Reuters) – A surprise 20 percent devaluation of the Belarussian currency has sent people rushing to shops before prices go up. The devaluation shocked many in this ex-Soviet state where President Alexander Lukashenko, widely known as 'Batka' or 'Dad', insulated the population from the turbulence of world markets by keeping much of the economy in state hands.

But the global turmoil has caught up with Belarus and has forced it to seek a \$2.5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. The devaluation may have been linked to the loan as freeing up the currency system, cutting social

spending to balance budgets and wage controls are common conditions set by the IMF for its loans to help rebalance ailing economies.

On Dec. 31 Minsk agreed to the IMF loan and on New Year's Day it devalued the rouble to 2,600/\$ from 2,200/\$. Belarussians rushed to the shops the next day to buy what they could in anticipation of steep price rises once the next set of imports hit the shelves. 'I don't remember such queues since the Soviet times,' said Marina, a 38-year-old housewife, out shopping in Minsk. 'I saw a woman grabbing onto a fridge and shouting that she got it first, while a man was telling her that he had ordered it.' 'We sold 10-days worth of stock in three days,' said Tatyana, a furniture store assistant.

'Today, there were a lot of unhappy people. People couldn't believe that we've sold out.' Read full text at Forbes.com.

The Jamestown Foundation: Belarus Survey Reveals Changes in Public Mood

✘ WASHINGTON – David Marples published the following piece on changing attitudes towards the West in Belarus in the Jamestown Foundation's Eurasia Daily Monitor.

The warming relationship between Belarus and the European Union has given rise to discussions about whether a new dialogue is possible under Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. It also leads to questions about the link between the world financial crisis and the more conciliatory attitude in Minsk. An equally important but often ignored factor is

whether Belarusian society supports the new direction and whether the government will remain the sole decision-maker for future policies.

From the official standpoint, Belarus is well-placed to withstand the effects of the world crisis. The growth rate from January through November was reported to be 10.8 percent, with an anticipated 7 percent rise in GDP in 2009 (Reuters, December 9). In other respects, however, the outlook seems less optimistic. Inflation has risen to 12 percent compared with 9.4 percent last year. The Belarusian currency continues to fall—the rate was BR 2,200 to the dollar last week in Minsk and even worse in other cities. The price for imported gas from Moscow seems certain to rise above Belarus's desired price of \$140 per thousand cubic meters (Belapan, December 11). Equally critical is whether Russia will reduce purchases of Belarusian goods, particularly machinery and tractors, which would make the country's impressive industrial output somewhat meaningless.

On the surface, the country seems bent on a new pro-European direction. On Belarusian Television on December 11, an earnest Lukashenka was shown in a conversation with the departing Ambassador Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary of Italy to Belarus, Norbert Cappello. The Belarusian president lauded Italy's role in improving relations with his country and stated that Belarus was ready for an open-ended dialogue with the EU, but without prior conditions (ITAR-TASS, Belarusian Television, December 11). A new official of the European Commission in Belarus was formally approved the next day (Interfax, December 12).

Read full text at jamestown.org

New York Times: Electoral Rot Nearby? The Russians Don't See It



ZHODINO, Belarus – The voting monitor began his rounds on election day here at Polling Place No. 7. “Issues? Violations?” he asked the poll workers, glancing around like a casual sightseer. They said no, so he left.

The monitor, Kholnazar Makhmadaliyev, breezed from one polling site (“What’s up? Things O.K.?”) to another (“Everything fine here?”), shaking a lot of hands, offering abundant compliments and drinking brandy with this city’s mayor.

Such went Mr. Makhmadaliyev’s stint on a large observer mission led by the Kremlin that concluded that Belarus, a former Soviet republic and an ally of Russia, had conducted a “free, open and democratic” parliamentary election in late September.

The Kremlin monitors’ version of reality, though, clashed with the one described by a European security group, whose own monitors dismissed the election as a sham tainted by numerous shortcomings, not the least of which was vote rigging. The monitors dispatched by the Kremlin did not report anything like that. Nor did they raise concerns about Belarus’s security service, still called the K.G.B., which had exerted harsh pressure on the opposition, imprisoning several of its leaders over the last year and thwarting their campaigns. Or about state-controlled television broadcasts repeatedly branding opposition leaders as traitors.

Or, for that matter, about the final results: a sweep of every seat in the 110-member Parliament by supporters of President

Alexander Lukashenko, often described as Europe's last dictator.

The Kremlin under Vladimir Putin has sought to bolster authoritarian governments in the region that remain loyal, and these election monitoring teams – 400 strong in Belarus alone – are one of its newer innovations. They demonstrate the lengths to which the Kremlin will go to create the illusion of political freedom in Russia and other former Soviet republics, even though their structures of democracy have been hollowed out..

Read the [full text](#) of this article in New York Times.

The National Endowment for Democracy hosts an event on Belarus



The International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and RFE/RL invite you to a briefing:

Are Belarus' Overtures to the West Genuine?

Friday, December 12, 2008 9:00AM-10:30AM

National Endowment for Democracy 1025 F Street NW, Suite 800
[at the historic Woodward and Lothrop Building]

Presentations by

Olga Kazulina *Activist and daughter of opposition leader,
Alyaksandr Kazulin*

Alyaksandr Klaskouski *Director of Analytical Projects, BelaPAN
news agency*

Introduced by

Rodger Potocki *Director for Europe and Eurasia, National
Endowment for Democracy*

Please RSVP by email to <bobbiet@ned.org> or

by telephone to (202) 378-9525.

Despite the controversial September 2008 parliamentary elections in Belarus, which were widely denounced by western observers as undemocratic, the European Union has followed through on pre-election pledges to loosen travel restrictions on Belarusian government officials, including President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Over the past year, Belarus has taken steps to release political prisoners and says it wants improved relations with the West. Is Belarus, which continues to actively repress domestic criticism and has reportedly offered to host Russian missiles on its territory, sincere in its stated wish to improve relations with Europe and America?

Olga Kazulina is the daughter of political prisoner and former presidential candidate

Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was arrested in March 2006 and sentenced to 5 1/2 years of imprisonment for his political actions against the Lukashenko regime. She is a member of the Social Democratic Party and the commission "Freedom for Kazulin and All Political Prisoners." Ms. Kazulina was the deputy director of the firm Alaktiv from 2005 until 2007, when

she was fired after attending an opposition conference in Lithuania.

Alyaksandr Klaskouski is Director of Analytical Projects for the news agency BelaPAN and Editor-in-Chief of BelaPAN's Elections website. He also runs a popular political blog for the e-weekly *Nasha Niva* and writes a column for *Naviny.by*. Mr. Klaskouski is a regular contributor to RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelSat, a Warsaw-based satellite television channel. Both speakers are in the U.S. at the invitation of the International Republican Institute to participate in events marking International Human Rights Day.

Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty 1201
Connecticut Ave NW, Washington, DC 20036 tel: 202-457-6900 *
<http://www.rferl.org> * fax: 202-457-6992