

Election 2011 Persona: Ales Mikhalevich



Opposition leaders were unable to adopt a procedure for selecting a single presidential contender at their meeting in Minsk at the beginning of July, BelaPAN reported*. According to Uladzimir Kolas, chairman of the Rada (Council) of the Belarusian Intelligentsia (RBI), the process of selecting a single presidential contender had taken too long and might soon be of no use, as there would not be enough time for preparations to ensure an efficient and successful campaign. If the selection of a single candidate continues to be delayed, the RBI may withdraw from this process, Mr. Kolas noted.

Two presidential candidates Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Ales Mikhalevich have refused to be involved in the process.

Ales Mikhalevich was the first opposition candidate to launch his presidential campaign bid at a presentation on January 27, 2010 in Minsk*. The politician said he would rely only on Belarusian resources in his campaign. According to Mikhalevich, his team will comprise representatives of a new generation of the Belarusian society. He regards urban youth as his main support base. Mikhalevich is also the youngest candidate. He just turned 35 this May.

Biography

Ales Mikhalevich was born in Minsk in 1975 to a family of research associates of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. He attended the Belarusian State University,

graduating in 1997 with a degree in Political Science and Law. While at university, Ales headed the Belarusian Students' Association, a non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting the rights of Belarusian students. He also undertook periods of study at the University of Warsaw, Poland and University of Oxford, UK.

After graduation Mikhalevich worked in tourist business as well as a crisis manager accredited at the Ministry of Economy, a legal consultant at the Association of Disabled Veterans of the War in Afghanistan, and a lawyer at the Belarusian Independent Trade Union.

In 2004-2008, Mikhalevich served as a deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF). Following his nomination to the position of the party chairman in 2008 and proposed program of party reforms, he was expelled from the party for publicly criticizing BPF leaders.

In 2003-2007, Mikhalevich was a member of the Pukhavichy district council, Minsk region and coordinator of the Assembly of Members of the Local Councils.

Ales is married and has two daughters.

Program

On May 27, Ales Mikhalevich presented his electoral program*. Its name is "Belarus: a strategy for evolution" and it consists of three pillars: economic growth, effective state, and active society. "For me and my team the most important thing is make people vote for us," said the politician.

The aspirant to participate in the presidential elections is in favor to support the private business, local government, constitutional reform, return to the separation of powers, and privatization of state-run mass media.

Another point of the politician's election program is a

territorial-administrative reform, which stipulates the abolition of regions and the republic's division at 17 povets (districts) with centers in Brest, Pinsk, Mozyr, Gomel, Grodno, Baranovichy, Slutsk, Bobrujsk, Molodechno, Borisov, Mogilev, Krichev , Glubokoe, Polotsk, Vitebsk, Orsha. Moreover, in his opinion, it's necessary to create a separate administrative and territorial unit of Minsk and Minsk region.

"Belarus needs an active self-management, which provides the decentralization of political, economic and financial power in favor of regions and local authorities," stressed Ales Mikhalevich.

Opposition politicians stated that after the election's victory he was going to expand the use of Belarusian language in the country, however, the presentation of his electoral program was made in Russian.

"My campaign will be mostly carried out in Russian. Russian is the language used by most part of our country citizens," said the politician.

In addition, among his priorities Ales Mikhalevich named the private ownership of land, moratorium on the death penalty, neutrality of Belarus on the international scene, withdrawal from the Union State with Russia, cancellation of nuclear power plant construction, ban on the production of fruit wines.

Being an advocate of Belarus' neutrality, Mikhalevich does not have plans to bring the country closer to NATO. As for the European Union, the country's admission might become a priority. But it is not included into the current program*.

The politician's team consists of philosopher Ihar Drako, economists Ales Lukashevich and Viktor Yawmenenka, scholar Kanstantsin Lukashow, and pharmacist Danuta Chyhyr.

Kremlin's Plan of Taming Lukashenka Goes Ahead

After June's gas dispute and Russian enforcing Belarus to join the Customs Union, political tension between Minsk and Moscow persists, taking ever new turns and twists. Belarusian leadership retaliated for the film about Lukashenka shown on Gazprom-controlled NTV by meetings with conspicuous nemesis of Russia – president Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia.

Furthemore, Saakashvili was invited to explain evil nature of Kremlin on Belarusian state TV. Reaction of Russian side was immediate – the same Moscow's channel showed second film about Lukashenka. At least the first film really reached general audience – something that Polish-based TV channel Belsat did not manage to do since three years despite all efforts and hopes of Lukashenka's opponents. Ordinary people discussed the NTV film, though quite few watched it by themselves.

It was a hard blow for Belarusian president, because it made clear how susceptible his people are to Russian propaganda. After all, it cannot be seriously deemed as Russian concern for lack of human rights or democracy in Belarus. Of course, there are these problems under Lukashenka's reign yet Moscow channel, critisizing Minsk for human rights violations and disappearances while silently omitting much grosser abuses in the own land, resembles not so old times of USSR lashing out at USA for American racism.

Weak national identity and nonexistent civic and political consciousness of Belarusians aggravate the situation, while

assisting Russian attempts to tame if not to oust Lukashenka altogether. A bulk part of Belarusian opposition facing the problems with Western support are inclined to turn to old Eastern comrades and this week proved that Moscow can count not only on popular reaction to anti-Lukashenka propaganda but also look toward collaboration of many politicians left for years without access to power in the country.

Thus, following the Russian film which mentioned disappearances of four persons in 1999-2000, the issue of disappearances was raised again with explicit references to Russia at Friday's press conference by "European Belarus" Coordinator Andrei Sannikau, leader of Social Democratic Party Stanislau Shushkevich, leader of United Civic Party Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the former Communist party Siarhiej Kaliakin, deputy chairman of Belarusian People's Front (BNF) Ryhor Kastusiu and head of the Minsk City Organization Of BNF Viktor Ivashkievich – the whole range of political opposition for the first time.

Shushkevich – sometimes considered to be a moderate National Democrat – said that spin doctors of Belarusian regime are trying to begin in Belarus an anti-Russian PR campaign. Yet, Russia cannot be our enemy, we are neighbours. We are told that Lukashenka is a guarantor of our independence, but a person which does not know Belarusianhood, language and history cannot be such guarantor. Such leader cannot bring us to independence.

Such statements one time were monopoly of the Belarusian president, but now the situation seemed to be contrary – Lukashenka is struggling with Kremlin and opposition seeks Russian friendship! They have to hurry, since Moscow possibly have already made up its strategy and put its agents in action.

New public campaign "Tell the Truth" – widely believed to have at least some deals with Russia and favorable stature toward

it – demonstrates a high professional level in both installing control over oppositional political and NGOs' structures and buying up most active oppositional organizations. Actually, there are almost no critical materials about that campaign in non-governmental media anymore, while all steps of Lukashenka in confrontation with Russia are accompanied by new waves of attacks on him in both press outlets and public statements of oppositional politicians.

A leader of the campaign – the famous poet Uladzimir Niakliajeu – declared last week his intent to participate in presidential elections. Apart from Russian support supposed by many, the campaign has a lot of funding, and at the same time it is clear that this time Western gave opposition no major resources. The campaign first denied Russian origin of its money. However, one time Niakliajeu got tired of questions about money and rhetorically asked,

“Why it is bad to say the truth for Russian money?”

The explicitly pro-Kremlin position of campaign's representatives during the gas conflict with Russia has only increased suspicions of campaign's Russian link. Very illustrative was Niakliajeu's statement on 600th anniversary of the Grunwald Battle, as he proclaimed that

“The Battle of Grunwald is a genuine symbol of cultural and political unity of Belarus, Poland, Lithuania and Russia”.

One can hardly find anything Russian to this battle except for later pan-Slavic and anti-German speculations of Russian imperial ideologues.

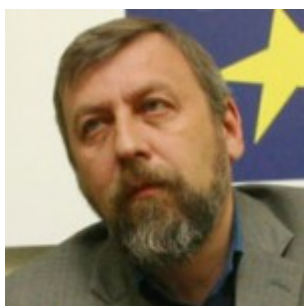
There is another bad news for Lukashenka. The campaign “Tell the Truth” regardless of its Russian connections, enjoys good relations with Western politicians. Niakliajeu began his international tour de force by visiting Canada but ended with

meeting the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton!

It means that Belarusian regime cannot count on West while facing the most extensive and intensive Russian intrusion in its history. And Minsk is showing first signs of weakness – always obedient to Lukashenka Belarusian judges this week did not even dare to close a facade organization of the campaign “Tell the Truth”.

SB

Third opposition candidate for presidency



In his article for the Jamestown Foundation the known expert on Belarus David Marples portrays Andrei Sannikau who recently announced his willing to run for the presidency.

Sannikau Throws His Hat in the Ring The Jamestown Foundation Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 56 March 23, 2010 By: David Marples A key opposition leader in Belarus has declared his candidacy for the next presidential elections, scheduled for 2011. Andrei Sannikau, the leader of the civic movement European Belarus, held an interview with “bloggers” in mid-March to outline his policies and answer questions. His decision reflects long-term disillusionment with recent attempts by the United Democratic Forces (UDF) in particular to engage in dialogue with the Lukashenka regime and support Belarus’s membership of the Eastern Partnership Project. Ironically, Sannikau is also the most overtly pro-

European of all the candidates to date, though he wishes to replace the Lukashenka regime with a completely new administration and state structure.

Sannikau is the third opposition candidate to decide to run for the presidency, following earlier statements by Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Ales Mikhalevich. It is also anticipated that the UDF will choose its own candidate, which raises the question as to whether yet another candidate from the opposition will undermine the chances of the country gaining its second president since elections were first held almost 16 years ago. Sannikau was born in 1954 in Minsk and graduated from the prestigious Minsk State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages (renamed as Minsk State Linguistic University) in 1977. He completed course work at the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR in Moscow in 1989, and holds the diplomatic rank of ambassador. From 1991 he worked in the Belarusian foreign ministry, rising to the post of deputy foreign minister, before resigning in November 1996, in protest against the controversial referendum that drastically amended the 1994 constitution in favor of greater presidential authority. Since then, he has been the coordinator of the civic initiative Charter-97, and he now also leads the European Belarus civic campaign (Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta, March 15). When it was formed in January 2008, European Belarus announced at a news conference in Minsk a long-term campaign for the country to gain European Union membership, where its representatives were Sannikau, Viktor Ivashkevich, Mikola Statkevich, and Mikhail Marynich. Sannikau stated that their goal was to recruit volunteers to gather "hundreds of thousands" of signatures for an appeal to the governing bodies of the EU, leading to the integration of Belarus into European structures (European Radio for Belarus, January 24, 2008). On March 15, Sannikau summarized his proposed presidential policies through a question and answer session with Belarusian bloggers. His campaign will rely on his family, those who share his views,

former classmates, and Belarusians. He describes his political stance as “right-centrist,” and notes his experience as the head of the Belarusian delegation at the talks on conventional and nuclear disarmament that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of an independent Belarus. He is a firm believer in democracy as a system that offers the right of choice to all its citizens.

He supports a relationship with Moscow based on mutual understanding rather than petty conflicts. Concerning the current regime, he would refer the fate of “Citizen Lukashenka” to an independent court and rely on lawsuits from individual citizens. He would change the current national symbols and reduce special detachments of the militia, though not necessarily the army, which has been downsized in recent years (www.charter97.org, March 15). If elected, Sannikau intends to enact sweeping reforms of the entire political and economic systems. Regarding the latter, he would provide opportunities for small and medium businesses. With respect to political reforms, he plans to construct “a normal state” by restoring the principle of the division of powers, recreating a parliament with real authority and securing the independence of the courts.

His free society would also be dependent upon an independent media. Ultimately, he wishes to see Belarus develop a “European level of life” within the briefest possible timescale, rather than have it regarded as a pipedream for the distant future (www.charter97.org, March 15). His campaign raises some important questions: foremost is whether the EU would be prepared to abandon its current dialogue with Lukashenka and embrace an opposition candidate who is firmly opposed to cooperation with the regime. Indeed, Sannikau and his wife, the well-known journalist Iryna Khalip, have been especially targeted in recent days. On March 5, they were detained on the Lithuanian border for three hours by the Belarusian border guards and had a laptop confiscated

(www.charter97.org, March 6).

On March 16, the Sannikau household was subjected to a police search for about three hours, along with a raid of Charter 97's headquarters and a confiscation of equipment (Narodnaya Volya, March 17). Despite reducing the chances of an opposition figure securing enough votes to enter a second round of presidential elections, the entry of Sannikau in the future contest can also be seen as a positive step. More than any other current candidate he is prepared to highlight and oppose the recent repression against opposition figures and the Union of Poles. He is a former "insider," highly educated, and fluent in English and French, as well as Belarusian and Russian, and on close terms with many political leaders of the EU. He may need to explain how the wholesale leap into Europe, which he proposes will allow friendly relations with Russia (he is notably quiet on the issue of NATO membership), and its impact on negotiations over gas and oil imports in particular.

VB

125 Cities Across the Globe for a Free Belarus



Solidarity and support from European civil society is crucial for democratic forces in Belarus. Belarus is indeed the last Eastern European country that has not joined the Free World after the breakdown of the totalitarian Socialist camp. It is one of the few countries of the region that have not joined the NATO and the EU and where the situation with democracy and human rights is still much worse than in other European countries.

Apart from that, Belarus is also one of the least known countries in the West. Actions like the one organized by the Young European Federalists are probably even more important than uncountable resolutions by the OSCE and the European Parliament. It is important not only to appeal to European politicians to have a firm position on Belarus, but also to inform the society in the EU about problems in its closest neighbour Belarus.

On the night of 18th March 2010 the Young European Federalists, political movement active in most European countries, and its global partners protested against Europe's last standing dictatorship. The event was dedicated to the fourth anniversary of the disputed presidential elections in Belarus. The fifth consecutive "Free Belarus Action" took place in 125 cities on four continents, including cities in almost all European countries, including Belarus. The Young European Federalists' collected signatures in the streets and posed with with signs reading "Give the people of Belarus a voice" in protest against Lukashenka's dictatorship. The current Belarus political regime has deprived 10 million Belarusian citizens deprived of fundamental human rights, including the right to free speech.

"Free Belarus means: when Belarus is free from the death penalty, celebrates good human rights, there is freedom of speech for all its citizens, freedom of press and NGOs and a process where the freedom of electing one's leadership in the elections is truly democratic – only then can we speak of a united, strong, and fair Europe," said JEF-Europe President Philippe Adriaenssens. "The European Union that JEF believes in is one with a clear foreign policy – not one turning a blind eye to human rights violations happening at its doorstep." "Actions speak louder than words," continued Free Belarus Action coordinator Elisabeth Velle, "yet every year we hope it will be the last time we have to organise this action.'" "Condemning a regime is not enough. The European

Union should do everything in its power to support civil society within the Belarusian borders, make sure that the next general elections are under full observation of election monitors and guarantee the freedom of the press and political opinion.

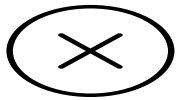
Moreover, it is time that the suspension of sanctions on Lukashenko and his officials were lifted. Europe must send out the message that its core values do not allow it to silently tolerate human rights violations and that it in no way supports Belarusian dictatorship." "We urge European Commission Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton to foster greater co-operation between Member States and European Institutions, and to assist Europe in releasing the people of Belarus from the dictatorial grip.

This way, Belarus can be on its way to join the democracies of Europe," concluded Adriaenssens. For participating in the action, three young Russian activists, also associated with the youth branch of the Yabloko (The Russian United Democratic Party), were arrested and imprisoned in the Russian city of Omsk. Facing an unexpected early morning wakeup call in a harsh Russian prison, the three campaigners of conscious now face a number of augmented charges, including vandalism and public disorder, which considering that no statues were damaged or public unrest was caused, is somewhat ludicrous.

See a press release on the [JEF website](#), see photos from the action [here](#).

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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 Belarusian 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 Belarusian culture, particularly in the face of political pressures that marginalize their mainstream presence, and will provide unique insights into contemporary Belarusian 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.