

Ukrainian Conflict in Belarusian State Media – Belarus State TV Digest

The Belarus state media widely covered the crisis in neighbouring Ukraine. Some of those featured by Belarusian state TV argued that external forces, including the EU and USA, provoked and financially aided the protesters to overthrow the government in Ukraine.

Others believe that the Ukrainian authorities were completely detached from the people so the Ukrainian events were not surprising.

At the same time, a visit by Uladzimir Makei to the Baltic States drew the attention of the media. Journalists pointed out that Belarus' relationship with Vilnius and Riga remain positive. The officials also discussed improving Minsk-Brussels relations.

Ukraine

[Catastrophic situation in Ukraine](#). According to unnamed experts quoted by Belarusian television, the chances for a civilised settlement of the conflict essentially zero. The Ukrainians are clearing the shelves of products in stores because they are increasingly worried about the developing situation in the country.

Long queues to ATMs prove that they also fear losing their savings, while international banks are closing their branch headquarters in Kiev. “Nobody knows what will happen in the country tomorrow,” one journalist noted. Fires, pogroms and chaos remain Ukraine's present reality. “The most horrible event is the death of dozens of people. This is already a

national catastrophe," state TV journalist concluded.

The high price of the present political crisis. A state TV reporter commented on impeachment of the president Victor Yanukovich, while new elections look like they will cost Ukraine US\$2bn. However, the country can receive financial aid from abroad, an amount estimated to be around \$35bn for both this year and the year ahead, she continued.

The new Ukrainian authorities have already requested financial aid from their international partners, including Poland and the USA. "It has already been proposed that an international donors' conference should be organised with the EU countries, USA, representatives of the International Monetary Fund and other international institutions," the journalist added.

Yanukovich met with representatives of media in Rostov-on-Don.

He stated that was still the official head of Ukraine. Yanukovich also apologised that he was not able to prevent bloodshed. "Experts say that Ukraine is on the brink of economic collapse," the news reports. According to the National Bank and Ministry of Finance, the treasury has been looted and is barren, she continued.

To save the economy, the new Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk does not exclude the possibility of increasing the price of gas, as well as cutting subsidies and social programmes throughout Ukraine. The reporter also noted the outbreak of protests in Crimea, with its participants do not recognise the new Ukrainian leadership. The Council of Crimea has elected a new Prime Minister for the autonomous republic, Sergei Aksyonov.

Moscow decides to intervene with its military in Crimea. The Council of the Russian Federation supported Putin's proposal for the use of the armed forces on the territory of Crimea. Earlier, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, requested

Putin to help secure peace in the region, the journalist reports.

ONT TV talk shows on Ukraine. Recently the state TV talk show [Pazicija](#) covered the conflict in Ukraine twice. The host of the show, [Vadzim Hihin](#) invited a few guest speakers, among them representatives from the minority Ukrainian and Russian communities in Belarus.

The first show was called "Ukraine: Between Peace and War" introduced the situation in Ukraine to the audience with some brief reportage done by by Tengiz Dumbadze, an ONT reporter. At the very beginning he explained that he aimed to present an objective version of events, and thus visited both Eastern and Western regions.

People in the East are less aggressive than in the West of Ukraine. Dumbadze noted that 70-80% of the protesters in Kiev came from western Ukraine. In his opinion the Donetsk region has always been the most hard-working and stable, and even today there is relative stability. In the eastern region of the country, people work hard, mine coal and earn money for the good of the country. "A fact is a fact. Here people talk less about politics, and instead just work," he commented.

The reporter presented the opinions of the students from the east who argued for a peaceful settlement of the crisis and compromise between all parties. Later on, the ONT journalist visited Lviv where he talked to some old men who criticised Yanukovich and his entourage with sharp words.

The correspondent commented that Ukraine's politicians failed to learn anything from the previous revolution and again created problems and suffering for ordinary people, and they should rather think now how to prevent any further escalation of the conflict.

The Ukrainians envy Belarusians' political leadership. The ONT correspondent talked to some random people in Eastern Ukraine

and some of them praised Belarusian leader, Alexander Lukashenka. "A leader like in your country is needed here," an older man stated. According to the journalist, politicians have divided people into two camps and the nation has become the hostage of its politicians.

On another occasion, the talk show Pazicija again focused on the Ukrainian conflict. The programme was entitled, "The Ukrainian Tragedy" and was hosted Maira Mora, the Head of the EU delegation to Belarus, [Yauheni Preiherman](#) from the Liberal Club and several government-friendly analysts and activists.

Why the EU wanted to sign an association agreement with a corrupt Ukraine? One of the commentators noted that there were two nations in Ukraine with completely different mentalities. Another participant argued that the former Ukrainian authorities have parted ways with society. If everything would be going well in the country, nobody would take to the streets to protest.

The moderator asked Moira why the EU wanted to sign an association agreement with a country like Ukraine. The official replied that the EU was a tool for changes, not a goal itself. "It is a tool to obtain the know-how, and it is readily available, free of charge," she said.

A Communist Party representative ironically commented that a ban of the Communist Party in Ukraine meant the new values have made the country truly democratic, with plenty of freedom and space for diverse opinions. He suggested that the USA and Europe inspired and financed the Ukrainian revolt. In his opinion, the Ukrainians are one with the Russian and Belarusian nations.

Participants pointed out the threat stemming from radical groups in Ukraine. Moira argued that the EU did not financially support any of these groups.

Domestic Affairs

Positive dynamics in EU-Belarus relations. Alexander Lukashenka met with Uladzimir Makei, the head of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss politics.

“There is no point in pursuing some kind of global politics. If we have a place where we have economic interests, regarding the diversification of our exports and external trade, then we have politics there,” Lukashenka stated.

They also discussed the improving relations with the European Union. “No serious breakthrough has been reached. There are real obstacles in our relationship, which cannot be, unfortunately, removed in a day or a month,” Makei said after the meeting.

The State TV journalist commented that Minsk is ready for dialogue both with its European partners and the USA, but “not at the cost of restricting our national interests.”

Makei visits Belarus' good neighbours: Latvia... The reported goal of the official visit was strengthening bilateral relations with Latvia, but also Minsk's co-operation with the EU. This time, more attention was paid by both sides to Belarus' ties with the EU, the journalist emphasised.

...and Lithuania. Minsk is enjoying rather fruitful co-operation with Vilnius as well. “Exemplary Belarusian-Lithuanian diplomatic relations show that stability is a wonderful foundation for mutually beneficial co-operation,” the journalist concluded.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials available on the web site of Belarusian State Television 1 (BT1) and ONT. Freedom of the press in Belarus remains restricted and state media convey primarily the point of view of the Belarusian authorities. This review attempts to give the English-speaking audience a better understanding of how Belarusian state media shape public opinion in the

country.