



## Newsletter

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The interview granted by president Alaksandar Łukašenka stirred quite a commotion abroad and in Belarus. Speaking for Reuters Agency on February 6th Łukašenka said that the current Belarusian external policy directed only at Russia was wrong. „We stood only on one foot, whereas we should be standing on both. We are a bridge between Russia and the West” the Belarusian head of state metaphorically told Reuters.

At the same time observers point that Łukašenka rejected Europe’s demands on the democratisation of the internal life in Belarus, calling them destructive to the political system in Belarus.

Analysts consider that Łukašenka wants to play on the West’s fears over the stability of deliveries of energy sources, the stability of transits as such and the problems of illegal migration. So the Belarusian president offers his country’s help to solve the problems. Thus Łukašenka aims to gain respect not withdrawing from his authoritative rule and at the same time win some more concessions from Russia, which could be disturbed by his talks with the West.

The latest declarations by Łukašenka concerning the external policy, say analysts, are just an element of PR, and the West should maintain a firm stand.

At the same time the Belarusian government wants to gain some \$ 1.5 billion of external credits and create a more favourable atmosphere for the presence of foreign capital. Earlier problems have been solved by the use of internal funds, said finance minister Mikolay Korbut, but now to lower the radical price increases for energy sources foreign capital is in demand.

The financial circles consider the chances for credits to be high, since the external debt is not very big (some \$850 billion with a GDP of \$37 billion).

Still the discussion concerns syndicated credits and not state credits.

Experts point that the investments will flow into the country only after market reforms have been implemented.

The government on its part speaks only of the need to modernise the industry, diversification

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of energy supplies and energy savings. At a press conference on February 5th the chairman of the State Academy of Science Michail Miasnikovich said that Belarus will aim to diminish energy spending and in the future reach the level of Canada. According to Miasnikovich the concept of Belarusian energy security aims at creating a base of energy sources, among others the use of brown coal.

The Belarussian authorities also put great hopes on the construction of an nuclear power plant. Official sources revealed plans of the development of nuclear energy. It has been decided that the construction of the plant should start in 2008. The first block will begin operating between 2013-2014 the second in 2015. Their joint power will amount to 1thousand MG. Two other blocks will be constructed by 2025, which will improve Belarusian energy potential

In 2007 Belarus has to select a strategic partner to put into life the project. Negotiations with technology suppliers should begin. Sources in the Academy of Sciences hint that a choice between Russian and French offers will be made.

According to commentators the choice of a Russian or Western project will symbolise the geopolitical orientation of Belarus. Ordering technology from France will be a pragmatic choice- credits from the West, development of contacts in all spheres, enlarging the sphere of credibility etc. On the other hand if the Russian option is selected it will bring about an even stronger dependence on a country which is already officially called in Minsk „the energy empire”.

However developing contacts with the West is hampered by doubts of the elites of improving market-democratic influences which can ruin the foundations of the regime.

Opposition leader Aleksandar Milinkievič has done an effective PR gesture, in an open letter to the head of state Milinkievič offered cooperation with the opposition in the European integration process. Analysts however doubt that the authorities would agree to include their opponents in a dialogue with the West.

Last week also brought more repressions against the opposition – a large group of activists of the Young Front has been detained. Two of them can be accused of being part of an unregistered organisation ( any attempts to register it failed). ■

## POLITICS

### Alaksandar Milinkievič in the European Parliament

**The leader of the Belarusian Democratic Forces, Alaksandar Milinkievič, has opened a visit to the European Parliament in Brussels. He is to take part in a series of meetings with parliamentary leaders within the framework of „Belarus Day” in the European Parliament.**

The Day is organised by the Group of the European People's Party – European Democrats.

Milinkievič's talks focus on the European Union's policy towards Belarus, as well as the prospects for reviving political and economic co-operation between Europe and Belarus.

Meetings with the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee Jacek Saryusz-Wolski and the leader of the European Democrats Joseph Daul are also planned.

The agenda of „Belarus Day” includes panel debates on the political situation in Belarus and the possible scenarios of its future development. The discussions are to be attended by Eurodeputies, and representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the EU Council and of the US State Department.

### Łukašenka interviewed by a Western news agency

**Twelve years after beginning his presidential rule, Alaksandar Łukašenka gave an interview for Reuters.**

According to commentators, it does not give much hope for changes in his style of government. However, Łukašenka emphasised his commitment to maintain good

relations both with the West and the East.

Talking on the European Union President Łukašenka said that Belarus „always wanted to sit at the same table”, but „it is impossible in the current atmosphere”. The EU has imposed a visa ban and frozen foreign accounts of Belarusian politicians after Łukašenka’s re-election in March 2006, which was condemned as rigged. Russia doubled the gas price for Belarus at New Year and imposed a higher oil export duty. „It was terribly painful that these actions were undertaken by our ally,” Łukašenka told Reuters. He compared Moscow’s foreign policy to the one of the USA, saying that „there is some imperial style in it”. Despite the critical comments on Russia Łukašenka hoped for an improvement in his country’s relations with Moscow. It is important to remember that Belarusians and Russians were one people, he said. The Belarusian leader carefully avoided direct criticism aimed at Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Meanwhile, Alaksandar Milinkievič, one of the leaders of the Belarusian democratic forces, told Reuters that because of the lack of cooperation with the European Union, Łukašenka drives the country into self isolation and its people into poverty. The authorities do not realize how dangerous the current situation of the country’s economy is, Milinkievič said.

## Belarusian Human Rights House opens in Vilnius

**According to one of the founders of the Belarusian Human Rights House Siarhiej Dubauc, the Belarusian Human Rights House will be the place to gather and analyse information on human rights abuse in Belarus.**

Seminars and conferences concerning human rights will take place in the House. There were several attempts to register the organisation in Minsk, but because of the authorities’ attitude towards human rights, the founders decided to move to Vilnius, Dubaviec says.

While crossing the border the activists constantly meet negative treatment and customs control stalling, which according to Dubauc, paralyses the traffic at the border crossing point and disturbs common citizens. The organisation will operate in Lithuania until considerable changes are carried out in the domain of human rights in Belarus, the Constitution is implemented and law

respected.

## OFFICIALLY

### Teacher’s street patrols in Grodno District

**Teachers in the Grodno District have been ordered to patrol the streets of their towns. A relevant regulation was issued by the education department of the local executive committee.**

There are two shifts – from 10 am till 3 pm and from 3 pm till 8 pm on Saturdays. The authorities believe that the new campaign should decrease the number of crimes committed by the under aged, as well as prevent alcohol and drug abuse.

The teachers themselves are less enthusiastic, seeing their mission as a modest effort to prevent young people from drinking beer and encouraging them to spend more time at home with their parents.

### The president of Iran to visit Belarus

**Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is to visit Belarus next month.**

According to the Iranian Ambassador to Belarus, a number of important treaties on bilateral co-operation concerning the implementation of joint projects is to be signed.

Iran has already provided access to a strip of its land for crude oil extraction. Currently a car factory „Samand” is operating on Belarusian territory. Iran has also declared support for Belarus in the construction of the country’s nuclear power plant.

### Belarus is looking forward to foreign investments

**Belarusian authorities are ready to let foreign investments to the country said the Belarusian Finance Minister Nikolai Korbut in an interview for Reuters.**

In order to modernise the economy Belarusian authorities are willing to open the country for foreign investments. The Minister pointed out that the investment conditions have to be favourable for both parties and confirmed that the transition to market relations with Russia will force the

government to introduce economic reforms in Belarus. In five year's time Belarus will have a different economy that will adjust to the current conditions, the Finance Minister says.

According to Korbuto, even this year Belarus will strive for a credit in foreign banks to the tune of 1 billion dollars. The credit is to compensate for the loss caused by the increase of Russian energy carriers' prices.

At the same time the Minister hopes that the increase of prices for Russian oil will not cause a crisis in Belarusian economy.

## OPPOSITION

### The „Young Front” activists in a KGB prison

**Activists of the „Young Front” youth organization, have been detained in a KGB prison.**

18-year-old Žmicier Chviedaruk and 22-year-old Aleh Korban were arrested in a private flat in Minsk on Sunday evening, during a session of the organisation's General Council. Together with 20 other members of the „Young Front” they were taken to a police station. All detainees were released during the night, while Chviedaruk and Korban were put in the KGB prison.

In accordance with Belarusian law a person can be detained without charges for 72 hours. During the interrogation the men were being forced to admit to being part of an illegal organization. It is likely therefore, they will be charged in accordance with paragraph 193 of the Belarusian Penal Code relating to „activities in a non-registered organization”. In compliance with this paragraph a „Young Front” leader Zmicier Daškiewicz was sentenced to one and a half year jail term.

The „Young Front” activists believe that the detention was aimed to warn young people before the planned demonstration of February 14th. The „young Front's” Valentine's Day „Love. Freedom. Changes” demonstration traditionally opens a season of summer opposition rallies in Belarus.

### A presentation of the film „The first line of victory”

**A film devoted to the history of all political prisoners, entitled „The first**

**line of victory” has had its presentation in Minsk. According Aleh Voůčak, an activist of the human rights organization the film is composed of amateur clips, and documents of the social committee „Freedom to Kazulin and other political prisoners”.**

Vouchak says that many people are unaware why Alaksandar Kazulin, the former presidential candidate, was imprisoned.

That is why adds Voůčak it is vital the film is seen by everyone and reaches all households. The film will be available on the Internet soon.

## ECONOMY

### Electricity three times cheaper at night

**The Belarusian government decided that there will be different prices of electricity during the day, in the evening and at night.**

In order to define costs of the electric energy, the 24 hours of day and night were divided into zones of minimal and maximal weight ratio.

1 kilowatt – an hour of cheap electricity will cost about 75 roubles, and expensive – over 220 roubles.

The weekend and holiday rate will be lower. The highest rate will be charged in winter time between 8 and 11 am, as well as in the evening between 5 and 8 pm.

In comparison to the present rate, it will be 1.5 times lower during the day, at night, at weekends and on holidays, whereas in the remaining periods the rate will double.

In order to pay for the electricity according to the new rules, Belarusians will have to buy special watt-hour meters which cost between 50 and 70 USD.

### Belarusian own nuclear power plant by 2014

**The construction of the first Belarusian nuclear power plant will start next year, the president of the Belarus Academy of Science Michail Miašnikovicz says.**

Currently, talks are held with the representatives of the International Atomic

Energy Agency (MAGATE), as well as the companies, which will take part in creating the power plant. France and Russia already presented their offers. It is likely that two different companies will be engaged in the construction of the power plant, the president of the Academy says.

Creating a nuclear power plant with the power rating of 2 thousand megawatts is an investment to the tune of 2.5 up to 3 billion dollars. A credit from the World Bank is not to be excluded, Miašnikovicz says and foreign capital contribution to the investment is also taken into consideration.

The first block of the nuclear power plant with the power rating of one thousand megawatts should start to operate in 2014, and the exploitation of another block is planned for the same year.

## Russia to pay the lease for the grounds which are the transit routes for energy sources deliveries

**According to a statement made by the chairman of the State Treasury Committee of Belarus Ryhor Kuźniacou, Russia will pay 5million USD for the lease of forest grounds which are the transit routes of the energy sources deliveries.**

The Interfax Zapad press Agency informs additionally that apart from the 5 million USD paid by Russia, Belarusian energy companies are to pay the land tax amounting to 3 million USD.

## SOCIETY

### A study on Belarusian soldiers serving as Soviet Army consultants

Students of the Brest State University are currently involved in a study on Belarusian participants of some of the wars fought in various parts of the world in the second half of the 20th century.

The authors conducted over 30 interviews with Belarusian veterans of the conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia and Egypt. They all served in the Soviet army as military consultants and specialists in those trouble spots.

Until recently they were not allowed to talk about their military service. Thanks to the project, their reminiscences will now contribute to the better understanding of the newest history of Belarus.

### Belarusians bought a thousand diamonds from the National Bank of Belarus

**About a thousand diamonds weighing together 186 carats was sold in Belarus at the beginning of February. The diamonds cost 353 thousand US dollars.**

The National Bank commenced the sale of the stones in December 2005. This new way of capital investment met the interests of the society. There is interest in all diamonds without exceptions, specialists say.

### A golf course to open near Minsk

**In four year's time a golf course of 318 hectares is to be built on the site of a former military training ground in Kałodziščy.**

The complex near Minsk will consist of a course and a village. A hotel for 250 guests, a bar, a restaurant, shops and a parking space for 400 cars will be built. The members of the golf club will be able to buy villas in the close vicinity of the course; some of the houses will be available for rent.

The registration fees to the golf clubs in Russia start from 3 thousand dollars. How much it will cost to join the club in Belarus remains to be seen.

The decision to build the course was signed personally by President Łukašenka. The opening is to be expected in 2010.

### Rectors of private schools of higher learning will be nominated by the education minister

**In line with the amended law on higher education rectors of private schools of higher learning will be nominated by the education minister.**

There are some 12 private schools of higher learning at present, and their authorities had been nominated by the owners.

Now according to Uładzimir Zdanovič the

chairman of the Belarusian Commission of Education of the National Assembly, an amendment had to be made to the existing law on education since "some of the rectors had brought shame to the system of private education in Belarus". Zdanovič points however that there is no question of liquidating private schools of higher learning in Belarus.

## A new way of energy saving

**As soon as in 2007 people living in the Belarusian countryside will be able to buy new models of heat generators.**

Scientists from the Belarus Academy of Science have developed new models of heat generators for the farmers.

Appliances of this kind can operate on straw, peat waste and wood. According to the scientists, this newly developed technology could contribute to considerable savings, when one takes into account today's gas and oil fuel prices. The process could be even up to several hundred times cheaper. Last month Belarusian President Alyaksandr Łukašenka made an appeal that the government should take measures to save energy. According to Łukašenka, this is the most topical issue of the country's safety.

## CULTURE

### Swedish graphic in Minsk

**An exhibition of Swedish graphics „Through Tradition to Future” will take place from February 6 to February 25 in the Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk.**

The works of 16 graphic artists from Sweden will be shown on the exhibition.

The Swedish Institute gathered the works for the exhibition last year. It originated after the visit of the Swedish royal couple in Slovenia in 2004.

During the exhibition a series of workshops with the Swedish artists for the students of the Belarus Academy of Arts will be held. The founder of the exhibition is the Swedish Embassy in Minsk supported by the Swedish Institute.

### „Days of Jewish books” exhibition in Minsk

**An exhibition „Days of Jewish books” has been opened in the National Library in Minsk.**

The event presents some 400 books published in Israel, Belarus and Russia as well as an exhibition of photographs by well known Israeli photographers.

The main aim of the event is to acquaint society with the history and culture of the Jewish nation. Some of the books will be presented to the National Library.

The first Belarusian translation of Etgar Kerets collection of short stories „A Man who wanted to be God” done by Pavai Kasciukievich was presented during the opening ceremony.

### The Minsk Book Fair attracts over 600 exhibitors from 16 countries

**„Belarusian Books - 2007”, which opened in Minsk today, is attended by 398 Belarusian publishers and 203 from abroad. Israel and Armenia take part in the event for the first time.**

Ukraine and Russia are represented by the largest number of publishers. Ukraine is the guest of honour of the Fair; Russia played the same role last year. The programme of the four-day Book Fair includes a wide range of seminars, meetings with writers and publishers and performances by amateur and professional artistic groups.



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) site fills this gap. The site allows to order weekly reception of news in English, French, German, Polish, Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian.

