

When Sanctions Work – The Belarus Buckle

Damon Wilson and David Kramer recently gave they account of how the United States pressure resulted in Belarus regime's release of political prisoners. David Kramer was the key figure in George W Bush administration responsible for dealing with Belarus.



It is interesting to see different approaches of the United States with their principled stand and the Realpolitik of Germany. According to Wilson and Kramer, the German embassy in Minsk was trying to strike a deal with Belarus authorities to let Alexander Kazulin, a former Belarus presidential candidate, quietly go into voluntary exile. Kazulin rejected that offer and was subsequently released without any conditions following the US pressure.

Within two months of the asset freeze on Belneftekhim, an authoritative representative of the Lukashenka government quietly approached the U.S. Embassy in Minsk to ask what the American response would be if the regime released its political prisoners. Note that the regime approached the American embassy, not any European embassy, because it was the United States that kept ratcheting up the pressure against the government, backed up its threats when the regime continued to stall and whose political figures, from the President on down, used the bully pulpit to shine a light on authoritarianism and corruption in Belarus. Lukashenka and his cronies wanted to get out from under that bright light and free themselves from the pressure from sanctions, and the only way to do so was to release the political prisoners.

Within 48 hours of the American reply to the regime's

inquiry, the first of the prisoners was released. Most of the others soon followed. Unfortunately, the unwelcome intervention of one European Embassy in Minsk delayed the release of Kazulin, the most sensitive of the political prisoner cases. German Ambassador to Belarus Gebhardt Weiss had proposed to the Lukashenka regime that Germany take both Kazulin and his very ill wife, but Kazulin rejected this offer because he deemed it virtual exile. The intervention of Weiss, who never consulted with Kazulin before making the offer to the regime, may thus have delayed Kazulin's release from prison. Irina Kazulina, who was too ill to travel anyway, died several weeks later after a long but courageous bout with cancer.

The full text of the article is available at [American Interest Online](#)

YK