

Amnesty International's Key Human Rights Concerns in Belarus

As Belarus prepares for elections on Sunday 19 December, Amnesty International UK outlined key human rights concerns in the country. The organization urged its members to sign a petition addressed to the acting Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and to the 19 December 2010 newly elected President of the Republic of Belarus.

The petition calls for Belarus to fulfil its human rights obligations, in particular, those which may be at risk of being violated during the election period. The closing date for the petition will be announced shortly – it is likely to be a couple of days before the (new) President is inaugurated.

According to Amnesty international UK, the main human rights concerns in Belarus include:

Freedom of expression

Most printed and electronic media remains under state control and the state press distribution system maintains a monopoly. However two independent newspapers – Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) and Nasha Niva (Our Field) – have been allowed to use the state press distribution system.

Amnesty is calling for a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into the recent death of the founder of the unofficial news website Charter'97, Aleh Byabenin. Shortly before his death, he had joined the campaign team of Andrei Sannikov, presidential candidate for the civic movement "European Belarus". He was found with a rope around his neck suspended from the banisters of his country house on 3 September this year; an initial investigation said the cause of death was suicide. In November two experts commissioned by

the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) agreed with the official conclusions that Byabenin had committed suicide, however, their mandate had been to review the materials already compiled by Belarusian prosecutors and no autopsy was carried out.

Colleagues and friends questioned this possible cause of death as Byabenin was a happily married man who had arranged to meet friends at the cinema the following day. Eyewitnesses saw bruises on his body and dirt on his hands, suggesting a struggle. Aleh Byabenin had been attacked in the past and in March this year, the Charter'97 offices were searched by police, allegedly in connection with a criminal investigation into corruption in the police force. Colleagues say they have received anonymous threats since Aleh Byabenin's death.

On 1 July, Presidential Decree No. 60 "On measures to improve the use of the national segment of the internet" came into effect. The decree requires that Internet cafés check the identity of all customers and keep records of internet use; and that internet service providers check the identity of subscribers in person and make information about subscribers available to the authorities. Other measures limit access to information that could be classed as extremist, pornographic, linked to illegal migration and trafficking, or that promotes violence and other illegal acts. According to a study commissioned by the OSCE these measures "lead to unsubstantiated restrictions of a citizen's right to receive and disseminate information", and give the authorities extremely broad powers to limit access to certain sources of information.

Freedom of assembly

The authorities continue to violate the right to freedom of assembly by not permitting demonstrations and public actions. The very restrictive Law on Public Events requires demonstrators to apply for permission to the local authorities to hold an event, and bans all demonstrations

less than 200m away from underground stations and pedestrian crossings .

There have been allegations that excessive force has been used to disperse non-violent demonstrations, and peaceful demonstrators have been detained.

On 24 March, Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovich and Iryna Toustsiak of Human Rights Centre Viasna were detained overnight and fined for holding an unauthorised picket when they unfurled a banner against the death penalty in front of the Presidential Administration building.

Amnesty is campaigning for three youth activists who fled Belarus after they were convicted for their involvement in a peaceful public protest about taxation. Tatyana Tishkevich left Belarus after she was expelled from university because of her political activities. She was sentenced in her absence. Alyaksei Bondar and Mikhail Kryvau also left the country after they were sentenced. All three face up to three years' imprisonment if they return to Belarus as leaving the country means that they have automatically violated the terms of their sentence.

The original sentence against Tatyana Tishkevich, Alyaksai Bondar and Mikhail Kryvau was in violation of their right to freedom of assembly. Amnesty is calling on the Belarusian authorities to allow the three to return to Belarus without any risk of being charged for violating the terms of their sentence. The organisation is urging people to take action on this case at www.amnesty.org.uk/minsk

Death penalty

Belarus is "Europe's last executioner" – the only remaining country in Europe and the former Soviet Union which still carries out executions.

In March this year, Vasily Yuzepchuk and Andrei Zhuk were executed by a shot to the back of the head. Vasily Yuzepchuk

was sentenced to death in June 2009 for the murder of six elderly women, after an investigation and trial which, according to his lawyer, were fundamentally flawed. The lawyer also claims that Vasily Yuzepchuk was beaten in detention to force him to confess. Vasily Yuzepchuk belonged to the marginalised Roma ethnic group, and was originally from Ukraine. He may have had an intellectual disability and, according to his lawyer, he did not know the months of the year and was illiterate.

Three men are currently on death row. Two were sentenced to death by shooting on 14 May 2010 for crimes committed during an armed robbery on a flat in Grodno in October 2009. Both men had their appeals dismissed on 17 September by the Supreme Court and have now appealed to the President for clemency. On 14 September, Ihar Myalik was sentenced to death by Mahilyou regional court for a series of armed assaults and murders, committed in 2009.

Fair trials and torture

Nineteen years after independence, Belarus retains many repressive features of the Soviet criminal justice system. Judges routinely do not exercise their authority to independently and impartially decide on the legality of an arrest or detention nor the need for continued detention.

There is credible evidence that, under pressure to solve crimes, police investigators sometimes resort to torture and other ill-treatment in order to force confessions. These confessions are subsequently admitted as evidence in trials.

On 18 January a Minsk prosecutor turned down a request for a criminal investigation into allegations of torture made by Pavel Levshin. He had been detained by police officers on 9 December 2009 on suspicion of theft. Levshin claims that on 10 December from 5pm to 8pm police officers subjected him to torture and ill-treatment: they handcuffed him, laid him on his stomach and inserted his feet behind his hands in a

position known as "the swallow". They then beat him with a rubber truncheon and with plastic bottles filled with water. They also put a plastic bag over his head and held it there five times until he came close to suffocating. A forensic medical report confirmed that he had injuries consistent with his allegations, but the Prosecutor quoted the police report and stated that no evidence of torture had been found.

Human rights defenders

In January 2009, the human rights organisation, Nasha Vyasna (Our Spring), previously known as Vyasna (Spring), applied for registration for the third time. This request was refused for reasons which appear to be politically motivated, including reference to previous convictions of members of the group on administrative charges, inaccuracies in the list of founders, the fact that the mechanism for electing the Chair and the Secretary was not described, that the name of the organization was missing from one document, and that the headquarters of the organization were too cramped.

On 24 July 2007, the UN Human Rights Committee had ruled that the dissolution of the human rights organization Vyasna in 2003 violated the right to freedom of association and that the organisation was entitled to an appropriate remedy, including re-registration and compensation

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender rights

The Minsk City Executive Committee refused permission for the Slavic Pride march to take place on Saturday 15 May 2010. The organisers of the march received a letter on 8 May from the Minsk authorities, prohibiting the march on the grounds that the proposed route violated Article 9 of the Law on the staging of public events. The Article stipulates that public events cannot take place within 200 metres of underground stations and pedestrian crossings.

Amnesty International believes that the strict application of the law in this case resulted in a disproportionate and

unjustifiable restriction on the rights to freedom of assembly and expression of those organising and wishing to take part in the march.

Violence against women Adequate resources and structures to respond to violence against women are lacking in Belarus. There are only two shelters for victims of domestic violence, financed from a combination of state and non-governmental funding. The recently-introduced Law on Crime Prevention specifically referred, for the first time, to domestic violence and called on state bodies including the Ministry of Internal Affairs to investigate all cases of domestic violence and to prosecute the perpetrators.

UK office of Amnesty International has issued a Media Briefing which outlines Amnesty International's key human rights concerns in Belarus.*

VB

How Lukashenka's Election Manifestos Evolved to 'Yes, we Could'

In this blogpost I am sharing my analysis of the changes in Lukashenka's political rhetoric since 1994. Authors like J. Budge, D. Robertson, D. Hearl studied political rhetoric in democracies, and S. Oates has contributed some interesting insights on the post-Communist Russia. Building on their work, I attempted to trace the evolution of Lukashenka's election manifestos.

Over time, the manifestos have become shorter, better structured and better organized. However, their content has not changed substantially. The same dichotomies like “the wealthy and the poor”, “the West and the East”, “stability and experiments”, “corruption and order,” etc are employed while the important issues like Chernobyl or inflation are never mentioned.

Lukashenka’s 2010 election manifesto recently published in Belarus demonstrates notable changes in the political communication over the 16 years of Lukashenka’s rule. Below are some of my observations.

The intensification of WE (a change in the definition of the audience)

In 2010 manifesto, different forms of “we” were used more than thirty times. Lukashenka has managed to outdo his previous manifestos, which were nearly half in length. At the same time, in 1994 manifesto the substantive meaning of “we” was better defined and categorized. In particular, several categories such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, health conditions, education, employment and pensions were distinguished.

Six years later, in 2001 manifesto more emotional signals were made about the “we” with the use of such metaphors as “united and friendly family” while the number of classified groups had diminished.

In 2010 manifesto, the metaphors of nation as family are still used, but the cognitive map of nation shows fewer points connected to the traditional subject of welfare. Interestingly, in Lukashenka’s latest manifesto, the emotional construct “we did” resembles “yes we can” in US President Barack Obama’s speeches.

Shorter than twitter (a change in form)

The balance of three traditional parts of Lukashenka's manifestos – “describing the situation”, explaining the “deeds” and outlining the “plans” – has changed. The part devoted to “plans” has become shorter. At the same time, the style of the manifesto is different: paragraphs are now shorter and the use of titles and introductions makes the text easier to read. We can describe this style as the one used in the SMS-messages or Twitter posts, especially popular among the youth who also happen to be the most “invoked” part of the population in this manifesto.

There are also some changes in the timelines constructed in the manifestos. In 2001 and 2006, the focus was on the situation before 1994 (with different inflation indicators for illustration). The existing timeline was: Time before 1994 → deeds (present) → plans (future). The timeline in the latest manifesto contained no references to the pre-Lukashenka period.

Rates and ratings

With no pre-1994 period to measure against, the legitimization of power is now achieved by using “rates and ratings.” This technique provides a sense of “independent, globally-international, and authoritarian” views on the situation. The ratings are used as figures to hammer the “recognized facts” home one more time.

Inflation figures

Inflation as a construct from the past was presented both in words and figures in all previous manifestos. The latest manifesto, however, does not build a bridge to 1994 inflation. This year, the president clearly does not feel comfortable discussing inflation.

Forgotten Chernobyl

The issue of Chernobyl was present in the two first

manifestos. However, in 2006 and 2010 manifestos there were no references to the catastrophe. This could be considered a sign that the issue is becoming uncomfortable for the president or is no longer connected to the interests of a wider public.

Using “the East” instead of Russia

The number of statements about Russia and the meaning of its foreign policy has decreased since 1994. In 2006 and 2010, Russia was not mentioned in manifestos at all. At the same time, Europe and the West are mentioned as an example of high living standards and a source for aspiration for the Belarusian people.

Democracy and human rights

Democracy and human rights, the traditional building blocks of the political rhetoric in Western democracies are not represented in the latest manifesto. Previously the word democracy had been used only once – in the 1994 manifesto. The issue of human rights is mentioned much more often.

New developments

2010 manifesto also contains some new points. In particular, it mentions the goal of developing information technologies and creating a new face for the Belarusian economy. This would entail “no less than 100 considerable investment projects” and the development of new industries (nano- and bio-technologies, alternative energy, space exploration, etc.).

by Solvita Denis, Contributing writer

Belarus and Ukraine Enter the 20th Year of Independence



Belarus and Ukraine are celebrating the 19th year of their independence in 2010. Kiev decided to schedule the fireworks for August 24. On this day in 1991, spurred by the “mortal danger surrounding Ukraine” after the USSR August coup, the Ukrainian Rada passed the Act of Declaration of Independence.

Back in 1991, Belarusian parliamentarians followed Ukraine’s example. The very next day, they gave the status of a constitutional law to the Declaration of Belarusian State Sovereignty, adopted on July 27, 1990. But today, Minsk celebrates neither August 25th nor July 27th. The authorities don’t even commemorate the creation of the Belarusian People’s Republic on [March 25th, 1918](#). Instead, independence day celebrations are held on July 3rd, the date marking the liberation of Minsk from the Nazi troops in 1944.

Whatever the wisdom of choosing one or the other date to commemorate, one can’t help comparing the goals of Belarusian and Ukrainian policymakers expressed 19 years ago and as their successes in actualizing these goals.

In fact, the differences in Minsk’s and Kiev’s interpretations of independence and sovereignty date back to 1990, when the Soviet Union still existed. One need only compare the two states’ respective Declarations of State Sovereignty, passed in the same political environment by the national parliaments

of Belarus and Ukraine within a day from each other. The two documents are similar in structure and in language, which makes their idiosyncrasies stand out even more.

Article 6 of the Belarusian Declaration states that “all questions concerning [Belarusian] borders shall be decided only on the basis of the mutual consent of the Republic of Belarus and the adjacent sovereign states.” In contrast, the Ukrainian Declaration notes that “[t]he Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic is independent in determining the administrative and territorial system of the Republic and the procedures for establishing national and administrative units.”

In Article 8 on cultural development, the Ukrainian Declaration stresses the “national and cultural recovery of the Ukrainian nation” admitting that the Soviet conditions were detrimental to Ukrainian culture. The document also contains a lengthy article on International Relations, in which Ukrainians stress their equality with other nations: Ukraine “acts as an equal participant in international affairs [...] and directly participates in the general European process and European structures.” The Belarusian document does not mention anything of this kind.

Although their destinies intertwined throughout history, Belarus and Ukraine seem to have less and less in common as the time goes. The two countries exist under the same geopolitical factors, but Ukraine has so far avoided the authoritarian extremes that befell its neighbor.

Even so, Ukraine’s new president Viktor Yanukovich seems to be taking after his Belarusian counterpart. At the independence-day celebration on Kiev’s central square, Yanukovich advocated strengthening his presidential powers by means of constitutional changes. He said he hopes to become a strong president “who has practical levers of coordination and

control over the implementation of key reforms in the country and its strategic policies.”

VC

Any hope for conscientious objectors in Belarus?



Ivan Mikhailov, Dmitry Smyk and Yevhen Yakovenko – the three young men convicted since late 2009 of refusing compulsory military service on grounds of conscience – separately told Forum 18 News Service* that they want the proposed new Alternative Service Law now being drafted to introduce a fully-civilian service, not of punitive length and open to all conscientious objectors, whether religious or not.

Mikhail Pashkevich of the group For Alternative Civilian Service insisted to Forum 18 that applicants for alternative civilian service should be able simply to inform the authorities of this decision without having to “prove” their entitlement. President Aleksandr Lukashenka’s instruction in February to draft Alternative Service Law came a decade after Belarus’ Constitutional Court ruled that introducing an alternative service was “urgent”.

BELARUS: Contradictory court rulings for conscientious objectors

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 News Service

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The three conscientious objectors to compulsory military service sentenced under the Criminal Code since such prosecutions resumed in November 2009 have faced different outcomes, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. Messianic Jew Ivan Mikhailov was found guilty and imprisoned, but was freed days before the end of his three-month sentence. He was acquitted on retrial and the prosecutor's appeal against this was rejected. He told Forum 18 he will seek compensation for his imprisonment.

Jehovah's Witness Dmitry Smyk, initially fined, was acquitted on retrial, but the prosecutor's appeal against this is due to be heard on 16 July, as he told Forum 18. Non-religious objector Yevhen Yakovenko, sentenced on 4 June to one year's restricted freedom, told Forum 18 he has appealed against the sentence. All three say they would do an alternative civilian service. "It is not wrong to serve one's country," Mikhailov told Forum 18, "especially on socially-useful work, such as in children's homes or hospitals.

Despite his acquittal in court in Belarus' south-eastern city of Gomel [Homyel] on 31 May, religious conscientious objector Dmitry Smyk faces a new hearing on 16 July as Prosecutor Igor Kupchin has lodged an appeal against the acquittal, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. Smyk is the second conscientious objector to have an earlier sentence for refusing compulsory military service overturned in a retrial this year. Minsk-based Messianic Jew Ivan Mikhailov – who served nearly three months in prison – was acquitted in a retrial and the Prosecutor's appeal against that acquittal was rejected on 15 June. Another conscientious objector, Yevhen Yakovenko, is appealing against his one year sentence of restricted freedom.

All three young men were prosecuted under Article 435, Part 1 of the Criminal Code, which punishes refusing the call-up to

military service with a fine or imprisonment of up to two years.

Smyk, Mikhailov and Yakovenko all told Forum 18 separately that they would be prepared to do an alternative civilian service tomorrow if it were available. "It is not wrong to serve one's country," Mikhailov told Forum 18, "especially on socially-useful work, such as in children's homes or hospitals." Yakovenko told Forum 18 that introducing an alternative service "would be a model for people to help the disadvantaged at home or abroad".

In February, President Aleksandr Lukashenko ordered a new Alternative Service Law to be prepared in accordance with existing provisions for such a service outlined in Article 57 of the country's Constitution*.

A May 2000 Constitutional Court ruling called for the "urgent" adoption of an Alternative Service Law or an amendment to the Law on Military Obligation and Military Service. An attempt to adopt an Alternative Service Law was rejected by Parliament in 2004 and a proposed Law was scheduled for inclusion in the 2010 Legislative Programme, but was removed at the last minute*. Activists hope this can now be achieved.

Prosecutor challenges Smyk's acquittal

Smyk, a Gomel-based Jehovah's Witness, said that the prosecutor's challenge to his acquittal is due to be heard on 16 July at Gomel Regional Court. "I believe the court will let the acquittal stand," he told Forum 18 on 24 June. He pointed to the earlier acquittal of Mikhailov in Minsk and the subsequent rejection of the prosecutor's challenge.

Kupchin of Gomel's Central District Prosecutor's Office refused absolutely to discuss why he is continuing to seek to have Smyk punished. "I do not discuss criminal cases with journalists by telephone," he told Forum 18 on 25 June.

“Indeed, it is banned by law.” He then put the phone down.

Smyk remains under restrictions until the court has heard the appeal. He cannot leave Belarus and has signed a pledge of good conduct. These restrictions will be lifted if the prosecutor’s challenge is rejected.

In November 2009, Gomel’s Central District Court fined Smyk 3,500,000 Belarusian Roubles (7,230 Norwegian Kroner, 862 Euros or 1,290 US Dollars) under Article 435, Part 1 of the Criminal Code. This was the first such prosecution since 2000.*

Smyk lost his subsequent appeals, but on 15 March Gomel Regional Court – at the request of the Supreme Court – overturned its earlier decision and ordered a retrial.

Welcoming his acquittal by Central District Court on 31 May, Smyk pointed out that the case has been long and tiring. He added that instead of paying a large fine imposed for following his religious beliefs he can spend the money on supporting his wife and young daughter. He had not paid the fine.

Mikhailov to seek compensation

Mikhailov, a member of the Minsk-based New Testament Messianic congregation, was arrested in December 2009. He was found guilty under the same Criminal Code Article in February and given a three-month prison term.*

However, Minsk Regional Court upheld his appeal on 9 March and sent the case for a retrial. He was freed from prison in Zhodino on 10 March, just days before his original term was due to expire.

Mikhailov’s retrial began on 26 March, and on 4 May Minsk District Court acquitted him of the charge. However, Minsk District’s Prosecutor challenged the acquittal. On 15 June,

Minsk Regional Court backed Mikhailov.

“The Prosecutor obviously wasn’t happy with the acquittal and was demanding that I be given a fine of 7,000,000 Belarusian Roubles [15,020 Norwegian Kroner, 1,885 Euros or 2,320 US Dollars],” Mikhailov told Forum 18 from Minsk on 24 June. He added that although the Prosecutor could try to take the case further to a higher court he believes it unlikely. “I have been cleared twice now, and the court would have to bear the earlier decisions in mind.”

Mikhailov is now free to lodge a suit for compensation for the almost three months he spent in prison after the first trial. “I believe I was wrongly imprisoned, so I am preparing to ask for compensation,” he told Forum 18. “I don’t think an innocent person should be imprisoned.” He added that since his release he has been able to resume his work in a private company and his studies.

Yakovenko appeals against one year restrictions

The most recent conscientious objector to be sentenced was Yakovenko who, like Smyk, comes from Gomel. After several earlier court hearings he was found guilty on 4 June at Gomel’s Central District Court under Article 435 Part 1. Judge Tatyana Shvets handed down a sentence of one year’s restrictions on his rights. “I can live at home, but can’t leave Gomel and have had to pledge myself to good conduct,” Yakovenko told Forum 18 on 24 June. “This means I can’t beat anyone up or cross the street on a red light,” he joked.

He said he had lodged an appeal to Gomel Regional Court on 14 June and is waiting for a date to be set for the hearing.

Yakovenko told Forum 18 that he is a pacifist, but does not belong to any religious organisation. “It is a matter of conscience,” he insisted. He described the verdict as “absolutely illegal” as he had merely demanded the right to an alternative service guaranteed in the Constitution.

Part of the prosecution case also related to his refusal to respond to call-up papers written in Russian, insisting that he wanted to receive them in Belarusan (both are state languages, though the government functions mainly in Russian). "Both issues – not having to serve in the army and being able to use our national language – are important to me."

Not all conscientious objectors prosecuted

Despite the current lack of a civilian alternative to military service, not all those who refuse military service on grounds of conscience are brought to court. Forum 18 is not aware of any cases between 2000 and Smyk's case in November 2009. "Sometimes cases are resolved quietly," Mikhailov told Forum 18. "It is only rarely that cases go to court."

Pavel Yadlovsky of the Jehovah's Witnesses says that each year his organisation sends certificates to local military commissariats confirming that named individuals claiming to be Jehovah's Witnesses who have requested not to perform military service on grounds of conscience are indeed members. "There are about 30 or 40 people each year we do this for," he told Forum 18 from Minsk on 25 June. "Some military commissariats take account of the Constitutional Court ruling from 2000 calling for a law on alternative service to be adopted."

As individuals who are allowed not to perform military service are then often summoned for the next call-up, he said sometimes they have to do this several times for one individual. "We have issued about 25 of such certificates so far this year."

Mystery surrounds presidential exemptions

Meanwhile, mystery surrounds assertions on 18 February by the Secretary of Belarus' Security Council Leonid Maltsev that a

system of an annual presidential decree grants exemptions from military service to about 50 or 60 people each year, including on religious grounds. His remarks were quoted in the account on the presidential website of his meeting with President Lukashenko at which the president ordered the drafting of an Alternative Service Law.

Forum 18 has not been able to find any publicly-available texts of such decrees.

After seeing reports of this possibility of being exempted from military service, Smyk, the conscientious objector from Gomel, asked the local Military Commissariat how he could be brought into the scope of one of these presidential decrees. "They responded that they had never heard of them," he told Forum 18.

An official of the presidential Press Office told Forum 18 on 25 June that such decrees are not made public "because they only concern the Defence Ministry and the individuals affected". However, he denied that they are secret. "I myself have never seen such decrees," he added. He referred all further enquiries to the Defence Ministry.

Vyacheslav Remenchik, chief spokesperson for the Defence Ministry, refused to discuss these decrees. "I cannot comment on the actions of the head of state," he told Forum 18 from Minsk on 25 June.

VB

As Violence Grows Regional Security Organisations Fail to Make Kyrgyzstan Secure



Regional security organisations prove to be remarkably inefficient as the ethnic violence unfolds in Kyrgyzstan. This country is Central Asia is a member of a half a dozen of regional organisations and none of them is willing to intervene. Over a hundred is already reported dead and tens of thousands of refugees are trying to flee Kyrgyzstan.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation are just a few of security blocks to which Kyrgyzstan belongs. Apparently, these organisations exist primarily for geopolitical manoeuvring and staging military games rather than for ensuring security.

The former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev is now a political refugee in Minsk, the capital of another dysfunctional organisation – the Commonwealth of Independent States. Bakiyev keeps repeating that the Kyrgyzstan interim government led by Roza Otunbayeva cannot control the country. He fiercely denies accusations that his close associates are involved of instigating violence between the Kyrgyz majority and the Uzbek minority in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

Under [personal protection](#) of Alexander Lukashenka, a Belarus authoritarian ruler who has been in power since early 1990-s Kurmanbek Bakiyev feels more secure than a few months ago when he had to flee Kyrgyzstan. The whereabouts of his son Maxim were unknown until yesterday when he was detained in a London airport where he arrived on a private jet. Under arrest in

England Maxim Bakiyev will be much safer than many of his compatriots in Kyrgyzstan torn by violence.

The passive idleness of regional security organisations in Central Asia is worrying. It is one thing to not to intervene when public protests are taking place and the political regimes change, for bad or for good. It is another thing to observe ethnic violence to unfold when hundreds are being slaughtered. The Dutch peacekeepers failed to intervene when thousands of men and boys were massacred in Srebrenica fifteen years ago. The world has a long memory for such atrocities but also a remarkable inability to learn the lessons and to act until it is too late.

YK

No News on the United States Policy on Belarus Sanctions



Earlier this week, the United States Embassy in Minsk issued a press release on economic sanctions. Despite Belarus authorities hopes, the change of administration in the White House has not resulted in the change of its Belarus policy. Following the introduction of the US sanctions in 2007, most of the US Embassy staff had been [expelled](#) from Belarus. The US government should look for ways to resume full functionality of its embassy in Minsk. This would be a much more important contribution to democracy in Belarus than economic sanctions. However, lifting economic sanctions might send a bad signal to the regime in Minsk, especially prior to presidential elections in Belarus. It

looks that the regime in Belarus is going to give the US a good reason to lift the sanctions only after President Lukashenka is re-elected for the fourth term. Here is the embassy's press release:

The United States has extended the suspension of sanctions against Polotsk Steklovolokno and Lakokraska until November 30, 2010. Other related U.S. sanctions in Belarus continue in force. Unfortunately, recent events, including raids on an NGO last week, indicate a continuing, negative pattern in the Belarusian authorities' respect for basic freedoms. An improvement in U.S.-Belarusian relations can come only when there is real progress on respect for democracy and for basic human rights. This situation will be a factor in our consideration of whether to continue the selected suspension of sanctions in November.

Customs Union: Economically Sound, Politically Harmful?



Russian business daily *Vedomosti* reported today that the Customs Union negotiated between Moscow, Minsk, and Astana may come into effect without Belarus. The paper quoted BNP Paribas official as saying that Kiev would make a more desirable union partner for Russia than Minsk.

The Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia is missing a second deadline this year. However, when it does come to fruition, the Union will lead not only to the adoption of a common external tariff, but also to eventually creating a free trade agreement and single economic space like the European Union by 2012.

Today, the main bone of contention is Minsk's insistence on the abolition of duties on Russian oil and petroleum that are exported to Belarus. Although it already owes \$192 million to Russia for its gas for the year 2010, Minsk claims to be gradually acquiring [energy independence](#) from Russia. It does not seem to realize that without export duties its energy dependence on Moscow would only grow.

Ironically, it is the currently obdurate Belarusian leadership who has been the most enthusiastic advocate of the Customs Union between the three post-Soviet states. The Belarusian government claimed the Union would help the national economy by mitigating the difficulties related to the adaptation to the new energy prices. Russia's refusal to provide this benefit by lowering energy prices and abolishing export duties

in the new union made President Alyaksandr Lukashenka say in his April State of the Nation Address that Russia was putting Belarus "on the verge of survival."

Because a formal customs union between Russia and Belarus already exists, it is unclear what effect the failure to agree to union conditions with Russia and Kazakhstan would have on Belarus' economy. However, were such a union to materialize, it would hardly alleviate the country's economic troubles.

Theoretically, customs unions are created with an economic and political benefits in mind. While the short-term economic benefits are easy to see, political and economic benefits in the long term are typically unclear and vary with time. More often than not, creating a big common market within a customs union allows to depoliticize economic cooperation between the participating countries. However, entering into a customs union with a big and powerful former empire like Russia often results in a much more politicized market than that typical for a Western free trade zone.

Even if participation in the Customs Union brings some short-term economic benefits for Minsk, it will undermine Belarus' economy in the long run and draw Belarus dangerously close into the Russian orbit. Just like the Soviet experience created problems for the economy of the independent Belarus, the Customs Union with two large energy-rich countries is likely limit the country's indigenous industrial capacity and skew its development. Russia already controls more than half the Belarusian economy and is buying shares in its oil processing industry, and the Customs Union will make Minsk even more dependent on Russian resources, especially if the oil export duties were abolished upon the Belarusian leader's request.

(In) famous Belarusian Justice



Last week, two men were sentenced to death in Hrodna, Belarus. The previously convicted men have murdered three during an armed robbery. They have 10 days to file an appeal, which may extend their lives, if only by a short period, and probably bring them into the full glare of publicity. While their crime is severe, it is hardly uncommon. So the media attention they will get is all due to the gravity of their sentence.

Belarus is the only country in Europe to practice capital punishment. Passing death sentences is what keeps the Belarusian Justice Ministry on the front pages, and the ministry excels at making headlines no less than the Belarusian leader. To maintain its nonpareil reputation, the Belarusian Justice Ministry has to annually resort to capital punishment, bravely shouldering the criticism of the international community. Unfortunately, publicity is not the only effect of Belarus' insistence on retaining the death penalty. Capital punishment has kept Belarus out of the Council of Europe and leads to the violation of its commitments as a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Belarus carries out executions in secrecy: the prisoners are informed of the execution only minutes before they are shot; prisoners' families are not notified about the execution, given the bodies after the execution, or told where the executed were buried. Statistics on execution are also kept secret, but human rights activists estimate more than 400 have been shot since 1991. Just this March, two men were secretly [executed](#) despite the fact that their applications were still

being reviewed by the UN Human Rights Committee. Alyaksandr Lukashenka's November 2009 promise to launch an information campaign on the abolition of death penalty has not yet been fulfilled.

But the death penalty is not the only trick that makes the Justice Ministry look famous and powerful. In March—for once taking up someone anything but defenseless—the Belarusian Justice Ministry filed a suit with the CIS Economic Court, arguing Russia's customs duties on oil supplied to Belarus was illegal. More often, however, the Ministry targets those who are weaker.

Time and again, the Belarusian Justice Ministry issues warnings of office closure to opposition parties and [harasses unions of minorities](#) and rights activists. It is even more fond of sentencing these activists to jail terms.

On May 6, the Belarusian Supreme Court sentenced four opposition activists to up to five years in prison on arms possession charges. The lucky four were acquitted of charges of forming a criminal group and plotting a terrorist attack for the lack of evidence. Good for them, for terrorism is one of the “grave crimes” that warrant the death penalty according to Article 289, Part 3 of the Belarusian Constitution. Those who disagree with the justice a-la Belarus undergo intense persuasion: the six protesting the five-year sentence in Minsk were detained.

Reacting to the sentence, on May 13 the United States issued a statement on the conviction that stressed the importance of observing due process. The [statement](#) reads:

We share the concerns of our EU colleagues, as expressed in the May 10 statement by the representative of the EU Presidency in Minsk, regarding procedural flaws and apparent political motivations in the case.

In this and other cases, we have long stressed to the Belarusian authorities the importance of observing due process. We had hoped that the Belarusian authorities would take this opportunity to demonstrate a strengthening of due process and the independence of the judiciary. Unfortunately, there are reasons to question the conduct of this trial with respect to the civil rights of Mr. Awtukovich and the three others.

As we have noted before, improvement in the relationship of the United States with Belarus can come only when the Belarusian authorities show a greater respect for the basic civil and human rights of the Belarusian people.

American Belarusians to Petition EU Diplomatic Community in Washington, DC



This Saturday, May 8, 2009, the EU Embassies in Washington, DC will open their doors to public as part of the Europe Week. The program of events in Washington, DC includes speeches, seminars and workshops on issues; film screenings, concerts and cultural events related to the European Union. Universities, think tanks, other non-governmental organizations and the Embassies and Consulates of EU Member States around the United States will take part in Europe Week, hosting events designed to create a better understanding of the European Union.

The local chapter of the Belarusian-American Association (BAZA)

is using this opportunity to hand-deliver a letter from Belarusians in the United States, urging EU member states to support human rights and democracy in Belarus. "Last year's letter delivery was very successful.

BAZA members were able to cover many Embassies and in some cases to hand letters to Ambassadors personally. The EU Open House* provides a great opportunity to express support for democracy and human rights in Belarus," said Alice Kipel of the Belarusian-American Association. ext of BAZA letter is provided below.

To the Ambassadors from EU Nations in Washington, DC: We write on behalf of the Belarusian community in the United States to express our concerns about what is occurring in Belarus today, and to ask for your help. Our primary concerns relate to the internet censorship decree that will go into effect in Belarus in July 2010 and the increasing crack-down by the Lukashenka regime on opposition and civil society activists, as Belarus moves towards the next presidential election in early 2011. We are pleased that the EU seems to have become more circumspect, and perhaps, skeptical, in its dealings with Lukashenka. While we understand the desire of EU nations to remain engaged with a country that shares a border with three EU countries, such engagement should not cast a blind eye towards the regime's human rights violations. Unfortunately, the Polish government all too recently learned that the regime in Belarus can quickly and violently turn against ethnic minorities, such as Poles, in the same way that it does against ethnic Belarusians who dare to speak out for democracy.

Lukashenka can just as easily order harsh measures against other minorities, investors, business owners, etc. No one is immune from the whims of a dictator. We strongly agree with the decision of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to freeze high-level contacts with Belarus due to violation of democratic standards. We also applaud Catherine Ashton's quick and public denunciation of Lukashenka's

internet censorship decree. That decree, signed by Lukashenka on February 1, 2010, will put the internet in Belarus under the control of the Presidential Administration's Operating and Analytical Center.

The decree aims to control the activities of internet providers, websites and internet users. Clearly, the decree is a means by which the regime will be able to control and limit access to information prior to the presidential election. We urge EU organs and individual countries to demand that the decree be repealed.

Such pressure is necessary so that the last forum for relatively free access to information in Belarus is not lost. A policy of acquiescence less than a year before the next presidential election in Belarus weakens the opportunities for the opposition and supports Lukashenka's plans to remain in power for a fourth presidential term, i.e., for 22 years.

The main strategy of the EU at this time must be the substantial strengthening of support for Belarusian democratic forces and civil society as guarantors of independence and a European orientation for the country. The following are necessary: – a demand for real improvements in freedom of speech and particularly for repeal of the internet decree; – support for alternative media, including satellite TV and FM radio broadcasting, internet projects; and – support for democratic forces, including human rights organizations, youth movements and initiatives and independent trade unions before the next presidential election in Belarus. Founded in 1949, the Belarusian-American Association is the largest organization of Belarusian Americans in the United States.

VB

Belarusian President Wants to be European Nazarbayev?

Why, really, should he change anything, according to his Realpolitik logic, well-known to any observers of politics in developing countries. Belarusian leader wants to be treated in the West at least as good as Nazarbayev, Aliyev or Karimov, which have undoubtedly worse, even shocking human rights and democracy records but have now almost no major troubles with the West. They are too important for the world power centers to be criticized. So wants to be also Belarusian leadership, and Lukashenka particularly emphasized the importance of his country for the West in his last interview.

He elaborated on it

So what, do other nations, our partners in Eastern Partnership, have no such problems as Belarus? Hey, they have even more. Why do you treat them so, and us otherwise?

However, Belarus is all too close to the West geographically and Lukashenka is surely not considered as an Eastern European Nazarbayev, i.e. another bad guy indispensable for the Western interests.

Yet, to change his policies in order to be welcomed in the West means for Belarusian president a near end of his political life, for his regime predictably cannot survive after adopting the measures demanded by Europe, like changes in electoral law and practice, providing more freedom for media or NGOs. Asking of Lukashenka to do it, means asking of him to go. No wonder, Belarusian leader will not accept such proposals unless he decides to finish his carrier.

Nevertheless, the relations between Lukashenka and the West are not yet in a dead-end, and are unlikely to be there anytime in the near future. Belarusian regime has many ways to avoid such predicament. First, it can continue its rather successful attempts to sell "security and stability" for Western toleration as well as offer its services for containment of Russia. Second, there many ways to do business, both political and economic, unofficially, with the same results, as Belarusian history of recent years has shown.

Third, even confronted one day with fatal necessity to negotiate with the West on its current terms, Minsk has a lot of things to sell without risking to cause a crash of Belarusian political model. Let's compare the risks encountered by Lukashenka in accepting, say, current European conditions.

Thus, while liberalization for media and NGOs (including Polish minority organizations) or free and fair elections could be fatal for Lukashenka's survival, such points as setting free political prisoners (anyway not so numerous) probably does not endanger the regime and could be swapped for some new Western credits, visits or other benefits. Another point, articulated by the West – capital punishment (not stopped in Belarus regardless repeated Western demands) is also not so crucial and its suspending or abolishing are only a question of price Belarusian authorities wish to get from their Western partners.

So far, this strategy of Belarusian government worked. Belarus managed to get loans with Western support. EU lifted travel restrictions for Belarus government officials and the US trade sanctions have been suspended, the country has been invited to join Eastern Partnership and Lukashenka visited European capitals.

SB

How to Benefit from Being Encircled by Soviet-Type Nuclear Plants



On 26 April 1986, a human error and the Soviet equipment caused the Chernobyl disaster – the largest technological catastrophe ever. For many days Soviet authorities attempted to conceal the scale of the disaster. The Soviet Union admitted that an accident had occurred only after radiation levels set off alarms at the Forsmark Nuclear Power Plant in Sweden. Instead of immediate evacuation, people were taken to the streets on the the May Day to celebrate the communist party with red banners and portraits of Lenin.

Because of the wind direction, the bulk of contamination ended up in Belarus which suffered more than any other country from the disaster. Chernobyl-type nuclear plants are more than just history. The territory of Belarus is literally encircled by Soviet-type nuclear plants. Just across the border are Smolensk and Kursk nuclear plants in Russia, Ignalina plant in Lithuania, and nuclear plants in Ukrainian Rivne and Chernobyl. The European Union authorities considered Ignalina unsafe and Lithuania had to close it down last year.

The Russian authorities do not think that their Soviet-type plants are too dangerous and Ukraine perhaps lacks funds to replace its own. The closure of Ignalina decreased energy dependence of Lithuania, which plans to build another nuclear plant on the border with Belarus. Russia also depended on Ignalina and plans to build a nuclear reactor in its

Kalinigrad enclave. Vladimir Putin already signed a decree to begin construction. This will increase to seven the number of active and recently closed (but still dangerous) nuclear plants close to the Belarusian border. Belarus has none on its own territory.

Belarus authorities has long dream of [building](#) its own nuclear plant and it is is likely to appear on the Lithuanian border. Although Russia's assertiveness in using its natural gas and oil as strategic weapons may justify the rush to build more nuclear plants, it should not blind the decision-makers. The costs of building a nuclear plant are enormous and require heavy external borrowing. Purchasing and recycling radioactive fuel is also very expensive and Belarus will have to rely on Russia for that. And at some point, the nuclear plant will need to be dismantled which takes decades.

For instance, it will take 20-30 years to complete dismantlement of the Ignalina plant. If you all these maintenance costs are put together, the nuclear energy is far from cheap. Chernobyl showed the world that nuclear energy is particularly dangerous in undemocratic and nontransparent societies. Belarus learned the [lesson](#) the hard way with human suffering of hundreds of thousands and hundreds of billions dollars in economic losses. Still many tend to forget that in the absence of full transparency and independent control mechanisms, nuclear energy is a too dangerous toy to play with. It is true that Belarus cannot control nuclear stations across its border and is exposed to any potential accidents.

The fact that it cannot do anything about it should be accepted and building its own station will not change it. Belarus is not exactly the [ideal](#) of democracy and good governance and the risks of a human error similar to that which caused Chernobyl are too high. If the Belarus nuclear plant sponsored, built, fueled and maintained by Russia it will make the country even more dependent upon its Eastern neighbor. Instead of exposing itself to more foreign debt and

dependence upon Russia, Belarus should bargain with Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine and buy cheap nuclear energy from them. They will always have a surplus of energy to sell. And given the competition between these countries, the price will be reasonable. Ripping the benefits of cheap nuclear energy without bearing the costs of maintaining nuclear plants would be a wise policy for a country which suffered so much from Chernobyl.

YK

Political Sphere in Belarus: from Marxism-Leninism to Political Science

Like its native country, the discipline of political science in Belarus will take decades to outgrow its Soviet past. After all, most of the country's contemporary social science luminaries were brought up on the volumes of scientific communism, memorizing the blessings of the socialist revolution and the proletarian dictatorship, and today force-feed their own students with courses like the "Ideology of the Belarusian State." As a result, the spectre of communist past still haunts the Belarusian academia.

Overcoming that "spectre" is what inspired five young researchers at the Belarusian State University to found *Palitychnaja Sfera* (*Political Sphere*), the only

professional journal of political studies in Belarus. Since its inception in 2001, the journal has evolved into a dynamic and professional research institute geared toward acquiring new knowledge and presenting it at the academic and political levels, as well as to the public at large. Today, *Political Sphere* is, first and foremost, a community of political and social scientists.

“Our main focus is the gradual formation of a Belarusian school of political studies,” explained Andrei Kazakevich, director of the Institute, in a Feb. 15 interview. *Political Sphere* aims to represent achievements of Belarusian political science without political and ideological limitations, overcome negative consequences of authoritarian rule for the Belarusian academic community and society, and maintain a dialogue between political scientists, the public, and the private institutions. *Political Sphere* also hopes to encourage the study of Belarusian politics, stimulate research and analytical activities in Belarus, and integrate Belarusian scientists in the international academic community, according to the “Concept note” on the Institute’s web site.

This spring, *Political Sphere* is completing a research project on the evolution of Belarusian national identity in 1990-2008. Nation, national project, concept of nation, and ethnic conflicts are the focus for the upcoming issue of the journal. “The topic is very important for Belarus, which is undergoing the process of nation-building, and where the national identity is fragmented,” said Kazakevich.

The journal *Political Sphere* receives submissions from the researchers in Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, and the United States, but most of its contents comes from Belarusian authors, according to Kazakevich. All articles pass an anonymous review. Sometimes the institute publishes the so-called “English issues,” compiled from the most interesting articles translated into English, said the Institute’s researcher and board member Siarhei Kuzniatsou in a Feb. 16 e-mail. The

publication's primary audience is political scientists, students, analysts, and observers. While *Political Sphere* may also be of interest for politicians and government officials, "they feel themselves smart enough without such readings," noted Dzianis Melyantsou, a researcher and board member of the Institute, in a Feb. 15 e-mail.

Having experienced the "idiosyncrasies" of Belarusian academia firsthand, members of the Institute identify the absence of empirical research and the isolation from international academia as the main obstacles to the growth of political science in Belarus. These obstacles have been both the main reason for the journal's existence and the primary concern of the founders of *Political Sphere*, who in 2005 moved the journal to the European Humanities University in exile in Vilnius, Lithuania, due to the increasing suppression at home. According to Kazakevich, the move is partial, and Minsk remains the center for the scientific community associated with the journal. In 2009, *Political Sphere* became independent from EHU, but remains registered in Lithuania.

The *Political Sphere* team consists of 12-15 permanent authors and researchers, all of whom are political scientists and sociologists between the ages of 25 and 35. Some of them are associated with Belarusian State University and National Academy of Sciences, while others received their MA and PhD degrees abroad, according to Melyantsou. Andrei Yahorau, a researcher and a board member at the Institute, said in a Feb. 16 e-mail the team's age corresponds to the age of the Belarusian political science, which started developing only in the recent 15-20 years. According to Yahorau, the team's interest in political science emerged as a result of the necessity to understand the political contradictions of the 90s. With contemporary Belarus being a "barely known state from the scientific view point," we are excited about discovering and describing every piece of Belarus' political reality," he said.

The difficult conditions of Belarus' social sciences have affected the career trajectories of all members of Institute. "It is very difficult (and often impossible) to defend a dissertation, get a job at the university that will correspond to one's qualification and career plans, undertake independent research, or officially publish one's work," said Yahorau.

"For the authoritarian regime in Belarus, research on politics is a taboo," Kazakevich said. "Political science is squeezed out by ideology, and 'politics' is considered as an undesirable and risky research subject. Belarus' conservative and patronizing academic community is isolated from its western equivalents, and there is no dynamic or incentives for creative work." Kazakevich said the discipline of political science has never become quite legitimate in Belarus. "Its main difference with the West is the orientation on translating current knowledge and speculative musings. Empirical research and attention to details is lacking," he added.

Despite the difficulties the team faces, *Political Sphere* aspires to take the place it deserves in the Belarusian academic community as well as integrate into the international academic field. Yahorau also said, "To be accepted as researchers and professors, to prepare the next generations of Belarusian political scientists, to form a vibrant scholarly community, and to discover the political reality in Belarus for ourselves, our country and the world, is our greatest ambition."

VC

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Instead of Landing in Minsk, Kaczyński's Plane Crashed in Smolensk

✘ In September 2009, the President of Poland Kaczyński sent his condolences to the President of Belarus because of the death of two Belarusian pilots in a crash of Su-27 fighter plane at an air show. Today, state leaders around the world are condoling with the Poles at the loss of President Lech Kaczyński and 95 others in a plane crash near Smolensk.

On April 10, Lech Kaczyński was flying to commemorate the deaths of thousands of Poles murdered by the Soviet Union and buried in the Katyn Forest just across the eastern border of Belarus. On March 5, 1940, Joseph Stalin signed an order to execute 25,700 Polish prisoners of war in the camps of Ostashkov, Starobelsk, and Kozelsk. Only in 1990 did the Soviet authorities admit responsibility for the Katyn murders.

Because of the fog, it was difficult for the pilots to land in Smolensk airport, near the Katyn Forest. Polish media report that air traffic controllers had advised the Polish pilots not to attempt to land at the airport, but turn around and head for Minsk, the capital of Belarus. The obscure military aerodrome near Smolensk lacked the necessary navigational equipment to receive planes in heavy fog. Despite these warnings, Polish pilots, apparently under pressure from their VIP passengers, decided to take the risk of landing in Smolensk. Perhaps, the Polish delegation had its own reasons not to land in Belarus.

Few people outside Warsaw and Minsk know that Lech Kaczyński was one of the staunchest defenders of human

rights in Belarus and a vocal critic of its president. Just last month, condemning the detentions and trials of activists of the Union of Poles in Belarus, Lech Kaczyński wrote a personal letter to Alyaksandr Lukashenka defending the Polish minority. Having received no response from the Belarusian authorities, Lech Kaczynski appealed to the European Union's institutions through the President of the European Union Herman Van Rompuy and European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek.

Notably, Belarus did not send a delegation to the earlier ceremony in Katyn. This is despite the fact that Katyn's victims included hundreds of Belarusians who served in the Polish Army in 1940 when Western Belarus was a part of Poland.

If the Belarus president were to fly to Smolensk, he would not have used an old Soviet plane for that. Ever mindful of what losing their leader would mean for the Belarusian people, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has long ago switched to the sleek and safe US Boeing. Lech Kaczyński was flying a 20-year old Tupolev Tu-154. Tupolev's long history of crashes has never been a secret, but the Polish leadership considered buying a new US-manufactured Boeings an unnecessary indulgence during the financial crisis.

Seventy years after the massacre orchestrated by Stalin, the Polish people once again lost some of its best compatriots in the cold foggy forest near Katyn.

VC & YK

Partizanization of the Belarusian Opposition



An article by one of this website's authors for Novaja Europa magazine The Belarusian liberal United Civil Party has decided not to participate in the local elections scheduled for April 2010. the authorities have started a new wave of repressions against independent

media and conduct the election campaign in the same undemocratic way as during all previous elections in Belarus since 1995. Taking these facts into account, the party's decision seems right. Such elections must be boycotted, but the absence of elections should not be an excuse for the opposition to not promote its ideas among the public.

More than that. It must finally be admitted that the Belarusian democratic opposition is currently unable to come to power. Neither the fraudulent elections, nor some Orange Revolution triggered by elections can lead threaten the current Belarusian regime. Such attempts have been several times repeated during the past fifteen years, and indeed, "if you do what you did, you'll get what you got". What should Belarusian opposition parties do in these circumstances? What can the much larger informal public opposition hope for?

A possible successful strategy of the democratic camp is seen in two complementary ways: 1. The formal existence of opposition political parties and their transformation into think tanks or education centres; 2. A total quasi-partizanization of the opposition community. For the organized opposition (political parties and movements) there are also two possible ways of behaviour. Firstly, they could act like a symbol, a lighthouse, and keep existing in an embryonic form. Sooner or later the public political life in Belarus will unfreeze and political parties (or catalysts of protest

sentiment in an emergency situation) will be required. A different thing is that there is no indication that this may happen in the next few years. And therefore the *raison d'être* of most of today's opposition parties is dubious. Another activity for the institutionalized democratic opposition in today's conditions could be generation of ideas and their promotion among the people.

The UCP seems the only political party which has a relevant team of experts as its members. The potential of most other parties in this respect seems much more dubious, if existent at all. The second effective strategy is more important and is already long since being implemented *de facto*. It is a strategy that has been used during the past 200 years by the independence movement in Belarus: the strategy is to use the infrastructure of the present regime to achieve own goals.

This means selective collaboration, underground activity and co-optation into the existing order. After 200 years of Russian and Soviet rule, Belarusians are very well used to undercover work and guerrilla warfare. A successful example of such tactics is what can be called "the cultural opposition" from a number of public organizations and initiatives. These organizations have managed to de-politicize the questions of Belarusian language and culture. Since these organizations have no intention to come to power, officials are more inclined to cooperate with them. Instead of aiming to come to power, these organizations demand fulfillment of certain requirements, which are usually objectively important. Such a strategy can now be productive at least with regard to issues of national revival, or, to a lesser extent, promotion of the liberalization of the economy. Unfortunately, democratization can't be quickly achieved by this strategy.

I think it is safe to say that in recent years the Belarusian Language Society, the campaign *Budźma* or the Voluntary Society for Protection of Architectural Monuments have been more useful for the evolution of the Belarusian society than any

political party or any of the opposition candidates in the past or future presidential elections. Politics in Belarus, as a means of publicly solving issues of national importance, must be grown from the "grass roots", from the very beginning. NGOs are the best way to do this. In addition, there are tens and hundreds of progressive people who work in the government and are able to implement useful initiatives to change the regime from within. A good example is the Belarusian-speaking culture minister Paviel Latuška (Latushka). There are people of this kind in many state institutions at different levels. Such network is unsinkable and capable of leading the country to change – not now, but after many years. One should not be more sad about this new approach than about other issues of the public life in Belarus. As a revolutionary scenario for the positive change is impossible, the democratic community has eternity at its disposal.

By Alexander Čajčyc

[Read the original article](#)

Belarusian Officials Want a License to Unleash Repressions From the EU



By organizing repressions against the unloyal fraction of the Polish minority the Belarusian officials only want to test what EU's response will be, the Belarusian political analyst Vitali Silicki argues. Indeed, unlike several years ago, the regime in Minsk can't afford tearing its relations with the EU now. The moment when Russia has risen the prices for natural resources for Belarus and thereby has stopped de-facto subsidizing Belarus was the birth for a real Belarusian foreign policy. Now the Belarusian officials have to play a complex game in maneuvering between the interests of the EU and of Russia.

Both EU and Russia present both danger and opportunities for president Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Both have economic resources Lukašenka needs and both threaten his unlimited power in Belarus. Aliaksandr Lukašenka's aim is to realize as many opportunities as possible and to avoid the dangers. This means he cannot fully ally with neither the EU nor with Russia. Nor can he go in direct confrontation with neither of them. The EU should therefore understand and realize its ability to influence the Belarusian regime. The EU should not give Lukašenka the license to continue repressions but should instead give a clear signal that human rights violations in Belarus will not be tolerated.

Minsk's general tendency in recent weeks has been to accommodate its EU neighbours. For example, at the request of Lithuanian prosecutors, the Belarusian authorities have interrogated a serving general, Valery Uskhopchik, for his role – as commander of the Soviet garrison in Vilnius – in the massacre of January 1991 during the Moscow-backed attempt to end Lithuania's self-declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Such unusual co-operation suggests Minsk needs more friends in the EU. And no wonder, since financial assistance from the EU to Belarus requires the unanimous backing of the EU's member

states. Moreover, the current conflict has already cost Belarus money: the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development put all projects in Belarus on hold until this episode is resolved. This episode does not mean the EU's policy of dialogue has failed. It does, though, show that Belarus takes the EU's current strategy – dialogue coupled with concessions and soft, cajoling words – as a licence to unleash repression whenever it wants or needs.

[Read the full article](#)