

X Minsk Forum held on November 22-24 may become a new and noticeable impulse in the process of standardization of relations between Belarus and united Europe. One proof of that is a big number of representatives of the European Union, Germany and Belarusian authorities at the Forum. In their speeches speakers from western Europe put special emphasis on Belarus as a country used for the transit of natural energy materials and goods through its territory. Simultaneously they ensured that Brussels does not aim to “isolate” Belarus and is ready for dialogue which would include 12 already known conditions, among them the release of political prisoners, the protection of human and citizens rights, the freedom of speech and free media as well as holding transparent and fair elections.

It is worth stressing that the importance of Belarus as a transit country consists in 20% of gas delivered to Europe (with 80% being delivered through Ukraine) and about 45-50 million tons of oil. Berlin claims that Russian oil covers only 30% of the country’s demand for the black gold.

According to numerous experts, the signs of a dialogue with the Belarusian regime will last until the appearance of alternative possibilities for the delivery of Russian energy resources to Germany as well as other countries of the European Union („Nord Stream” project).

The presidential media paid a lot of attention to the Minsk Forum while creating possibilities for some speakers to deliver their speeches e.g. on television. Access to national and foreign media was also granted to high ranking Belarusian authorities participating in the Forum. An official propaganda made all the efforts to create an impression that there has appeared a serious dialogue with Europe based on the energy security and not on “some sort of” human rights.

It would seem that one token of such a dialogue could have also been talks held during the Forum in the Belarusian Foreign Ministry with EU’s main advisor to Javier Solana, Helga Schmidt and the director of the French Ministry’s Continental Europe Department, Jacques Faure. It turned out, though, that all those who did not believe in the fact that the Belarusian president is capable of carrying out a dialogue in a way leading Belarus back to Europe were right.

“Europe these days does not want to have regular relations with Belarus because at some point it has launched out and today it should come out of this situation to save its face” Lukashenka said in an interview with the Spanish daily “El Pais”. “When the European Union decides to do that then we will sit down at one table and we will talk if we want to get closer. This is what we have been

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aiming for and talking about it everywhere” stressed Lukashenka. “Meanwhile the European Union does not want to do that and hence is making conditions that are unacceptable. Why put conditions to our dialogue? There’s no need for that” summed up Lukashenka.

Such a reaction of Lukashenka appeared literally within two days after official statements of EU representatives on the Belarusian striving for dialogue.

What’s also worth stressing is the following fact. It is well known that the head of Poland’s new government Donald Tusk has issued a number of statements announcing the will to improve relations with Russia and Belarus. Unfortunately, there appeared an isolation tendency on the side of the Belarusian regime, an example of Homel being one proof of that.

Several Polish citizens were expelled from Belarus for participating in a seminar of Belarusian advocates of human rights held in a private apartment. Their visas were simply annulled. One can also recall that before taking the post of the PM Donald Tusk was proclaimed by the Belarusian authorities to be persona non grata. Such examples do not bode well for the Minsk – Warsaw relations. However, as eurodeputy Janusz Onyszkiewicz claims, Poland’s current government will conduct a “more reasonable” policy towards Belarus without obviously being harmful to the generally accepted democratic standards and European values.

In view of a certain revival of contacts on various levels between official Minsk and Europe the latest developments in Moscow again cause uneasiness among recipients of Russian oil. “Gazprom” informs that the European recipients should expect increase in prices. Following the increase of oil prices next year gas tariffs will also increase by 17% thus reaching the rate of 300-350 USD for a thousand cubic meters.

It has been announced that an agreement with Turkmenistan on the considerable increase of prices had been reached. In the first half of next year Russian national company will pay 130 USD for a thousand cubic meters while in the second half – 150 USD in comparison with 100 USD paid this year. “Gazprom” will adjust its prices to market reality as of January 2009. Then Belarus may be paying even 150-200 USD per thousand cubic meters.

According to independent economists, such an outlook has already intensified the increase in prices in the country and has contributed to the appearance of new hope for achieving a Russian loan worth 1.5 billion USD. It has also brought about tales of a possible working visit of Vladimir Putin to Belarus before the end of the year.

## OFFICIALLY

### **The UN Committee has adopted a resolution on human rights in Belarus**

**The document was submitted by USA jointly with Australia, the EU, Israel, Canada, Switzerland and Japan. 68 countries voted in favor of the resolution, while 32 were against it and 76 abstained from voting.**

In the document they expressed their uneasiness over systematic violation of human rights in Belarus and further “erosion

of the democratic process”. The authorities are oppressing the opposition and advocates of human rights as well as independent journalists. The resolution calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately release political prisoners as well as to stop oppression of political opponents, social activists, advocates of human rights and independent media. Apart from that the UN is calling the Belarusian authorities to remove from their posts all the officials who had any connection with the disappearance of politicians, with their torturing and murders as well as to carry out an open investigation of

their disappearances and to punish those who are found guilty.

## OPPOSITION

### **The Congress of Pro-European Belarusian Forces**

**The leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party „Narodnaja Hramada” Mikalai Statkievich is appealing to hold a Congress of the Pro-European Belarusian Forces.**

The politician notes that the time has come to specify which direction Belarus should follow – to the West or to Russia. The problem has become a very live issue because many European politicians are putting forward concrete suggestions for cooperation both with the official authorities and with the opposition. According to Mikalai Statkievich, a considerable part of the opposition is still ignoring the calls of the European Union. The leader of the party „Narodnaja Hramada” stresses that the Congress of Pro-European Belarusian Forces should take place before the spring of 2008.

The authorities did not allow Minsk citizens to celebrate the birthday of a political prisoner, Aliaksandr Kazulin.

Minsk municipal authorities did not give permission for a picket on the birthday of a presidential candidate and the leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party „Hramada” („Hromada”) Aliaksandr Kazulin.

The action was planned for November 25 in three places – in Bangalor Square, in the Park of the 50th Anniversary of October Revolution as well as at Arlouskaia street. The authorities did not grant permission to carry out the picket.

## SOCIETY

### **The anniversary of the Slutsk Uprising**

**On November 27 the Belarusian society celebrates the anniversary of the Slutsk Uprising. It was in November and December of 1920 that the locality of Slutsk was the place where a**

**military attempt of defending the independence of Belarus took place. Belarusian military units which included rural population attempted to resist the Russian army.**

In the years 1918-20 Slutsk was an important center of the national movement. As a result of the Riga Treaty new national borders were outlined and both Belarus and Ukraine were divided in two parts. The territory around Slutsk remained neutral for some time. Over time, though, it has come under the Polish reign. Poland did not make obstacles to the development of the national movement in the Slutsk region and to the creation of Belarusian military units. Fighting between Belarusian and Russian colonels started on November 27. Their forces weren't equal, though. At the end of December Slutsk insurgents retreated to the territory of Poland where they were then disarmed.

Official Belarusian authorities ignore the date of the Slutsk Uprising while participants of the national movement of Belarus celebrate it as the Day of the Hero.

### **223 French soldiers were reburied near Barysau**

**223 French soldiers were buried near the village of Studzionka of the Barysau region on the left bank of the Biarezina river. The ceremony was conducted on the 195th anniversary of the overcoming of the river by the French army.**

The killed soldiers were found two years ago in the wilejski region near the village of Sieliszczka. It has been proved that all of them either died in combat or froze in their sleep not being able to survive extreme freezing temperatures of the Belarusian winter. Apart from the ashes of the soldiers the search battalion found the remains of their clothes, buttons as well as shots of various calibers. Last year near Studzionki the ashes of one soldier were buried during a special ceremony but the French Embassy wished for all the soldiers to be buried in this place. The ceremony was attended by the French ambassador Mireille Mussot, representatives of the French foreign ministry and the

Belarusian defense ministry, local authorities, priests, heads of diplomatic missions of some countries as well as representatives of the community.

In her speech Mireille Mussot welcomed the fact that the French soldiers had finally found an eternal rest. She also laid flowers at the Monument of the Studzionka Battle which was unveiled 5 years ago.

## POLITICS

### **The visit of Aliaksandr Milinkevich to Riga**

**Aliaksandr Milinkevich paid a visit to the Latvian capital, Riga where he participated in an international conference “The Baltic States and the Neighborhood Policy of the European Union”.**

The meeting was held with the support of the Latvian foreign ministry and the Council of the Baltic Sea Countries.

Aliaksandr Milinkevich met with Belarusian Diaspora in Latvia. The leader of the “Movement for Freedom” came to Riga at the personal invitation of the Latvian prime minister. A representative of the Belarusian foreign ministry also participated in the meeting.

## ECONOMY

### **Increase of milk and meat prices**

**Prices of dairy and meat products have gone up again in Belarus.**

According to official data, low fat sour cream, milk and cottage cheese have gone up by 5,5%. Products with a higher fat content have gone up by almost 15%. The increase in prices of meat and meat products amounts to about 8%.

## CULTURE

### **Napoleon Orda Exhibition in Minsk**

**An exhibition of paintings of Napoleon Orda was launched on November 27 in Minsk to celebrate the painter’s 200th birthday. The reproductions of paintings were brought from the National Museum in Warsaw.**

Napoleon Orda is an outstanding 19th century Rzeczpospolitan artist, producing over a thousand water-colours and paintings depicting the historical places of Belarusian and Polish lands. Some of his works provide the only remaining documentary sources displaying hundreds of residences and other buildings.

The exhibition is on display until December 29 in the building of the Belarusian National Library. Its main organizer is the Polish Institute in Minsk.



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

