

Five Candidates to MPs from the United Civil Party of Belarus Terminate Participation in the Parliamentary Election

The EU Position Caused "Vague Optimism" of Belarusian Government

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The Belarusian authorities are taking pains in order to demonstrate some progress in holding the Parliamentary election in accordance with the OSCE standards. Thus, following the Central Election Committee's initiative, there was arranged the repeated TV presentation of several candidates' five-minute election speeches. This innovation appeared in response to a remark, delivered by the ODIHR OSCE observers about few if any signs of electioneering in Belarus.

The Belarusian political scientists join the international observers' concern, mentioning that the state authorities managed to refine on the methods of holding "quite" elections in the past. Consequently, the election process can be hardly noticed by average citizens.

Politicization of society in connection with electoral campaigns is malapropos to the regime in power. Therefore, the candidates' campaigning resources are strictly limited. The government provides every candidate with a sum that equals nearly USD 800 for publishing leaflets and posters. The funds are sufficient for



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printing quite a frugal number of inexpressive black-and-white informational materials. It is banned by the law to use donors' assistance or personal savings for electioneering. Also, the local state executive authorities normally permit the candidates to hold their meetings with voters in solitary places only.

Consequently, the results of independent surveys show that a lot of citizens know little if anything at all about the candidates in their constituencies, to say nothing about the contents of their election pledges.

At the same time, according to a survey results, presented by specialists from the Informational and Analytical Center at the Belarusian President's Office, 84.6% of respondents expressed their desire to take part in the coming Parliamentary election. (The survey was held in August 2008.) A little bit more than 9% of respondents told that they weren't going to take part in the election, and nearly 6% of respondents stated that they hadn't decided if they would vote.

The Independent Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies (Vilnius) held a survey in June 2008. Surprisingly, it presented quite different results. Around 53% of respondents from Belarus told that they would vote at the coming Parliamentary election 2008. 18.4% of respondents told that they wouldn't take part in the election. At the same time, 27.4% of respondents felt uncertain if they would come to polling

stations to leave their vote and 1.2% of respondents refused to answer the question at all.

There's no doubt that the number of people, wishing to vote at the election could grow to a certain extent from June to August. However, it could hardly grow by over 30%. Therefore, some independent experts have drawn a conclusion that the state authorities have an intention to ensure high percentage of voters at polling stations by administrative methods.

In particular, up to 1/3 of voters took part in early voting during the previous elections. The early voting period amounts to five days, preceding the Election Day, according to the Belarusian law. Thus, although the election to the lower chamber of the National Assembly has been appointed to September 28, 2008, the polling stations will open their doors for early voting since September 23, 2008.

The opposition activists believe that early voting creates favorable conditions for rigging the election, as on the one hand, the state authorities urge students, servicemen, collective farmers, workers etc. to leave their votes before the Election Day and on the other hand, the ballots are left in the ballot-boxes without any independent control for five days in a row that creates favorable grounds for forgery.

Also, the human rights and democratic opposition activists believe that the election results can be fabricated at the stage of composing the final protocols of local election committees, when "the required" figures are inserted into the documents instead of the real ones. The observers' access to counting of votes is usually highly restricted. Each polling worker usually counts his/her part of ballots only and tells the result to the head of the local election committee. Consequently, he/she knows nothing about the general voting results.

The opposition activists note it is not by chance that the representatives of oppositional political parties in the overwhelming majority of cases weren't allowed to become members of local election committees. Polling workers are selected by local governmental authorities. Consequently, less than 50 democratic activists out of almost 70,000 (!) polling workers were permitted to enter the local election committees.

At the same time, the state authorities agreed without any objections to let the representatives of oppositional political parties work at the Central Election Committee with the advisory vote. This decision was used for the official propagandist purposes as an example of democratization of election process. However, it should be

emphasized that in reality the opposition activists have not real influence on the Central Election Committee's activity at all.

Thus, e.g. the Central Election Committee refused to consider the claims, submitted by the CEC members with the advisory vote during a session on September 18, 2008. In particular, there was a request to figure out why Barysau printing house had been persistently refusing to duplicate the election materials, prepared by the candidates from the United Democratic Forces, including Anatol Lyabiedzka, Stanislau Bahdankievich and others.

"We can't discuss rumors and gossips the whole day long", the CEC Head Lidziya Yarmoshyna noted, according to the RL/RFE update.

A memorial action, commemorating the kidnapped politicians was brutally upset by the riot police forces in Miensk on September 16, 2008. The attack evoked wide response both in Belarus and abroad. Several democratic opposition activists were beaten hard during the action dispersal. Consequently, the leadership of the United Democratic Forces submitted a claim to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Certainly, there had been even more ruthless cases of police attacks against the democratic opposition in



Belarus. However, nowadays, when the international observers follow precisely the political atmosphere in the country, the incident has definitely spoiled the image of the Belarusian government. According to the leader of "Za Svabodu" civil movement and a former candidate to Presidency Alaksandr Milinkievich, "the state authorities committed a serious blunder", when they dispersed the memorial action on September 16, 2008, as the scandalous step was pushing back the dialogue between the Belarusian government and the EU.

A. Milinkevich told in the interview to the RL/RFE that in his opinion, different groups within the Belarusian government are struggling for and against the use of force against

demonstrators. The West will not suspend its dialogue with the Belarusian authorities in response to the brutal police attack. However, the western politicians will definitely express their deep concern with the incident, the oppositional politician believes.

Independent analysts have noticed a similar fight is taking place between a group of market economy supporters and orthodox economists in the Belarusian government. The progressively thinking economists in the government won a victory, when a highly ridiculous governmental order No.179 was cancelled. The governmental decision threatened numerous importers with bankruptcy. Firstly, the gloomy perspective concerned the small and medium-sized business representatives. The Belarusian business community expressed harsh indignation at the governmental restriction of trade markups for the imported commodities.

It should be emphasized that the import restrictions are caused by alarming figures in the field of foreign trade. The red ink of Belarusian foreign trade dashed to USD 1,762,100,000 during the first half-year of 2008, the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis reports.

The economic imperatives coerce to holding reforms. According to a recent "Doing Business-2009" report that

evaluates economies of 181 countries of the world as far as the simplicity of running business is concerned, Belarus has entered a list of countries, holding progressive legal reforms in the economic area. It was noted that Belarus had implemented reforms in six out of ten fields, investigated by analysts. Consequently, it moved to the 85th position from the bottom of the list.

Though, the tendency is not a breakthrough, undoubtedly, it is a real progress in the field, the Belarusian independent economists believe. However, they add that the quality of the Belarusian tax system is still evaluated as the poorest in the world.

POLITICS

Five Candidates to MPs from the United Civil Party of Belarus Terminate Participation in the Parliamentary Election

Anatol Lyabedzka, the Head of the United Civil Party of Belarus delivered a statement at a press-conference on September 19, 2008. Accordingly, five party activists, including Stanislau Bahdankievich, Valantsina Palevikova, Hanna Yahorava, Katsiaryna Malasayeva and

Alaksandar Dabravolski would stop their participation in the running parliamentary election.

The decision was caused by impossibility of publishing a common election leaflet, as no printing houses in Belarus agreed to take the order. The Central Election Committee Secretary Mikalay Lazavik told this Thursday that he had "a sincere desire to help Anatol Lyabedzka arrange the publishing of campaigning leaflets". However, he noted that the UCP candidates "decided to publish a special issue of "Narodnaya Vola" independent daily instead of campaigning leaflets" and "failed to respond" to his proposal to change the format of their election material, the BelaPAN News Agency reports.

OFFICIALLY

The EU Position Caused "Vague Optimism" of Belarusian Government

Andrei Papou, a spokesman for the Belarus' Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted positive signals on the part of the European Union in bi-lateral relations with Belarus.

He told that these steps evoke "vague optimism". Among other, he



expressed satisfaction with the document, approved after a recent meeting of the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Brussels.

However, he stressed that the EU officials failed to get rid of the traditional approach to Belarus. A. Papou added that the Belarusian government was waiting for concrete steps from the European Union instead of void declarations.

OPPOSITION

Hanchar and Krasouski Disappeared Nine Years Ago

A memorial action, commemorating the kidnapped politician Hanchar and his colleague Krasouski was held in Miensk on September 16, 2008.



It was upset by riot police with the use of force.



falling down rapidly because of high costs of food products. He notes that the costs for the commodities that the poor can afford buying are growing the most rapidly nowadays. The rich people often do not feel that the costs are rising quickly as they purchase a lot abroad, where the costs are considerably lower than in Belarus. The economist forecasts that up to 70% of commodities will become more expensive by another 30% till the end of 2008.

SOCIETY

Children Are Not Permitted to Improve Health Abroad

Several diplomatic representations in Belarus have confirmed information about the decision of Belarusian governmental officials to suspend the program of sending children from Chernobyl area to recreational trips abroad, the BelaPAN News Agency reports.

The Belarusian authorities did not confirm the fact. However, at the same moment the officials noted that bi-lateral inter-governmental treaties had to be signed with the countries that wish to take the children from



Chernobyl area abroad prior to the program revival.

Reportedly, no proposals of the kind have been received by the foreign embassies yet. Most probably, the ban is connected with the recent scandal, when an under-aged citizen of Belarus Tatsiana Kazyra refused to return to her home country from the United States after a similar recreational trip and pledged for asylum there.

CULTURE

"The Free Theatre" Started an International Action of Cultural Workers

The Belarusian actors started an international action of cultural workers in support of UN Convention against kidnapping. "The Free Theatre" presented a "Comprehending Love" performance about

famous people that disappeared without trace in Belarus within a framework of "Rotterdamse Schouwburg" international theatre festival in Rotterdam.

The performance is grounded upon the Krasouskies' love and family story. Iryna Krasouski arrived in Rotterdam in order to attend the first-night performance.

The British people of art were the first to support the action. They recorded two sound-tracks for the performance with the read fragments of UN Convention against kidnapping, the Charter'97 reports.



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

The action participants were beaten hard. A number of candidates to MPs, including the UCP leader Anatol Lyabedzka, a Deputy Head of BPF Party Vintsuk Viachorka and his son Franak Viachorka were beaten black and blue, the Charter'97 reports. The police officers were tearing into pieces the European and national banners.

ECONOMY

Minus USD 300 a Year

The Belarusians overpay USD 300 a year for food. An independent economist Yaraslau Ramanchuk has come to this conclusion recently.

Mr. Ramanchuk believes that the people's real earnings are