

# EU considers Lifting Sanctions, Putin's Proposed Airbase – Western Press Digest

Putin's announcement of a Russian air base in Belarus dominated western media in September. Western media see the declaration as further support of Russian expansion.

Other significant news: The EU might lift sanctions after Lukashenka freed 6 political prisoners. A decision may lift Lukashenka's travel ban and allow some Belarusian companies to trade with the EU.

Upon returning to Belarus former presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich was briefly arrested for alleged provocations after the 2010 presidential elections. Another former presidential candidate, Mikalaj Statkievich, held an unauthorised rally in central Minsk denouncing the upcoming election as a "circus". All of this and much more in this September edition of the Western Press Digest.

[Russia moves to establish air base in Belarus](#) – Deutsche Welle reported that Putin stated recently ordering the Defence Ministry to begin negotiations with Minsk over a Russian air base. Minsk stated it would not welcome the base. However, it is reliant on Russian energy, credit and already has Russian military facilities. This makes it unlikely Minsk will deny its building.

With the Ukraine crisis, the Kremlin estimates it needs to bind Belarus closer. Yet, for Valery Karbalevich "against the background of the Ukrainian crisis, the stationing of a permanent Russian military contingent in Belarus will upset

the balances of forces and facilitate an increase in tension in the whole region”.

The air base, according to [EurasiaNet](#), has caused consternation among Belarusian elites. The Russian government has pushed the issue. It [published a document](#) alleging an agreement. It will be built near Babruysk in 2016. According to the agreement, Minsk cannot monitor the base, receive money for staging the base and Russia can put any weaponry on the base's territory.

Sections of the [western media](#) believe that Minsk's delay could herald Russian intervention similar to Ukraine.

[European Union considers removing Sanctions on Belarusian Elites and Companies](#) – An article published by Reuters contended that with the release of 6 political prisoners; the EU is considering reducing sanctions on Minsk. EU diplomats are contemplating ways to reduce asset freezes and visa bans on Belarusian elites. Reuters contends that diplomats are planning freezing sanction renewal for a year. These could extend to Lukashenka. Diplomats are considering lifting trade restrictions on 25 Belarusian companies. However, the EU will retain sanctions on military elites and companies.

[The Eurasian Union Contemplates Potential new Eurasian currency](#) – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty raised the issue of a new Eurasian currency. Although it remains unlikely the Belarusian rouble will disappear soon, the new Eurasian currency story did the rounds this month in the western press. It first appeared in [March](#). But it is only now the name Altyn has appeared. The Eurasian Union has called to stop using the Euro and the dollar in foreign trade. Now it looks to create a common currency. The idea of creating the Altyn emphasises further Eurasian integration.

In other economic news, according to Reuters, the network provider Turkcell has stated that its Belarusian unit,

Belarusian Telecommunication Network (BEST) is now debt [free](#).

[Ales Mikhalevich Arrested upon return to Belarus](#) – Deutsche Welle published an article that border guards arrested Ales Mikhalevich. He was an opposition figure who stood at the 2010 presidential elections. After a 5 year exile in the Czech Republic he decided to return due to the release of political prisoners “I want to live in Belarus, in my homeland. I want to be with my family. I always said that when all political prisoners are freed...I will return immediately”.

Yet on his return, border guards quickly arrested him at the Belarusian-Lithuanian [border](#). They released him, but told him not to leave Minsk. This is all the more bizarre as another opposition activist returned, but was not arrested. [Vyacheslau Siuchyuk](#) has vocally stated he will compete in the elections. Yet, unlike Mikhalevich he has not been arrested.

[300 Opposition Activists Call to boycott the October Presidential Elections](#) – A group of 300 demonstrators protested in central Minsk according to the Washington Post. They called for an election boycott. Mikalaj Statkievich, an opposition activist, held an unauthorised rally. Statkievich was only released from prison last month. But he called on Belarusians to boycott the upcoming presidential elections. Other opposition activists, Anatol Liabiedzka and Uladzimir Niakliajeu called for a united opposition.

[Lukashenka Publishes \\$31,000 Income Statement](#) – Bloomberg published an article stating that for the upcoming elections Lukashenka submitted an income statement of only \$31,000 per annum. The statement does not mention houses or cars.

In other electoral news, 3 candidates other than Lukashenka registered with the central electoral commission on the final day of registration. Bloomberg contends that the Belarusian regime hopes this will create a [veneer](#) of democracy and appease the west.

[Minsk Residents defend a Blind Man](#) – An article and video posted by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty shows police dragging a blind man down some steps and banging his head on metal railings. Passersby intervened on the man's behalf. But police arrested him for being 'unkempt' and 'violent'.

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