

# Belarusian Espionage: Abroad and at Home

On 10 November the General Prosecutor's Office of Lithuania reported that a Vilnius court will try a Lithuanian citizen on espionage charges. The Lithuanian authorities claim that he cooperated with Belarusian security services.

As other cases from recent years prove, Belarusian intelligence is quite interested in its immediate neighbours – Poland and Lithuania. Belarusians usually seek military intelligence and generally probe opportunities to advance Belarusian economic interest in these countries.

Belarus's EU neighbours regard Belarusian intelligence as being, more or less, on par with its Russian counterpart. However, despite close ties since Soviet times and cooperation agreements, Belarusians may have a separate agenda, as Lukashenka's attempts to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

Inside Belarus, recent public spying cases have involved only local citizens. As either Andrej Hajdukoŭ's or priest Uladzislaŭ Lazar's cases show, the authorities can use espionage charges to intimidate the opposition or independent institutions.

## **A Spy with Belarusian Roots**

A former worker of Oro Navigacija, a Lithuanian air traffic control agency, is suspected of committing espionage against Lithuania for Belarus's security services. He may receive up to 15 years in prison as a result. A Vilnius circuit court will hold his trial in January. At the moment the suspect's name remains unknown.

The investigators claims that the suspect secretly photographed documents in his office, including various objects tied to Lithuania's military and civilian infrastructure, and then proceeded to hand them to the General Staff of the Belarusian armed forces. "He gathered and passed on to Belarus information on the Lithuanian armed forces, its state enterprises, objects of strategic importance for national security in Lithuania", stated a press release from the General Prosecutor's Office.

The Chief of Lithuania's Security Department Gediminas Grina noted that Russia could also use this information, because Belarus and Russia have a military alliance and share intelligence data.

Having Belarusian roots, the suspect visited Belarus a couple of times a year to see his relatives and friends. His two sons have business partners in Russia, and regularly go there on to tend to their affairs. These facts could easily become rounds for Lithuania's own security services to become interested in him.

However, espionage scandals more often than not arise Belarus's other neighbour – Poland. In recent years several incidents have occurred with Belarus citizens being charged with spying.

#### **Belarus Intelligence: Poland in its Sights**

The Polish Agency of Internal Security in its annual 2013 report noted that Russian and Belarusian spies have shown the highest level of activity in Poland. Russians are interested mostly in the energy sector, such as liquid gas and nuclear power, as well as EU and NATO's eastern policy.

For Belarus, the report says, Poland is a priority country for intelligence gathering. Belarusian spies search for markets to sell Belarusian goods, firms that can invest in Belarus, possibilities of becoming beneficiaries for EU assistance

programmes and assess the nation's military capacity.

In March 2014 the Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza reported that the Polish Internal Security Agency detained two Belarus citizens with charges of spying for Russia. One of them, a Military Attache of Belarus in Poland Dzmitry Žukaŭ, took pictures of a NATO training centre in Bydgoszcz. Another Polish newspaper, Gazeta Prawna, added that he sought contacts with veteran societies, retired soldiers, and youth scout groups and often visited their gatherings and events.



A few month before this episode, Polish counter-intelligence detained a Hrodna resident named Jury, who also took pictures of military-related objects.

Another Belarus citizen, known as Aliaksandr, remains in Polish custody for already two years now. He apparently cooperated with officers from the shuttered Polish Military Information Service.

They regarded him as a source in the Belarus security services and paid him \$300,000 for his assistance. But a subsequent investigation proved that he was misinforming the Poles and carrying out the orders of his bosses in Minsk.

### **Spies inside Belarus**

In 2011 the Belarusian KGB reported that it had terminated the activity of 23 agents of its foreign security service. However, there was never ever any concrete cases data that appeared in the media. The people whom the authorities publicly charged with espionage or treason were all Belarusian citizens.

In 2012, the Belarusian KGB published information on two Belarus citizens, Aliaksandr Fenzeliaŭ and Jaŭhien Kačura, who were allegedly spying for Lithuania. The KGB detained a

Lithuanian intelligence officer and two Belarusians who passed to him secret information about something related to the military. The agency was able to prove their case by gathering information and, later on, the suspects confirmed their guilt during trial. The court found them guilty and imposed a 10 and 8 year sentence on them, respectively.



Another case to surface was that of Andrej Hajdukoŭ, one that appears to be politically motivated. Opposition activist and leader of the youth organisation “Union of Young Intellectuals”, he was detained in Viciebsk by the KGB in November 2012 and faced charges of treason.

When taking a look at the KGB's official position on Hajdukoŭ, his tactics look rather ridiculous in an era of digital technology. For one, he allegedly hid secret information for foreign agents in a mail drop box. Nevertheless, he was tried and sentenced to 1.5 years in prison on a less serious charge – an attempt to establish contacts with a foreign agency, or in his case, with the US embassy.

In July of this year Lukashenka revealed information that one of the officers serving in Belarusian security agency, “was connected to foreign states via a Catholic Church representative. He not only passed information on to them, but also caused trouble for our people who were working abroad”.

Soon, information appeared that the KGB had arrested the catholic priest [Uladzislau Lazar](#) on charges of state treason. After spending half a year under investigation, he was released due to the prosecutor's inability to prove his case.

As these cases show, the charges mounted against individuals by the Belarusian authorities sometimes appear to be more an issue of exerting political pressure on the opposition or independent institutions (like Catholic Church). Real

instances of the apprehension of foreign spies remain unknown to the public, although the KGB continues to boast about its achievements in this arena.

According to the words of Polish and Lithuanian officials, these countries (and perhaps the whole west) regard Belarusian intelligence as being one and the same as Russian intelligence. They continue to work in close cooperation and are committed to sharing any and all needed information. Indeed, such agreements have legally existed since the early 1990s, and these close ties have continued to exist since soviet times, when they were originally established..

However, as the retired KGB lieutenant-colonel Valer Kostka said in an interview to Charter97.org web site, "if there is a common goal, the special services make a deal over it, no matter if it is CIA, Russian FSB or Belarusian KGB. It is a complicated hidden mechanism. If a certain interest exists, Lukashenka will make an agreement with Putin, so Belarusian intelligence will cooperate with Russians, and vice versa".

This means that Belarusian intelligence and special services may have their own agenda separate from Russia's, with which Lukashenka can attempt to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

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## **Economic Troubles Deepen and Regime Consolidates Before Elections – Polish Press**

# Digest

The Polish press most frequently reported on the [teddy bear affair](#) over the last weeks. The newspapers follow the actions undertaken by the Belarusian authorities aimed at the investigation and punishment of those related to it. Other issues covered include the September parliamentary elections, the opposition, the regime's internal games and the consequences of the Belarusian economic crisis.

The Teddy Bear issue was broadly covered by the Polish press. [Polska The Times](#) reports on the repercussions aimed at the officials responsible for the air zone security. Two generals Ihar Rachkouski and Dzmitry Pakhmielkin have already been dismissed for the alleged failure of their duties which resulted in the light aircraft entering Belarusian territory from which the individuals on the plane threw out the teddy bears over the country.

## The Parliamentary Elections

[Gazeta Wyborcza](#) reports that an "electoral war" is taking place in Belarus. According to the newspaper, Lukashenka's regime, through the repression of the opposition and intimidation of its own political apparatus, is about to mobilise its political apparatus. The newspaper suggests that these actions are accompanied by an intensified anti-corruption campaign aimed at the administration's employees to signal that the repression can touch anyone who is against the regime.

While the regime consolidates itself, the political opposition remains divided over whether boycott of the elections or participation in them would be the best. [Gazeta Wyborcza](#) reports also on the formation of the election committees and low number of opposition representatives, which is less than in the last parliamentary elections in 2008. It highlights the

fact that according to political activists, opposition candidates are often not registered.

[Polska The Times](#) informs that Alexandr Milinkievich, a leader of the For Freedom movement, announced his intention to take part in the parliamentary elections campaign. In the aftermath of his failure to win the 2006 elections, he did not take part in the following elections. The newspaper cites Milinkievich arguing that his decision to actively campaign in the September elections is due to the fact that the Belarusians should understand the necessity for change and have a sense of responsibility for the country. The newspaper also stated that there is no unity among the political opposition in Belarus in regard to their strategy for participation in the elections.

[Gazeta Wyborcza](#) informs that two other ex-candidates of the presidential elections will not take part in in the electoral campaign, Mykola Statkevich and Ales Michalevich. The chairman of the Central Election Commission of Belarus, Lidia Yermoshina, explains that neither have created groups that could collect the necessary signatures for their lists. With regards to Statkevich, she explains that the prisoner could not apply for registration of such an initiative group. Michalevich, on the other hand, does not live in Belarus and has a standing international warrant from Belarus.

### **One Day in the Life of the Opposition**

[Gazeta Wyborcza](#) reports that President Lukashenka signed the amnesty bill. Thank to this bill, over 2000 people will be released. However, the independent media suggests that no political prisoners will be set free. Among those who will be embraced by the amnesty might be people sentenced for small petty crimes, pregnant women, and under some conditions also those sentenced for abuse of power and position as well as others. Elsewhere the newspaper reports on Lukashenka's preparations for the upcoming elections.

[Wprost](#) suggests that the pressure upon independent activists in Belarus has increased over the last few months. The Belarusian courts charged Dzmitry Wus and Andrei Mouchan due to their anti – regime activities. It claims that imprisonment of the youth and political activists is on the rise as are bans on leaving Belarus. The newspaper comments on the new wave of political prisoners, like Vasil Parfiankou, arrested for 6 months for breaking his terms of release.

## **Poles in Belarus**

[Newsweek](#) deals with the issue of the imprisonment of Andrzej Poczobut, a chairman of the Governing Council of the Union of Poles in Belarus, unrecognised by official Minsk. He has been charged with the defamation of President Lukashenka. It further reports the opinion shared by many independent media outlets that the authorities treat the issue as a bargaining chip in regard to relations with Poland and a signal to journalists to stay quiet leading up to the upcoming parliamentary elections.

## **Economy Spreads Panic**

[Rzeczpospolita](#) takes a closer look at the recent mass purchase of foreign currency by Belarusians, despite the fact that authorities have established certain barriers against it. According to the newspaper, it will lead to the bankrupting of the economy, though potentially not as severe as last year's crisis. The purchase of foreign currency in banks increased in June to 20.6 per cent. An increase in inflation and other negative tendencies in the economy can spread even more panic among Belarusians.

[Rzeczpospolita](#) argues also that the Belarusian authorities falsify statistics on the Belarusian economy and hide the true level of unemployment in Belarus. By proving this statement using the data of the World Bank, the newspaper suggested that its level is even seven times higher than what the official

data presents. According to the newspaper, there are more problems related to the low benefits payments and unemployment registration procedure, which discourage jobless people from searching for a job. Moreover, lack of interest in the privatisation, both by the heads of state-owned companies, but also by workers, are among the reasons why the Belarusian economy has lost its dynamism over recent years.

[Wprost](#) comments on the economic situation in Belarus. It reports that Minsk asked the Anti – Crisis Fund of the Eurasian Economic Union for the next tranche of its loan. It noted that the sum of the three previous tranches is estimated at \$1.68bn. At the same time, the authorities also declared increases in the prices of communal service (utilities) and transportation. Wprost also pointed out that in 2011, Belarus was credited for a \$3bn loan from the EurAsEc.

### **Social Effects of the Crisis**

[Rzeczpospolita](#) writes about the social effects of the economic crisis, calling it 'Belarus' minor stabilisation'. It argues that the crisis has resulted in further economic and political dependence on Russia, and furthermore it has also led to the impoverishment of society. The financial assistance from Moscow, particularly lower prices for gas, duty free oil and the purchase of Beltransgas by Gazprom, helped Minsk to manage inflation. At the same time, the current economic situation has led to Belarusians losing their political engagement and interest in the upcoming elections, which is the real factor that could eventually bring about significant changes.

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# Belarus Elections in the Focus of Polish Press

The recent presidential elections in Belarus have received significant attention in Polish press. All major media such as Gazeta Wyborcza and Rzeczpospolita followed the events related to the elections. In Poland, those events bring back the memories of oppression, lack of freedom and poverty of 1980s. Back then, free elections resulted in mass beatings and arrests just like in Belarus these days.



It was a Polish politician Jerzy Buzek, the President of the EU Parliament, who was the first top European official to ring the bell about major election fraud, massive beatings and arrests in Belarus. Mr Buzek requested an immediate release of all detained and in particular presidential candidates.

Polish press began to follow Belarusian events closely as they unfolded. On the 21st December Gazeta Wyborcza, the leading Polish daily, wrote that Lukashenko did not win the elections. It quoted Radoslaw Sikorski, Foreign Minister of Poland, that in reality Mr Lukashenko received between 30 and 40% of the votes. Mr Sikorski said that perhaps that was the reason for such a violent and irrational reaction which followed the elections. "Someone who wins honestly does not have to jail its competitors in prisons"- Sikorski stated in his interview.

Later that month, Gazeta Wyborcza described Mr Sikorski statements as "the strongest blow to the reputation of the Belarusian leader. " It emphasized that none of the foreign politicians have denied Lukashenko's victory. Other foreign leaders only admitted that the elections were not fair.

According to the Polish press, Adam Rotfeld, a former Polish

Foreign Minister, said that he was certain Mr Lukashenko did not win in the first round of the elections. He thought that Mr Lukashenko remains in power because he realizes that whoever comes to power after him, would hold him responsible for his misconduct such as the death of the disappeared opponents of the regime. "He who has blood on his hands, obviously is afraid of this responsibility" – said Rotfeld.

Mr Sikorski also spoke over the telephone with Olga Nieklaeva – the wife of Vladimir Nieklaev, an opposition presidential candidate. He shared his words of encouragement with Olga Nieklaeva according to the website of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Gazeta.pl writes about Polish contribution to improve the situation in Belarus. Mr Bosacki, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed that Poland would double its support to Belarus from PLN 20 to 40 mln (around US\$13mln). The money is to be spend on helping the repressed, providing young Belarusians with scholarships, supporting mass media, radio and television such as Belsat broadcasting from Poland. According to Rzeczpospolita, the government is also considering abolishing visa fees for Belarusians, not only for Poland but also for the entire Schengen area.

Poland devoted more attention to the recent Belarus events than any other European country. It appears to be serious to commit significant resources to help democracy in Belarus. Poland is likely to play an active role in the EU institutions advocating sanctions against the Belarusian regime on one hand and stronger support for civil society in Belarus on the other hand.

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# Two Letters to Obama with One Subject: Russia



Last July, a number of European leaders, signed an [open letter](#) to Obama urging a more active and principle-driven role of the United States in Europe. Vaclav Havel, Lech Valensa and other former European presidents were worried about what they called the Russia's creeping intimidation and influence-peddling in the region.

Recalling the “realism” of Yalta conference which divided Europe for decades, the authors praised the US role during the Cold War and in opening the doors of NATO. In their opinion, role of the United States was crucial in NATO enlargement and the realization of the idea of united and free Europe at peace. The European leaders called for renaissance and strengthening of the role of NATO, creation of a special program for young leaders, relaxation of the U.S. visa regime and promotion of Europe's energy independence from Russia.

This week a similar letter was written from Belarus. Stanislau Shushkevich, the first Head of State of Belarus, and Ivonka Survila, President of the Rada of Belarus Democratic Republic-in-Exile, expressed concerns about Russia's economic and political pressure in their letter to President Obama. The authors called the United States to create an initiative similar to EU's Eastern Partnership, which would include the countries of the former Soviet Union into transatlantic cooperation.

Below is the text of the open letter from Belarus.

*Mister President!*

*On July 16, 2009, the Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza published an open letter to the administration of President Obama raising crucial issues pertaining to the Euroatlantic partnership. It was signed by some 22 foreign policy and security elites from the newer NATO and EU members--self-styled Central and Eastern European (CEE) intellectuals. Whether implicitly or explicitly, all the matters they touched on concern the dynamics of current and likely future events in their region of Europe vis-a-vis Russia. Their call for a reengaged, collaborative United States as a true partner with Europe in addressing concerns of the region was eloquent, accurate, and most timely.*

*Regrettably their letter omitted input, or at least signatures, of their counterparts from those Eastern European states which unfortunately do not at present enjoy the luxury (and security guarantees) of NATO and EU membership--Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Not coincidentally, they are the ones closest to Russia in Europe and the ones, in the cases of Belarus and Ukraine, having had by far the longest experience with Soviet Russian communism. That experience is of particularly crucial value now in the context of evolving developments and trends.*

*All the issues raised by the authors of the Open Letter published in Gazeta Wyborcza – and many, many more – apply even more vitally to these countries. Last year's Russo-Georgian conflict is no doubt the most graphic demonstration, but hardly the only one.*

*Moscow's economic blackmail, most recently, of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine to force them into the Kremlin's revisionist line of post-Soviet spheres of influence is a less publicized but no less real threat to their future. Periodic energy blackmail by Russia of all of six of these countries became the norm in this first decade of the 21 st*

century.

*Through its long domination by, first, Russia and then the Soviet Union our homeland of Belarus is a special case and needs special attention. We discern that the present “constellation of forces” – economic, political, security–may be propitious for bringing about that “change we can believe in” which your administration has enunciated and which has captured the imagination of people everywhere.*

*With most welcome wisdom, the European Union has responded to evolving realities in Eastern Europe, notably, through its Eastern Partnership initiative. Now we call on the United States to join in with equal vision and vigor. For all the reasons pointed out by the signers of the July 16 Open Letter from their vantage point in NATO and EU member countries, we too call on the United States to carpe diem. Please engage with us and with our NATO and EU friends from Central and Eastern Europe. We have much to offer from our perspective outside these organizations. And our needs are ever so great. We look to America, just as we look to Europe, for the wisdom and spirit these times demand.*