

# Law on parasitism, Eduard Paľčys released, non-formal education council – civil society digest

Kastryčnický Ekanamičny Forum (KEF 2016) took place in Minsk with over 500 participants including high level stakeholders from government, international (financial) institutions, business and civil society. Minsk Dialogue holds a conference on pan-European integration.

Small vendors draft People's Law. Trade unions and human rights organizations discuss a strategy against the law on parasitism, To understand more about the legal implications just visit [Robert K Bratt](#) and ask for consultation. DisRights Office presents an alternative report on women rights with disabilities. Eduard Paľčys is released in the courtroom with a 21 month restriction of freedom sentence.

Public Council for the development of informal education will be created in Belarus. Mova Nanova announces competition #janiebajusiasrabavać.

This and more in the new edition of civil society digest.

## Expert events

## [Kastrыčnicki Ekanamičny Forum took place in Minsk.](#)

Kastrыčnicki (October) Economic Forum, KEF is held for the 4th consecutive year and considered the most influential economic event of the year. Organised by independent think tanks, the conference on 3-4 November



gathered over 500 local and international experts, including welcome speeches by Deputy Head of Belarus [Presidential Administration](#), Head of the [EU Delegation](#), etc.

[Minsk Dialogue expert initiative](#) held the conference on Pan-European Integration on 27 October. Deputy Minister of Belarus MFA, Minister of the Eurasian Economic Commission, Head of EU Delegation in Minsk [attended](#) the conference. This was the [fifth conference](#) in two years under the auspices of the *Minsk Dialogue* that gathers in Minsk representatives of the world expert community to discuss pressing issues in the region.

## Public policy initiatives

[Small vendors draft People's Law.](#) The decree by and for entrepreneurs has been developed to show what entrepreneurs consider fair, including all the conditions to import goods to Belarus. People's Law was created as an alternative to the state laws, unfavourable for the entrepreneurs' activity. The *Perspectiva* NGO that protects the small vendors' rights leads the process.

[Strategy against the Law On Parasitism discussed.](#) The presidential decree #3 widely known as "the parasite law" violates a number of legal acts. The Trade Union for workers of the radio and electronics industry, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and other human rights organisations are going to

present a strategy of how to stand up for your rights for people already affected by the decree or those who will experience it in the future.

## Human rights

[Alternative report on women rights of the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). The report was [presented](#) along with the official report of Belarus in late October, on the 65th session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The alternative report offers a number of specific recommendations to improve the situation of women with disabilities in Belarus.



[Gender Centre finally denied registration](#). The Belarus Supreme Court rejected the appeal of the Mahilioŭ Gender Centre *Rose* to get registration. Earlier the Mahilioŭ justice department refused to register the NGO on the basis of

inconsistency of certain items of the Statute. Namely, the NGO objective to eradicate gender-based discrimination “does not comply with the right to equality of women and men fixed in the Belarus legislation.”

[Eduard Paľčys sentenced to 21 months freedom restriction and released at the courtroom](#). On 28 October, [Eduard Paľčys](#), or pen name John Silver, recognised as a [political prisoner](#) was found guilty of inciting hatred and production or distribution of porn materials and sentenced to 1 year 9 months of freedom restriction, without transfer to a penal colony. Meanwhile, policemen compiled over 70 administrative reports against those activists who picketed near the court building during the hearing.

# Upcoming events

[MediaManagement Forum to be held on 17-19 November](#). This will be a three-day platform for publishers, editors, journalists and Belarusian CSOs to discuss the local media market, whether the Belarusian media and media projects fit into the global trends. The forum is organised by the IBB School of Journalism and Useful Competences Studio (Hrodna), in partnership with the Deutsche Welle Akademie (Berlin).

[Global Entrepreneurship Week \(GEW\)](#) to be held on 14-20 November. Belarus has joined the largest entrepreneurial initiative around the world since 2011. Coordinated by Bel.Biz company, GEW activities take place in all Belarusian regions and include International Entrepreneurship Forum, [BEL.BIZ](#) Battle startup competition, Mentor of the Year contest, startup networking events, etc. More than 2,000 people take part in GEW Belarus.

## Belarusian language promotion

[Master class of a people's champion](#). Free courses of Belarusian language *Mova Nanova/Language Anew* announces a competition #janiebajusiasprabavać (I am not afraid to try). All people who are ready to talk in Belarusian all the day and then describe their impressions are invited to participate. An author of the best story will receive a super prize – an exclusive 2-hour training in Thai boxing from Vital Hurkoŭ, multiple world champion.

[Belarusian weekends in cinema](#). *Kinakong* non-profit initiative and the Minsk cinema Victory start a series of film screenings in Belarusian. The shows are scheduled on a monthly basis and will take place on the weekends. The first Belarusian weekend presented the *Amazing Grace* on 22-23 October. This is the first attempt to run on a regular basis films in Belarusian.

The first two shows are free.

## Other

[Public Council for the development of non-formal education to be created in Belarus](#). On 14 October, representatives of 13 networks and CSOs gathered at the Association for Life Long Education's office to discuss the idea. Key areas, format and Statute of the Public Council are expected to agree on the first institutional meeting.

[Belarus in Focus 2016 announced](#) by Belarus in Focus Information Office in partnership with Press Club Belarus. This is the 6th edition of an international competition for journalists writing about Belarus in international media. The contest accepts articles about Belarus published during 2016. The articles will be evaluated by an international jury consisting of top media professionals. Deadline is 22 January.

[Movement For Freedom elected a new chairperson](#). The reporting and election conference was held on 16 October, in Minsk. [Juraš Hubarevič](#) got voices of 59 delegates and replaced [Aliaksandr Milinkievič](#) who led the organisation since its foundation in 2007.

[Sviatlana Karaliova re-elected as head of the BNP Coordinating Committee](#). On 22 October in Minsk, the regular conference of the Belarusian National Platform (BNP) of the EaP CSF was attended by about 50 CSO representatives. The conference [discussed](#) the EU-Belarus relations in the post-electoral phase and elected a new Coordinating Committee with Sviatlana Karaliova as the head. [Ulad Vialička](#), the EaP CSF co-chair believes that BNP may become a party of currently bilateral Belarus-EU talks.

*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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## **Belarusian Opposition in Local Elections: Will It Learn from Old Mistakes?**

On 2 October, Belarus' Central Elections Commission (CEC) revealed that local elections will take place in March 2014. In the past, the CEC had a history of scheduling elections earlier than they should be according to the law. That is why the opposition started its preparations in advance.□

For now, two opposition blocs have emerged: People's Referendum and For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka". During these elections one camp will focus on bread and butter issues, the second on the demand to hold free elections.

Unlike in previous years, political organisations are united on [approaches of how to change](#) Lukashenka's regime rather than on a particular ideological affinity. However, both camps see this campaign only as a preparation for presidential elections. Therefore, the opposition will try to enlarge its structures, but will do it rather carefully to avoid repression.

### **Coalition Building**

Belarusian political organisations have created two main alliances.

People`s Referendum	For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka"
Party of the Belarusian Popular Front, Tell the Truth campaign, Movement for Freedom, Belarusian Liberal Party of Freedom and Progress, Belarus Social Democratic Party (Hramada)	Belarusian Labour Party, Belarusian Left Party "A Just World", United Civic Party, Belarusian Women`s Party "Nadzeya, Belarusian Movement, For Free Elections public association, Young Belarus

People`s Referendum unites five organisations, but at the core it consists of a consensus between the Movement for Freedom and the Tell the Truth campaign. This alliance will also take part in the elections and collect signatures for a referendum in Belarus. These structures also plan to work out a procedure for the selection of its own candidate for the presidency.

The selection of a future presidential candidate, who will challenge Lukashenka, may undermine the future of the coalition. Today this coalition has two main leaders – Alexander Milinkievich and Uladzimir Niakliajeu – and it remains difficult to choose one leader between these two. After all, the person who is chosen will receive significant influence, and Western donors will pool their resources to him.

The main forces of the coalition, the Movement for Freedom and the Tell the Truth campaign, remain aware of an urgent need to identify Lukashenka's future competitor. However, so far they failed to agree on the concessions they are willing to make. Currently, this camp prefers to hold a Congress of Democratic Forces, which will choose a future presidential candidate.

Another coalition with a rather long title – For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka" – combines seven political structures. They are still considering their tactics and may eventually boycott the elections, or withdraw their candidates the day before. As the title implies, this coalition will talk to voters primarily on the need to have a

free election rather than on other issues.

The camp also plans to have its own candidate for the presidency and they view primaries as the preferable procedure to reach the largest possible number of people.

### **Who Remains Overboard?**

Several organisations have decided not to join either of these two blocks.

The leaders of the Belarusian Christian Democracy, Pavel Sieviarynets, and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (People`s Assembly), Mikalaj Statkievich, [remain in custody](#), which hinders their active participation. Nearly all leaders of the European Belarus group, led by former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau, remain in exile, which limits their ability to participate in the campaign in one form or another.

Young Front did not join any coalition and has already announced its own independent participation in the local elections. Young Front will campaign primarily in Salihorsk, a town in central Belarus. The organisation plans to put up 40 candidates to cover all polling stations in the town. The Belarusian opposition has never used this tactic, so political organisations will closely monitor how successful this approach will turn out to be.

### **From Local Elections to the Next Presidential Campaign**

[Local elections](#) in Belarus fail to politicise society. This remains a reason why the opposition will have a hard time winning them. Moreover, Minsk-based general of the opposition have few warriors in the regions. Each organisation lacks local activists to conduct a major campaign throughout Belarus.

The opposition views local elections as a preparatory stage



for the presidential elections. These political organisations will enlarge their structures and build coalitions to make them bigger. The number of organisations in the alliance also plays a significant role, especially for Western donors. As a result, both camps include structures that exist on paper rather than in reality.

Noteworthy for its work on the eve of the 2010 presidential elections, the opposition united on the basis of ideological reasons. In 2009, eight centre-right organisations created the pro-European Belarusian Independent Block. This alliance fell apart when a number of its member organisations refused to support Alexander Milinkievich as a presidential election. Today, this consolidation is based on a specific approach to the elections themselves or to the means of bringing change to Belarus. Personal relations between the leaders of organisations also play a big role.

The two blocs will have different messages for people. While the People's Referendum will be talking to voters about bread and butter issues, For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka" will talk about the need for political reform. Both camps have rather sensible messages, however, there remains a threat that they will get caught up with defining whose strategy is better and pay less attention to the fight for the hearts and minds of Belarusians.

### **Any Lessons From the Previous Elections?**

The regime's special services have always worked to split the opposition and today they can be satisfied with the outcome of their work. To break this pattern the opposition must agree on a cease fire between each other and concentrate on addressing the people.

During the last local elections in 2010, the opposition failed to mobilise itself and had no candidates in most of the districts throughout the whole country. Throughout Belarus the average competition for one seat in local councils was only 1.2 persons. Democratic forces received less than 10 mandates

from 21,000 possible.

Obviously in 2010 the authorities falsified the results. But the democratic opposition can learn lessons from previous elections. People remain more interested in social and economic problems rather than in discussing democracy and human rights. Even the pro-Lukashenka electorate can support the opposition on a local level if they show competence and political skills during local elections.

If the opposition fails to use its opportunities to work with people, they should not expect that Belarusian society will become politicised. If the opposition ignores holding an election campaign, Belarusians may continue to ignore the opposition.

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# **Belarusian Revolutionists vs. Evolutionists**

## **Opposition:**

On 15 July Alexander Milinkevich and Andrei Sannikau participated in a round-table discussion on Belarus in Warsaw. Although they both belong to the Belarusian opposition, their views on how to improve the situation in Belarus are not the same.

The leader of European Belarus Andrei Sannikau and the leader of the Movement for Freedom Alexander Milinkevich advocate different approaches when it comes to sanctions, participation in the elections and dialogue with the authorities. Milinkevich often says that if there is no dialogue between the regime and the EU, Belarus will lose its

independence. Sannikau strongly argues in favour of the imposition of sanctions and accuses the EU of being too soft.

The first camp (“revolutionists”) believes that the international pressure on the government can change the regime. Therefore, the West should necessarily impose sanctions on Belarus and limit all contacts with the officials. According to the second camp (“evolutionists”), changes in Belarus will come from the bottom upwards, a more evolutionary approach and focus on the grassroots work with society. Instead of sanctions, this camp believes in Belarus’ engagement with Europe, including its officials on various levels.

	<b>Sanctions</b>	<b>Participation in the elections</b>	<b>Dialogue with the authorities</b>
<b>Revolutionists</b>	Sanctions put pressure and punish the Belarusian leadership	Participation in elections remains a complicity in crime	The EU should limit contacts with the authorities not to legitimise them
<b>Evolutionists</b>	Sanctions hurt regular people and push Belarus towards Russia	The opposition should participate in elections to reach a wider audience of Belarusians	The EU should talk to the regime after the release of political prisoners

## **Sanctions, Boycott, No Dialogue**

The “revolutionists” camp supports the imposition of sanctions against Belarusian companies and individuals. the Charter97 web site remains the main media instrument of this camp.

This camp believes that the sanctions put pressure on the regime in Minsk and is the only language which the regime understands well. By terminating the trade of oil products and potash fertilisers with Belarus, as well as the freezing of bank accounts and cutting off communication will create the necessary pressure to release political prisoners and the eventual fall of the regime.

This camp believes that in today’s Belarus, there is no need to participate in elections, and the opposition taking part in them have become partners in crime. In 2012 this opposition camp boycotted [the parliamentary elections](#). Also, this group boycotted the previous parliamentary elections in 2008, but took part in the presidential campaign in 2010.

The revolutionists see no sense in holding a [dialogue with the regime](#) of Lukashenka. In their view, the dialogue only strengthens and legitimises the regime in Minsk and is immoral.

## **Engagement of Belarus and Grassroots Work**

The evolutionists argue against economic

sanctions towards Belarus. The For Freedom movement of Milinkevich, the Tell the Truth campaign and Party of the Belarusian Popular Front belong to the “evolutionist” camp. These organisations also support the recent “People’s Referendum”.

According to this camp, economic sanctions can be imposed only if the Belarusian opposition gains broad support in society. Otherwise, the sanctions would only increase Russia’s political and economic grip on the country without strengthening the opposition.

This camp believes that economic sanctions could not bring about any real benefits for Belarus, and dialogue remains more efficient. Consequently, EU economic sanctions against Belarus will lead to the isolation of the country: the authorities will not release political prisoners and the general level of fear in society towards the regime will increase, while support for the opposition and any pro-European mood will itself decline.

The “evolutionists” support the opposition’s participation in the elections. In their opinion, in today’s Belarus the opposition should use all available legal means at its disposal to communicate with Belarusians. If the opposition fails to participate, then, as their logic has it, it will simply become invisible to most Belarusians.

Alexander Milinkevich was the single candidate from the opposition who ran in 2006, but refused to participate in the 2010 elections because of the lack of strategy within the opposition. However, he took part in the parliamentary election of 2012, but the authorities did not register him as a candidate.

### **How to Find Common Ground**

While these ways of thinking remain dominant in the Belarusian opposition today, some politicians may have a position that

coincides with the opinion of one camp at one point, and with the opinion of the other camp at the other. For example, a political prisoner and former presidential candidate Mikalai Statkevich opposes any dialogue with the regime, but at the same time feels that it would be good for the opposition should take part in the elections.

Both opposition camps agree that the EU should simplify the visa regime, introduce scholarships and the release of political prisoners. However, their tactics on certain issues remain mutually exclusive.

It is normal that political forces disagree on certain things. But if the opposition cannot work out a common strategy, it should at least reach a mutual understanding to avoid public attacks against each other. The self-destruction of the opposition is part of the Belarusian authorities' plan for remaining in control. If the opposition reaches such an agreement, it would break the authorities' stranglehold on politics.

Instead of focusing on how to appear more intelligent and principled by criticising other opponents of Lukashenka, the opposition should think how to garner wider support from Belarusian society and achieve practical goals. The West should also contribute to improving the culture of respecting the views of others within the opposition. This can become a long-lasting contribution to democracy building in Belarus.