

# Belarusian independent think tanks: surviving despite the odds

Although people rightly regard the Belarusian political regime as authoritarian, several independent think tanks function in the country. In this article, Belarus Digest identifies some of the main players, drawing on data from the [Belarus Policy](#) database and a ranking prepared by the Belarusian Research Council in 2016.

Belarusian independent think tanks mostly specialise in economics, international relations, security, public administration, or education reforms. Very few attempts have been made to measure the performance of Belarusian think tanks. According to estimates by the Belarusian Research Council in 2016, BEROC, BISS, CASE Belarus, and the Ostrogorski Centre possess the highest organisational potential and widest information outreach. Despite their ostensibly limited influence on the state apparatus, Belarusian independent think tanks generate ideas, some of which actually do influence policy-making. Click on <https://immigrationlawnv.com/es/> to access the best legal information to win your case.

## The organisational potential of Belarusian think tanks

In 2016, the Belarus Research Council [ranked](#) Belarusian independent think tanks according to their organisational potential, information outreach, and research activities. In terms of organisational potential, the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS), CASE-Belarus, and the Belarusian

Research and Outreach Centre (BEROC) occupied the top three places. The Minsk-based [BISS](#) (Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies) conducts research in four target areas: human capital, social contract, modernisation and institutional change. Moreover, BISS works in the area of international relations, focusing its work in three directions: Belarus as a part of Eurasian integration, the Belarus-EU relationship, and Belarus's relationship with developing nations.

The research database [Belaruspolicy.com](#) contains [50 research papers](#) prepared by BISS experts from 2009 to 2018. The BISS experts researched issues of the social contract between the state and various groups of Belarusian society, Belarus's isolation in Europe, and improving Belarusian competitiveness on a world stage. The BISS experts paid particular attention to the Belarusian national identity and Belarusian migration. The most popular research papers included the analysis of Belarusian [views on immigration](#) by [Alexei Pikulik](#) and the analysis of [migration](#) between Belarus and the EU by [Andrei Yeliseyeu](#).

The Warsaw-based [CASE Belarus](#) (Center for Social and Economic Research Belarus) conducts broad socio-economic analysis and sectoral studies, providing data and policy recommendations. Helping Belarus to avoid the mistakes of other post-socialist countries remains the key mission of CASE Belarus.



One of the research papers prepared by CASE Belarus. Source: [case-belarus.eu](#)

[Belaruspolicy.com](#) contains [31 papers](#) prepared by CASE Belarus experts from 2011 to 2018. The experts research covers the structural crisis of the Belarusian economy, the performance of Belarusian industries, and the potential for the

development of market institutions in Belarus. Socio-economic problems also receive significant attention, in particular, environmental problems, poverty belts, the use of labour in the prison system, and reducing the role of orphanages.

The most popular research papers included an analysis of the unrealised [potential of Belarus-EU](#) economic cooperation edited by [Dzmitry Babicki](#) and a diagnosis of [“poverty belt” in Belarus](#) by [Aliaksandr Radyna](#).

The Minsk-based [BEROC](#) (Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre) features among the leading economic academic think tanks in Belarus. The Centre started its work in 2008 as a joint project of the Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics (SITE) and the Economics Education and Research Consortium (EERC).

Belaruspolicy.com contains 82 papers prepared by BEROC's experts from 2010 to 2018. The experts' research encompasses foreign investments, inflation, macroeconomic trends, tax amnesties, liquidity and monetary policy in Belarus. Moreover, BEROC paid particular attention to the dollarisation of the Belarusian economy, the Belarusian pension system, and the role of private sector in Belarus. Among the most popular of BEROC's papers – an analysis of [self-employment in Belarus](#) by [Mariya Akulova](#) and a study of [depressed regions](#) in Belarus by [Aleh Mazol](#).

## Information outreach

In terms of information outreach, the Belarusian Centre for European Studies, SYMPA/BIPART, the Ostrogorski Centre, and Liberal Club hold the leading positions. The Minsk-based Belarusian Centre for European Studies promotes closer relations between Belarus and the European Union and positions itself as an expert base for the European movement in Belarus. Apart from its research activities, the Centre administers an

educational platform (ECLAB) and a discussion club “European Café”.

SYMPA (The School of Young Managers in Public Administration)/[BIPART](#) (Belarusian Institute for Public Administration Reform and Transformation) conduct educational projects in the field of public administration and conduct research activities. Over recent years, BIPART’s experts have researched [public procurement](#), [e-government](#), and [public-private partnerships](#) in Belarus.



Source: Majority of papers on Belarus Policy database

The [Ostrogorski Centre](#) analyses the problems Belarus faces in its transition to a market economy and the rule of law. The Centre [experts](#) transition processes in Belarus and provide policy solutions, often based on the best practices of other countries.

In addition, the Ostrogorski Centre regularly holds [conferences](#) on Belarusian [education reforms](#) and [security issues](#). Since 2013, the Ostrogorski Centre has prepared 12 research papers on [education reforms](#), [national security](#) and [foreign policy](#). The most popular papers include [“Who rules Belarus”](#) by [Siarhei Bohdan](#) and [“Belarus-Russia Relations after the Ukraine Conflict”](#) by [Ryhor Astapenia](#) and Dzmitry Balkuniec.

The Minsk-based [Liberal Club](#) focuses on research and dissemination of liberal paradigm in the context of the Belarusian socio-political, economic and cultural realities. Belarusprofile.com contains 14 papers written by the Liberal Club’s experts from 2010 to 2018. The experts have calculated an index of [economic adequacy](#) of Belarus, proposed ways to stimulate [corporate social responsibility](#), and analysed

Belarus's relations [with the EU and Russia](#) in the discourse of print media.

## **Analytical and research activities**

In terms of analytical and research activities, BEROC, NMNE, and IPM Research Centre occupied the first three places. NMNE (or the expert community "Nashe Mnenie") has provided daily analytics of Belarusian politics, economy, governance, society, cultural and gender policies since 2003.

The Minsk-based [IPM Research Centre](#) (The Research Center of the Institute for Privatisation and Management) has monitored and forecast the economic situation in Belarus since 1999. The most popular research papers by IPM's experts on Belaruspolicy.com included [corruption studies](#) on Belarusian SMEs, an analysis of Belarusian SMEs development, and the prospects of Belarusian [business developments](#) in 2017.

## **Cooperation between independent think tanks and the state?**

From time to time Belarusian independent think tanks conduct joint events with representatives of the state. Originally started as a [joint initiative](#) of the Liberal Club and the Ostrogoski Centre, and now run by the Liberal Club "Minsk Dialogue" has become a platform for the exchange of ideas on issues of foreign policy. On 23-25 May, the "Minsk Dialogue" expert community arranged an international forum, "Eastern Europe: in search for security for all", with President Alexander Lukashenka and Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makei

among the speakers.

One of BEROC's flagship events is the annual KEF conference which attracts top economists from the Belarusian government, such as the former first deputy prime minister [Vasil Maciusheuski](#) and top advisors from the National Bank of Belarus. The Ostrogorski Forum organises events in the area of education, attracting heads of faculties of Belarusian universities and high-level officials from the Ministry of Education.

In most cases, however, independent think tanks exert only very limited influence on Belarusian state policies. Government officials generally view think tanks with suspicion as many of them have to survive on funding from the West. The restrictive legal and political framework prevents think tanks from engaging properly with Belarusian businesses, apply for meaningful state funding or conduct large-scale joint projects with the government, particularly in areas viewed as politically sensitive.

*Yarik Kryvoi & Olga Hryniuk*

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## **Minsk Forum 2014 Brings the Spirit of Discussion Back to Minsk**

On 1-2 December the international conference "Regional Stability and Modernization: Challenges and Opportunities for EU-Belarus Relations" took place in Vilnius and Minsk.

For the first time since the crackdown on the mass protest

against the presidential election results in December 2010, the German-Belarusian Society organised an event in Minsk.

The conference produced a list of concrete policy recommendations and, more importantly, helped to bring the forgotten spirit of constructive discussion back to Belarus. For a country where stakeholders are not used to talking to each other this presents a more crucial value than the conference's formal outcomes.

### **The Legendary Minsk Forum**

In 1997, the German-Belarusian Society in cooperation with the Minsk-based Analytical Centre *Strategy* launched a conference that soon transformed into something unique for Belarus. Once a year the Minsk Forum gathered together almost every major Belarusian political and civil society actor as well as stakeholders in Belarus-EU relations. The forum's venue managed to host over 300 hundred people for two or three days of tense, open discussions.

It was the only event of its kind in Belarus. Only there could one observe such unusual scenes for the Belarusian political reality as, for example, a leader of the opposition and former presidential contender talking to the head of the Presidential Administration.

In 2010, the last such forum took place. The brutal [events](#) that followed the presidential elections of 2010 and the imprisonment of a number of opposition activists brought the Minsk Forum to a halt. The German political [foundations](#), which used to sponsor it, [declared](#) that they would not do so long as political prisoners remained behind bars. Against the background of deteriorating EU-Belarus relations, the forum was [cancelled in 2011](#) and did not take place in 2012.

In 2013, however, the Minsk Forum was reincarnated in the form of a conference in Vilnius. For two days the leaders of the

Belarusian opposition and NGO community discussed ways to improve the relations between Belarus and the West with diplomats, politicians and experts from the EU. They do so without any representatives from the Belarusian authorities present.

Finally, this year a partial return of the Minsk Forum to its original venue unfolded. The German-Belarusian Society in partnership with the East European Studies Centre (Vilnius), Analytical Centre *Strategy* (Minsk) and the Centre for Analytical Initiatives of the *Liberal Club* (Minsk) organised a two day cross-border conference: the first day took place in Vilnius and the second one in Minsk.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

This time the Belarusian authorities did not accept an invitation at a political level but delegated a number of diplomats to participate in the conference's expert roundtables. This itself can already be seen as a small step forward.



During the two days the discussions focused on the regional challenges that Belarus and the EU face in the context of the Ukraine crisis and opportunities in their bilateral relations.

The ambassador of Germany to Belarus **Wolfram Maas** spoke of the necessity of reevaluating the way certain things are perceived in the EU's policy towards Belarus. For example, he proposed to look at the Bologna process as an opportunity for young Belarusians rather than as a gesture to the Belarusian government. At the same time, he asked not to touch "the ties between the sanctions and the political prisoners" in the ongoing debates about ways ahead in EU-Belarus relations.

**Balazs Jarabik**, Pact Belarus project director and a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,

opined that the current EU-Belarus dialogue looks better than the one in 2008-2010: “in those years we were declaring a dialogue, now we are doing it”.

**Valery Karbalevich** of the Analytical Centre *Strategy* reminded about the escalation of tensions between Russia and the West, particularly militarily, as a factor in EU-Belarus relations: “against a backdrop of this increasing escalation, Belarus might find itself impotent in the face of Russian pressure”.

Ambassador of Lithuania **Evaldas Ignatavicius** argued that the existing Eastern Partnership (EaP) format was not sufficient for further progress in the region in general and in the relations with Belarus in particular. He suggested that more regional horizontal activities be developed. For instance, new cross-border projects between Belarus, Ukraine and the Baltic states.

Ambassador **Dirk Schuebel**, head of the EaP-bilateral division at the European External Action Service, offered some details of the present-day dialogue with Belarus. According to him, the EU welcomed a number of decisions that the Belarusian government took over the last year. These positive developments included the release of the human rights defender Ales Bialiatski, the start of the visa negotiations and its independent position on the developments in Ukraine, as well as President Lukashenka’s positive statements on Moldova’s Association Agreement with the EU.



He expressed appreciation for Belarus’s active participation in the EaP’s multilateral track and said that the EU was also ready to increase the number of its activities with Belarus and in Belarus. In Schuebel’s words, “it is too early to talk about a window of opportunity before the next presidential elections, but the EU should not miss an opportunity when it arrives”.

## Process Over Outcome

After the conference, the organisers disseminated the conference notes that include eleven recommendations to policy-makers in the EU and Belarus:

- to redefine the EaP towards a more bilateral approach;
- to consider trilateral formats (EU-Belarus-Russia) for discussing neighbourhood issues, such as energy, trade, logistics, etc.;
- to advance regional cross-border cooperation between Belarus and the neighbouring EU states;
- to review sanctions against Belarus as soon as the government makes constructive steps towards meeting the EU's expectations;
- to enhance the role of Minsk as a “new Geneva”;
- to promote European/international standards in Belarus by accepting the country to the Bologna Process and the WTO;
- to place more emphasis on economic reforms in Belarus;
- to encourage the EBRD and European Investment Bank to finance more EU-Belarus business projects;
- to speed up the visa negotiations;
- to support the strengthening of Belarus’s statehood and national identity;
- to look for ways to facilitate better cooperation between the EU and Eurasian Economic Union.

However, the recommendations were in a way secondary to the fact that the event was able to take place only after three years of the Minsk Forum’s suspension. Still, for Belarus even such a tiny, and not particularly successful, attempt to gather various actors and stakeholders in one room is an important step forward.

In a country where people do not talk a lot to each other about numerous internal and external challenges and ways to meet them, any such attempt serves a better cause than

meaningless confrontation.

The smartest thing that the Belarusian government can do at this point is to invite the German-Belarusian Society to hold a full-fledged Minsk Forum next year. And if it really wants to build on its "new Geneva" momentum such fora should become almost a daily routine.

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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 500<sup>th</sup> 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.

*Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.*

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# Tax Freedom Day, Monitoring of Belarusian Students' Rights – Belarus Civil Society Digest

How much Belarusians work for the state and for themselves? – Liberal Club presents its findings in a special report. Student Council wants to monitor violations of the rights of students at the Belarusian universities.

*Belarusian House* (Poland) offers Belarusian unregistered or deprived of registration NGOs to register in Poland. Local festivals boom in Belarus.

## New Initiatives

[Tax Freedom Day in Belarus](#). On 6 June for the first time in Belarus Liberal Club presents a research *Belarus Tax Freedom Day 2014 Report*. The study shows how many days a year the Belarusian society and every individual citizen work for the state, and when they begin to work for themselves. The study is performed according to the internationally recognised methodology that in an easy and clear way answer the most important questions about taxes and the tax system.

[Citizens to organise local fests in Minsk](#). After the local festival *At Grusheuka* held on 1 May the activity of citizens hasn't been over: now Grusheuka every Sunday held a meeting of local residents. Moreover, the idea to hold such festivals are picked up by residents of the other three Minsk districts – Uruchcha, Malinouka and Slepianka. Now organisers of the Grusheuka fest are developing the web site [grad.by](http://grad.by), which is

to collect contact data of active people – those who are willing to change Minsk for the better.

**Online monitoring of violations of the rights of students in universities**. Youth human rights group *Student Council* launches online monitoring, where each student who confronted the violation of students' rights can post information about it and mark the violation on the map. Monitoring results with the analysis of violations will be periodically posted on the organisation's website. To assist in gathering information, students need to fill an online application-form in the Internet.

**Time to clean up! action**. A large multimedia actions is to be held in Gomel dedicated to World Environment Day. The organisers are Gomel Democratic Forum and community sdelae2012gomel. Anyone is invited to join the action on 7 June and removes garbage in any territory where it is needed. Also a participant is suggested to text sms with data about his/her location and the code word #chisto. A clear place is to appear on the map chisto.gdf.su – this should provide a picture how many people are involved in the action.

**Monologue of Master Project** is producing and posting at its website a collection of short documentaries that aspire to sketch out artistic and psychological portraits of some of the unique figures in traditional crafts, who live and work in Belarus today. Thus, the project aims to contribute to development of tourist trade in the country. The project is promoted and implemented as part of *Budzma* culture campaign.

**Gender Component in a Project Proposal workshop**. On 26 June a program Belarus-EU by the Office for a Democratic Belarus invites to take part in the workshop titled as *Gender Component in a Project Proposal* with a leading specialist, chairwoman of the Gender Perspectives NGO, Irina Alkhovka. During the event the representatives of NGOs and government agencies implementing or planning to implement international

projects, will be able to verify whether a gender component is considered in their project applications.

[Accessibility Week Goes On](#). Initiated by the Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Accessibility Week 2014 provides a space for a bunch of thematic events like a public discussion on [universal design](#) or a presentation of the city [accessibility map in Zhytkavichy](#), Gomel oblast. [Music Festival The Beatles](#) invited all guests to try physical barriers faced by every person with a disability – everyone could use a wheelchair or wear masks and headphones to feel the related problems.

### **From the Life of Belarusian Civil Society**

**Registration of Belarusian NGOs in Poland.** *Belarusian House* (Poland) offers Belarusian unregistered or deprived of registration NGOs to register in Poland. *Belarusian House* staff assists with registration documents and provides individual consultations on the activities of public associations and taxation in Poland. Organisers also compensate the costs of registration and both-way travel from Belarus to Poland. According to the [belngo.info](#) newsletter

[Statement on signing of Belarus the treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Community \(EAEC\)](#). The Belarusian National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum issued a statement where expressed a disagreement with signing by Alexander Lukashenka the EAEC Treaty – "The signing of the treaty causes significant harm to the national interests of the Republic of Belarus, as well as deprives our country some opportunities of geopolitical and civilisational choice, including more intensive and long-term oriented cooperation with the EU and using the potential of the Eastern Partnership".

[Regular conference of the Belarusian National Platform \(BNP\)](#) will take place on 21 June in Minsk. The conference is called "Belarus in conditions of regional crisis and stagnation of

the Eastern Partnership" and aims to report of the Coordinating Committee for 2013-2014, discuss goals and future steps for the development of the BNP in today's difficult situation, etc. The conference can be attended by the BNP members, as well as other organisations (without the right for participation).

## **Educational Events**

[Week of educational events "Justice and People" to be held in Minsk](#). On 2-6 June the public campaign *Non Mortal Penalty. Because We are People* invited to the summer days of old movies in Belarusian, public lectures and round tables with experts. The Week aims to provide tools and neutral space where people can get complete information on the death penalty and non mortal, crime, justice, and decide what his/her true position on this issue.

[IV Summer School of Flying University](#). In July, the Flying University holds summer school titled *Shifts and Transformation of our Time: Challenges and Circumstances for the University and Society*. This year Summer School is dedicated to understanding the social, cultural and humanitarian changes that occur in the world today. Deadline for applications is 10 June.

[Academy of the First kicks off](#). In late May, the first session of the long term educational program Academy of the First gathered about 15 representatives of different CSOs – animal protection, cultural platforms, human rights defenders. The agenda includes educational sessions and implementation mini-projects to benefit a particular community or group. Youth Council RADA implements the course for the 14<sup>th</sup> time already.

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# Museum Fair, Internet for Activists, SocStarter – Belarus Civil Society Digest

In this issue of Belarus Civil Society Digest: demands for a special amnesty on the occasion of the ice hockey championship, training for social activists, competition for bike-friendly companies, discussions of Belarus investment possibilities and transparency of university budgets.

The digest also covers several recent cultural initiatives, including Museum Fair, festivals of Hrusauka and of Belarusian advertising and communication.

## Civil Society and the State

[Appeal for special amnesty on IHWC occasion](#). On the occasion of the Ice Hockey World Championship, the human rights organisation *Libereco – Partnership for Human Rights* demands a special amnesty from Belarusian president Lukashenka for the release of all political prisoners. Another appeal has been launched by representatives of international and national human rights organisations which call the concerned States [to refrain from sending official government delegations to participate in the events](#) related to the Championship. One more statement named [Belarus Must Play Fair, in Sports and Beyond](#) calls on Belarus' leaders and citizens to take decisive steps towards making Belarus an open and democratic country.

[Legal Transformation Center Lawtrend continues its activities on researching an access to government online.](#) On April 28, Lawtrend conducted a round table to discuss the methodology and results of the last year monitoring of 45 governmental websites. The event was attended by about 20 representatives of government organizations, including the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Communication and Information, the Ministry of Defense, state committees, etc

[Memorandum of Partnership Alliance signed.](#) On April 23, in Minsk, six CSOs signed a Memorandum of Partnership "Alliance" – the initiative *Europerspectiva*, Institute of History and Culture, Lastovsky History Society, International Association of Environmentalists, the initiative Sober Life, analytical project Belarus Security Blog. The mission of the new coalition is to increase public control over the decision-making and implementation processes at the state level, to achieve real changes in the Belarusian society, etc.

## **Social activism**

[Contest of small deeds Let's Make it Better 2014.](#) The Assembly of pro-Democratic NGOs continues its campaign *Let's Make it Better!* and announces a new contest of positive ideas. Any CSO which is a member of the Assembly is invited to participate in the campaign aimed at revitalization of society through involvement of citizens in solving local issues. The application deadline is June 15.

[Internet for activists. Basics Manual.](#) The Assembly of pro-Democratic NGOs prepared a second edition of the manual, which aims to help civil society activists to find their way in the world of modern technology and adapt it to their needs. The manual is help CSOs to talk about their activities for a wide range of people, promptly inform and educate the public about important issues and offer solutions, find new activists, etc. The book is available in various formats.

[SocStarter training program launches its 2nd season](#). From May till July 2014, the 2nd season of SocStarter offers 10 social initiatives the chance to get a full training with the goal to enable to start their own social enterprise. SocStarter is an International Social Entrepreneurship Training Program organized by SocialWeekend.by, Maesens.by, Bel.Biz, UNESCO Clubs. The program invites to the participation teams (from two people) who want to implement social business in Belarus.

[Competition for bike-friendly companies](#). Minsk Bicycle Society and Center for Environmental Solutions launched a competition *Business Bike* among bike-friendly companies. The contest covers Minsk and Grodno and will identify an organization, that develops internal cycling infrastructure and support staff using bikes. [The website of the competition](#) describes the rules and criteria of the winner's selection, as well as suggests useful tips for managers who want to make an active lifestyle as part of a corporate policy.□

## **Conferences and Roundtables**

[Panel on investment possibilities in Belarus](#). On April 22, in Minsk, analytical community Liberal Club organized a panel discussion [Is it possible to do business in Belarus?](#) The discussion raised such issues as success factors for foreign and Belarusian investors, the examples of business projects developing in Belarus despite or because of ambiguous investment reputation of the country, etc. Among the speakers were Pavel Daneiko, the Belarusian Economic Research and Education Center (BEROC), Mikhail Borozdin, Investment Consulting Company, Daniel Krutzinna, International consulting company Civitta.

[International conference on protection of children](#). On April 23-24, Minsk hosted the 5th International Conference *Safe Belarus and CIS Region for Children*. The results achieved in

the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States were thoroughly discussed as well as practical recommendations in the field of law, treatment, training and education were worked out. Master-classes and presentations of the speakers answered the question HOW to PROTECT children and PREVENT child abuse. The organizer of the Conference is the International *Ponimanie* NGO.

[Discussion on transparent budgets of universities](#). On April 24, at the Minsk Gallery Ÿ, Analytical Laboratory of Development Center of Student Initiatives held a discussion titled as of *Making transparent budgets of Belarusian universities!* During the discussion, [a new campaign of student organizations on transparency Belarusian universities](#) was presented. The discussion was attended by representatives of the research project BIPART, public Bologna Committee, Association of Belarusian Students (ZBS), Studentskaya Rada/ Student Council.

## **Cultural events**

[Local Hrushauka Festival](#) took place on May 1, in Minsk. The Festival became the first ever local community collaboration in one of the Minsk districts. The event was initiated by a private person and facilitated by a crowd-funding platform Talaka.by. Hand in hand with inhabitants of the district the Festival was joined by some organized groups – Youth union Falanster, CPM independent project, Center for Environmental Solutions and some others. The Festival had a big rotation of people to come and to leave according to varied day-long programme and gathered up to 1000 visitors.

[Art-Siadziba says goodbye to the premises with a big concert](#). On April 25, Art-Siadziba held a farewell concert party Solidarity with Art-Siadziba, headliner was NRM band. The concert had a charity nature – all the musicians performed for free, and the money will go to purchase of own premises. On May 1, Art-Siadziba should release its current office – the

fifth one for the last two years. Meanwhile, the total amount of funds raised on the new office already exceeds \$7,100 out of 200 thousand dollars needed.

**Museum Fair.** On May 15, the cultural campaign *Budzma* conducts *Museum Fair* dedicated to new, relevant ways to expand the audience of museums and modern models of working with visitors. Special attention will be given to projects that not only stimulate scientific and educational activities of the museum, but also take into account the needs of today's Belarusian society. Both professionals and amateurs are invited to participate. Professionals in the museum field will assess the project ideas.

**AD.NAK! launched for the fifth time.** On April 22, the Fifth Festival of Belarusian Advertising and Communication AD.NAK! was launched with a press-conference. The Festival is traditionally presented in a new concept, namely *Think globally – Act locally!* The current Festival promotes the idea of the high value of the local communications that can be developed via the new modern formats. The final awards ceremony will be held on June 27 in Minsk. The initiator of the Festival is the campaign *Budzma*.□

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# Human Rights for Dummies, Belarusian Collegium – Belarus Civil Society Digest

A new project from “Human Rights for Dummies” campaign started recently. The Centre for European Transformation invites individuals for a series of analytical seminars. BEROC and the British Embassy in Minsk organise a student school for young economists.

## Human rights

[Human Rights for Dummies](#). On 16 September activists of the “Human Rights for Dummies” campaign presented a new project – the human rights school “Pcholka”. The event was attended by students from law faculties, journalists and volunteers of the human rights center “Viasna”. The human rights school “Pcholka” is organised with the support of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Human Rights Centre “Viasna”, Legal Transformation Centre Lawtrend and others. The project is aimed at young people under 35 years old who took part in human rights programmes before and want to deepen their knowledge in this sphere.

[State-appointed expert labels Ales Bialiatski’s book as dangerous for the state](#). Ales Bialiatski’s book “Enlightened by Belarusianness” (“Asvechanyia Belaruschunai”) “could damage the image of the Republic of Belarus”, reports the results of an expert examination ordered by the Ashmiany customs department. 40 copies of the book were confiscated from human rights defender Tatsiana Reviaka on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border on 3 July this year.

[Lawtrend Digest](#). The Legal Transformation Centre Lawtrend and EuroBelarus released the sixth issue the Digest of international news on Human Rights. Release covers the July-

August 2013 and includes a Belarus' report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, decisions of the UN Committee on Human Rights on Belarus, a Russian version of the EU report by Justas Paleckis and other documents.

## **Seminars and lectures**

[Belarusian Collegium announces a new round of studies.](#) Belarusian Collegium is a non-governmental platform for public lectures and discussions as well as a place for intellectual and cultural dialogue. The Collegium offers education in journalism, contemporary history and philosophy/literature. Senior students or persons with higher education are invited to participate. The classes are free of charge.

[EuroCafe lectures in Minsk.](#) On 7 September a public lecture by Professor Timm Beichelt "Germany and the EU face to face with its eastern neighbours" took place in the Minsk TUT.by gallery. The lecture was organised for the "European Café: open space in Europe" project. 80 people attended the event.

[The Third BEROC School for Students.](#) Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre (BEROC) in cooperation with the British Embassy Minsk will organise the Third School for Students on Modern Economics and Economic Research to be held in Minsk in September-December 2013. Among the lectures there are BEROC economists who have obtained PhD both from leading Belarusian universities and abroad, as well as a visiting professor. The working language of the school is English. Participation in the School is free of charge.

[School of environmental lawyers.](#) The Green Alliance invites senior students of law to participate in the legal service training of the Green Alliance. The series of trainings will address issues related to environmental law and developing strategies to protect it.

[CET analytical seminars.](#) The Centre for European Transformation opens a series of regular analytical seminars. Participants will analyse the situation in Belarus, to offer guidance and action strategies for cultural and political actors. The first seminar was held on 17 September. The lecturer

is Head of CET, Andrei Yahorau.

## **Campaigns and projects**

**[Belarusian politicians at Press Club Belarus](#)**. On 9 September Press Club Belarus in Warsaw hosted the initiators of the “People’s referendum” Alexander Milinkevich, Uladzimir Niaklajeu, Andrei Dmitriev, and Yuri Gubarevich. At the Press Club Belarusian politicians spoke about the results of a meeting with Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski which [earlier took place](#), as well as their vision of the situation in Belarus, the capacity of the “People’s referendum”, etc. The Press Club Belarus was established by the Solidarity with Belarus Information Office in 2011.

**[Mova ci Kava gathered more 100 people](#)**. On 16 September the first session of the second season of the Belarusian language courses “Mova ci Kava” (Language or Coffee) brought together more than 110 people. About half of the participants were new students. The place and time of the classes have not changed – every Monday at the Minsk Gallery “Ź”. The courses were started in late 2012 by a Belarusian journalist Katerina Kibalchich.

**[New student think tank](#)**. On 17 September in Minsk, a new student think tank – the Analytical Laboratory at the Centre for Student Initiatives Development – presented its activity and prospective work. The Analytical laboratory plans to focus on the study of the issues of higher education and student self-government in Belarus. The Laboratory will conduct research and develops policy papers, as well as organise public events on topical issues of the student movement and the academic community.

**[Belarus Future](#)**. Portal [newspeak.by](#) invites individuals to participate in the project “Belarus’ Future” under the campaign “Citizens’ Club.” Belarus’ Future is a project aimed at discussing which transformations are needed for

Belarusian society, and how to implement them in practice. The organisers will select the best participants who offer the most profound, reasonable and attractive concept of transformation in Belarus.

[Call for start-up battle](#). [BEL.BIZ](#), a coordinator of the Global Entrepreneurship Week in Belarus, invites ambitious projects to take a stab at the Battle of pitches, which is to be held on 21 November 2013 at the 3rd International Entrepreneurship Forum. [BEL.BIZ BATTLE](#) is a competition aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and promoting a “start-up culture” in Belarus. The finalists will go on to the Baltic Bay Area Startup Roadshow.

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## **Lukashenka's Rating on the Rise, Counting Political Prisoners – Digest of Belarusian Analytics**

IISEPS published the latest national opinion poll results. Alexander Lukashenka's rating is on the rise. The Liberal Club takes a closer look at the public administration reforms. Jana Kobzova notes that the discrepancy in a number of political prisoners in Belarus might be a practical problem for EU policymakers.

[Results of the National Opinion Poll. June, 2013](#) – A national survey conducted in June 2013 by Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS), shows that the image of the state as the chief spokesman of the people's interests becomes more and more "dim". However, these sentiments are not directly transferred to the president. Increasing the "economic well-being" in the second quarter of the year has had a positive impact on the attitude to the president – his electoral rating continues to gradually rise: in December 2012, 31.5% respondents were ready to vote for him, in March – 33.4%; now, in June – 37.3%.

[What Eastern Europeans Think about the Democratic Transition: Understanding Values and Attitudes](#) – The paper describes current trends based on available public opinion polls in four Eastern European countries (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) in order to provide deeper analysis of the transition process taking place in these countries. It argues that democratic transition in post-Soviet countries should not be viewed only in terms of changes in the political elite, but also in terms of changes in the attitudes of its citizens.

[Belarus and the Eurasian Union: Incremental Integration](#) – In a policy brief by Balázs Jarábik, Alexei Pikulik and Andrei Yeliseyeu examines the new integration process which reflects Moscow's efforts to create a supranational regulatory framework inspired by the EU. However, many obstacles prevail. Belarus, for example, has no interest in pressing for a full-fledged Eurasian Union unless it is on its own terms. While Central Europe and the Baltic states were willing to pay the price of hard reforms to achieve their European dream, Belarus wishes to get paid for Eurasian integration.

[Counting Belarus' Political Prisoners](#) – Jana Kobzova gives some attention to the difference in numbers of political prisoners: 9 such people on EEAS' list; 11 – in Human Rights Centre *Viasna* list; 5 prisoners of conscience are named in the recent Amnesty International annual report; and 13 political

are mentioned by Belarusian news portal Charter97. The expert notes that such a difference in numbers is not just confusing – it might also become a practical problem for European policymakers.

[How to Arrange Belarus. A Square with Love](#) – Ina Romashevskaya of research project in public administration BIPART comments on the meeting of Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich with the Minsk authorities on the issue of improvement of the capital. The expert believes that the state – in this case, the city authorities – should and can transform its urban space, making it attractive, safe and fun for everyone. Respectively, the government should ask the citizens' opinion in order to understand what a “cosy” and “attractive” urban space means for them.

[Public Administration Reform: Policy Documents vs. Presidential Decree](#) – Nikita Belyaev, of the Liberal Club, presented a policy brief on the analysis of the Program of Social and Economic development of Belarus for 2011-2015 and the relevant presidential decrees. One of the findings of the research claims that some decisions taken in the framework of public administration contradict the objectives set out in the policy documents; at the same the presidential decrees have much greater practical force.

[Belarusian Mobilization as an External Factor](#) – Alexei Gajdukevich, the project “Cytadel”, talks about the purposes and methods of mobilization of Belarusian society. He believes that integration into global processes with positive internal consolidation and protection of the physical, moral and spiritual dangers can become a significant factor for the Belarusian state in foreign policy. In contrast to the decline of Western civilization, the expert sees some positive processes in Belarus, which may lead to more opportunities for Belarusian expansion in the world.

[Economy on the Fingers](#) – a regular program of TV TUT.by

discusses the strike of entrepreneurs, the introduction of “platinum action” and the legal side of unloading warehouses. The experts of the program – the economist Sergei Chaly and the lawyer Maxim Znak – come to ambiguous conclusions, in particular, that individual entrepreneurs are at a dead end in the evolution of corporate law. Also, [Gazeta.ru](http://Gazeta.ru) identifies the main feature of the current protests, namely, for the first time Belarusian entrepreneurs have put forward political demands and starting to collect signatures for the exit of Belarus from the Customs Union.

[The State Needs Young Experts. But Why?](#) – this week TV TUT.by program “Amplituda” is dedicated to young people’s participation in analytics and the state demand for young intellectuals. The invited experts – Alexei Matsevilo, Information Analysis Centre under the Administration of President; Yauheni Preiherman, of the Liberal Club NGO; and Alexander Shpakovsky, of project “Cytadel” – discuss the challenges and guarantees that the project would not become analytical support to add to the legitimacy of government decisions already made.

[LGBT Topic in Belarusian Media](#) – Mediakritika.by analyses the results of the annual Report on coverage of LGBT issues in Belarusian media. In particular, monthly Belarusian media publishes about 1.6 related articles; about 61% of the materials contain a neutral evaluation, about 26% – positive, and 12% – negative. It is noteworthy that the state-run media are showing a more aggressive approach in covering the LGBT topic while independent editions demonstrate neutral or positive modality.

[Victor Martinovich: Belarusians are an Absolutely Tolerant, but Cowardly People](#) – What is exactly is Belarusian tolerance and is it objective? Whom and why do Belarusians like or not like ? Is it possible to love others if you do not love yourself? What is more healthy, “give a face” or to keep yourself? Why is the issue of homophobia relevant? Journalist and writer Victor Martinovich answers these questions under

the campaign “Budzma!” project “Culture Improves Life!”

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# **Dead Organisations in the Belarusian Third Sector – Digest of Belarusian Analytics**

Over the last few weeks a number of analytical publications came out. BISS prepared two regular reports on the trends within the Belarusian society and priorities in Belarus's foreign policy. For the first time the UN issued a report on the trends in the field of human rights in Belarus.

Mediakritika.by monitored how the state and independent media find out the sources of their news. The Liberal Club discussed the possible consequences of the new health system reform implementation.

[Belarusian Third Sector is Overloaded with Dead Organisations](#) – Uladzimir Matskevich, the leader of the National Platform of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum considers problems and threats to the civil society. He pays attention to poor legislation and poor conditions for Belarusian NGOs which waste time on formation, existence and survival: “Only those who can get away from all those formal obligations and allocate time for thinking, criticism, reflection, evaluation, and mere human discussion are capable of something. But there are very

few of them in Belarus."

[Where do the news come from?](#) Mediakritika.by portal has monitored the two state-owned TV-channels in Belarus and non-governmental Belsat to find out sources of their news. Liaison offices of government bodies, public relations departments, ideology deputies – are the ones shaping the key information occasions featured by the Belarusian TV-channels on a daily basis. News occasions created by government's spokespeople are the basis of the news broadcasts aired by all three TV-channels during the monitoring week. Meanwhile, there were almost no exclusive news materials created by the channels' journalists.

[BISS-Timeline #4 \(April 2013\)](#) – Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) presents its brief monthly review of the major social, economical, political and cultural events in Belarus. According to publication, environmental issues were high on the agenda for Belarusians recently. Majority of public initiatives in April related to the Chernobyl disaster and the construction of a new power plant in Astraviec. The experts describe also the landmark foreign policy events in April, note that overstocks remain a significant problem, predict no important innovations in the social sector in the coming months, and reveal further confrontation between official and unofficial culture.

Another publication of BISS, [Belarus' Foreign Policy Index #13 \(March-April 2013\)](#), presents the 13<sup>th</sup> issue of its regular report, which focuses on five foreign policy priorities of Belarus. In particular, the experts note that official Minsk has once again underlined its limited negotiability with Russia and the willingness to take the necessary decisions in exchange for significant economic concessions. Belarus' relations with the EU continued to develop rapidly and demonstrated an unprecedented number of diplomatic and political contacts on the high state level for the last years.

Some results of the current Index were also discussed at the [“Amplituda” TUT.BY](#) program.

[What kind of Health Reform does Belarus need?](#) After a panel discussion on the possible upcoming health reform in Belarus, Liberal club has shared the key findings and experts' advice on the issue. According to surveys and experts' opinions, the key problems of medical industry are lack of effective financial models for hospitals and poor human resources management. The experts also discussed the opportunities and consequences of insurance-financed medicine.

[The European Dialogue on Modernization: the Current Status and Development Problems](#) – Centre for European Transformation prepared policy paper providing a rationale for the reorganisation of the EU initiative European Dialogue on Modernization. The author substantiates the necessity of the convention and coordination of the position of various subjects, which is to actually set the stage for modernization reforms in Belarus – so called conventional modernization is contra posed to authoritarian modernization as a possible way of reforming Belarus' economy while the current political regime is preserved.

[Review-Chronicle of Human Rights Violations in Belarus in April 2013](#) – Human Rights Centre *Viasna* presents its regular monitoring on the human rights situation in Belarus. In April, the experts notice consistently poor situation with a clear tendency to deteriorate. Namely, 11 political prisoners were still kept in jail. A dangerous trend in April was that KGB and the prosecutors' offices issued warnings to activists about the possible criminal punishment for activities on behalf of unregistered organizations.

[The Way Belarusians Understand Civil Society is Puzzling](#) – Ulad Vialichka, the chairman of the International Consortium "EuroBelarus", considers whether the notion of civil society is used correctly in Belarus and which countries' experience

can be most useful for Belarusian civil society. Vialichka assumes that Belarusian society still has an underdeveloped understanding of civil society that is connected with the fact that the processes of civil society formation that were going on in the early 90s were exposed to serious attacks afterwards.

## **International Reports on Belarus**

[First report of UN special rapporteur on Belarus](#). Miklos Haraszti, the UN Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on Belarus, published his first report on the situation in Belarus. The report to be submitted to the UN Human Rights describes the main trends in the field of human rights in Belarus in the period 5 July 2012 – 31 March 2013 and emphasises the systematic violations of human rights in Belarus.

[The UN Special Rapporteur's second thematic report](#). The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, [published his second thematic report](#) which draws particular attention to the ability of civil society to seek, protect and use financial resources from international and internal sources. The report also provides practical guidelines to facilitate the implementation of the freedom of peaceful assembly.

[European Parliament adopted draft recommendation on EU policy towards Belarus](#). Justas Paleckis acted as the rapporteur of the document. The European Parliament addresses its recommendations to a number of the EU institutions which should "reiterate the need for the unconditional and immediate release and rehabilitation of the political and civic rights of all remaining political prisoners to be a prerequisite for a gradual lifting of EU restrictive measures and for a substantial upgrade in EU-Belarus relations".

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## **How Decisions are Made in Belarus**

In less than two weeks, the Secretary of the Security Council Leanid Maltsau has to submit his proposal on the optimisation of the law enforcement agencies ("siloviki"). This follows the Presidential [Decree No. 168](#) aimed at reforming the public administration in Belarus.

This will again raise questions about the role of the "siloviki" and, ultimately, about how the country is governed and who makes the decisions. The obvious easy answer goes that, of course, Alexander Luakshenka does. In the personalistic authoritarianism he indeed makes all important decisions himself. However, it would be an extreme oversimplification to see only Lukashenka behind any single decision or piece of legislation.

The bureaucratic machine undoubtedly plays a decisive role in shaping policy alternatives that Lukashenka considers. It governs Belarus as much as its highest official does. Therefore, understanding the mechanics of this machine is crucial. A recent study of Minsk-based Liberal Club helps shade some light on it.

It shows that the state decision-making process looks like a cycle with four different stages. It is strictly top-down and,

therefore, highly reactive. The study also reveals poor communication between different ministries and other governmental bodies.

The public administration system in Belarus, in a way, resembles a Papal conclave: the outcomes of its work immediately become public and there are always rumours about, but generally the decision-making process remains non-transparent to outsiders.

Off-record interviews with state officials present the only opportunity to get an overall picture of the world inside the Belarusian state apparatus. The Centre for Analytical Initiatives of the Liberal Club has conducted a series of such interviews as part of its study on the reform of Belarus' public administration system. This article is based on their findings.

20 semi-structured interviews were conducted in April-May 2013. The interviewees represent the Presidential Administration, Council of Ministers, 5 ministries, 2 state concerns, 2 Voblast Executive Committees and 3 City Executive Committees.

#### **Four Stages of State Decision-Making**

The recent interviews reveal that the established decision-making process has four major stages and no single legal enactment which regulates it. Of course, the four stages do not apply to extraordinary cases where Lukashenka decides on the spot – like, for example, the cases of the confectionery factories [Kommunarka and Spartak](#) or the recent case of the private medical centre [Ecomedservice](#).

**At the first stage** officials identify problems that need addressing. This normally results from various forms of monitoring the socioeconomic and political situation in the country: opinion polls, household surveys, analysis of citizens' complaints, inspections, etc.

Initiatives to address a problem are the responsibility of either the relevant government bodies (ministries or state concerns) or supreme governmental bodies (the Council of Ministers and the Presidential Administration). These bodies produce all sorts of annual legislative plans and state programmes that prioritise issues for the state.

**At the second stage**, once the priorities are set, thematic government bodies are assigned the task of drafting decrees or other legislative acts. According to the majority of the interviewees, ministries and those whom are assigned the tasks have enough competence to develop decent quality drafts.

However, the quality often suffers **at the third stage**, when drafts are circulated for discussion among all interested bodies. Among other things, each institution involved pursues its own corporate goals. The resulting balance of interests may significantly undermine the ideas of the original drafters.

Finally, **at the fourth stage** it will end up in the Presidential Administration. There they go through another round of balance-of-interests discussions. Influential officials have every chance to amend drafts the way they want (if high-ranking officials themselves do not clash over certain issues). Importantly, the Presidential Administration's governing principle is political expediency. As a result, here the contents of some drafts become further modified and streamlined in comparison with their technocratic original drafts.

Only after these four stages Alexandr Lukashenka reviews the drafts (if they need his signature) and makes his own decision. No doubt, his opinion is heavily affected by the previous stages of decision-making and also by the people who present the drafts to him.

## **Implications**

Socioeconomic plans serve as typical examples of this four-stage process. At a government meeting last year Lukashenka famously exclaimed: "Why do you submit these plans to me to sign and then fail to fulfil them?"

The answer is easy: because in the existing decision-making short-term political goals and populism often prevail over any reasonable analysis and long-term planning.

Another important implication of the findings is that state decision-making remains highly reactive. The majority of problems fall in the government's focus only after they become very serious. This results from the top-down hierarchical approach to identifying problems and making decisions.

This partially explains why Lukashenka has to interfere personally in all sorts of problems: the system of governance often remains inactive without an impulse from him. Of course, it was precisely Lukashenka's own political style that resulted in the consolidation of this very system. It is still important to remark that Lukashenka's personal involvement in every matter is often the only way to get things done by the bureaucratic machine.

### **Poor Inter-Institutional Communication**

Finally, the interviews reveal another problem: the lack of proper communication among separate governmental bodies. If one ministry needs some data from another one, there is every chance that it will not get it. Or will not get it on time.

This strange situation primarily results from competition of powerful officials and state agencies. Sometimes they would rather be happy to learn of the bad performance of their colleagues than the country's progress. The crisis-hit year of 2011, when certain [cracks](#) inside the government became obvious, serves as a good example of their disjointed relations.

In addition, Belarusian bureaucrats like to classify everything. Even harmless decrees can bear the “for internal use only” label. More sensitive documents get higher protection, which complicates the transfer of information even within the state machine.

Simply put, the state decision-making process in Belarus looks like a closed cycle broken into four main stages. The initial impulse comes from the supreme governmental bodies or even Lukashenka himself. Then it transforms into a draft that returns to the supreme level in a form suitable for the balance of interests and political expediency.

The natural drawbacks of this super-centralized system are poor inter-institutional communication and reactive actions instead of proactive strategic thinking.

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## **Friends and Draniki – Belarus Civil Society Digest**

"Friends and Draniki" initiative improves economic literacy by means of in-home discussion meetings.

Following civil society protests, Minsk authorities will not build a multipurpose centre "Park Avenue" on the banks of Minsk river Svisloch. Representatives of Belarusian ministries participate in a civil society round table on drug-related issues.

Two journalists arrested in Minsk are causing a protest from the Belarusian Association of Journalists.

### **Discussions and Campaigns**

[“Friends and Draniki” club in Minsk offers in-home economic literacy campaign](#). According to economist Anton Boltochko of the Liberal Club, the campaign aims at eliminating economic illiteracy among youth activists and students by organising informal home-based discussion meetings. The initiative was originally launched by Minsk-based Analytical Centre "Stratehija".

[Discussion: Prospects for reforming media sphere](#). On the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day, BAJ held a discussion with leading media professionals on the topic of challenges and opportunities of developments of the current media market. Around twenty media experts, editors and journalists took part in the event; unfortunately, all officials, representatives of state-run mass media and the Belarusian Union of Journalists ignored the invitation to the discussion.

[Political Sphere conference](#). On 3-4 May, the Lithuanian embassy in Minsk hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference "Recovery of History: Memory and Society in Central-Eastern Europe." The conference was organised by the independent *Institute Political Sphere* and attended by 30 scientists from Belarus, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, as well as other guests. One of the panel discussions was devoted to the dispute of the Belarusian and Lithuanian vision of shared history.

[Guide on domestic violence issues](#). Belarusian Association of Young Christian Women (YWCA of Belarus) published a handbook of state and non-profit organisations that provide assistance to citizens in domestic violence situations. The guide covers domestic violence issues, statistics on Belarus, the related legislative regulations, etc.

## **Contests**

[Online quiz](#). On 17 May, Centre for Environmental Solutions will hold a virtual "climate" quiz. A team can consist of any number of people. For answering the questions, one can use any

sources of information. The main condition is to answer as many questions during 2 hours, that is, the time of the online game.

[Belarus Press-Photo-2013 sums up the competition results](#). The international jury of the news photo contest has [announced](#) the names of the contest finalists. The best works will be demonstrated at an upcoming exhibition. The organisers are planning to hold the award ceremony on 10 May.

[School of Leaders: Acting with unlimited opportunities](#). The [Disrights office](#), and the [Polish School of Leaders](#) have organised a joined project "Acting with unlimited opportunities". Currently, the organisers are selecting 15 participants from various regions of Belarus to participate in the program. The goal of the School is to develop leadership skills of the representatives of specialised Belarusian NGO's in order to promote the rights of people with disabilities, as well as enhance the participation of such people in the lives of their local communities.

[The school of ecological activists is announcing an open call for new applicants for 2013](#). The SEA is an annual event organised by the Green Network society with the goal of increasing the level of eco-education and give an opportunity to all those who wish to learn more about the green movement.

### **Interaction between the State and Civil Society**

[Controversial project "Park Avenue" abandoned](#). Construction of a multipurpose centre "Park Avenue" on the banks of Minsk river *Svisloch* will not be constructed, informed the Minsk Committee for Architecture and Urban Planning. Local residents and civil initiative *European Perspective*, which led a campaign to protect this area from January 2013, welcomed the decision of the authorities.

[State and civil society discuss drug-related issues](#). Representatives of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of

Interior, General Prosecutor's Office and civil society organisations recently met at a round table to discuss the benefits and risks of the use of methadone substitution therapy for the treatment of drug addicts. Director of the anti-drug project "Antimak", Alexander Shpakovsky had the opportunity to present his point of view and emphasises that methadone programmes are "absolutely wrong road rehabilitation of drug addicts."

[Journalists Halko and Yarashevich sentenced to arrest](#). On 7 May, a journalist Aliaksandr Yarashevich and blogger Dzmitry Halko were sentenced to 12 and 10 days of arrest respectively, for "using the obscene language and resistance to the police". Both persons were detained while returning from the delinquents' isolation centre in Akrestsina after meeting the civic activists who had been released from it after serving arrests for the participation in the "Chernobyl Way" rally. [BAJ made a statement](#) of protest condemning the recent arbitrary detentions and arrests of journalists.

[Civil society solidarity](#). On 4 May, Pavel Vinahradau, the leader of Tell the Truth! youth wing, was released after serving administrative arrest for staging an authorised action in support of political prisoner Mikalai Statkevich. When in detention, [Vinahradau urged all opposition](#) leaders and civil society activists to express solidarity and welcome his release in front of the detention centre. He was met by Vladimir Nieklyaev, Andrei Dmitriev, Vladimir Matskevich and about 30 civil activists; there were no other leaders attended.

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# Quo Vadis Belarusians? – Belarus Civil Society Digest

The snow storm “Xavier” did not discourage Belarusian civil society from new projects and initiatives.

BISS recently discussed migration and Liberal Club “diagnosed” Belarus at roundtables in Minsk. The DisRight Office launched a new phase of an accessibility campaign. The Festival of Central European literature Shengenska opened in Minsk. Gomel activists campaign want to preserve historical wooden buildings.

The government asked business to form partnerships. Due to Constitution Day, Belarusians had the opportunity to query the Chairperson of the Constitutional Court.

## Civil Society Activities

[BISS roundtable on migration](#). On 14 March, in Minsk, the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) held a roundtable *Quo vadis, Belarusians? The Impact of Migration on the Economy and Society*. The event presented some results of a recent national survey on migration, as well as [a study on migration](#), published by the Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration CARIM-East. The event brought together experts on migration topics from government bodies, independent research institutes and international organisations.

[Human rights defenders put new questions](#). The first anniversary of the execution of Uladzislau Kavaliou and Dzmitry Kanavalau, sentenced to death on charges of terrorism,

is being marked in March. During a press conference held in Minsk on 13 March, the mother of one of the executed, Liubou Kavalioua and human rights defenders declared that they start a series of actions in order to get the information about the place of Vlad Kovalev's burial and issuing his body.

[From Accessibility to Equality](#). Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities is launching a new phase of the information campaign *Accessibility* under the slogan "From Accessibility to Equality" aimed to visualise and expand understanding of accessibility. The Office has produced four video-clips, where people with disabilities tell their real stories. The Office has also announced a [competition for the best graphic](#) "Accessible to the disabled."

[Roundtable of liberals](#). On 15 March, in Minsk, the Liberal Club held a roundtable, aimed at gathering those who are in Belarus to declare their commitment to liberalism and to give them an opportunity to explain what kind of ideals they actually defending. The round table was attended by Yaroslav Romanchuk, Mises Center, Oleg Gaidukevich, the Liberal Democratic Party, Yauheni Preiherman, Liberal Club, etc.

[Marketplace in Hrodna](#). On 26 March, in Hrodna the Capacity Development Marketplace is to hold an Open House day for CSOs and providers from the Grodno and Brest regions. The event is a continuation of [the first national Capacity Development Fair](#), held in Minsk in October 2012, and is designed to present the regional market of organisational development's services for local nonprofits.

[Bell's Call for papers](#). The Vilnius-based Eastern Europe Studies Centre after releases the electronic newsletter "Bell". "Bell" is a monthly electronic analytical publication comprising articles written by Belarusian researchers and journalists. Next "Bell" issue "Russia's mounting influence in Belarus" is expected to be published in the middle of April.

[MediaBarCamp 2013: Survive in the Web](#). On 9-12 May, in Lithuania, the 6<sup>th</sup> International MediaBarCamp, dedicated to the use of new opportunities of online media and the development of media activism, will be held. The participants – media, CSOs, political organisations – will have an opportunity to present their online projects at special presentations and in working groups. The organiser of MediaBarCamp 2013 is the Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC).

## **Cultural Events**

[Shengenka in Minsk](#). On 12 March, Festival of Central European literature *Shengenka* opened at the Minsk Gallery Ё. The Festival consists of five events and aims to introduce the works of well-known Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Polish writers, philosophers and political scientists translated into Belarusian. The project initiator is Laboratory of Science and Art of Translation, its co-organizers are the campaign Budzma Belarusians! and the Association of Belarusian Writers.

The latest book by [Joanne Ivy Stankievich](#) recently came out with Outskirts Press. “Living with a Scent of Danger, European Adventures at the Fall of Communism” is about the 13 years the author and her husband spent in Europe: 1988-2001, when he worked for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. They interfaced with KGB and Foreign Ministers and participated in the transition from Communism to, mostly free, societies in Eastern Europe.

[34 sights of Belarus](#). Online magazine [34mag.net](#) prepared a subjective guide titled *34 sights of Belarus*, a concise guide to places for Belarusian and foreign visitors. The guide contains a map and a witty description of the proposed architectural monuments.

[Gomel tries to preserve wooden buildings](#). Gomel CSOs, which work to preserve local historical wooden buildings, plan to hold informal public hearings and develop consolidated

actions. The hearings are to be held with the support of Gomel Democratic Forum. Earlier, on 13 March, Gomel activists with the police's assistance [managed to prevent the destruction](#) of a monument of wooden architecture. [Youth CSO Talaka](#) also appealed to the city authorities to take one of the buildings on the organisation's balance to make there a museum and a youth cultural centre.

[Belarusian Week in Vilnius](#). On 25-30 March, the Belarusian Week will take place in Vilnius. The program of the Week includes various events such as conference, festival of short films, music festival, which are going to begin with the solemn celebration of Freedom Day on 25 March. The Organising Committee invites all Belarusians in Vilnius and Belarusian guests of the Lithuanian capital to join the celebration of the Freedom Day.

[Belarusians collect money to save old Belarusian films](#). A campaign on the Internet has begun raising money to save old movies shot by *Belarusfilm*. Since the cost of restoration and digitisation of the films are not provided for in the state budget, Belarusians themselves decided to save them for their own money.

## **Trainings and Seminars**

[Raising the expertise of young researchers in Belarus](#). The Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC) together with BISS launches an opportunity for the Belarusian beginner researchers in social sciences to further develop their expertise and analytical skills. Within the framework of the programme "Raising the Expertise of Grassroots Level Researchers in Belarus" and in collaboration with the Belarus Research Council, new Belarusian researchers will be provided with training and a scholarship to spend time at a leading European think-tank.

[New consultants](#). Clearing House Project recruited a new set of

consultants who will provide free services to Belarusian CSO on developing project proposals for competitions held by the European Commission and other programs. Five new consultants will take part in a series of informational meetings and workshops that will soon take place in different Belarusian cities.

[Seminar on quality assurance in higher education](#). On 26 March, in Minsk, the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels, Belgium) together with the Office for European Expertise and Communication (Minsk, Belarus) will organise a seminar on quality assurance in higher education. The seminar will be conducted in the frames of "EU and Belarus: Sharing Knowledge programme". The organisers encourage participation of representatives of the Ministry of Education, researchers, academics from Minsk and regional universities of Belarus.

[Conference on elderly education and socialisation is coming](#). Over a hundred people applied to the International conference, to be held on 29-30 March in Grodno and dedicated to the socialisation and intellectual, physical and social revitalization of elderly. Actual challenges and best practises will be discussed by representatives of the nonprofit, state and educational organisations from Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Russia. The conference is organised by the Third Sector Centre in cooperation with the registered association DVV International.

## **Interaction between the State and Civil Society**

[Authorities are asking for help from business](#). On 13 March, at a meeting of the Assembly of business circles, The government of Belarus and business once again tried to establish a dialogue. Economy Minister, Nikolai Snopkov urged entrepreneurs to strengthen partnerships with the state. Business said they are not against cooperation, but are waiting on the authorities to improve the business environment.

[Constitutional Court online](#). On 15 March, Belarus Constitution Day, a state-run news agency Belta conducted an online conference with the Chairperson of the Constitutional Court, Piotr Miklashevich. All internet users had an opportunity to ask questions in this open discussion.

[ARCHE gets third registration denial](#). As reported by the acting editor-in-chief of the magazine, Ales Pashkevich. According to him, the reason for the registration denial appears to be wire-drawn.

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# **Do Well-Situated Belarusians Need European Values? – Digest of Belarusian Analytics**

Do well-situated people need European Values? Does the new Russian foreign policy doctrine prompt changes in Minsk to turn to the West? Analysts also examine if there are any pro-Western trends in foreign policy and society.

Belarusian experts discuss whether the Western Partnership has potential and the recent indicators in the economy. Mediakritika's survey reveals Belsat is not far ahead of state-run channels by international journalism standards.

**Society**

[The Main Character – Authorities](#) – Mediakritika.by presents a content analysis of three Belarusian TV channels (two state run channels and the Warsaw-based Belsat) for the last six months of 2012. The survey noted that the main newsmaker for both public and independent channels remains the authorities – national or local, while the Belarusian opposition had almost no coverage.

Moreover, all channels were far from meeting basic professional standards – separation of facts from opinion, standards of completeness, and reliability and accuracy of presenting information.

[Does Belarusian IT Programmer Need European Values?](#) – Dmitry Galko of the online magazine New Europe discusses why the high income of the IT community does not guarantee the ideological shift to the active rejection of the current political system. The expert believes that satisfaction with personal situation wins out, and highly paid groups prefer to maintain the status quo.

[Media in Belarus – 2012. Final Analytical Review](#) – BAJ issued a final report of the media situation in Belarus in 2012. The main conclusion is that the media situation in Belarus during 2012 changed together with the socio-political situation. A critical point of the year was the three criminal cases against journalists in summer 2012.

[Oleg Manaev: We Have to Distinguish Serious Sociology from Boloney](#) – on 8 February, Professor Oleg Manaev conducted a public lecture titled *The Future of Belarus as a projection of the current* under the cycle *Urbi et Orbi*, the Flying University. On the eve of the lecture, TUT.by journalist talked to Manaev about possible scenarios of the future of Belarus and sociology in Belarus.

[Review-Chronicle of Human Rights Violations in Belarus in January 2013](#) – The Human Rights Centre Viasna issued its

monthly thematic review. The experts note that the first month of the year brought no changes in the human rights situation. 12 political prisoners remained in jail, and the persecution and pressure on public and political activists, human rights defenders and independent media continued.

[Freedom of Associations in Belarus in 2012](#) – the Assembly of Democratic NGOs and the Legal Transformation Center released the annual review of freedom of associations and the legal status of non-profit organizations in Belarus for 2012. The paper highlights the most important trends and developments related to the legal conditions of different forms of civil society organizations.

## **Politics**

[Integration Is Given a Boost](#) – Grigory Ioffe observes that while Minsk has been recently trying its best to revive its relationships with the West, reciprocal steps have not yet been undertaken by the Western countries and international structures. In contrast, the analyst lists a number of recent success stories which show that Russia has been energetically and conspicuously acting to tighten its bonds with Belarus.

[Lukashenka Gave the KGB Special Mission to the West?](#) – Alexander Klaskovsky, [naviny.by](http://naviny.by), focuses on the foreign policy of Belarus: the Belarusian president again demonstratively shows interest in the Western direction, in that time he had just returned from Sochi, where he waited in vain for over a week, for Vladimir Putin. BISS analyst, Denis Melyantsou believes that in this way Lukashenka again starts to shake geopolitical swings to impress the official Moscow; although PR moves may follow real steps towards unlocking relations with Brussels and Washington.

[New Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine](#) – Dzianis Miliantsou, BISS, breaks down the new Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine, signed in February by Vladimir Putin. According to the

analyst, Belarus is losing its exclusive status of Russian ally, while the doctrine demonstrates Russia's willingness for constructive cooperation with the West.

[Can the Eastern Partnership Work?](#) – Jana Kobzova notes that the EU has been promoting its interests in Eastern Europe by exporting its values and building more political and business links with the region, but the strategy has thus far not worked to the EU's liking. To make the Eastern Partnership an initiative worthy of its name, the EU should continue to promote both its interests and values in its Eastern neighbourhood, but it also needs to invest much more in cultivating new partners in the region.

[Policy Brief: National Security, January 2013](#) – Belarus Security Blog issued its monthly review of national security of the country. The authors observe that the first month of the year has not brought significant changes. The previous threats to the sustainability of Belarusian state remain: the poor quality of public administration, human resources crisis in the government, the negative trends of foreign trade, limited funding of national security and defense, etc.

[Western Vector of the Belarusian Foreign Policy](#) – Alexander Shpakouski, Analytical Center for Conservative Concepts, observes that since the appointment of Vladimir Makey to a post of the head of foreign policy department there is a noticeable intensification of contacts with the West countries, first of all with the EU and the USA. The expert believes that in such situation pressure and imposing of unilateral understanding are unacceptable, but joint movement in the direction of creation social and fair, democratic world way is necessary.

[A Potential Rapprochement with the West and the Prospects of Economic Liberalization](#) – Grigory Ioffe notes that Belarus's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has generated a flurry of activity on the country's western flank. Reviewing the recent trends,

the expert cautions that there is still a great deal of harmony between Belarus's political regime and many ordinary Belarusians. Western attempts to base its relationships with post-Soviet countries on a putative community of values have apparently exhausted their potential.

## **Economy**

[On the Fantastic Figures of Labor Migration](#) – Andrei Eliseev of BISS, questions whether the number of Belarusian migrants of 1,3 million people, voiced by some experts, is realistic. Using simple math and available official statistics data, Eliseev shows exaggeration of these numbers and promises to devote his next paper to the issue of real numbers of Belarusian labor migrants. The article is posted in the section *Blogs analysts* on the updated [BISS website](#).

[Economicus Obscuricus: Economic Results of Belarus in 2012](#) – Anton Boltochko, Liberal Club, analyzes the economic policy of Belarus in 2012 with the ranking of economic victories and defeats. The expert says that every victory allowed maintaining the relative stability of the entire system. In particular, euphoria, caused by exports of solvents / thinners / biofuels, prevented the officials to focus on reforming the economic system after the crisis 2011.

[Belarusian Monthly Economic Review, February 2013](#) – the IPM Research Center has released February issue of its monthly review which covers recent developments in political and economic life of the country. Namely in January, Belarusian Potash Company – an exclusive distributor of Belaruskali and Uralkali – signed a new contract on supply of 1 m tones of potash fertilizers at a price of 400 USD/t to China. This is 70 USD/t lower than a price of a previous contract with China. In general, this event might stipulate a number of negative outcomes.

[Lessons From the 2011 Belarusian Devaluation](#) – The paper shows

that the currency crisis and inflation of 2011 rapidly decreased the level of well-being of the Belarusian society. The state tried to cushion the crisis effects but their policies had a very limited effect. Mechanism of index of prices appeared to protect the poorest social groups in Belarus from the currency crisis effects. However, the group of pensioners seemed to be the most harmed by the politics of the state.

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## **Radioactive Mushrooms, Civil Magistrate, Mova ci Kava – Digest of Belarusian Civil Society**

Belarusian civil society organised a number of discussion events on topics ranging from cancer to media wars. Other initiatives included the promotion of the Belarusian language and examining radioactive mushrooms.

The Liberal Club attracted 100 practitioners to its event on information wars in the media, including representatives of state and independent media. NGO Assembly gave awards to Civil Society Champions, among them Andrzej Paczobut and Valer Bulhakau. Mahiliou activists formed a “civic magistrate” to help citizens deal with local issues.

## Media

**Discussion on information wars in the media:** On 7 February the Liberal Club organised a discussion on how to overcome the information war in Belarusian media? The event was held at the hotel Europe and attended by about a hundred people, including well-known representatives of state and independent media: blogger Victor Malishevski, a political columnist Pavlyuk Bykovsky, the Belarusian Thought chief editor Vadim Gigin, TUT.by founder Yuri Zisser and others.

**Cancer topic in media:** On 4 February the Belarusian Organization of Working Women together with a team from [oncopatients.by](http://oncopatients.by) website conducted a roundtable *Cancer Topics in the Media, What Information Helps Belarusians to Beat Cancer?* The discussion was timed to correspond with the International Day Against Cancer and was attended by experts from oncology centres, patients and journalists.

**TUT.BY offers its versions of Minsk brand:** After [the sensational story](#) with the official Minsk brand developed by the British company INSTID, an alternative Minsk team decided to offer other ideas for branding the city. Belarusian portal [TUT.BY](http://TUT.BY) has also joined the initiative of designers and PR specialists and suggests own versions.

**BAJ presents Anatomy of freelance:** The book *The Anatomy of Freelance* sums up of the journalistic experience with and knowledge of freelancing, received over the first year of the thematic campaign implemented by the Belarusian Association of Journalists. The book is designed to help freelance journalists to overcome existing obstacles.

## Social Campaigns and Initiatives

**Radioactive mushrooms video:** Gomel Democratic Forum with the support of the Green Alliance created a short film with a story about how radioactive mushrooms end up in Gomel residents' households and what tricks illegal collectors use

to circumvent restrictive measures.

**In defense of Belarusian Wetlands sums up their first results:** On 1 February public campaign *In Defense of Belarusian Wetlands* held a press conference. The meeting summed up the interim results of the campaign, designed to attract the attention of people and CSOs to the destruction of eight Belarusian wetlands.

**Kurapaty will be promoted:** On 6 February the BPF office hosted a meeting of the members of the Kurapaty Rescue Initiative. An expert in the field of PR and advertising, Yulia Lyashkevich, presented a draft of Kurapaty promotion which aims to inform Belarusians what Kurapaty is by using the norms of advertising.

**NGO Assembly named Civil Society Champions:** The 4<sup>th</sup> annual award ceremony of The Assembly of NGOs of Belarus – *Civil Society Champions 2012* – was held at the Minsk Lohvinau bookstore on 1 February. The Civil Leaders of the year were journalists Andrzej Paczobut and Valer Bulhakau; the award for the Years Most Creative was given to the Swedish airdrop of teddy bears; the Venue of the Year went to the Office of Human Rights Center *Viasna*; as the most important Regional Event of the year the establishment of independent union trade structures at the Hranit factory was honored, amongst others.

**Mogilev activists form a “civic magistrate”:** Activists from Mogilev city created a public discussion platform, which they call a “civic magistrate”, in order to help citizens deal with local issues. The magistrate is positioned as a non-political intermediary between residents, experts and local authorities and seeks to establish dialogue in the city around the most pressing issues. One of the recent successes of the initiative, reported on the [magistrate’s website](#), was authorities’ decision not to shut down local markets.

**Marketplace undertakes local trips:** Capacity Building Marketplace continues a series of local trips throughout Belarus in order to inform Belarusian CSOs about the possibilities and the importance of capacity development. The meetings with CSOs and service providers were held on 31 January [in Grodno](#); on 5 February [in Mogilev](#); the next meeting is scheduled for 12 February in Gomel.

**Antimak visited addicts:** Activists of the public campaign [Antimak](#) continue to draw attention to the problem of drug abuse in Belarus. This time they together with Telegraph correspondents visited the apartments where addicts live and talked to their residents.

**CSOs to establish organization in response to the disregard for the decisions of the UN Human Rights Committee.** On 12 February Gomel gathered civil and political activists, the violation of whose rights by Belarusian authorities have been officially confirmed by decisions from the UN Human Rights Committee or whose complaints are pending at the Committee. The participants of the meeting decided to establish a national public organisation which would change the practise of neglecting to undertake actions under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by Belarus.

**A special hot line – 10 years.** A joint project of the Business Women Club and the International Organization for Migration celebrates the 10 years of the anti traffic hotline. For 10 years, the call-centre specialists have received more than 20 thousand calls; 110 people were able to return home.

**Football clubs asked to more widely use the Belarusian language.** On the eve of the beginning of the Belarusian football championship in the higher league, activists of the civil campaign *Office Work in Belarusian!* addressed twenty football clubs with a proposal to extensively use the Belarusian language during

the organization, holding and elucidation of the matches.

**Modern life of Muzhytskaya Prauda**: Brest activists have resumed publication of the first revolutionary-democratic newspaper in Belarusian. In the period from 1862 to 1863 seven numbers were published. Newspaper #8 is coming in February 2013. This is the way of celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kalinouski Rebellion in the Brest region.

## **Workshops and Conferences**

**Master class from Talaka**: On 9 February Gomel youth NGO Talaka and Vetka Museum invited for a master class in creating a marriage of guardian dolls. In ancient times, this amulet guarded the union of two people and was presented to bride and groom at the wedding day. The event was scheduled to correspond with Valentine's Day.

**Mova ci Kava**. On 18 February in Minsk educational free courses *Language or Coffee (Mova ci Kava)* will be launched. The courses are designed for people who want to improve their Belarusian language. The teachers are journalist Gleb Labadzenka and philologist Alesya Litvinovskaya who taught Stefan Eriksson to speak Belarusian. The courses will be held in a cafe once a week.

**Round table on human capital**. BISS launches a series of presentations on the results of the research project *Human Capital as a Source of Competitiveness and Modernization*. The first round table is to be held on 15 February at the Minsk hotel Victoria. The event presents two research papers: *The Returns to Education and the Evaluation of Human Capital in Belarus* and *Belarusian Higher Education in Cross-country Perspective*.

## **Awards**

[New award for researchers](#). The Organizing Committee of the International Congress of Belarusian Researchers announces the establishment of an annual award for the best publication in the field of social sciences and humanities during the year. The award is designed to celebrate the achievements in the social sciences and humanities during the year, as well as improve the quality of scientific work.

[I Love Belarus award](#). On 16 February Young Front invites to the ceremony of its annual award *I Love Belarus*. The prize is awarded in six nominations – Belarusization, Pro-Belarus, Journalism, Culture, Politics, Civil activity, Fighter of the Year, and Sports.

[Lyubow Kavalyowa voted Person of 2012 in Vitebsk](#). The mother of a man executed over the 2011 subway bombing in Minsk has been voted the Person of the Year 2012 in Vitebsk. A [local news website's](#) readers had been asked to choose the person who was of the greatest use to Vitebsk or who contributed to promoting the city in the world in 2012.

[BEROC awarded](#): BEROC was awarded by *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus* as an organization which actively formed the informational sphere in Belarus in 2012. Among other winners were the National Bank, Investigative Committee, Ministry of Emergency Situations, Ministry of Statistics, etc.

[Svetlana Naumova Award](#): *Tell the Truth* campaign has completed the nomination of candidates for the Svetlana Naumova Award. The award is given in three categories – political journalism, political analyst and best young politician of the year. Among others, the short list of 2013 includes journalist Andrei Poczobut, BISS academic director Alexei Pikulik, journalist Alexander Klaskovsky, etc. The award ceremony will take place on 1 March 2013.

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# **Bialiatski, Belsat, Liberal Club – Digest of Civil Society**

Notable events last week included transfer by Ales Bialiatski of his prize to Belarusian human rights defenders, reduction of Belsat broadcasting, and a new Belarusian initiative in Prague.

**Ales Bialiatski awarded the Prize of the Peter Kelly.** The ceremony was held on November 22, in Berlin. The award was given to a political prisoner [Ales Bialiatski](#) to recognize his merits in defending human rights in authoritarian Belarus. Ales Bialiatski refused to accept monetary component 10,000 euro, asking to transfer the funds to support human rights activity in Belarus.

**Belsat reduces broadcasting.** From November 26, the Warsaw-based independent TV channel Belsat is downsizing its broadcasting mode. Almost all of the regular programs are to leave in the forced vacation because they have [no funding to the end of the year](#).

**Liberal Club conference.** On November 24, the International conference "[In Defense of Liberalism in Eastern Europe](#)" took place in the Minsk hotel "Europe". The conference is organised by NGO "Liberal Club" and aims to further develop the network of liberalism's supporters in Eastern Europe.

**New centre of Belarusian emigration.** On November 20, in

Prague, six Belarusian organisations reached an agreement to cooperate as an "[Alternative Belarusian Embassy](#)" in the Czech Republic: Association "For Modernization", "Nash Dom", the NGO "Pahonia", etc. In response, the NGO of Czech Belarusians "[Pahonia](#)" made [a statement](#) that the aforementioned meeting was "nothing more but a theatrical ostentatious staging, directed by political refugee Alexei Mikhalevich aimed to show him as a leader of the Belarusians in the Czech Republic".

**Drupal-sliot.** On December 15-16, in Minsk, [the youth NGO "Falanster"](#) conducts the 2<sup>nd</sup> Drupal-sliot. The event is organised as a social event which is to strengthen horizontal connections in the environment of drupal-developers (Drupal is an open source content management system) as well as other open source communities.

**Green Alliance celebrated 5-year anniversary.** On November 22, at the Minsk Gallery "Ź", the first Belarusian association of environmental organisations, activists and experts "[Green Alliance](#)" celebrated its 5-year anniversary. The activists presented the results of the current campaigns and introduced a new concept of "Green Alliance" – the development of regional networks to launch a broad national environmental movement.

**The best video about CSO organisational capacity.** [Belarus' Capacity Building Market place](#) was awarded in the framework of the 1<sup>st</sup> Forum of Organisational Development, which was held on November 19-20, 2012 in Kiev. The team of the Belarus' Marketplace won the video contest "CSO organisational capacity" with a video report about the First Fair of Capacity Building in Minsk, on October 12, 2012.

**Budzma's talk shows.** On November 21, in Mogilev, the campaign "Budzma" ("Be Belarusians!") began a series of talk shows and public presentations under the title "[Culture improves life!](#)",

which are planned to be conducted in all Belarusian regions. The Mogilev talk show "The CIS Cultural Capital: initiative from top or bottom?" was devoted to the issue of giving the city the status of the CIS cultural capital in 2013.

**Informal legal school for Roma people to be arranged in Gomel.** On November 19, Gomel human rights activists announced the opening of [a legal school for Roma](#). The decision was made based on the results of [a roundtable discussion on Roma-related discrimination](#).

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Forum of Belarusian cyclists** took place in Hrodna on November 24-25. The purpose of the Forum is to bring together the cyclists of Hrodna and Belarus in order to influence the development of urban infrastructure. The Forum is organised by the ["Velo-Grodno" initiative](#).

**Weekend GDF events in Gomel.** On November 24, [Gomel Democratic Forum](#) (GDF) hosts a round table devoted to youth politics in Belarus and organized by the movement "For Freedom". On November 25, GDF conducts a meeting of the youth club "Civilization" on the development of volunteerism in Homel region.

**Roundtable on anonymous donations.** On November 28, Legal Transformation Center and the Assembly of pro-Democratic NGOs conduct a roundtable ["Anonymous donations in Belarus"](#). The event will present an overview of the legal regulation and practical situation with anonymous donations in Belarus and abroad.

**Educational websites' competition.** 18 Belarusian websites take part in the "Best Website / Blog of non-formal education for 2010-2012". One of the nominees is a blog of the Golden Age University project aimed at working with the social, intellectual, and physical revitalization of Grodno elderly residents. [Voting is available](#) on the website of [the 4th Festival of Non-Formal Education](#) that will be held on December

7-9, 2012.

**Forum of Volunteers in Minsk.** On December 4, the 5<sup>th</sup> International Forum of Volunteers is to take place in Minsk International Education Center (IBB) The Forum focuses primarily on volunteer work with the elderly, in particular witnesses of the events of the II World War, as well as on interaction between the generations.

**Small grant competition for Minsk and Minsk region.** Registered and non-registered CSOs of Minsk and Minsk region are invited to participate in the competition of small grants "Support of civil initiatives that strengthen the values of democracy and independence". The aim of the competition is to expand the values in civil activities. The maximum grant amount is \$1,000. According to the newsletter [belngo.info](http://belngo.info)

**Literature as tag clouds.** KYKY.org established its method of reading of literary texts and transformed [10 classic pieces of Belarusian literature](#) into the tag clouds. The results showed that the Belarusian literature revolves around the word 'WHAT'.

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## **Ghetto or Barricade? – Digest**

# of Belarusian Analytics

Belarusian experts carried out a lively debate on the role of civil society and intellectual in contemporary Belarus, revelations of Zianon Pazniak and the situation with doing business in Belarus among other topics.

[Civil Society: To the Ghetto or the Barricade?](#) – political analyst Alexander Klaskousky summarised the views of the participants of the conference "The State of Civil Society in Belarus," which took place in Warsaw on October 26-27, with support from the Casimir Pulaski Foundation and the Council of Europe. In particular, CSO activists believe that Belarusian authorities talking about modernization are not ready to proceed with serious reforms. Also, CSOs have still not still seen any mitigation of the circumstances for their activity in the country.

[Damocles Sword of Anonymous Donations](#) – Yury Chausau, based on case of the magazine ARCHE which is now under financial investigation, expresses concern that formal suspicion of violating the law in the economic sphere can be a reason for the persecution of civil society institutions. The expert, in particular, draws attention to the legislative nonsense whereby anonymous donations in Belarus are not prohibited, but are treated as foreign aid, the use of which is tightly regulated.

[The Main Battle will be After Lukashenka](#) – Alexander Klaskousky refers the Alexander Lukashenka's thesis that it is time "to bring to power normal young politicians." The journalist makes a sad conclusion that the hour "X", which is so expected of change agents can be stupidly missed: "Belarus lacks a truly educated, hardened in real battles, polished by practice, and disciplined by responsibility

political cadres. It's difficult to consider as such those members of Parliament who do not solve anything, or languish in the ghetto, at most what now exists is the leading of online internecine wars by opposition figures.

[Another revelations from Zyanon Pazniak](#) – one of the most sensational recent revelations belongs to Zyanon Paznyak, leader of the CCP-BPF who has lived abroad for more than 15 years. Paznyak narrates for almost 30 minutes about how the former head of the OSCE office in Minsk Hans-Georg Wieck, in coordination with KGB, who spent \$1.7 million on splitting BPF and hand-picked the current Belarusian opposition, which are "a bunch of people to whom the West gives money and tells what to do". Paznyak suggests that democracy is only a tool to achieve Western interests in Belarus, which is not always in the best interests of Belarus and was widely quoted [by state media](#).

[The Return of Europe](#) – BISS presented the seventh issue of the polling memorandum series based on the public opinion poll data of the Independent Institute for Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS). Surprisingly good news for Europe: for the first time since June 2011 Belarusians would prefer a European choice. No clear winner appeared in the controversy surrounding the opposition's decision over whether to boycott parliamentary elections or to participate. BISS considers those to be the two main outcomes of the latest polling data provided by IISEPS.

[Belarusians' Ideas of Human Rights and Rights Defense Activities](#) – the study was conducted by the Centre for European Transformation on the initiative of Belarusian human rights organizations from April-June 2012. The purpose of the study was to identify concepts that exist in Belarusian society regarding the relationship between people and the state, human rights and their defence. The initial hypotheses generally affirmed that: a) the set of issues that is being researched is not actualised in the practises and beliefs of

the respondents; b) the level of competence of the respondents as to the specified issues is not very high.

[Analytical Review of the Human Rights Situation in Belarus. July-September 2012](#) – the Review covers the period of July-September 2012 and identifies medium-term trends in the area of human rights, socio-political and economic situation in Belarus. It also contains a final report on the observation of the parliamentary elections and the analysis of the state of Belarusian civil society. The document was prepared by BHC, BAJ, the NGO Assembly, Lawtrend, Human Rights Centre Viasna, BISS, EuroBelarus, etc.

[Discussion TUT: Will People of the Moment Lead Changes in Belarus?](#) – political analyst Alexander Klaskovsky and political columnist Pavlyuk Bykovsky speculate who could take the lead, when Belarusian society is ready for a change in politics. Both experts believe that the situation will birth new faces, but not use the former presidential candidates and political activists who are now displaced abroad.

[Belarus and Russia: Affinity and Dependency](#) – Grigory Ioffe considers the closeness of Russia and Belarus which has multiple aspects, one of which is a structural affinity between Russian and Belarusian societies. Both are afflicted with an internal schism, and the two resulting segments of each society have limited mutual communication. The problem of the Belarusian Westernizers is their proclivity to construe their own preferences and attitudes as those of the society as a whole. The analyst refers to the case with the diametrically opposite verdicts on the September 23 parliamentary elections by the opposition-minded electorate and the rest of Belarusian society, and supports it with the recent IISEPS data.

[Index of Economic Adequacy of Belarus-2012](#) – analytical community "Liberal Club" presents the second edition of its study "Index of Economic Adequacy of Belarus-2012". The annual

survey is an attempt to draw the attention of the Belarusian public to the existing economic instability in Belarus and the absence of public debate on how to overcome it; the latter is considered by the authors as a major threat to national security. The [presentation of the report](#) took place on October 26, in Minsk.

[Business in Belarus 2012: Status, Trends, Prospects](#) – IPM Research Center prepared an annual report on the status and prospects of small and medium size business in Belarus in 2012. The issue considers the economic situation of small and medium enterprises and their development prospects, including an analysis of the influence of the integration agreements with Russia and Kazakhstan in this field.

[Belarus' Foreign Policy Index №10](#) – The Kremlin retains the full political support of Minsk. The Ukrainian vector after its summer activation has returned to essentially zero. The relations with developing countries improved a bit, especially with China. The relations with the European Union re-entered the stage of "vacuum of events". These are the main conclusions presented by BISS in the latest issue of Belarusian Foreign Policy Index, covering September and October of 2012.

*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.*