

# Paleckis' Report, National Referendum and Sanctions – Belarus Press Review

Washington lifted their sanctions on a Belarusian company. What does it mean for the future of Belarus-EU relations? Further integration in the post-Soviet space and Minsk's role in the process, living standards of Belarusians are among the most discussed in the independent and state Belarusian press.

**Will Brussels relaunch a dialogue with Minsk?** Business-oriented "[Belarusy i Rynok](#)" weekly comments upon the report of the Lithuanian expert, Justis Paleckis. It reports some of his recommendations for the European Parliament, including preparation of the roadmap for Belarus with certain requirements for the political and economic modernisation. The Palackis' report has already roused some controversy among other European experts.

For example, the Finnish expert, Anais Marin, did not agree with Palackis' argument on an improvement in the human rights situation in Belarus in 2012. In her words, 'the situation with human rights in Belarus remains stable-negative, and there are no grounds for its improvement'.

**American love instead of anger?** Daily "[Narodnaja Volia](#)" commenting on the recent lifting of sanctions on the company 'Belttekheksport' by the Americans, asks if the European Union will act in kind as well. The newspaper cites Alexander Klaskouski, who thninks that the inefficiency of the sanctions could be one of the causes of Washington's decision. The Belarusian companies clearly managed to avoid the sanctions, for example by functioning under different ownership.

The commentator notes, however, that the lifting of the

sanctions does not mean that the US has softened its attitude toward Minsk. According to Klaskouski 'Brussels would like to change its attitude toward Minsk, but only if the authorities will meet minimum expectations for that matter release of the political prisoners'. The commentator noted that the EU is interested in withdrawing a high-ranking politician from the 'black list'. Uladzimir Makei, Foreign Minister, could be such a needed 'messenger who could freely travel across Europe and establish contacts'.

**Increase in average wages: more bottles of vodka.** Daily "[Komsomolskaya Pravda](#)" informs that the wages in Belarus since 2000 increased by up to six times. The newspaper, however, decided to check what this has meant for ordinary Belarusians. In terms of housing it shows that nothing has improved, because 'now, as in 2000, Belarusian needs to work for three months for one square km of the house'. It may seem as a rather positive message, because in 2007 Belarusians needed to work for a year and a half to purchase one km square of the house.

The second indicator of living standards, the price for a bottle of vodka, proves that life became better for ordinary Belarusians. Since the average Belarusian earned more in April, he could afford 113 bottles of the alcohol. In comparison, in 2000, an average wage allowed to purchase only 41 bottles, almost three times less than today. As the newspaper notes, the more expensive vodka, the more difficult life will become.

**Cheaper oil and gas from Russia?** "[Nasha Niva](#)" reports that in Lukashenka's words, by 2015 Belarus should pay for oil and gas according to priced for Russian domestic consumers. The newspaper notes that decrease in the prices 'would lead to the significant increase of the pace of the Belarusian economy and the average income'. It also adds that 'it would also strenghten the already exceptional dependence of Belarus upon Russia'.

### **People's referendum – the new initiative of the opposition.**

"[Belorusy i Rynok](#)" reports on the initiative that three political organisations want to undertake next year under the name of 'National Referendum'. Initiators of the campaign are 'Tell the Truth', Belarusian Popular Front and the movement 'For Freedom'. Valerii Karbalevich commenting for the newspaper underscored that the 'referendum by the opposition's initiative is impossible to carry out. But it is possible to have a political campaign called 'National referendum''. He adds that providing that the campaign will interest large groups of society, then it might bring some political benefits for the opposition.

### **Official press optimistic about post-Soviet integration.**

The government run "[Sovetskaya Belarus](#)" states that May turned to be 'energetic' due to the recent development in the post-Soviet integration. The newspaper comments that Minsk became the platform for further discussions about the CIS, Customs Union, but also about their evolution into the Eurasian Economic Union. The newspaper noted that 'the three: Belarus-Russia-Kazakhstan clearly are increasingly gathering centralisation energy'.

In the words of Alexander Lukashenka: 'We agreed that the Union will be economic and these political problems that subsequently will interfere the Union's development, will be gradually resolved'. Lukashenka also added that 'One cannot limit ourselves only to economic co-operation, because it also requires actions in the sphere of politics, diplomacy, defence'. According to "Sovetskaya Belorusiya", other CIS countries watch closely the process that develop between the Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

### **Importance of Ukraine for the Customs Union.**

State daily "Zviazda" comments that the recent Customs Union summit did not meet all the expectations and the leaders decided to postpone a number of issues. According to newspaper, the invitation of the Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine 'was intriguing'. In

particular, participation of Ukraine in the integration processes seems crucial. The country has not yet joined the union, but became the observer.

Zviazda underlines that 'In Russia they perfectly understand that the Eurasian integration without Ukraine cannot be complete and so this is important for the Union not to let Ukraine remain aside'. The newspaper notes also on the close co-operation between Belarus and Kazakhstan 'despite the thousands of kilometres separating the countries'. According to the newspaper, Astana due to reserve from extensive export of its natural resources, might be interested in investing into modernisation of the Belarusian companies. That may lead to deepening the mutual economic co-operation within the very Customs Union but also will enable to launch new projects on a wider scale.