

Minsk in Top 10 Eastern European getaways



For years Eastern Europe was the undiscovered half of the continent, where architectural gems, wonderful landscapes and buzzing cities saw only a fraction of the number of visitors heading to Western Europe.

Things have changed, with Eastern Europe now drawing travelers by the trainload, but the diversity and appeal of the region's highlights remain the same. Whether you're discovering them for the first time or coming back for a second dose, you won't be disappointed.

Lonely Planet placed Minsk on the closing position in its top 10 Eastern European getaways.*

Minsk, Belarus: Minsk will almost certainly surprise you. The capital of Belarus is, despite its thoroughly dreary sounding name, an amazingly progressive and modern place. Here fashionable cafes, wi-fi-enabled restaurants and crowded bars and nightclubs vie for your attention. Sushi bars and art galleries have taken up residence in a city centre totally remodelled to the tastes of Stalin. There are relatively few traditional sights in the city but myriad places of interest for anyone fascinated by the Soviet period, and plenty of cosmopolitan pursuits to keep you entertained come the evening.

Prominent Belarusian journalist found dead in his summer cottage



Aleh Byabenin was one of the founders and leaders of charter97.org website.

According to the Belarusian independent news portal **charter97.org** *, the body of Aleh Byabenin was found on September 3, at 5.30 p.m. in his summer cottage not far from Minsk. The reason of death is not clear.

Aleh Byabenin was born in 1974. He graduated from the Belarusian State University, department of journalism. In 90s he occupied the position of the deputy chief editor of Imya, an independent Belarusian newspaper. Since 1998 he was the founder and head of charter97.org website. Aleh Byabenin had a wife and two sons.

In just few hours after publication of sad news about two hundred visitors of the website have expressed their deep condolences and concerns that the Belarusian government could be involved in this tragic incident.

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Belarus in Amnesty International's Report 2010

Bellow we provide excerpts from the chapter.

***Background** European institutions continued their engagement with Belarus. In June, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe voted to restore Special Guest Status to the Belarusian parliament on several conditions. Besides a moratorium on the death penalty and registration of the human rights organization Nasha Viasna (Our Spring), terms included the immediate and unconditional lifting of sentences of restricted freedom imposed on several young people for their participation in a peaceful demonstration in January 2008. However, these terms were not met by the end of the year. In November, the EU Council reviewed the decision made in October 2008 and decided not to end the travel restrictions on senior Belarus officials, but to extend the suspension until October 2010. The majority of printed and electronic media remained under state control, and the state press distribution system maintained its monopoly. Two independent newspapers – Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) and Nasha Niva (Our Field) – were allowed once again to use the state press distribution system. **Death penalty** On 29 June, the House of Representatives set up a working group to draft proposals on imposing a moratorium on the death penalty. However, Belarus continued to hand down death sentences despite international pressure. Two men were sentenced to death for murder in the course of the year. On 29 June, Brest regional court sentenced 30-year-old Vasily Yuzepchuk to death; and on 22 July, Minsk regional court sentenced 25-year-old Andrei Zhuk to death. Both death sentences were upheld on appeal. – In January, Vasily Yuzepchuk and another unnamed man were detained and charged with first-degree murder, following the murder of six elderly women between November 2007 and January*

2008. On 29 June, both men were found guilty by Brest regional court. The second man, convicted as his accomplice, was sentenced to life imprisonment. Vasily Yuzepchuk was sentenced to death. On 2 October, the Supreme Court turned down his appeal and he subsequently applied for clemency. Vasily Yuzepchuk, originally from Ukraine, belongs to the marginalized Roma ethnic group, and may have an intellectual disability. His lawyer stated that the investigation and trial were fundamentally flawed and that Vasily Yuzepchuk had been beaten to force him to confess. On 12 October, the UN Human Rights Committee called on the Belarusian government not to execute Vasily Yuzepchuk until it had considered the case. **Freedom of assembly** The authorities continued to violate the right to freedom of assembly by not permitting demonstrations and public actions in accordance with the very restrictive Law on Public Events. There were allegations that excessive force was used to disperse non-violent demonstrations, and peaceful demonstrators were detained. – On 12 February, an application by a group of 20 people to hold a small public awareness action about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues was refused by the Gomel city administration. They said that the application did not include copies of contracts with the local police department, the health clinic and the waste disposal services to cover the expenses of ensuring public order, safety and for cleaning up after the action. Gomel District Court held that the application had been refused in accordance with the Law on Public Events and turned down the appeal. – Peaceful legal demonstrations to mark the anniversary of the disappearance of leading opposition figures Viktor Hanchar and Anatoly Krasouski, held on the 16th day of every month, were regularly dispersed using force. Viktor Hanchar and Yury Zakharenko, as well as businessman Anatoly Krasouski and journalist Dmitry Zavadsky, were subjected to enforced disappearances in 1999 and 2000. On 16 September, police officers in Minsk allegedly used excessive force to disperse demonstrators and detained 31 people for over three hours

before releasing them without charge. The demonstrators reported that they had been standing silently holding portraits of the disappeared when approximately 40 men in plain clothes approached and started to beat them, closely followed by riot police who detained them and took them by bus to Tsentralny District police department. According to one demonstrator, police officers did not explain the reason for their arrest and some of the detainees were beaten in the bus. At the police station they were reportedly made to stand facing the wall for three hours and subjected to verbal abuse, threats and beating. On 17 September, the Presidency of the European Union expressed concern about the crackdown on peaceful demonstrations in Minsk the previous day and urged the Belarusian authorities to refrain from excessive use of force in dealing with peaceful demonstrations.

Prisoners of conscience Several people continued to be held under "restricted freedom" following participation in a peaceful protest in January 2008. The conditions of "restricted freedom" are so severe that they amount to house arrest. Furthermore, although the sentence of "restricted freedom" is imposed by a judge, the details of the restrictions can be changed arbitrarily by the police officer in charge of the case without any possibility to appeal. This makes it very difficult for those convicted to comply with the conditions of their sentence. – On 7 July, Artsyom Dubski was sentenced to one year in prison by the Asipovichy district court in the Mahilyow region, and on 15 June Maxim Dashuk was sentenced to one year and three months of further "restricted freedom" by the Maskouski district court in Minsk. Both were convicted for violating the terms of earlier sentences imposed for their participation in the January 2008 protest and Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience. These young men had been among 11 people who were given sentences of up to two years of "restricted freedom" for "taking part in or organizing actions that gravely disturb public order". As of November 2009, five out of the original 11 had received amnesties, one

had had his restrictions reduced, and three remained abroad.

Human rights defenders Civil society organizations faced many obstacles in registering with the authorities before being permitted to operate. – On 26 January, the human rights organization Nasha Viasna (previously known as Viasna), applied for registration and was refused for a third time. The Ministry of Justice rejected the application on several grounds: previous convictions of the group's members on administrative charges; inaccuracies in the list of founders; the failure to describe the mechanism for electing the Chair and the Secretary; the absence of the organization's name on one document; and that the headquarters were too cramped. On 22 March, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Ministry of Justice after an appeal by the founders on 19 March. On 25 April, the founders applied again and on 28 May, registration was again refused by the Ministry of Justice. In addition to the reasons cited in previous refusals the Ministry of Justice claimed that the second part of the organization's name was not in line with its statute. On 16 June 2009, the founders of Nasha Viasna appealed against this decision, but refusal of registration was again upheld by the Supreme Court on 12 August.

Violence against women On 21 January, a new Law on Crime Prevention came into effect which for the first time specifically referred to domestic violence and called on state bodies including the Ministry of Internal Affairs to investigate all cases of domestic violence and to prosecute the perpetrators. However, adequate structures and resources to respond to violence against women were lacking. At the end of the year only two shelters for victims of domestic violence were financed from a combination of state and non-governmental funding. VB

Katyn Killings Commemorated Without a Belarusian Delegation



Just as Belarus Digest had predicted, there is no news of a Belarusian delegation attending the ceremony in Katyn, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Soviet killings of officers of the Polish army.

This even despite the fact that one of the central issues preceding the meeting of Russian and Polish prime ministers Vladimir Putin and Donald Tusk has been the so-called Belarusian List. The list contains names of officers of the Polish Army killed by the Soviets in extermination sites in Belarus (including, very likely, the infamous Kurapaty forest). Russian authorities claim they have not found it in archives. According to Radio Free Europe, Ukrainian and Russian lists have already been found and published.

Not to say about the hundreds of people from Belarus who had been killed in Katyn. In 1940 West Belarus was part of the Second Polish Republic. Many people from the region have served in the Polish army or have just been mobilized after the German invasion in 1939.

BBC Russian edition quotes Belarusian intellectual Liavon Barsceuski who draws parallels between Katyn and Kurapaty:

Here is a person from Minsk. Lieutenant Edmund Menke from Minsk, as the sign says. Overall, there are quite a few people from Belarus here: from Hrodna, from Biaroza (that's in Polesia), from the Wilno

voivodeship, most of which is now Belarus. there are also many unidentified victims, who also could be our compatriots. This memorial is also a memorial for us.

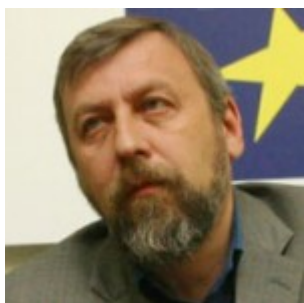
It's not Russia or Poland to blame for Belarusian authorities ignoring the memory of hundreds of Belarusians buried in Katyn. As already mentioned, Belarusian authorities do not care about organizing a decent memorial in Kurapaty near Minsk. What should one expect in relation to Belarusian graves outside the country?

Still, there is at least some good news indirectly related to Katyn. Today the Belarusian Academy of Arts has awarded Andrzej Wajda, author of the well-known film about the Katyn massacre, an honorary doctorate in recognition of his life's work. A symbolic coincidence, if not more.

Read reports by [Daily Mail](#), [BusinessWeek](#), [Der Standart](#) (in German).

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Third opposition candidate for presidency



In his article for the Jamestown Foundation the known expert on Belarus David Marples portrays Andrei Sannikau who recently announced his willing to run for the presidency.

Sannikau Throws His Hat in the Ring The Jamestown Foundation
Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 56 March
23, 2010 By: David Marples A key opposition leader in Belarus
has declared his candidacy for the next presidential
elections, scheduled for 2011. Andrei Sannikau, the leader of
the civic movement European Belarus, held an interview with
“bloggers” in mid-March to outline his policies and answer
questions. His decision reflects long-term disillusionment
with recent attempts by the United Democratic Forces (UDF) in
particular to engage in dialogue with the Lukashenka regime
and support Belarus’s membership of the Eastern Partnership
Project. Ironically, Sannikau is also the most overtly pro-
European of all the candidates to date, though he wishes to
replace the Lukashenka regime with a completely new
administration and state structure.

Sannikau is the third opposition candidate to decide to run
for the presidency, following earlier statements by Alyaksandr
Milinkevich and Ales Mikhalevich. It is also anticipated that
the UDF will choose its own candidate, which raises the
question as to whether yet another candidate from the
opposition will undermine the chances of the country gaining
its second president since elections were first held almost 16
years ago. Sannikau was born in 1954 in Minsk and graduated
from the prestigious Minsk State Pedagogical Institute of
Foreign Languages (renamed as Minsk State Linguistic
University) in 1977. He completed course work at the
Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
USSR in Moscow in 1989, and holds the diplomatic rank of
ambassador. From 1991 he worked in the Belarusian foreign
ministry, rising to the post of deputy foreign minister,
before resigning in November 1996, in protest against the
controversial referendum that drastically amended the 1994
constitution in favor of greater presidential authority. Since
then, he has been the coordinator of the civic initiative
Charter-97, and he now also leads the European Belarus civic
campaign (Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta, March 15). When it was

formed in January 2008, European Belarus announced at a news conference in Minsk a long-term campaign for the country to gain European Union membership, where its representatives were Sannikau, Viktor Ivashkevich, Mikola Statkevich, and Mikhail Marynich. Sannikau stated that their goal was to recruit volunteers to gather "hundreds of thousands" of signatures for an appeal to the governing bodies of the EU, leading to the integration of Belarus into European structures (European Radio for Belarus, January 24, 2008). On March 15, Sannikau summarized his proposed presidential policies through a question and answer session with Belarusian bloggers. His campaign will rely on his family, those who share his views, former classmates, and Belarusians. He describes his political stance as "right-centrist," and notes his experience as the head of the Belarusian delegation at the talks on conventional and nuclear disarmament that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of an independent Belarus. He is a firm believer in democracy as a system that offers the right of choice to all its citizens.

He supports a relationship with Moscow based on mutual understanding rather than petty conflicts. Concerning the current regime, he would refer the fate of "Citizen Lukashenka" to an independent court and rely on lawsuits from individual citizens. He would change the current national symbols and reduce special detachments of the militia, though not necessarily the army, which has been downsized in recent years (www.charter97.org, March 15). If elected, Sannikau intends to enact sweeping reforms of the entire political and economic systems. Regarding the latter, he would provide opportunities for small and medium businesses. With respect to political reforms, he plans to construct "a normal state" by restoring the principle of the division of powers, recreating a parliament with real authority and securing the independence of the courts.

His free society would also be dependent upon an independent

media. Ultimately, he wishes to see Belarus develop a "European level of life" within the briefest possible timescale, rather than have it regarded as a pipedream for the distant future (www.charter97.org, March 15). His campaign raises some important questions: foremost is whether the EU would be prepared to abandon its current dialogue with Lukashenka and embrace an opposition candidate who is firmly opposed to cooperation with the regime. Indeed, Sannikau and his wife, the well-known journalist Iryna Khalip, have been especially targeted in recent days. On March 5, they were detained on the Lithuanian border for three hours by the Belarusian border guards and had a laptop confiscated (www.charter97.org, March 6).

On March 16, the Sannikau household was subjected to a police search for about three hours, along with a raid of Charter 97's headquarters and a confiscation of equipment (Narodnaya Volya, March 17). Despite reducing the chances of an opposition figure securing enough votes to enter a second round of presidential elections, the entry of Sannikau in the future contest can also be seen as a positive step. More than any other current candidate he is prepared to highlight and oppose the recent repression against opposition figures and the Union of Poles. He is a former "insider," highly educated, and fluent in English and French, as well as Belarusian and Russian, and on close terms with many political leaders of the EU. He may need to explain how the wholesale leap into Europe, which he proposes will allow friendly relations with Russia (he is notably quiet on the issue of NATO membership), and its impact on negotiations over gas and oil imports in particular.

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Today is the Alternate Independence Day of Belarus



On March 25, 1918, the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, a representative body formed as a result of a nationwide congress in 1917, has adopted its Third Charter declaring independence of Belarus from the Russian Empire.

Formally, from that very moment till modern days Belarus has legally been a sovereign state: first as the Belarusian Democratic Republic (also known as the Belarusian People's Republic or the Belarusian National Republic), then as the Belarusian Soviet Republic and since 1991 as the Republic of Belarus.

The day is actively celebrated by the Belarusian democratic opposition and by the Belarusian diaspora in the West but is ignored by Belarusian officials. Here the official address by Ivonka Survilla, President of the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, the [Belarusian government in exile](#):

Dear fellow Belarusians! On behalf of the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic I congratulate you with the great national holiday, Freedom Day. I wish you to spend it with faith and hope for a better future. The Belarusian people will gain freedom and democracy just as it has gained independence.

Living in the free world, we always knew that no evil can be eternal. We have read the Third Charter of the Belarusian Democratic Republic which proclaimed the independence of Belarus, and believed that if in 1918, in such difficult circumstances, our people have managed to express their desire to be free among the free nations of the world, it

will find the strength to endure Soviet oppression and regain independence.

Today I would like to share with you an excerpt of the Third Charter, which I consider particularly inspiring: "Now we, the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, are canceling the yoke of dependence, which the Russian tsars had violently thrown on our free and independent land. From this moment the Belarusian Democratic Republic is declared an independent and free state. Hereby we declare as invalid all previous state unions, which enabled an alien government to sign on behalf of Belarus the Treaty of Brest, which kills the Belarusian people to death, dividing his land into parts." Dear compatriots, let's remember these words. Only an own independent free state can protect the land from foreign aggression, wherever it may come from.

Only a democratic government will be able to give the people a peaceful foreign policy. Only a national government will save national language and culture from decline. From the depths of my heart I wish you strength, love to your beautiful land, faith in the future and the courage that characterizes all the people of the free spirit. The time will come when our nation will celebrate its grand triumph of independence and freedom and proudly remember its ancestors, who have overthrown "the last yoke of state dependence" on March 25, 1918. [Read the original in Belarusian](#)

Žyvie Bielaruś! AČ

Common Currency for Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia: as Far as It Has Always Been

Several observers say that the introduction of a common currency should be the next step of the integration of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. The three countries have recently created a customs union and it is logical to assume that the integration will continue. However, there are reasons for being sceptical about it. Russian officials have been feeding the world – and in first place the Russian public opinion – with promises of a soon restoration of the USSR since the very moment of the USSR's collapse. Exploitation of post-Soviet stigmas for PR purposes has been actively used already under president Yeltsin, who initiated the creation of the so-called Union of Russia and Belarus (later renamed to the Union State of Russia and Belarus).

Aliaksandr Lukashenka, the president of Belarus, has also based his state ideology on the population's Soviet nostalgia and on exploitation of key Soviet ideological symbols like the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. The customs union of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus has already a concrete effect as the three countries have switched to a common tax code. As a result of newly introduced import duties, automobile prices in Belarus have risen by 20% and [Russian telecom operators have had trouble importing equipment](#). President Lukashenka has several times stressed that the union will only make sense if Russia cancels duties on oil exports to Belarus.

Belarus would economically benefit from a common currency more than Russia or Kazakhstan, because Belarus' exports are largely oriented on Russia. However, it seems highly unlikely that the president of Belarus would give away some of his economic decision making power to a foreign centre. Belarusian

officials have always demanded an equal representation of Belarus and Russia in the management of the eventual common central bank of the Union State. For obvious reasons, this is a condition Russia could never have accepted. Besides that, introduction of a common currency requires synchronization of economic systems of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. At present they are very different and hardly compatible.

Resource-based economies of Russia and Kazakhstan react against global macroeconomic shocks in a way very different than the economy of Belarus. Therefore there are no indications that the talks of a new Eurasian empire will this time result in anything different from previous times. Ukraine's president Yanukovich has already de facto rejected Putin's proposal to join the Russian-Kazakh-Belarusian customs union. Ukraine would only cooperate with the Union as long as it doesn't contradict with the country's WTO membership. Kazakhstan won't give up its independence despite Nazarbayev not having appointed a heir yet. It's hard to imagine that the local elites won't be able to find a new leader. Different officials including Pavel Borodin, the Secretary of the Union State, have been predicting a soon introduction of a common currency since early 2000s. To be exact, Russia's deputy prime minister Igor Shuvalov only said he "would not rule out the possibility in the long-run of a switch to a unified monetary space". I.e., introduction of a common currency is a thing as far as it has been all these years.

The Soviet Union is gradually being rebuilt as Vladimir Putin eyes a return to the Kremlin. The man who declared the collapse of the Communist state to be the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" appears determined to forge a new empire. The latest evidence emerged in a suggestion by Igor Shuvalov, First Deputy Prime Minister in Mr Putin's Government, that Russia may abolish the rouble and create a common currency with Kazakhstan and Belarus. [Read the Full story](#)

Read news stories at [Belorusskie novosti](#), [Global Times](#) AČ

BBC Interviews Ivonka Survilla – President of Belarussian Government in Exile

BBC features Ivonka Survilla, the President of the Council (Rada) of the Belarussian Democratic Republic in a special broadcast on governments in exile.



According to the program author, Clive Anderson, the Rada is the longest-serving government in exile in the world. The Belarussian Democratic Republic's independence was declared on March 25, 1918 during World War I, when Belarus was occupied by the Germans according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

After the Germans retreated from the territory of Belarus and the Russian Red Army started moving in to establish the Socialist Soviet Republic of Belarus, in December 1918, the Rada (Council) of the Belarussian Democratic Republic moved to Hrodna, which became the centre of a semi-autonomous Belarussian region within the Republic of Lithuania. During the subsequent 1919 Polish invasion, the Rada went into exile and facilitated an anticommunist struggle within the country during the 1920s.

The BBC program examines interesting examples from around the world, which vary from the serious to the apparently ridiculous.

Clive Anderson examines one of the potentially strangest corners of international politics, the lesser-known governments or rulers in exile – a paradoxical area of international relations and surreal part of international law.

In Toronto, for example, a Belarusian government holds court, run by the charismatic Irvonka Survilla. Their version of Belarus only existed for nine months in 1918 before it was assimilated by the Soviet Union. Now that Belarus is independent, is there any reason for their continued existence?

The broadcast is available at BBC Radio 4 until 1 March 2010. To listen, click [here](#).

Viktor Yanukovich, an ethnic Belarusian, Elected as President of Ukraine



While Belarus itself has been stuck with its authoritarian ruler since 1994, an ethnic Belarusian in

neighboring Ukraine has secured the highest position in the country.

Father of the newly-elected Ukrainian President Fiodar Uladzimiravich Yanukovich was born in 1923 in Yanuki in northern Belarus. Fiodar Yanukovich was very young when his father Uladzimir Yaraslavavich Yanukovich moved to Ukraine in 1920-s to work in coal mines. Uladzimir went there with his brother, who subsequently returned to Yanuki in Belarus.

There has been rumors that Fiodar Yanukovich was collaborating with Nazis while in Belarus. Reportedly, Baranovich regional branch of NKVD, the predecessor of KGB [requested](#) in 1945 to "extradite" Fiodor Yanukovich back to Belarus on charges of collaboration with Nazis. However, the genuineness of this story is questionable.

In Ukraine, Fiodar worked as locomotive driver in Donbas, the region of Ukraine rich in coal. His first wife Olga died in 1952, when Viktor was just two years old. Fiodar later remarried and Viktor Yanukovich was brought up by grandmother. Being born in and having grown up in Ukraine, it is not surprising, that Viktor Yanukovich regards himself Ukrainian.

However, Viktor Yanukovich has not forgotten his Belarusian roots. He visited Yanuki, the birthplace of his father, at least twice. Once he went there on an official visit as Prime Minister of Ukraine with accompanied by his Belarusian counterpart Siarhei Sidorski and later paid a private visit. On both occasions, he met the local Yanukovichs and visited the local cemetery, where his grandfather's brother and other distant relatives are buried.

During his official visit to Yanuki in December 2006, Viktor Yanukovich even vowed to rejuvenate his family nest by building a new road and a dairy factory. According to media reports, he thought of inviting all people named Yanukovich from Belarus and Ukraine to resettle in Yanuki. Currently

there are only two families live in Yanuki. Both of them are Yanukovichs.

Viktor Yanukovich certainly has sentimental feelings towards his historic motherland, which may facilitate closer ties between Ukraine and Belarus. Hopefully, these closer ties will not lead Viktor Yanukovich to emulate the methods of another ethnic Belarusian president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who has been refusing to give up power for more than fifteen years.

Read more about visits of Viktor Yanukovich to Yanuki in Belarusian at tut.by.

YK

Belarusian Visa Price Has Risen to EUR 180 if Issued at the Airport



The main aim of a visa regime is to regulate migration flow and to prevent eventual illegal immigrants from entering the country. What kind of illegal immigrants could come to Belarus from the EU or the USA?

How is Belarus going to become one of the world's top 30 economies by easiness of doing business, which the government has declared as its goal, if it has one of the most expensive visas in the world? The solution should definitely be to ease the visa regime or even its de-facto cancellation, as it has been done in Ukraine and Georgia.

The explanation for this Soviet-styled decision, however, seems simple: the West is still seen by the Belarusian government as a potential threat and a potential source of danger for the regime. In the past, visa issues have been used as a tool to [force several Polish Catholic priests from Belarus](#). Along with Polish priests, who have presumably been promoting Polish nationalism instead of doing their primary spiritual work, foreign journalists, human rights activists and observers can easily be forced away from the isolated country in the middle of Europe.

However, if investment attraction is priority for Belarus, the visa regime for the EU and the US should definitely be liberalized. Besides, the EU itself could initiate this by lowering the Schengen visa price for Belarusians from the current EUR 60.

Starting 2010 the price for a Belarusian visa has risen to 180 euros for the citizens of the EU. First of all this concerns those who receive visas at the airport upon arrival to Belarus, the consular department of Belarusian Foreign Ministry told. The cost increase for Belarusian visas is due to new amendments to the Tax Code of the Republic of Belarus.

As explained in the Consular Section of the Minsk National Airport, potential tourists from the European Union, who wanted to come to Belarus, could previously have received a single journey short-term visa for USD 60. The new visa price is EUR 180. Long-term visas for citizens of the EU and the United States cost more than EUR 200.

Since the New Year the Belarus authorities charge for visas in Euros, not US dollars. Another change was introduction of three types of visas: transit, short-term and long-term. There is no separation between tourist and business visas, the Belarusian edition of RFE/RL reported.

“They have a choice, either to get the visa at an embassy of

Belarus in their country for EUR 60 or at the airport for EUR 180,” – representatives of the consular department of Belarusian Foreign Ministry said.

In the consular at the airport “Minsk-2” noticed that foreign nationals are paid and the new tariffs. “Nobody yet refused”, – reported at the airport.

Tourism agencies say that foreigners are beginning to refuse to travel to Belarus because Belarusian visas are among the most expensive visas in the world.

[Read the original story at Telegraf.by](#)

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The Wall Street Journal: Europe’s Last Dictatorship

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. The Wall Street Journal published an article of Jeffrey Gedmin, president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, who recently visited Belarus. He urges the U.S. to consider lifting sanctions only on the basis of strict conditionality. He also suggests that the EU insists that any economic assistance be closely tied to political reforms and respect for human rights. Here is the text:

Minsk, Belarus – One of the questions I was repeatedly asked during a recent trip to the capital of Belarus was whether the Obama administration would opt for greater pragmatism at the expense of idealism in foreign policy. Both the government and opposition in this country have a vested

interest in the answer. As early as next week, the U.S. will decide whether or not to continue sanctions against the country known as "Europe's last dictatorship." The European Union faces fresh choices as well.

NATO sees Belarus as a potential threat to neighboring Lithuania. Russian tanks stationed in Belarus can be in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, in about 90 minutes. This small nation of 10 million can threaten in other ways: 20% of EU gas imports from Russia pass through the former Soviet state.

Belarus also remains a notorious human-rights abuser. In its press-freedom index, Freedom House ranks Belarus 188th out of 195 countries. Transparency International rates Minsk as more corrupt than Moscow. Minsk can feel like a time warp: Main avenues in the capital are still named after Lenin, Marx and Engels.

On my trip, I attended a dinner with leading oppositionists in a private room at a local restaurant. It was private except for the two minders who were stationed about five feet away from us. At a meeting of former political prisoners at the U.S. embassy to celebrate the 55th anniversary of Radio Liberty broadcasts to Belarus, I met a former trade minister who had served two years for breaking with the regime. Another young, charismatic businessman had spent six years behind bars for his pro-opposition views.

The man who rules Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, is severe. In 1995 he had his air force shoot down a hot air balloon that had strayed into his air space, killing two Americans.

The U.S. and the EU need to consider two issues in their relations with Belarus. It's only through a coordinated approach that we'll make progress towards reform.

The first issue has to do with democratic development. The heady days of the 1990s, when it appeared that freedom was on the march around the world, have given way to a decade of

democracy recession. The most troubling developments have taken place in Russia and its periphery.

Democratization in countries such as Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine will almost certainly help to curb Russia's imperial appetite. Faced with neighboring democracies, Russia would be forced to take greater stock of its affairs at home. Garry Kasparov, the chess champion turned Putin opponent, thinks of an inside and an outside game if you want to support Russian democracy today. Mr. Kasparov argues that the outside game – what happens in Russia's neighborhood – may be as important as what's happening inside Russia.

Let's encircle Russia with states that provide a powerful model for democratization. It has been 20 years since George H.W. Bush gave his "Europe, Whole and Free" speech in Mainz, Germany, and the project is only half complete.

Second, the prospects for political change in Belarus may not be as bleak as some believe. True, the opposition is weak. For his part, Mr. Lukashenko never fails to disappoint. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the regime calls into question the fact that the mass graves on the outskirts of Minsk are the work of Stalin's henchmen. And Mr. Lukashenko is the only ex-Soviet leader to have proudly retained the name "KGB" for his security services.

Yet every dictator has his Achilles' heel. For the authorities in Belarus, theirs may be the economy. The Russians, with whom Mr. Lukashenko has a "close but dysfunctional relationship," as one EU diplomat puts it, have reduced their economic support for Belarus in the last couple of years. Moreover, Belarus has not managed to remain immune from the global financial crisis. According to that same diplomat, some 25% of state-enterprise employees are now working on reduced hours. Mr. Lukashenko is in trouble if his social pact begins to seriously fray.

What to do? The civil-society leaders I met were in agreement that the recent release of political prisoners was the result of U.S. and EU pressure. That pressure must be sustained. The U.S. should consider lifting sanctions only on the basis of strict conditionality. Washington should not give in to the temptation to accept the return of the American ambassador, who was expelled last March over U.S. sanctions, as sufficient. Belarus must be pressured to have more independent media, to investigate the cases of missing dissidents, and to end the practice of jailing oppositionists. For its part, the EU should insist that any economic assistance be closely tied to political reforms and respect for human rights.

This will be slow, tough going to be sure. But now is exactly the wrong time for a short-sighted realpolitik approach.

Source: The Wall Street Journal of 29 May 2009, page A13.