

The Fate of European Security Decided in Minsk, An Anti- Corruption Law – Belarus State TV Digest

Belarusian state TV provided extensive coverage of the negotiations in Minsk, calling them "constructive" and playing a decisive role in securing the safety of the whole of Europe.

Belarusians can now actively discuss a new anti-corruption law and express their views on the web site of "SB – Belarus Segodnya", a state-run daily newspaper.

State TV journalists also showed how European farmers have suffered serious damage as a result of the Russian sanctions on their food products. As a result, the number of opponents towards western sanctions grows daily.

Minsk – a platform for international dialogue. For first time in its history, Belarus hosted an international meeting involving high profile officials from the EU, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

"Minsk became a platform for a final attempt for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the east of Ukraine", states the reporter. In his opinion, the gathering in Minsk would decide the fate of peace and security in the whole Europe.

Alexander Lukashenka declared Belarus' readiness to host any future rounds of negotiations. "Innocent people die, infrastructure is being destroyed, hundreds of thousands of refugees are forced to leave their native land (...) These are not scenes from the history, this is our reality today. Can we look upon what is happening today with indifference? Of

course, we cannot", he stated in his speech.

After the talks, Lukashenka speaks with the press. The Belarusian leader stated that the meeting was a successful step in the direction towards further talks. "The talks were not easy, but the dialogue was essential and open", he told international journalists gathered in Minsk. Lukashenka also emphasised that all of the participants in the talks had a chance to express their point of view. Despite various positions, "all agreed on one thing: we should find a compromise".

Lukashenka also noted the importance of the encounter between the two powerful economic blocs, i.e. the EU and Customs Union.

Initial media commentary on the summit in Minsk. "Observers, political scientists and journalists of the world's leading media outlets" agree that the talks in Minsk were difficult but constructive. "Minsk has a unique atmosphere that is conducive to constructive political and economic talks, something that is invaluable for international relations", one reporter proudly stated.

It was also noted that the leaders focused on three key issues: peace, or at least an armistice, humanitarian aid, and energy-related issues – an agreement on gas supply and transit "to not let Ukraine and Europe freeze", but also the economy – especially the possible losses the Customs Union member states may face as a result of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU.

Further Russian humanitarian aid. One report took note of Moscow's plan to send another convoy of humanitarian aid to people living in the Donbas. Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, informed the media of Russia sending the appropriate official notice to the authorities in Kyiv.

UN Under-General-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, also argued for more aid, including medication and food, to the eastern Ukraine. She also called on all sides in the conflict to not politicise the issue of humanitarian aid, one Belarus state TV journalist added.

Foreign Affairs

Belarus-Poland relations. The Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs set to travel to Warsaw on a two-day visit. He will meet with Polish officials, including Radoslaw Sikorski, the head of Polish diplomacy. The officials will be discussing issues of “interest to both sides” – the report stated, but did not, however, provide any further details about the visit.

European farmers suffer serious losses due to Russian sanctions. Farmers are struggling with a “catastrophic decrease in demand” for their agricultural goods. Thus, a number of opponents of the “economic confrontation” between the EU and Russian steadily increases on a day to day basis. Producers count their losses and feel that the EU's sanctions towards Russia are ineffective, states the report.

Explaining the context of the ongoing exchange of sanctions, the state TV reporter states that the EU and US imposed sectoral sanctions on Russia, and Moscow reacted with a “boycott of their food products”. This subsequently brought about the losses being experienced by European farmers presently.

State TV's coverage of the issue also pointed out that not everybody supports the politics of sanctions. The Swiss Minister of Economy, Johann Schneider-Ammann, criticised the idea of imposing mutual sanctions and argued how it would negatively affect both sides.

Domestic Affairs

Belarus-Ukraine mutual trade. State TV reported that beginning

19 August both Belarus and Ukraine lifted previously imposed barriers on mutual trade. At the same time, according to the coverage, Belarus must protect the Russian market from illegal exports through its territory of products from countries that Russia has sanctioned.

Belarusians free to discuss new anti-corruption draft law. The Belarusian leader says Belarusian society should join in discussions on the proposed amendments to the nation's main anti-corruption law. People can now express their views on the web site of the "SB – Belarus Segodnya", the largest state-run daily newspaper.

So far a number of Belarusians have actively joined the discussion, one journalist noted. "Over only the course of the previous week 150 suggestions were made", they explained. "SB – Belarus Segodnya" will send the best and most concise comments to the General Attorney for further assessment.

Agro-tourism as a source of economic development. The head of state has visited several agro-tourism farms in the Volozhynkij region. He spoke with the owners of the farms and praised them for their hard work. "In this way, we can turn Belarus into Switzerland", he cheerfully chimed. He also argued for the further revival of small Belarusian villages.

Bumper crops in Belarus. Journalists from state Channel 1 widely covered the results of this year's harvesting campaign. According to their sources, 10 mln tonnes of grains has been collected in total. The coverage notes that the Belarusian leader set a threshold at this level a few years ago, but then nobody believed that would be attainable. Today this is a reality, one journalist proudly noted. "There will certainly not be any shortage of bread in the country", he added.

The report explains that the key to the harvest's success was primarily due to financial support from the state. In addition to the high level of investment by the state, the report also

pointed to the “dictatorship of technology” as another reason behind its success.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials available on the web site of Belarusian State Television 1 (BT1). 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.