



## Newsletter

6.02.2007

Belarusian president continues to keep up his ant Kremlin rhetoric. He has spoken about relations with Russia several times over the past days and accusations against the Russian authorities were heard during a meeting with scientists, talks with the leader of Russian communist party Geinadyi Ziuganov and a t a meeting with Alaksandar Prohanov the editor in chief of the Moscow paper Zavtra (Tomorrow).

According to the Belarusian head of state it was the Kremlin which torpedoed the process of the creation of the united Belarusian Russian state, the Kremlin which ordered the price hikes for gas and oil and the Kremlin is also responsible for the breaking out of a media war.

„If they attempt to strike our weak points again, said Łukašenka, we know where to strike back”.

Analysts consider that this stand of the Belarusian president aims to boost his authority as a strong leader in the eyes of his electorate, but at the same time attempts to threaten Moscow with the fact that Belarus can withdraw from agreements to demand more.

Belarus has managed to sign beneficial contracts for oil deliveries as of February 1st and analysts point that Russian authorities will be reluctant to change anything in order not to disappoint this part electorate which dreams of „fraternal integration”, before the Russian parliamentary elections of this year and presidential ballot of 2008.

Much attention was given last week to the interview granted to the Die Welt daily by the Belarusian president. Alaksandar Łukašenka assured that he is ready for a dialogue and the possibility of foreign capital participation in the privatization of state enterprises in Belarus.

The Belarusian leader resorts to a metaphor in his recent speeches saying that the foreign policy leaned on one wing far too long, it is high time that it gets a multi vector dimension now to allow for the development of relations with the west.

Independent experts conclude that the attacks from Russia demand a change of direction from Łukašenka. Instead of being only Moscow oriented a new model has been chosen balancing between Brussels and Russia. A similar policy was practiced during the Cold War by Yugoslavia and Romania.

### POLITICS

- EU defends Belarusian Helsinki Committee
- Kazulin to offer his court records to international experts

### OFFICIALLY

- 400 companies to be set up in Belarus
- Alaksandar Łukašenka: let's analyse past events in the conflict with Russia instead of aggravating the situation
- Łukašenka wants to learn from Europe

### OPPOSITION

- The date of the Congress of the Democratic Forces of Belarus established
- State-owned newspaper to apologise to opposition members
- Germany backs Kazulin
- „True Name” campaign launched by Young Front in Baranavičy

### ECONOMY

- Russia to quit Belarusian transit services in a few years
- Belarus and China to step up economic ties

### SOCIETY

- Another act of vandalism on Clinton's bench in Kurapaty
- Belarus has a record number of 100-year-olds

### CULTURE

- Days of Jewish book-printing and photography in Minsk
- Rock-Coronation – 2006

The future of the Łukašenka regime depends on two factors, say analysts, first the force of the Moscow pressure and second the consequence of the EU in relation to the dialogue with Minsk.

Minsk may attempt a breakthrough to Europe through the wall of isolation and benefit from economic cooperation avoiding at the same time the weakening of the authoritarian regime. Experts consider that the most probable scenario will be certain small compromises, such as the recent decision not to move the Belarusian Helsinki Committee from its headquarters in Minsk. The lease agreement has been prolonged for one year.

The Belarusian opposition warns Europe not to be taken in by the moves and advises, as the first step to the dialogue, to demand from Minsk concrete steps towards democratisation, such as the freeing of political prisoners, guarantees of freedom of speech to the media, holding true democratic elections. These issues topped the agenda during the speech of opposition leader Alaksandar Milinkievič in the German Bundestag.

At the same time the date for Łukašenka's visit to Kiev has been set. It is expected that the Belarusian president aims to reach an agreement with Ukraine on the energy transit and achieve Ukraine's mediation to start talks with the EU.

The Belarusian opposition has finally set the date to conduct the second Congress of the Democratic Forces on March 17 and 18th. A huge protest action is planned for March 25th. According to independent experts the constant battles within the opposition have greatly weakened its image and it is doubtful whether the protest action may bring the expected results and gain massive support.

The energy price hikes in Belarus have not struck the average man in the street, still disquieting signals can be spotted such as the rise in prices of the municipal services. A wave of inflation is expected.

Information on the preparation of documents supporting the private enterprises in Belarus has been confirmed. A meeting is planned for February 14th between representatives of the Belarusian authorities and Belarusian business circles. According to experts there may be hope for granting the entrepreneurs more freedom in order to avoid a worsening of the economic situation. ■

## POLITICS

### EU defends Belarusian Helsinki Committee

**The European Union Has demanded that the Belarus regime stop the persecution of the independent human rights organization the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.**

The demand was made on the EU's behalf by Germany, which is presiding over the permanent committee of the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The EU is concerned over the regime's pressure on the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, which could be abolished because it lacks a permanent address. This is because the authorities cancelled the

committee's lease of an office.

### Kazulin to offer his court records to international experts

**Former presidential candidate Hramada Social Democratic Party leader Alaksandar Kazulini ready to make his court records available to experts in the West.**

On January 25 Kazulin met with his lawyer at the Vitebsk penal colony. His message to world community was that if the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly has doubts as to his prison sentence, he was ready to pass on all the records to European institutions. Kazulin doubts whether the Belarus regime allows European organizations to examine the case, which Europe regards as politically motivated.

The Belarusian political prisoner is now

working on an appeal to the Supreme Court in Minsk. He then intends to pass on all the court records to European experts for inspection. They are also to be addressed to the UN human rights council.

## OFFICIALLY

### 400 companies to be set up in Belarus

**Belarus is planning to set up some 400 new companies and to modernize 600 existing companies.**

The country's Prime Minister Siarhey Sidorskiy says the companies must become competitive on the local and outside markets. Research spending is to be trebled over the next four years time.

Sidorski said Belarus needs an efficient system of training young specialists for industry familiar with new technologies, the Interfax-Zapad agency reports.

### Alaksandar Łukašenka: let's analyse past events in the conflict with Russia instead of aggravating the situation

**Alaksandar Łukašenka argues that the time has come for both Belarus and Russia to „calm down, analyse past events and refrain from creating a situation from which there would be no return“.**

„The reason we don't want a row is not that we are weak. We are ready for everything and we shall endure everything“, the president said, quoted by the state BELTA Agency.

According to the Belarusian leader, „the Belarusian nation should not be blamed for anything in its relations with Russia; we have always fulfilled the terms of our agreements“.

Alaksandar Łukašenka reiterated that Belarus would never become a part of Russia, as was suggested by some politicians in Moscow. „If they make any attempt to touch our sore spot, we shall strike back because we know where their sore spots are“, he said.

### Łukašenka wants to learn from Europe

**The Belarusian leader has told the German Die Welt newspaper that he does not exclude the possibility of introducing the euro in his country or of forging a strategic alliance with Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states.**

Łukašenka says that during the energy crisis with Russia Belarus understood how much it needs foreign investment. He called on Europe to open up the EU market to Belarusian products and to lift the ban on travel to Europe by Belarusian officials.

Łukašenka also pointed out that German chancellor Angela Merkel is paying too little attention to Belarus, but he is hoping that this is about to change. Łukašenka added he was „the world's most open president“, that there were no problems with freedom of expression in Belarus and that the opposition was not persecuted.

## OPPOSITION

### The date of the Congress of the Democratic Forces of Belarus established

**The Congress of the Democratic Forces of Belarus will take place on March 17-18.**

The decision was made during the session of the Political Council of the Democratic Forces on January 31.

In favour of setting the congress in mid-March were 8 members of the Political Council. The leader of the „Za Svabodu“ movement Alaksandar Milinkievič was not present during the session.

The president of the United Civil Party Anatol Liabiedźka, pointed out that the draft of the „Small Constitution“, as well as a platform with the answers to the questions of most interest to the society is to be presented by March 17. According to Liabiedźka, these documents are to constitute the basis for the political campaign during the elections to the parliament in 2008.

The session also adopted a decision to hold a demonstration on March 25, when the 89th anniversary of proclaiming the Belarusian People's Republic will be celebrated.

## State-owned newspaper to apologise to opposition members

**Following a court decision, the Homelskaya Prada government newspaper agreed to publish corrections to earlier printed information and to apologise to local opposition activists.**

The contentious report was published before local elections on January 14. Some opposition activists, including the leader of the local United Citizens' Party branch were accused of lacking morals. Their families were described as „yobs”. The head of the newspaper's social and political department told the court that she was „carried away” while writing the article, the bulletinonline.org portal reports.

## Germany backs Kazulin

**The German branch of Amnesty International has launched a campaign of support for Alaksandar Kazulin.**

It is calling for letters of support to be sent to the prison where the former presidential candidate is being held. According to Amnesty International the leader of the Hramada Social Democratic party is a prisoner of conscience. Human rights campaigners addressed a letter to president Łukašenka, the public prosecutor's office and the Belarus interior ministry, demanding Kazulin's release.

## „True Name” campaign launched by Young Front in Baranavičy

**Members of the Young Front opposition youth organization in the city of Baranavičy have called for a change of street names from Soviet into historically Belarusian names.**

The campaigners intends to raise public awareness of the fact that the streets of Belarusian towns and cities still bear the names of the heroes of the former communist regime, which bore responsibility for repressions against the Belarusian nation.

„The people must know and remember the names of Belarusian heroes and activists. Through this campaign we intend to give their names back to the homeland”, the mfront.net web page declares.

## ECONOMY

### Russia to quit Belarusian transit services in a few years

**The Russian Transnief consortium is rethinking the possibilities of increasing the capacity of the Baltic Pipeline System (BPS), the vice governor of the Leningrad district Grigory Dwas informs.**

Doubling the capacity would allow Russia to quit oil transit via Belarus altogether.

Today the BPS pumps over 80 million tons of Russian oil a year to the terminal in Primorsk – the Russian port in the Bay of Finland. So far, work on increasing capacity did not start because of lack of the Russian government's decision. Implementing the project could take about 2 to 3 years.

If BPS capacity increases to 150 tons a year, it will allow Russia to practically move the whole oil transit through the territory of Belarus to the BPS. According to Russian president Vladimir Putin, because Russia subsidises oil supplies to Belarus, it loses some 2.5 million dollars a year. After the Russian oil prices increase recently Minsk threatened to introduce a transit fee.

### Belarus and China to step up economic ties

**Belarus and China are already in the process of implementing or are planning some 40 projects to the tune of 2.5 billion US dollars.**

Chinese corporations intend to participate in the construction and modernization of power generating plants in Belarus. The two sides are also planning co-operation in construction and forestry. The Belarus government is hoping that China will finance a number of new Belarusian projects, Belta agency reports.

## SOCIETY

### Another act of vandalism on Clinton's bench in Kurapaty

**Unknown perpetrators have broken a memorial bench dedicated to former US president Bill Clinton in a wooded area of Kurapaty on the outskirts of Minsk.**

The bench was installed in 1994 to commemorate Clinton's visit to Belarus.

The inscription on the memorial reads: „From the people of the United States to the Belarusian Nation”. The vandals destroyed part of the bench. It is the eleventh attack on the memorial's says historian Ihar Kuznyatsou. The vandals have not been caught, because there is no suitable protection over the area.

Kurapaty is recognized as a historical monument of international significance. From 1937 to 1941 the Soviet NKVD security police executed between 30 and 250 thousand people, mostly political prisoners.

## CULTURE

### Days of Jewish book-printing and photography in Minsk

**„Days of Jewish book-printing” and an exhibition of famous Israeli photographers were opened in the capital city of Belarus on January 30.**

The events will go on till February 4. The exhibitions, which can be seen in the National Library of Belarus and the Jewish Center, are meant to help the people of Belarus better understand Israel and its people. According to the Ambassador of Israel to Belarus Zeev Ben Arie, the exhibition will provide an impulse for developing the bilateral relationship.

Over 20 Israeli publishing houses take part in the book exhibition, including major ones that bring out books in Hebrew and Russian, as well as religious publishers. Russian publishing houses and the Belarusian „Met” also present their products.

Parallel to the book exhibition, a presentation of works by two famous Israeli photographers, Julia Komissaroff and David Dekert, will be held. Their works depict everyday life scenes of Israeli people. Within the event, a presentation of Edgar Keret's book translated into Belarusian, will take place.

### Rock-Coronation – 2006

**The award ceremony for the best rock-bands in Belarus will take place on February 25 in the Concert Hall in Minsk.**

The jury numbering 30 people will soon begin to choose the best performer, band, producer, video clip, album, etc.

This year's format of the „Rock-coronation” will be considerably extended. Apart from rock bands, pop-rock, hip-hop, and metal performers will take part in the competition. The ceremony will be hosted by well-known TV presenter Viktor Malinowski and Jana Kamienskaja from Radio „Unista”.

The theatre director from the Russian Drama Theatre will handle the organization of the show.



There are various sites devoted to events in Belarus, which are, however, little known in Western Europe, and among people dealing with politics towards Belarus who do not understand the Russian or Belarusian languages.

The [belarus-live](http://belarus-live.eu) site fills this gap. The site allows to order weekly reception of news in English, French, German, Polish, Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian.

