

Disgrace or Promotion? Kiryl Rudy Goes to China

In July 2016, president Alexander Lukashenka appointed two new ambassadors – to China and to Georgia.

A few days earlier, several sources had reported that the president's aide on economic issues – Dr. Kiryl Rudy – was to become the Belarusian ambassador in Beijing.

This information became fodder for significant speculation concerning Belarus's economic policy in the future. Many experts considered Kiryl Rudy to be a supporter of semi-liberal (or any) economic reform in Belarus. Such expectations were generally based on Kiryl Rudy's biography, as well as his bold statements and publications regarding the current economic situation in Belarus.

Rapid career growth

At the age of 23, Kiryl Rudy completed his Ph.D. in Economics, at the age of 26 he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and spent four months interning in the USA, at the age of 33 he completed his post-doctoral research and at the age of 35 – in June 2013 – he became the president's aide on economic issues.

Thanks to his earlier post as an economic counsellor at the Belarusian embassy in Beijing and as deputy General Director at Bel Huavyei Technologies (a China-Belarus joint company), Kiryl Rudy is well acquainted with the peculiarities of working in China. Moreover, some experts believe that he remains one of the main lobbyists for China's interest in Belarus even after his appointment with the Presidential Administration. There are also rumours that he maintains business interests in China and in joint Chinese-Belarusian

projects.

A new boost for relations with China?

During his appointment speech, Alexander Lukashenka criticised the work of previous ambassadors to China for their implementation of joint projects. Numerous researches have expressed significant doubts concerning the benefits of existing projects for the [development of the Belarusian economy](#). The China-Belarus Industrial Park “Great Stone” is the most significant example.

In his comprehensive research, Stanislav Ivashkevich argues that Great Stone has failed to attract real manufacturing, build reliable infrastructure, or secure financing besides tied loans from China and subsidies from the Belarusian budget. Moreover, Great Stone risks becoming a competitor for the Belarusian logistics business. Kiryl Rudy has been very involved with this initiative among other examples of dubious cooperation with China.

officials do not perceive ambassadorships as particularly prestigious

In the Belarusian public administration system, officials do not perceive ambassadorships as particularly prestigious compared with positions in the highest echelons of power, especially in the Presidential Administration. However, when it comes to appointments in major foreign partner countries, including China, the situation may be different.

For former ambassadors Anatoly Kharlap (2004-2006) and presumably Pavel Burya (2011-2016), this office signalled the end of their public administration career. However, for Vladymir Rusakevich (2000-2003) and Anatoly Tozik (2006-2010),

ambassadorship in Beijing became a platform for further promotion: to the positions of Minister of Information and Deputy Prime-Minister respectively.

Kiryl Rudy belongs to the younger generation of Belarusian officials and still has ample opportunities to further his career. One can hardly call this appointment a form of disgrace or a sign of the president's displeasure with Rudy's statements or positions. Moreover, Alexander Lukashenka tends to react immediately to failures of his closest subordinates and would not have tolerated Rudy's 'liberal' ideas for any amount of time without solid reasons.

Pseudo-liberalism and a throwback to the year 2011

Almost all experts believe that Rudy's appointment in June 2013 was intended to demonstrate the president's ability and willingness to reform the failed Belarusian model of development. Kiryl Rudy was an outspoken advocate of reducing budget allocations and achieving a more balanced monetary policy, supporting private property rights, and general liberalisation of the Belarusian economy.

the president rejects even the idea of significant reforms in Belarus

However, his appointment means that he is unlikely to be able to implement these ideas. It is also difficult to ascertain to what extent they influenced Alexander Lukashenka. Moreover, some experts believe that despite any economic crisis, regardless of its gravity, the president rejects even the idea of [significant reforms](#) in Belarus.

The [confrontation between 'liberals' and 'conservatives'](#) in the Belarusian public administration predates Kiryl Rudy –

occurring in 2011 during the first serious economic crisis after the ten 'rich' years. The 'conflict' started between then Deputy Prime-Minister Siarhey Rumas and the president's aide on economic issues Siarhey Tkachou.

In spite of Lukashenka's public support of the 'conservative' faction, he replaced Siarhey Tkachou with Piotr Prokopovich and eventually with Kiryl Rudy. However, Rumas did not fall from grace, becoming the Head of the Belarusian Development Bank.

It seems that this 'confrontation' was of a largely artificial character. The Presidential Administration initiated this 'conflict' in order to prepare the ground for a number of unpopular measures, most importantly a reduction in social transfers. It is possible that this is the only form of 'reform' that Alexander Lukashenka is willing to accept.

Appeal to the IMF

However, in 2013 new negotiations with the International Monetary Fund complicated the situation. Following its Stand-By program in 2009-2010, the IMF started Post-Program Monitoring Discussions. The Fund demanded structural reforms and actual deconstruction of the Belarusian economic model. The discussions became particularly strained in 2013, when Belarus failed to complete almost all of its obligations on reforming the economy.

It seems that Rudy's appointment as a presidential aide was meant to demonstrate the authorities', and in particular Lukashenka's, personal willingness to conduct at least limited economic reforms according to the IMF's recommendations. However, during the years 2015-2016 the authorities became strongly disappointed with the IMF and in its readiness to start a new program with Belarus.

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Besides vague economic perspectives, such disappointment also threatens the light liberalisation process in the country; it suggests that parliamentary elections will be organised in the traditional way with no opposition representatives elected.

China's loans an alternative to reform?

However, the personality of Kiryl Rudy has little to do with this. He has ceased to be a source of hope for foreign agents promoting the idea of market reforms in Belarus. Meanwhile, in June 2016 China agreed to allocate a \$1.4 bln loan to Belarus. In spite of the presumably very unfavourable conditions of this loan, it looks like a better option than endless and fruitless negotiations with the IMF.

At the moment, the skills and abilities of Kiryl Rudy seem more needed in China than in the Administration of the President. However, the very fact of this personnel rotation may be a signal of renewed de-liberalization of Belarusian policy.

This does not mean that Belarus will stop attempting to secure financial support from the West, including from the IMF, but changes in economic policy or in parliamentary election processes remain unlikely.

Aliaksandr Filipau

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Belarus Foreign Ministry Toys With The Belarusian Language

Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenka said in 1994 that the Belarusian language was a poor one, unfit for expressing anything grand. His senior diplomats appear to be proving him wrong.

On 19 February, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei [publicly recited](#) the poem "Motherland" written by Janka Kupala, a famous Belarusian poet. Two weeks later, his deputy, Alena Kupchyna, inaugurated an art exhibition in perfect Belarusian. Both of them share an internal conviction that Belarusian should play a greater role in public life.

The foreign ministry has long been a vanguard of the progressive Belarusian bureaucracy. However, despite these and other examples of changing attitude towards the national language, most diplomats still scarcely use it – more out of indifference and lack of proper guidance than because of any policy restrictions.

The Belarusian Language as a Cornerstone of the Country's Independence

Moscow's ideological coverage of its actions in Ukraine should have warned the Belarusian ruling elite of the vulnerability of having a weak national identity. Russia has been clearly demonstrating it is eager to stake out a claim in lands where Russian remains a predominant language.

Russian still heavily dominates Belarus' foreign ministry

The authorities have finally heard the warning shot across the bow. President [Alexander Lukashenka](#) spoke in Belarusian at a National Day holiday celebration in July. It sent a signal to the nomenklatura that they should not regard the use of national language an apanage of the opposition. Later on, Lukashenka and other senior officials advocated for a greater role of the Belarusian language and culture.

Many expected that the foreign ministry, as one of the country's showcase institutions, would take the lead in this process. This government agency has the advantage of employing many well-educated and open-minded people.

However, the results thus far have been mixed. While some changes are under way, the Russian language still heavily dominates the ministry's communications and internal workings.

The Belarusian Language: Personal Choice, Institutional Indifference

In mid-1990s, the prospects of the Belarusian language in the foreign ministry seemed much brighter. Piotr Krauchanka, the then foreign minister, conducted the meetings in Belarusian. Many diplomats, from attachés to Krauchanka's deputies, studied the language with a ministry-paid coach.

Language use depends on enthusiasts

Everything changed when Lukashenka arrived. The ministry has never expressly prohibited or penalised the use of Belarusian by diplomats in their work, though it has long failed to encourage or promote it either.

In fact, any advance or retreat of the Belarusian language's usage in the foreign ministry has rarely been an institutional decision. It mostly depended on personal choice or preferences of individuals working there. Here is a brief anecdote to support this point.

The foreign ministry has always had two telephone directories, one for the headquarters in Minsk and the other for its foreign missions. In 1995, a minister's assistant, a Belarusian-language enthusiast, translated both directories into Belarusian. The foreign ministry used them until 1998, when it merged with the ministry of external economic relations.

Then, another official, in charge of creating a unified directory, translated the old MFA's part back into Russian. Since then, the HQ directory has always been in Russian. As the merger never affected the foreign missions' network, their phone directory still exists and gets updated in Belarusian.

There have been no reports of the ministry preventing its staff from speaking or writing in Belarusian. The author of this article, while serving in the ministry from 1993 to 2006, drafted most of his correspondence in Belarusian – both internal memos and documents addressed to other government agencies.

These included a few memos to President Lukashenka on standing issues between Belarus and the US. Ural Latypov, the then foreign minister (born in Russia), signed them without posing any question with regard to the choice of the language. The author's preference for Belarusian never affected his career.

Two Waves of Belarusianisation?

Back in 2010, the foreign ministry adopted a set of measures to promote the use of Belarusian in its internal workings and external communications. (Ironically, they wrote the internal Belarusianisation plan in Russian).

The ministry failed to implement many of these measures, i.e. the provision on promoting the Belarusian language in the activities of the MFA-controlled [National Centre for Marketing and Price Study](#). The plan died in December 2010, together with the thaw in relations with the West.

Only a handful of Belarusian embassies communicate in Belarusian

The 2010 plan included, among other things, a provision regarding the Belarusian-language versions of the ministry's and its foreign missions' web sites. The foreign ministry's web site acquired a [Belarusian-language version](#) only in July 2014, in the 23rd year of the country's independence. Now, the MFA's press service runs all news reports in three languages, Belarusian, Russian and English.

Previously, the Russian-language section of the web site hosted rare news items written in Belarusian. They came almost exclusively from a narrow circle of embassies – in Bonn, Budapest, Paris and Warsaw – as well as the permanent mission to the UN in New York.

MFA's spokesman reassured Belarus Digest that the ministry "remained committed to wider use of the Belarusian language"

All of Belarus' foreign missions, with the exception of the embassy in Moscow, have their web sites based on the same template, which allows one to choose between several languages. However, only four embassies out of over fifty – in France, Germany, Hungary and Poland – have Belarusian-language versions of their web sites.

About two dozen Belarus' embassies now have Twitter accounts. Only the [embassy in France](#) and the [MFA's press service](#) care to post some of their tweets in Belarusian.

MFA's spokesman Dzmitry Mironchyk reassured Belarus Digest that the ministry "remained committed to wider use of the Belarusian language in its daily activities and communications to the outside world". However, he stressed that the ministry embraced the principle of "reasonable sufficiency and maximum efficiency" when choosing the language for its communications.

In July 2014, the Belarusian-language newspaper Zviazda

started a series of interviews with Belarusian ambassadors and other senior diplomats. The fact that it happened simultaneously with the emergence of the Belarusian-language web site would seem to indicate that a new wave of Belarusianisation is likely ahead.

However, it seems that the ministry is putting little effort into this process. Indeed, some steps do not even require any financial support or a much in the way of perseverance and could be quite symbolic, such as using Belarusian-language nameplates during official meetings.

While some changes in the foreign ministry's language policy are encouraging, they are happening much too slowly. For a new wave of Belarusianisation to succeed, the ministry's senior officials must show more determination, while rank-and-file diplomats need to show more interest and personal involvement. So far, these factors are largely lacking.

CNN Offended Belarus and Russia

On 24 January, CNN published a rating of the world's ugliest monuments, causing an outrage in many post-Soviet countries, both officially and among the general public.

The channel described the Courage monument from the Brest Fortress memorial in Belarus as looking constipated, a strange characterisation from a professional media company.

The story provoked a chain of official letters of protest in Belarus and Russia. In Russia the anti-American wave seemed to grow even stronger as a result. In return, Russian TV show

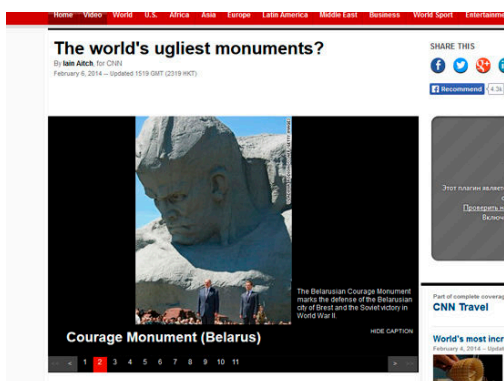
depicted soldiers at Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, hinting that they were simulating a sexual act.

The case demonstrated just how Belarus and Russia still use World War II glory, developed by the USSR on a massive scale, as an important tool for ideological battles with the West. But while in Russia the anti-western mood remains strong both among the elite and general population, in Belarus people are not as hostile and the government does not dare engage in another informational war in a period of [rapprochement](#).

The Controversial Ratings

On 24 January, CNN published a rating of the world's ugliest monuments with photos, giving them some facetious descriptions. Michael Jackson, Martin Luther King Junior, a monument given to the United States by Russia to commemorate the 9/11 World Trade Centre bombing, Pope John Paul II and other monuments appeared on the list.

These pieces of art were accompanied by light-hearted humorous comments, and while some of these works of art are sacred for many people, they did not cause a big stir at first.



However, one of the monuments soon sparked a firestorm in several post-Soviet countries. The monument, known as Courage, is a monument of a Soviet soldier that commemorates the struggle with the Nazis in World War II and is located in Brest, Belarus. Although CNN published the material on 24

January, in the former USSR countries it exploded only two weeks later.

The description of the monument in the CNN story said the Soviet soldier “emerging from a mountainous block of concrete looks as if he's about to thump the West into submission before hurling North America at the sun.” It also noted that others think the soldier “simply looks constipated.” The editors could hardly expect a firestorm that this joke finally caused.

The Monument's Story

The history of the monument dates back to the very beginning of World War II. The German troops supported by artillery and aviation attacked the fortress on the border early on 22 June 1941. German command planned to capture the fortress by 12 p.m. the very same day. However, the Soviet soldiers desperately resisted for about a month, with 2,000 Soviet soldiers killed and 7,000 taken prisoners.

This resistance became a symbol of struggle with the Nazis in the USSR. After the war, the story of fortress defence became a part of Soviet mythology, glorifying the victory and continues to play a similar role in Belarus until now. The authorities decided to build a memorial in 1965. Today, the Brest fortress is a place of countless visits and commemorative events held by officials.

Russians, who share the heritage of Soviet war ideology, also consider Brest Fortress as an important symbol of their own. It is not only official Russia's state ideology that makes use of the monument. Many average Russian tourists come to Belarus just to visit the memorial. It should be no surprise, then, that the outrage spread across Russia even to a larger extent than in Belarus.

Belarus and Russia's Nervous Reaction

On 7 February, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus summoned the Chief of the US diplomatic mission to Belarus, Ethan Goldrich. Belarusian officials informed Mr. Goldrich that the CNN piece with the Courage monument is unacceptable.

“The insulting material caused an outrage among regular Belarusians and even civil organisations. Belarus lost one fourth of its citizens in World War II and memory of heroes who died for the country's liberty is sacred to the Belarusian people,” the note said. Belarus' Embassy in the US addressed the Department of State and CNN channel with a similar note.

Interestingly, the reaction of common Belarusians to the incident appeared quite moderate. TUT.by media portal polled Brest dwellers on the incident, and usual answers were “Well, it is not ugly I think...”, “I think Americans do not understand it...”, “I wish Americans came here and we would explain to them the meaning of the monument...”

Apart from official Foreign Ministry note, Belarusian officials refrained from publicly commenting on the issue. Meanwhile, Russians appeared much more active in this respect. A Russian foreign ministry told CNN Moscow Bureau chief Phil Black that the mockery of the memory of Soviet soldiers, who gave their lives for the victory over fascism, cannot be justified or forgiven. The Russian embassy in the US called the inclusion of the Courage monument in the rating unacceptable and insulting and beyond reason.

The vice-speaker of the Duma, Russia's lower house of Parliament, and the secretary of General Council of United Russia party Sergei Neverov called the rating an affront and sacrilege to the 5 million dead, who saved the world from falling into the grips of fascism. He thinks that US public should consider this incident seriously.

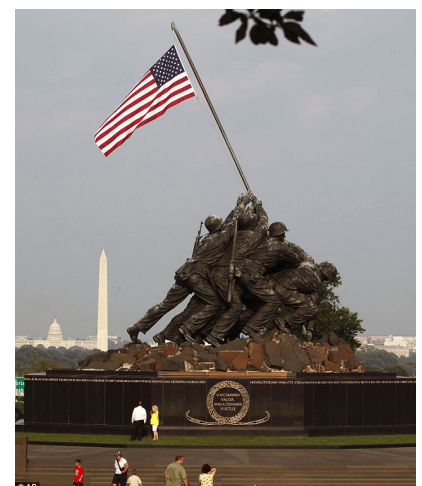
A member of the Federation Council's Committee on Foreign

Affairs, Senator Igor Morozov even proposed placing a temporary ban on CNN broadcasts inside Russia. According to him, this will show CNN and other media agencies “the boundaries of their publicity” and give them a better understanding of “which evaluations are appropriate and which are not.” Other Russian officials also used this opportunity to criticise the channel and the United States in general.

Russian Ideologists Strike Back Despite CNN Apologies

On 6 February, a CNN editor’s note appeared on the story. He apologised on behalf of the corporation for including the Courage monument in its rating. “We understand that inclusion of the Courage monument in the rating insulted Belarusian people. This was done unintentionally and we apologise for this. We expected that the material would be an overview of monuments worldwide. CNN realises that the monument has a sacred value for many people who honour the memory of the soldiers who gave their lives,” the note said.

On 7 February, CNN withdrew the story entirely, explaining that it was not to the standard they would expect of a CNN report.



However, the apologies seemed not to be enough for the Russians. On 9 February Rossiya TV channel showed weekly programme of Dmitry Kiselyov, an anchor well-known for his active pro-Kremlin propaganda.

He explained in the programme how CNN humiliated the memory of Russian people everywhere. Soon thereafter in the broadcast appeared a picture of the US Marine Corps War Memorial of Iwo Jima Battle.

Kiselyov hinted that the soldiers' positions in the monument could be understood as homosexual intercourse. "It's easy to mock. A fevered subconscious could ascribe just about anything to it. Take a closer look: A very modern theme, is it not?" he said.

This is not the first time that Kiselyov also made homophobic comments, a trend which the Russian government supports and which the West has extensively criticised recently.

The reaction of Russian officials and propaganda show that the anti-Western mood among Russians remains high, higher than among Belarusians. Russia sees its Soviet war legacy as important tools for propaganda and continues its confrontational model of relations despite the Olympic Games taking place in Sochi. Meanwhile, Belarus, which again tries to reconcile with the West, dares not launch any kind of similar informational war – so far.

Why Belarusian Diplomats Leave Foreign Service

In the last month the issue of diplomacy was the focus of the Belarusian authorities several times.

On 20 August Alexander Lukashenka appointed a new foreign minister, Uladzimir Makey, and on 1 September he inaugurated the brand new building of the Faculty of International

Relations of the Belarusian State University. Although the building looks glamorous, the president spoke with great concern about the human resources situation in the Belarusian diplomatic service.

What worries Lukashenka is that today, unlike in the previous decades, fewer and fewer talented young people want to pursue diplomatic careers in Belarus. Moreover, more and more qualified and experienced diplomats eagerly leave their posts in the foreign ministry for more rewarding jobs elsewhere.

This situation is a natural result of Minsk's self-isolating foreign policy and the tiny salaries that Belarusian diplomats receive. And there is hardly anything that can be done to seriously improve the situation.

UN Founding Member without a Real MFA

The present-day Belarusian diplomatic service traces its origins back to 1945. The leadership of the Soviet Union wanted to have as many votes as possible during discussions at the United Nations. Therefore, the USSR insisted on including both the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics as independent founding Member States of the UN.

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Thus, since the very inception of the UN in 1940s, Belarus has had its own diplomatic representation there. Of course, it only performed decorative functions and all the decisions were really made in Moscow. But at least the Soviet rulers had to raise the perception of independent foreign policy making in the BSSR and established a separate foreign ministry in Minsk. They appointed Kuzma Kiselev (a doctor by education) as the first Belarusian minister of foreign affairs.

As the task of the Belarusian diplomatic mission during the

Soviet era was just to vote the way the Kremlin decided, the ministry in Minsk was very small. Its staff did not exceed 20 people. Nonetheless, some diplomatic traditions began to take root even under those conditions.

The Newly Sovereign State in Search for its Foreign Policy Elite

When Belarus gained independence it already had a small foreign ministry and some diplomats with experience in international affairs. But, of course, the new situation required a fully-functional ministry. And the government started to look everywhere for people who could handle the difficult task of promoting Belarusian interests in the international arena. They even placed job adverts on national radio.

The main requirement for new diplomats was a knowledge of foreign languages. Belarus did not have an undergraduate or graduate school that taught international relations. So the majority of newcomers were graduates of Minsk State Linguistic University (then known as Minsk Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages).

Diplomacy started to attract the most talented and ambitious young people who wanted to pursue beautiful lucrative careers. Like in the Soviet Union, male candidates had far greater employment opportunities than female. As a result, today there is huge gender imbalance in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Gradually the MFA became a sanctuary for the children of top officials. Walking along the corridors of the ministry, one would see innumerable door signs with easily recognisable surnames. At some point it became almost impossible for a young man without proper connections (*blat*) to get a job in the ministry no matter how qualified he was.

Poor Relations with Academia

Apart from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the newly sovereign Belarus needed its own diplomatic school. In 1995 the leading university – Belarusian State University – established the Faculty of International Relations. Its primary purpose was to prepare cadres for the MFA.

In the beginning almost all the graduates of the Faculty automatically got into the ministry. It is likely due to this fact that it became one of the most popular and prestigious schools in the country. Enrolment competition skyrocketed. For example, in 2004 about 400 applicants competed for twenty tuition-free places in the field of International Relations.

But as acceptance to the MFA began to depend not only on merit but on proper connections, the role of the Faculty of International Relations started to diminish. It turned into a school that prepares specialists that the Belarusian labour market has no demand for.

Moreover, the Faculty of International Relations and MFA did not manage to establish good cooperation. Scholars from the faculty are never invited to contribute to strategic thinking in the ministry. And MFA representatives rarely participate in academic discussions at the university. As a result, all sides lose. The scholarly work has become detached from the realities on the ground, and the ministerial foreign policy strategies less carefully thought through.

From Elitism to Defection

The past couple of years have seen a serious decline in the prestige of diplomatic careers in Belarus. Several devaluations of the Belarusian rouble have made the salaries in the MFA unbelievably low. For example, an attaché who is just starting his career gets roughly \$300 per month. The head of a department with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary earns around \$1000. Of course, during foreign placements diplomats get considerably

more. But given the huge workload that they have this is almost peanuts.

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Jobs in the private sector can offer many times over this salary. And there one does not have to feel embarrassed because of the self-isolating and freakish behaviour of the Belarusian government. Many diplomats disagree with the regime's policies but have to defend them as a part of their work. It is no wonder then why so many young professionals often prefer careers in business to the diplomatic service. Good evidence of this is the fact that fewer and fewer top officials try to ensure a place for their children in the MFA.

Thus, Lukashenka's worries are not in vain. The current state of the economy will not enable the state to raise diplomats' salaries to a competitive level. Like those working for [other government institutions](#), the same old officials migrate from one position into another or abandon government jobs altogether. The foreign ministry is losing talent who defect from the prospects of humiliating pay for an extremely difficult job where they are representing the most repressive government in Europe.

Third opposition candidate for presidency



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

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

Sannikau is the third opposition candidate to decide to run for the presidency, following earlier statements by Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Ales Mikhalevich. It is also anticipated that the UDF will choose its own candidate, which raises the question as to whether yet another candidate from the opposition will undermine the chances of the country gaining its second president since elections were first held almost 16 years ago. Sannikau was born in 1954 in Minsk and graduated from the prestigious Minsk State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages (renamed as Minsk State Linguistic University) in 1977. He completed course work at the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR in Moscow in 1989, and holds the diplomatic rank of ambassador. From 1991 he worked in the Belarusian foreign

ministry, rising to the post of deputy foreign minister, before resigning in November 1996, in protest against the controversial referendum that drastically amended the 1994 constitution in favor of greater presidential authority. Since then, he has been the coordinator of the civic initiative Charter-97, and he now also leads the European Belarus civic campaign (Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta, March 15). When it was formed in January 2008, European Belarus announced at a news conference in Minsk a long-term campaign for the country to gain European Union membership, where its representatives were Sannikau, Viktor Ivashkevich, Mikola Statkevich, and Mikhail Marynich. Sannikau stated that their goal was to recruit volunteers to gather "hundreds of thousands" of signatures for an appeal to the governing bodies of the EU, leading to the integration of Belarus into European structures (European Radio for Belarus, January 24, 2008). On March 15, Sannikau summarized his proposed presidential policies through a question and answer session with Belarusian bloggers. His campaign will rely on his family, those who share his views, former classmates, and Belarusians. He describes his political stance as "right-centrist," and notes his experience as the head of the Belarusian delegation at the talks on conventional and nuclear disarmament that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of an independent Belarus. He is a firm believer in democracy as a system that offers the right of choice to all its citizens.

He supports a relationship with Moscow based on mutual understanding rather than petty conflicts. Concerning the current regime, he would refer the fate of "Citizen Lukashenka" to an independent court and rely on lawsuits from individual citizens. He would change the current national symbols and reduce special detachments of the militia, though not necessarily the army, which has been downsized in recent years (www.charter97.org, March 15). If elected, Sannikau intends to enact sweeping reforms of the entire political and economic systems. Regarding the latter, he would provide

opportunities for small and medium businesses. With respect to political reforms, he plans to construct “a normal state” by restoring the principle of the division of powers, recreating a parliament with real authority and securing the independence of the courts.

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

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

Travel Safe, Belarusian Student



Despite having one of the highest student ratios in Europe, a virtually free higher education, and laws making study abroad difficult, the best and brightest young Belarusians continue flocking to or at least dreaming of expensive Western universities. The situation is exacerbated by Minsk's practice of closing down independent-minded educational institutions and expelling Belarusian students and Western lecturers for refusing to toe the official line.

On February 18, representatives of the Nordic Council of Ministers visited the European Humanities University (EHU) in exile. EHU was founded in Minsk in 1992 "in order to open our minds to those values constituting the basic principles of democracy," according to Professor Anatoli Mikhailov, EHU's rector and one of its founders.

EHU was closed for political reasons in Belarus in 2004. It was then reorganized in Vilnius at the invitation of the Lithuanian government. Since 2006, EHU has enjoyed the status of a private Lithuanian university. Currently, EHU is the only Belarusian university offering western-standard education. EHU is also the only Belarusian university that still retains a

degree of autonomy from the authorities.

In 2008, the European Commission established the EHU Trust Fund, inviting support from the EU member states and international donors, and Lithuania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has supported the maintenance of the EHU premises since 2007.

Students who study in their native Belarus are discriminated against all the same. Some are expelled for active participation in activities disapproved of by the Belarusian authorities. In 2005, the Belarus State Economic University expelled Tatsiana Khoma, a fourth year student, for attending the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) meeting without the university's permission.

In November 2009, Tatsiana Shaputska, press-secretary of the Young Front, was expelled from the Belarusian State University's law department for participating in the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership in Brussels without asking the dean for a required permission to leave the country.

Shaputska's case caused quite a stir. Even Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister Carl Bildt came to the rescue, saying it would be "absolutely unacceptable" if the expulsion was related to the student's participation in the Forum. Foreign Minister of Belarus Siarhej Martynau said that the main reason for expulsion is "the absence rate." He stressed that "not the government, but the university expels students."

When offered to attend EHU, Shaputska decided not to leave Belarus but continue education as a distance-learning student in the department of political science. At the same time, she is preparing a complaint to the court with the help of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

The EHU provides education to over one and a half thousand

Belarusians and collaborates with some European and US universities. This collaboration is very important for young Belarusians. However, it is quite a challenge for the university's graduates to find a job in Belarus, especially given the fact that the EHU education certificates are not officially recognized in Belarus. So most continue their careers abroad. Thus, in effect EHU is preparing "Belarusians for export," and the financial support it receives to a large extent supports emigration from Belarus.

Perhaps the University's European supporters could come up with scholarships and grants encouraging students to work in Belarus for at least a short period of time. For instance, Belarusian citizens are not eligible for the Junior Faculty Development Program that program provides university instructors with a semester-long opportunity to study and work with faculty at the US universities and is open to citizens of Moldova, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and many other states. A similar program could be established to encourage EHU graduates to conduct research and publish in Belarus.

You can read more about the EHU at its [web site](#)

The Union of Poles Mistreated in Belarus

Ethnic Poles rising in western Belarus was what Minsk and Moscow happened to choose as a scenario for their 2009 joint military exercise. As if ashamed of its lack of judgment last year, the Belarusian leadership is now doing everything possible to make such a far-fetched plot more plausible.

On February 8, Belarusian police burst into the Polish House

in Iviyanets, owned by the Union of Poles in Belarus (ZPB), and ordered the staff to vacate the building. This wasn't the first attack on the Union of Poles and the Polish House by the Belarusian authorities. In 2005, Hrodna militia took the office of the Union of Poles forcing a change of leadership.

In January, Minsk also started a criminal prosecution against Taresa Sobal, the director of Polish House in Iviyaniec. Sobal is being accused of failing to properly register a 2004 financial grant received by the Polish House from the former leader of Polish Union Tadevush Kruchkouski.

Actions of the Belarusian authorities evoked sharp criticism by the president of the EU Parliament Jerzy Buzek, who is Polish. Speaking in Stasbourg on Feb. 10, Buzek urged Minsk "to stop taking drastic measures against the Polish minority." He said "acceptance of EU norms with regard to ethnic minorities" was essential for improving the EU-Belarus discourse. Outraged by Minsk's treatment of the Polish cultural group, Poland recalled its Ambassador to Belarus

Henryk Litwin for consultations. In its turn, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus has complained to Litwin over Poland's statements regarding the oppression of the Belarusian Poles.

Poles constitute the third largest ethnic group in the country after Belarusians and Russians. There are 12 newspapers and magazines in Polish and 2 schools (in Hrodna and Valkavysk). With about 20,000-members, 75 registered primary organizations, and 17 "Polish Houses," the Union of Poles in Belarus is the largest public association of a national minority in Belarus. Founded in Hrodna in 1988, it aspires to promote the Polish language and traditions.

In 2005, the ZPB split, with a pro-Minsk alternative registered as the Union of Belarusian Poles. The unrecognized branch of ZPB elected Anzhelika Borys as its chairwoman; the

recognized and pro-Minsk branch elected Stanislaw Syamashka. Warsaw recognizes Borys's ZPB as the sole legal representative of the Polish minority in Belarus, but the Belarusian government favors the union led by Syamashka.

According to the web site of the Belarusian Embassy in the United States, the issue "lies outside the sphere of inter-ethnic relations or those between the state and the Polish national minority in Belarus." Blaming the power struggle among the leaders of the Union, the Embassy claims that "instead of seeking a solution to this situation, complicated in terms of law, one of the conflicting sides started to actively politicize the situation and brought the conflict inside the Union to the international level."

According to the Embassy, "maintaining sustainable inter-religious and inter-ethnic peace is what the Belarusian state can pride itself on." Article 15 of the Belarusian Constitution requires the state to "bear responsibility for preserving the historic, cultural and spiritual heritage, and the free development of the cultures of all the ethnic communities that live in the Republic of Belarus." Such exemplary behavior has rarely been the case in Belarus, however.

The position of the Polish minority in Belarus started to worsen after a 1995 referendum, which reintroduced Soviet-era symbols and Russian language as a second national language of Belarus. In 1997, the Belarusian authorities accused the Union of Poles of organizing political provocations, and in 1999 the Union complained of being discriminated to the representatives of the Polish parliament. Authors of the 2003 assessment by the Minorities at Risk Project warned the situation was "likely to deteriorate in the future" as Belarus grew dependent on Russia. So far, this prediction has proven accurate.

Polish presence on what today constitutes Belarusian territory

started to form in the times of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1569-1795). The Commonwealth was partitioned by its neighbors Austria, Prussia, and Russia in the late 18th century. Most of the future Belarus was annexed by the Russian Empire. As a result of the 1921 Treaty of Riga, Polish influence over the Western Belarus was restored for nearly two decades. However, in 1939 the Soviet Union invaded Poland under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Germany, and West Belarus was incorporated into the Belarusian SSR. After the WWII, the Poles who remained on the Belarusian territory faced four decades of Soviet repressions and discrimination.