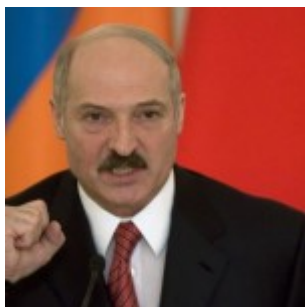


Belarusian Officials Want a License to Unleash Repressions From the EU



By organizing repressions against the unloyal fraction of the Polish minority the Belarusian officials only want to test what EU's response will be, the Belarusian political analyst Vitali Silicki argues. Indeed, unlike several years ago, the regime in Minsk can't afford tearing its relations with the EU now. The moment when Russia has risen the prices for natural resources for Belarus and thereby has stopped de-facto subsidizing Belarus was the birth for a real Belarusian foreign policy. Now the Belarusian officials have to play a complex game in maneuvering between the interests of the EU and of Russia.

Both EU and Russia present both danger and opportunities for president Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Both have economic resources Lukašenka needs and both threaten his unlimited power in Belarus. Aliaksandr Lukašenka's aim is to realize as many opportunities as possible and to avoid the dangers. This means he cannot fully ally with neither the EU nor with Russia. Nor can he go in direct confrontation with neither of them. The EU should therefore understand and realize its ability to influence the Belarusian regime. The EU should not give Lukašenka the license to continue repressions but should instead give a clear signal that human rights violations in Belarus will not be tolerated.

Minsk's general tendency in recent weeks has been to accommodate its EU neighbours. For example, at the request of Lithuanian prosecutors, the Belarusian authorities have interrogated a serving general, Valery Uskhopchik, for his role – as commander of the Soviet garrison in Vilnius – in the

massacre of January 1991 during the Moscow-backed attempt to end Lithuania's self-declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Such unusual co-operation suggests Minsk needs more friends in the EU. And no wonder, since financial assistance from the EU to Belarus requires the unanimous backing of the EU's member states. Moreover, the current conflict has already cost Belarus money: the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development put all projects in Belarus on hold until this episode is resolved. This episode does not mean the EU's policy of dialogue has failed. It does, though, show that Belarus takes the EU's current strategy – dialogue coupled with concessions and soft, cajoling words – as a licence to unleash repression whenever it wants or needs.

[Read the full article](#)

Today is the 70th Anniversary of the Katyn Massacre Decision



On this day 70 years ago, on March 5, 1940, the politburo of the Communist Party of the USSR has passed the decision to kill several thousands officers of the Polish army. The killings are now known as Katyn Massacre, named after the first known place of where the executions have taken place. The Katyn Massacre is a historical episode where the role of Belarus is usually understated or, better said, ignored at all. This has its reasons.

Among the officers of the Polish army killed in Katyn there were many people from West Belarus that was part of the Second Polish Republic before 1939. In particular, one of two generals killed by the Soviets was Bronisław Bohatyrewicz from Hrodna, who had also been a commander of Belarusian national self-defence units in 1918-1919. According to historians' estimates, about a quarter of the 14.5 thousands people killed in Katyn were Belarusians.

A delegation of Belarusian NGO activists and opposition politicians has visited Katyn in August 2009 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Soviet-Nazi alliance that has preceded the joint invasion to Poland. The current Belarusian officials, however, ignore the Katyn massacre. The state ideology rather sympathizes with the Soviets. September 17, the day of the Soviet invasion to West Belarus, is still officially called the Day of Reunification of Belarus.

Several years ago the city authorities of Minsk have constructed a road through Kurapaty, an execution site similar to Katyn, ignoring all protests. Unfortunately, there is no place for the history of West Belarus in the current state ideology of the Belarusian government. Belarus is viewed as the descendant of only the BSSR and not as well of West Belarus (and thereby partly of mid-war Poland). All issues around Katyn and the Soviet invasion to Poland in 1939 are therefore viewed as a matter of Polish-Russian relations, ignoring the geographically obvious fact that Belarus, the land between Poland and Russia, has been in the very centre of the events of 1939 and 1940 as well.

There is no sign of Belarusian officials planning to participate in Katyn commemoration ceremony planned for April 2010. It seems like organizers of the event don't even think of inviting high-ranked Belarusian officials. Read a story by [thenews.pl](#) and [a petition](#) by the Russian human rights organization Memorial to president Dmitry Medvedev to open archives and to officially rehabilitate the victims of Katyn.

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