

# The Fate of European Security Decided in Minsk, An Anti-Corruption Law – Belarus State TV Digest

Belarusian state TV provided extensive coverage of the negotiations in Minsk, calling them "constructive" and playing a decisive role in securing the safety of the whole of Europe.

Belarusians can now actively discuss a new anti-corruption law and express their views on the web site of "SB – Belarus Segodnya", a state-run daily newspaper.

State TV journalists also showed how European farmers have suffered serious damage as a result of the Russian sanctions on their food products. As a result, the number of opponents towards western sanctions grows daily.

[Minsk – a platform for international dialogue](#). For first time in its history, Belarus hosted an international meeting involving high profile officials from the EU, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

"Minsk became a platform for a final attempt for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the east of Ukraine", states the reporter. In his opinion, the gathering in Minsk would decide the fate of peace and security in the whole Europe.

Alexander Lukashenka declared Belarus' readiness to host any future rounds of negotiations. "Innocent people die, infrastructure is being destroyed, hundreds of thousands of refugees are forced to leave their native land (...) These are not scenes from the history, this is our reality today. Can we look upon what is happening today with indifference? Of

course, we cannot", he stated in his speech.

**After the talks, Lukashenka speaks with the press.** The Belarusian leader stated that the meeting was a successful step in the direction towards further talks. "The talks were not easy, but the dialogue was essential and open", he told international journalists gathered in Minsk. Lukashenka also emphasised that all of the participants in the talks had a chance to express their point of view. Despite various positions, "all agreed on one thing: we should find a compromise".

Lukashenka also noted the importance of the encounter between the two powerful economic blocs, i.e. the EU and Customs Union.

**Initial media commentary on the summit in Minsk.** "Observers, political scientists and journalists of the world's leading media outlets" agree that the talks in Minsk were difficult but constructive. "Minsk has a unique atmosphere that is conducive to constructive political and economic talks, something that is invaluable for international relations", one reporter proudly stated.

It was also noted that the leaders focused on three key issues: peace, or at least an armistice, humanitarian aid, and energy-related issues – an agreement on gas supply and transit "to not let Ukraine and Europe freeze", but also the economy – especially the possible losses the Customs Union member states may face as a result of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU.

**Further Russian humanitarian aid.** One report took note of Moscow's plan to send another convoy of humanitarian aid to people living in the Donbas. Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, informed the media of Russia sending the appropriate official notice to the authorities in Kyiv.

UN Under-General-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, also argued for more aid, including medication and food, to the eastern Ukraine. She also called on all sides in the conflict to not politicise the issue of humanitarian aid, one Belarus state TV journalist added.

## **Foreign Affairs**

**Belarus-Poland relations.** The Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs set to travel to Warsaw on a two-day visit. He will meet with Polish officials, including Radoslaw Sikorski, the head of Polish diplomacy. The officials will be discussing issues of “interest to both sides” – the report stated, but did not, however, provide any further details about the visit.

**European farmers suffer serious losses due to Russian sanctions.** Farmers are struggling with a “catastrophic decrease in demand” for their agricultural goods. Thus, a number of opponents of the “economic confrontation” between the EU and Russian steadily increases on a day to day basis. Producers count their losses and feel that the EU's sanctions towards Russia are ineffective, states the report.

Explaining the context of the ongoing exchange of sanctions, the state TV reporter states that the EU and US imposed sectoral sanctions on Russia, and Moscow reacted with a “boycott of their food products”. This subsequently brought about the losses being experienced by European farmers presently.

State TV's coverage of the issue also pointed out that not everybody supports the politics of sanctions. The Swiss Minister of Economy, Johann Schneider-Ammann, criticised the idea of imposing mutual sanctions and argued how it would negatively affect both sides.

## **Domestic Affairs**

**Belarus-Ukraine mutual trade.** State TV reported that beginning

19 August both Belarus and Ukraine lifted previously imposed barriers on mutual trade. At the same time, according to the coverage, Belarus must protect the Russian market from illegal exports through its territory of products from countries that Russia has sanctioned.

**Belarusians free to discuss new anti-corruption draft law.** The Belarusian leader says Belarusian society should join in discussions on the proposed amendments to the nation's main anti-corruption law. People can now express their views on the web site of the "SB – Belarus Segodnya", the largest state-run daily newspaper.

So far a number of Belarusians have actively joined the discussion, one journalist noted. "Over only the course of the previous week 150 suggestions were made", they explained. "SB – Belarus Segodnya" will send the best and most concise comments to the General Attorney for further assessment.

**Agro-tourism as a source of economic development.** The head of state has visited several agro-tourism farms in the Volozhynkij region. He spoke with the owners of the farms and praised them for their hard work. "In this way, we can turn Belarus into Switzerland", he cheerfully chimed. He also argued for the further revival of small Belarusian villages.

**Bumper crops in Belarus.** Journalists from state Channel 1 widely covered the results of this year's harvesting campaign. According to their sources, 10 mln tonnes of grains has been collected in total. The coverage notes that the Belarusian leader set a threshold at this level a few years ago, but then nobody believed that would be attainable. Today this is a reality, one journalist proudly noted. "There will certainly not be any shortage of bread in the country", he added.

The report explains that the key to the harvest's success was primarily due to financial support from the state. In addition to the high level of investment by the state, the report also

pointed to the “dictatorship of technology” as another reason behind its success.

*Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials available on the web site of Belarusian State Television 1 (BT1). Freedom of the press in Belarus remains restricted and state media convey primarily the point of view of the Belarusian authorities. This review attempts to give the English-speaking audience a better understanding of how Belarusian state media shape public opinion in the country.*

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# **European Union Faces A Crisis, Eurasian Union Attracts New States – Belarus State TV Digest**

Alexander Lukashenka's participation in the inauguration of Ukraine's elect-president was among the top news items over the last two weeks on state-run Channel 1. Reporters were particularly enthusiastic in pointing out that the Belarusian leader stood out from other politicians present in the event because he received more attention from Western and Ukrainian media than others.

“The Serbian nation is our people, the Belarusian people” – Lukashenka asserted during his recent official visit to Belgrade. In Serbia, he advocated for strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries and commented upon Western politicians inimical attitude towards the meeting of him and president Tomislav Nikolić.

On a few occasions, state TV commented in a positive way about the newly formed Eurasian Union, particularly the huge

potential it has and how it has already attracted new states. Journalists also covered the European Union, reporting on the ongoing disagreement among EU member states over who will be the next president of the European Parliament.

## **Ukraine**

[\*\*Alexander Lukashenka: Territorial Integrity of Ukraine.\*\*](#) The Belarusian leader took part in the inauguration of Petro Poroshenko for the Ukrainian presidency. State TV noted that the ceremony had special significance in the context of recent developments within the country.

They noted that although a number of foreign guests took part in the ceremony, the Belarusian leader received a lot of attention from the Western and Ukrainian media. After the ceremony several deputies approached Lukashenka to shake his hand and express their gratitude, journalist enthusiastically noted.

Lukashenka commented upon the future of Ukraine. To the question "What will Ukraine be like?", he replied: "Ukraine should be one, a united, integrated state". In his opinion, the country should seek to find an agreement both with Russia and the European Union.

"I hate all intermediaries and peacemakers. I think Ukrainians are a wise people who can deal with the problems on their own", Lukashenka added. However, he expressed his readiness to help in some capacity. "The main hope of Ukrainians up until this point are related to revival of the country and a belief that it got finally have a chance to develop peacefully", the Belarusian leader concluded.

[\*\*"The Situation in Ukraine Remains Tense..."\*\*](#) – One State TV Belarusian journalist reported cynically. Although the state authorities have already announced its "peace plan", the conflict is far from being over. Shooting once more erupted in Slavyansk, Kramatorsk and Lugansk.

Belarusian state TV journalists also emphasise the need for Russia to take an active role to settle the conflict in Ukraine. Regularly invoking the Russian media, they failed to mention anything from Ukrainian sources. Over the past months Moscow has made two draft resolutions on Ukraine in the UN, "in accordance with the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity", as the journalist commented.

## **Foreign Affairs**

### **Belarus-US: Towards Normalisation of Mutual Relations?**

Journalist took a note of the consultations carried out by Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs, [Uładzimir Makiej](#), and Deputy Assistant Secretary of US Department of State, Eric Rubin. They discussed the cooperation in international organisations. At present Minsk and Washington already work together in the sphere of the issues such as global and regional security, reported noted.

### **Is a Political Crisis Tearing Apart the European Union?**

Journalists speculated on who is to become the next president of the European Commission. EU member states do not agree on one candidate and that clearly proves that there is a crisis in the Union. Countries such as Germany, Italy, and Spain advocate for Jean-Claude Juncker, a supporter of further integration. However, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Hungary are less keen to support this candidature.

In the aftermath of recent elections to the European Parliament, a new coalition of euro-sceptics can obstruct any further European integration. "Who will be able to overcome the crisis in the integration and stop a rise of the anti-European moods is yet unclear", reporter pointed out.

### **Official Visit of Lukashenka to Belgrade: Your People are our People.**

State TV took note that the economies of both countries are complimentary and have a firm foundation for further development. Belarus remains for Serbia a window to

the Eurasian Union, according to the report. Serbia is not against working with the Eurasian Union, although holds the official status of candidate for European Union accession.

Journalists took note of how exceptionally good the relations between both countries remain. “We have always respected the Serbian nation, because the Serbian nation is one with us, the Belarusian nation”, Lukashenka asserted during the meeting of the two heads of state. In his opinion, Western countries have completely diminished or ignored the importance of the meeting between Belarusian and Serbian leaders. “They were ready to do anything possible to disrupt this visit or make it go unnoticed”, he proclaimed at the meeting.

The president of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić, praised the Belarusian model of economy: “In Serbia, in the aftermath of massive privatisation, many enterprises remained stagnate, and you preserved your economy”, the Serbian president stated.

**Belarus-Serbia Relations**. Just before Lukashenka’s official visit to Belgrade, the Belarusian leader gave an interview to Serbian state media journalists. “Belarus, through Serbia, can enter the whole market of the Balkans and southern countries of the EU, and Serbia through Belarus can enter the market of the Eurasian Economic Community”, the coverage noted.

## **Domestic Politics**

**Regional Cooperation and Great Potential of the Eurasian Union**. The Belarusian leader met with the chairwoman of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, Valentina Matviyenko, at a regional cooperation forum.

One of the participants, Yevgeny Savchenko, the governor of Belgorod Oblast in Russia, enthusiastically commented upon the Eurasian project’s future: “with our potential, that of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, but also Ukraine, which will join it sooner or later, we can feed half a billion people”. Savchenko also advocated for the expansion of exports into new

markets.

Matviyenko also praised the Belarusian leader for his organisation of the Ice Hockey World Championship. She emphasised that in the opinion of experts and the Ice Hockey Federation, the event turned to be the best in the history of the ice hockey tournament.

[The Eurasian Union: A New Centre of Power](#). During the same interview the Belarusian leader also commented upon Belarus-EU relations. “Why should I get offended by the West? I do understand what they want from me and what they want from Belarus. I will never agree to let them be the boss here”, he asserted strongly.

In his opinion, Belarus is maintaining its stability and that it is “much more important than going to the EU and smiling at one another”, he added. The Eurasian Union has become a ‘new centre of power’ and a ‘step to a multi-polarity in world order’. In Lukashenka's opinion, the organisation is attracting more and more countries all the time.

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# State Analysts Discuss Crimea, Corruption, Freedom Day Coverage – Belarus State

# TV Digest

Recently state TV widely covered Alexander Lukashenka's official statements regarding events in Ukraine.

Journalists also reminded the harm to the state and society which corruption could pose. However, in their opinion Belarus, unlike Ukraine, is successfully combating the problem.

The Belarusian opposition commemorated Freedom Day, organising a rally through Minsk. On this occasion, it expressed its support for Ukrainians. State TV journalists depreciated the rally and compared with nationalistic movement.

## Internal Affairs

[The Belarusian opposition praises the Ukrainian nationalists?](#) On 25 March, the Belarusian opposition commemorated Freedom Day, unrecognised by the state authorities. Journalist reported that it organised a rally through the centre of Minsk with slogans praising the Ukrainian nationalists.

'Usually they celebrate the so called 'Freedom Day with symbols that remain distant to the Belarusian history', journalist critically noted. In his opinion, the annual rally also this time gather just a few people, and it did not present neither ideas nor historical facts.

In his coverage, reporter was persistently comparing the Belarusian opposition and the participants of the rally with nationalists. reminding the viewers that nationalists helped Hitler in Nazi operations in Belarus and Ukraine.

[How to make small business driving the Belarus economy?](#) The authorities want to increase the role of small companies in energising the state economy. In the opinion of (unnamed)

experts small business' contribution in GDP will increase twice, even up to 50%, until 2020. To achieve that, the authorities want to significantly reduce the cost of loans, and offer loans in the Belarusian rubbles, not only in the foreign currencies.

### Corruption remains a serious threat to the state and society.

However, the state successfully deals with it, unlike in the neighbouring Ukraine where it led to overthrow of the authorities. According to journalist, Belarus has a good legislation that prevents the corruption. 'Other countries use our experience', he proudly emphasised. Journalist presented the most critical statements of the Belarusian leader addressing the problem of corruption.

### Lukashenka met with representatives of media. He widely discussed Ukraine and Crimea.

The head of state sadly commented the developments in the neighbouring country, a 'third part of our Slavic world'.

'That was not a legal a constitutional process (...) This is not a normal thing when the legal authorities are overthrown and they establish the new authorities', Lukashenka stated.

Although he took a note that the new Ukrainian government consisted of both professionals and shouters, he is ready to work with any authorities.

Commenting on Crimea, he noted that it has already become a part of Russia. 'You can recognise it or not, but nothing will change because of that', he strongly argued. The head of state laughed at the imposition of sanctions on Russia's officials, who anyway did not travel that often to Europe.

## **Ukraine**

### Lukashenka's interview to the Ukrainian talk show 'Shuster' is widely commented.

The head of state gave the interview to the 'most popular, democratic and liberal' talk show on Ukrainian

TV.

Political scientists and economists commenting upon Lukashenka's interview, praised him for his adequate reaction to the development in Ukraine. Referring to Crimea, reporter pointed out that it has de facto become a part of Russia, and thus any negations of that appeared senseless.

Belarusian journalist reported that the audience gathered in the studio applauded and wholeheartedly supported Lukashenka. But also the Internet users in Russia and Ukraine also praised the Belarusian leader for his position in regard to the conflict between Kiev-Moscow. This unanimity brings hope that a dialogue between the neighbours will once again be constructive, journalist concluded.

[The Ukrainian Maidan was scrupulously prepared](#). Journalist informs that the 'main driving force of Euromaidan, the Ukrainian radical organisation "the Right Sector" has become a political party'. It embraces now a number of nationalistic organisations. Reporter also pointed out that the events on Maidan were not such spontaneous, as presented, but scrupulously prepared in advance. TV showed videos, found on the Internet, presenting people complaining that were not paid for their participation in Maidan.

[ONT talk show Pazicija \(Position\)](#) covered the recent developments in Ukraine. The first show called 'The choice of Crimea' focused on referendum.

**How legitimate is referendum.** The host of the talk show, [Vadzim Hihin](#), invited the regime-friendly politicians, but also the opposition-minded analysts, including [Aliaksandr Klauskowski](#), Andrej Jelisejeu, and journalist, [Viktar Marcinovich](#), to comment on the Crimean referendum. The pro-regime guests did not express any concerns regarding its fairness and legitimacy.

Some argued that Crimea, as a part of Russia, would be able to

improve the economy. Klaskouski noted that the official statistics on the referendum looked suspicious. In his opinion, it was impossible to organise a real political agitation within such a very short period of time, and clearly the violations took place.

**The new Ukrainian authorities.** Participants of the talk show argued also that the new Ukrainian authorities hold neo-Nazi views. Vadzim Hihin and the vast majority of his guests shared this opinion. He did not comment the opposing views.

**Sanctions on Russia.** 'Some countries which criticised Russia that had acted in a similar way before', one of the discussants argued. All economic sanctions will be harmful for Europe, Russia, but not for the US. Thus, Europe is not interested in imposing sanctions and nothing like that would happen – as one of the guest speakers emphasised.

On the other occasion, in 'Lessons from the Ukrainian conflict', participants of Pazicija talk show discussed how Belarus should get involve and help Ukraine.

**The Orthodox Church and events in Ukraine.** Participants commented upon the recent statement of Lukashenka on the situation in Ukraine. There was unanimity among participants and hosting the programme, Vadzim Hihin – all praised the Belarusian leader for his position on the conflict. An Orthodox priest, father [Fiodar Pouny](#), also noted that Lukashenka felt the situation in Ukraine deeply. He presented the Orthodox Church's statement, prepared by Synod in Istanbule, calling all who care about Ukraine to cease violence and further disorder.

**Is Maidan likely to take place in Belarus?** In the opinion of all discussants the Maidan scenario is hardly possible to happen in the country. Primarily it is because countries chose different paths in the early 1990s. According to one overwhelming opinion of the participants, the parliaments in

both countries work differently, and in Belarus it works more efficiently than in Ukraine.

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