

# [Dashkevich Sentenced to Another Year, Arrests of Activists – Belarus Politics Digest](#)

Belarus authorities arrested a number of young activists and sentenced the leader of Young Front [Zmicier Dashkevich](#) to one additional year in prison. Other developments relate to parliamentary election campaign, foreign travel bans and court cases involving opposition activists.

[The Young Front leader sentenced to another year in prison](#). On August 28, after a closed hearing of, the local court Gluboksky district has sentenced Dmitry Dashkevich, the leader of an international organisation “The Youth Front”, to another year of imprisonment for “malicious violation of the requirements of the penal establishment’s administration”.

According to his fiancé, Dashkevich does not plan to appeal against this court decision, because it would not be of any use. The human right defenders see this precedent as an attempt by the authorities to apply pressure on the young activist movement.

Arrests

[Dzianis Sadouski sentenced to 10 days in prison](#). On August 28, a [message](#) appeared on Belarus Partisan about the disappearance of Dzianis Sadovsky, the Executive secretary of the Belarusian Christian Democratic Party. As it turned out, he was detained and taken to a court in Minsk, where he was convicted for “disorderly conduct”. Vitali Rymashevsky, a board member of the party, claims the precedent was boldly unlawful: the court was held without a lawyer, and the information on the case was

not even presented during the hearing.

**Mass arrests of opposition social network moderators.** On August 30, administrators of opposition communities in social networks have been arrested in Minsk and Vitebsk. One of them, Pavel Yevtikhiev, was convicted of petty crime and sentenced to 5 days in jail. Another one, Roman Protasevich, after four hours of beating and interrogation, was let go due to his young age. Human rights defenders say that these arrests represent the authorities' sharp reaction to opposition's calls to ignore the elections.

Elections

**A parliamentary candidate arrested and searched in Vitebsk.** Aleksei Gavrutikov, running in parliamentary elections in Vitebsk region, has filed a complaint to the public prosecution office, based on his groundless detention by the road police in Vitebsk and unauthorised search of his daughter's personal belongings (which were claimed by the police officer to be stolen) and his friend's car. Gavrutikov hopes to bring the police officer to justice.

**A BNF party candidate plans to quit the elections.** Aleksandr Romanovich, a BNF party candidate in Pinsk, during his speech for the Belarus-2 TV-channel, pronounced that the upcoming parliamentary elections are organized unfairly and in fact are a mere formality. He promised that, unless the regime changes his authoritarian policy and releases all political prisoners, he will withdraw his candidature from the election lists.

Travel ban

**Lawyer Oleg Volchek has lost the court case, but is not on travel ban anymore.** On August 22, the Central District court in Minsk has denied sustaining the claim of lawyer Oleg Volchek on illegal conduct of MIA and the Ministry of Justice, due to which his name appeared in the list of persons

restricted to travel abroad. Volchek claims he filed a lawsuit on July 11, because he had run out of means to resolve the issue via communicating with different bodies of authorities. He maintains that his appearance in the list of people restricted to leave the territory of RB is an attempt by the authorities to apply pressure on a human right activist. After the court, however, he was informed that his name was put off the travel banned list.

As of the end of the last week, the Belarusian following civic and political activists were removed from GOB's travel ban list: [Oleg Volchek](#); [Andrei Bondarenko](#); [Valentin Stefanovich](#); [Zhanna Litvina](#); [Garry Pogonyailo](#); [Anatoly Lebedko](#); [Oleg Gulak](#); [Viktor Korneenko](#); [Valeriy Ukhnaiev](#); [Mikhail Yanchuk](#); and [Lev Margolin](#).

Other

[An activist from Baranovichi has won 500,000 BYR in court against his ex-employer](#). Grigoriy Grik, who claims he was fired from his workplace due to his active involvement in an opposition party, was appointed to receive a 500,000 Ruble compensation from his employer. However, the activist was not reinstated at his workplace and now has to look for a new job.

[A disabled wheelchair user won the case in a non-barrier environment](#). It is the first time that the court has proclaimed a municipal company liable for disregarding the non-barrier environment norms. Bobruisk municipal road-construction company was obligated to pay the compensation for the moral harm to Sergei Matskevich, a wheelchair user with the first group of disability.

[Public hearings regarding proposed construction of cellulose plant in Svetlagorsk](#). On August 17, a public hearing regarding the assessment of potential environmental threat of the cellulose plant planned to be built in town took place. Despite the massive disagreement of local people, they were not given an opportunity to speak during the hearing or merely put questions to the officials personally. People claim that

the hearing was played by the authorities' scenario.

*Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.*

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## **A Bad July for Lukashenka**

July did not start very happily for Alexander Lukashenka. At the Independence Day speech on 4 July he praised the great political and economic situation of Belarus, but subsequent developments undermined both.

The teddy bear affair and rejection of his visa application to attend the London Olympic Games are among the issues likely to have made Lukashenka embarrassed and frustrated, and sparked a new wave of enemy-searching.

Financial troubles and the need to obtain more financial assistance from Moscow still remain the most burning problems. The recent diplomatic conflict with Sweden and, in consequence, tensions in relations with the EU, will isolate Belarus internationally even more and push it further into Moscow's arms.

### **(Un)diplomatic conflict with background teddy bear affair**

The [drop of teddy bears](#) with pro-democracy slogans over Belarus was first met with denial that it had happened and then to a number of high-ranking officials being dismissed or

reprimanded. The dismissed include air defence chief Major General Dmitry Pakhmelkin and Major-General Ihar Rachkouski, who was in charge of the border service.

The Belarusian authorities have now started searching for more enemies – both external and internal. On 3 August Minsk announced that Ambassador Eriksson's accreditation had been terminated. Stefan Eriksson was a diplomat whose ability to speak the Belarusian language and knowledge of Belarusian history have long made Belarusian authorities suspicious.

A few days later, on 8 August, Sweden demanded that two Belarusian diplomats leave Stockholm. In response, the Belarusian authorities went even further and recalled all the employees of the Belarus Embassy in Sweden and asked the Swedes to close the embassy in Minsk.

Although Belarusian officials failed to prove any link between Eriksson's diplomatic and alleged anti-regime activity (for example, responsibility in the organisation of the teddy bear campaign), they suggested such conclusion quite openly. Moreover, other arguments that the authorities raise, related to Eriksson staying too long with the diplomatic mission in Belarus, appear not to be serious.

As a part of the conflict with Sweden, the authorities [arrested and continue to detain with the KGB](#) a journalist who was the first to take pictures of Swedish teddy bears in Belarus and a real estate agent who housed the Swedes when they came to visit the country just before the stunt.

## **The Olympic Embarrassment**

The authorities wanted to demonstrate their tough approach in response to the teddy bear affair. However, the ease with which Minsk escalated tensions with Sweden could have been motivated by an additional factor: Lukashenka's humiliating

visa rejection to go to the Olympics, where Belarus eventually got less medals than ever before in its sovereign history.

On 24 July, the British authorities officially refused to issue a visa to Alexander Lukashenka who has been on the EU travel ban list for years. Since he has been president of the Belarusian Olympic Committee since 1997, the whole situation surely seemed even more severe to him. In their official announcement, the British officials treated him as equal to other dictators like Bashar Assad and Robert Mugabe who were not welcome at the Olympics either.

While from the very beginning the Belarusian authorities avoided making any comments on the decision, on another occasion, during the Slavianski Bazaar singing contest in Vitebsk, President Lukashenka described the Olympic Games as dirty, corrupt and politicised.

### **A Weak Reaction from the EU**

On 10 August EU foreign ministers at an extraordinary meeting agreed to express their solidarity via a diplomatic note addressed to the Belarusian authorities. Widening the so-called "black list" of those who are not allowed to enter the EU territory is also under consideration in Brussels.

However, the EU politicians will make a concrete decision by 31 October, when Brussels is supposed to discuss it in the broader context of mutual relations and other issues, such as political prisoners and repression of civil society in Belarus. Such a concrete date indicates that Brussels aims at detailed observation of the September parliamentary elections and will also deal with their probable abuses.

Nevertheless, the recent reaction of the EU toward the conflict with Swedish diplomacy is by no means harsh, as some have actually expected it to be. A diplomatic note, which the EU member states decided to use this time, has just purely symbolic meaning. In fact, the Belarusian political leadership

is already isolated and there is not much else Brussels can do without harming the population of Belarus.

A key challenge to Brussels might be to close the whole issue smoothly as soon as possible – a recent diplomatic conflict when all EU ambassadors were first recalled but then returned could have taught something to both Minsk and Belarus.

### **Moscow Support is Key**

It is not only the Swedish teddy bear provocation and UK visa refusal that might have motivated such a tough reaction from Lukashenka. As a matter of fact, he needs financial assistance to sustain his regime. In an official letter back in June, the Belarusian authorities [requested from the Eurasian Economic Community](#), an organisation dominated by Russia, more financial aid. As Russia is trying to close down various [unauthorised oil trading schemes](#) of the Belarusian regime, its external debt is growing.

Moscow remains the only supporter of the Belarusian regime. Thus, Minsk does its best to portray itself to Russia as the only reliable and trustworthy partner which needs support in its struggle against Western pressure. The Belarusian official media portray the West as responsible for spy activities and provocation which helps them shift attention away from internal problems.

Brussels puts forward concrete conditions on any financial assistance, whereas Moscow simply generously donates to retain the status-quo in Belarus. But the truth is that Russia's support is also conditional not only upon its geopolitical anti-Western position but also upon [privatisation of state-owned companies](#) – the question which will inevitably appear on the agenda soon.

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# How the EU and Lukashenka Keep Belarusians Out of Europe

Belarusians are the most travel-restricted nation in Europe. Both their own government and the European Union seem to be determined not to let them out.

The Belarusian authorities prevent leading opposition activists, students and state bureaucrats from travelling to the neighbouring EU states. The European Union also restricts Belarusian citizens by keeping the most restrictive visa policy in Europe and blacklisting top Belarusian officials and businessmen.

The malicious motivation of the Belarusian authorities is not surprising. Why the European Union keeps its visa rules so strict is much more difficult to understand.

## **Belarusian Authorities v the Opposition**

Following the last round of EU sanctions in February 2012, the Belarusian authorities banned over a dozen opposition activists from travelling to the EU. The authorities say that this is their response to EU sanctions. Perhaps they also hope that some activists will decide not to come back to Belarus to avoid future problems. The more political refugees abroad, the safer they feel at home.

In the past Belarusian opposition activists could travel to the West via Russia. There is no border control between Belarus and Russia which makes it easy. But last week the head



of the Russian Border Service pledged not to prevent Belarusian citizens blacklisted by their own government from leaving Russia. If this threat materialises, many activists would be kept within the borders of the so-called Union State of Belarus and Russia.

### **Belarusian Authorities v Students**

Another group which the Belarusian authorities want to keep a close eye on is students. Full-time students can travel abroad during term periods only if they get permission. In the past, they had to seek permission from the Minister of Education. Now it is enough to secure permission at a university level.

In the Soviet Union the harshness of laws was balanced by their non-compulsory nature. This is also true for Belarus today – most students can travel abroad without any problems and their universities know about it. However, the student travel ban can sometimes be used as a pretext to expel politically active students as it has been used to do so in the past. That was the case with politically active students Tatsiana Khoma in 2005 and Tatsiana Shaputska in 2009.

### **Belarusian Authorities v Belarusian Officials**

A number of categories of state employees are unable to travel abroad without special permission. For instance, most officers of the Belarusian police or KGB have to seek permission from their superiors when they want to travel abroad.

According to Moscow-based website *Belaruski Partyzan*, this April the Presidential Administration issued a new classified instruction in which senior officers of KGB and police were asked not to approve requests to travel abroad. It is was presented as a "temporary measure" but it did not specify how long it would last.

Belarusian legislation also prohibits those who have access to "state secrets" from travelling abroad without special

permission. In the era of the internet, this restriction seems obsolete but it still makes the lives of some people more complicated.

### **European Union v Belarusian Officials**

Some Belarusian officials suffer not only from their own bosses but also from EU sanctions. In other words, they are under a dual travel ban.

In February 2012, EU foreign ministers added 21 Belarusian citizens to their travel ban list, bringing the total number to more than 200 individuals. The list includes judges, prosecutors, senior police officers and those responsible for the falsification of elections. This year the EU also began adding the most influential businessmen who, in their view, support the Lukashenka regime.

But some of the blacklisted officials can still travel to the European Union to attend official meetings of various international organisations. In January 2012 Minister of Interior Arkady Kuliashou travelled without any problems to attend an Interpol meeting in Lyon. In March the KGB chief Vadzim Zaitsev reportedly travelled to Rome as part of an official delegation.

### **European Union v Belarusian Citizens**

In any event, the restrictions discussed above affect only a limited number of people. The travel restrictions imposed by the EU on millions of Belarusian nationals are a much more serious problem.

It often takes months for Belarusian citizens to get a visa for an EU country. This includes waiting for an appointment, preparing thick packages of documents, and spending many hours queuing outside the consulate regardless of the weather. The procedure is very expensive too – a simple visa costs €60 – the highest price in Europe. To put it into context, the

average monthly salary in Belarus is around €270.

What is worse, many consulates deliberately issue singly-entry visas valid for several days only. The German consulate is notorious for this. In practise this means that Belarusian nationals have to undergo this humiliating and expensive procedure again and again. No wonder that the pro-rata [number of Schengen visas](#) issued for Belarusians is the highest in the world.

Consulates of EU countries in Belarus are overloaded with visa applicants who cannot get long-term visas. According to the Coalition for EU-Belarus Visa-Free Movement, EU regulations allow visas to be issued for a period of up to five years.

### **Why So Many Restrictions?**

One can understand why the Belarusian authorities want to keep their citizens locked inside the country. Lukashenka and other top officials are already on the EU travel ban list and have no desire to help their fellow citizens. In January 2012, the spokesman for the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted that the main reason why visa prices were so high was because Belarus was unwilling to sign a visa facilitation agreement with the EU.

It is more difficult to rationally explain why the EU treats Belarusian citizens so badly in terms of visas.

Is this policy a useful tool to keep away potential illegal immigrants? No. Issuing short-term one-entry expensive visas does not help. Even a one-day visa would be enough to enable a potential illegal immigrant to stay in the host country.

Is it a legal requirement to give visas only for several days? There is no such requirement. Each consulate is different in their treatment of Schengen visa applicants. For instance, Polish consulates often issue multiple entry visas for six or twelve months, while the German consulate in Minsk more often

issues one-entry visas valid for a few days only.

Perhaps consulates of EU countries are just interested in earning money by charging €60 for a little passport sticker? That sounds like a possible but immoral explanation. Belarusians already have one of the lowest salaries in Europe. It is wrong to make those who already suffer from the most repressive political regime in the region to pay the highest visa fee in Europe.

### **Time to Introduce "White Lists"**

It is time for the European Union to adopt not only blacklists for "bad Belarusians" but also whitelists for "good Belarusians". The whitelisted categories of Belarusian nationals should be entitled to long-term, multiple-entry visas free of charge.

These whitelists should go beyond the opposition leaders and include thousands of Belarusians: students, academics and teachers, political and human rights activists, those working for NGOs and various community initiatives.

When Belarusians travel abroad, the benefits of democracy and market economy speak for themselves. These people would become the best advocates of European values in their own country.

Rather than hoping for a [quick regime change](#) in Belarus, the West should patiently work to integrate rather than isolate Belarusian citizens from the rest of Europe.

If Europe wants to have a stable and democratic neighbour tomorrow, it needs to plant the seeds of change today.

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# How Can Belarusian Authorities Retaliate Against the EU Sanctions?

Last month for the first time ever, the EU introduced sanctions against a number of companies, which supply oil refinery products to EU countries. It means that there is still a possibility of expansion of painful economic sanctions against Lukashenka's regime.

There is no dominating opinion in the assessment of the possible effects of the EU sanctions' expansion and possible retaliatory measures of Lukashenka's regime. A more common opinion is that the EU, by introducing, for the first time ever, the sanctions against quite a large number of Belarusian companies, reached a certain line in its pressure on Lukashenka's regime, which it will not cross. It will not cross it because it is afraid of pushing Lukashenka into Russia's arms. This step will be followed by a period of long diplomatic maneuvers and backroom talks on the terms of resuming the dialogue.

Some experts believe that actions of both the EU and Lukashenka's regime, starting from this point, can be described in terms of conflict resolution studies. Each party will make ever stronger confrontational steps to save face. In this case, Lukashenka's actions will resemble more and more to actions of a person who threw a noose around his neck hoping that someone will stop him and agree with him. The noose in this case is the degree of dependence from Russia.

## **Foreign Policy**

The authorities will retaliate to the sanctions mainly in the foreign policy area, and less so in the domestic sphere.

Lukashenka's regime will try and convince the West that in response to the expansion of sanctions it will intensify cooperation with Russia.

At the same time, the authorities will try and use the deterioration of relations with the West for persuading Moscow into stepping up its economic support.

In fact, the authorities will make no concessions to Russia. Together with Kazakhstan, they will block the initiatives of the Russian leaders to strengthen the centralization in the framework of the newly created Eurasian Union.

In 2012, the Russian leadership will hardly push for more concessions on the part of Lukashenka's regime. They will not demand to sell Belarusian enterprises to Russian companies and to establish a monetary union.

In 2012, the most pressing foreign policy issue for Putin's administration will be relations with Ukraine. Russia will put pressure on Ukraine in order to buy its gas transportation system. It will push Ukraine into the Customs Union.

Putin's administration will use cooperation with Belarus as an advertisement for Ukraine. However, Moscow will not satisfy Lukashenka's request to increase the volume of subsidies.

### **Domestic Policy**

In the domestic policy sphere, Lukashenka's regime will exert pressure on the EU position by using the methods it uses now. It puts pressure on political prisoners, including using criminals. The authorities made it more difficult for opposition activists and NGO leaders included on its "black list" to go to EU countries.

Repression against opposition groups, which the authorities believe to be involved in the attempt to storm the Government House on December 19, 2010, continues.

If the EU remains consistent and decisive and expands the economic sanctions, it will not lead to a change of power in Belarus: opposition is divided, it is represented by conflicting groups and does not have a leader or a program. In its current capacity, opposition is unable to form a well-functioning government.

However, acting in such fashion, one can force the authorities into implementing changes in Belarus. The first such step should be the release of the political prisoners.

### **No Good Solutions**

If the EU backs down and agrees to Lukashenka's terms, it is most probable that the political prisoners who are now in jail will be released. But then, at the next turn of the cycle of relations between Lukashenka's regime and the EU (thaw – tension) their place in jail will be taken by others.

A certain advantage of Lukashenka's regime in its relations with the West is that for the West, the political decision-making and decision-implementing system in Belarus is a "black box". Until now, an opinion is widespread that Belarus is a de facto super-absolute monarchy. Everything is decided and controlled by one person, Lukashenka.

On Lukashenka's team, there are people who know well how the huge bureaucratic machine of the EU works. There is a great deal of open information about what is said and what is planned to be done in Brussels, as well as about what Brussels and the capitals of some EU countries, which are interested in Belarus, are afraid of. Now, Lukashenka's team will push these buttons, these vulnerable pins of the EU. They know that in the West they are afraid of:

1. Pushing Lukashenka towards Russia.
2. Provoking a broad wave of repression.

3. Causing negative attitude towards opposition from people who are not happy with consequences of the EU sanctions.

4. Provoking growth of anti-Western and pro-Russian sentiments in Belarusian society.

Moreover, businesses in some EU countries, primarily in Lithuania and Latvia, will suffer as a result of sanctions against Belarusian companies. According to some Lithuanian experts, the annual losses of Lithuania as a result of introduction of large-scale EU economic sanctions would amount to about \$2bn. According to some Latvian experts, the annual losses of Latvia would amount to \$500m.

However, the Belarusian authorities are not going to foster anti-Western hysteria in society for several reasons. First, even in the present-day situation, they believe that the main threat is not generated by the West with all its demands to release political prisoners. They are pretty sure it comes from Russia who is interested in buying Belarusian enterprises and securely attaching Belarus to itself.

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## **Russia and the Travel Ban, EU Ambassadors Return, Political Prisoners – Politics and Civil Society Digest**

□While Moscow has confirmed that those on the Belarus authorities' exit ban list will be unable to leave Russia either, official Minsk started to show willingness to release



prisoners. It was also hinted that Belarusian Ambassadors to Brussels and Warsaw may return soon. Just in advance of this, Russia announced that it will be lowering the flow of cured oil to Druzhba pipeline and ship more crude to Europe via the BTS 2 terminal at Saint Petersburg. Belarus and Russia continue their “airline” conflict as well.

Belarusian civil society organisations peak this week with civic education events. Topics vary from leadership through assistance to HIV vulnerable groups to registration and security issues for civil society organisations.

## Politics

**Russia will support the Belarusian government in barring citizens from leaving Belarus.** Russian Border Services Chief Vladimir Pronichev has announced that Belarusian citizens barred from leaving the country [will not be allowed](#) to use Russian territory for travelling to other countries. According to Pronichev, any Belarusian citizen, who is not allowed to leave his country will be stopped both by Belarusian and Russian border guards on the countries' borders.

**EU ambassadors returning to Belarus?** On March 30, the Brussels-based online newspaper [EUobserver](#) reported that EU ambassadors are to return en bloc to Belarus shortly after the Easter break, “unless President Alexander Lukashenka does something drastic in the meantime”.

**Minsk started to show willingness of release prisoners.** In the near future the decision to [pardon opposition prisoners](#), convicted of the events on December 19, 2010, can be made, said President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenka at the government session held on 5 April to discuss foreign policy matters. At the meeting Lukashenka also noted Belarus did not expel the EU ambassadors, but will consider [their return on a name-to-name basis](#).

The most likely reason is the Russia beginning to apply pressure. The old days of [making hard currency of refined crude](#) seem to be over, so the real fight between Russia and Belarus may kick off soon. "[Airline wars](#)" are already a conflict in full swing.

**Why Vital Rymasheuski was not detained** is the most debated issue of the reported week. [Narodnaya Volya](#) "revealed" that in the same compartment, where Sergei Kalyakin, Anatoly Lebedko and Alexander Atroshchankau were detained, Vital Rymasheuski, who was with them, got to Moscow and then to Brussels. At the same time [Rymasheuski claims](#) that the authorities allow to travel abroad only to their lobbyists.

**Kavalenka is forcibly fed in prison clinic.** Jailed Belarusian opposition activist [Syarhey Kavalenka](#), whose health has deteriorated due to a lengthy hunger strike, reportedly is being forcibly fed in a prison psychiatric clinic in the eastern city of Vitsebsk. Prison officials told Kavalenka's relatives on April 2 that Kavalenka's state of health is "close to grave" and a decision was made to feed him forcibly with a milk formula using a feeding tube. [Belarusian Helsinki Committee](#) asked the procurator's office to inspect conditions of Kavalenka's keeping in hospital.

**Lebedko Reelected Leader of United Civil Party.** [Anatoly Lebedko](#) was reelected as chairperson of the United Civil Party (UCP) in a secret ballot at the party's convention held in Minsk on March 31. At the suggestion of Lebedko, participants elected Lew Marholin, Lyudmila Petsina and Antanina Kavalyova to be deputy chairpersons of the UCP.

Civil Society

**Workshop for culture CSOs.** On April 6, the Office of European

Expertise and Communications (OEEC, Minsk), in collaboration with the Office for Democratic Belarus (Brussels) and EuroBelarus (Vilnius) conducted a workshop for representatives of the Belarusian CSOs working in cultural area. The participants received information on opportunities for cooperation with European partners and organisations and learned about various thematic European programs. The meeting took place in the Gallery Ź in Minsk. *According to the OEEC newsletter.*

**Presentation of the Marketplace.** On April 09, at 3 pm the Minsk International Educational Center IBB hosts a presentation of the [Capacity Building Marketplace](#) ORGCONSULTING.BY. Marketplace is a joint project of a number of key Belarusian CSOs and is developed as a platform for providing consulting services to CSOs on the basis of market mechanisms. The presentation is conducted for consultants and experts in the field of organizational development and aimed at engaging them to work on the Marketplace platform.

**Face Gallery of the campaign "Budzma!"** Website [budzma.org](http://budzma.org) presents a new section "[Faces](#)" where it is possible to meet with prominent personalities of the campaign "Budzma Belarusians!" who push it forward and actively promote Belarusian culture. The circle of participants of the project is very broad: businessmen, public figures, advertisers, historians, and managers.

**Award named Lev Sapieha.** On April 4, at Warsaw University analyst [Ales Lahvinets](#) was awarded with the Lev Sapieha prize, which is given for outstanding contribution to the development of civil society and building of an independent and democratic Belarus. During the year Lahvinets will have the possibility to conduct lectures in five Polish universities, that are the founders of the award.

**Young Front addresses MPs concerning death penalty moratorium.** Civil organisation "[Young Front](#)", registered in the Czech

Republic, addressed all members of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus with the demand to initiate a vote on introducing a death penalty moratorium in Belarus.

**The first Bible in the modern Belarusian language.** In January 2012, [the Bible Society](#) of Belarus issued the first Bible in the modern Belarusian language. Work on the book lasted for 10 years.

**School of nurses in Gomel.** Gomel NGO "[Social Projects](#)" will prepare 30 qualified nurses out of active senior citizens and students to care for people in need. The project is implemented under the program "The Meeting Place is Dialogue" with the support of the German Foundation "Memory, Responsibility and Future".

**Training on security issues.** The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs (Lithuania) is recruiting for an in-depth training on the security of social activism. Participants will learn about approaches and special software that help to work more safely and effectively in unfavourable conditions. Dates of workshops: April-May 2012. The venue will be shared with only to selected participants. *According to [belngo.info](#) newsletter.*

**Workshop on CSOs registration.** On April 16, in the Minsk Legal Transformation Center and the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs will organize a workshop entitled "Creating and registering non-profit organizations." The trainers are experienced lawyers in the Belarusian non-profit law, Olga Smolyanka and Yuri Chausov. The workshop invites participation from representatives with initiative that are going to start registration of a nonprofit organization. *According to the newsletter of Legal Transformation Center.*

**Educational course on work with HIV vulnerable groups.** NGO "ACT" and Youth Education Center "Fialta" launched a [long-term training course](#) for specialists in the field of HIV on work

with hard to reach and vulnerable groups (sex partners of injection drug users, clients of sex business workers and their regular sex partners, etc). The course is held with support from a grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

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## Freedom Day, Arbitrary Detentions and Travel Bans – Belarus Politics Digest

Although Belarusian authorities permitted and did not interfere with the annual Freedom Day opposition rally in the centre of Minsk, the pressure against opposition activists is increasing. Multiple detentions leading to short-term prison terms are now coupled with restrictions on travelling abroad for pro-democracy activists. The life of political prisoner Siarhey Kavalyou who has been on a long hunger strike is in danger.

**Pro-democratic supporters mark BNR anniversary with demonstration.** An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 people took part in a “[Dzen Voli](#)” (Freedom Day) demonstration that was held in Minsk on March 25 to mark 94 years since the proclamation of the 1918 Belarusian National Republic (BNR). No arrests were reported during the demonstration, which had been sanctioned by the Minsk City Executive Committee. According to witnesses,

police acted politely.

**100 detained in benefit concert over drug suspicion.** On March 24, [around a hundred people](#) have been reportedly detained during a concert in support of the “Food Not Bombs” international campaign held in Minsk MTZ Palace of Culture that evening. As a result, 9 people were sentenced to administrative arrests for a period of 2 to 3 days, 7 people – to fines. In this regard [Belarusian human rights activists](#), on the initiative of the Legal Transformation Centre, signed an appeal to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

**Non-political expulsion.** A journalist Ales Gorski investigates a case of dismissal of a civil activist [Nasta Shuleyka](#) from the Belarusian State University. He cites the words of the former student who agrees with the decision of the administration and claims that she was expelled for very valid reasons – a lot of missing of lectures and the “non-admission” to the exam session. Belarusian and international press extensively wrote that her dismissal was political.

**Two more independent journalists warned by prosecutor.** BAJ members Alina Radachynskaya and Volha Chaychyts were officially [summoned](#) to the prosecutor’s office of Minsk on the morning of March 28. The journalists are accused of collaboration with “Belsat” TV-channel and warn against work for independent mass media in Belarus without accreditation. In 2012 already 8 warnings have been issued to independent journalists.

**Ivashkevich warned for sanctions call.** Belarusian opposition politician [Viktar Ivashkevich](#) has been warned against the actions that may be aimed at “undermining the state sovereignty”. The warning to the politician was issued in the Prosecutor General's Office on March 27.

Political prisoners

**Hunger strike caused irreversible damage to Kavalenka's health?** Referring to [Syarhey Kavalenka](#)'s lawyer, who met with the client on March 29, the activist's wife has sounded an alarm over the rapidly deteriorating health of the imprisoned opposition activist, saying that his lengthy hunger strike has already caused "irreversible" damage to his internal organs.

**"Young Front" members sentenced to long terms of arrest.** On March 11, "Young Front" activists were tried at the Leninski District Court of Minsk. Dzmitry Kramianetski, Mikhail Muski, Uladzimir Yaromenka and Raman Vasiljieu were given [15 days of administrative arrest](#), though they had already spent three days in a detention centre. So, each of them was given 18 days of arrest. The activists were tried for an action near the MFA headquarters. Anonymous people threw toilet paper at the building to show their protest against the agency's pro-Russian policies and expelling foreign diplomats from Belarus.

**Syarhey Kavalenka set to continue his hunger strike until he is released.** The wife of [Syarhey Kavelenka](#) has filed a fresh appeal with the Prosecutor General's Office, asking it to replace the opposition activist's prison term with a non-custodial sentence. Alena Kavalenka submitted the appeal after meeting with her husband at Detention Centre No.1 in Minsk on March 12. According to the wife, Syarhey Kavelenka is set to continue the hunger strike.

Travel Ban

**Three key opposition politicians sentenced to fines.** Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civil Party; Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the "Spravedlivy Mir (Just World) and Alyaksandr Atroshchankaw, a member of European Belarus, who were arrested and taken off a Moscow-bound train by police early on March 28 were [sentenced to fines](#) on March 29. They had planned to travel from Moscow to Brussels for meetings with European Commission representatives before they

were arrested in Orsha on their way to the Russian capital.

**Lukashenka promises to maximally expand travel-banned list.** [Alexander Lukashenka](#) has declared that the country has a list of the travel banned opposition activists, which is not operating to its maximum though. Lukashenka added that it was decided to prevent the opposition of Belarus from leaving the country because they had contributed to the introduction of sanctions by Western countries against the official Minsk.

Currently there are evidence about nearly a dozen Belarusian opposition politicians, civil society activists and independent journalists have been denied permission to cross the Belarusian border, including former parliament speaker [Stanislav Shushkevich](#), the United Civic Party Chairman [Anatol Lebedka](#), BAJ Chairwoman [Zhanna Litvina](#), Belarusian Helsinki Committee Chairman [Aleh Hulak](#) and others.

**Travel ban for civil society activists.** Starting from the early March, nearly a dozen (so far confirmed) Belarusian opposition politicians, civil society activists and independent journalists have been denied permission to cross the Belarusian border without being given an explanation. Among them there are human rights defender [Valentin Stefanovich](#), Platforma Chairman [Andrei Bandarenka](#), Nasha Niva Editor-in-Chief [Andrey Dynko](#), and over then other people. Although authorities deny the existence of a no-exit blacklist, [activists say](#) the exit denials appear to be a response to the EU's sanctions against individuals in the regime of Lukashenka.

**Former director of IBB Astrid Sahm denied entry to Belarus.** On March 18, the former German director of the IBB "Johannes Rau" in Minsk, [Astrid Sahm](#) was not allowed to enter Belarus. Sahm had a Belarusian visa and flew to Minsk on the affairs of the charity NGO "Hope". Rainer Lindner, Head of the German-Belarus Society [condemned](#) in the denial in a public [statement](#).



International

**Fule launches dialogue with Belarusian society.** On March 29, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule launched [the European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarusian society](#) at a meeting in Brussels with representatives of Belarusian civil society and political opposition. This follows the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council last week welcoming the idea of launching such a dialogue with the Belarusian society.

**European Parliament adopted resolution on Belarus.** On March 29, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Belarus at the meeting in Brussels. [The full document](#) is published on the site of the European Parliament (see part 2, pp.28-32). The resolution condemns "the deteriorating situation as regards human rights and fundamental freedoms, combined with the lack of deep democratic and economic reforms in Belarus, and will continue to oppose the repression of the regime's opponents."

**Estonia allocated €100 thousand to Belarusian civil society.** [The Estonian Foreign Ministry](#) has allocated €100 thousand to support civil society in Belarus. According to ambassador of Estonia to Belarus Jaak Lensment, this amount is pretty small, but can do many useful things when used properly.

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# Opposition Activists Face Travel Restrictions – Digest of Belarusian Politics

Belarusian authorities create problems for opposition activists who are crossing Belarusian borders. Isolation of the country is increasing. Following the departure of EU ambassadors, the IMF decided not to have any resident representative in Belarus and the country's representatives were missing at an Eastern Partnership meeting in Prague.

**Anatoly Lebedko not allowed to leave Belarus.** On 7 March, United Civil Party leader Anatoly Lebedko [was not allowed](#) to leave the territory of the European Union on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. According to the politician, he was detained at the border checkpoint Kamenny Loh under restriction to leave Belarus. Two other opposition leaders – Siarhei Kaliakin and Viktor Karnienka were not allowed to cross the border. They subsequently managed to get to Lithuania, presumably through Russia.

**Belarusian customs detained Alexander Dobrovolsky.** On 7 March, the United Civil Party member [Alexander Dobrovolsky](#) was detained at the border with Lithuania. Dobrovolsky went to Minsk from a working meeting in Vilnius. Belarusian customs invited him to a separate customs control, resulting in Dobrovolsky having to wait overnight for the next train to Minsk.

**Syarhey Kavalenka set to continue his hunger strike until he is released.** [Syarhey Kavalenka](#) is determined to continue his hunger strike until he is released. The opposition activist is currently in a prison hospital in Minsk, since the beginning of his hunger strike he lost 30 kilo. On 24 February, a district judge in Vitsyebsk sentenced Kavalenka to two years

and one month in a low security correctional institution on a charge of violating probation rules.

**Young opposition activist Ivan Shyla to spend 22 days in jail.**

Young opposition activist [Ivan Shyla](#) has been placed in the detention centre on Akrestsina Street for 22 days to serve earlier imposed jail terms. The deputy chairperson of a Czech-registered youth group called Malady Front was arrested in Minsk on February 14 near the office of the Belarusian PEN Centre, where Malady Front activists were scheduled to present the "I Love Belarus" award.

**BAJ urges to abolish warnings to its members.** On 2 March, the Belarusian Association of Journalists [submitted](#) an official letter to the Hrodna regional prosecutor, Viktor Marozau, in which the difference between freelance journalists and foreign media journalists is explained. The reason for the letter was a series of warnings to BAJ members Mikalai Dziachenia, Aliaksandr Dzianisau, Viktor Parfionenka and Hrazhyna Shalkevich for work with foreign media without official accreditation.

**Ministry of Justice refused to register BCD.** Ministry of Justice took a final decision [to deny registration](#) to the Belarusian Christian Democracy party (BCD). Considering the BCD documents, the Ministry of Justice has found a number of inconsistencies and contradictions. BCD also announced that on February 17 all party [websites were blocked](#).

Foreign Affairs

**Appeal to LT Foreign Minister.** [VISA-FREE Coalition](#) "Go Europe! Go Belarus!" appealed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Audronius Ažubalis to support further steps to promote people-to-people contacts and facilitation of ties between Lithuania and Belarus. The Coalition proposes to amend the legislation of Lithuania to allow the consular offices of the country to regularly issue short-term multi-entry Schengen

visas with a validity of five years, rather than one year, as is still provided. The appeal was signed by NGOs, initiatives and campaigns from Lithuania, Belarus and other countries.

**U.S. supports expansion of the European Union sanctions against Belarus.** This was [stated](#) by the U.S. representative to the OSCE, Ian Kelly, during a video conference on 2 March. He says that sanctions, being far not the main instrument of influence on official Minsk, should demonstrate the Belarusian authorities that they have chosen the wrong path of self-isolation.

**Lukashenka warns EU of harsh response to sanctions.** On 4 March, [speaking](#) on the sidelines of an annual ski race involving top government officials, Lukashenka described as "absolute hysteria" the European Union's latest move to extend the list of Belarusian citizens subject to entry bans and asset freezes. Lukashenka went so far as to apparently mock the sexuality of openly gay German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle. "It's better to be a dictator than gay," he said.

**National Platform Statement.** On 2 March, Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum [adopted a Statement](#) in which expressed their deep concern at the diplomatic conflict between the authorities of Belarus and the European Union. NP urged the leaders of Belarus and the European Union to hold from further conflict escalation and transforming it into an exchange of blows according to the principle "an eye for an eye".

**Belarus absent at Eastern Partnership meeting in Prague.** No representatives of Belarus arrived in Prague to attend a 5 March [meeting of the foreign ministers](#) of the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership countries. Vit Kolar, spokesman for the Czech foreign ministry, said that Belarus had been invited to send a deputy foreign minister to the meeting.

**IMF Won't Replace Resident Representative in Belarus.** [The](#)

[International Monetary Fund](#) will not replace its representative in Belarus after April, suggesting that having a resident in place was having little impact in the crisis-hit former Soviet republic.

**KGB chairman to travel to Rome despite EU entry ban.** [Vadzim Zaytsev](#), chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB) who is subject to the European Union's entry ban, is expected to travel to Rome for an official meeting.

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## **Faces of Belarusian Politics: Viktar Lukashenka**

Viktar Lukashenka is a big enigma. The 36 year-old lieutenant-colonel and the oldest son of the current ruler is rumoured to be the next leader of Belarus.

Although Lukashenka has three sons, only Viktar acts as a political figure. Since Viktar became National Security Aide to his father, many analysts have come to explain every move inside the regime in terms of Viktar's influence.

On his trips to Arab countries Viktar Lukashenka meets future successors of Arab leaders as his counterparts. But his father does not intend to step down anytime soon. He is just 57 and has no evident health problems. Viktar may have to bide his time.

**Grooming the Next President?**

Viktar Lukashenka has been a successor in the making for many years. In the 1990s, he studied at the International Relations Department of the Belarus State University, the most prestigious school in Belarus. Already at that time, Viktar displayed his ambitions in a documentary made by NTV channel. When he and his younger brother Dzmitry were asked whether they could imagine replacing their father as president, Viktar said, "Why not?" Dzmitry replied with a firm "no."

After completing his studies, Viktar first served in the Border Guards. Viktar claims that he belonged to the special forces unit, but it is rumoured that he was assigned to the regular staff in Minsk. In a rare interview, he hinted at his participation in operations planning.

From the Border Guards, he switched to the Foreign Ministry, where he worked in 2001-03 in the Western Europe Department. From there, Viktar jumped into a new role as chief of the foreign department at Agat, a state-owned corporation that handles defence contracts for automated control systems.

In 2005, President Lukashenka appointed his 29 year-old son as his National Security Aide, a position created just for him. In 2007, Viktar joined the Security Council, a high-level organ of the regime. By that time he became involved in sensitive dealings. He regularly visited Libya, Oman, and some other Middle Eastern nations, meeting mostly top leadership and security officials.

Although Viktar kept a low profile, opponents of the regime started to publicly discuss Viktar as a prospective president after he became National Security Aide. Speaking to *Le Monde* in 2007, Lukashenka explained, "When I appointed my son to be my assistant, I wanted to open additional channels to get information. No head of state can have absolute trust in his followers, so my son helps me."



## **Rise to Power**

Political analyst Andrei Liakhovich believes that Viktor shaped major reshuffles among Lukashenka's top officials in 2007-08. Some important regime figures lost their influence and offices. Among them was regime grey eminence Viktor Sheiman, Secretary of the Security Council. Viktor's friends gained influential offices, first of all Uladzimir Makiej, the current chief of the Presidential Administration.

Viktor consolidated his power and promoted his confidants from the Border Guards and KGB Brest Section to influential positions. Lukashenka junior also played different government organs off against one another. He allied with the Internal Ministry against the KGB, which resulted in the appointment of Vadzim Zaytsau, Viktor's close friend, as new chief of the KGB.

Viktor then relied on the KGB while trying to overtake other agencies. In 2009, a former ally, Interior minister Uladzimir Naumau, was dismissed. Even so, the Interior remained beyond Viktor's control. Only in late 2011, after the [arrest](#) of the Deputy Internal Minister Yauhien Poludzien and dismissal of another Deputy Minister, one of them was replaced by a former KGB member and confidant of Viktor's. By that time, Viktor had already formed his own security agency – the Operative-Analytical Centre of the President.

## **Accused of Political Suppression**

The Operative-Analytical Centre focuses on surveillance in IT sphere but is also dealing with corruption and political

dissent. It soon took measures to enforce control over the Internet. For instance, in 2010, the government adopted changes in Internet regulation prepared by the Centre. They caused negative reaction in the society. But the situation with Internet did not change significantly and repressive intentions of the new structure of Viktor Lukashenka have been largely exaggerated.

In September 2011, Lukashenka created the Investigative Committee – a new agency to take over the investigative functions of the Internal Ministry, the Public Prosecution Office, and the Committee of State Control. The move provoked a new wave of speculation that the president was looking to strengthen Viktor's position. But as political analyst Alyaksey Myadvietski has pointed out, there is little evidence of this, and indeed, "almost every significant change of officials in security agencies is explained now by Viktor's influence.



Is Viktor demonised? The *Charter 97* web site believes that he was engaged in a crackdown on protests after the last presidential elections. Opposition activist Uladzimir Baradach has said that Viktor's "personal team" might be behind the terrorist attack in the Minsk subway. But again there are no facts to back up these claims.

Indeed, according to cables published by Wikileaks, US diplomat Jonathan Moore has characterised Viktor as adamant but attentive and polite after meeting him in 2008. In public, Viktor has been courteous and allowed the public to freely take pictures of him. In a 2008 document on the Border Guards, Viktor seemed to feel uneasy about all the attention he was getting.

## **Dynastic Rule**



For the time being, Lukashenka's oldest son seems too weak politically to run the country. He lacks his father's charisma, and has yet to prove his administrative abilities. However, in the post-Soviet space, the Azerbaijani precedent of power succession within one family suggests that Viktor's chances as successor should not be underestimated.

Hardly anyone believed that the current president of Azerbaijan would last even one year – Ilham Aliyev was known more for his casino exploits and embezzlement than for political achievements. But he succeeded.

Of course, Belarus is not Azerbaijan and has different traditions. Viktor also has one major weakness compared to Ilham – his lack of international recognition. Ilham served as Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe before assuming office as president. Viktor's biggest international achievement so far was to land on the EU travel ban list.

Most probably, there is no succession plan at this point. Lukashenka is eager to retain power for as long as possible. He even jokes that his youngest son Mikalai – now seven years old – will be the president. Unlike Mikalai, however, Viktor grew up at a time when his father was not yet president. That makes him different from those dictators' children who have never seen the world without bodyguards.

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## **Svetlana Naumova Awards – Belarus Civil Society Digest**

□ In the context of the high level political scandals a surprising number of new civil society developments takes

place in Belarus. Belarusian NGOs launched new campaigns moving on social responsibility and institutionalising its networks. The civil sector activities covered education, business, targeted better social inclusion as well as police misconduct.

**Svetlana Naumova awards.** On 1 March, [the awards ceremony](#) named in honour of Svetlana Naumova, a prominent political scholar who passed away last year, took place in Minsk. The award was established by the civil campaign "Tell the Truth" and given in three categories – "Journalism", "Analytics" and "Hope." This year winners are Svetlana Kalinkina, chief editor of the Narodnaya Volya Valeria Kastsyuhova, editor of the website "Nashe mneniye", and Nasta Palazhanka, deputy chairwoman of the "Young Front".

**National platform institutionalised.** 34 Belarusian civil society organisations signed a Memorandum of Cooperation and became [permanent members of EaP CSF National Platform](#). Now they have the opportunity to vote on the procedural and strategic issues of the National Platform. Among the signers there are Consortium "EuroBelarus", Ecodom, Legal Transformation Centre, Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers, Association for Long-Life Education, Human Rights Center "Viasna", RADA, etc.

## Education & Research

**OEEC round table.** On February 29, Office of European expertise and communication (OEEC) together with the Brussels-based "Office for Democratic Belarus" held a round table "[European support for higher education in Belarus](#)" in Minsk. The debate between the governmental bodies and NGOs has shown that there is no unity in the understanding of the principles of the Bologna process in the Belarusian academic community.

**Hrodna Center "Third Sector" presents an educational program BY\_HUB.** On 17-18 March Hrodna [hosts](#) a training "How Internet

technologies can help to achieve personal and organisational goals", which launches an educational program [BY\\_HUB](#). The program invites to participation NGO representatives, journalists, bloggers who are interested in learning of modern communication technologies.

**International Congress of Belarusian Studies.** On 28-30 September International Congress of Belarusian Studies will [take place](#) in Kaunas (Lithuania). It is an annual meeting of Belarusian and foreign scientists, experts, analysts, representatives of public institutions engaged in Belarusian studies. International Congress of Belarusian Studies is organised by a Consortium of academic and expert organisations of Belarus, Lithuania, Poland and other countries, including Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere", BISS, Internet newspaper "New Europe", etc.

## Business

**Assembly of business circles.** On 29 February, Minsk hosted XIII Assembly of Business Circles of Belarus "[To modernization – Together.](#)" The event was attended by businessmen and representatives of 46 business associations. The event was organised by Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers, Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship, with the support of the Council for Business Development. The Assembly adopted a draft "National Business Platform of Belarus – 2012" developed to facilitate improvement of business climate in the country.

**The right on social responsibility.** On 28 February, International Socio-Economic Foundation "Idea" conducted a talk show "[1% Project: The Right to Social Responsibility](#)". The talk show's participants discussed the need for a law on social responsibility, and also got acquainted with the results of national research "Social Responsibility of the Modern Belarusian Business" commissioned by the Fund at the

end of 2011. The talk-show, [covered on the national television](#), was attended by representatives of business companies, NGOs, government agencies and [journalists](#).

## Police

**The chiefs of the colonies can be added to the EU blacklist.** Non-profit institution [Platforma](#) declares that it will ask EU to include in a travel ban list representatives of prisons and detention centres, involved in torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against Belarusians.

**Legal experts, rights defenders criticise Belarusian police.** On 1 March, prominent legal experts and rights defenders voiced criticism of the Belarusian police at a [conference in Minsk](#). In particular, Mikhail Pastukhow, a former judge of the Constitutional Court, stressed that the Belarusians 'must think about how to make the police safe for the public, how to make them serve public interests and law exclusively.'

## Social inclusion

**Review "Poverty and Social Inclusion in Belarus."** The most important social issues were analysed in a pilot study, "Poverty and Social Inclusion in Belarus", prepared by economists of [the IPM Research Center](#). Economists have analysed the poverty level in Belarus, identified the most vulnerable groups, and also examined the effectiveness of existing social transfers.

**Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities launches a No Barriers banner campaign.** On 1 March 2012 the Disability Rights Office launched a [No Barriers banner campaign](#) on four major

Belarusian websites: tut.by, ej.by, naviny.by and interfax.by. The banners will appear on a daily basis on at least two of these websites (rotating), except for weekends and holidays. Over the next month the total of four banners will call Belarusian citizens' attention to mental and physical

barriers, as well as issues that persons of disabilities are facing in employment and education.

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## **The Logic of Sanctions and Engagement**

The recent pull-out of EU ambassadors from Minsk signals the deeply troubled relations between Belarus and the West. The amended and updated Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2011 that was signed by US President Barack Obama in January outlines the official policy and maintains sanctions that have been in place for several years.

The proposed goals of the West, however, remain largely unfulfilled. The increased isolation has affected Belarus as a whole and despite the clear messages sent to denounce violations of human rights and democratic norms, civil society remains very weak and Belarus' economy has become even more anchored to Russian subsidies. In the months ahead a clear strategy must be developed that goes beyond sanctions and intimidation.

### **The EU Exits Belarus**

On 27 February, the EU passed further sanctions through blacklisting an additional 21 individuals, all of whom are

Minsk city officials. In response the Belarusian regime promptly requested the EU's delegation leader in Belarus Maira Mora and the Polish ambassador Leszek Szarepka to leave. That escalated into a wholesale withdrawal of all EU ambassadors from Minsk.

The fresh EU sanctions are meant to renew pressure on Belarus to release its political prisoners, many of whom were detained as a result of their involvement in the protests following the December 2010 presidential elections. UK Foreign Secretary William Hague reasserted this point and the position of the EU. The United States made statement of solidarity with the EU shortly thereafter. The bottom line: release all political prisoners and allow civil society to flourish.

In the wake of their withdrawal, EU officials have taken a hard-line in response to Belarus' accusations of its 'hysterical' reaction. Hungarian Ambassador Ferentz Contra stated that he personally felt that a condition of their return would be, 'the release of political prisoners and their rehabilitation.' The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland demanded the same and also said they would consider introducing further sanctions. Lithuanian foreign minister echoed the position of other EU nations stating that 'normalisation of relations between the EU and Belarus is in the hands of Belarus.'

It is clear that the EU is frustrated with the situation in Belarus. Little progress has been made from their perspective. Previous sanctions have worked to further isolate Belarus. The removal of its diplomatic missions, which appear to be temporary at the moment, shows a deep commitment to this policy. This fatigued policy, however, does not appear to be strengthening civil society nor democratic freedoms in Belarus.

The addition of 21 officials to a list of 200 is a symbolic gesture, as is the withdrawal of the EU member-state

ambassadors. Similar actions in the past have done little to serve civil society, nor strengthen the democratic institutions of Belarus. The absence of any western diplomatic mission ahead of the parliamentary elections due to take place this fall surely cannot be the best means of supporting Belarusian civil society.

The absence of any western diplomatic mission ahead of the parliamentary elections due to take place this fall surely cannot be the best means of supporting Belarusian civil society.

Therefore any continuation of this policy would have to be coupled with new approaches.

### **The Role of Russia**

As painful as it may be for the EU and the US, Russia is and will remain a very important entity in Belarus. Western diplomats often admit to being exasperated with the Kremlin, but including Russia in talks in reforming Belarus are long overdue. The question that remains is how to do so.

There are certain areas that Russia is already cooperating with the West on and will likely continue to do so. The most prominent examples of this cooperation are the US and Russia signing of a new START treaty ratified in 2010, the EU-Russia energy partnership, and the efforts between the US, EU and Russia to accelerate Russia's WTO ascension.

On the other hand, discussions revolving political prisoners and the health of Belarus' democracy are clearly off the table. Russia keeps the Belarusian economy alive with generous subsidies which undermine the Western pressure to reform. Russia is in the midst of its own war with what Putin has deemed 'foreign interests', the West, trying to interfere in Russia's domestic affairs. Similar critiques from the West towards Belarus simply reinforce the Kremlin's message.

## **Engaging Belarusians**

The most vital and overlooked component to creating a more democratic and free Belarus is the citizenry itself. Numerous official decrees from the West state their solidarity with the Belarusian people time and time again. However, the simple fact that most of Belarusians know nothing of the speeches of foreign presidents or ministers. The West should not only devise new sanctions against the regime or help the opposition but also take steps for more direct engagement with the people of Belarus.

The most vital and overlooked component to creating a more democratic and free Belarus is the citizenry itself.

What is missing are some concrete and highly visible positive policies directed at Belarusians themselves. Extending support and funding for programmes already in existence in western nations to Belarus is the most obvious option.

Belarusian youth needs more opportunities to study outside of Belarus. Although new initiatives such as the Open Europe Scholarship Scheme emerge, most of the programmes currently in place have either reduced their funding or have ceased to operate in Belarus. Those still working receive far more qualified applicants than can possibly be accepted. By providing a substantial increase in funding for opportunities through scholarships and research grants for Belarusians to study in western universities at the undergraduate and postgraduate level is a clear investment in the future of Belarus.

Volunteering and professional exchange programmes exist in almost every western nation. Individual EU member states and EU institutions can create such programmes operating in Belarus and in western countries for Belarusians. These programmes would ideally come at no cost to its participants, be open to everyone interested and last a month or longer,



depending on the needs of the communities being served.

The introduction of Working Holiday residence permits that would allow recent university graduates to work in a country of their choosing for up to a year. Again, this already exists in many EU countries, but need to be extended to Belarusians.

The most powerful and meaningful policy, however, would be the introduction of a visa-free regime for Belarusians to travel throughout Europe. The high visa fees and complicated procedures currently in place limits on the movement of a majority of Belarusians. They also virtually eliminate their ability to interact with the European community.

All of these initiatives directly connect the Belarusian public and the rest of Europe bypassing the regime in Minsk. They involve very few political risks, are relatively inexpensive, and clearly demonstrate the West's interest in Belarus and its people.

*Devin Ackles*

*Devin Ackles is a Fulbright fellow in Kyiv, Ukraine.*

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## **The Reverse Effect of EU Sanctions**

Last week Gunnar Wiegand from the European Commission announced that the EU was going to extend sanctions against Belarus. 135 more people may be added to the existing list of 208 Belarusian officials who are prohibited to visit the EU. Diplomatic sources also suggest that one or several Belarusian enterprises may be added to the ban list.

Europe wants to show that it cares about the situation in Belarus. Some even hope that Belarusians will soon revolt. But this 'tough love' approach is counterproductive. Despite the worst economic crisis in Belarus since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of those who are willing to protest diminishes. Ironically, the highest number of protesters in this century was in December 2010 when Belarusians were much richer than they are today and Europe pursued the policy of engagement.

The EU Council of Ministers may make its final decision on January 23. Instead of wasting their time and efforts on introducing yet another round of symbolic sanctions, the European Union should come up with fresh ideas how to empower and integrate Belarusian society. The EU should invest into making its presence in Belarus more effective to get enough political and economic leverage to influence the situation there.

### **The Reverse Effect of Sanctions**

The EU imposed its first set of sanctions on 31 January 2011 after fraudulent presidential election and repression of opposition rallies. Then it extended them several times over the year in hope to free political prisoners, including former presidential candidates Andrei Sannikov and Mikalai Statkevich who were sentenced to 5-6 years of imprisonment.

In 2011 American politicians supported the isolation policy and [imposed economic sanctions](#) against important state-owned enterprises JSC Naftan, JSC Grodno Azot, JSC Grodno Khimvolokno and JSC Belshina. On 3 January 2012 US President Barack Obama signed the Act on democracy and human rights in Belarus that is intended to provide additional support for Belarusian civil society. The Act extends existing visa and financial sanctions. It also appeals to the the organizers of the World Ice Hockey Championship 2014 to move it from Belarus

to another country.

Nevertheless, all these actions hardly help Belarus become democratic. Quite the contrary, the human rights situation in Belarus has significantly deteriorated in comparison with that of the period between 2008-2010 when the EU and the USA pursued an engagement policy. For example, this week jailed Belarusian opposition activists were placed under even stricter conditions. Earlier Belarusian authorities restricted the freedom of assembly with the introduction of new legislation that requires permission for any street actions such as flash-mobs or 'silent' protests.

Many EU politicians and some people in Belarus claim that visa sanctions play a great symbolic role. In reality, however, some of those on the EU travel ban list travel to the EU without restrictions to attend events organized by intergovernmental organizations.

Look at the facts: the First Deputy Interior Minister Oleg Pekarsky traveled to Vienna to participate in the UN round table on 24 March 2011. Belarusian TV propagandist Alexey Mikhalchenko visited Lithuania to take part in the OSCE Council of Foreign Ministers summit in December 2011. Finally, Anatoly Kuleshov, Minister of Internal Affairs, made an official visit to the INTERPOL General Secretariat in Lyon earlier this month. Kuleshov is personally responsible for repression of the post-election opposition demonstration.

### **Economic sanctions are a key for change?**

Some isolation policy advocates argue that the only way to change the situation in Belarus is to impose harsh economic sanctions to force the collapse of the Belarusian economy. For years the most radical representatives of the Belarusian opposition hoped for the revolution on economic grounds.

Last year, the worst economic crisis since the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred in Belarus, but [no revolution took](#)

[place](#). The average salary in Belarus is now the lowest in the region. However, Narodny Skhod and other opposition rallies that had been specifically arranged to protest against deterioration of the economic situation gathered less than a thousand people. The numbers were much higher after the presidential elections in December 2010, when there were no sanctions, and people were earning much more and had fewer reasons to be unhappy than today.

Take the Moscow protests as another example. More than 100 000 people participated in December 2011 in the demonstration against the United Russia Party in Moscow, the richest city in the post-Soviet space. This happened because young Russians can easily travel to Europe, actively use the internet and many have a Western education.

Belarusians now have much more practical problems to resolve than changing the regime. There is no time to think about democracy when there is nothing to eat at home.

### **Sanctions Almost Never Work**

Sanctions look like a good and morally correct response to what is happening in Belarus, but international experience [shows](#) that unfortunately they fail to bring the expected results. The Cuban regime has not changed, Iran and North Korea have not stopped in their development of their nuclear programs. The Soviet Union has been dismissed by Soviet leaders themselves, not due to the magical effect of the 1974 US Jackson-Vanik Amendment. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are not very democratic countries today, but it did not impede Kazakhstan from heading the OSCE in 2010 and Azerbaijan to become a Council of Europe member.

What is more important, European and American sanctions just [create favourable conditions](#) for Russia to buy or privatize Belarusian enterprises and other assets for a lower price. Belarusian companies become less attractive to Western

investors when they are included in the ban list. In such situation Belarusian authorities are forced to rely on Russian support for their survival. Consequently, it motivates Belarus to participate in [the Eurasian Union project](#) with Russia and Kazakhstan.

### **Isolation or engagement?**

A new engagement policy intended to foster Belarus-EU ties on all levels could be a better alternative. The EU needs to develop contacts with Belarusian civil servants and businessmen that have a great influence over the situation in the country. At the same time, the EU should increase its support for civil society, reduce visa fees and make a large-scale [expansion](#) of employment, internship and education opportunities for Belarusians. Increased engagement would help more to release political prisoners than yet another round of good old sanctions.

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## **The War of Blacklists – Belarus Politics Digest**

Yesterday a former Belarusian presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich found himself on an INTERPOL blacklist. The Polish authorities had briefly detained him in the Warsaw airport before they found out that he was put on the list by Belarusian authorities who had targeted him for his political activities in Belarus. Mikhalevich was released after the intervention of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As this digest of recent developments show, Belarusian authorities and the European Union use their respective blacklists to restrict "undesired" individuals. Although

Belarusian authorities usually make it easy to exit Belarus, they want to keep certain foreign journalists, NGO activists and politicians out of the country. Inside Belarus, they blacklist undesirable rock groups to prevent them from performing in public and restrict activities of Western NGOs and local opposition activists. The West, on the other hand, [imposes](#) travel bans and asset freezes against those whom they see as playing an active role in human rights violations in Belarus.

**"Blacklisted" Belarusian Reporter could Enter Lithuania.** The correspondent of the Belarusian state TV channel ONT [Aleksei Mikhalchenko](#), targeted by the EU visa sanctions, was able to freely [enter](#) the territory of Lithuania to take part in the coverage of the meeting of the OSCE foreign ministers in Vilnius. As reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, the journalist received the Lithuanian national visa as an exception.

**Members of the Norwegian and Danish PEN Centers were not allowed in Belarus.** On the night of December 05, in Minsk-2 airport representatives of Norwegian Danish PEN Centers were [denied](#) visas. Guests were expected to meet with representatives of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the Belarusian PEN Centre, the Union of Belarusian Writers, local authors and publishers.

**"Black list" of musicians works.** On November 22, musician [Zmitser Vaitsyushkevich](#)'s concert [was canceled](#) a few hours before beginning. The concert was to be held in the café *Mistral* in Minsk. The similar incident occurred with [Lyavon Volski](#) in Brest.

**Belarusian authorities close Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus [confirmed](#) the closure of the Belarusian branch of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung . "We made this decision due to the fact that the Foundation does

not fully meet the criteria of constructive engagement with Belarusian authorities”, – said Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Savinykh. The Belarusian representative office had worked in Minsk since 1997.

**National Bolsheviks Detained in Minsk.** On December 06, in Minsk, two activists of the National Bolshevik Party – Eugeni Kontush and Vladislav Lobov, were detained. Yauhen Kontush is [charged](#) with “disorderly conduct” for alleged spilling a bucket of noodles and scattering leaflets at the entrance of the Belarusian TV and Radio Company on 3 December.

**Tatiana Gatsura fined for performance against the death penalty.** On December 09, the day of her birth, a human rights activist Tatyana Gatsura was [punished](#) by a fine equivalent to approximately \$80 for participation in an unsanctioned action. On December 6, the mother of many children, Tatiana Gatsura, with her two sons came out into the street with a placard "Mr President, I have four children, who is guaranteeing their right to life?"

**Tax officers are interested in the Liabedzkas' income.** As the leader of the United Civil Party Anatol Liabedzka informed the public, his wife and son have [received](#) a notification that they should submit tax declarations.

**Preventive steps before the coming anniversary of 19 December events.** The prosecutor’s office of Leninski district of Minsk has issued an official warning to the ex-presidential candidate [Uladzimir Niakliayeu](#). The politician could be sent into prison, in the event that he intends to continue to violate the rules of conduct set for him, the same rules set for a convicted person. On December 06, [Nasta Palazhanka](#), the “Young Front” deputy head, was asked by police if her place of residence changed.

**Pickets banned.** On December 10, International Human Rights

Day, human rights activists applied for holding pickets in several cities in Belarus. The pickets were banned in [Brest](#), [Borisov](#), [Vitebsk](#), [Molodechno](#), [Gomel](#).

**“11+3” List.** Now in prison there are not less than ELEVEN political prisoners: ex-presidential candidates Andrey Sannikov, Nikolay Statkevich; leader of the campaign “European Belarus” Dmitry Bondarenko; Pavel Seviarynets; Head of the Human Rights Centre “Viasna” Ales Byalyatsky; youth leaders Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobov; entrepreneur Mikalai Autukhovich. Anarchists Igor Olinevich, [Mikalai Dziadok](#) and Alexander Frantskevich are [recognized](#) as political prisoners of the Belarusian regime by human rights defenders at *Viasna* and *BHC*. Three more anarchists from Bobrujsk – Yauhen Vaskovich, Pavel Syramalotau and Artiom Prakapenka – are currently under [discussion](#).

**Foreign Ministry Receives Recommendations of UN Committee Against Torture.** The Belarusian foreign ministry has [received](#) the recommendations of the UN Committee Against Torture, the ministry's spokesman, Andrey Savinykh, said at a briefing on December 8. In its concluding observations released following the November 11 and 14 meetings of the Committee Against Torture, which saw representatives of the Belarusian government and of rights organizations [deliver](#) diametrically opposed reports on the situation in Belarus, the Committee called on the Belarusian government to promptly investigate all reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees.

*Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.*



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# Getting the Travel Ban Right

Lukashenka invites the West to participate in a "tug of war" with Russia. He wants to persuade the West that Belarus is significantly strengthening cooperation with Russia, and thus push the West towards cooperating on his terms: extension of loans, development of trade and economic cooperation without significant steps towards political liberalization. Russia's generous loans, heavily discounted gas prices and imprisonment of Bialiatski are two recent steps in this game.

Despite some emotional reactions in Belarus, the new Eurasian economic integration does not mean significant changes in relations between Belarus and Russia. Lukashenka expects increased subsidies from Russia, including lower energy prices, and also improved conditions for Belarusian exports.

At the same time, he refuses to meet a number of commitments towards Russia, undertaken by Belarus as Russia's partner in the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space. He refuses to sell enterprises to Russian companies and thus to make the first important step towards the genuine integration, as it is seen by Moscow. He refuses to open the Belarusian market to exports of integration partners from the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space.

This blackmail against the West is successful to some extent. The West is afraid ofing push Lukashenka into the arms of Russia. However, the threats by the West to expand the list of banned Belarusian officials play into Lukashenka's hands. It is in his interests that his fortress has a larger garrison, which would defend itself to the last round.

On 14 November 2011, the EUobserver on-line periodical

(Brussels) reported with a reference to information sources in EU diplomatic circles that the EU could include the Prime Minister of Belarus Mikhail Miasnikovich, the First Vice-Premier of Belarus Uladzimir Siamashka, and the Head of State Border Committee of Belarus Ihar Rachkouski on the existing visa ban list.

## **Businessmen**

Moreover, it was noted by EUobserver that Lukashenka's close business allies might find themselves on the list as well. The group of candidates consists of Triple Co. owner Yury Chyzh, head of Minsk-based machine-building plant Amkador and a member of the Council of the Republic Alyaksandr Shakutsin, Tabak-Invest cigarette plant and retail chain Karona owner Pavel Tapuzidzis, and Director General of Brest-located fish-packing plant Santa Impex Alyaksandr Mashenski.

Out of the all the heads of enterprises and businessmen mentioned in the EUobserver list, only Yury Chyzh clearly represents the interests of Lukashenka's family. He is Viktor Lukashenka's de facto business manager.

In addition, the success of Pavel Tapuzidzis' business has become possible due to the auspices of Lukashenka and his family. However, it is not quite correct to regard him as 'Lukashenka's ally'.

The application of sanctions against Chairman of Amkodor Board of Directors Alyaksandr Shakutsin

and milk and seafood seller Alyaksandr Mashenski is not sufficiently justified. They have created their successful businesses practically from nothing and mainly due to their own efforts.

## **Officials**

The on-line newspaper doublestressed that a "tough reaction was almost inevitable" if human rights defender Ales

Byalyatski was imprisoned as a result of a tax evasion trial.

The author underscored in the previous reports that inclusion of state officials on the visa ban list could not be regarded as a tough reaction anyway.

Taking into account that the visa ban list is among the main EU signals to Lukashenka regime, it seems to be relevant to put Lukashenka and a wide range of his supporters, involved in repressions and election frauds, on the list.

However, the broadening of visa ban list has reached a point where the measure could become counterproductive. It is necessary to take pains in order to determine carefully the people that can be included into the list.

It is absolutely irrelevant to include the First Vice-Premier Viktor Siamashka on the list. For his part, he has made a lot of efforts to develop cooperation with the West. In particular, Siamashka noted in 2009 that Belarus should initiate negotiations with the EU on creating a free market zone. At the same time, he is a consistent adversary of selling Belarusian enterprises to Russian companies as well as other steps towards real integration with the Eastern neighbour (as Russia sees it), including amalgamation of monetary systems etc.

Furthermore, this decision will do more bad than good if the Head of State Border Committee Ihar Rachkouski is included. It's worth mentioning that Rachkouski obtained quick promotion with Viktor Lukashenka's assistance, when around 40 senior officers from the State Border Committee with Vadzim Zaytsau at the head were appointed to high offices in KGB in July 2008. However, this fact does not create sufficient grounds for applying sanctions against Rachkouski. There is no information available about a connection between the State Border Committee leadership and repressions in Belarus.

In 2009, Rachkouski stated on his own initiative that Belarus

would take retaliatory measures in response to the tightening of border control by Russia. It is also remarkable that Rachkouski often delivers his speeches in Belarusian. A developed national conscience is a rare occurrence among those who are [wearing](#) uniform in Belarus.

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