

The potential 'anschluss' by Russia: will Belarus resist?

On 5 April 2019, the Russian Ambassador to Belarus Mikhail Babich informed that Alexander Lukashenka and Vladimir Putin agreed to conduct further consultations on the [inter-state integration](#). However, both Belarusian and Russian media continue discussing the possibility of the Belarusian 'anschluss' by Russia.

Moscow believes that Belarusians do not want to lose its independence, but if an attempt is made to include Belarus into Russia by force, the Belarusian uniformed services will not offer resistance and there will be no strong opposition from Belarusian society. Indeed, the failure of the Belarusian authorities to conduct a proper '[Belarusization](#)' has resulted in the generally passive attitude from the Belarusians toward the potential Russian threat.

Any grounds for the Belarusian 'anshcluss'?

The inclusion of Belarus into Russia, among other things, in order to enable Putin to run for president of Russia in 2024, is a scenario that strikes imagination. In early 2019, Russian media began discussing the subject of Putin remaining President of Russia after 2024. The Russian Constitution stipulates that "one and the same person may not be elected President of the Russian Federation for more than two consecutive terms".

Putin could have taken the post of Russia's prime minister in 2024, essentially appointing a president who was loyal to him, a controlled person, and then returning to the presidency in

2030. However, in 2030 he will be 78 years old. According to some Russian experts, Putin can solve the problem of 2024 by merging Belarus with Russia, which would allow him to run for president of the all-new Russian state.

Many in the Russian expert community believe that the Belarusian uniformed services will not resist the 'anschluss' attempt. There will be no resistance on the part of Belarusian society. The Belarusians do not want Belarus to be merged with Russia. However, there is a very big difference between not wanting it and fighting for independence, being ready to die for it and kill Russian soldiers.

In fact, Belarus has [no army capable of rendering any resistance in the event of Russia's aggression](#). The army is an organic part of society. Some of the Western experts note that the Belarusian nation and the Belarusian national self-consciousness have been being formed under Lukashenko. This is a disputable statement.

The authorities do not interfere with the activities of civil initiatives aimed at popularizing the Belarusian language and forming a cultural and historical identity. However, the authorities themselves have been making contradictory steps. A step forward, as a rule, is followed by a step in the opposite direction.

The ugly face of the pro-governmental 'Belarusization'

Billboards with slogans such as "We are Belarusians!", "For Belarus!" were placed in towns. In the streets and along roads, one can often see billboards with social advertisement where the Belarusian language is used.

However, in most schools, schoolchildren receive education in

Russian: all subjects, except for the [Belarusian language](#), are taught in Russian. The Belarusian language is often taught as a foreign language: students are taught to understand it but do not to speak it.



Source: family.by

In Homiel, the second largest city in Belarus with a population of over 0.5 million, there is one gymnasium in which several classes study in Belarusian. In Hrodna, thirteen students are taught in Belarusian. This training is provided in two secondary schools. In Vitsiebsk, there is no single class with the Belarusian as the language of instruction.

In Mahiliou, a city of over 380,000 people, only one schoolgirl is studying in Belarusian. In the provincial district towns (there are 118 of them), there are only two schools with the Belarusian language of instruction.

In higher education institutions, the Russian language is normally used. After graduating from school, a Belarusian citizen faces only one situation when he needs to fill out a document in the Belarusian language – when filling the passport application. In all other cases, a person can use the language he masters much better than the Belarusian – the Russian.

If a person does not have any Belarusian-speaking friends, then he hears the Belarusian language seldom – on television or radio. With age, his understanding of the language is worsening; he quickly forgets the rarely used words. The vast majority do not speak Belarusian. Belarusian society under Lukashenko is a Russian-speaking society in which Belarusian-speaking people are a minority.

Russian media domination continues

According to a study conducted by journalists of the web portal nn.by, programs of Russian production represent 80% of the content of the Belarusian state television channel ONT; the share of Belarusian production is 10%, and the Western production (American and European movies) is 10%. Apparently, the other state television channels have similar proportion.

The state censorship does not allow the broadcast of Russian TV shows which are critical towards the Belarusian authorities. However, a significant part of Belarusian society receives information about what is happening outside Belarus from the Russian TV channels' shows and news bulletins. A significant part of Belarusian society looks at the world through the prism of Russian TV channels, and these people are more and more under the cultural influence of Russia.



Vladimir Soloviev, the host of a popular Russian propaganda TV-show. Source: teleprogramma.pro

In 2015, the Belarusian public was alarmed by the war in Ukraine. The opinion was widespread that destabilization of political situation would cause the appearance of Russian "green people". Nevertheless, according to the results of a public opinion poll conducted by independent sociologists in October 2014, 67.8% of Belarusians supported the annexation of Crimea by Russia. About 20% spoke against it.

18% of the respondents said that they fully trusted the Russian media, 55.4% trusted them partially. Only 17.3% of respondents said that they did not trust the Russian media.

In conclusion, the importance of building a Belarusian cultural-historical identity cannot be underestimated. So far, the official discourse has not properly answered the question “Who are the Belarusians?”, only the President once remarked that “the Belarusians are the Russians with a quality mark.”

As a consequence, Belarusians have become extremely prone to the influence of Russian propaganda and the narratives of the ‘Russian world’. As Belarus-Russia relations get more complicated, the general weakness of [national identity](#) of Belarusians poses serious questions in the sphere of national security for the Belarusian state.

Top 10 Civic Actions in Belarus in 2014 According to Pact

With the 2015 approaching fast, international NGO Pact identified the most notable items in Belarus’ civil society life in 2014. For the second straight year Pact acknowledged top 10 civic actions in Belarus.

Belarus’ civil society is [growing](#) and going somewhere, only we are not sure about the direction yet.

Trend of the Year: Belarusization

Belarusian language free courses have become a new hit in 2014. [Mova Nanova](#) (*Language in a New Way*) has spread to eight Belarusian cities with about 1,000 students and got state registration. The largest Belarus web portal [TUT.by](#) launched

free Belarusian lessons.

The courses titled as [Movaveda](#) attracted a public attention due to their promotional videos based on the known movies. In September, Minsk hosted a first-ever Belarusian-language sports festival [Mova Cup](#) organized by stars of Belarusian sports.

Belarus' top leadership, including president [Alexander Lukashenka](#) and prime minister [Mikhail Myasnikovich](#) spoke Belarusian in public. In addition, "mass" enthusiasm was shown for national [embroidered shirt/vyshyvanka](#) in Belarus. Several companies offer both authentic costumes and modern fashionable clothes with elements of national ornament.

Two Vyshyvanka Days – on [October 5](#) and [December 13](#) – were held as a Festival of national culture and gathered up to 5 thousand people. This year the central October Square in Minsk is decorated with [New Year Tree in traditional style](#) with embroidery ornaments.

Event of the Year: [Kastychnicky Economic Forum \(KEF\)](#)

On November 5, 2014 KEF gathered about 160 Belarusian and international experts for professional dialogue on Belarus' private sector potential. The annual economic forum was [opened by the Minister of Economy](#) Mikalai Snapkou and attended by leadership of World Bank in Belarus, Moody's Investors Service, IFC Belarus Office among others. KEF is organised for the second time by the Research Center of the Institute for Privatization and Management in association with the Belarus Economic Research and Outreach Center (BEROC) and CASE Belarus.

Local Fundraising of the Year: [MaeSens project](#)

Tree time in row Pact sees the MaeSens project as the most successful local fundraising initiative. The main reason is in

its stability: launched in October 2011, a social Internet platform MaeSens.by has collected to the moment about \$320 thousand of private donations for charity. Moreover, MaeSens continues to organize a contest of grassroots ideas [Social Weekend](#). The recent Social Weekend-4 gathered more than 200 applications; nine of them received financial support from local business.

Lobbying of the Year: [Antimak campaign](#)

On January 15, 2014, president Alexander Lukashenka signed a decree 'On certain issues regarding state regulation of poppy seeds turnover'. According to [Alexander Shpakouski](#), the Aktualnaja Konseptsiya non-profit institution leader, the decree "practically liquidates conditions for organization of drug business on poppy seeds materials in Belarus". After more than three year of the Antimak public campaign, adoption of the above decree is the major indicator of its success.

Award of the Year: [Via Bona CSR Award](#)

The first ever award in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Belarus was established by Fond of Ideas. In March 2014, the best CSR projects of Belarusian business were awarded in seven categories, for example, the mobile company Velcom got the prize for the best cooperation with the local community (the project VELOCITY).

Community Initiative of the Year: [Local Hrushauka Festival](#)

In May 2014, the first ever local community Festival was organized in Hrushauka Minsk district. The event was initiated by a single activist, joined by some organized groups and gathered up to 1,000 local residents. Most notably, Hrushauka Fest was fully self-funded and inspired a number of similar initiatives in Minsk (similar Fests were planned in Uruchcha, Malinovka and Slepjanka city districts) and across the country.

Monitoring of the Year: [Barrier-free environment of IIHF World Championship](#)

Before the start of the IIHF World Championship in Minsk, the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held an accessibility monitoring of facilities of IIHF World Championship 2014 in Minsk. The monitoring studied about 50 different facilities including railway stations, sports complexes, hotels, shops and other places of the service sector and concluded their unsatisfactory degree of accessibility.

Survey of the Year: [BISS poll on attitude to reforms](#)

The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) public poll under the REFORUM project reveals the general attitude of [ordinary citizens](#) as well as representatives of [civil society and political opposition](#) to reforms and identifying high-priority areas. Thus, 75.6% of Belarusians consider reforms necessary and wants reforms in health sector while representatives of civil society believe the key area of reform a political system.

Education Program of the Year: [Golden Age University in Grodno](#)

Golden Age University was voted as such at the [5th Festival of Non-Formal Festival](#) in December 2014. According to the people's voting and professional jury decision, the Grodno-based Golden Age University (GAU) was recognized the best educational event. Starting from 2010, GAU is improving the quality of life of Grodno elderly by increasing their participation in different fields of life and creating conditions for them to contribute to both civil society and local community.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT:

The phrase of the year: [Что-то не так!](#) ([something's wrong](#))

The film 'Abel' financed by the Ministry of Culture includes the reconstruction of political events of the presidential elections in Belarus in 2010. While filming the Ploscha events of December 2010, the actors of mass scenes shouted slogans 'We are not satisfied' and 'Something's wrong (in Russian – «[Что-то не так!](#)»)). Actually, there were no such slogans at the true Ploscha of December 19, 2010 which [anniversary](#) is marked these days.