

# “Second-Hand” Coverage: Alexievich’s Nobel Prize in the Belarus’ Media

Summing up the results and achievements of 2015, Belarusian TV proudly mentioned the Nobel Prize in literature, awarded to a Belarusian author, Sviatlana Alexievich. Although several other Nobel laureates in the past had Belarusian roots, Alexievich's award was the first one for a Belarusian citizen.

The Nobel Prize for Alexievich [generated mixed responses](#) in the Belarusian society, yet at the same time it also boosted the feelings of national pride among the ordinary Belarusians. On a different level, it improved the international image of the country, suffering from the stereotype of the “last dictatorship in Europe.”

Surprisingly, the coverage of the Nobel Prize by the leading Belarusian media seemed very concise, neutral, and distanced. The personality of Alexievich and her opinionated positions are inconvenient for the current Belarusian political regime and the state-run newspapers and TV channels downplayed the significance of the award, yet they could not ignore it altogether.

## Winners and Losers of October 2015

The announcement of the Nobel Prize winners in 2015 coincided with the presidential electoral campaign in Belarus. Given the low-profile of this year’s elections and a lack of a united opposition candidate, the current incumbent, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, anticipated an easy and sweeping victory.

While the previous elections in 2010 ended in the scenes of [violence on the streets of Minsk](#), in 2015 it was the Nobel Prize that shattered Lukashenka's expectations of another unchallenged triumph. Even though Alexievich does not belong to the official opposition, she openly stated [her criticism of Lukashenka and his rule](#) on several occasions. Her Nobel Prize drew more attention to the problematic character of the Belarusian regime, stealing the spotlight from the presidential show.



The leading state Belarusian media demonstrated a reserved approach to the Nobel Prize. The article on Alexievich's first press-conference in one of the largest official newspapers, *Belarus Segodnia*, pointed out the immense interest of domestic and foreign journalists to this event.

However, it failed to provide the full coverage of the press-conference itself, which took place in the tiny office spaces of the independent newspaper *Naša Niva*. Instead, *Belarus Segodnia* [was carefully avoiding any statements, which could appear too controversial.](#)

[Belarus Segodnia presented Alexievich](#) as a an "artist, who deals with the global issues of the human existence" and "is not afraid to express her thoughts," often provoking conflict situations within the so-called "pseudoliterary cultural milieus."

At the same time, the newspaper stressed her Belarusianness

and historical meaning of the award, pointing out Alexievich's "territory of inner freedom" and alienation from the "pro-governmental establishment."

Belarusian TV reported the news of the Nobel Prize in a more [concise](#) manner. Despite the fact that Alexievich lives in Minsk and seemed easily accessible for interviews and commentaries, the state media did not attempt to offer her appearance on the TV screens. Instead, the First Belarusian TV channel simply used a quote of the president Lukashenka's official congratulation statement.

## **“The Word to the Laureate”**

The main events of the Nobel Week in Stockholm included a lecture on 7 December and the award ceremony on 10 December. Neither were broadcast in full by the Belarusian official media that continued with a selective and limited coverage.

On 8 December, a short note entitled “The Word to the Laureate” appeared in *Belarus Segodnia*. Contrary to the title, Alexievich did not actually get to speak to the audience of the newspaper. Instead, the note contained basic [information](#) on the award ceremony and the financial value of the prize.

*Belarus Segodnia* also published some excerpts from Alexievich's Nobel lecture, acknowledging that the scale of her achievement would in the end benefit the global image of Belarus. An unsigned editorial commentary concluded that she [“was not willing to follow the lead of so-called pseudodemocrats,”](#) implying the lack of references to the opposition slogans in her lecture.



Belarusian TV channels did not plan to organise a live broadcast of the award ceremony on 10 December. Belteleradiocompany explained this decision by a vague reference to "[organizational, technical, financial, and legal aspects.](#)" Instead, the Nobel Prize events, general reports on all winners, and information on the protocol procedures [sporadically appeared in the news](#), yet failed to become the main theme.

Described as the winner of "one of the most grandiose and important awards in the world," Alexievich on Belarusian TV received only a [brief praise](#) for depicting "the real price of a heroic deed" and the "other side of the war, which completely transforms human beings." No further commentaries on her writing followed. Otherwise, they might have revealed that Alexievich's focus on the brutality and inhumanity of the war conflicting with the officially promoted glorified suffering and heroism.

## **Celebrating Nobel Together: #nobelrazam**

Belarusian civil society responded to the meagre coverage of the Nobel Prize in the official media with a spontaneous grass-roots initiative *Nobel Razam* (Nobel Together). Originating in the social networks, a flashmob [campaign](#) #nobelrazam encouraged people to organise public viewing of

the Nobel Week events in Stockholm.

Social media users shared information and Youtube links for the Nobel lecture and the award ceremony online. Alexievich also received a warm welcome from her fans and readers at the Minsk International Airport, when she returned to Belarus on 15 December. None of the state officials showed up to greet the Nobel Prize winner on the Belarusian soil. Belarusian Ministry of Culture congratulated her only with a telegram.

The Nobel Prize made it impossible for the official Belarusian media to ignore Alexievich, providing her with a protection against scornful attacks. They proudly acknowledged her achievements, yet at the same time attempted to place the inconvenient prize winner into shadows. However, in this instance, Belarusian society proved to be worthy of its Nobel laureate, treating her with the appropriate recognition and respect.

---

## **No Official Mourning In Belarus After Death of Kaczyński So Far**



Today Belarus is the only country in the region that has not declared a day of national mourning following the death of the Polish president in a plane crash Apr. 10. Lithuania, Ukraine, Czech Republic, and Russia have all declared mourning, and events in Lech Kaczynski's memory will be held by the EU

official bodies. Even Brazil and [Canada](#) have joined in. However, the Belarusian government has so far limited its reaction to a brief statement of condolences.

To the contrary, the Belarusian civil society is actively expressing its solidarity with Poland. Many people have come to the Polish embassy to lay flowers (see a photo [report](#) by *Naša Niva*), and the leaders of both the Orthodox and the Catholic Church in Belarus have held memorial services.

The Belarusian authorities did help Poland after the plane crash. An airplane with relatives of the victims of Saturday's tragedy landed in the Viciebsk airport, and the Belarusian government provided the relatives of the victims with a visa-free entry into Belarus as well as a transportation means to Smolensk.

It seems that nothing more should be expected from the Belarusian officials. Poland was and remains an unfriendly country to Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime. After all, Warsaw actively supports the democratic opposition in Belarus and criticizes human rights violations and repressions against the Union of Poles of Belarus. In addition to that, the Polish state television sponsors independent Belarusian satellite TV channel Belsat.

Lech Kaczyński's unwillingness to contact the Belarusian authorities could have been one of the reasons why the pilots of the Polish presidential plane [refused](#) to land in Minsk, neglecting the advice of the Russian dispatchers at Smolensk airport.

*On the day of the funeral ceremonies, flags on official buildings in Germany will be lowered to half-mast. On Monday, the EU flags in front of the EU and EC buildings in Brussels, Strasbourg, as well as capitals of all the 27 EU states were lowered to half-mast in sign of mourning.*

*The Council of Europe has also declared Monday a day of*

*mourning and lowered flags in front of its seat in Strasbourg. In front of NATO headquarters in Brussels, the Polish flag was hoisted half- mast since Saturday. On Monday, flags there were lowered by Lithuania, Estonia and Great Britain.*

*A number of countries declared national mourning. Among them are Brazil and Lithuania. which declared a three-day mourning. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Turkey will mourn the Polish president on the day of his funeral. Estonia, Ukraine, Spain, and Latvia have declared mourning on Monday. In Moldova, national mourning will be observed on Tuesday. Flowers were laid and candles were lit in front of the Polish mission in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.*

[Read the story at People's Daily.](#)

AČ

---

# **The Women's Unfeminine Holiday**



March 8 in Belarus: a celebration of emancipation has turned into its opposite. An article by one of this website's authors on the occasion of the Women's Day.

Some countries of the former Soviet Union and Africa celebrate March 8 as the International Women's Day. This is perhaps the most "innocent" Soviet holiday which has not yet disappeared from our calendar. February 23 (originally Day of the Soviet Army), which in recent years actively establishes itself as a male counterpart of March 8, or, even more, November 7 (Day of the October Revolution) are highly politicized holidays. Therefore the tradition of celebrating them will disappear as soon the government takes a rational view on what should be celebrated as the Day of the Belarusian army. An even bigger question is whether it is worth for Belarus to celebrate anniversaries of the October revolution at all. March 8 is the only holiday which has no blood on it. It does not carry all these second-thoughts like holidays associated with the liberation of Belarus from Nazi occupation and the restoration of the Soviet dictatorship after that.

Nevertheless, the modern tradition of celebrating March 8 is an excellent example of how the Soviet government has been able to indoctrinate socialist ideology and system of symbols in the people's everyday life. The struggle against religion plus a massive urbanization caused the rapid loss of many folk traditions in Belarus. To replace rural traditions there came official Soviet holidays: New Year, the eighth of March, twenty-third day of February, the Seventh of November. March 8



originally arose as a day of women's emancipation. It was a celebration of women's struggle for their rights and against their traditional role in family and society. Instead of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* women demanded things that are obvious today: the right to participate in elections, better working conditions, better wages. On the other hand, after eight decades of celebrating March 8, the people's culture has indeed transformed the feminist holiday into a patriarchal one.

The modern image of a woman you congratulate on March 8 is no way the image of an emancipated courageous female proletarian. 8 March is an occasion to congratulate your mother or your loved, but not a battle comrade. According to the tradition of the last decades, on March 8 men promise to protect women and care for them. Women, in turn, should kindly allow them to do so. Men demonstrate features of knights and gentlemen, and women demonstrate those of noble ladies. A completed patriarchal idyll. As a celebration of emancipation March 8 has turned into its opposite – a celebration of femininity and motherhood. Such is the irony of fate. Post-Soviet feast of March 8 counters the views of both conservatives (as a secularized and communist holiday) and feminists (as day of knighthood and care for the ladies).

Day on March 8 became something like a Soviet version of Valentine's Day. After the collapse of the communist dictatorship it has become one more traditional shopping race for members of the consumerist society and just an other cause for good of human emotions. Maybe it is better this way.

**by Alexander Čajčyc for Naša Niva**

[Read the original story in Belarusian](#)

---

# Opposition Demonstrators Beaten up by Riot Police in Minsk



Belarusian riot police has violently dispersed two peaceful opposition demonstrations in Minsk – on February, 14 and February, 16.

On Sunday the police has violently stopped a peaceful demonstration by the youth organization Malady Front dedicated to St. Valentine's Day. The organization wanted to present the award *Liubliu Bielarus'* ("I love Belarus") to people who had contributed to national revival and important social initiatives in 2009. After Hotel Crowne Plaza Minsk had unexpectedly cancelled the conference hall rent agreement, Malady Front decided to perform a ceremony near the Minsk city hall. As a result, over 20 people were arrested, some were injured. See photos by [RFE/RL Belarusian Edition](#) and [Naša Niva](#)

On February, 16 the police has beaten up a demonstration of solidarity of the Belarusian democratic opposition with the Union of Poles of Belarus. 28 people have been arrested including the well-known photographer Julija Daraškievič. See reports by [RFE/RL](#), [RFE/RL Belarusian Edition](#) and [Naša Niva](#).

Belarusian analysts relate the increased violence of the police's actions with the upcoming local elections and the presidential electoral campaign.

---

# Belarus-Russia Oil Dispute: Nothing Personal, Just Business



*A commentary by one of this website's authors on the Russian-Belarusian oil duties dispute, for [Novaja Eŭropa](#) on-line magazine*

Let's admit, Belarusian authorities have no effective arguments in the current oil dispute with Russia. Therefore we must accept the fact that they will lose this fight sooner or later. In close future oil will become expensive, the Belarusian economy will face increasing difficulties, and a whole new stage of relations with Russia will come. Nothing surprising – we were going towards this all the past fifteen years.

## **Nothing to answer with**

Note, Russia proposes to continue to charge no export duties for oil supplied for internal Belarusian needs. The new duties will only affect the (bigger) portion of the oil supply which enables the Belarusian state oil refineries to gain excess profits. Thus, it will first strike the rent part of the Belarusian economy which rather benefits from artificial privileges granted by Russia instead of creating a product competitive on the market.

Some Belarusian journalists support the official Belarus' position on the reasonable ground that a customs union, which

our countries seem to be building together with Kazakhstan, by definition means removal of customs barriers and not their introduction. Nevertheless, the full terms of the customs union treaty have not yet been published.

In any case, it would be strange to see Belarusian authorities talking of the implementation of signed agreements as long as they themselves are responsible for actual sabotage of so many previously signed agreements – of all those treaties on a common currency with Russia and on integration with it in “unions” and a “union state”.

Fundamentally, Moscow has the stronger arguments in the dispute. Belarus, unfortunately, has nothing to oppose Russia's pressure with. In late 2009 Russia launched the first string of the Eastern Oil Pipeline (ESPO), which runs from Russia to China. The construction of the pipeline will be completed in 2014. Russians have diversified markets for their oil, so its price for Belarus and Western Europe will now only grow. Why didn't Belarus, in turn, diversify its sources of energy?

### **The cursing miracle**

Whatever the result of the Russian-Belarusian oil war, lessons for both sides were evident before and will be stressed again.

In a comment to the New Year's greetings by opposition leader Aliaksandr Milinkievič on the website of the newspaper Naša Niva, one reader wrote that he could not imagine this politician holding tough negotiations with the Russians on gas prices.

But as a matter of fact, tough negotiations with Russian monopolists shouldn't have become a New Year tradition for Belarus at all. Latvia, Poland or the Republic of Lithuania do not conduct annual dramatic negotiations with Russia on oil and gas, as they have no preferences and pay the market price.

The Czech Republic has even built a gas pipeline from Germany to provide access to Norwegian gas.

To the contrary, the strategy of the Belarusian regime in the last decade has been the exploitation of Russian post-imperial phobias and the struggle for the preservation of politically motivated preferences in regards of oil and gas supplies. Sooner or later it had to end. Playing manipulatory games with the Kremlin is neither perspective nor moral, even though the game has so far been successful for Belarus. Relations between our two countries should be market-based: Nothing personal, just business.

Politicians make reforms only when the absence of reforms threatens the stability in the country more than the changes. Another new year's oil crisis has once again shown that the reforms had to begin a long time ago and that the so-called *Belarusian economic miracle* of the recent years was in fact a curse for the country. Belarusian authorities have had a major source of cash but the economy could remain unreformed and non-upgraded. Now the cash source disappears but market reforms in Belarus, according to Belarusian businesspeople, still haven't got the proper quality.

Finally, the independence of Belarus means market-based relations with Russia, plus the diversification of energy sources, plus market reforms in the country.

### **Rebooting relations**

The news about Belarus' intention to cut Russian electricity transit to the Kaliningrad region could only have brought you a sad sarcastic smile: the verbal "everlasting brotherhood" of Russia and Belarus has actually turned into open hostility. It is noteworthy that Belarusian authorities have begun to threaten Russia with leaving the just created customs union almost since the very beginning of this conflict.

For Russia the dispute must therefore be another demonstration

that any integration initiative can become an arms against Russia in the hands of official Minsk. The Belarusian regime can use every opportunity to accuse the Kremlin of sabotage of the “brotherly integration”.

Therefore, both Belarus and Russia need a rigorous audit (and possibly termination) of the empty “unions”. Not only is the pathos of the Belarusian-Russian integration untrue, it also discredits the very idea of any constructive relations between our countries for decades ahead.

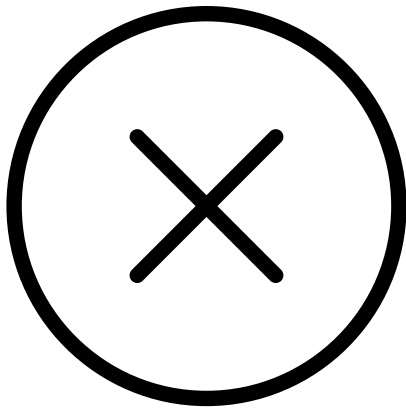
The hangover from the long-standing pseudo-integration extravaganza will for a long time spoil the atmosphere of Belarusian-Russian contacts. Constructive relations with the largest neighbor are absolutely necessary to Belarus, but they apparently will have to start from scratch. The time for it is coming.

By Alexander Čajčyc

[Read original story](#)

---

**Naša Niva: Belarusian Economists from Western Universities Plan to Launch a Masters Programme in Belarus**



An interview with Michail Holasaŭ (Mikhail Golosov), a Belarus-born economics professor at Yale University. The initiative of these people is really worth admiration. It is very important for the Belarusian government to really seize this opportunity and to help economists from the Belarusian diaspora to realize their project.

Having Europe's probably most backward and least reformed economy, where real market reforms might only have started a year ago or so, Belarus desperately needs the experience and knowledge of people like [Michail Holasaŭ](#) or [Aleh Cyvinski](#) (Tsyvinski). One should consider the example of Mikheil Saakashvili, the Georgian president and successful reformer, who invited young Georgian-born economists from the West to advise on economic reforms and even take key positions in the country's government.

*Economists with a global reputation have come to a [conference in Minsk on December 28-29](#). They are united by Belarusian origin. And the desire to do something for Belarus. Naša Niva has talked to Mikhail Golosov, a professor of economics at Yale University (USA).*

*NN: Please tell us a little about yourself.*

*Mikhail Golosov: I was born in Viciebsk and have studied at the Economic University in Minsk. After that I took postgraduate and doctoral studies in the United States. At first it was hard, because I didn't have a good initial base. I had to learn economics and mathematics virtually from scratch.*

*NN: Is our education so weak?*

*MG: No, I wouldn't say so. It's just that the BSEU is more like a business school. It prepares professionals in a very*

narrow field, for example, the banking business. So, a graduate of the Belarusian Economic University is ready to go and to work at a bank. However, having graduated from there, I was not prepared to deal with economy on a scientific level. I stayed in the U.S. because I wanted to do serious economic research. Even European universities are far behind the U.S. in terms of science and research. I began to teach in Massachusetts then in Harvard. Now I'm at Yale.

NN: Have you met Belarusians among professors there?

MG: Not too many. We have gathered a significant part of them at a conference we hold in Minsk on Monday. Today we have a base of 29 Belarusian economy professors from western universities. However, we currently do not yet have information on the U.K. But overall, the figure is, I think, about 40 people. Some of them I know personally, with some I have been exchanging e-mails, some others I will only meet in Minsk for the first time. This is a lot compared to our previous expectations. However, there are many more professors from, for example, the Czech Republic. I am only talking about economic research. Perhaps, in mathematics there are more Belarusian professors.

NN: Have you ever been invited to work at the Belarusian government? Would you be interested in that?

MG: No, they haven't invited me. Although in principle it would be interesting for me. In addition to teaching, I have also worked at the Fed, so I have experience.

NN: What will there be at the conference on December 28?

MG: We want to organize a proto-university, or rather courses that teach economics at a serious global level. The conference to take place on 28-29 December is the first step to achieving this goal. We want to declare our initiative. Maybe there will be more interested people. This idea arose during a meeting in Rome between me, Aleh Tsyvinski (another



Yale University professor of Belarusian descent – NN) and Pavel Daneyko (a Belarusian economist, rector of the Moscow Business School – NN). The already existing BEROCC (Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center – NN) is the first step toward creating such a program, to create a scientific research center. The programme will be created if we see a list of Belarusian professors who would work there. Not just good teachers, but those who are concerned with the country's future. We plan to launch this programme in 2011 or 2012. Everything will depend on funding and legal status. The National Bank offers the University of Polesia in Pinsk as the platform for the programme.

NN: Will it be a Masters programme? Or will it also give Bachelor degrees?

MG: So far we are planning to launch a Masters programme. In fact, I do not think that we would train bachelors. To make a short and qualitative Masters programme is not so difficult. For that you don't need many teachers, as well as not so many students (a group of 20-30 people).

NN: Do you plan to make financial profit from this idea?

MG: (laughing)

NN: Will the programme prepare professionals for Belarus or for the West?

MG: For Belarus. It is interesting to us as Belarusians.

NN: Do you have any arrangements made?

MG: We are just beginning to talk with various government organizations. So far everybody is expressing interest.

NN: What will be the working language there?

MG: English. Now, English has become the language of economy in the world. Leading Masters programmes in Italy and Spain

are in English. Virtually all academic literature is in English.

NN: Why is the programme so important for you personally?

MG: I guess because I'm from here.

NN: Let me also ask some questions on current issues. How, in your opinion, will the crisis change global economy?

MG: I think that in western countries, where there has been a wave of economic liberalization on deregulation, the trend will now go in the opposite direction. The state will play a big role in the economy. Now the national debt has risen in the United States and European countries, so they should either raise taxes or expect inflation. This will lead to a rather slow growth of the economy. This forecast is for the short or medium term. The slow growth in Western countries will also slow down the rise of prices for oil and other raw materials.

NN: And will China be growing as previously?

MG: It is difficult to predict something certain for China. I think that for some time it will be growing in its current volumes. China has enough of their own problems to be solved. China started with from a very low point and grew very quickly. In principle, it is easier to grow from a low starting point than from a higher one. The more China develops, the more it will have problems rich countries are now facing: problems of inequality, social problems.

Read the original story in Belarusian at [nn.by](http://nn.by)

---

# Naša Niva: To Study, Study and Again Study Capitalism



A translation of an article by one of this blog's authors about economic reforms, published by the newspaper [Naša Niva](#). The government of Belarus demonstrates readiness to perform market reforms in the country and supports words by deeds. Sometimes these actions look

unsure, sometimes even comical, but at the end of the day the investment climate seems to be slowly getting better in Belarus. There is still much to do, but one thing that is difficult to predict now is whether the national economy will survive the transformation without a breakdown in midst of it. Whether it is not too late for the government's ambitious reforms plans.

## *To Study, Study and Again Study Capitalism*

*For several weeks, before and after the Belarusian Investment and Economic Forum, the media was being bombarded by news on developments around the privatization of Belarusian state property and plans for further liberal reforms in the economy of the country. Belarusian authorities finally outlined plans to make order in the Augean stables of the national tax system – the world's worst according to international rankings. Movement in the right direction is good, but its shortcomings must be corrected.*

## **How to attract adventurers**

*The Belarusian economy is perceived as a high risk investment*

target. To improve the image of Belarus, more than just one year is needed. Old scandals (unsuccessful investors to Belarus in the 1990s, like “Baltika” or “Ford”) are much better remembered than new success stories. No protection of investments, biased courts and the overall exotic totalitarian image of Belarus – the government has a huge scope of work to do. Positive changes must happen and be recognized by the international community.

Only adventurer-type investors would be ready to invest in Belarus now. For ignoring the risky image of Belarus they want high returns on their investments. Prospects of such returns are vague: Belarus doesn't have natural resources that attract investors to Russia or Kazakhstan. It is hardly possible to transform Belarus from the “Assembly Shop of the USSR”, as it was called in Soviet times due to Belarusian heavy industry supplying the rest of the USSR, to “a Small Assembly Shop Near the EU” because Belarus is not even a member of the WTO. Today, when Finnish wood processors sometimes find it easier to handle Russian wood in China, Belarus is not physically able to compete with Asian countries as an eventual location for foreign production facilities.

“To be proud of one's export potential is past century,” a senior foreign delegate of the Belarusian Investment Forum said in a private conversation. Investors are more interested in domestic market and the effective domestic demand, on which Belarus is not very attractive, he added.

The government could sell state-owned companies, which it can't manage anyway, for a lower price, but today the Western investors have enough cheap objects at home. This makes them less interested in Belarusian enterprises. There are many assets for sale in Belarus, but many of them lack a realistic valuation, the forum participant complained.

[Read full article](#)