

Conflict with Russia, the first crypto exchange in the world – digest of Belarusian analytics

Belarus finds itself in another conflict-in-progress with Russia, with a growing wave of Russian information attacks on Belarus. Belarus lifts restrictions on the number of US diplomats in Minsk, however, a breakthrough in Belarus-USA relations remains unlikely.

Belarus's economic growth will slow down in 2019/2021. Belarus has got potential for reducing the generation of waste and expanding the substitution of primary resources with secondary raw materials.

World's first crypto exchange launched in Belarus. Belarusian opened a hostel at the foot of a nuclear power plant. Belarus allows foreigners to register online. Minsk airport tops World's Most Punctual Airports. To learn more visit cryptonews.com – [Current Up to date crypto news](#).

This and more in the new digest of Belarusian analytics.

Politics

[Belarus and Russia Dispute the Fundamentals of Their Relationship](#) – Yauheni Preiherman notes that over the past several months, Belarus has found itself in yet another conflict-in-progress with Russia, with a growing wave of Russian information attacks on Belarus. The analyst believes that relations with Russia are absolutely crucial for Minsk and will remain so for a long time and under any government. But Belarus is not going to trade its sovereignty to preserve

the status quo in relations.

[Belarus – US: There Will Be No Breakthrough. Blitz Comment #1](#) – Andrei Kazakevich comments on a recent report on the lifting of restrictions on the number of US diplomats in Minsk. He believes that the full-fledged work of the embassy will expand the relations between countries but doesn't mean qualitative changes. The Blitz-Comment is a new joint analytical [project](#) of BISS and *Nashe Mnenie* expert community.

[Is Annexation of Belarus Really Imminent?](#) – Belarus is not a former Soviet republic, Edward Lucas, a reputed British writer and security policy expert, stated in an interview with Belsat TV. He reduced the likelihood of a dramatic scenario in Belarus-Russia relations and noted positive changes in the country.



Belarus's Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makei. Source: tut.by

Economics

[Business self-regulation in Belarus: the case of advertising business – from declaration to implementation.](#) Nikita Belyaev and Evgeny Mordosevich from Liberal Club research business self-regulation in Belarus on the case-study of the advertising business. To ensure the promotion of self-regulation in the Republic of Belarus as a whole, it is necessary to develop a form of incorporation for the self-regulatory organization.

[Effectuation processes, gender, innovativeness and performance of SMEs: the case of Belarus.](#) Maryia Akulava from BEROC explores the link between the applied effectuation principles,

the gender of the leader and SMEs financial and innovative functioning on the Belarusian example. The findings also clearly indicate women being more prone to the hybrid decision-making strategy than men.

[World Bank: Belarus' economic growth will slow down in 2019/2021](#). According to the data in Global Economic Prospects [report](#), the annual growth rate for Belarusian economy may slow down to 2.7% in 2019 and down to 2.5% in 2020/21. The lack of structural reforms may leave to increased political uncertainty.

Human rights

[Authorities Performing Balancing Act Between Their Interests and Human Rights](#) – Valyantsin Stefanovich, HRC Viasna, notes that the number of politically motivated criminal cases went down in 2018 but this may be due to the lack of important political events. This year, 18 people became the targets of politically motivated

[UN: Prisoner executions in Belarus 'simply unacceptable'](#). The continued use of the death penalty in Belarus has been condemned by an authoritative UN rights body after three men were reportedly executed there, despite its requests for clemency. Belarus remains the last country in Europe and Central Asia that applies the death penalty.

[Sweep. Green Light for Some, Red Cards for Others](#) – Yanina Melnikava, MediaKritika, overviews the rapid change of the Belarusian information space. The journalist points to the prosecution of the leading online resources, the introduction of mandatory user authorization, the emergence of Russian actors on the market that can result in serious consequences not only for the media sector but also for national security in general.

Security

[Can Russia Devour Belarus? Really?](#) – The conflict between Minsk and Moscow about the tax manoeuvre gives rise to fears that Russia is preparing to join Belarus. Several articles on this topic appeared in major Western media like [The Washington Post](#), [Bloomberg](#), [Independent](#). In the [TUT.BY](#) new video project *Chewed*, Artyom Shraibman convinces that it's too early for supporters of Belarus's independence to panic.

[Belarus Inside the Bear Hug. And Its Geopolitical Predicament After the Ukraine Crisis](#) – Aliaksei Kazharski, PONARS, in his policy memo notes that the 2014 crisis between Russia and Ukraine has produced new security concerns in Minsk related to a hypothetical Russian intervention and occupation of Belarus. But the crisis has also allowed Minsk to reap some short-term diplomatic benefits and improve its image in the West.

[New Union State Military Doctrine Will Not Change Status Quo in Belarusian-Russian Military Alliance](#) – Arseny Sivistky doesn't believe that a new Military Doctrine of the Union State of Russia and Belarus will include provisions for the establishment of a Russian military base on Belarusian soil. But what is almost certain is that Minsk will seek to exercise its veto power to block the adoption of any political and military decisions inconsistent with its national interests.

Other

[World's first crypto exchange launched in Belarus.](#) Currency.com platform allows traders to buy shares, gold, [pink diamonds](#), foreign exchange and other traditional assets with cryptocurrencies from Belarus and other countries. The project was launched by two investment companies led by Viktor Prokopenya and Said Gutseriev.

[Belarusian opened a hostel at the foot of a nuclear power plant](#). 18 km from Astravets town. The hostel is in demand among workers who are building the first Belarusian nuclear power plant. The hostel manager is confident that the place is safe, because “the degree of protection against radiation is very strong”.



Inside Minsk Airport. Source: airport.by

[Belarus allows foreigners to register online](#). Foreigners arriving in Belarus can register online and free starting January 2, 2019. Thus, foreign visitors to Belarus are no longer obliged to visit registration offices in person. The registration of tourists can be done through the unified portal of e-services within 5 business days after arrival.

[Minsk airport tops World's Most Punctual Airports](#), according to Punctuality League for 2019. Minsk National Airport claimed the first place in the category of the best-performing small airports (2.5-5 million seats) with 92.35% of flights arrived or departed on time. 'On-time' is defined as departures and arrivals that take place strictly less than 15 minutes after schedule.

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.

Antisemitism week, hate-speech testing, KEF, Kurapaty monument – Belarus Civil Society Digest

Belarusian cities hold a week against fascism and antisemitism. Political prisoner Zmicier Paliyenka released from prison. A monument to the victims of Stalin-era executions was erected in Kurapaty by the pro-governmental Federation of Trade Unions.

National campaign *Budzma Belarusami!* (*Let's Be Belarusians!* in English) celebrates 10 years. The Golden Age University starts its 10th season.

Journalists for Tolerance initiative developed a service for testing hate-speech. Kastryčnicki Economic Forum (KEF) gathered over 800 high-level guests to discuss global risks and future opportunities for Belarus in the new brave world. Ted X Minsk Women Showing Up conference is to take place on December 1 in Minsk.

This and more in the new edition of Belarus civil society digest.

Civil society

[Week Against Fascism and Antisemitism](#) will be held November 9-16, in Belarusian cities. The Week includes a series of educational activities aimed at promoting the ideas of respect and non-discrimination. The Week program includes films screening, social games, a human library, etc. The Week is initiated by the [Human Constanta](#) with the support of the human rights community.

['Official' monument erected in Kurapaty](#). A monument to the victims of Stalin-era executions was erected in Kurapaty on November 6, by order of the pro-governmental Federation of Trade Unions. The activists involved in the memorization of the repression victims received the monument with [mixed](#) feelings: some commended the government for the initiative; others insisted a memorial in Kurapaty should look differently.

[Political prisoner Zmicier Paliyenka released](#) on October 24 after serving nearly two years in a penal colony in Babrujsk. The activist was prosecuted for his participation in a peaceful gathering. The human rights community named Paliyenka a political prisoner. After Paliyenka's release, Belarus has one political prisoner held behind bars, [Mikhail Zhamchuzhny](#).

[Week Against the Death Penalty](#). From October 5 to 10, the annual Week Against the Death Penalty was held in Belarus. This year's events focused on the conditions of detention on death row. Belarus is the only country in Europe and the former Soviet Union, which pronounces death verdicts and executes people. This year two Belarusians were shot, and another four are awaiting execution.

Education

[Students Week 2018](#) is to take place on November 12-18. This is an initiative of the Association of Belarusian students (ZBS) on the occasion of the International Students Day. The Week includes a series of educational and entertaining activities in different cities of Belarus – lectures, speed-dating, student Hackathon, urban quest and more.

[Budzma campaign celebrates 10 years](#). National campaign *Budzma Belarusami!* (*Let's Be Belarusians!* in English) is one of the most famous and successful public campaigns in the country. For 10 years of its activity, the campaign has reached

thousands of people in various areas, leading the Belarusian language to mainstream and approving that all Belarusian can be fashionable and actual.



Studies at Hrodna's Golden Age University. Source: <http://uzv.by/universitet-zolotogo-veka-v-grodno/>

[Golden Age University in Hrodna kicks off 10th season](#). The opening ceremony of the anniversary academic year took place on October 4, in Hrodna. This year, nearly [200 people](#) aged 55+ became the students of the University. The Golden Age University is a non-formal education project, based on active ageing approach and implemented by the Hrodna-based Studio for Useful Competences.

Media & IT

[Launch Me Media Accelerator selected six best startups](#) at the media Hackathon that took place on October 27-28. The winning ideas are related to Youtube contextual analytics, an article title's generator, an interactive map of Belarusian dialects, etc. *Launch Me* is the first Belarusian accelerator for technology startups in the media industry. This is an initiative of Press Club Belarus and SPACE in partnership with the British Embassy in Minsk.

[Service for testing hate speech](#) has been developed by *Journalists for Tolerance* initiative. J4T-Checker service allows entering the text, finding incorrect vocabulary regarding vulnerable groups and offering a replacement with an explanation. J4T-Checker works with such topics as LGBT, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, migrants, and more.

[Media Management & IT Forum](#) was held in Minsk, on October 25-27. The forum brought together over 100 participants from Belarus, Eastern Partnership countries and the EU. The forum focuses on four key topics: media management & content creation, investigative journalism, media sustainability & new monetization resources, and IT tools & open source investigations.

High-profile conferences

[TED x Minsk Women Showing Up conference](#) is to take place on December 1, at the Minsk Gallery Ÿ. The event will start with watching the TEDWomen2018 Showing Up global broadcast from Palm Springs (USA). Then four Belarusian bright women will present their creative ideas in economy, design, architecture, and medicine.

[KEF 2018 gathered over 800 high-level guests](#) to discuss global risks and future opportunities for Belarus in the new brave world. Kastychnicki Economic Forum (KEF) was [held](#) on November 5-6, in Minsk, for the 6th time. The conference was opened by Alexander Turchin, First Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus, Katarína Mathernová, Deputy Director-General, European Commission, Satu Kähkönen, World Bank Country Director, and Alexander Chubrik, Director of the IPM Research Center. [Media](#) call the KEF among the main economic events of the country.



KEF 2018 Conference in Minsk. Source:
tut.by

[Global Entrepreneurship Week Belarus](#) will take place for the 8th time, on November 12-18. The main scene of BelExpo will host speakers from all over the world representing multinational companies who will share unique stories of

business transformation, development of innovative products and company scale. The content of GEW Belarus is tailor-made for the business community and startup ecosystem.

Ecological initiatives

[Eco Cup International Film Festival](#) takes place in Belarus for the first time. During October 25-30, the Festival of green documentary films is held in Minsk and other Belarusian cities under the slogan *Films That Change the Future*. The festival shows films about what is happening on the planet and with each of us. All films a

[The scenario of energy \[r\]evolution for Belarus](#) will be presented in Minsk, on October 23. The modelling work ([resume](#)) was done in collaboration with the Aerospace Center of Germany. The transition to renewable energy would allow Belarus to be among the advanced countries involved in the transformation of the world energy system. The presentation is organized by environmental CSOs.

[Survey: 40% of Minsk residents are not aware of any urban initiative](#). The rating of the most famous Minsk civic initiatives was conducted among Internet Minskians by the Baltic Internet Policy Initiative. The top best known urban initiatives are the protection of the Minsk historical district Osmolovka, a platform for group appeals Petitions.by and the Minsk Cycling Society; they are recognizable for one-third of those who are aware of the initiatives.

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Belarus's neighbours: patronising and obliging – Belarus Foreign Policy Digest

From January to early February 2016, Belarus and Lithuania drifted further apart as their diplomats exchanged tart-tongued statements over the safety of the Astraviec NPP and Belarus's sovereignty. Alexander Lukashenka, who remains unwelcome in the EU, travelled to more sympathetic Egypt and Sudan.

The Belarusian authorities continued with their efforts to restore the international legitimacy of the national parliament in both bilateral relations (with Poland's willing accommodation), and international organisations.

Belarus and Lithuania wrangle over nuclear safety and regional security

Tensions between Belarus and Lithuania [over the completion of the Astraviec NPP](#) near their joint border have continued to escalate.

On 4 January, Lithuania's MFA appointed Darius Degutis as ambassador-at-large for coordination of institutional actions over the NPP. Degutis is seeking the support of other European nations for Lithuania's 'logical, healthy call for the construction of the Astraviec NPP to be stopped'.

So far, Lithuania has not been very successful in forming an international coalition to proscribe exports of 'unsafe energy' from Belarus. Latvia's foreign minister Edgars Rinkevics recently stressed that his country was not considering any laws to restrict electricity imports from the Belarusian plant.

✘ On 16-20 January, Belarus hosted the SEED mission from the IAEA, which assessed the sustainability of the Astraviec site and the plant's systems. The mission's report will be ready within a few months.

Nevertheless, the mission's format and mandate failed to satisfy Lithuania. On 19 January, the country's foreign minister Linas Linkevičius accused Belarus of selectively applying nuclear safety standards. Two weeks later, in an interview to a Belarusian online news source, the minister characterised the activities of the Belarusian government in regard to the NPP as a 'propaganda game', and resolutely excluded [any possibility of compromise](#) on the matter.

The conflict over the Astraviec NPP has also spilled over to other issues. Speaking to *Deutsche Welle* about the forthcoming Russian-Belarusian joint military exercise Zapad 2017, Linkevičius called Belarus's sovereignty, or 'what is left of it', into doubt.

This provoked an immediate rebuke from Minsk. A spokesman for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, Dmitry Mironchik, called the tone of the statement 'patronising and scornful' and accused Vilnius of 'insults and preaching'.

No more obstacles to

cooperation with Serbia

On 26-27 January in Minsk, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic held talks with his Belarusian counterpart [Andrei Kabiakou](#). He also met with President [Alexander Lukashenka](#).

The two countries' bilateral trade had plummeted by nearly 60% last year, marginally exceeding \$100m in January – November 2016. Despite the negative trend, Vucic claimed that Belarus and Serbia would still strive to attain a \$500m turnover by 2019 – the goal they had set in 2013.

Belarus and Serbia signed bilateral agreements in the fields of economy, health care, tourism, culture, sport, and military-technical cooperation.

✘ If in previous years Serbia had remained [formally constrained by EU sanctions](#) against Belarus, which Belgrade had voluntarily agreed to undertake, now the two countries are feeling increasingly free to expand their cooperation in all areas.

The Serbian media widely reported on a military donation from Belarus unveiled by Zoran Djordjevic, Serbia's defence minister. In 2018, Minsk will give eight MiG-29s fighter aircraft as well as two Buk-M1 surface-to-air missile systems free of cost to Belgrade. Serbia will pay for their overhaul and modernisation in Belarus.

According to Vucic, Lukashenka reassured him that Belarus fully accepts Serbia's aspiration to become an EU member without seeking to join NATO.

Serbia appreciates Belarus's unwavering [support for its territorial integrity](#). Indeed, unlike Russia, another friend of Serbia, Belarus has no record of recognising and supporting any breakaway entities.

Belarus's delegation to PACE showcases pluralism

The Belarusian parliament sent two of its members to the hearings on Belarus held by the Political Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg on 24 January.

Andrei Navumovich was chosen due to his status as the head of the parliament's working group on the death penalty – a priority topic for the Council of Europe. [Hanna Kanapackaja](#), one of the two opposition-inclined MPs, served as a token of Belarusian democracy and political pluralism.

✘ PACE had stripped Belarus of its special guest status in January 1997 after an undemocratic referendum held by Lukashenka. Since then, PACE has been inviting Belarusian officials to attend its meeting on an ad hoc basis.

Kanapackaja stated in an interview that the Belarusian authorities had no intention of joining the Council of Europe as a member. 'Their priority is to obtain the status of special guest', she emphasised.

In Strasbourg, Kanapackaja spoke about the need to hold free and fair elections in Belarus; she also voiced her support for the country's full-fledged membership to the Council of Europe and the [abolition of capital punishment](#).

However, her colleague Navumovich raised doubts about the parliament's readiness to abolish the death penalty, stating that he would like to organise hearings on the issue only in 2018. Without doubt, the Belarusian authorities do not think the time is ripe to play this card in their diplomatic match with Europe.

Poland presses ahead with legitimising Belarus's parliament

On 30 January – 1 February, the lower house of the Belarusian parliament dispatched a high-level delegation to Warsaw.

The team, which included deputy speaker Balieslau Pishtuk and former ambassador Valery Varanietski, held talks with deputy speaker of the Sejm Ryszard Terlecki and speaker of the senate Stanisław Karczewski. They also met with deputy foreign minister Marek Ziolkowski and other Polish officials.

☒ Belarusian MPs expect a return visit of their Polish colleagues in April to discuss a roadmap for future cooperation.

Poland has *de facto* [recognised the appointed rubber-stamp Belarusian legislature](#) as their peers, i.e. a legitimate and viable parliament. Warsaw leads the process among European nations. According to Varanietski, the parliaments of Slovakia and the Czech Republic will soon follow suit.

No convincing attempt to explain the sudden need to 'normalise' this irrelevant entity has been made so far. Ziolkowski, who wrote an extensive article for Rzeczpospolita explaining in detail Poland's 'change of heart' towards the Lukashenka regime, failed to utter a single word on the topic.

Curiously, the press services of both the Polish Sejm and the Senate have not reported on the encounters of their leaders with the Belarusian delegation. It is unclear whether they still feel embarrassed about this partnership or if they do not attach any particular significance to it.

In the near future, Belarus looks set to further improve and

intensify ties with most of its partners from Central and Southern Europe. However, the relationship with Lithuania is likely to develop in the opposite direction.

Nuclear Power Plant, Overdue Loans, Ease of Canadian Sanctions – Western Press Digest

Western media focused heavily this month on the current state of Belarus' economy and financial market. In addition, the anticipated removal of Canadian sanctions might serve as a stepping-stone for other Western nations to re-evaluate their current sanctions against Belarus.

In other news: the construction of a new nuclear power plant in Belarus has caused controversy across the globe as we remember Chernobyl. U.N. human rights experts are also displeased with the recent execution of a prisoner, the results of Belarus' Eurovision contender.

All of this and more in the newest edition of the Western Press Digest.

International relations

[The Government of Canada is recognizing Belarus' role](#) – The *Global Affairs Canada* rewards Belarus for their facilitation of the Ukrainian ceasefire negotiations and peace agreement.

This recognition will be seen through the removal of sanctions against Belarus, which have been in place since 2006.

In addition to Belarus' assistance in the Ukrainian crisis, Canada is also recognizing the release of political prisoners and closer adherence to international regulations during the October 2015 presidential election.

Economy and business

[Belarus' potential bond deal will hopefully help the economy](#) – *Reuters* reports on the potential sale of \$ 1 billion of bonds at yields under 7 percent. As the result of economic decline in the last two years, Belarus is hopefully that a \$ 3 billion support programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will boost its economy. Currently, there is no anticipated timeline for an agreement with the IMF.

[Impact of Russia's recession and low commodity prices on Belarus' economy](#) – *The World Bank* has recently released an economic update report on Belarus which focuses on potential policy reforms that could help increase productivity and employment growth in Belarus.

Specifically, expansion into new markets coupled with the upgrade of internal goods produced will require state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to restructure. This restructuring will hopefully assist with a return of competitiveness in the market with the goal of reduced support from state subsidies. In addition, increased foreign investment through joint ventures and reforms will ultimately help foster growth.

[Government spending cuts for June](#) – The proposed cuts by Finance Minister [Uładzimir Amaryn](#) are anticipated for June of this year. Amarin wishes to cut government expenditures by 7-8%. The cutbacks are a result of revised budget calculations for oil barrel prices, as confirmed by *Reuters*.

[The increase of overdue loans is placing strain on the Belarusian central bank](#) – *Bloomberg* reports on the Belarusian central banks growing concern of increased pressure on the financial industry as a result of overdue loans. The bank has tried to stabilize the financial system through controlling the money supply in addition to relaxing the exchange rate. The ultimate goal is to restore the general populations' trust in the Belarusian Ruble.

Security and Defence

[Belarusian Parliament introduced a new military doctrine](#) – *DefenseNews* discusses Belarus' new military doctrine, which prohibits the Belarusian military from engaging in foreign operations. Armenia has criticised the passing of this doctrine as it challenges the obligations set forth by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) established in 1992. Armenia's concerns come as a result of renewed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The resurgence of military activity between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces has undoubtedly caused Armenia to re-validate current security agreements to ensure allied support.

Civil society and culture

[Anti-government opposition calls on Belarus' prosecutor to ban the Russian biker club Night Wolves](#) – The Belarusian People's Front party is advocating the ban of the pro-Putin Russian biker club Night Wolves. The club has been accused of extremist behavior resulting in the Polish Government denying them access to journey through Poland for their yearly recreation of the Soviet Red Army's march towards Berlin in WWII.

The journey through Belarus is an integral part of the Night

Wolves' recreation of the Soviet march. The club had not seen any resistance from Belarusian authorities until the request was issued by the People's Front as reported by *Newsweek*.

[Belarusian charged with fighting alongside Ukrainian extremists](#) – *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* confirms the sentencing of Taras Avatarau to five years in prison following a Minsk district court ruling. The accused stood trial for assisting the Ukrainian extremist group the Right Sector through trafficking weapons and other explosive materials. In addition to trafficking, Avatarau was cited as engaging in combat against Russian separatists in Ukraine's regions of Donetsk and Lukansk. The Right Sector has been labeled and banned in Russia as a terrorist organization.

[Belarus execution criticised by U.N. rights expert](#) – The *Associated Press* reports on the reaction from U.N. human right experts about an execution of a suspected murder in Belarus. The execution of Sergey Ivanov on 18th April, has re-surfaced discussions around Belarus and continued human rights violations. The victim's brother had appealed to the committee on the grounds that Sergey's trial was unfair. This event serves as a reminder that Belarus remains the only country in Europe that continues to apply the death penalty.

[Belarusian Eurovision entry Ivan has been criticised](#) – The *Telegraph* reports on Eurovision's contestant Ivan for his desire to perform on stage naked while accompanied by two live wolves. Ivan's vision for his onstage performance was a clear violation of Eurovision's staging rules. Ivan's last competition was held on 12th May for the second Semi-Final. Ukrainian singer Jamala won Eurovision on 14th May.

[The construction of a new Belarusian nuclear power plant](#) – The *BBC* examines the construction of a new nuclear power plant in Belarus near the town of Ostrovets in the Hrodna Voblast. The construction is reminding the world of the events that

transpired in Chernobyl in 1986. The Government of Lithuania is interpreting the construction of Ostrovets, which is roughly 50km from Vilnius, as a security threat. The BBC outlines the design of the plant in the April version of BBC Magazine.

[An international criminal conspiracy](#) – The *Pittsburg Post-Gazette* discusses the usage of computer malware the arrest of two citizens of Belarus in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. The suspects, Aleskey Yaroshevich and Egor Pavlenko were arrested by the FBI as part of an initiative to halt the theft of money through the distribution of malware software on the Internet.

Aaron Ostrovsky

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Belarus between EU and EEU, New Opposition Strategy – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Over the past month analysts discussed continuing rapprochement of Belarus with the West and potential Russia's responses to it. Meanwhile, influenced by Russian propaganda, Belarusians favour Eurasian integration over European, although official Minsk finds its result unsatisfactory.

Belarusian opposition changes its strategy in relations with the authorities and plans to push them to negotiations with

backing of mass street pressure. However, a Ukrainian sociologist predicts that democracy in Belarus will come not earlier than in 50 years and conditions for a Maidan do not exist there. This and more in the new Digest of Belarusian Analytics.

Foreign policy

[Belarus in the EAEC: a Year Later \(Disappointing Results and Doubtful Prospects\)](#) – This report was [presented](#) in Minsk on March 22, by the Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The report is devoted to the analysis of the first year of existence of the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) for Belarus. Among the key findings is that Minsk had great expectations from this association, but now finds it unsatisfactory.

[Europe's Last Dictator Comes in From the Cold](#) – [Artyom Shraibman](#), for Carnegie Moscow Center, notices that Lukashenka's fortunes have changed. Once known as "Europe's last dictator," he has won friends in Europe, while antagonizing his traditional ally, Russia. It's a situation that has left the Kremlin in a difficult position: should it punish Belarus for its pro-Western tendencies? Or should it continue to prop up the Belarusian economy rather than risk further unrest in the region?

[Belarus-Ukraine Relations Beyond Media Headlines](#) – [Yauheni Preiherman](#), in Eurasia Daily Monitor, notices that media narratives often distort the reality of Belarus-Ukraine relations. Some observers explain this by the absence of a "strategic vision for a long-term relationship". The author sees this a typical feature of inter-state relations in the post-Soviet space, where politics is mainly about tactics, and fighting protectionist trade wars is part of the political culture.

Politics

[Belarusian Opposition Comes Up With New Strategy: Negotiations With Authorities Due to Protest Pressure](#)

– Politicians and leaders of the mass protests discuss the lessons of "The Square-2006". The new strategy is likely to depart from the revolutionary approach to power change and focus on evolutionary approach, by changing relations between the authorities and the opposition through negotiations, backed by mass street pressure.

[Ukrainian Sociologist: Maidan will not be in Minsk](#)

– Democracy in Belarus will come not earlier than in 50 years. This will happen only when society is ready for this. Artificial imposition of liberal values does not work, as well as there are no political or social preconditions for Maidan of the Kyiv scenario in Minsk, according to Ukrainian sociologist, Professor Eduard Afonin.

Public opinion polls

[Majority of Belarusians want to keep death penalty](#). According to the March national poll conducted by IISEPS, 51.5% of Belarusians do not agree with the idea to abolish the death penalty; opposite opinion is shared by 36.4%. Women are less in favor of abolition of the death penalty than men – respectively 55.3% and 46.9%. Belarus is the only country in Europe and on the post-soviet space, which still applies the death penalty.

[Belarus Between EU and EEU. Nation-Wide Poll](#)

– The ODB Brussels commissioned a survey about perceptions, preferences, and values Belarusians attribute to the European Union (EU) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). According to the study, Belarusians have a high-level understanding and appreciation of the EU, a clear opinion that the EU and EEU are competitors

while public reasoning is currently swayed in favor of economic cooperation with the EEU.

[Peculiarities of Public Opinion in Belarus](#) – Grigory Ioffe overviews the key results of a fresh national poll by IISEPS and an alarming reaction of official sociologists to the results, namely, the decline in Alexander Lukashenka's electoral rating. [Siarhei Nikalyuk](#), an associate of IISEPS, suggests that independent sociologists who are de facto allowed to work in Belarus are playing the role that jesters did in medieval Europe. After all, only a jester was allowed to speak the truth to the monarch, who actually appreciated that.

Other

[Advocacy Sector in Belarus: CSO Experience](#) – The study analyses the actual practices of advocacy in Belarus for the recent five years. The researchers see the key factor of success/failure of any campaign in its capacity for politicisation, i.e. whether authorities perceive a campaign political or not. The study was commissioned by OEEC in a series of sectoral studies aimed at summarising data on the development of specific sectors of civil society in Belarus. The presentation was held on March 24.

[How to Make Minsk a Cycling City?](#) – Pavel Harbunou, the Minsk Bicycle Society, shares the results of an annual monitoring on bicycle traffic on the Minsk streets, which shows that the number of cyclists has increased significantly in the city. The activists tells what can be done to make Minsk comfortable for all road users. Namely, the Bicycle Society launches a new campaign [Street Bike Supervisor](#) aimed to provide a regular feedback on the conditions of Minsk streets.

[Ghetto for Each. Why Minsk Art Spaces Live Separately From Each Other](#) – *Belarusian Journal* online describes the existing

art spaces in Minsk, both mainstream and alternative. While a growing number of cultural spaces is a positive sign, it is too early to talk about the impact of these spaces for culture in general. It is more a question of the formation of separate subcultural groups, the original "ghetto" that arise, rather against the wishes of the state.□

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Death Penalty: is There a Price Tag for Mercy?

On 10 March 2016, Minsk hosted an international conference titled The Death Penalty: Transcending the Divide.

According to Stavros Lambrinidis, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, a moratorium on the death penalty would send a positive signal for relations between Belarus and the EU and improve the international image of Belarus.

The existence of the death penalty has contributed to the pariah image of Belarus – it lost its guest status at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) after the 1996 referendum, when more than 80 per cent of the population voted in favour of maintaining capital punishment.

Currently, [Belarus remains](#) the only European state in which

the authorities continue to execute criminals convicted of serious offences.

The EU's recent [lifting of sanctions](#) has created a window of opportunity for the improvement of relations with the EU in all spheres. The introduction of a moratorium on the death penalty appears to be an easy yet important symbolic step for sealing rapprochement with the EU and demonstrating Belarusian good will. Yet while public opinion shifts more towards accepting the moratorium, the government appears to be treating the death penalty issue as a bargaining chip.

Dark secrets of death row

Currently, 14 articles of the Belarusian Criminal Code foresee capital punishment as one of the available penalty options. These include war crimes, genocide, international terrorism, use of weapons of mass destruction and various categories of serious crimes, including murder. The Belarusian Interior Ministry has also pointed out that those Belarusians who signed up as [mercenaries in Ukraine](#) could be accused of committing crimes against the humanity and potentially face the death penalty.

 According to the Ministry of Justice, Belarusian courts have handed down death sentences to over 300 people since 1990. Yet the transparency and availability of information leave a lot to be desired.

For instance, official statistical information on the website of the Interior Ministry is not up-to-date, reflecting only the numbers of death penalties carried out between 1998 and 2010. According to officially released information, over the last decade the average number of executions ranged from between 2 to 9 people per year.

The government keeps all procedures secret and neither society

nor the families of the convicted know what has happened to them after they hear their verdict. One of the few sources of information available to the public is the book *The Death Squad* by the former chief of the Minsk detention centre Aleh Alkaeŭ, who used to be in charge of executions.

The most infamous case in recent years featured Uladzislaŭ Kavaliouŭ and Dzmitry Kanavalaŭ, found guilty of organising explosions in the Minsk subway on 11 April 2011. Both were promptly tried and convicted before the year was out. Resonance of the case and the haste with which the trial was organised resulted in the first serious instance of public debate on capital punishment, exacerbated by growing [distrust of the judicial system](#).

Lukashenka and public opinion: pros and cons

With regard to the issue of the death penalty, President Alexander Lukashenka persistently refers to the results of the notorious 1996 November referendum, when 80 per cent of voters refused to abolish the death penalty. Therefore, the president has typically maintained that as “a servant of the people, who knows the popular mood” he has no power to force society to accept a moratorium.

Yet his recent statements on the death penalty indicate some potential for a change of heart. On 9 March 2016, the president noted that Belarus has developed “its own interpretation of humanitarian issues, including on the question of human rights.” He tied progress in the sphere of human rights to the economic situation, hinting that changes in public opinion depended on the material well-being of the people. In other words, the death penalty would be abolished if the EU provided an economic incentive.

37 per cent of Belarusians did not know that Belarus still employed the death penalty

According to a 2013 survey carried out by Penal Reform International, 37 per cent of Belarusians did not know that Belarus still employed the death penalty. Belarusian civil society actors, including the Helsinki Committee and the human rights organisation *Viasna* with the support of the EU institutions, engage in information campaigns to raise public awareness on the issue.

Gradually, these efforts are creating a potential shift in public opinion. The president's reminders that 80 per cent of the population is in favour of the death penalty sound less and less credible. According to a sociological survey conducted by the consulting company SATIO in cooperation with Penal Reform International and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee in 2014, the number of death penalty opponents for the first time exceeded those supporting it, with 43.3 per cent against versus 41.9 per cent in favour.

Opponents are convinced that the death penalty is not an effective means of punishment. According to IISEPS opinion polls, these people are more social responsible, are tolerant towards minorities and tend to oppose the current political regime. On the contrary, supporters of the death penalty are more likely to trust the police and state authorities.

Capitalizing on the death penalty moratorium?

☒ On 5 January 2016, the Minsk Regional Court handed down the first death sentence of the new year. Henadz' Yakavicki from Vilejka was tried and convicted for the cruel murder of his girlfriend. On 15 February another verdict of a certain "Kh." followed.

The EU promptly expressed its concerns, urging the Belarusian authorities to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty and to encourage public debate on the issue. Since the EU lifted its sanctions against Belarus in February 2016, governing circles have started to show some willingness to co-operate with their EU counterparts.

On 10 March 2016, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) hosted an international conference titled *The Death Penalty: Transcending the Divide*. Despite acknowledging the need to launch a broad dialogue about capital punishment, Belarusian organizers requested that journalists be removed from the conference venue following the official opening ceremony. The unregistered human rights organisation *Viasna*, known for its active position on the issue of the death penalty, was not invited to participate.

These circumstances throw a shadow of doubt over the government's commitment to a genuine dialogue. The authorities remain reluctant to address a moratorium on capital punishment. It is also likely that the president is unwilling to relinquish the absolute symbolic power he holds over the lives and deaths of Belarusian citizens.

However, the main issue appears to be in the practical realm of politics. Recent statements by Lukashenka specifically point to the connection between human rights issues and the economic well-being of the population. For now, the Belarusian regime is attempting to raise the stakes in what it perceives to be a trade process with the EU. It hopes to sell the death penalty moratorium for the highest possible price.

Belarus Retains Death Penalty, Promotes UN Reform – Belarus Foreign Policy Digest

In the first half of March, the EU's top human rights official came to Minsk to talk President Alexander Lukashenka into introducing a temporary moratorium on the death penalty.

The Belarusian authorities are very willing to discuss human rights with Europe but remain reluctant to take specific action.

At the UN, Belarusian diplomats continue to promote greater inclusion of rank-and-file UN members in the decision-making process, this time by advocating a stronger role for them in selecting the next UN head. These actions are at odds with Russia's position on this matter.

Lukashenka meets the EU human rights head

On 9-11 March, Stavros Lambrinidis, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, visited Belarus. The EU official met ministers for foreign affairs, the interior, justice and information. His agenda also included meetings with opposition and civil society leaders, independent journalists and human rights activists.

✘ [Lukashenka](#) received Lambrinidis on the first day of his visit in Minsk. The Belarusian leader sounded reconciliatory and constructive. He expressed satisfaction with the fact that Belarus and Europe had “abandoned [their] head-on confrontation”.

Lukashenka spoke in favour of a “permanent dialogue, permanent contacts”. However, he claimed Belarus’ right to have its own understanding of human rights issues.

Lukashenka and Lambrinidis agreed that trade and human rights are interrelated but disagreed on cause and effect. The Belarusian president stressed that, with the development of trade and economic relations, human rights issues would disappear on their own.

The EU official, in his turn, believes that the [improvement of the human rights situation](#) in the country will result in more trade and foreign investment.

Belarus retains death penalty as a bargaining tool

Lambrinidis came to Minsk to persuade Lukashenka to introduce a temporary moratorium on the death penalty in Belarus. Belarus is the only country in Europe where [capital punishment](#) is still applied.

The issue of the death penalty remains at the top of Europe's demands vis-a-vis Belarus. When [lifting the sanctions](#) in February, the European Council “condemn[ed] the application of the death penalty in Belarus ... and urge[d] the Belarusian authorities to set up a moratorium as a first step towards its abolition”.

✘ On 10 March, the Belarusian foreign ministry and the UNDP office in Minsk organised an international conference titled The Death Penalty: Transcending the Divide. Speaking at the conference, Lambrinidis urged Belarus’ highest authorities to show their political will by abolishing capital punishment.

The Belarusian authorities [continue to shelter themselves](#) behind public opinion. Opening the conference, deputy foreign

minister [Valentin Rybakov](#) pointed to the fact that most Belarusians still support the death penalty. “We cannot and will not ignore this fact, including in the context of dialogue with our much esteemed European partners”, Rybakov stressed.

Abolition of the death penalty would be one of the easiest steps for the authorities to take in order to please Europe. Unlike concessions on freedom of speech or assembly, such a decision would hardly undermine the regime’s grip on society. [Public opinion on this subject](#) can be easily ignored or tweaked.

Abolition of the death penalty or even a moratorium would improve Belarus’ image in Europe. It would help the European bureaucracy to rationalise the need for more cooperation with Minsk. Belarus would finally be able to [join the Council of Europe](#).

However, one should not expect the Belarusian authorities to take such a step in the near future. They realise fully well the bargaining power that retention of the death penalty provides. Thus, they will likely choose to play this card at a more crucial moment, as they did with the [release of political prisoners](#).

A temporary moratorium on the death penalty can hardly be an option. Lukashenka realises that nothing is more permanent than the temporary. Once the moratorium is in place, it will be difficult to withdraw it without damaging the country’s reputation.

At this stage, the maximum Europe may expect from Belarus on the death penalty is more dialogue and a lot of talking. The same also applies to other divisive issues between Belarus and Europe.

Belarus reforms the UN

By the end of 2016, the United Nations will appoint its new Secretary-General for the next several years. An informal regional rotation arrangement provides that the next head of the UN Secretariat should come from among Eastern European countries.

This factor makes the forthcoming selection process an important exercise for Belarusian diplomacy.

✘ On 29 February, speaking at an informal brainstorming session, Belarus' ambassador to the UN Andrei Dapkiunas insisted on the appointment of the UN's chief through a secret ballot. Though the existing rules require such a procedure, in practice, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) always rubber-stamps the candidate recommended by the Security Council.

Belarus also wants the UNGA to withdraw its own recommendation (made in 1946) to the Security Council to "proffer one candidate only" for the appointment.

Throughout the UN's entire history, the UN Secretary General has remained a product of consensus of the Security Council's permanent members. Submitting more than one candidate to the UNGA would mean effectively letting the wider international community have the final say on the matter.

Even if the UNGA adopts the Belarusian proposal, it is highly unlikely that China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States would agree to relinquish their control over who will head the organisation.

Nevertheless, this year the process of selection and appointment of the Secretary General promises to be more transparent and inclusive for member states. The process starts in April when Belarus will chair the UN's Eastern European Group (EEG). The country's mission at the UN seeks to

organise a high-level EEG event with participation of potential candidates.

A UN official told Belarus Digest that Belarus favoured the candidature of Irina Bokova, a Bulgarian politician and UNESCO's Director-General. Bokova [visited Belarus](#) in April 2014 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the country's UNESCO membership.

Belarus' activity in reforming the appointment process has been frowned upon by Russia, which does not welcome any change that could undermine its role at the UN. Belarusian diplomats have taken this into account by softening their reforming zeal. However, they are still pressing ahead with their agenda.

Belarusian MPs at PACE, Cooperation with Turkey, Retirement Age Increases – State Press Digest

Belarus continues to boost cooperation with western partners and is seeking to avoid excessive economic dependence on Russia.

MPs hope to receive special guest status at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) after the issue of the death penalty is resolved in Belarus.

Foreign minister Vladimir Makiej says that the current turbulence in the world has made the west better understand

the priority of security over democracy, which Belarus has always pursued.

All of this and more in the latest edition of State Press Digest.

Politics

[Belarusians are not yet ready to abolish the death penalty.](#)

Soyuznoye Veche newspaper interviews [Mikalaj Samasiejka](#), a member of the Standing Commission of the House of Representatives on International Affairs, on Belarus' growing cooperation with PACE. The newly elected president of PACE Pedro Agramunt during a meeting with the Belarusian delegation promised to restore the country's special guest status after Belarus abolishes or at least puts a moratorium on the death penalty.

The MP said that the death penalty issue cannot be easily resolved, as the majority of Belarusians still support the policy, though their numbers are gradually declining. The majority of parliamentarians are also in favour of leaving the death penalty in place. Samasiejka also expressed support for the Russian delegation, which boycotted the recent PACE session because of some restrictive measures imposed on it.

[West starts to better understand Belarus.](#)

Belarus Segodnya newspaper interviews foreign minister of Belarus [Uladzimir Makiej](#) during the Munich security conference. According to the minister, foreign countries seem to now better understand the reasons for Minsk's behaviour, its decisions and policies. The current turbulence in the world and the EU migrant crisis is making the west appreciate the significance of stability and security, which Belarus has always put before democracy and human rights.

The minister also explained that “the president has set a

clear directive to avoid dependence on one economic partner". The Belarusian economy is highly dependent on exports and Russia accounts for half of the country's trade turnover. This situation brought plenty of trouble after Russia fell into crisis, and Belarus will seek to establish firm economic relations with as many countries as possible to reduce its dependence on its eastern neighbour.

Security

[Governors prepare to organise territorial defence.](#) Belarusian governors – heads of the six regions and Minsk city – took part in a military drill at the firing field nearby Minsk, reported *Belarus Segodnya*. The military leadership organised the drill as part of its so-called territorial defence training. The governors learned how to shoot with various kinds of guns and how to organise the defence of their region in case of a conflict.

Territorial defence is a military system designed to involve the broadest possible population in defence in case of armed conflict. It works according to the administrative divisions of the state under the command of the executive vertical – heads of regions, who supervise the heads of districts. President Alexander Lukashenka initiated territorial defence drills for regional chiefs to be held on a regular basis.

Economy

[The authorities initiate public punishment case against Ministry of Housing and Communal Services officials.](#) The State Control Committee initiated 17 criminal cases against officials of the ministry and local governments after a sharp rise in the cost of communal services in January, *Respublika* reported. The Committee claims that the officials made

multiple mistakes when introducing new tariffs which the government announced earlier in 2015.

Many Belarusians were shocked when they saw the new communal bills for January. The problem received wide attention in the media and among state officials, and Lukashenka had to deal with it personally. Low tariffs on communal services have traditionally been one of the key elements of Belarusian social model, which must now be reformed because of economic difficulties.

Turkey will expand its projects in Hrodna region.

Hrodzianskaja Praŭda highlights the meeting of heads of Hrodna region with Turkish businessmen. Over the past three years Turkish business has been increasing its presence in the region, with six Turkish-capital organisations currently working there.

The parties discussed a project for a Turkish industrial park in the free economic zone Hrodnainvest. Belarusian officials are offering 300 hectares of land for realisation of the project. Contacts with Turks are increasing as a backdrop to the crisis in Russian-Turkish political relations, which has resulted in a decrease of economic cooperation.

Public policy

The government prepares public opinion for increasing the retirement age.

In 2015 the issue of the rising retirement age became one of the most popular in official media. The state tried to explain to citizens the need for a highly unpopular step. *Vecherniy Minsk* writes that the state currently spends 10 per cent of GDP on pension payments. Belarus has one of the earliest retirement ages in the world – 55 for women and 60 for men.

In Minsk, the youngest city in Belarus, only a quarter of

residents have reached this age, while in the countryside they make up the majority of the population. If the current pension system remains in place, after 2050 every working age Belarusian will have to support the life of one pensioner. The authorities plan to raise the retirement age in several stages to 60 and 65 years, but will not announce the final decision until the public is ready.

[Belarusian education system faces serious challenges.](#) The working meeting of the Education Ministry raised a number of problems in the national education system, writes *Belarus Segodnya*. Lukashenka himself recently criticised the quality of school textbooks. The Ministry admits that the system seriously lacks qualified author teams for writing textbooks. Excessive paperwork remains another major school problem, which turns teaching into red tape.

The authorities have also failed to attract foreign students into Belarusian universities. Out of 19,000 students from 98 countries, 50 per cent originate from Turkmenistan, while Russians make up only 5 per cent, and there are even fewer westerners.

Belarusian universities lack programmes in English – for example, the largest university, the Belarusian State University, offers only three such programmes. Meanwhile, one third of candidates and two thirds of doctors of science who teach at universities are over 60 years old. Young people do not want to teach at universities because of poor payment conditions.

The State Press Digest is based on review of state-controlled publications in Belarus. 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.

Why Belarus Keeps Capital Punishment

On 27 June 2013, at the session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Belarusian authorities stated that Belarus would not abolish the death penalty and will continue to shoot convicts. Western demands to impose a moratorium seem to follow a certain ritual without any realistic expectations.

Belarus remains the only country in Europe and on the territory of the former Soviet Union which still uses the death penalty. The data provided by the Interior Ministry states that Belarusian courts sentenced 102 people to death between 1998 and 2010. The death penalty procedure remains so secret that the authorities do not even return the bodies of the executed. Several years ago two death convicts hung themselves in their cells in order to avoid being shot, so that the authorities would give their bodies to their families.

It should be noted that the idea of death penalty as a fair punishment remains quite popular in Belarus. On the other hand, the position of religious institutions and human rights defenders has become more noticeable in society. The recent speech of head of the [Belarusian Orthodox Christians Filaret](#) for the abolishment of the death penalty has become a considerable event in Belarus.

How Does Death Penalty Look Like

Execution by shooting remains the form of death penalty execution in Belarus. Most of the executed are criminals that committed crimes with aggravating circumstances. The aggravating circumstances usually mean the homicide of children or elderly people, pregnant women or homicides with rape. The authorities shoot from two to nine people annually –

much less than in 1990s. ❌

The decision whether to sentence someone to capital punishment depends on a concrete judge. Andrei Zhuk, executed for a cruel homicide, wrote to his mother that the court sentenced one person for the similar crime to 25 years of imprisonment, another one – to life in prison, and him – to death.

Very often, about a year passes between the verdict until the actual execution. Aleh Alkayeu, former head of Minsk pre-trial detention centre and death sentences executor, describes the procedure of shootings in Belarus in details in his book “The Shooting Team”.

The Commission consisting of a Public Prosecutor, a Head of a detention centre and an Interior Ministry’s representative calls the deathrow convict to the office. In the office, the Commission informs about the rejection of the convict’s pardon appeal, then policemen put a black bandage on his eyes and lead him to the next office. There, the executioner brings the convict to his knees and shoots him in the back of the head. The whole procedure takes about two minutes.

The authorities never give the bodies of the executed to their relatives or inform them of the place of burial. Often, the relatives of the executed go around Minsk cemeteries in order to find fresh graves there, after having received written notification with information that the convict was dead. It gives no results. Relatives of one of the executed buried his personal belongings instead of the body and put a tomb stone just to have a place to commemorate the dead.

The UN Human Rights Committee demanded that the Belarusian authorities should give the bodies of the executed convicts to their families several times. However, the authorities continue to ignore these demands.

The Attitude of the Society

The death penalty has remained an issue of little importance for Belarusian society for many years. The problem of execution by shooting in Belarus proceeded to the national level only once, after the execution of Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavalyou. The court sentenced them both to death for [the blast in Minsk metro](#) on 11 April 2011, which took the lives of 15 people.

According to the data provided by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, 37% of Belarusian population did not believe in [the convicts' guilt](#). This caused a wave of moods for abolition of death penalty in the society. According to IISEPS, since September 2012, 40.7% Belarusians stand up for the abolition of the death penalty, while 49.1% want to preserve it.

Human rights defenders and intellectuals stand for the death penalty's abolition rather prominently in Belarus. The Catholic Church and the Belarusian Orthodox Church raise their voices against the authorities' policy very rarely, however, as for this issue, both denominations pursue the death penalty's abolition.

However, Belarusian society still holds to the idea that the death penalty should remain. Moreover, the Belarusian authorities have some instruments of the informational influence over the people. When the state media systematically show the pictures of cruel murders, it raises the pro-death penalty mood amongst the populace almost automatically.

When Belarusian TV-viewers see Anders Breivik sitting in a leather arm-chair smiling, they think that it is not that Belarus should abolish the death penalty - rather it's Europe that should introduce it.

When Belarusian TV-viewers see Anders Breivik sitting in a leather arm-chair smiling, they think that it is not that Belarus should abolish the death penalty – rather it is Europe

that should introduce it. In such situations, Belarusian society sees the attempts of human rights defenders to stop the death penalty as a step of solidarity with murderers, not as an act of humanity.

Will Belarus Abolish the Death Penalty?

The European Union has been trying to convince Belarus to abolish the death penalty for a long time. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe set up the introduction of a Moratorium as the only condition for returning the status of specially invited to Belarus. Belarus lost this status in 1996, when the referendum made the death penalty legal. The West did not recognise the results of that referendum.

Belarus has shown no reaction to the demands of the European structures so far. The officials often say privately that "Let the EU and the Council of Europe teach the U.S. some humanity, and then demand something from Belarus".

Although as the chart above shows, the number of executions has dropped significantly since 1990s, Alexander Lukashenka personally often said he would not go for the introduction of a moratorium as most Belarusians would object. Also, the Belarusian leader has no plans to become a member of the Council of Europe, as it would bring no major benefits for his regime. If Lukashenka wants to mend the relations with the West, he would release political prisoners and it would be enough.

Neither the Belarusian authorities nor society seems to be ready for the death penalty's abolition yet. It may take a while before Belarus will stop being the only country in Europe using death penalty.

KaliLaska, Minsk Branding, Green Initiatives – Civil Society Digest

Belarus remains the last country in Europe which keeps capital punishment. Activists of campaign “Possessed. Against the Death Penalty” produced a clip and explained why it should be changed. Apart from “green” events, Belarusian activists launched social campaigns including Belarus Days in Sweden with roundtable on media in Belarus.

BelNetwork anti-AIDS issues annual report. Everyone who wants to learn Belarusian language has a chance to participate in the project “Mova ci kava”. Budzma became the partner of that initiative. From April 2013 Belarusian elderly in Minsk for the first time will have an opportunity to become the students of the Third Age University.

[KaliLaska opens](#). On 5 April, the first charity store KaliLaska will be opened in Minsk and aimed to help the homeless, children's homes, large families, shelters for animals. The shop takes second-hand things from population: about 20% of them are sold for money then; the bulk goes to vulnerable groups for free. Team of KaliLaska is an association of friends “who have decided to move from words to action: do something useful for the world”.

[Minsk Branding Team held public hearings](#). On 25 March, the public initiative Minsk Branding Team held open public hearings at live TV.TUT.BY. The meeting included presentations of research results of opinions of citizens on the Minsk brand (according to Group SATIO), the best submitted concepts, as well as an open discussion among professionals, the media and indifferent Minsk residents.

[Possessed. Against the Death Penalty.](#) The campaign against the death penalty produced a video to the first anniversary of the execution of Uladzislau Kavaliou and Dzmitry Kanavalau, sentenced to death on charges of terrorism. The story tells why the Belarusian human rights activists oppose the death penalty, and what everyone should do to change the situation.

[BISS on tut.by's Amplituda show.](#) On 20 March BISS analysts Elena Artemenko and Andrei Eliseev were invited experts of a television TUT.by program *Amplituda* on the topic *Migration of Belarusians*. The experts told where, when and why Belarusians are leaving the country, as well as explained the migration impact on the demographic situation in Belarus. The material caused heated discussion of readers and collected more than 1,000 comments.

Educational Opportunities

[Third Age University in Minsk.](#) From April 2013, the first department of the Minsk City University of the Third Age is to be launched. Elderly people will be trained on computer skills under the faculty *Information and Communication Technologies*. The project aims to create conditions for further education of elderly and is implemented by Belarusian Association of Social Workers, supported by German Foundation *Memory, Responsibility and Future*.

[ICT study visit.](#) E-Governance Academy (Tallinn) and Pact, Inc announce a call for participants for a study visit *Public-Private Partnership for Development of E-governance*. The visit is to take place on 28 April – 4 May 2013, in Tallinn and continues a series of events for the Belarusian participants to introducing to the experience of the Estonian ICT sector.

[Mova ci kava continues its regular lessons.](#) Every Monday the Minsk residents have an opportunity to gather at the Gallery Ÿ to study Belarusian in an amusing and relaxed way. On 18 March more than 80 persons attended a lesson on the

topic *World through Belarusians' View*. [The campaign Budzma is a partner](#) of the initiative.

[REC recruits trainers](#). The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), with the support of Sida, announces a call for trainers/facilitators to assist the REC in organisational viability support work for the he project "[Supporting Environmental Civil Society Organisations](#)" (SECTOR). A group of ten trainers will be trained, and it is expected that four or five of them will be contracted under the project to provide support to CSOs to carry out self-assessments and draft organisational development plans.

[Economic and Business Education Abroad](#). On 7 April, Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center (BEROC) together with IPM Business School organise the conference *Economic and Business Education Abroad*, which will present opportunities for economic and business education in Europe and the U.S. The conference will present the programmes of leading educational institutions of Ukraine, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania.

'Green' Events

[Earth Hour in Belarus](#). Earth Hour 2013 was held on 23 March at 8:30pm-9:30pm. Belarus joined the global campaign for the fifth time. The Green Alliance appealed to heads of the ministries and large industrial enterprises with a request to turn off the lights on billboards, and other communal property, where the blackout is not critical. [Center for Environmental Solutions](#) offers a series of related events for school pupils, including participation in the creation of the video "60 seconds for the Earth."

[International Day of Sparrow](#). On 30 March BirdLife Belarus invited to celebrate the Day of Sparrow in Baranovichi (Brest region). During the day, a series of events is to be conducted – putting up birds houses in the park, quiz "What bird am I?", master-class on making birds out of unconventional materials,

lotteries, sale of souvenirs and gifts from the test with the image of birds.

[Capacity development for environmental CSOs](#). The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) announces a call for environmental CSOs which are interested to get support in their capacity development. The organizers are to provide ongoing support of a facilitator during all the process. CSOs that will design a long-term development plan successfully are eligible to receive a grant of up to 8,000 euro to improve their capacity.

Abroad

[Update From Belarus](#). On 12 April, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington, DC) hosts a discussion of the current situation in Belarus with a delegation of professional and CSO Belarusian leaders. Speakers will include Yury Chavusau, the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, Janna Grinyuk, the Center of System Business Technologies, and Yury Zisser, creator and founder of [TUT.BY](#). Travel for this delegation is supported by USAID and Pact.

[Belarus Days in Sweden](#). On 19-21 March “Belarus Days” were celebrated in Sweden. The agenda included a round-table discussion *Media under pressure* with the participation of Zhanna Litvina, BAJ, Yuliya Slutskaya, Solidarity with Belarus Information Office, etc. Also several other events were held with the participation of the Belarusian and Swedish human rights defenders, representatives of Amnesty International, Belarusian musician Liavon Volski.

[Belarus in Focus: International journalists awarded in Warsaw](#). Winners of the international journalism competition ‘Belarus in Focus 2012’ were awarded on 15 March in Warsaw. The competition received 60 articles from 36 journalists from 16 countries all over the world. The most articles were sent by journalists from Belarus, the United Kingdom, and Poland.

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.

Vitali Silicki Prize, Budzma, Tsmoki – Civil Society Digest

Gallery Ź hosts a presentation of a book on Ales Bialiatski in Minsk. The Center for Legal Transformation trains the first group under its not-for-profit Law School. A Minsk court orders compensation to former political prisoner Dmitry Bondarenko.

BISS shares plans for 2013. The public announcement of the foundation of the Vital Silicki Prize For Contributions to the Promotion of Political Thought in Belarus became the focal point of the gala evening that [Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies](#) traditionally holds on 14 January to celebrate Old New Year's Eve.

The Vital Silicki Commemoration Committee established the Vital Silicki Prize to commemorate the first BISS director. Alexei Pikulik, BISS Academic Director, presented the new staff members of BISS, drew up the results of BISS' activities in 2012 and spoke about the projects planned for 2013.

Efficient press services. Human rights Centre Viasna, UCP and the Tell the Truth campaign have the most efficient press services, [in journalists' opinion](#). Among CSOs, journalists

also noted the Green Alliance and human rights institution Platform.

“Bialiatski’s Case” presented in Minsk. On 18 January, the Minsk-based Gallery Ÿ hosted the presentation of a book titled [Bialiatski’s Case](#), a documentary novel by journalist Valer Kalinouski. The event was attended by Ales Bialiatski’s relatives and colleagues, as well as prominent human rights defenders, political and cultural figures.

Partizaning in Gomel and Brest. On 17 January, an open lecture titled Partizaning: Tactics of street art for improvements the city, was held in Gomel. The event was organised by [the youth club Civilization, a project of the Gomel Democratic Forum](#). The invited guests were the Belarusian street-art community SIGNAL and a famous Russian street artist and a leader of the Partizaning Igor Ponosov. The meeting was attended by over 70 young Gomel residents. The same lecture took place in Brest, organised by [youth NGO Dzedzich](#).

Not-for-profit law School. On 12 January, the [Legal Transformation Center](#) graduated the first group of the Not-for-profit Law School, organised under the Flying University. 3 people compete for every place; the course was attended by practitioners, civil society activists, and students of humanities.

"Flight"- animation about the death penalty in Belarus (video). The animation film, created by volunteers of the [Human Rights Defenders against Death Penalty](#) campaign, dwells on the topic of the cruelty and inhumanity of the death penalty in Belarus.

New cultural CSO. On 12 January, in Minsk, an organisational meeting of the founders of [the Society of Amateurs of Belarusian History Vaclav Lastovsky](#) was held. The founders are

professional historians, writers, journalists, artists. The new organisation will apply documents for registration.

December 2012 disability rights monitoring. In December 2012, [the Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities](#) received 38 citizen appeals. The largest number of complaints concerned issues of adequate standards of living, habilitation and rehabilitation. The Office conducts such monitoring on the monthly basis.

Expert discussion on capacity building. On 10 January 10 2013, the Capacity Building Market place conducted an expert discussion titled [Capacity development of Belarusian CSOs in 2012](#). The event was attended by about 30 CSO experts and consultants. The discussion summed up the major trends in the capacity development field and concluded that Belarusian CSOs should get out of their "comfort zone" in order to develop.

IT in Belarusian. The students of Belarus State Technological University have launched [the Centre of Assistance to Students](#) which organises courses on trend IT technologies. The lessons are conducted mainly by students, and two of them teach in Belarusian.

International conference in Warsaw. Lazarski University in cooperation with the Belarusian office of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, NED and the Visegrad Fund announced a call for applications for participation in the 5th International conference, titled 'Revolt in the name of liberty: the forgotten Belarusian gene?'. The conference is aimed at searching for historical inspiration for civil society in Belarus today. It will take place on 8-10 March 2013, in Warsaw.

Czech authorities register Belarusian House in Prague. [The Belarusian House](#) is now able to establish official contacts and cooperate with Czech governmental agencies, the city

authorities and local NGOs. The Belarusian House is expected to function as an alternative to the Belarusian embassy in Prague and to become a human rights and information centre for Belarusians in the Czech Republic.

INTERACTION BETWEEN STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Gomel authorities hinder registration of "Stop Drinking – Start Living". The Gomel civil initiative "[Khopic Pic – Treba Zhyc](#)" ("Stop Drinking – Start Living") cannot get equal status due to obstacles put up by the authorities, namely preventing the initiative from getting a legal address.

Tsmoki at state TV. National TV picked up the rhetoric of the promotion of Dragon (Tsmok) as a symbol of Belarus. [The video shows](#) the initiators of the very idea – the Budzma! campaign which at the beginning of 2012 launched a pilot project titled Searching for Tsmok, which aims to provoke wide public discussion of ‘cool’ Belarusian cultural heritage and the country’s brand.

Budzma and Mogilev City Executive Committee have published [a joint call for citizens’ ideas](#) on how to improve cultural life in Mogilev. Partnership between Budzma! and the city authorities will allow citizens to present and discuss their ideas in a creative *lightning talk* format, honouring the election of Mogilev as the 2013 cultural capital city of NIS and Belarus.

Fine for online photo. On 5 January, three local human rights defenders [Victor Sazonau, Raman Yurquel, and Uladzimir Hilmanovich](#) were fined 15 base amounts each (about €140). The activists staged their solidarity action on the international day of human rights: they took a photo in the street with Ales Bialiatski’s portrait and later published the photo on the website of the HRC Viasna. On 18 December, the local police made up a protocol on an unsanctioned picket based upon the

media fact only.

Warnings and detentions in 2012. [BAJ summed up the information](#) about detentions and warnings, issued by law enforcement agencies and special services to members of the organisations: at least 12 journalists received warnings from the prosecutor's office for contributing to foreign mass media without accreditation; at least 4 journalists had prophylactic talks with the KGB; and around 60 cases of detention occurred.

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Language of Democracy and Language of Dictatorship – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Belarusian analysts discuss the role of language in Belarusian society, media barometer, abolition of death penalty, European and Eurasian integration among other topics.

[Language of Democracy and Language of Dictatorship](#) – brief but probably the most popular article of the week authored by journalist Siarhei Dubavets states that the Belarusian democracy remains the only value – Belarusian. Language (Belarusian or Russian) is the main criterion for distinction opposition and the government, democracy and

dictatorship, independence and provinciality, genuine culture and serving at the tsar's table. Dubavets says he is speaking the humiliated in Belarus but his native language of democracy while Russian speaking opposition activists use the colonial language of dictatorship forced upon them.

[The creation of the "sixth column"?](#) – Belarusian Security Blog notes the increasing of activity of the pro-Moscow "initiative" in Belarus which "buys" local activists. The experts see that Moscow supported groups are working mainly in the free mode, and have the main task of the increasing the number of activists. More strict and clear requirements for their activities will appear near 2015, when presidential elections are to be held. As a result, Alexander Lukashenka may well face a rival far more powerful than even the candidate from the united national democratic opposition.

Politics

[BISS Political Media Barometer №1](#) – Belarusian Institute for Political Studies (BISS) presents the first public issue of a new quarterly report– BISS Political Media Barometer covering April-June BISS designed this product with one major goal in mind: to scientifically analyse the quality of the political communication between the Belarusian democratic political forces and the society, and contribute to its improvement. The new BISS product has already got some [feedback of the politicians](#).

[Lukashenka is running out of arguments in public speeches](#) – Alexander Zimouski, media consultant and former head of Belarusian state television and radio company, states that Alexander Lukashenka goes to the public "archi poor" prepared. The expert refers not to rhetoric, but content of the speeches, which contain only a set of old templates. Zimovski suggests that the president's associates

cannot grasp the new rapidly changing trends and therefore not able to offer a new image of the father of the nation.

[What Could be a Transition to Democracy?](#) – a politician Vital Karatysh notices that the transition to democracy in the current Belarusian context does not mean a change of power and the existing laws, but only change of the vector of the existing political system in Belarus. Accordingly, he believes that "any strategy of the opposition, which claims to be effective, must include the achievement of the unity of the democratic forces. Their leaders should always remember that the art of politics is the ability to enter into agreements and to reach a compromise".

[Opposition Politics: the Art of the Possible](#) – political analyst Dmitry Kukhlei notes that the official results of the parliamentary elections of 2012 consolidated the trend of the last twelve years, according to which the electoral campaign does not cause changes in the political system. The election showed that neither the leading opposition force, nor an independent civil society did not demonstrate the capacity to mobilize people and create a pole of attraction for the supporters of the changes that have recently dominated in Belarusian society.

[National Security Brief: September 2012](#) – Belarusian Security Blog has released its monthly brief paper covered the national security issues in September. In particular, the experts note that the recent parliamentary campaign demonstrated the authorities' loss in the domestic field. The regime was unable to mobilize the population to ensure the necessary turnout that confirms the idea of a low level of trust of the population to the government.

[Abolition of Death Penalty in Belarus is not Realistic](#) – defender Vyachaslau Bortnik speculates if it's possible that Belarus will abolish the death penalty. The expert gives an unambiguous answer: this question is political,

and Belarusian authorities use it as a tool for dealing with foreign and domestic policy issues. Accordingly, its abolition is not realistic in the foreseeable future.

[European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries](#) –

The second edition of the European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries has been published – a study aiming to explore the process of convergence between the six Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union. The work involved over 30 experts from various institutions in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries. Belarus was represented by the BISS who have participated in the preparation of the Index.

[BISS Launches Research in a New Field, to Analyze Eurasian Integration](#) –

the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) launches research in a new field in order to provide its expert analysis of Eurasian integration, taking into account that this is becoming a reality, which cannot be ignored and requires a thorough analysis by the expert community. The first paper authored by Maksim Karliuk centers on the institutional structure of Eurasian integration.

Economy

[Belarusian Monthly Economic Review, No.10, October 2012](#)

The IPM Research Center released its monthly analysis of Belarusian economy. The October issue covers the following topics: Belarus held parliamentary elections; sharp slowdown in industrial growth; problems of external borrowing come to the fore; growth of imports outpaced growth of exports.

[What Model of Social Policy is Needed in Belarus?](#) –

Belarusian social policy shows a number of successes, but it has a certain inconsistency, and the government's participation is too large. Such an assessment was given by Oksana Yerofeeva, Head of Department of Economics and Finance of The Belarusian

State University, during her report at the 2nd International Congress of Belarusian Studies.

Civil Society

[Belarus Researchers Shared Their Knowledge Outside the Country](#) – [TUT.BY](#) journalist describes his impressions of the 2nd International Congress of Belarusian Studies held on September 28-30, in Kaunas. The author believes the event the largest Belarusian Science Conference in the Humanities, organised by NGOs. Particular emphasis is placed on the fact that the Congress is above politics and its main task is to give opportunity for scientists and researchers to share their knowledge.

[Results of the II Congress of Belarusian Researchers: Expected Topics and Unexpected Conclusions](#) – Natalya Ryabova elaborates at length on key results of the II International Congress of Belarusian Researchers, which took place in Kaunas on September 28-30, 2012. The author suggests that the Congress is becoming a 'happening' for Belarusian academic community, while establishment of national scientific data base of research and citation.

[Organizational Development: the Situation is Stable, but Need to Keep a Hand on the Pulse](#) – representatives of non-profit organisations positively perceive the idea of the First Capacity Building □□Fair, that's confirmed with a blitz survey of the Fair participants. The event takes place on October 12 and brought together representatives of CSOs interested in receiving consulting services in organizational development, and consultants who are ready to offer their services.

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Interpol Clashes with BBC over 2011 Minsk Metro Bombing

On 30 July, BBC showed a controversial documentary about the 2011 terrorist attack in Minsk where 15 people died and over 200 were injured. It questioned the guilt of the two men convicted and subsequently executed for it. The film provoked a strong reaction from the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol). Interpol labelled the BBC documentary as based on "biased speculation".

Back in 2011, Interpol publicly endorsed the preliminary results of the investigation which preceded the trial of two convicted young Belarusians. The international organisation was involved in the investigation and dispatched its experts to Minsk where it offered technical assistance. Now some in the Belarusian opposition criticise this international organisation for its failure to condemn the Belarusian regime. Interpol, however, insists that the official investigation was conducted professionally.

Emotions Against Evidence

The full BBC documentary is no longer available online – but a [brief transcript](#) gives a taste of it. The film blames the official investigation and relies primarily on anonymous sources. The author of the documentary John Sweeney describes how doubts about "the guilt of the two men convicted for the bomb have arisen. Now the Belarus KGB is being accused of planting the bomb, rigging a show trial and torturing confessions out of the two suspects".

However, the whole narrative of the BBC report appears to be built on one story told by the mother of one of the bombers.

She gives her own, very humane but hardly impartial, version of what happened. According to the BBC journalist, the campaign to rehabilitate her son launched by Lyubov Kovalyova might even threaten the Secretary General of Interpol who is American.

In addition to Lyubov Kovalyova's story, the report contains a quote from Natalya Kolyada, co-founder of the Belarus Free Theatre. "This was a KGB bomb. There are no facts whatsoever to prove something else." In its previous March report, the BBC covered the topic in the same way by quoting the mother and anonymous sources.

Interpol had to respond to the BBC report because the journalist essentially publicly reduced the organisation to an accomplice of a dictator. It insisted that, the "presumption of innocence of defendants ... was not breached". The [Interpol statement](#) also noted:

It is regrettable that none of the information provided by INTERPOL about the nature and strength of evidence obtained during Belarus's criminal investigation into the Minsk terrorist metro bombing was included by the documentary maker, who preferred instead to rely solely on biased speculation.

Both Belarusian investigators and Interpol draw attention to the publicly available CCTV footage. Criticising the BBC, Interpol asks, "it is not clear whether the journalist making the documentary saw any of the CCTV footage himself, or is relying on second-, third- or possibly fourth-hand information". Interpol officials believe that the CCTV footage explicitly proves at least some episodes concerning the bombing on 11 April.

Moreover, Interpol points to other forensic evidence such as apartment rental records, phone records, clothes, bomb materials, and numerous interviews with eyewitnesses. In other

words, they highlight that the defendants' confession (according to the BBC documentary obtained by torture) was by far not the only basis for conclusions reached by Belarusian investigators.

Some activists and media raised a number of legitimate questions concerning the trial, claiming in particular that the ICTV footage had been edited or that no traces of explosives had been found on the cloths of the bomber. A number of other procedural issues [looked questionable](#). Yet the substantive doubts have not been conclusively confirmed by experts.

The BBC documentary also accuses the Belarusian regime not only of the disappearance of four political opponents in 1999-2000 – something which has been [accepted by many](#) as the regime's crime – but it also puts forward a completely new accusation, much to the surprise of those who follow the situation in Belarus: "More than 30 others, the BBC has been told, were also killed by the death squad".

The journalist implies that these 30 persons were also political opponents of the regime. Neither the source, nor additional details to explain this accusation were provided. Even the most radical opposition groups never accused Lukashenka of killing so many political opponents.

When Belarusian Courts Can Get It Right

The case shows how it is easy to manipulate facts when dealing with a complex investigation in a country with a deplorable record of human rights. The Belarusian government, as always, cared very little about transparency and publicity. The EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton said that both men had not been accorded due legal process. British Europe Minister David Lidington claimed that independent reports had "raised serious and credible concerns over the standard of evidence and fairness" of the process.

Of course, much of this criticism has been linked with the EU's concern about the death penalty in Belarus – the only European country which still uses it. Yet it is important to avoid explicitly denouncing this serious crime or even ridiculing the Belarusian tragedy. In May, the mother and sister of Uladzislau Kavalyou were invited to Poland where they met the wife of the Polish president and got extensive media coverage. This hardly helps with the goal of struggling with the dictatorship in Belarus or improve ties between two countries.

Some in Belarus and abroad tend to criticise the regime in Belarus without a bit of substantial evidence. This culminated in an action on 16 March when a number of internet activists urged people to bring flowers to the metro bombing place for the two convicted men and show solidarity with them. Several dozen people showed up. A similar action also took place in Moscow.

[Dismissing the entire Belarusian state](#) as a dictatorship is a mechanism that does not help to actually influence what is going on in the country. Such an attitude destroys the very foundations of the state, undermining the future of the Belarusian government after Lukashenka is gone. Some parts of the Belarusian state do function more or less as they should, and according to Interpol the investigation of the 2011 metro bombing proved it.

Belarus KGB Attempts to Recruit Informants – Digest

of Belarusian Politics

Belarusian authorities have not changed their ways in 2012. The former presidential candidate Mikola Statkevich will be transferred to a detention facility with harsher conditions, the KGB is trying to recruit new informants and more democratic activists are under pressure.

Statkevich to be moved to cell-type prison. On January 12, in a trial that took place in Correctional Institution #17 in Shklow, Mahilyow region. The convicted former presidential candidate Mikalay Statkevich was [found guilty](#) of violating prison rules and must be moved from the facility to a higher-security prison for three years. The charge was brought against Mr. Statkevich because of his missing number tag and failure to mention handkerchiefs among his personal items. In May 2011, a district judge in Minsk sentenced Mr. Statkevich to six years in a medium-security prison, finding him guilty of organizing "mass disorder" in connection with the December 19, 2010 post-election protest.

Opposition youths say that KGB attempted to recruit them as informants. Five members of an opposition youth group called Malady Front (Young Front) [revealed](#) to reporters on January 9 that officers of the Committee for State Security (KGB) had attempted to recruit them as informants. The young men were contacted by KGB officers while they were serving jail sentences in the detention center on Akrestsina Street following their arrest in Minsk on December 19, 2011.

Two jailed over protest in front of KGB office. An opposition activist Mikita Kavalenka who demonstrated in front of the headquarters of the Committee for State Security (KGB) in Minsk on January 8 and a Belsat TV reporter Alyaksandr Barazenska who filmed the protest were [sentenced](#) to jail terms on January 09. Kavalenka was sentenced to 15 days in jail,

Barazenska was handed an 11-day jail term. Both were found guilty of participation in an unauthorized demonstration under Article 23.34 of the Civil Offenses Code. Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, [condemned](#) on January 11 the sentencing of Belarusian journalist Alyaksandr Barazenska.

Seven Russian urban explorers left Belarus after serving out jail terms. On January 12, seven Russian urban explorers [served](#) out their 10-day jail sentences and boarded a train for Moscow. They were part of a group of 13 young people from Russia who were arrested at a hotel in Minsk on January 2 following complaints about their rowdy behavior and sentenced to jail on charges of disorderly conduct. The Russians have been banned from traveling to Belarus in the next five years.

Vitsebsk opposition activist Siarhei Kavalenka faces three years of prison. Vitsebsk activist of the Conservative Christian Party “Belarusian Popular Front” Siarhei Kavalenka may be [imprisoned](#) for up to three years for alleged violation of suspended sentence restrictions. The activist is currently held in a local detention center and has gone on a hunger strike in protests against the criminal prosecution.

Siarhei Kavalenka refuses to stop his hunger-strike. Siarhei Kavalenka, a Vitebsk member of the Conservative-Christian Party “Belarusian Popular Front”, has been placed in a [detention](#) facility. He has been on hunger strike from December 19 protesting against criminal prosecution. He is charged with violating article 415 (avoidance of serving sentence) for violations of the rules of serving suspended sentence. The activist may face up to three years in prison.

Sviatlana Chornaya continues hunger strike against death sentence for Kanavalau and Kavaliou. A disabled woman in Minsk continues her [hunger strike](#) in protest against the death sentence passed on Dmitri Konovalov and Vladislav Kovalyov in

the subway bombing trial in Minsk. Svyatlana Chornaya, who has a second-degree disability, began the strike on November 30.

The new Belarusian calendar for the next 8 years. Advertising consultant Julia Lyashkevich and designer Baba-Zhaba have created "[Prison Calendar](#)" to help understand the feeling of time in custody. The Calendar is to remind people of political prisoners and all unjustly imprisoned in Belarus.

Law Enforcement Officers Have Access to Restricted Sites in Bynet. The amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences and the Procedural-Executive Code of Administrative Offenses have taken [effect](#) on January 6. Now Internet providers, still making access to the restricted information in the government offices and educational institutions available, will be subject to a fine. Law enforcement agencies are the only open-shelf representatives of state structures. As [Euroradio reports](#), about 60 online resources are included in the list of restricted access in Belarus. Most of the "blacklisted" resources are pornographic, but as well as some prominent opposition websites such as charter97.org, belaruspartisan.org, spring96.org, prokopovich.net, prokopovi.ch, Lipkovichea.livejournal.com.

BHC is under threat of liquidation. The Ministry of Taxation requests the Ministry of Justice to initiate a process of [liquidation](#) of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. Under the law, NGO activities can be suspended or liquidated if an NGO has received two warnings over a one year span of time. BHC has received two warnings for violating tax laws. BHC is the single registered human rights organization of the national level in Belarus.

Justice ministry suspends consideration of Belarusian Christian Democracy's registration application. The Belarusian justice ministry has notified Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD) that consideration of the party's application for registration has [suspended](#) for a month, without explaining the

reason, BCD Executive Secretary Dzyanis Sadowski said. The party filed its registration application on December 20, 2011, after holding another, fourth founding conference.

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Green Christmas and the “Kind Button” – Civil Society Digest

This month's notable events included the Green Christmas initiative, which urged Belarusians to give a second life to old things and make an original Christmas gift. Belarusian ATMs may soon have a "kind button" to make charitable donations. Important cultural events included celebration of anniversary of Belarusian Philosophy Space and Rock Solidarity campaign.

Social

Green Christmas. On December 22, the Center for Environmental Solutions [organized](#) Green Christmas event. The idea is to give a second life to old things and make an original Christmas gift. One can bring old clothes and materials and together with the designers give them a new life. If desired, each participant has a possibility to pass his/her presents to children's home.

The "Kind Button". Association of Persons with Disabilities on Wheelchairs [prepared](#) a social advertising film which calls for accessible living environment for persons with disabilities. In addition, the organization signed a contract with a major Belarusian state-owned Belarusbank to add the so called "kind button" on its ATMs. That would enable bank cards holders to transfer charitable donations in Belarusian rubles for the benefit of the Association. The "Kind Button" will be launched in two weeks.

The first Club House is opened Minsk. A new social service for people with psychological disorders that [helps](#) to organize life beyond the boundaries of the hospital has been opened. This a system to transform a patient into a personality and help them to realize the reality around. The round table was held during the opening discussing employment and social security of this target group.

The international organization "Our home" ("Nash Dom") on the nuclear power plant. A video of the program "Dom-show" ("Home-show") [highlights](#) pros and cons of and controversies of construction of atomic power station in Belarus. One of the most interesting and surprising assumptions indicates that such a station would give an impetus for the development of an atomic bomb, which is considered to be just a red herring tactic.

Human Rights

Kovalev's relatives filed a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee. On December 15th relatives of the convict in the case of terrorist attack in the subway, who was sentenced to the death penalty, [compiled](#) a personal address to the UN Committee regarding the violation of the human right for life. Principles of just prosecution are stated to be disregarded, as well. Kovalev himself wrote a petition for mercy addressed to President Lukashenka.

Belarusian Orthodox Church is not against death penalty. The Orthodox Church does not see enough evidence for univocal treatment of the death penalty. The press centre of the Church [emphasized](#) on 15 December that it can not ask for the categorical abolition of the death penalty, which is supported by a considerable part of the population of Belarus.

Belarusian Catholic Church Will Seek Abolition of the Death Penalty. The Catholic Church will [direct](#) its efforts to abolish death penalty in Belarus, regardless of the convicted persons. According to Archbishop Tadeush Kandrusievich's statement on 15 December, the death penalty is not based on the principles of humanism and deprives the convicted of an opportunity to repent.

Fundraising campaign for Ales Byalyatski. Famous Belarusian human rights activists [appealed](#) to the Belarusian society to show solidarity and raise money for the payment for human rights defender Ales Byalyatsky as “damage caused by the crime.” Compensation of the penalty, according to campaign organizers, can affect the release of Ales Byalyatski or at least decrease the measure of sentence. The required amount to be collected is Br 757 526 717 (approx. \$88 000).

Book about victims of post-election crackdown published in Minsk. A book-launch event for journalist Alyaksandr Tamkovich's [Suprats Plyni](#) (Against the Flow), which describes the fates of 18 victims of the post-election crackdown on government opponents in Belarus, was held in the office of the Belarusian Popular Front in Minsk on December 21. The book was published with the support of Human Rights Centre Viasna.

Culture

The new online portal Usebelarusy.by. On December 20, an interactive portal [Usebelarusy.by](#) has been launched. This is the first national web-portal, where everyone can become an author. Portal was created within the project "[Dakranisya to](#)

[vytokau](#)" ("Touch to the source") by a number of NGOs (APB BirdLife Belarus, "Rest on Village"), governmental bodies, and private companies.

Birthday of "Belaruskaya Filasofskaya Prastora". Belaruskaya Filasofskaya Prastora (Belarusian Philosophy Space) [invites](#) to celebrate its second anniversary, which will be held on December 28 in the Gallery "Ź" in Minsk. BFP is a community of Belarusian intellectuals who seek to fill the Belarusian cultural field with bright events, create a platform for discussion, support educational projects, open new horizons for reflection on current social issues. Among the participants there are representatives of state research institutions, as well as public initiatives.

Campaign "Rock-Solidarity." A public campaign has been launched in support of independent music culture "Rock-Solidarity", initiated by the Belarusian fan-club musicians, rock lovers and NGOs' activists. The campaign aims to express solidarity with the banned musicians, to inform the public about the existence of "black lists". One can join the campaign via social networks – [Vkontakte](#) and [Facebook](#).

BelSat started new series of stories called "Obsessed" ("Oderzymye"). This reporting on well-being of civic society in Belarus will cover eight different organizations and individuals, eight kinds of public activity, as well as, eight different civic initiatives. The coverage will include those groups and individuals, who incurably ["obsessed"](#) with what they are doing. The opening program was devoted to Vitebsk civic initiative "Our home" ("Nash dom").

A compilation of films about Belarus during the Soviet era. Civic initiative "Za Novya Smaliavichy" [compiled](#) a selection of films about Soviet history of Belarus, which has not been always adequately described. With the motto: "History does not claim absolute truth!" on its cover the disk contains films about Hatyn tragedy, the period of German occupation,

Sluck military uprising, Stalin's times and many other controversial historical issues.

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