

Congress of Belarusian Studies, Wiki-Manual, Belaruspolicy.com, KEF Belarus Civil Society Digest

Belarus Research Council has presented the Belarus Think Tank Rating. New online research database Belaruspolicy.com launched.

The 10th project on the Belarusian crowdfunding platform Talakosht has completed successfully – a book on facilitating activity in Wikipedia *Wiki-manual. Manage knowledge!* has collected 4.3 million rubles.

The Belarusian authorities want to know the opinion of the business. Thus Information and Analytical Center at the Presidential Administration is conducting an online survey of entrepreneurs.

Conferences

[Belarus Research Council \(BRC\) presents first-ever Belarus Think Tank Rating results](#). The top three includes the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS), the Research Center IPM and the analytical community *Nashe Mnenie*. The [results](#) were announced on 1 October in Kaunas, at the sixth BRC meeting that also introduced new think tanks' online resources – [thinktanks.by](#), [belaruspolicy.com](#), [imhoclub.by](#). The rating was initiated by Pact to motivate Belarusian research centres to improve the quality of their work and increase public awareness of the nation's research sector capacity and output.

[**Fifth International Congress of Belarusian Studies kicks off in Kaunas**](#). More than 450 scientists involved in studying Belarus people attend the biggest academic and expert event of the year. The Congress provides a platform for polemics on the entire spectrum of social and political sciences and in the humanities. The [**event**](#) takes place in the Vytautas Magnus University on 2-4 October in Kaunas. The Congress is traditionally conducted by the Institute for Political Studies *Political Sphere*.

[**Leadership in Local Communities calls for fellows**](#). About 30 community activists will be selected to take part in the long-term leadership course on mobilizing citizens for addressing community issues and needs. This is the 8th Leadership Fellows Program implemented by Pact for Belarusian civil society activists; for two recent years it is organised jointly with the Office for European Expertise and Communications (OEEC). The deadline for applications is 12 October.

[**Registration for KEF opened**](#). On 3-4 November Kastryčnický Ekanamičny Forum, KEF titled as *Economy of Belarus: At a Tipping Point* will take place in Minsk. The [**registration and subscription for KEF updates**](#) are available. The overall objective of KEF-2105 is contribute to building consensus and trust towards a structural reform agenda, bringing the professionals together for an open discussion of the reform plans of the government of Belarus in the context of global trends and local challenges.

[**International Conference Deinstitutionalization: Global Experience and Way for Belarus**](#) was held in Minsk. The conference brought together leading experts from different countries. Deinstitutionalization approach is supported by Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and aimed at changing the forms of social support of the disabled. The

initiative includes the promotion of qualitative research of the situation in Belarus, educational thematic seminars and pilot transition to independent living.

Education

[Sixth Golden Age University \(GAU\) kicks off in Grodno.](#) On October 1, GAU conducted an opening ceremony of its 6th academic year. The program offers persons aged 55 to 85 a skills-, values-, and action-based civic education curriculum, and engages in advocacy and policy work towards better conditions for elderly population of Belarus to contribute to the country's development as full-fledged citizens.

[Press Club Belarus kicked off a new season of meetings with international media specialists](#) by holding an open meeting in Minsk with Sam Woodhouse, a managing editor of BBC political programmes and BBC Election Night editor, on 25 October. Mr. Woodhouse talked about British standards of covering elections.

[Belarusian Collegium calls for 2015-2016 academic year.](#) The Belarusian Collegium (BC) provides additional education on contemporary history, philosophy/ literature, the European Union and journalism. Senior students and persons with higher education are invited to participate. BC is an initiative of a number of independent Belarusian institutions and private individuals; it started its activities since 1998. Education in BC is for free.

[First Belarusian University joins Magna Charta Universitatum.](#) In November 2014, ODB Brussels in cooperation with the National Institute for Higher Education organized a [seminar](#) on the opportunities of accession and cooperation with Magna Charta Universitatum Observatory. As a result, on 17-18 September in Bologna, International University *MITSO* has become the first institution of higher education in Belarus that has signed the Magna Charta of the European Universities.

Civil society initiatives

[10th success at Talakosht](#). One more project on the Belarusian crowdfunding platform Talakosht has completed successfully – a book on facilitating activity in Wikipedia *Wiki-manual. Manage knowledge!* has collected 4.3 million rubles (about \$240). Developed by the youth CSO *Falanster* *Wiki-manual* is the 10th successful project that raised funds through the platform Talakosht, launched last year.

[Entrepreneurs Forum announced a program of reforms](#). On 28 September the Forum of entrepreneurs was held in Minsk and attended by about 200 delegates, representatives of the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Economy. Organized by the Perspective NGO, the Forum presented a new program of reforms in the regulation of the work of small businesses.

[People's voting for the projects participating in the 6th competition of social projects Social Weekend launched](#) on 24 September. Internet users should choose the best 20 ideas out of more than 150. The organizers and the jury will select another 20 projects. The finalists will receive more than 350 million rubles (about \$20,000) for the implementation of their projects.

Interaction between state and civil society

[President's Decree on signing UN Disability Rights Convention](#). The Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [welcomes the Decree](#) and believes that the signing of the Convention by Belarus may have unprecedented consequences for the progressivity of the Belarusian society. For several years the Office conducted a campaign calling on the authorities to sign the Convention.

[General plan of Minsk is under discussion](#). Minsk city

executive committee informs about holding a public discussion of urban project – the General plan of Minsk. All interested are invited to a public discussion, which takes place from 12 October to 5 November.

Government wants to know the opinion of entrepreneurs.

Information and Analytical Center at the Presidential Administration is conducting a survey of entrepreneurs concerning the decree №666 "On introduction of the state sanitary-hygienic examination on imported goods", which has drawn criticism of independent experts. The survey is anonymous and held in the online format.

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.

Top 10 Civic Actions in Belarus in 2014 According to Pact

With the 2015 approaching fast, international NGO Pact identified the most notable items in Belarus' civil society life in 2014. For the second straight year Pact acknowledged top 10 civic actions in Belarus.

Belarus's civil society is [growing](#) and going somewhere, only we are not sure about the direction yet.

Trend of the Year: Belarusization

Belarusian language free courses have become a new hit in 2014. [Mova Nanova](#) (*Language in a New Way*) has spread to eight Belarusian cities with about 1,000 students and got state registration. The largest Belarus web portal [TUT.by](#) launched free Belarusian lessons.

The courses titled as [Movaveda](#) attracted a public attention due to their promotional videos based on the known movies. In September, Minsk hosted a first-ever Belarusian-language sports festival [Mova Cup](#) organized by stars of Belarusian sports.

Belarus' top leadership, including president [Alexander Lukashenka](#) and prime minister [Mikhail Myasnikovich](#) spoke Belarusian in public. In addition, "mass" enthusiasm was shown for national [embroidered shirt/vyshyvanka](#) in Belarus. Several companies offer both authentic costumes and modern fashionable clothes with elements of national ornament.

Two Vyshyvanka Days – on [October 5](#) and [December 13](#) – were held as a Festival of national culture and gathered up to 5 thousand people. This year the central October Square in Minsk is decorated with [New Year Tree in traditional style](#) with embroidery ornaments.

Event of the Year: [Kastryčnický Economic Forum \(KEF\)](#)

On November 5, 2014 KEF gathered about 160 Belarusian and international experts for professional dialogue on Belarus' private sector potential. The annual economic forum was [opened by the Minister of Economy](#) Mikalai Snapkou and attended by leadership of World Bank in Belarus, Moody's Investors Service, IFC Belarus Office among others. KEF is organised for the second time by the Research Center of the Institute for Privatization and Management in association with the Belarus Economic Research and Outreach Center (BEROC) and CASE Belarus.

Local Fundraising of the Year: [MaeSens project](#)

Tree time in row Pact sees the MaeSens project as the most successful local fundraising initiative. The main reason is in its stability: launched in October 2011, a social Internet platform MaeSens.by has collected to the moment about \$320 thousand of private donations for charity. Moreover, MaeSens continues to organize a contest of grassroots ideas [Social Weekend](#). The recent Social Weekend-4 gathered more than 200 applications; nine of them received financial support from local business.

Lobbying of the Year: [Antimak campaign](#)

On January 15, 2014, president Alexander Lukashenka signed a decree 'On certain issues regarding state regulation of poppy seeds turnover'. According to [Alexander Shpakouski](#), the Aktualnaja Konseptsiya non-profit institution leader, the decree "practically liquidates conditions for organization of drug business on poppy seeds materials in Belarus". After more than three year of the Antimak public campaign, adoption of the above decree is the major indicator of its success.

Award of the Year: [Via Bona CSR Award](#)

The first ever award in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Belarus was established by Fond of Ideas. In March 2014, the best CSR projects of Belarusian business were awarded in seven categories, for example, the mobile company Velcom got the prize for the best cooperation with the local community (the project VELOCITY).

Community Initiative of the Year: [Local Hrushauka Festival](#)

In May 2014, the first ever local community Festival was organized in Hrushauka Minsk district. The event was initiated by a single activist, joined by some organized groups and gathered up to 1,000 local residents. Most notably, Hrushauka Fest was fully self-funded and inspired a number of similar

initiatives in Minsk (similar Fests were planned in Uruchcha, Malinovka and Slepjanka city districts) and across the country.

Monitoring of the Year: [Barrier-free environment of IIHF World Championship](#)

Before the start of the IIHF World Championship in Minsk, the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held an accessibility monitoring of facilities of IIHF World Championship 2014 in Minsk. The monitoring studied about 50 different facilities including railway stations, sports complexes, hotels, shops and other places of the service sector and concluded their unsatisfactory degree of accessibility.

Survey of the Year: [BISS poll on attitude to reforms](#)

The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) public poll under the REFORUM project reveals the general attitude of [ordinary citizens](#) as well as representatives of [civil society and political opposition](#) to reforms and identifying high-priority areas. Thus, 75.6% of Belarusians consider reforms necessary and wants reforms in health sector while representatives of civil society believe the key area of reform a political system.

Education Program of the Year: [Golden Age University in Grodno](#)

Golden Age University was voted as such at the [5th Festival of Non-Formal Festival](#) in December 2014. According to the people's voting and professional jury decision, the Grodno-based Golden Age University (GAU) was recognized the best educational event. Starting from 2010, GAU is improving the quality of life of Grodno elderly by increasing their participation in different fields of life and creating conditions for them to contribute to both civil society and local community.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT:

The phrase of the year: [Что-то не так!](#) ([something's wrong](#))

The film 'Abel' financed by the Ministry of Culture includes the reconstruction of political events of the presidential elections in Belarus in 2010. While filming the Ploscha events of December 2010, the actors of mass scenes shouted slogans 'We are not satisfied' and 'Something's wrong (in Russian – «[Что-то не так!](#)»)). Actually, there were no such slogans at the true Ploscha of December 19, 2010 which [anniversary](#) is marked these days.

Vyshyvanka Day, Golden Age University, Forum of Entrepreneurs – Belarus Civil Society Digest

Perspektiva`s Entrepreneurs Forum gathered over 200 participants, raised media and government attention. \$170,000 was granted to NGOs via state social contracting.

International Human Rights Day is marked with series of events. Hrodna Golden Age University is recognised the best educational event of 2013/2014.

Vyshyvanka Day Festival to be held this weekend in Minsk. Cozy Town civil campaign launches in Mahiliou to engage local citizens in solving local problems. Local residents manage to cancel a construction a pig farm near Maladzechna.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

[Forum of Entrepreneurs of Belarus](#) took place on December 8, in Minsk. Organized by *Perspektiva* NGO, the forum gathered around 200 entrepreneurs representing different cities and towns of Belarus as well as representatives from the Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Taxes, and State Committee on Standardization. The main mode of the forum was discussion of the most acute and painful issues for the entrepreneurs like increase of taxes, certification, new rules of trade, increase of control and punishment from the side of authorities.

[Hrodna Golden Age University is recognized the best educational event of 2013/2014](#). The results of people's and expert voting were announced at the [5th Festival of Non-Formal Festival](#) that took place on December 5-6, in Minsk. Among 47 contenders the jury identified [four more significant events](#) in non-formal education field – namely, Mova Nanova Belarusian language courses, the Minsk Third Age University (Belarusian Association of Social Workers); Green Weekend Children Festival (Ecodom) and Distance learning courses for people with disabilities 'Internet – No Barriers'.

[Vyshyvanka Day 2 to be held this weekend](#). On December 13, in Minsk, Art Siadziba with the support of the Belarusian Union of Artists holds a *Vyshyvanka Day* (Embroidery Day), the second festival of Belarusian culture. From 3 pm till 10 pm the Palace of Arts will host an exhibition of traditional and modern embroidered shirts and gifts from popular brands, various products of artisans and craftsmen, as well as master classes, competitions, presentations and musical performances of the Belarusian bands.

[Twelve thousand ribbons with national ornament distributed in Minsk](#). On December 6, on the initiative of Art-Siadziba, about 100 volunteers distributed about five kilometers of ribbon with the Belarusian ornament. According to the organizers, there were no people who refused to take the ribbon or somehow

negatively spoke about the action. During the action, though, [three activists were detained](#) by police, but soon released without detention reports.

[Cozy Town civil campaign launched in Mahiliou](#). First 200 signatures of citizens were sent to Mahiliou municipality. The campaign goal is to push Mahiliou citizens in solving local problems. The signatures are collected for the improvement of social infrastructure – construction of clinics, schools and kindergartens. The initiative is led by the BSDP party (Hramada), the BCD organizing committee, and civic initiative Public Magistrate. All in all, the leaders of the campaign plan to address the problem of 200 yards and help citizens to solve their local problems.

[Around a hundred people attended freemarket in Homel](#). Last weekend Green Alliance and Center for Regional Development GDF organized a freemarket in Homel timed to the Day Without Shopping. The event aimed to draw attention to the issues of overconsumption in modern society.

[Become an older friend: kind initiative in Minsk](#). For the second year the project 'Older Friend' is running in Minsk. The project is implemented by the Healthy Choice NGO following the example of the US mentoring program *Big Brothers Big Sisters*. The program selects volunteers of 18-25 years to mentor/ to be friends with children from shelters and vulnerable groups. It's important that a young volunteer is perceived not as a potential adopter, but really as an older friend.

[National Platform conference in Minsk](#). On December 22, Belarusian National Platform of EaP Civil Society Forum organizes a conference in Minsk. The conference has a focus on inventory and re-evaluation of the potential of the Eastern Partnership for the development of Belarusian civil society. Stakeholders from national and regional non-governmental organizations, international organizations, experts and the

media are invited to participate in the event.

[**The Vitali Silitski Alumni Scholarship.**](#) In 2014 the CEU Belarusian Alumni Chapter launched the third year of its alumni scholarship honoring the late Belarusian scholar Vitali Silitski. The scholarship is intended to support promising students from Belarus while honoring Silitski, a brilliant scholar who from 2007 to his passing in 2011 headed the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS). The chapter hopes to raise \$2,000 for supplementary scholarship awards for Belarusian students.

[**The Institute of Political Studies *Political Sphere* announces the Fourth International Academic Conference in Minsk.**](#) The conference is dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the beginning of perestroika in the Soviet Union and titled as 'Beyond the Soviet Canon: Political Resistance, Academic and Artistic Autonomy in the Late Soviet Period (1960s-1980s)'. Deadline for applications is March 1, 2015.

[**Legal Transformation Center announces call for applications for online course.**](#) Online course 'Non-profit organizations Law' provides an opportunity to learn a *Lawtrend's* unique experience in legal regulation of NGOs, accumulated over 19 years of practical work in this area. The course is designed for law students, lawyers, staff and volunteers of nonprofit organizations, as well as all interested in the issues of freedom of association and the legal regulation of NGOs.

International Human Rights Day, December 10, was marked in Belarus with a number of thematic events. The Office for European Expertise and Communication (OEEC) and the Belarus Research Council (BRC) conducted a live panel discussion on Belarusian society's attitude towards the death penalty under [**What Do Belarusian Think**](#) series. The Human Rights Center *Viasna* presented an [**analytical report**](#) on the results of monitoring places of detention in Belarus for 2013-2014. The [**round table**](#) on new challenges in human rights work was held in

Brest on the initiative of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

National Human Rights Community Award called the winners.

Elena Tonkacheva was recognised the human rights defender of the year; Lyudmila Kozak – the attorney of the year; Elena Pankratova and the *Viasna* website got the award in journalism dealing with human rights issues. Traditionally, the winners are defined by nine Belarusian human rights organizations. On the same day, December 10, **the prize named after Frantsishak Aliakhnovich** (it is delivered to the authors who wrote book in custody) went to Ales Bialiatski, Zmitser Dashkevich, Aliaksandr Fiaduta, Iryna Khalip, Feliks Peker and Pavel Seviarynets.

Viasna launches video project Kitchen.

Human Rights Centre *Viasna* starts the series of video programs Kitchen TV that is a peculiar ‘round table’ with the participation of contemporary human rights activists, representatives of the democratic community with the aim to discuss the most acute social issues. According to the authors, the format of kitchen allows speak freely and sincerely about the burning issues as well as find ways to act together in the present circumstances.

INTERACTION BETWEEN STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Alesin released from KGB detention center. The journalist of *Belarusy i Rynak* and military commentator Alyaksandr Alesin was behind bars since November 25 on charges of cooperation with a foreign intelligence. On the morning of December 10, he was released. Alesin told that he was cleared of ‘treason’, now he was being charged only with cooperation with foreign intelligence (Art. 356).

Authorities decide against a pig farm near Maladzechna.

Construction plans for pig farm for 100 thousand heads near the village Moisichy, three kilometers away from Maladzechna caused great controversy in society. Locals actively rejected

the construction; several hundred signatures were collected against the decision. On December 1, Maladzechna Region Executive Committee held [a public hearing](#) on this topic. As a result, the local authorities canceled the project – a pig farm will not be constructed.

[Belsat TV turns seven years](#). Belsat TV, the first independent channel in Belarus was launched on December 10, 2007, on International Human Rights Day. Formally the channel was established by virtue of an agreement signed by the Polish Foreign Ministry and Telewizja Polska S.A. (Polish Public Television). Year over year Belsat TV's viewership has been growing, as the channel attracts people of different age, income level and political views.

[Sex shop moves into former location of evicted NGO](#). An online sex shop's showroom opened at the former location of Art Siadziba, a popular independent art center which seeks to popularize Belarusian culture and language and had to move to new addresses in Minsk every few months because of what is widely seen as pressure from authorities. When the landlord notified Art Siadziba that their lease contract would be terminated, it said that the premises were needed to house a sewing shop.

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Belarusians Want Reforms,

Entrepreneurs Protest, New Education Initiatives – Belarus Civil Society Digest

New polls suggest that in the current environment Aliaksandr Lukashenka remains the most trusted politician in Belarus but Belarusians want reforms, in the first place of its political system.

The recently released political prisoner Ales Bialiatski is meeting with top European politicians.

Education initiatives and debates keep civil society activists busy in Belarus this summer. Entrepreneurs protest against new regulations adopted in accordance with new Customs Union rules.

Polls

[BISS Poll: Attitude to Reforms](#). The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) has released the data of a public poll under the REFORUM project.

The research reveals the general attitude of [ordinary citizens](#) as well as representatives of [civil society and political opposition](#) to reforms and identifying high-priority areas. Thus, 75.6% of Belarusians consider reforms necessary and wants reforms in health sector above all. According to representatives of civil society the main area of reform should be a political system.

[Trust to Lukashenka continues to rise](#). The Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) has released the results of a national survey conducted in June 2014. According to the poll, the level of trust to the president continues to rise: in December he was trusted by

37.7% Belarusians, in March – 45.9%, and in June – 49.6%. At the same time, popularity [ratings of all potential opposition](#) presidential candidates combined do not exceed 20%.

Education

['Learning Region' Adukatar](#). Association for Life Long Education (ALLE) has released a regular issue of its thematic magazine *Adukatar*. The issue is devoted to the 'learning region' concept that is defined as any regional competitiveness in the modern world by its ability to learn. The 'learning region' is shown to readers as a theoretical construct as well as its implementation on the European continent and in Belarus.

[Distance learning for Human Rights advocates](#). The International Human Rights House Network announces a call for applications to participate in distance learning program for lawyers and experts from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. 125 participants – 25 fellows from each country – will pass theoretical and practical training in applying the concept of human rights and international legal standards in the national and international legal protection. The course is certified by European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania).

[Golden Age University invites to a methodological Summer School](#) on education for the elderly. The School is to be held on 6-10 August in the Grodno region; it aims to share Belarusian and foreign experience on the methodology of social enhancing of the elderly. The organisers are welcome representatives of community and government organisations that already have or plan to start educational and outreach programs for the elderly. The University works at the Third Sector Centre NGO in Grodno from 2010.

Debates and projects

[What young Belarusians want](#). On 1 July in Minsk, the Liberal

Club held a roundtable discussion titled as *Youth Policy Concept in Belarus: What Young People Really Want?* At the meeting, the experts presented an updated concept of youth policy and launched a debate on how to satisfy the real needs and interests of the youth. Thus, organisers hope to contribute to the country's national security and to meet the challenge of a high level of dissatisfaction of young Belarusians and their strong desire to leave the country.

[Ales Bialiatski visits Brussels and Strasbourg.](#) Ales Bialiatski, head of the Human Rights Centre *Viasna* meets with European diplomats and journalists such as the newly elected President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz, EU Commissioner Stefan Fule, Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland, etc. Remind that on June 21, Ales Bialiatski was released from prison under an amnesty having served almost three years for tax evasion. On 27 June in Vilnius, Ales Bialiatski gave a press conference for the Lithuanian media ([full video](#)).

[First city-game "Skhvatka" in Belarusian language would take place under the slogan "Let the Glory of Orsha be eternal!"](#). For the first time the city-game "Skhvatka" will be held In Belarusian language. It will be devoted to 500th Anniversary of Orsha battle. The game will have a format of bicycle ride with a team contribution of 30 US dollars. One can become a part of the game joining [its website](#) or official public account at social networks.

[Festival of Belarusian Advertisement and communication Ad.nak! celebrates its fifth anniversary](#) (picture at the top). Traditionally organised by civil cultural campaign Budzma and web-portal Marketing.by Festival is steel increasing in numbers. This year the Festival has collected more than 400 works from almost 200 participants. 6 Grand Prix (2 – last year), 17 first places (6 – last year), 33 second and 41 third places given. The fifth edition was the first one to bring

collaboration with general partner on business side which was the oldest mobile operator Velcom.

Projects on social inclusion

[Accessibility Week summarizes results](#). Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities summarises the results of the Accessibility Week that held in Belarus for the second time. The Week lasted from 1 to 15 June and took place not only in Minsk, but also in other cities of Belarus: Hrodna, Kobryn, Zhytkavichy, Lida, Smarhon, Baran', Babruisk. The Week included 14 events attended by more than 400 people.

[UNDP initiative "Inclusiveness after 2015: social collaboration of disabled in Belarus" has started](#). The program has started in May 2014 and its aim is to improve the life and deepen involvement of people with disabilities into community life.

The communicational core of the action is [an internet platform](#), where everyone willing can write down his own story or the story he witnessed. When the pull of the stories is collected it will be analysed by special program, working out a new approach to further development of disabled involvement. The approach would be used for further spreading among civil, business, governmental and international organisations.

Interaction between state and civil society

[Entrepreneurs try to defend their interest through Forum and strike](#). On 30 June in the Minsk hotel Belarus, 235 entrepreneurs from across the country gathered at their regular forum, organised by the republican public association *Perspectiva*.

Entrepreneurs urged not to sign the decree that requires that from 1 July light industry goods should be imported to Belarus only with documents on compliance with special technical regulations of the Customs Union. The next day, on 1 July

entrepreneurs from different cities of Belarus [went on strike](#).

[Campaign of Belarusian language defense at Constitutional court has started](#). Friends of civil initiative "Rada of Belarusian intelligence" have signed a petition in defence of Belarusian language to Constitutional court. The example of the petition was worked out by Belarusian Helsinki Committee chairperson Harry Paganajla. One can simple [cache and sign the example](#) and read [methodical recommendations](#).

[New public hearings are announced on Kurapaty building project](#). Minsk municipality has decided to run another round of hearings on city development project of detailed planning of territories near Kurapaty. This information is coming out of the list of head of architecture branch of municipality. During first hearings many remarks were made and were supported by expert board on situation around Kurapaty and second round has to fix misunderstanding between authorities and activists.

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Record Violations at Local Elections, Freedom Day Rally, CRS Awards – Belarus Civil

Society Digest

Two thousand people attend Freedom Day rally. Fund of Ideas delivers CSR awards to Belarusian companies.

CityDog rolls out competition for creative solution of Minsk urban issues. EuroBelarus holds international conference on civil society at local level. MediaBarCamp 2014 continues to accept applications until April 7.

EU notes positive trends in Belarus' cooperation with international community on death penalty and higher education.

[Electby.org recorded the record number of violations at the local elections.](#) 635 violations during the recent local elections were recorded on the interactive map [Electby.org](#). This is a record number of violations of the electoral process, starting since 2010, when the platform of civic monitoring of elections was launched. The traditional "leader" in the violations became the category of "Early voting."

[Some 2,000 people attend Freedom Day rally.](#) On 25 March an estimated 2,000 people attended a rally that crowned "Dzien Voli" (Freedom Day) demonstration in Minsk. The sanctioned event was staged to mark the 96th anniversary of the proclamation of the Belarusian National Republic (BNR). [Ten people were detained](#) after Freedom Day action in Minsk, two of them – activists of European Belarus – were sentenced to administrative arrests.

[Civic education from Liavon Volski.](#) On 25 March to the Freedom Day, the multi label 34 Piarshak presented a new album of well-known musician Liavon Volsky titled as Social Science/ Hramadaznaŭstva. The musician describes his new CD in terms of civic education: "I think that time of compromises ran out. Time of trading, making rules of the game, the inner censor and manoeuvring ran out. Time of Aesopian language,

hidden meanings and reading between the lines has passed." For the first two days in the internet the album was downloaded about 20 thousand times.

Belarus is to join the largest environmental campaign Earth Hour. On 29 March for one hour from 8.30 to 9.30 the campaign suggests everyone to turn off the lights and unnecessary appliances at home or in the office, and thus try to care about preserving natural resources. The initiator of the Earth Hour campaign in Belarus is Green Alliance together with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. A number of Belarusian artists supported the campaign.

Folk Spring meeting. The last weekend was marked with the traditional Spring Meeting/ Hukanne Viasny ceremony, held in different parts of Belarus. The national folklore ritual is designed to greet the coming spring. The Student Ethnographic Society organised a ceremony in Vyazyinka near Minsk, the youth organisation Talaka – near Gomel.

Peace Gallery photo project is just two weeks but more than 70 people have participated in it. The author of the project, a photographer Alexander Zharnasiek implements his idea to make a gallery of portraits of positive people who oppose the war. Anybody can become a participant of the *Peace Gallery*.

The Fund of Ideas delivered CSR awards. On 21 March the National Art Museum hosted an award ceremony in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The event was organised by the Fund of Ideas for the first time. The awards went to the best CSR projects of Belarusian business companies in seven categories, for example, the company Velcom was awarded for the best CSR project in cooperation with the local community (the project VELOCITY); socially responsible media was recognised a state-run informational agency BelTA.

MinskFun competition indicates the Minsk urban problems. The independent Minsk portal CityDog.by composed a tentative list

of Minsk urban problems that should be solved in a non-standard way. Mapping of problems is done in the framework of the MinskFun open competition announced by Volkswagen and CityDog.by to improve the urban environment of Minsk; the winner receives \$1,500 for the implementation of ideas. Among the identified problems are lack of parking, lack of public toilets, dog feces on the streets, etc.

[Acting with Unlimited Abilities 2014](#). The Association School of Leaders (Poland) and the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Belarus) invite to participate in the second round of the Acting with Unlimited Abilities project. The purpose of the program is to strengthen organisations and informal groups of persons with disabilities through capacity building and leadership development. Participation in the program is available for nonprofit organisations or initiative groups of persons with disabilities or working for the benefit of this social group.

Belarus-EU Relations

[The EU remains committed to a policy of critical engagement towards Belarus](#). On 27 March the European Commission presented updates on the progress made by the countries in its Eastern Partnership program. The report, in particular, acknowledges that the EU-Belarus relationship is still dire but there has been a positive trend in "Belarus's cooperation with the international community on some specific issues, namely the death penalty and the higher education."

[EBRD is to allocate €500,000 to Belarus small, medium-sized business](#). The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) plans to allocate at least €500,000 for subsidies to small and medium-sized enterprises in Belarus in 2014. Non-repayable subsidies will be available for small and medium-sized business that has at least two years of experience on the market and with the personnel of 10 to 250 workers. The EBRD grants can be spent on consulting services.

Education and Trainings

[SYMPA held a session in Georgia](#). On 19-24 March the fellows of the School of Young managers in Public Administration (SYMPA) learned some basic reforms in the public administration in Georgia. The program included visits to the Ministry of Justice, Economy and Sustainable Development, Regional Development, University, as well as meetings with MPs and local experts. The next session will be held in Sweden with a special focus on the management of public finances.

[Academy of the First 2014](#). Belarusian National Youth Council RADA invites to participate in its regular educational course Academy of the First aimed at preparing youth activists to be efficient in building the youth CSOs and manage them. The educational course consists of 5 workshops, a series of public activities, homework and pilot projects. Young people of 18-31 years, representatives of Belarusian youth organizations and initiatives are invited to participation.

[Golden People at Golden Age nomination for journalists](#). Golden Age University announces its nomination for journalists within the national contest at the IV Festival of Youth Journalism *Your Style*, which is to be held on 16-18 May in Hrodna. The nomination accepts journalistic materials demonstrating active life position of older people who retired, but did not lose optimism and show that anyone can be useful to society at any age. This is the main purpose of the Golden Age University, an educational program implemented by the Hrodna-based Third sector Centre.

[The MediaBarCamp 2014](#) continues to accept applications until 7 April. The 7th International MediaBarCamp will be held on 1-4 May 2014, in Lithuania, and dedicated to using new opportunities of Internet media and development of media activism. This year the MediaBarCamp is organized around the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Belarusian national domain .BY. Organised by Swedish International Liberal Centre

(SILC), the MediaBarCamp invites all participants – media, public and political organisations, etc. – to present their projects online and find like-minded people.

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.

Belarus Top Civic Actions in 2012

With the New Year celebration just around the corner, it is time to think about the list of top civic actions in 2012. As a disclaimer, the goal of the list is to highlight achievement and recap success, often overlooked in the repressive environment.

Event of the Year: Educators and Researchers

We could not choose between significant events organised by educators, capacity builders and researchers in 2012. Our choice would be the educators, as they managed to conduct both of their national events in Belarus. Nevertheless, researchers gained both in quality and quantity, being at a core of modernization attempt of the Belarus government (at least part of it), as well as of the EU's modernization policy.

On October 12, [the First Capacity Building Fair](#) took place in Minsk. The Fair was organised under the Marketplace project

which promotes a market model of consulting services for CSOs in Belarus. The Fair was attended by more than 150 providers and CSOs-customers of capacity building services. On December 7-9, [the 4th Festival of Non-Formal Education](#) took place in Minsk. The Festival was attended by about 250 participants – teachers, trainers and other people sharing the values of life-long learning and non-formal education.

On September 28-30, [The Second International Congress of Belarusian Studies](#) took place in Kaunas, Lithuania. The event was attended by about 300 scholars from around the world involved in studying Belarus and East-Central Europe. The final agenda includes 20 sections in different fields like regional development issues, Belarus relations with other countries, etc.

On May 25-26, Vilnius hosted an international conference "[The Future of Belarus](#)" dedicated to the 20th anniversary of independent studies in Belarus and the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS). The conference was attended by about 100 well-known Belarusian and international researchers, experts, civil society leaders. Following the conference, a book was published titled "The future of Belarus. Opinion of independent experts".

Evidence of the Year: Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS)

The September-October public opinion poll of [Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies](#) (IISEPS) showed the real results of September parliamentary elections – regardless of numerous declarations and evidence of the opposition representatives, they were valid: 17.4% of respondents had voted early, and 49% – on September 23.

Only 9.6% answered they had boycotted the elections, and another 24% said they had not participated in voting due to other reasons. Some Belarusian politicians [expressed distrust](#)

[in results of the poll](#). In his turn [Oleg Manaev responded](#) that there is a very little difference between both authorities and opposition who manipulate the truth to the same extent.

Watchdog of the Year: Mediakritika

A new analytical media project was launched – [Mediakritika.by](#). Created by a team of Belarusian journalists, it is aimed at comprehensive critical analysis of the media in Belarus. The new project has a slogan “Truth Loves Criticism” and sets the task to improve the quality of the Belarusian journalism by monitoring the quality of news as it is presented in all Belarusian media.

Cross-Sectoral Cooperation of the Year: Mark Chagall Open Air Exhibition

During the summer season, [an open air exhibition of reproductions of works by Mark Chagall](#) worked at the Yakub Kolas Square in Minsk. The exhibition was dedicated to the 125th anniversary of the artist. The project was implemented by the “Fond of Ideas” paid for by Belarus business and opened by the Minister of Culture.

Advocacy of the Year: Social Contracting by ACT

During the year, the law "[On Social Services](#)" passed all levels of approvals and was adopted on July 13, 2012. One of the most important parts of the bill is introduction of the mechanism of social contracting that allows nonprofit organizations to get funding from the state budget. The main advocate for this change was [NGO “ACT”](#).

Political Project of the Year: Election Monitoring

Political parties managed to agree and deliver partisan poll-watching – [For Fair Elections](#) – of the 2012 parliamentary elections in a coordinated fashion and with a clear methodology based on the local conditions. Two additional

project were operating in a coordinated fashion. [The interactive platform of monitoring](#) elections resumed its work before the parliamentary elections in Belarus of September 2012. It is an open platform where anybody can share their experience and observations of the election campaign. Electby.org is powered by the platform Ushahidi (which means “evidence” in Swahili).

[The “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections”](#) campaign is an independent and non-partisan joint initiative of the Human Rights Center “Viasna” and Belarusian Helsinki Committee. From the very first day of the election 95 long-term observers began their work, covering 106 out of 110 election districts. They prepared weekly reports on the course of the election process which were processed, presented and spread as the campaign’s weekly and preliminary reports on all stages of the election.

Belarusian Language Promo of the Year: AD.NAK! by Budzma

[Festival of Belarusian-language advertising and communication AD.NAK!](#) is a platform that unites the most active professionals in advertising and communications field and aims to interest others to do advertising and create communications in Belarusian. This year the event was held for the third time and attracted over 300 applications from more than a hundred participants. The Festival is organized annually by [Budzma!](#) civic campaign.

Branding of the Year: Tsmoki-Minsk

At the beginning of 2012 [Budzma! launched](#) a pilot addition to their campaign – Searching for Tsmok – which aimed to provoke wide public discussion of ‘cool’ Belarusian cultural heritage and the country’s brand. Tsmok is a mythical Belarusian dragon, friendly to people, who represents richness in every sense of the word. As a result, the most popular Belarusian professional basketball club Minsk-2006 was [renamed to Tsmoki-](#)

[Minsk](#) (ЦМокі-Мінск).

Local Fundraising of the Year: MaeSen project

In December 2012, [the project MaeSens](#) transferred 40 million BYR to charity, and this means that the mutual assistance to children has increased \$100,000. One-year-old MaeSens project raises funds for the treatment of seriously ill children and orphanages by organizing the online auction of meetings, where anyone has the opportunity to set a meeting with him/her or to buy a meeting with a person he/she liked. In 2012, the project was awarded as a "Best Startup of the Year" by [Bynet users](#).

Pro Bono of the Year: Minsk United Branding Team

Self-organized Minsk United Branding Team offers to design alternative brands for Minsk. Minsk United Branding Team, a voluntary mixed group of creative professionals and civic activists with a [dedicated page on Facebook](#), starts designing city brand, alternative to INSTID proposal. [The team is open for anyone interested](#) and declared its three main principles as: Professionalism; Inclusivity; and Love to city/country and self-respect.

New Topic of the Year: Working with the Elderly

The issues dealing with intergeneration interaction and non-formal education accessibility for older people became the main topic of Festival of Non-Formal Education of 2012 "[Non-formal education for all generations](#)". The Grodno-based NGO "Third sector" for 3rd year implements a project "[Golden Age University](#)" for Grodno residents of pension age; this year the University is attended by 140 people.

Effective Cooperation with State Authorities of the Year: RAIK

Due to the RAIK's initiative, the National Airport Minsk approved a policy to adopt the quality standard of service for persons with reduced mobility. In addition, from January 26,

“Kind Button” was launched in Belarusbank ATMs all over Belarus. The initiative of [Republican Association of Wheelchair Users](#) (RAIK) provides an opportunity for users of plastic cards transfer the money to the charity for the Association. From April 14, RAIK launched a charity project “Kind Call”. Every resident has the opportunity to make a paid call from local phone and donate for the rehabilitation of disabled persons in wheelchairs. Also,

Last but not least...

Rural citizen of the Year: “Village Girl”

Kseniya Degelko’s ‘I am from the village’ song [gathers over one million views on youtube](#) in a few weeks period and spark heated debate. Produced by a GONGO, it is characterizing what kind of (civil) society our partners are operating in and trying to influence.

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