



Newsletter  
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On 23 November Alaksandar Łukašenka participated in a press conference organized for Ukrainian journalists. During the conference he proposed the authorities in Kiev a close cooperation in the framework of energy. Moreover, he even mentioned to create a federation of two countries.

Analysts consider the key idea of Łukašenka is to create such an alliance because, in terms of Belarus' geopolitical location, it can become a „narrow throat for Russia and Western Europe”. Independent commentators also observed that the press conference was a kind of psychological pressure on the Kremlin in connection to the fervent bilateral dispute on petrol and gas.

It was expected that some issues of this battle would be discussed during the meeting of the president of Russia and Belarus during the summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), held in Minsk on 28 November (the conference itself was estimated as „nothing significant” and „unnecessary”). Eventually, nobody knows about outcomes of the „face to face” dialogue between the leader of Belarus and Russia.

Until now there has been no information on an independent evaluation of „Bieltransgaz”, whose shares the Russian energy giant Gazprom wants to buy through the Dutch bank ABN Amro.

At the same time, before the taking off from Riga to Moscow, Vladimir Putin informed that a new common enterprise, which would be based on the parity principle, would replace „Bieltransgaz” very soon. Observers treated the statement as an attempt of psychological pressure on the Belarusian partner, who, in their opinion, is trying in different ways to avoid selling of the petrol and gas transit infrastructure.

Experts say that meetings which can bring some outcomes in the scope of energy substances are still ahead. As it was foreseen, on 24 November Russia and Belarus did not manage to initial the project of the agreement concerning the division of the customs duties received from the export of petrol products.

### OFFICIALLY

- The process of forming electoral commissions completed

### OPPOSITION

- A. Milinkievič at NATO summit
- A. Milinkievič meets the US president

### ECONOMY

- A joint Belarusian –Russian gas concern
- Russian gas at 200 USD for Belarus?

### SOCIETY

- Cardinal Kazimierz Świątek has been decorated with the Order of the Commander of the Legion of Honour

### CULTURE

- Minsk to get a new National Museum
- Exhibition of Russian and Belorussian painters in Moscow



Beside the significant price rise of gas (up to 200-230 dollars for a thousand cubic metres), Moscow is planning to limit profits gained from petrol products sale (according to some estimation 4-5 million dollars, which come from a profitable sale of products obtained from oil to the West, contribute annually to the budget of Belarus).

Experts think that it is highly unlikely that Belarus will experience gas cut off stating from 1 January (a

representative of „Gazprom” has recently menaced Belarus in this context). There is a compromise foreseen (100-150 dollars for a thousand cubic metres of the „blue petrol”) in lieu of concessions of the Belarusian side in reference to the sale of the part of „Bieltransgas” shares. „Moscow will probably also take into account the value of Belarus as a transit tunnel and as a military-strategic partner” – says independent media.

Observers underline that, in scope of searching for alternative energy sources, Minsk is looking for new partners. Therefore, on 28 November, during the summit of the CIE, a meeting between the president of Belarus, Ukraine and Azerbaijan took place. The subject of the meeting considered a cooperation in the field of energy.

On the same day, one of the Belarusian opposition leaders – Alaksandar Milinkievič, met with President Bush during the NATO summit in Riga. After coming back to Minsk, he was accused of illegal frontier crossing for which he will be sentenced soon.

Meanwhile representatives of the democratic camp think that former opposition activists in the parliament are being persecuted. One more member of the former group of deputies „Respublika” – Hienadz Dyleŭski – was sentenced to five years for alleged bribe attempts. The information was given by the General Prosecutor of Belarus on 29 November.

Besides, Alaksandar Kazulin, the former candidate of the opposition during the presidential elections, has been still on the hunger strike from 20 October. He was sentenced to 5 years and half imprisonment. His health is in a critical stage. The leaders of opposition parties have asked him to stop the hunger strike giving the argument that his requirements were partially granted. However, Kazulin is still demanding to consider „the Belarusian issue” during the UN Security Council’s meeting.

Unfortunately, the Belarusian society is not well informed about Kazulin’s hunger strike. According to the data issued by sociologists from the Institute of Socio-Economical and Political Surveys NISEPI (Vilnius) 44% of the Belarusian did not know at all about the fact that the former candidate for the president was put to jail. The United Democratic Forces ADS will try to solve the problem concerning the lack of information among people during the local elections, which are about to be held on 14 January 2007.

Simultaneously the opposition is preparing the Second Congress of Democratic Forces and so-called a „hot spring”. The rise of protect among the nation is expected to be higher as the economic situation of the country is aggravating because of the rise of energy price. However, the official propaganda is accusing the opposition,

which allegedly wants to „make profit on someone’s misfortune for its own sake”. Also the idea concerning summoning the Second Congress of Democratic Forces is being criticized. Recently, some opposition activists started gathering signatures against this initiative. According to some opinions, which recently emerged, a new stage of the dispute for power (especially concerning the alleged undermining of the position of the leader of the Political Council of the United Democratic Forces ADS, Alaksandar Milinkievič) can finally divide the coalition of democrats, which is already feeble.

At the same time the leader of the Party of Belarusian People Front BF Vincuk Viačorka says that the opposition should revise the outlines of the campaign and concentrate on explaining the society what are the advantages of the 12 point European Commission plan, enshrined in the new strategy towards Belarus (the plan is supposed to be realized by the government).

Some representatives of the authority (especially the deputy head of the presidential administration – Natalla Piatkievič, who was on TV on 26 November), and the national propaganda finally rejected the proposal of Brussels. The authority described the proposal as a type of dictatorship, an attempt of setting stereotypes without taking into account the unique model of Belarus. It was hailed a „one-way street”.

Analysts are foreseeing that the regime can consider setting free just one or some political prisoners in order to begin a play with the EU to shake the Kremlin down. At the same time the current establishment is afraid of losing control on the situation at the moment of democratic changes. ■

## OFFICIALLY

### The process of forming electoral commissions completed

**According to BielaPan, 29 November saw the completion of the process of forming electoral commissions for local government elections. The secretary of the Central Electoral Commission Mikalaj Łazavik has said that a total of 6.562 voting booths have been established.**

Of these 992 are in the Brest region, 967 in the Vitebsk region, 1.125 in the region of Homl, 749 in the region of Grodno and 1.128 in the region of Minsk. In the city of Minsk itself 667 voting booths have been formed. The total number of booths is smaller than in the 2003 local government elections (by 155). Łazavik says this is a result of some village, regional and town councils having been merged. Local government elections in Belarus are scheduled for 14 January 2007.

## OPPOSITION

### A.Milinkievič at NATO summit

**At the NATO summit in Riga Alaksandar Milinkievič is to meet with economists from Europe and North America, informs Radio Svaboda.**

Participating in the summit will be 9 presidents and 15 prime ministers, among others from the USA, Czech Republic, France, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, German Chancellor Angela Merker, and Prime Ministers from Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Holland, Britain etc.

One of the main issues at the summit will be expanding contacts between NATO states and countries which are not members of the Alliance.

## A. Milinkievič meets the US president

**Leader of the Belarusian opposition Alaksandar Millinkievič has met with US president G.W.Bush. The meeting took place during the NATO summit in Riga.**

During the short meeting both leaders discussed the situation in Belarus, the violation of human rights and the problem of political prisoners. Alaksandar Milinkievič has also met with the former national security presidential advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and a representative of the Russian president Sergey Karogonov. Alaksandar Milinkievič arrived at the NATO summit in Riga at a personal invitation of the Latvian president Vaira Vike-Frayberge.

## ECONOMY

### A joint Belarusian –Russian gas concern

**„Bieltransgaz” and „Gazprom” are to establish a joint venture on a parity basis. Information to this effect has been presented On Tuesday by the Russian president Vladimir Putin.**

The Russian leader underlined that part of the price of the Russian gas for Belarus in 2007 will flow into the budget of „Bieltransgaz”, which together with the Russian concern will form a 50-50 company. Decision concerning the conditions of the deal will be taken this year, informs RIA „Novosti”. The Belarusian side refrained from commenting the Russian president’s statement.

### Russian gas at 200 USD for Belarus?

**The Russian „Gazprom ”concern will be delivering gas to Belarus at 200 USD per 1 thousand cubic metres, to Russia at 49 USD and to Europe at**

### 293 USD – informs Charter’97 after „Viedomosti” daily.

The concern's budget provides for gas deliveries to CIS states (excepting Ukraine) at 210 thousand USD per 1 thousand cubic metres.

The conflict over Russian gas prices for Belarus has continued for several months. At the beginning of October, President Alexander Lukashenko announced that Russia's proposed price increase would mean „severance of all economic contacts between both countries”. Nonetheless there is much to indicate that „Gazprom” considers the matter of gas prices in respect of Belarus closed.

## SOCIETY

### His Eminence Cardinal Kazimierz Świątek has been decorated with the Order of the Commander of the Legion of Honour

**The ceremony took place in the residence of the French Ambassador in Minsk on 23 November. The former head of the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus, now in retirement, is the first Belarussian citizen to have received this high distinction from the French president. The citation describes the Cardinal as a man who „in the eyes of the French people epitomizes the history of the Belarussian nation of the last 70 years”.**

In his acceptance speech, the Cardinal said the distinction was for him a mark of respect and recognition of the Belarussian nation’, informs the website [catholic.by](http://catholic.by)

Cardinal Świątek added that it was a recognition of the courage and dignity with which the entire Belarussian nation has fought for its right to sovereignty. He said he was grateful to God for having

been able to be with the nation in both the difficult and happy moments.

## CULTURE

### Minsk to get a new National Museum

**The National Art Museum in Minsk is to move into its new premises in December. The opening ceremony of the four-storeys facility is to start on 5 December and last several days.**

On the first day the ceremony will be attended by the directors of the largest museums in Belarus as well as the country's leading artists. The new museum will then host the diplomats and representatives of the Belarussian artistic associations. On 9 December the National Art Museum will open its doors to the public.

Exhibition of Russian and Belorussian painters in Moscow

An exhibition of Russian and Belarussian painters opened in Moscow. The

exhibition was organized in the Central State Museum of Contemporary Russian History, it includes works of ten contemporary painters from Russia and ten painters from Belarus.

The painters are mainly followers of the tradition of realism. The visitors may see the works of the Belorussian painter Michał Savicki, one of the most eminent representatives of the so called "raw style" using a limited set of means of expression. This tradition is based on laconic though monumental form. The exhibition also includes the works of the well-known Belorussian landscape painter Valery Škaruba and the master of book illustration and etching Ryhor Paplaŭski.

Among the Russian painters there is Valancin Sidaraŭ the president of the Union of Painters of Russia, Ivan Lubyennikov who was responsible for the new interior designs of the Moscow underground stations and the Mayakovsky Museum. His works are to be found in Tretyakovska Gallery, the Russian Museum and many private collections. The paintings of Efremy Zverkov and stained-glass of Victor Usanov are also presented at the exhibition.



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 Belarussian languages.

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

