

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trip to Tbilisi for higher education specialists. The

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

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

□Interaction between State and Civil Society

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

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

Belarusian.

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

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

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

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Sannikov Released, Kavalenka Stops Hunger Strike – Politics and Civil Society Digest

Yesterday Andrei Sannikov, a 2010 presidential candidate, was released after almost sixteen months in prison.

Belarusian authorities prepare for the next [warming up cycle](#) in their relations with the West where political prisoners, Western pressure and Russian subsidies (or absence thereof) play a prominent role.

Earlier this week Lukashenka announced that he would be willing to release those who asked for a pardon. Mikola Statkevich, another 2010 presidential candidate, and over ten other political prisoners are still serving their sentences.

Court orders psychiatric evaluation of Syarhey Kavalenka. On 10 April, a panel of the Vitsyebsk Regional Court placed [Syarhey Kavalenka](#), who is widely regarded as political prisoner, in a psychiatric hospital for a comprehensive evaluation, while simultaneously postponing a hearing on the hunger-striking opposition activist's appeal against his prison sentence until the examination's findings are published. Later Kavalenka was put in the Navinki psychiatric hospital in Minsk where [he reportedly stopped his hunger strike](#) voluntarily.

Review-Chronicle of Human Rights Violations in Belarus. March

2012. The Human Rights Center Viasna has released its [review of human rights violations](#) in Belarus for March 2012. In particular, the experts note that during the reporting month, the human rights situation is strongly dependent on foreign policy volatility. The unresolved issue of political prisoners deepened the crisis between the Belarusian authorities and the EU.

Police takes away passport from BISS Director. On 6 April, Academic Director of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies [Alexei Pikulik](#) was detained by the police and had his passport and iPad seized. So far Pikulik has not been provided with any information about the timing of the return of the seized items.

Former Prosecutor General on EuroRadio. Former Prosecutor General and ex-Chair of the Constitutional Court Griroriy Vasilevich gave an [extensive interview to Euroradio](#), in which he suggests that the death penalty could be abolished in Belarus without a referendum. The lawyer called for the Chair of the Supreme Court of Belarus to “stop hiding behind the backs of subordinates” and comment on the death penalty verdict for Kovolev. He also suggested that the constitution and major international human rights instruments should become a “pocket book” for every public official in Belarus.

A debate on journalism ethics in Belarus. A heated debate on journalism ethics appeared among Belarusian media professionals following a publication on the website of Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) by [Tatiana Bublikava](#). The author raises the wide-spread problem of “copy-pasting” materials produced by others without references to the original sources.

Bublikava particularly examines the case of Belaruspartisan and Charter97 publishing a report titled “Three days with the mother of the executed,” initially produced by Polish TNV channel, the link to which the author placed on Facebook,

without making any direct link to the Facebook or the initial source. The article resulted in a lively several-day long [debate](#) on Facebook and publications by activists, such as [Olga Karach](#), and further publications by [Tatiana Bublikava](#) on Facebook and [Yanina Melnikava](#) on BAJ website.

Authorities

Makey: Belarus is ready for dialogue with EU. The Belarusian authorities are ready for the resumption of dialogue with the European Union, but their further steps will depend on what decisions the European Union's Council makes at its coming meeting later this month, [Uladzimir Makey](#), head of the Presidential Administration, said on 6 April. [Video](#)

Lukashenka asks Catholic church to help mend Belarus' ties with West. The Roman Catholic Church should help Belarus improve its relations with Western Europe, [Alexander Lukashenka](#) said while meeting with the outgoing ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to Belarus, Paul Friedrich von Fuhrherr, in Minsk on 9 April.

Social contracting in the House of Representatives. On 12 April, at its 10th session the House of Representatives [adopted](#) on first reading the draft law On Social Services. The new law introduces a mechanism of social state contracting, which provides funding for organizations of different ownership, including CSOs, from the state budget. 97 deputies voted in favour; 3 abstained.

April 11 Bombing

Memorial unveiled in Minsk on subway bombing anniversary. On 11 April, a [memorial was unveiled](#) at an entrance to the Kastychnitskaya station in Minsk to pay tribute to the victims of the 11 April 2011 subway bombing. More than 200 people gathered at the site to attend the event.

State and independent TV produced films about the Minsk subway

bombing. On 11 April, by the anniversary of the blast in the Minsk subway state Belarusian TV showed the documentary film [Metro](#), a Poland-based TV channel Belsat released its film [Fear of the Country of Peace](#).

Belarusian National Platform has adopted a statement condemning the executions. On 11 April, the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum has issued a [statement condemning the death penalty](#) in Belarus on the anniversary of the explosion in Minsk subway. In particular, the signers urged the authorities of Belarus to establish a moratorium on the death penalty.

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Freedom Day, Arbitrary Detentions and Travel Bans – Belarus Politics Digest

Although Belarusian authorities permitted and did not interfere with the annual Freedom Day opposition rally in the centre of Minsk, the pressure against opposition activists is increasing. Multiple detentions leading to short-term prison terms are now coupled with restrictions on travelling abroad for pro-democracy activists. The life of political prisoner Siarhey Kavalyou who has been on a long hunger strike is in danger.

Pro-democratic supporters mark BNR anniversary with demonstration. An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 people took part in a "[Dzen Voli](#)" (Freedom Day) demonstration that was held in Minsk on March 25 to mark 94 years since the proclamation of the 1918 Belarusian National Republic (BNR). No arrests were reported during the demonstration, which had been sanctioned by the Minsk City Executive Committee. According to witnesses, police acted politely.

100 detained in benefit concert over drug suspicion. On March 24, [around a hundred people](#) have been reportedly detained during a concert in support of the "Food Not Bombs" international campaign held in Minsk MTZ Palace of Culture that evening. As a result, 9 people were sentenced to administrative arrests for a period of 2 to 3 days, 7 people – to fines. In this regard [Belarusian human rights activists](#), on the initiative of the Legal Transformation Centre, signed an appeal to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Non-political expulsion. A journalist Ales Gorski investigates a case of dismissal of a civil activist [Nasta Shuleyka](#) from the Belarusian State University. He cites the words of the former student who agrees with the decision of the administration and claims that she was expelled for very valid reasons – a lot of missing of lectures and the "non-admission" to the exam session. Belarusian and international press extensively wrote that her dismissal was political.

Two more independent journalists warned by prosecutor. BAJ members Alina Radachynskaya and Volha Chaychyts were officially [summoned](#) to the prosecutor's office of Minsk on the morning of March 28. The journalists are accused of collaboration with "Belsat" TV-channel and warn against work for independent mass media in Belarus without accreditation. In 2012 already 8 warnings have been issued to independent journalists.

Ivashkevich warned for sanctions call. Belarusian opposition politician [Viktar Ivashkevich](#) has been warned against the actions that may be aimed at “undermining the state sovereignty”. The warning to the politician was issued in the Prosecutor General's Office on March 27.

Political prisoners

Hunger strike caused irreversible damage to Kavalenka's health? Referring to [Syarhey Kavalenka](#)'s lawyer, who met with the client on March 29, the activist's wife has sounded an alarm over the rapidly deteriorating health of the imprisoned opposition activist, saying that his lengthy hunger strike has already caused "irreversible" damage to his internal organs.

"Young Front" members sentenced to long terms of arrest. On March 11, "Young Front" activists were tried at the Leninski District Court of Minsk. Dzmitry Kramianetski, Mikhail Muski, Uladzimir Yaromenka and Raman Vasiljieu were given [15 days of administrative arrest](#), though they had already spent three days in a detention centre. So, each of them was given 18 days of arrest. The activists were tried for an action near the MFA headquarters. Anonymous people threw toilet paper at the building to show their protest against the agency's pro-Russian policies and expelling foreign diplomats from Belarus.

Syarhey Kavalenka set to continue his hunger strike until he is released. The wife of [Syarhey Kavelenka](#) has filed a fresh appeal with the Prosecutor General's Office, asking it to replace the opposition activist's prison term with a non-custodial sentence. Alena Kavalenka submitted the appeal after meeting with her husband at Detention Centre No.1 in Minsk on March 12. According to the wife, Syarhey Kavelenka is set to continue the hunger strike.

Travel Ban

Three key opposition politicians sentenced to

fines. Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civil Party; Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the "Spravedlivy Mir (Just World) and Alyaksandr Atroshchankaw, a member of European Belarus, who were arrested and taken off a Moscow-bound train by police early on March 28 were [sentenced to fines](#) on March 29. They had planned to travel from Moscow to Brussels for meetings with European Commission representatives before they were arrested in Orsha on their way to the Russian capital.

Lukashenka promises to maximally expand travel-banned list. [Alexander Lukashenka](#) has declared that the country has a list of the travel banned opposition activists, which is not operating to its maximum though. Lukashenka added that it was decided to prevent the opposition of Belarus from leaving the country because they had contributed to the introduction of sanctions by Western countries against the official Minsk.

Currently there are evidence about nearly a dozen Belarusian opposition politicians, civil society activists and independent journalists have been denied permission to cross the Belarusian border, including former parliament speaker [Stanislav Shushkevich](#), the United Civic Party Chairman [Anatol Lebedka](#), BAJ Chairwoman [Zhanna Litvina](#), Belarusian Helsinki Committee Chairman [Aleh Hulak](#) and others.

Travel ban for civil society activists. Starting from the early March, nearly a dozen (so far confirmed) Belarusian opposition politicians, civil society activists and independent journalists have been denied permission to cross the Belarusian border without being given an explanation. Among them there are human rights defender [Valentin Stefanovich](#), Platforma Chairman [Andrei Bandarenka](#), Nasha Niva Editor-in-Chief [Andrey Dynko](#), and over then other people. Although authorities deny the existence of a no-exit blacklist, [activists say](#) the exit denials appear to be a response to the EU's sanctions against individuals in the regime of Lukashenka.

Former director of IBB Astrid Sahm denied entry to Belarus. On March 18, the former German director of the IBB "Johannes Rau" in Minsk, [Astrid Sahm](#) was not allowed to enter Belarus. Sahm had a Belarusian visa and flew to Minsk on the affairs of the charity NGO "Hope". Rainer Lindner, Head of the German-Belarus Society [condemned](#) in the denial in a public [statement](#).

International

Fule launches dialogue with Belarusian society. On March 29, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule launched [the European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarusian society](#) at a meeting in Brussels with representatives of Belarusian civil society and political opposition. This follows the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council last week welcoming the idea of launching such a dialogue with the Belarusian society.

European Parliament adopted resolution on Belarus. On March 29, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Belarus at the meeting in Brussels. [The full document](#) is published on the site of the European Parliament (see part 2, pp.28-32). The resolution condemns "the deteriorating situation as regards human rights and fundamental freedoms, combined with the lack of deep democratic and economic reforms in Belarus, and will continue to oppose the repression of the regime's opponents."

Estonia allocated €100 thousand to Belarusian civil society. [The Estonian Foreign Ministry](#) has allocated €100 thousand to support civil society in Belarus. According to ambassador of Estonia to Belarus Jaak Lensment, this amount is pretty small, but can do many useful things when used properly.

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