

# Why Is the Belarusian Language Disappearing? – Belarus Civil Society Digest

The disappearance of the Belarusian language from the public space, a visa free campaign, the commemoration of Vitali Silitski and summer schools feature among the top civil society news this week.

Belarusians can learn more about their history in the 1990s thank to the new project '90s.by', European Café held a public lecture on the European Union, and will the protestant church 'New Life' face accusations of the illegal use of a building for a prayer? All this and more in this edition of the Belarus Civil Society Digest.

## Social Campaigns

[Samakhod 2013](#). The campaign "Visa Free!" presents the second Festival of mobility "Samakhod" (Self-Propelled) which is to be held in Minsk on June 21-22. The Festival will be opened with a concert of groups Akute and Clover Club and be continued at the creative cluster ME100. The second day of the event's agenda includes workshops, lectures, and performances. The Festival's topic is human mobility. Participation in all events is free.

[Silitski is remembered](#). On 11 June two years ago Vitali Silitski, a prominent Belarusian political scientist, and the first BISS director, passed away. Silitski became well-known in the international scientific community with his concepts of preventive authoritarianism and authoritarian international. This year Silitski's colleagues and friends gathered for an evening of remembrance in Minsk.

**Nash Dom initiates an amendment to the Law on the status of deputies.** Activists of the civic campaign Nash Dom appealed to the Committee on Regional Policy and Local Self-Government of the Belarus National Assembly regarding the amendment to the Law "On the Status of Local Councils' Deputies." Nash Dom offers to reduce by more than three times the number of voters in districts at the written request of which can be heard by an extraordinary report of a local deputy.

**Where did the beauty go?** Digital-studio «Aguru» launched a non-profit social project [admova.by](http://admova.by), dedicated to the issue of the disappearance of the Belarusian language. The first video under the project caused, though, the most **controversial reaction** in Bynet this week.

**Culture improves life.** The campaign Budzma! released another video in the frame of its concept "Culture Improves Life." The video presents a number of talented individuals who answer the question "why?" with projections for their profession – including the writer Uladzimir Arlou, editor of the Belarusian Wikipedia Pavel Selitskas, lawyer Darya Katkouskaya, athlete Vitaly Gurkou, etc.

**"Chronicle of Judgement Time" presented at BAJ website.** The series of mini-movies "Chronicle of Judgment Time" includes eight films that are dedicated to the members of Belarusian Association of Journalists who suffered in the name of freedom of speech: Ales Bialiatski, Zmitser Bandarenka, Iryna Khalip, Andrei Pachobut, Natallia Radzina, Pavel Seviarynets, Anton Surapin and Siarhei Vazniak. The project originated with the informational support of the [Human Rights Center Viasna](http://www.viasna.org).

**Back to 90's.** The new multimedia project 90s.by shares the most intense period of Belarusian history – the decade stretching from 1990 to 1999. The project authors are ambitious and willing to cover everything: from elections and crises to rock festivals and the first "McDonald's." Each

article will contain interviews with direct participants, fragments of memories, statistics and interesting facts, archival photos and videos, and related links. Among the goals of the web site is to inspire people, because in the 1990s Belarusians were acting on the principle of "if you want something – do it."

## **Green Initiatives**

[CES environmental videos](#). Center for Environmental Solutions created a series of videos, called "Collect old batteries separately". The videos are dedicated to World Environment Day and tell why it is important to dispose of used batteries in special urns and what danger these wastes bring to health and the environment. The videos are created with the support of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and planned to be broadcast on national TV.

[15 thousand signatures in support of Belarusian wetlands](#). 15,000 Belarusians provided their signatures against the extraction of peat in the partial reserves which were forwarded to the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Minsk Regional Executive Committee on 5 June. The coordinators of the campaign "In Defence of Wetlands" note that the signatures were collected less than planned.

## **Belarus and the European Union**

[Minsk hosts conference on Belarus-EU partnership](#). The Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus under the auspices of the MFA of Belarus and the EU Office in Belarus host to an international conference "Belarus-European Union: Problems and Partnership Prospects" on June 13-14. The program of the conference comprises reports and greeting speeches on behalf of the MFA, the EU Office and foreign diplomatic missions.

[European lecture in café](#). On 18 June a public lecture "Modernization of the New Strategy in Eastern Europe: the

Impasses and Leapfrogging" took place at a Minsk cafe. The lecturer was Dr. Pál Tamás, a professor of Corvinus University (Budapest, Hungary). The lecture was held in the framework of the project "European Café: Open Space of Europe" implemented by the Centre for European Studies.

[NP conference in Minsk](#). On 1 June the National Platform conference titled "Between the Eastern Partnership and the European Dialog on Modernization" was held in Minsk. The conference resulted in the election of a new Coordination Committee and its chairperson – Ulad Vialichka, supported by 37 out of 44 representatives of the organisations attended. 26 Belarusian organisations were recommended for the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Civil Society Forum out of 33 applicants – a marked decline of 300% when compared to the previous Forum.

## **Education**

[Workshop for school teachers](#). Belarusian School Society and the web site Nastaunik.info invite educators, librarians and teachers to participate in the workshop "The School as a Platform for the Formation of Social and Civic Competencies". The seminar will be held on 22-24 June near Minsk; organisers cover all related costs.

[Summer historical school](#). From June to August, the Skaryna Language Society under the campaign "Budzma" starts summer school of history "History on Vacation" held by Dr Aleh Trusau. The participants will have an opportunity to see and discuss historical films and take part in a historical quiz. The School is free.

## **Interaction between State and Civil Society**

[Closed hearings on "espionage case"](#). On 12 June the hearings on the case of Andrei Haidukou, 23-year-old Navapolatsk resident, who is accused of "high treason",

started at the Vitsebsk Regional Court. No one, including journalists and human rights defenders, were allowed to attend the hearings. Andrei Haidukou was arrested in November in Minsk "while he was hiding with information which could be relevant to foreign intelligence services".

[Economic Court again against "New Life"](#). On 13 June church "New Life" received a summons from the Minsk Economic Court for the initiation of proceedings against the church. The document offered the church community to leave the building it occupies in 7 days. But the next day, on 14 June the authorities informed the church that they had [suspended the proceedings](#).

[Journalist warned for work with Belsat](#). The prosecutor's office of Smaliavichy district issued a warning to an independent journalist Ales' Silich for contributing to a foreign mass media service without accreditation.

*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.*