

The objective of Vladimir Putin's visit to Belarus, lasting from 13 to 14 December, was to sum up the period 1991-2007 in the Russian-Belarusian relations, as most observers report. It is worth emphasizing that it has been the first such meeting in 2007 between the two heads of the states and that the inter-state integration which would result in forming one union state features among the projects that Putin has so far not succeeded in completing.

Apparently, both Russian and Belarusian analysts are tired with trying to guess the real reasons and objectives of Putin's visit to Minsk. They don't think the meeting will have any spectacular results. They assure it is but a regular visit planned well in advance.

However the admirers of surprises, peculiar to the Kremlin's host is, are in a different mood. According to their words, Putin will make it a "yes-no" situation: either Russia and Belarus decide to end the building of a union state and will have referenda concerning the support of each country's citizens for the Union of Russia and Belarus project, or Russia will terminate the union agreement and will start building strict and realistic market relations, preserving the transition periods concerning prices of energy raw materials fixed earlier by the Russian authorities.

The decision whether to opt for the first or the second scenario made by Russian authorities will be influenced by the results of the December meeting in Minsk.

If Lukashenka's meeting with Putin will not result in any progress whatsoever, Belarus will only remain politically autonomous for a while, since it will soon lose it, owing to economic reasons.

Foreseeing such a scenario, the Belarusian side tried to soften Russia's tough stance, causing an information leak to international media.

Other possible consequences of Putin's visit are not out of the question, like the creation of different moods and delusions among the Belarusian *nomenclature*.

An important factor influencing the home political situation in Belarus may be connected with the planned increase in the prices of communal services by USD 20 in 2008.

Everything depends on the price of Russian gas, which will be subject to negotiations. The conditions for oil supplies are also deteriorating, hence the society will be forced to pay more that

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is proved by the cancellation of social benefits. With the time passing, various additional expenses will become more and more of a burden to the society.

The results of a survey carried out by the Institute of Privatization and Management indicate that expenses on foodstuff and communal products and services between 1996 and 2006 were respectively 56.6% and 8.9% of all costs spent by 20% of the poorest households and 45.7% and 5.1% by 20% of the wealthiest ones respectively.

The prices for foodstuff in Belarus went up 136 times (!), those for communal services – 453 times (!), and those for non-food products – 72 times (!) within the mentioned period.

The individual entrepreneurs may become a real catalyst of changes in Belarus. Despite possible repressions, the demonstration held on 10 December in the city center of Minsk gathered more than 1000 businessmen. The action participants expressed their opposition to a president's discriminating decree, related to the conditions of their work.

The present protesting moods show that the long-standing rule of fear in Belarus is something that can be overcome.

OFFICIAL

Nuclear and Radiological Safety Department is being created in Belarus

Nuclear and Radiological Safety Department is being created by the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Belarus. It will be responsible for controlling the building and exploitation of the Belarusian nuclear power plant.

Recruitment in the new department, which is to be staffed with 32 employees, has already started. In the future, after settling it with MAGATE, Belarusian specialists will be offered the possibility of internships in Russia and Ukraine.

POLITICS

Human Rights Day in Belarus

10 December is the International Human Rights Day. Belarusian human rights activists have called upon the UN Security Council to investigate once again into violating human rights in Belarus.

„We call upon the countries who are members of the UN Security Council, in particular the

authorities of the Russian Federation, to examine once again the problems connected with violating human rights in Belarus”, reads the human rights activists' statement issued by the Committee for Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repressions.

OPPOSITION

Zmicier Chviedaruk beaten up badly

Some protesters suffered in a demonstration against Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, visit to Minsk, which took place on the October Square at 6PM.

Protesters were badly beaten up by the *riot police*. Zmicier Chviedaruk, who suffered a concussion and stomach injury, is currently being hospitalized in the 9th Clinical Hospital in Minsk. He is being constantly supervised by the police.

The protest's initiator was deputy head of the Belarusian National Front Party (BNF), Viktor Ivaszkievicz, who called upon supporters of freedom, independence and the pro-European option to come to the October Square with the flags of Belarus and the EU.

SOCIETY

Mikalaj Charhiniec takes legal action against Alaksandar Tamkovich

The first trial concerning slandering the President of the official and pro-government Association of Belarusian Writers, Mikalaj Charhiniec by the journalist for the independent “New Time”, Alaksandar Tamkovich, will start 19 December. Mikalaj Charhiniec accuses Tamkovich of offending his dignity in an article in “New Time”.

For his moral losses Mikalaj Charhiniec demands 100 million Belarusian rubles from the journalist and 500 million Br from the „New Time” weekly, claiming that the huge damages will prevent other journalists from attempts at offending him.

Charhiniec declared also that if the court agrees with him, he will donate the damages to a psychiatric clinic in Belarus.

ECONOMY

Russia offers Belarus gas for \$165 for 1,000 square meters

Russia offers Belarus gas for \$165 for 1,000 square meters in 2008. It is the result of negotiations held in Moscow between head of Gazprom’s board and Belarus’ first PM, Uladzimir

Siamiashka, reports Interfax agency quoting a reliable anonymous source.

The Belarusian government’s counter-proposal to Gazprom was \$ 119.5 for 1,000 square meters, which led the negotiations to collapse.

Ukraine has already signed an agreement with Russia for gas supplies in 2008. The price will be \$179.5 for 1,000 square meters. Currently Ukrainians are paying \$130, while Belarusians - \$ 100 for 1,000 square meters of Russian gas.

CULTURE

Kiryl Turauski medal for Jan Zaprudnik

A well-known Belarusian ex pat, historian and scientist Jan Zaprudnik will receive Kiryl Turowski memorial medal. The prize is awarded by the Metropolitan of Miensk and Slutsak, the Patriarchal Head of all Belarus Filaret for Mr. Zaprudnik’s contribution to the development of Christianity in Belarus.

The decision was taken as early as in mid-November, but it has only been made public now. The Metropolitan Filaret acknowledged Jan Zaprudnik’s help in building an Orthodox church of Saint Eufrosiniya in Ivianiec. Jan Zaprudnik lives with his family in the US but supports the spiritual and national revival in Belarus.



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

