

# Environmentalists v Church, Intellectual Club, Internet Control – Civil Society Digest

Environmentalists clash with the Catholic Church over a city park. Urban Myths are looking for funding for new murals. Crowdfunding helps to finance civil society projects. Belarusian reporter recovers from KGB moral damages for unlawful detention.

Amendments to Internet control prepared secretly from the public. Nobel prize winner Svetlana Aleksievich will open an intellectual club in Minsk. What do Belarusians Think public discussion on 2 June will dissect pension reform. This and more in the new edition of Civil Society Digest.

## Urban activism

[Sixth episode of The City reality show](#) continues to acquaint with urban activists and educational program for them. In this week episode, the fellows painted the fence and removed the trash in a park in the rhythm of capoeira. Organised by the Centre for Cultural Management, The City weekly reports on 20 grassroots activists who fight for the prize money to implement social projects on the ground.

[And park, and church. How it's possible to agree.](#) [Andrej Jahoraŭ](#), the Centre for European Transformation, parses a [local conflict](#) over the construction of the church, followed by the cutting of trees in the Minsk park Katoŭka. The expert believes that the issue isn't in ecology or violations of the rights of believers, but in decision-making at the local

level. The conflict is caused by the practice adopted in Belarus when the society is actually excluded from the decision-making processes.

[Urban Myths festival opens a new season](#). The project brings prominent street artists to Belarus to create a series of murals based on local content. Now in Minsk, the Spain artist Deih is trying to combine his traditional theme of Universe with the Belarusian mythology. In 2015, street art community Signal organised the first [Urban Myths festival](#) in Minsk with two graffiti rated within the top 10 of the month in the world.

## Crowdfunding

**Crowdfunding platforms report their achievements.** [Talaka.by informs](#) that for the recent 12 months 203 new projects have been posted on the platform; the fastest Belarus' crowdfunding campaign was completed for 8 hours – raising money for a known athlete to attend competitions abroad. For the recent month [MaeSens.by](#) has collected Br365 mil (around \$18,6K) for assisting creative, social and charity projects.

**[Book about Piotr Martsev collects money through crowdfunding.](#)** Kyky.org chief editor Sasha Romanova publishes a provocative book of memoirs about Piotr Martsev, businessman and founder of the Belarusian independent newspapers *BDG* and *Imya*. A crowdfunding platform Ulej.by hosts a [campaign](#) to raise money on the printing of the book. For the first two days, the campaign has collected more than 62 million rubles (around \$3,1K) – 41% of the required amount.

# Intellectual life

[Nobel laureate Svetlana Aleksievich to open intellectual club in Minsk](#). Aleksievich informed on her plans during the [master class](#) organised by Press Club Belarus. Starting from September, the Club's meetings will be held in the Minsk [TUT.BY](#) gallery, with the participation of the world famous intellectuals. The Club will have its website to provide information on the lectures and invited guests.

[Presence Code anthology](#). On May 18, Flying University and the Belarus Collegium [presented](#) an Anthology of 2000-2015 Belarusian thinking titled *Presence Code*. The anthology allows seeing the intellectual and cultural contribution made in 2000-2015 and contains the texts of different genres and styles – manifestos, metaphysical reasoning, criticism and others to understand Belarus.

# Interaction between state and civil society

[Reporter gets moral damage compensation for unlawful imprisonment in KGB](#). In 2012, a reporter Anton Surapin spent a month in the KGB detention centre for allegedly aiding the [teddy bear airdrop](#) team. Now, with the help of BAJ lawyers, Surapin won 8 million rubles (around \$400) for the moral damage. This is the first precedent in years when a person, who had been recognised a political prisoner, succeeded in his claim for compensation.

[Amendments to Internet control prepared secretly from the public](#). On May 16, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) got an answer from the Ministry of Information on its request to reveal details on drafting a new law to control the Internet. The Minister answered that BAJ's request "had been

taken into account” without any other clarifications.

[Activist held in ‘cycling case’ faces formal charges](#). Dzmitry Palijenka, an activist detained after the [brutal dispersal](#) of the Critical Mass cycling event on April 29, has been officially charged with using violence against a police officer (Article 364 of the Criminal Code). On May 12, three more cyclist activists were [fined](#) of Br840,000 (around \$45). Environmental CSOs have launched a [campaign](#) and [flashmobs](#) to support participants of the Critical Mass.

## Other

[What Belarusians think on pension reform](#). The topic of the pension reform’s implications will be discussed on June 2, in the Minsk Gallery [TUT.BY](#) with online broadcasting. A BEROC expert will present economic impacts on the pension system because of the ageing of the population. A series of live discussions *What Do Belarusians Think* is organised by OEEC in partnership with the Belarusian Research Council, Pact and supported by USAID.

[Infographics on European Cafe's results](#). The project [European Cafe – Open Space of Europe](#) has summed up the results of a customs survey to get feedback on its activity. Since 2011, the project aimed at integration of the Belarusian society into the European space, has organised 60 lectures with experts from 16 countries, with over 3,000 people attended. 96% of respondents answer that they have a positive impression of the project. The infographics was made with the methodological support of Pact.

[Emigre politician makes trip to Belarus](#). Opposition Belarusian politician [Siarhiej Navumčyk](#) arrived in Minsk on May 24 on his first visit to Belarus in 20 years. The 55-year-old politician works in Prague for the Belarusian service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In September 2015, opposition

politicians [Alieś Michalievič](#) and Viačaslaŭ Siŭčyk returned to Belarus after years of self-imposed exile.

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# Swamp Campaign Victory, Alexievich in the Palace of Republic, Who Hates Whom – Civil Society Digest

Fastest crowdfunding campaign ever has collected money for an athlete and rock band singer Vital Hurkoŭ. Online registration on the 6th International Congress of Belarusian Studies is now open.

Svetlana Alexievich held its first public presentation in the very heart of Minsk – the Palace of Republic. A public campaign In Defense of Belarusian Swamps achieved the adoption of the Strategy of conservation and sustainable use of peatlands.

IDEAby published a grid based on relations between Belarusian political parties and movements' leadership. This and more in the new edition of Civil Society Digest.

## Crowdfunding

[Fastest crowdfunding campaign has collected money for an athlete.](#) For 7 hours a crowdfunding platform Talakosht collected Br68.2 mils (\$3,4K) for Vital Hurkoŭ to participate in the Muaythai World Championship in Sweden. Vital Hurkoŭ is

a world champion and vocalist of BRUTTO band banned for performances in Belarus. After his dismissal from the Ministry of Vital Hurkoŭ looked for money via crowdfunding; his campaign was supported by 170 people, who donated from \$2,5 to \$250.

### [Talaka.by celebrates one year of its crowdfunding activity.](#)

During the year, 19 out of 48 crowdfunding campaigns hosted at Talakosht (Talaka.by crowdfunding resource), finished successfully. More than 200 people consistently support the new campaigns at the platform. The total amount of funds raised is around Br600 million (around \$30,000).

## Education and science

[To the 10th anniversary of the Kalinoŭski programme](#), opened since 2006 for repressed Belarusian students and funded by the Polish government, Svaboda.org has collected 10 alumni success stories. [Andrej Dyńko](#), *Naša Niva* editor, [reviewed the stories](#) and revealed that 9 of the 11 best graduates remained in Poland, two of them opened the hookah. Dyńko concludes that now when there are no cases of expulsion from the Belarusian universities the program brings damage since the most talented youth move from Belarus.

[Online registration on the 6th International Congress of Belarusian Studies is open from 1 April.](#) The 6th Congress will take place on October 7-9, in Kaunas, Lithuania. The Congress was initiated as an annual meeting of Belarusian and foreign scholars, experts, analysts and representatives of civil society and government institutions, which are involved in studying Belarus. Application deadline is 20 May.

# Green initiatives

[Swamp campaign won: the resolution on draining marshes replaced by strategy for their conservation](#). A public campaign *In Defense of Belarusian Swamps* started three years ago at the initiative of several people and has grown to the *Bagna* eco-CSO. The campaign could cancel the Council of Ministers' Resolution on peat extraction and achieved the adoption of the Strategy of conservation and sustainable use of peatlands. The organisers share their experience of successful implementation.

[Zrobim! action attended by over 22 thousand people](#). On April 9, the global action of cleaning illegal dumps *Let's Do It! (Zrobim!* in Belarusian) gathered about 22,700 volunteers from 43 cities and villages of Belarus (1,500 volunteers last year). Participants collected 560,000 litres of waste, thus removing more than 500 contaminated sites. The action was coordinated by Green Network, Centre for Environmental Solutions, Interaction Fund, Minsk Cycling Society and government ministries.

[New educational program "City: Core, Community, Image of Action"](#) is implemented by the Flying University in partnership with Green Network and Urban Tactics almanac. The course focuses on the modern approaches to the development of Belarusian cities and consists of three phases: intensive education, research and a summing-up workshop. Researchers and activists of environmental and urban movements are invited to participate. Deadline for applications is April 15.

## Interaction between state and

# civil society

[Svetlana Alexievich's presentation took place in the Palace of Republic](#). On April 14, a presentation of the Radio Svaboda's book *Alexievich on Svaboda* took place in the very heart of Minsk – the Palace of Republic. This was the first [public presentation](#) of Svetlana Alexievich in Belarus after receiving the Nobel Prize.

[One-fifth of appeals at the Comfortable City resolved positively](#). For five months of its activity the website [Comfortable City](#) ([petitions.by](http://petitions.by)) posted 137 petitions, received 58 responses from government bodies, and 26 issues were decided in favour of citizens. Two-thirds of appeals are linked to the community level. Appeals submitted via the website are legally valid and require a mandatory reaction of related officials.

[Freedom House has raised the rating of democracy in Belarus](#). In its annual report [Nations in Transit 2016](#) Freedom House improves the Belarus' overall rating of the level of democracy, for the first time in six years. The growth is recorded only on two of the seven parameters – electoral process and civil society.

[29 CSOs submit a group proposal for the changes in the rules of foreign aid receiving](#). The initiative to develop a consolidated position is initiated by Centre for Legal Transformation *Lawtrend* and the Assembly of NGOs. The program maximum is to cancel a permit procedure for receiving foreign grants and go to the notification principle, or at least to determine the minimum amount of aid, which does not require the state registration.



# Other

[Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities presents an annual monitoring of citizens' appeals](#). The total number of requests increased by 40% comparing to 2014. Geographical distribution is almost equal 49% (Minsk) and 51% (regions). The major part of requests is still on social protection issues – 39%. Increasing the number of appeals can be linked to the signing by Belarus of the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons, which took place in autumn 2015.

[Play "Seven" in Belarus](#). On April 4, in the framework of the UNFPA information campaign, the National Academic Janka Kupala Theatre hosted a play "Seven" aimed to draw public attention to the problem of domestic violence. The play is a monologue of seven women from different cultures, who have overcome major obstacles on the path to justice, freedom, and equality. In each country, the roles are performed by famous women and men.

[IDEAby map of the opposition](#). IDEAby published a grid of opposition relations, jokingly called 'Who Hates Whom'. The grid is based on relations between Belarusian political parties and movements' leadership. It is noticeable that the relations within the opposition has changed [for the year](#).

*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.*

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# **Future of Belarus Conference, Youth Initiatives Festival – Civil Society Digest**

**International Conference “Future of Belarus”.** Renowned scholars, researchers, respected international experts, development professionals and civic activists from Belarus and abroad will gather in the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius on May 25-26 to debate the “Future of Belarus” at an international conference dedicated to the 20 years of independent research in Belarus and the establishment of the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS).

The conference is organised with support of USAID through Pact, the Eastern Europe Studies Center (EESC) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. Organisers will provide live streaming from the conference over the Internet. The conference program is available [here](#).

**Experience of promoting the interests of people with disabilities.** Representatives of organisations working for people with disabilities are invited to participate in educational visits “Experience of promoting the interests of people with disabilities” aimed at [exchanging successful experiences](#) of Belarusian organisations. The organisers are the International Children's Fund, the Office for the rights of people with disabilities and local organisations. The visit will take place in Gomel (June 7-8) and Polotsk (June 12-13).

**Human rights training in Homel.** The training named [“International standards in the sphere of human rights: monitoring of court proceedings”](#) was held in Homel, with the support of Homel Center for Strategic Litigation. The training was given by experts of the Center for Legal Transformation (Minsk) Mikhail Matskevich and Aleh Fiadotau. During the

seminar the participants and trainers discussed the relevant instruments for conducting court monitoring, created by Belarusian human rights organisations and aimed at revealing violations of human rights and procedural legislation.

**Trial monitoring workshop "Observer".** The Centre for Legal Transformation [invites to the workshop "Observer" which will take place on May 21 and 25 in Minsk](#). The workshop will be devoted to monitoring the hearings in administrative proceedings.

**BAJ Congress.** On May 18, Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) organised its 8<sup>th</sup> Congress. At the event, attended by nearly 100 journalists and guests, BAJ Board [presented](#) the results of organisation's work in 2009-2012.

**Gomel NGOs to discuss third sector development.** Gomel Democratic Forum and Strategic Thought NGO invited Gomel-based NGOs to take part in a [discussion of third sector development](#) in the region. The organisers will present a brochure of best NGO practices in the region, and invite participants to openly discuss main development trends and institutional challenges that civil society face in Gomel.

**Scenarios of the Common Future.** On May 24, a roundtable "Belarus: Scenarios of the Common Future" will be held in Minsk. The organizer is the [project group "Cytadel"](#), which invites participants to make a meaningful attempt to interface the existing social and political scenarios for Belarus.

**Amnesty International refuses to recognise opposition activist Syarhei Kavalenka prisoner of conscience.** MEP Marek Migalski received this information from [John Dalhuisen](#), Director for Europe and Central Asia at Amnesty International. To justify his decision Mr Dalhuisen relied on evidence by Belarusian police officers, who claim Kavalenka showed disobedience to police in jail.

**A second month without a passport.** [Dr Alaksiey Pikulik](#), BISS Academic Director received an official notification informing him that the term of checking the validity of his passport has been extended for another month. In April Alaksiey Pikulik's car was stopped in Minsk by the road police on suspicion of disorderly conduct and forging documents. The latter allegation was used as a pretext to confiscate his passport and iPad.

**Young Front activists: detained, beaten, sentenced to arrest.** On May 14, the apartment rented by the Young Front activists [Mikalai Dzemidzenka, Zmitser Kremianetski and Raman Vasiliieu](#) was assaulted by the riot police. The activists were beaten, detained and later charged with disorderly conduct. They were sentenced to ten and twelve days of arrest.

**Festival of youth initiatives.** A [festival of youth organisations and initiatives](#) took place on May 13, 2012 in Art Siadziba in an open space format. Center for the Development of Student Initiatives, Student Council, Public information service of BSU campus, Union of Belarusian Students, [AIESEC](#) and [AEGEE](#) took part in the event. In addition to learning more about each other's organizations, the participants viewed a presentation of monitoring results of academic freedom violations.

**Quality standards for NGOs to prevent trafficking.** The Program "La Strada" / [NGO "Gender Perspectives"](#) under the project "Combating human trafficking: work with risk groups and experts: 2012-2013" started the development of quality standards of NGOs in the prevention of human trafficking. Standards will be internal quality criteria that establish minimum requirements for the organization of work.

**Current situation in Belarus to be discussed at human rights documentary film festival in Brussels.** FIDH, Viasna and People in Need invite to the screening of ONE WORLD 2012 documentary

[“Belarusian Dream”](#) by Ekaterina Kibalchich with the presence of Taciana Reviaka from Viasna and Alexandra Koulaeva from FIDH to be held in Brussels on 21 May as part of the sixth annual One World human rights documentary film festival.

**Winners of Belarus Press Photo 2012 are determined.** The jury of the annual competition of press photographers, Belarus Press Photo 2012, decided on the winners of this year's contest. The [awards ceremony](#) will be held on May 28, 2012 in the Gallery 'Ź'.

**PhotoBattle kicks off.** The first national competition among amateur photographers PhotoBattle kicked off on May 12, 2012, organised by Grodno-based Third Sector NGO. At the moment, the competitions' [jury is reviewing the works submitted by 16 teams](#) from Brest, Maladechna, Hrodna, Gomel, Baranavichi, Slutsk and Minsk.

**34 Multimedia Magazine from Belarus to receive IPI's 2012 Free Media Pioneer Award.** An independent jury of five members of IPI's Executive Board selected [34 Multimedia Magazine](#), a banned, Belarusian-language youth magazine, to receive the honor. IPI will present the award during a special ceremony at its Annual World Congress, which will take place from June 23 to 26 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

**Guidebook "I am setting up a non-governmental organisation in Poland" for Belarusians.** The Belarus Working Group in cooperation with the Association Klon/Jawor prepared [the guide](#) which "step by step" shows the procedure for registration of Belarusian NGOs in Poland, as well as experiences of foreigners in providing social activities in our country. The guide's authors believe that registration of juridical personality in Poland is a solution that in the long run will help fund Belarusian organisations using foreign funds.

**Anti-homophobia pickets banned in Minsk.** [LGBT Human Rights](#)

[Project 'GayBelarus'](#) was denied by Minsk City Executive Committee to hold pickets against homophobia in the government and opposition. The group asked city authorities to hold a picket near the office of BPF party to protest homophobic statements made by the party leader Alexander Streltsov.

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## **AD.NAK, 'Tell the Truth', Social Contracting – Belarus Civil Society Digest**

The most important civil society events in Belarus included the festival of Belarusian-language advertising, a civic campaign of Tell the Truth and arrests of its leaders as well as a number of training courses organised for civil society in Belarus.

**AD.NAK!** The 3rd Festival of Belarusian-language advertising and communications [AD.NAK!](#) opened its doors to members of the competitive program. The main objective of the 2012 festival is to give new impetus to the development of the advertising and communications market in Belarus. The idea for the festival belongs to the cultural campaign Budzma Belarusians! The organising partner of the festival is online resource Marketing.by.

**Civil contract with Tell the Truth.** The Tell the Truth campaign released a [video](#) titled Civil contract wins China's industrial park. The video explains in an accessible form how citizens can influence the government through a civil contract with the Tell the Truth campaign.

**Belarusian internet party.** According to [EuroBelarus](#), Facebook community [Belarusian Internet Party](#) is the most interesting and promising among Belarusian internet communities. The group was established to consolidate Belarusian society, the revival of interest in political debates, to discuss current issues and find possible ways to resolve them. As of 1 May, the number of participants was about 2,300. The group is represented in several social networks and on Facebook it has a few pages.

**Coalition of the six.** On 2 May, a meeting of the “coalition of six”, a group of opposition parties and movements, took place in Minsk. According to public information, issues concerning running in the parliamentary elections were not discussed. Instead, the coalition focused on the issues of Belarus' modernization and cooperation between political parties, NGOs, and the expert community. The experts of '[Solidarity with Belarus' Information Office](#) (Warsaw) commented on the meeting's results as "personal ambitions continue to outstrip strategic aims of the opposition".

**Belarusian Human Rights School.** The Belarusian Human Rights School, organised by the community of human rights organisations, announces a competition for participation in the [2012 Summer School on Human Rights](#). Under the program, participants will learn about the history and philosophy of human rights, as well as the methods and tools of protection at the national and international levels. The School invites participation from young Belarusians of 18-25 years old interested in the field of human rights. The Program takes place in Vilnius (Lithuania), at the Belarusian Human Rights House.

**Rally of wheelchair-bound disabled persons.** On 5 May, a rally organised by [the Republican Association of Wheelchair-Bound Disabled Persons](#), devoted to the support of the international movement of disabled people for equal rights and against discrimination, was held in Minsk. About 100 people with posters were talking about their rights and problems, and about the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. A cat in the cage became the symbol of the meeting. The poster read, "I'm OK, I live in a cage".

**Opening of the cycling season in Minsk.** On 6 May, the opening of the 2012 bike season took place in Minsk. [A Traditional spring sports Festival](#) was organised by the website poehali.net, the Federation of Adventure Races and Minsk cycling organization. The festival programme included competitions for cross country, figure driving, and orienteering, and contests for children. Registration and participation were free.

**A new network of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).** For the first time in Belarus, CSOs working in the field of preventing domestic violence will join the network. The network has been created to enhance the role of CSOs in the prevention and combating domestic violence in Belarus by increasing their capacity to conduct preventive work and to provide expert assistance to victims of domestic violence. The institute meeting for the network members is to be held on 26 May. *According to the [BASW](#) newsletter.*

**HIV awareness.** Between 7-21 May, [the photo exhibition](#) "HIV awareness" will be held in Minsk. The purpose of the photo project is to reduce stigma and discrimination against HIV-positive people. The photo project is part of the Message information and cultural campaign, implemented by the Belarusian NGO Positive Movement and supported by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

**Trip to Tbilisi for higher education specialists.** The



Brussels-based Office for a Democratic Belarus together with the Office of European Expertise and Communications (Minsk) is [organizing a trip to Tbilisi](#) for 5-6 Belarusian specialists in the field of higher education under a program titled The EU and Belarus: Sharing Experience. During the visit Belarusian specialists will be able to establish contacts with colleagues from leading universities in Tbilisi, to learn about local universities' experience of their transition to the Bologna system. The trip will take place in early June 2012.

**Training courses on writing proposals for NSA/LA program.** The Office of European Expertise and Communications (Minsk) is organising a [series of training courses](#) titled Development and Submission of Project Proposals to European Commission Competition "Non-state actors and local authorities (NSA/LA)" for representatives of governmental and non-profit organisations, and local authorities. The closest training course will be held in Vitsebsk, on 12-13 May.

## □Interaction between State and Civil Society

**Andrei Dzmitryieu and Mikhail Pashkevich sentenced to 10 days arrest.** The Smaliavichy district court sentenced [Andrei Dzmitryieu and Mikhail Pashkevich](#), activists of the Tell the Truth civil campaign, to 10 days arrest. The activists were accused of violating the rules for holding mass events for a meeting of summer houses owners in the Smaliavichy district. They protested against the construction of a Chinese-Belarusian industrial park on the territory of nearby villages.

**Presidential administration thanks opposition activist.** Jan Dziarzhautsau, a Belarusian Popular Front activist from Vitebsk, received a formal response from the presidential administration written in Belarusian [thanking him for his active civic position](#). Mr. Dziarzhautsau complained to the presidential administration against local public officials, who refused to respond to written inquiries in

Belarusian.

**MoU on cooperation in environmental protection.** On 8 May, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Belarus, the non-governmental organisation APB BirdLife Belarus and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) of the United Kingdom signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU) on cooperation in environmental protection. The memorandum envisages information exchange on climate change and biodiversity as well as building partnership in environmental protection.

**State social contracting develops in regions.** The regional executive committee in Slutsk has [called for social projects](#) aimed at preventing HIV in their districts. The competition invites participation from registered non-profit organizations, except political parties. The selected projects will be funded by the executive committee and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Earlier the same social projects' contests were announced in Zhlobin, Svetlahorsk, Salihorsk and Osipovichy. All competitions are held at the initiative and with advisory support of the NGO ACT.

**Hearing of Syarhey Kavalenka's appeal.** The hearing of [Syarhey Kavalenka's](#) appeal against his prison sentence will resume in the Vitsebsk Regional Court on 18 May. He is currently being held in solitary confinement in a detention centre in Vitsyebsk.

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# NGO Assembly, Here you can Be Served in Belarusian – Civil Society Digest

NGO Assembly was refused to hold its Congress the last minute.

“Here you can be served in Belarusian” campaign kicks off in Gomel. The Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities presents its survey on attitudes towards people with disabilities. EHU returns to Minsk – for the sake of an art presentation.

**Congress of the Assembly of NGOs cancelled.** The 7th Congress of the Assembly of pro-democratic NGOs, which was to be held on May 5-6 at the Minsk International Educational Centre (IBB), [did not take place](#). IBB management referred to the directions from Minsk city authorities and cancelled all former arrangements two days before the Congress.

Representatives of nearly 200 NGOs from all over Belarus were aiming to attend the Congress in order to discuss problems and further steps in development of the country's civil society. Now the organising committee of the Congress considers postponing the event further to June. *According to the Assembly of NGOs newsletter.*

**Belarusian stickers for the stores.** Civil campaign "Paperwork in Belarusian" starts a new phase of popularisation of the Belarusian language in the service and advertising. The activists developed a special sticker that says "[Here, you can be served in Belarusian.](#)" The stickers will be offered to the stores, ready to communicate with customers in Belarusian. Now the new initiative is tested in Gomel.

**EHU project in Minsk.** On May 03-25, the Minsk Gallery "Ÿ" hosts an art and educational project [Artes Liberales](#). The project starts with an exhibition of design works of students of European Humanities University. During three weeks the exposition will vary according to the agenda of the project, implemented by EHU students and teachers.

**Viasna's new editions.** Human rights Centre ["Viasna" marked its 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#) with a presentation of two books – a photo album "For the Right to Elect: Portraits of Convicts" featuring photographs of participants in the post-election demonstration of December 2010 and a book "Our Viasna. History via people". The presentation was held on May 02 in Minsk and was attended by journalists, human rights activists, public figures, former political prisoners and their relatives.

**IPM Research Center** launched [a new version of its website](#) with the latest information on the studies of the Belarusian economy, economic reviews and forecasts developments in the economy, as well as announcements of IPM Research Center events.

**"Free Word" Contest Winners.** The day before the World Press Freedom Day, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) administrative board announced the winners of the yearly journalistic contest "[Free Word](#)". The [awarding ceremony](#) took place in Minsk on May 03. Not only representatives of the independent, but also of the state-owned media have become the award winners, which illustrates BAJ's aspiration to keep the professional standards in the whole journalistic community in Belarus.

**Meeting on regional development and agriculture.** On May 03, in Minsk, the "Clearing House" project conducted the working group meeting on regional development and agriculture for Belarusian organisations and initiatives. The discussion on the perspectives of regional and local development was followed by presenting different opportunities to participate

in EU programmes and calls for proposals for organisations and initiatives working in the sphere of regional and local development. *According to the Clearing House newsletter.*

**Small projects competition** is announced for educational initiatives aimed at expanding the ideas of democracy and human rights, increasing civic competence, and the development of critical thinking among children, youth, teachers, parents, local communities. Project budget should not be more than \$500. *According to [belngo.info](http://belngo.info) newsletter.*

**Invitation to event in Brussels.** On May 08, in Brussels, the Solidarity with Belarus Office (Warsaw, Poland) invites to attend [a discussion on the current situation in Belarus: Lukashenka is ready to start a new game with the EU, who defines the rules?](#) The leading Belarusian experts will share their views on the current political, economic and the human rights situation and the state of affairs in the media sector. The discussion will be followed by a presentation of the book 'Belarus in Focus: through the eyes of international journalists' representing 14 winning articles at an international competition Belarus in Focus.

**The sixth stage of the German-Belarusian partnership.** On May 01, Support Program for Belarus launched the sixth stage of the German-Belarusian partnership. As part of the stage the [Support Program for Belarus of German Federal Government](#) announces a call for proposals. The aim of the Program is to support non-state actors such as NGOs, networks and other institutionalised structures involved in the processes of sustainable development and promoting reforms at the national and regional level.

**Information Meeting on NSA-LA Call for Proposals for Belarus.** On May 11, the EU Delegation to Belarus will organise an information meeting on the ongoing call for proposals "[Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development: In-country Operations for Belarus](#)". The session will take place in Minsk,

at the Hotel Viktoria, from 11.00 to 12.30.

**Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities** conducted a [study](#) to identify some aspects of attitudes towards people with disabilities in Belarus. The study was made by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) and the Centre of European Transformation (CET). Research results show that the public consciousness of Belarusians is determined with an archaic charity view both on disability and people with disabilities.

**Disability rally.** On May 05, [Republican Association of Wheelchair Users](#) conducts a rally aimed at supporting the international disability movement in Europe for equal rights and against discrimination, paying attention to barrier-free environment for disabled people. The event will be held at the Friendship Park in Minsk, from 12.00 to 15.00.

**Week against homophobia.** On May 12-17, a human rights project "[Gay Belarus](#)" organises a series of educational activities titled "Action Week Against Homophobia in Belarus 2012." The events are devoted to the International Day against homophobia and transphobia, which is celebrated on May 17.

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**Svetlana Naumova Awards –**

# Belarus Civil Society Digest

□ In the context of the high level political scandals a surprising number of new civil society developments takes place in Belarus. Belarusian NGOs launched new campaigns moving on social responsibility and institutionalising its networks. The civil sector activities covered education, business, targeted better social inclusion as well as police misconduct.

**Svetlana Naumova awards.** On 1 March, [the awards ceremony](#) named in honour of Svetlana Naumova, a prominent political scholar who passed away last year, took place in Minsk. The award was established by the civil campaign "Tell the Truth" and given in three categories – "Journalism", "Analytics" and "Hope." This year winners are Svetlana Kalinkina, chief editor of the Narodnaya Volya Valeria Kastsyuhova, editor of the website "Nashe mneniye", and Nasta Palazhanka, deputy chairwoman of the "Young Front".

**National platform institutionalised.** 34 Belarusian civil society organisations signed a Memorandum of Cooperation and became [permanent members of EaP CSF National Platform](#). Now they have the opportunity to vote on the procedural and strategic issues of the National Platform. Among the signers there are Consortium "EuroBelarus", Ecodom, Legal Transformation Centre, Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers, Association for Long-Life Education, Human Rights Center "Viasna", RADA, etc.

## Education & Research

**OEEC round table.** On February 29, Office of European expertise and communication (OEEC) together with the Brussels-based "Office for Democratic Belarus" held a round table "[European support for higher education in Belarus](#)" in Minsk. The debate between the governmental bodies and NGOs has shown that there

is no unity in the understanding of the principles of the Bologna process in the Belarusian academic community.

**Hrodna Center "Third Sector" presents an educational program BY\_HUB.** On 17-18 March Hrodna [hosts](#) a training "How Internet technologies can help to achieve personal and organisational goals", which launches an educational program [BY\\_HUB](#). The program invites to participation NGO representatives, journalists, bloggers who are interested in learning of modern communication technologies.

**International Congress of Belarusian Studies.** On 28-30 September International Congress of Belarusian Studies will [take place](#) in Kaunas (Lithuania). It is an annual meeting of Belarusian and foreign scientists, experts, analysts, representatives of public institutions engaged in Belarusian studies. International Congress of Belarusian Studies is organised by a Consortium of academic and expert organisations of Belarus, Lithuania, Poland and other countries, including Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere", BISS, Internet newspaper "New Europe", etc.

## Business

**Assembly of business circles.** On 29 February, Minsk hosted XIII Assembly of Business Circles of Belarus "[To modernization – Together.](#)" The event was attended by businessmen and representatives of 46 business associations. The event was organised by Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers, Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship, with the support of the Council for Business Development. The Assembly adopted a draft "National Business Platform of Belarus – 2012" developed to facilitate improvement of business climate in the country.

**The right on social responsibility.** On 28 February, International Socio-Economic Foundation "Idea" conducted a



talk show "[1% Project: The Right to Social Responsibility](#)". The talk show's participants discussed the need for a law on social responsibility, and also got acquainted with the results of national research "Social Responsibility of the Modern Belarusian Business" commissioned by the Fund at the end of 2011. The talk-show, [covered on the national television](#), was attended by representatives of business companies, NGOs, government agencies and [journalists](#).

## Police

**The chiefs of the colonies can be added to the EU blacklist.** Non-profit institution [Platforma](#) declares that it will ask EU to include in a travel ban list representatives of prisons and detention centres, involved in torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against Belarusians.

**Legal experts, rights defenders criticise Belarusian police.** On 1 March, prominent legal experts and rights defenders voiced criticism of the Belarusian police at a [conference in Minsk](#). In particular, Mikhail Pastukhow, a former judge of the Constitutional Court, stressed that the Belarusians 'must think about how to make the police safe for the public, how to make them serve public interests and law exclusively.'

## Social inclusion

**Review "Poverty and Social Inclusion in Belarus."** The most important social issues were analysed in a pilot study, "Poverty and Social Inclusion in Belarus", prepared by economists of [the IPM Research Center](#). Economists have analysed the poverty level in Belarus, identified the most vulnerable groups, and also examined the effectiveness of existing social transfers.

**Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities launches a No Barriers banner campaign.** On 1 March 2012 the Disability Rights Office launched a [No Barriers banner campaign](#) on four major

Belarusian websites: tut.by, ej.by,naviny.by and interfax.by. The banners will appear on a daily basis on at least two of these websites (rotating), except for weekends and holidays. Over the next month the total of four banners will call Belarusian citizens' attention to mental and physical barriers, as well as issues that persons of disabilities are facing in employment and education.

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## **New Charity Technologies and Education Initiatives – Belarus Civil Society Digest**

This week is marked with significant intensification of civil society activities, in particular in the field of human rights. Civil society organisations are adopting new charity technologies through online tools and attempt advocacy attempts, and it seems that governmental bodies began to make available draft laws for public discussion.

### **Challenges of EU strategy towards Belarus discussed in Minsk.**

On February 18, a 'round table' initiated by Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies [took place](#) in Minsk. Its agenda included the challenges of the EU – Belarus relations and their development, as well as the impact that the visa ban imposed on some representatives of the Belarusian regime has on the EU – Belarus relations. The round table was attended by

about 20 members of the Belarusian expert community, civil society and human rights organisations.

**Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs celebrates its 15th anniversary.** On February 22, the [Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus](#), the largest association of Belarusian NGOs, celebrates its 15th anniversary. Now the Assembly consists of more than 300 organisations – both registered organisations and unregistered initiatives. After three unsuccessful attempts to register in Belarus the Assembly got a legal status in Lithuania (in July 2011). This year VII Congress of the Assembly is to be held.

**School of Educators-2012.** Education Centre "POST" within the framework of the "Flying University" program conducts a training course "[School of Educators](#)". The School is to represent POST's experience and the concepts in the field of informal education. It will also provide an opportunity to get acquainted with some successful practices of the educational work, to evaluate their effectiveness, as well as develop trainers' skills. The course will be held in Minsk, from February to June 2012 in the format of interactive seminars, workshops and lectures.

**Distance learning for lawyers in nonprofit law.** Republican NGO "[United Way](#)" invites students and the NGOs members to participate in the e-learning for lawyers. The program includes a wide range of issues relating to the legal regulation of non-profit organisations. The course is practical and considers the real issues faced by nonprofit organisations. Study period is March-December 2012.

**EHREL in action.** On February 16-19, the Belarusian Human Rights House hosted a working meeting and training within the framework of the project Electronic Human Rights Education for Lawyers ([EHREL](#)). Coordinators, experts and project partners discussed the key issues and perspectives of the project. The

curriculum of the project, carried out simultaneously for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, aims at teaching jurists and lawyers professional use of international and constitutional law in the jurisprudence.

**In-depth course on human rights.** [Belarusian Human Rights School](#) announces a competition for participation in the in-depth course on human rights, aimed at deepening the knowledge of motivated young people in the field of human rights, enhance their practical application in the professional and public spheres. Young Belarusians of 20-30 years old, who have a basic knowledge of human rights are invited to participation in the program. The course will be held in March-June 2012, at the Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius (Lithuania).

**School of Local Governance.** Educational NGO "Leu Sapieha Foundation" within the framework of the "Flying University" holds the [School of Local Governance](#)." The School will present the Foundation's long-term achievements in the field of local governance. The School will be held in Minsk in March-June 2012.

**Study tour for Belarusian lawyers in Lithuania.** Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and the Institute for Development and Training EDUCATIO announced a call for applications to participate in a study tour for Belarusian lawyers in Lithuania "[Exchange jurisprudence in favor of the Belarusian people](#)." The project goal is to gather a group of Belarusian lawyers, advocates and people involved in legal issues in the political parties / NGOs, in order to enable them to review the legal system of Lithuania and other European countries.

**Charity online store.** Charitable NGO "Belarusian Children's Hospice" has launched a charity online store [www.takprosto.by](http://www.takprosto.by), where everyone can put their goods, which can be bought by other online users. The money from the deal goes to the bank account of the organisation.

**On line service of charitable meetings.** Online auction "[Mae cэHC](#)" was launched in October 2011 and has already [collected](#) about 60 million rubles and sold more than three thousand meetings. The project offers two ways to participate in a charity – one can fill out a questionnaire and to offer himself/ herself as a lot, and then go to a meeting with the winner of the auction, and also one can buy a meeting with a pleasant person. The money raised organisers give to charity – usually for children with serious illnesses.

**Web platform for national monitoring.** [Crisisby.net](#) developed by a group of Internet activists from different cities and countries, is a platform for national monitoring of crisis events in Belarus. The platform allows gathering and organising messages from multiple sources, applying them on the map, presenting in the form of graphs and tables. Everyone can send a message; post a link to the text, video or photos.

**New office of EuroBelarus and Forum Syd in Vilnius.** On February 21, [in Vilnius a joint office](#) of the International Consortium "EuroBelarus" and the Swedish organisation "Forum Syd" has been opened. The event was attended by leaders of EuroBelarus and Forum Syd, as well as representatives of diplomatic missions, international organisations and Belarusian NGOs in Lithuania. The purpose of the new Office is the promotion of civil society in Belarus.

**Press-conference of the DisRights Office.** On February 28, [Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities](#) conducts a press-conference in Minsk. The main purpose of the event is to summarise outcomes of the regional stage of the Office campaign. The speakers are Sergei Drozdovskiy, the Office coordinator, and Jamie Bolling, Executive Director of the European Network for Independent Living (ENIL). The event starts at 12:00, at the hotel "Yubileyny".

**International Conference on alternative methods of rehabilitation.** Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs in

conjunction with the Branch of the Russian State Social University in Minsk [invite](#) to take part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Scientific Conference on alternative methods of rehabilitation of children and adults with disabilities, HIV/AIDS, cancer and other serious illnesses. The Conference will be held on 30-31 May 2012 in Minsk.

**Volunteers wanted for building environmentally friendly houses.** [International NGO "Ecodom"](#) (Minsk), together with the charity organisation "Houses instead of Chernobyl" (Germany) invites to participation in building of environmentally friendly houses in Lepel district, Vitebsk region. The project needs in builders on a volunteer basis (11 people) and translators of German (5 people).

**Invitation to discussion about Legislation on Philanthropy.**

Legal Transformation Centre invites to discuss the necessity to develop legislation on philanthropy in Belarus. For this purpose, the Centre's web site has created [a special section](#) with documents on international experience in the legal regulation of charitable organisations, reference to media publication, etc.

**Experts of civil society involved in the drafting of the pension reform.** In March 2012, the government should get [a pension reform project](#), developed by independent Belarusian experts, including representatives of the Business Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers. The experts are going to stir up the Belarusian authorities, and, above all, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection regarding the issue of reforming the current pension system.

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# Visa Ban, Stuffed Animals Protest, Civil Society Champions – Belarus Civil Society Digest

The debate launched by the Office for a Democratic Belarus regarding the fine-tuning of the criteria for applying the EU visa sanctions towards Belarusian officials was the most discussed topic for Belarusian civic activists this week.

**Debate Regarding the Visa Ban.** The initiative voiced by the Brussels-based [Office for a Democratic Belarus](#) to fine-tune the criteria for applying the EU visa ban lists to Belarusian officials went on to create a wide discussion in Belarusian electronic media. Among the most vocal debate participants are political analyst [Yury Drakhahrust](#), BISS academic director [Alexei Pikulik](#), ODB Head [Olga Stuzhinskaya](#), former presidential candidate [Ales Mikhalevich](#), Head of the Nash Dom campaign [Olga Karach](#), Head of Human Rights Alliance [Lyudmila Gryaznova](#), Head of Free Theatre [Nikolai Khalezin](#), and others.

**Tell the Truth youth wing organizes a stuffed animal protest.** On 10 February the youth wing of the Tell the Truth campaign organized a protest in front of the Minsk City Executive Committee, the participants of which were [stuffed animals](#) holding different signs such as "Where is freedom of the press?" "Alexander, free the people!" and others.

**Civil Society Champions-2011.** On 7 February, the Assembly of NGOs held a third annual ceremony titled [Civil Society Champions-2011](#). The winners are Gallery Ź (Venue of the Year),

People's Journalist (Initiative of the Year), Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Registration of the Year), Center for Development of Voluntarism (Refusal of Registration of the Year), Campaign to collect signatures against adoption of the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations (Campaign of the Year), Strike of employees of Barysau Housing and Communal Services (Regional Event/Action of the Year), website Prokopovi.ch (Creativity of the Year), and Ales Byalyatski (Civil Society Leader of the Year).

**The Public Bologna Committee statement regarding EU sanctions on university rectors.** In its [statement](#), the Public Bologna Committee campaigning for education reforms in Belarus condemns the country's system of higher learning as a "tool of the political persecution of dissidents" and stresses that the rectors blacklisted by the EU have ordered the expulsion of students on political grounds and deserve punishment.

**Entrepreneurs advocate for introduction of arbitration courts.** On 10 February the Association of Small and Medium Business together with a local chapter of United Civic Party held a round-table in Molodechno on issues of [business development and elections](#). Business lawyers argued for the introduction of arbitration courts as a more efficient and cost-effective dispute resolution mechanism.

**Business associations want to be heard by the authorities.** On 9 February at a press conference in Minsk Chairman of Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (MCUEE) [Vladimir Kariagin reported](#) that only 21 out of 104 points of last year's National Business Platform of Belarus were fully implemented in 2011, while another 31 proposals are in the final stages of implementation. The business community has shifted some non-implemented proposals to a new platform in the hope that their appeals will be heard by the authorities.

**Web portal Green Belarus gathers signatures in support of the Park of the 40th Anniversary of October.** The [Belarusian Green](#)



[Portal](#) has started collecting signatures for a petition in defense of the city parks. The collective message will be forwarded to the governmental bodies, which are working with electronic appeals from 2012.

**RAIK public report.** For the first time the Republican Association of Disabled Persons in Wheelchairs released its [Public Annual Report](#). The report includes a description of all activities and achievements in 2011. By publishing an annual report, RAIK aims "to show the openness of the organization, to tell about its successes".

**Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continues its regional No Barriers campaign.** On 8 February the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [held](#) a public discussion in Vitebsk under the No Barriers campaign. Two more regional public events are planned in Mogilev (15 February) and Gomel (6 February) with a final event scheduled in Minsk on 21 February.

**International conference on children's issues.** On 15-17 February, Minsk will [host](#) the 3rd International conference on The partnership of government and civil society in Belarus to develop a system of protecting children from violence. The organizer of the Conference is the international NGO Understanding.

**Children-topic conference in Gomel.** On 4 February in Gomel, a scientific-practical conference, [Solving Together the Problems of Gomel's children](#), was held. The conference organizers were the Belarusian Association of Women Lawyers and the Association and Gomel children and youth ASDEMO. Among the speakers there was a parliamentary deputy, doctors, teachers, and NGO representatives. The conference materials will be published.

**Tell the Truth announces the Civil Contract.** On 8 February, the Tell the Truth campaign [introduced](#) the concept for its

activities in 2012. The campaign plans to carry out activities under the Civil Contract, i.e. it agrees to be a guide "for one's interest in solving specific problems, contribute to the realization of one's ideas and provide support to one's endeavors" (Andrei Dmitriev). The campaign announced a new phase of its activity: a willingness to decide national problems via solving local ones.

**Press Photography in Belarus-2011 album is released.** On 9 February, at the Gallery "Ź" a presentation of the [Press Photography in Belarus-2011](#) was held. The album includes more than 200 works from 28 Belarusian photographers.

**Competition for young Belarusians.** Young Christian Democrats have announced a competition for young people to carry out [a joint project with European youth](#). The main purpose of the competition is to give an opportunity for Belarusian students to communicate directly with students from elsewhere in Europe.

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