

Tax Free Shopping, Civilised Divorce with Uralkali, Hockey Championship – Belarus State TV Digest

State TV widely reported on a meeting with Alexandr Lukashenka where he discussed the recent potash-related affair, but also its consequences for Belarus-Russia relations: a civilised divorce or a further co-operation with new management at Uralkali.

Channel BT1 also covered preparations for the World Cup in Hockey. The reportage showed that the successful organisation of the event remained a top priority for Lukashenka. Ukrainian representatives met with Belarusian deputies to discuss intensifying mutual relations. Serbian businessmen seek to increase co-operation with Minsk.

Economy

[Lukashenka on the Uralkali affair: civilised divorce or further co-operation?](#) Lukashenka headed a meeting with other Belarusian officials. The ruler commented upon “the most recent resonant issue”, as the journalists put it, referring to the scandal with the Russian company, Uralkali. Russian vice-prosecutor, Alexandr Zvyaginsev, also attended the meeting.

Journalists emphasised that in fact Russia had lost much more in the affair than Belarus. It should not impede the relations of both states. They pointed out that Lukashenka principle position as being no one could disrespect the Belarusian nation: “They say: what did Lukashenka want to demonstrate? I will give you an answer: Lukashenka wanted to demonstrate one thing: it will not be allowed to wipe one’s shoes on us. We are a sovereign state. We have never made trouble for our

neighbours, our brothers the Russians". It continued on to state that the Belarusian nation has chosen the Belarusian president and thus his actions and decisions aimed at one thing – the protection of Belarus' national interests.

The state TV noted that the head of the state was actually protecting the interests of both countries, Belarus and allied Russia. It emphasised that development of relations with its historical ally and strategic partner, Russia, still remained important for Belarus.

Lukashenka also expressed his views on how both the Belarusian and Russian sides should work together to resolve this "dark story". Either a civilised divorce or continuation of co-operation with a new management of Uralkali is possible. Belarus should also receive some compensation for its losses, as "all what was stolen from us, should be returned", the head of the state added.

Tax free shopping to attract more tourists. State TV journalists reported that Belarus was the first among CIS countries that would introduce tax free shopping for foreign customers. Journalists pointed out that "50 countries worldwide, including our closest neighbours: Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, have already set up conditions for a comfortable shopping."

A tax free system should attract more foreigners to come to Belarus. According to journalists, the case of Sweden, which introduced it already in the 80s, proved that. Today 80 per cent of tourist perceives tax free as a serious incentive to purchase and for visiting certain countries. "If the car costs a few thousand dollars, the desire to purchase something tax free is obvious, and the economy will feel it", journalists explained.

Serbian businesses interested in investing in Minsk. State television noted that many countries knew about the geopolitical advantages of Belarus. European countries

have already for some time considered Minsk as a reliable shield from many dangerous phenomena, including extremism.

Officials and entrepreneurs from Serbia started talks in Minsk on the intensification of business co-operation. State TV journalists pointed out that over 3 years, both countries had increased the trade turnover 3 times, now standing at \$150m. In regard to trade turnover with Serbia, Belarus has always maintained a positive balance. In 2011, Belarusian exports were estimated to be nearly \$60m.

State further mentioned that in 2012, both sides traded for \$150m. However, it was still less than what was demanded by Lukashenka – \$500m annually in trade in the near future. The journalist commented that conditions for such a development in trade exchange remained even more promising, because Belarus has maintained with Belgrade a free trade regime. Belgrade and Minsk signed a package of documents of further co-operation.

Domestic Politics

[Minsk and Kiev: a need to develop mutual relations](#). Belarusian television reported on a meeting of the inter-parliamentary commissions of both countries which recently took place in Minsk. Journalists commented that both sides aimed at making progress in their mutual relations in various spheres, from political to humanitarian co-operation. Thus, the national parliaments of Belarus and Ukraine would intensify their joint projects in the near future.

[World Cup in Hockey is coming](#). The state channel noted that 227 days remain until the event starts in Minsk. Thus, a special press conference gathered journalists and experts from Belarus and Russia.

The head of the state is supervising the ongoing preparations for this sporting event. In the words of Lukashenka, this event might be a chance to change the international image of Belarus. “We should prepare our infrastructure, to be not

worse than in the other countries. It should be done so that people who would come, could say: 'Yes, it is completely different country than we thought! And so other people would desire to come here", he said.

Journalists noted that nearly 20 thousand people could come to Belarus to attend the sporting event.

Foreign Affairs

[CSTO: a more ambitious mission](#). The head of the state attended the Collective Security Treaty Organisation session in Sochi. Belarusian state channel emphasised that the members of CSTO stepped up regional security by making a decision on unprecedented aid for the protection the Tajikistan border with Afghanistan.

Lukashenka talked how the importance of the development of these and other joint initiatives, mainly because the problems facing everyone have become transnational these days. The head of the state commented upon the situation in Syria and expressed his support for Russia in regard to settlement of the conflict.

Apart from the assembly, Lukashenka also met with the Armenian president, Serzh Sargsyan and talked about bilateral relations. The Belarusian ruler confirmed that Minsk would support the Armenian intentions to join the Customs Union.

Society

["Belaya Rus" wants to talk to people](#). The state TV journalists reported that the head of the most respectable civil society organisation in Belarus, "Belaya Rus" (White Russia), met with representatives of the local branch of the organisation.

The state channel pointed out that over 6 years of its

existence it became the main organisation in its sphere in the country. Today over 140 thousand of people belong to it. One third of the members are young people, the journalists specified.

Aleksandr Radzkou, the leader of White Russia, explained on TV the importance of informal ways of talking to people, in particular in the countryside. The organisation would like to spread this type of social dialogue also to enterprise.

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.

Belarus and Russia Prepare for the West – 2013 Military Drill

The planned Belarusian-Russian joint military drill, “West 2013”, has stirred up NATO member countries. The armed forces of both countries will hold the drill in the autumn, while some Polish and Lithuanian politicians have already discussed the threat of war.

Alexander Lukashenka said on 21 February that “Belarus and Russia are not going to threaten anyone”. This time he is telling the truth. A war in the centre of Europe remains beyond contemporary perception of reality, while the mentioned

military drills seem to be an attempt to satisfy Russia's imperial complex. The Belarusian regime uses intensive military cooperation as a pretext for getting more financial aid from the Kremlin.

Most likely, West 2013 will be similar to the previous drill that took place in 2009. That one was grand from the point of view of the size of the manpower employed and technical equipment involved.

The systems of defence of Belarus and Russia remain tightly interconnected. Specifically, the Kremlin is trying to make Belarusian defence an integral part of the Russian one. Today, Russia has great influence over Belarus' air defence system and has two military bases on the territory of Belarus: the Volga radar station near Baranavichy and the Antey long-range radar centre near Vilejka.

War Rehearsal in the West

Last month, the former Minister of National Defence of Poland Romuald Szeremietiew made a statement that Belarus and Russia were preparing for a future war with Poland, in connection with the upcoming drill.

In his opinion, West 2013 will resemble the previous military drills, held back in 2009, in its scope. West 2009 became the greatest military drill to happen on the territory of the former Soviet Union since its downfall. 12,500 people took part, with both the Belarusian and the Russian sides providing an approximately equal number of soldiers.

The armed forces involved 63 planes and 40 helicopters, 470 armoured vehicles, 228 tanks, 234 artillery cannons, mortars and multiple artillery rocket systems. Naturally, [NATO was alarmed](#) by the drill. Neighbouring Lithuania does not have a single tank.

This autumn, Belarus plans to broadly use its territorial defence troops, while the Collective Forces of Operative Reaction of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation will take part in the military drill in Belarus for the first time. The Kremlin created this organisation as a follower-up to the Warsaw Pact and is essentially the contemporary anti-NATO organisation of Russia.

In 2009, Dmitri Medvedev and Alexander Lukashenka watched the drill, while state propaganda used the mutual Russian-Belarusian preparations to show the might of the Belarusian military. This differed quite drastically from the [teddy bear stunt](#) that happened several years later.

Unity, or Russian Control over the Belarusian Army?

Despite the declarations of the military unity of the allies, Belarus and Russia have contradictory interests. On the one hand, Russia wants to obtain total control over the Belarusian army. On the other hand, Belarus is slowing down this process in order to preserve its independence in the military sphere and use it [to obtain Russian energy resources](#) at low prices.

The Russians have achieved their goal: by creating the [United Regional System of Air Defence](#) they have gained full control over the Belarusian air force. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Russia failed to create an effective air defence system at its Western border so Belarus became a very important asset.

Unofficially, Belarus has been under strong Russian influence in this sphere for quite a long time already, and has earned rent from the scheme. In 2006, the Belarusian regime got four long range surface-to-air missile systems (the S-300) for \$13,000,000 each. The market price of such a rocket division is about 14 times more expensive in reality – or approximately \$180,000,000.

The importance of Russian military bases on the territory

of Belarus deteriorates as the Russian authorities are building up their radars in the Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions. However, the Russians will never leave their bases in Belarus voluntarily, even if only for ideological reasons.

Belarus and Russia conduct common military drills and joint sessions at military headquarters, and Belarusian military men often get their education in Russia. Over quite a long period of time Belarus has been re-exporting Russian weapons to Africa and the Middle East. Belarus remains an outpost of defence for the Russian generals and they will hold on to it.

Contradictions in the Allies' Camp

Vladimir Putin outlined the development of the Russian army as one of the priorities of his third presidential term. The military-industrial complex will benefit the most from such a policy. The Belarusian weapons manufacturers would have been happy about this decision by the Kremlin if the Russian armed forces had not chosen the path of independence from Belarusian importers.

Starting in 2014, Russia will not order or receive Belarusian military trucks. The Volat truck transports the Jars and Avangard mobile strategic rocket systems today. Besides, the Russians, have no analogues to the Volat, and this means that the case appears to be entirely politically motivated. This seems a strong blow to the Belarusian military-industrial complex. The Russian authorities will strive to obtain further control over the Belarusian army and its industrial complex.

For a long time, military cooperation remained the "sacred cow" of the Belarusian-Russian relationship. Despite the conflicts of political or economic character, military cooperation looked stable. However, now Russia is trying to show Belarus its proper place.

The Kremlin binds Belarus with organisational and legal instruments in order to take away its sovereignty in the

military arena. Nevertheless, Lukashenka's regime will never give up independence entirely. Sovereignty remains its only good as well as its only guarantee before Russia. Ironically, Lukashenka is not only a danger to Belarusian independence, but also its main defender.

Ryhor Astapenia

Kyrgyzstan Clashes with Belarus Over the Bakiev Clan

Yesterday Belarus officially declared that it would not extradite the former head of Kyrgyzstan's security service Janysh Bakiev.

That was the State Prosecution Office's response to an extradition request from Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan accuses Janysh Bakiev of committing a number of violent crimes. Minsk calls Kyrgyzstan's request politically motivated.

On 17 August, Belarusian activist Mikhail Pashkevich took a photograph of a Kyrgyz man near a restaurant thinking that it was the former Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiev who has been living in Belarus since April 2010. The Kyrgyz government have tried – without success – to bring him back to prosecute him for crimes committed during his time in office.

However, the man in the picture has been subsequently identified as Janysh Bakiev, the younger brother of Kurmanbek. Two other Kyrgyzstani citizens sought for crimes in their home country were with him. That triggered a serious diplomatic scandal between Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, the recall of

Kyrgyzstan's ambassador and an attack on the Belarusian embassy in Bishkek.

Belarusian Embassy under Attack

Kyrgyz authorities reacted immediately. Already on 21 August Kyrgyzstan Foreign Ministry handed to the Belarusian ambassador a note demanding the arrest of Janysh Bakiev. The next day the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan explained that the individuals in the picture are accused of killing among others the former head of presidential administration of Kyrgyzstan. Belarusian authorities then denied Janysh's presence in Belarus.

On 24 August, the Kyrgyz ambassador to Belarus was recalled to Bishkek. Belarus decided not to respond in kind and kept its ambassador in Bishkek. Minsk apparently wants to soften the crisis. On the same day, Pashkevich, who photographed Janysh Bakiev, told the media that some suspicious people were following and threatening him for revealing Janysh's location.

On 28 August, Kyrgyz protesters threw stones at the Belarusian embassy in Bishkek and tried to storm the building. Kyrgyz police explained that this is how Bakiev's victims were protesting Belarus' actions. On 3 September, the Kyrgyz president recalled his country's ambassador to Minsk. It is now clear that the Belarusian government was aware of Janysh living in Belarus and apparently helped him to hide in the country.

Bishkek Tolerated the Presence of its Ousted President in Belarus

Such harsh reaction to the revelation of Janysh Bakiev's whereabouts contrasts with Bishkek's silent tolerance of the former Kyrgyz president's presence in Belarus. Kurmanbek has been openly living in Belarus for years, where he has reportedly bought a USD 1.7m mansion and taken up citizenship. Sometimes he holds press conferences and invites journalists

for tea at his house – without actually allowing anybody into his house. He reiterated that he was paying for everything out of his own pocket without the Belarusian government's help.

Relations between the two nations continued despite sporadic ritual demands for the former president's extradition to Bishkek. In October 2011 high-level Belarusian officials even attended the inauguration of the new Kyrgyz president Almazbek Atambayev. On 5 July, Kyrgyzstan withheld its vote for a resolution of the UN Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in Belarus. The new Kyrgyzstani government had more important business to attend to and was too weak to deal with the former president.

Actually, the Kyrgyz government might easily let Kurmanbek stay in exile, as his return would bring no real benefits for the new regime. Moreover, Kurmanbek was considered to be under the strong influence of his brother Janysh and son Maxim – the main villains in Kyrgyzstani public opinion. Janysh was responsible for the security services and gave orders to shoot at protesters. The current Kyrgyzstani authorities even set a prize for anyone providing information on the whereabouts of Janysh.

“Dictators Solidarity”

Some analysts believe that Lukashenka has helped out Bakiev and his retinue out of personal, apparently emotional motives. The Belarusian ruler considered it necessary to give refuge to the ousted “fellow dictator” and give a signal that he would also – like Bakiev – without hesitation crush protests. But this may be only a part of the real explanation.

A more rational scheme, however, may be behind bringing Bakievs to Belarus. In its relations with Russia, Belarus has a constant problem of disproportional forces. To compensate for its own weaknesses in this relationship, Lukashenka has worked on building up relations elsewhere and finding allies

to counterbalance Moscow.

His major partner among post-Soviet nations is Kazakhstan's president Nazarbayev. Minsk paid for that cooperation when it [solved](#) for Nazarbayev his "Bakiev problem". After his flight to Kazakhstan in April 2010 Bakiev became a doubtful asset for Nazarbayev. The fugitive leader and his team were eager and able to wreak havoc in Kyrgyzstan. A few weeks after Bakiev was ousted, his supporters instigated massive bloody inter-ethnic clashes in the southern Kyrgyz province of Osh.

Nazarbayev hardly wanted to see a destabilised Kyrgyzstan on his borders. And he was happy to send Bakiev thousands of miles to the west, to Belarus.

Lukashenka made an attempt to capitalise on Bakiev's arrival in Belarus. He reportedly came in July 2010 to the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation with a letter from Bakiev urging CSTO nations to intervene militarily in Kyrgyzstan. The Belarusian leader found no support for this idea, and from his proposal the heads of state only included in a final declaration a brief sentence about "unconstitutional power change" in Kyrgyzstan. Next year, Lukashenka again articulated the idea of [using CSTO troops to suppress revolutions](#) in post-Soviet nations yet it failed as well

Bakievs Stay in Minsk

The extradition of Kurmanbek Bakiev is very unlikely. Kyrgyzstan has no leverage to force the extradition, and Russia and the US just wanted him to [go](#) and have no interest in his prosecution. The same is true even for Janysh. Bishkek believes to have enough evidence to build up a case against the former security service chief. It guarantees a fair trial and asks for help both from the CIS and Interpol. Yet both have limited influence on Belarus.

Belarusian authorities may also have a mercantile interest in

keeping the former ruling clan in the country. Bakiev's son Maxim has been staying in the UK since 2010 – though officially he still does not have political refugee status. The charges against Maxim are not lighter than those against Janysh.

In the past, many speculated that Saddam Hussein and Muammar Qadhafi would find refuge in Belarus. None of them ended up in Belarus which could have saved their lives. The feeling of solidarity between dictators coupled with the money which they have bring could yet again make Belarus a potential safe haven for fallen dictators from around the world.

CSTO: From NATO's Enemy to Strategic Partner?

This week Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka attended the jubilee summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The summit participants took stock of the organisation's evolution since its founding ten years ago on 14 May 2002, on the basis of the 1992 agreement. They also set targets for the CSTO's future development.

Their goals include two potentially contradictory developments. On the one hand, they hope to enhance cooperation with the West and NATO. On the other, they are set on preventing contagion of the “Arab spring”. Which of these two goals comes to dominate will have a profound impact on Belarus' future.

The CSTO as a time capsule

seven CSTO members have remained frozen in time

Looking back at the decade of political developments outside and inside the CSTO, one gets the impression that the seven CSTO members have remained frozen in time. Belarus and fellow CSTO members Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan remain undemocratic, dependent on Russia, and economically vulnerable.

In the meantime, Belarus' neighbours Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia have joined NATO and the EU. EU membership and access to the EU structural funds have provided a major boost to these states' economies and ensured the continuation of democratic transformation. These states participate in NATO's collective defense system and have revamped their militaries.

Out of the seven CSTO member states only Armenia and Kyrgyzstan have changed rulers

Just like in 2002, when the CSTO was founded, Russia is ruled by President Vladimir Putin and Belarus by President Lukashenka. The leaders of Kazakhstan (Nusultan Nazarbaev), Uzbekistan (Islam Karimov), and Tajikistan (Emomalii Rahmon) are starting their third decades in power. Out of the seven CSTO member states only Armenia and Kyrgyzstan have changed rulers.

All CSTO members remain disengaged internationally, but Belarus' relations with the West have been the most strained. In 2002, the EU states imposed their first travel ban on Lukashenka and his ministers over poor human rights violations. Earlier this year, EU diplomats were recalled from Minsk, and the Belarusian leader has become less welcome in the EU than ever.

The CSTO members' ambitions

What has held this motley alliance of autocrats together? At the time of founding, the CSTO states faced very different external security challenges – from Islamic resurgence in Tajikistan to territorial [defense from Western enemies](#) in Belarus. As its members were scrambling to develop foreign policy after the Soviet breakup, the group has been held together mostly by default.

Lukashenka openly prioritised controlling social unrest and bridling the power of Internet as the organisation's main targets

However, the threats of popular unrest after a string of colour revolutions and now the Arab Spring have given the alliance a new meaning and kept the leaders coming to the summits. It is not accidental that the CSTO members emphasise developing the collective rapid reaction forces, created on the initiative of Kazakhstan, whose leader has been in power since 1990. Last year, CSTO chair Lukashenka openly [prioritised](#) controlling social unrest and bridling the power of the internet as the organisation's main targets.

Besides developing rapid reaction forces, the CSTO has also moved into building drones. Last year, the Interstate Corporation for Development was launched in order to develop “scientific, industrial and high-tech cooperation in CSTO countries”. The organisation is headed by Ivan Polyakov, a senior CSTO official, and boasts 250 ongoing high-tech projects on its website.

Thanks to the CSTO membership and a close military alliance with Russia, small Belarus has a formidable, even if ageing, military. Lukashenka is keen on using national security it as a [trump card](#) in negotiations with Russia.

This year Belarus national defence funding reached \$550.1mln, a 3.3 percent increase from last year.

Just as he [warns](#) the EU of having weakened border control at

the Belarus-EU border, he reassures Moscow that Belarus is a reliable ally in defending the western borders of the “union state”. This year Belarus national defence funding reached \$550.1mln, a 3.3 percent increase from last year. At the same time, the armed forces remain greatly impoverished, with average monthly salary around \$280.

Looking into the future

Putin has redoubled his interest in the post-Soviet space

Judging by Putin’s diplomatic agenda for the coming weeks, the CSTO’s relevance is likely to grow. This year Putin has redoubled his interest in the post-Soviet space. He cancelled his meeting with Barack Obama at the Group of Eight summit in Camp David on 18-19 May and instead has been planning meetings with neighbours. Kazakhstan is the first to be honoured by his presence – on 25 May, and Belarus will enjoy Putin’s visit on 31 May.

Even though Putin seems to have neglected Obama, the new goal of the CSTO seems to be to stand next to rather than in opposition to the US and NATO. Building strategic cooperation with the West was first outlined in the report on reforming the CSTO by the Russian Institute of Contemporary Development last year. Another area for reform is changing the decision-making process from consensus to simple majority. What do these developments spell for Belarus?

Belying his anti-NATO and anti-Europe reputation, the Belarusian leader expressed interest in the constructive dialogue with the UN, the OSCE, and NATO in his speech at the jubilee summit. He seemed certain that the outsiders would be interested in such cooperation and even boasted that the organization expanded during the chairmanship in 2006 (jointly with Uzbekistan). Emphasizing the “growing prestige of the OSCE in the world”, Lukashenka wants to see the organisation welcome additional members in the future.

However, both cooperation with NATO and majority decision-making will radically alter the costs of Belarus' participation in the organisation. Without the consensus requirement, there will be no need to waste time persuading or pressuring Minsk into agreement if Lukashenka's goals diverge from those of Moscow. More importantly, if NATO is to become the CSTO's strategic partner, the Belarusian leader will have to mend his relations with the West. While none of the CSTO members are democratic, the costs of open repression as well as of angering the US and the EU diplomats may rise.

two potential incarnations of the CSTO – as an alliance of autocrats that helps its members hold down their populations and as NATO's partner

Whether cooperation with NATO or catering to the political interests of the CSTO leaders dominates is likely to depend on Vladimir Putin's immediate interests. Yet in the long run, these two potential incarnations of the CSTO – as an alliance of autocrats that helps its members hold down their populations and as NATO's partner in Iran and Afghanistan – will come into conflict with each other. While even NATO has cooperated with undemocratic regimes, it is much less tolerant of human rights abuses than the Kremlin.

In addition to the symbolic praise, the CSTO declaration produced at the end of the May summit contains a curious aside on the inadmissibility of economic and political pressure – between the CSTO members as well as on them from non-members. One may only wonder whether this statement alludes to the Russian or the Western pressure and whether Lukashenka is behind it.

How to Please the "Russian Bear" – Belarus Politics Digest

Belarusian authorities intensified their efforts to please their Russian counterparts by publicly praising the idea of the Russia-dominated Eurasian Union. They also continued repression of political opponents. Several opposition activists involved in actions of solidarity with political prisoners were arrested last week. Two journalists working for popular Poland- and Russia-based media were also targeted.

Lukashenka: Belarus Stability Depends on the "Russian Bear". President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenka [believes](#) that the stability of Belarus is largely dependent on stability in Russia. He said on October 26 "If the Russian bear is doing well, we'll be fine, too. But if Russia is shaking and unstable, as it did at the end of the last century, hard times will come for us".

Makei: Eurasian Union to be in Real Competition with the EU. Head of Presidential Administration of Belarus Uladzimir Makei [said](#) that the idea of Eurasian Union, voiced by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and supported by Alexander Lukashenko, was taken by West very cautiously. According to Vladimir Makei, Western countries fear the Eurasian Union to become a real competitor in foreign markets.

Lukashenka: Belarus has learned to combat «revolutions through social networks». Belarus has learned to combat "revolutions through social networks," Alyaksandr Lukashenka [said](#) while meeting on October 26 in Minsk with members of the Council of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Russian journalist deported from Belarus. On October 26, [Igor Karmazin](#), reporter of the Moskovsky Komsomolets Russian newspaper, was [deported](#) from Belarus after arranging a number of interviews with former Belarusian political prisoners and their families. Karmazin was given a paper saying his entrance to Belarus would be banned within a year.

Belsat journalist warned by General Prosecutor's Office. On October 27, independent journalist Alina Radachynskaya was [accused](#) of cooperation with the foreign media, in particular, of working for the Polish TV-channel Belsat without accreditation. Two more Belsat journalists – Alyaksandr Barazenska and Aleh Razhkou – were summoned to the General Prosecutor's Office but no warning was issued to them.

Actions of solidarity. From October 21 to October 29, the civil campaign "European Belarus" [held](#) daily pickets to demand freedom for the political prisoners. At least 1.5 dozen people were detained during the actions of solidarity in Minsk. Some of them were sentenced from 5 to 15 days of administrative arrest under for "violation of the order of organization or holding mass actions or picketing". Gomel Court [sentenced](#) local activist Vital Pratasevich to 10 days of administrative arrest for staging an unauthorized picket of solidarity in Gomel.

Opposition activists detained. On October 27, Gomel Savetski District Court [sentenced](#) local activist Illia Mironau to 10 days of administrative arrest for involvement organizing the People's Assembly scheduled for November 12. On October 27, Barysau district court [sentenced](#) a former prisoner of conscience Aliaksandr Malchanau to 10 days of administrative arrest for allegedly resisting arrest. On October 30, a former Head of the "Right Alliance" Yury Karetnikau was [detained](#) in Minsk. He was charged with disorderly conduct.

Total number of political prisoners – 11+3. Now in prisons there are not less than eleven political prisoners: ex-

presidential candidates Andrey Sannikov, Nikolay Statkevich; leader of the campaign “European Belarus” Dmitry Bondarenko; Pavel Seviarynets; Head of the Human Rights Centre “Viasna” Ales Byalyatsky; youth leaders Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobov; entrepreneur Nikolay Autukhovich.

Anarchists Igor Olinevich, Nikolay Dedok and Alexander Frantskevich are [recognized](#) as political prisoners of the Belarusian regime by human rights organizations *Viasna* and *BHC*. Three more anarchists from Babrujsk including Yauhen Vaskovich, Pavel Syramalotau and Artiom Prakapenka are under [discussion](#).

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.

Lukashenka Advocates Foreign Military Intervention Against Revolutions

While Belarusian authorities bitterly criticize NATO intervention in Libya, they actively advocate the idea of foreign troops helping post-Soviet dictators remain in power.

Since July Belarusian ruler Alyaksandr Lukashenka has sought to strengthen the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). He proposed to turn the CSTO into an anti-revolution alliance. Although yesterday Russian daily *Izvestia* quoted an

anonymous Kremlin official saying that the Belarusian leader “vulgarized” the idea and there was no agreement on using the CSTO to prevent *coup-d'etats*,* changes in the organization can seriously reconfigure post-Soviet politics.

Unholy Alliance

Belarus joined the 1992 treaty which established the CSTO only after heated debates in parliament – then an important institution in Belarus. The speaker of the Belarusian parliament publicly protested against joining the organization but had to sign the CSTO treaty in 1993 following the majority's decision. Belarus was the last country to sign the treaty. Other member of the CSTO include Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Russia clearly dominates in the organization.

Today Lukashenka has many reasons to promote the CSTO and turn it into an anti-revolution alliance. His own position is weakening both domestically and internationally day by day. Fearing revolution, he is trying to obtain guarantees of his protection from the CSTO and even foreign military intervention to stop possible civil unrest. In addition, Lukashenka currently acts as chairman of the CSTO, and apparently likes the idea of gaining political weight by making the organization more powerful.

Changes proposed by Belarus for the CSTO December summit include proposals to extend the mandate of the CSTO Collective Immediate Reaction Forces beyond defense against foreign military aggression. As Lukashenka explained: “currently nobody will attack us in a frontal, military way, but many are eager to do an unconstitutional *coup-d'etat*. We shall defend the integrity and independence of our countries...”

The Russian media, quoting a source in the Russian foreign ministry, revealed yet another proposed provision to the CSTO decision-making procedures. According to *Commerzant* the changes purport “to renounce the consensus principle and no one except for Uzbekistan is against it.”* Until 2005 Uzbekistan tried to stay away from post-Soviet integration projects

but the Andijan massacre made Karimov seek Russian help against a possible revolution in his country.

Minsk and Moscow have already agreed to act together against Uzbek president Islam Karimov. "If anyone does not want to abide by the Statute functions, then he shall quit it [the CSTO] and should not hamper the others," said the Belarusian strongman. Clearly the message was for Karimov – neither man has hidden his antipathy towards the other in the past.

Playing for Russia?

Entering the "military political bloc", Lukashenka once again disregarded the Belarusian Constitution which declares the neutrality of Belarus. Such a policy also contradicts the principles of the Non-Alignment Movement that Belarus has been a member of since 1998.

The Belarusian government is now trying to include in the CSTO constituent documents a provision that "military bases of foreign countries shall be established in member countries upon agreement with the Council of the Heads of States of the CSTO". This provision is not particularly important for Belarus. Most likely it acts as a proxy for the Kremlin, which constantly fears any new Western military presence in its former empire.

As Russian daily *Kommersant* put it, the latest CIS summit in Dushanbe demonstrated that for Russia the CIS was no longer the most important organization, and its focus has shifted to the Customs Union (currently with Belarus and Kazakhstan) and CSTO, both of them to be seriously reorganized.* *Kommersant's* sources have also confirmed that the transformation in both organizations has not only begun but that they already coordinate implementation of concrete decisions.

Speaking at the Dushanbe CIS summit, Medvedev agreed that often accusations of abstractness and weak implementation of commitments taken in the CIS framework are fair. By contrast

he referred to the Customs Union and the CSTO as more successful integration projects. *Kommersant* warns that "reforms launched in these two organizations should make the CIS nations think about their foreign policy choice.*

Ukraine is still trying to combine European and post-Soviet integration projects. Lukashenka has already made the choice for Belarus, exchanging its sovereignty for his chance to stay in power a bit longer. Winston Churchill once said that tyrants never leave behind a decent country. In addition to immense economic and social troubles, heavy debts, undermined rule of law and other ills, the post-Lukashenka Belarus will also have to deal with the liability of dubious international commitments.

Unfortunately, the Belarusian opposition and independent media failed to explain to the nation the seriousness of the CSTO-related developments. Preoccupied with economic survival, Belarusians did not even notice that the government is about to engage in a pact which will significantly limit Belarusian sovereignty. It may also expose Belarus to military confrontation with other post-Soviet countries.