

The fact that 33 countries from the UN General Assembly have proposed a draft resolution condemning Belarus for breaching human rights has attracted much media coverage.

The resolution's authors, among them the US, EU member states and Japan, have reminded the authorities in Minsk about the disappearing of President Lukashenka's three political opponents in 1999 and a journalist in 2000.

The Belarusian regime is being accused of persecuting and liquidating NGO's, ethnic minorities' organizations, independent media, religious associations, political parties from the opposition, independent trade unions, as well as student associations. The list includes also the European Humanitarian University, forced by authorities to leave Belarus (it now operates from Vilnius).

Last year the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Minsk for breaching democratic freedoms. However, Russia voted against the resolution, which let Belarus disregard the UN decision.

However, what may get much more media coverage and have greater consequences for the regime is the US administration's decision to introduce sanctions aimed at the Belarusian state-owned concern Belneftekhim to put more pressure on the Belarusian President, whom the US had already banned from entering its territory. In 2006 the US Ministry of Finance blocked the accounts of Lukashenka and other top-rank Belarusian officials.

Now the American authorities have forbidden their citizens to do business with

Belneftekhim and blocked its assets in America, where the Belarusian concern owns Belneftekhim USA Inc.

The concern is one of the „diamonds” of the Belarusian economy, bringing as much as 20% of revenues into Belarus' state budget.

According to experts, if in the US manages to create more Euro-Atlantic solidarity as regards Lukashenka's regime through broadening the number of countries participating in the sanctions, then, combined with tougher relations with Gazprom – since 1 January 2008 Belarus will receive

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the same gas price tariffs as the rest of Europe, the regime reigning in Belarus will lose its economic base.

And that is why Lukashenka has once again resorted to military arguments, which has been approved of by Russia.

A representative of the Belarusian Ministry of Defense, and then his Russian counterpart have announced Russia's intention to locate Russian missile bases – Iskander – on the territory of Belarus.

As in the case of the UN resolution, disregarding complications in Putin-Lukashenka relation, the Kremlin has once again lent a helping hand to Europe's last dictatorship.

With growing tension inside Russia, which is a cause of the turmoil connected with Putin's stepping down, the "Lukashenka factor" is gaining importance.

This is further confirmed by statements concerning the possibility of an asymmetric answer to the question of placing elements of an American anti-missile shield in Europe, consisting in equipping Belarus in Russian missile launcher, Iskander.

More attention will also be paid in Belarus to Lukashenka's plans concerning the construction of own nuclear plant.

The European Union, in particular the member states neighboring with Belarus will be forced to define their stance on US sanctions.

To understand the inner economic situation of Belarus it is worth noting that the influence of foreign capital is increasing in banking.

The uncertain situation on the international financial market is not influencing Belarus' financial market negatively yet, however it may contribute to rising costs of external debts of Belarusian banks and companies.

As of 1 September this year, the share of foreign capital in Belarus' banking system, apart from the "state four" (JSC "JSSB Belarusbank", JSC «Belagroprombank», JSC «BPS-Bank» and "Belinvestbank" JSC) have increased to the level of 56.8%, compared with 54.6% on 1 August.

According to official data, foreign capital is present in 23 of 27 Belarusian banks. Russia's share in the banking system of Belarus as of 1 September 2007 was 19.2%, followed by Austria – 11%, Great Britain – 6.8%, Cyprus – 5.8%, Ukraine – 2.6%, Latvia and Switzerland – each 2.5%, the Netherlands – 2.2%, Kazakhstan – 1.3%, Libya and Ireland – each 0.8%, the Bahamas – 0.5%, and the USA – 0.4%

Experts warn that the growth rate in the Belarus' financial sector might slacken due to the rising prices on the international capital market.

As far as the socio-economic situation is concerned, it can be said that one thing is certain: it is not possible to continue with the living standard observed in recent years, which was rising continuously until 2006 contributing to the wealth of Belarusian citizens and general economic successes.

In the future it will be only possible to secure stability increasing the positive balance in external trade. However, according to experts the situation is quite the reverse. In such conditions trying to maintain the current living standard even at the cost of selling state-owned property will be extremely difficult. It is impossible to sell state-owned companies at such pace. Hence the conclusion, living standards will fall, which is obvious. The last meeting of the president with the cabinet showed that the blame will be pinned on the current government. Nevertheless, no-one expects that the change of cabinet will bring about a radical change of the Belarusian authorities' policies.

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Belarus to donate \$100,000 of humanitarian aid to Moldova

This sum will come from the fund established to finance expenses connected with liquidating the effects of acts of God.

As the president's press office has informed, on 13 November Aliaksandr Lukashenka accepted a decision made by the Belarusian cabinet to donate humanitarian aid to Moldova. The decision to support Moldova in its fight against the drought aftermath was made in reply to a request by Moldova's PM, Vasile Tarlev.

Belarus will also donate 150 tons of potatoes worth \$55,000 and 100 tons of wheat seeds worth \$30,500. The total worth of humanitarian aid – formalities, loading and shipping costs included – will be \$100,000.

This sum will come from the fund established to finance expenses connected with liquidating the effects of acts of God, breakdowns and catastrophes. The action will be coordinated by the Belarusian Ministry for Emergency Situations.

POLITICS

Sanctions against the Belneftekhim concern

The US Ministry of Finance has introduced sanctions against the Belneftekhim concern, informs the TUT.BY portal, referring to the Ministry's website.

All Belneftekhim's and its subsidiaries' accounts have been blocked and an appeal has been made to American entrepreneurs to refrain from business contacts with the concern.

“We are intensifying sanctions against Lukashenka and his environment, we are introducing restrictions regarding a big state-controlled”, declared Adam Szubin, representative of the US Ministry of Finance.

Last week deputy adviser of the Secretary of State, David Kremer, spoke of the possible introduction of sanctions against Belarus. The main reason for doing so is Belarus' not meeting the requirements set, in particular releasing all political prisoners.

A stamp allowing to leave Belarus will be abolished on the condition that...

State authorities promise to abolish the stamps allowing Belarusian citizens to leave the country. However, the abolishing is connected with one restriction – a list of people banned from going abroad is to be drawn up.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is working on such a database. People who have knowledge of state secrets, people against whom criminal proceedings are in progress, who are wanted by authorities, people with court sentences and with debts. The information concerning the temporary ban on leaving the country will be relayed to the National Border Committee and from there to all border crossing points in the country.

The stamp which allows to travel abroad was declared unconstitutional five years ago. Its abolishing was delayed by the fact that there

was no list of people with a temporary ban on traveling abroad.

ECONOMY

Belarus has 5 banking facilities for every 1,000 citizens

„Finance for everybody?“ – in a survey under such a title the World Bank analyzes the accessibility of banking services to citizens of different countries.

The accessibility to financial instruments varies considerably in different countries. The differences are not only regional. For instance, in Greece virtually every citizen decided to take a loan, while in the neighboring Albania – only one person in 250.

According to the survey, the Belarusian financial services accessibility indicator is relatively low – only 16% citizens are using them. By means of comparison: In Ukraine – 24%, Russia – 69%, Poland – 66%, the US and Great Britain – 91%, and 98% in Singapore.

Belarus fares a bit better when it comes to the number of banking facilities per 1,000 people. There are 5 of them in Belarus, 2 in Russia, 4 in Lithuania, 8 in Poland. According to the ranking, there are 30 banking facilities per 1,000 people in the US, 50 in Germany, 95 in Spain.

SOCIETY

Youth defends Belarusian artist

The activists of the youth-wing of the BPF party have started campaigning for Belarusian-speaking artists. They demand that the authorities stop impeding the activity of Belarusian rock bands from organizing concerts and festivals. This is why they are collecting signatures, which will be later sent to the Ministry of Culture and Information, as well as preparing activities to support the artists.

The young members of the BPF party have announced a campaign to support Belarusian-speaking musicians. Among their demands are, enabling fans to attend concerts, without canceling gigs two hours in advance due to alleged technical shortcoming at the venue.

“When the soul weeps from pain” - meeting to commemorate victimized writers held in Minsk

On 14 November in the German International Education Center in Minsk meeting to commemorate victimized writers, “When the soul weeps from pain”, was organized. Its initiators were the social organizational committee for the campaign to honor Stalin’s victims, the Associations of Belarusian Writers and the international social organization Belkni hazbor.

When opening the meeting, writer Volha Ipatava reminded of the words of Michaś Čarot, written by the poet just before he was shot at a wall of an internal NKVD prison in Minsk (called „the American“): „All of them could tell the story of themselves, tortured and slain by the ruthless Stalinist regime”.

OPPOSITION

Hramada has made an appeal to the PACE to define its stance on the Kazulin sentence

An appeal has been made to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to “issue a legal opinion concerning the persecutions by the Belarusian judiciary” of the former candidate in the presidential elections, the head of the Belarusian Social-democratic Party (Hramada), Aliaksandr Kazulin.

As the deputy president of the party, Ihar Rynkievich said, the appeal was part of an international campaign of expressing solidarity with the political prisoner.

Authors of the document remind that during the visit to Belarus, the president of the PACE René van der Linden promised to check the legal status of the sentences for Belarusian opposition activists, considered political prisoners.

“Belarusian authorities deny there being any political prisoners in Belarus. Such an influential institution like the PACE could exert some influence on Minsk as well and lead to the release of Kazulin and other prisoners of conscience”, claims Ihar Rynkiewicz.

The appeal has been handed into the Minsk OSCE office and e-mailed to the PACE.

CULTURE

The concert to present the new album of the Belarusian band Neuro Dubel was cancelled

The concert to present the new album of the Belarusian band Neuro Dubel was cancelled. The event was supposed to take place on 14 November.

As the leader of Neuro Dubel, Aliaksandr Kulinkovich, informed, a couple of hours before the concert the directors of the Minsk concert hall, where the concert was to take place, had a conversation with the KGB, and consequently the concert was cancelled.

„I cannot comment on this situation in elegant words”, said Kulinkovich. At the same time the artist informed that the concert will be held at some other time and some other place, but “it will not be a presentation this time”.



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

