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Two Belarus' biggest government organizations – "Belaya Rus" and BRUY – are each preparing for a congress. The leaders of these organizations expect an even greater support from the authorities; the government hopes these bodies can and should operate on their own.

The first congress of the Republican public organization "Belaya Rus" is to be held on October 25 in the Palace of the Republic. The chairman of

the organization is the Minister of Education Aliaksandar Radzkou. The congress will be attended by over 400 delegates from all the regions of the country, as well as the capital of Belarus. 51 MP of the Chamber of Representatives are members of this organization. It's notable that "Belaya Rus" members did not mention they belonged to this organization during the election campaign. Among the new Council of the Republic senators as many as 25% are "Belaya Rus"

members. The total number of members in "Belaya Rus" is over 75,000 persons. The first congress of "Belaya Rus" has been postponed several times, because the scale of government support for this organization remained unclear.

The public organization "Belarusian Republican Union of Youth", which includes as many as 490,000 members, plans to hold a congress on October 29. According to some sources, the President's administration is getting seriously displeased with this organization, as it continuously fails to deliver despite huge financial support from the government. Law enforcement agencies' analysts are reporting that some BRUY leaders – both in Minsk and in regional headquarters – are misusing the financial assets they have been entrusted with. The administration decided to choose another leader for this organization. On a plenary session in July 2008, First Secretary of BRUY Leanid Kavalyou was dismissed from his post, and replaced by Yuri Kryvadubski, who previously occupied the position of a deputy chairman of BRUY's Central Control



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Commission. Shortly afterwards, first secretaries of regional BRUY offices were also replaced.

Mass media often dramatize the problems and prospects of government organizations by saying the authorities will either provide enormous support to them, or shut them down. However, both these scenarios are unlikely. The administration is prepared to spend a significant amount of money on these mass unions to utilize them as a replacement for civil society NGOs. On the other hand, the country's leadership doesn't think it necessary to create an "authority party", as such a party could ultimately gain enough political leverage without remaining loyal to the current

administration. The government's primary concern regarding BRUY and "Belaya Rus" is due to these organizations' inability to fulfill their purpose: they seem to be unable to even create an appearance of a civil society, much less replace it. So far, both organizations only proved capable of taking advantage of the provided privileges for the good of their leaders. Obviously, when providing certain privileges, the government expects these unions to operate on their own, without further support from the state or the governmental funds.

A notable event has been the recent public confession of Mikhalay Zaichenka, the Minister of Economics, that Belarus is faced

with indirect consequences created by the global financial crisis. "Our stock market is underdeveloped, so we're suffering less direct losses," - Zaichenka said. "The countries adversely affected by the crisis and facing economic slowdowns - such as Russia and the EU - are less likely to buy Belarus' produce, which makes it harder for us to preserve the high rate of economic growth."

A case in point: MAZ September sales on the Russian market have dropped by 20%. To correct this situation, MAZ - in cooperation with Belvneshekononbank - will render financial support to leasing company MazKontraktLizing in the amount of up to 10 million dollars to create a competitive edge on the Russian market.

Deputy Minister of Economics Tatsiana Starchanka noted that the global financial crisis could result in decreased external crediting, and that the government's plans to attract foreign investors could be jeopardized. She called attention to the fact that the largest credits in 2007 came from Russian banks, who, in their turn, acquired loans on external markets to finance Belarusian firms. "Despite this, the ambitious plans of attracting foreign investments are still on the agenda. We're still getting ready for the Belarusian Investment Forum

in London that will open November 16," - Deputy Minister of Economics said.

According to certain sources in the Belarusian government, the Russian firms are losing interest in investment projects in the Belarus' petroleum industry. In particular, the "SIBUR Minudobreniya" company has been negotiating the acquisition of the control share of "Grodno Azot", as well as ensure direct gas supplies to cover the needs of this company. Currently, these talks are stalled. "Naftan" and "Polymir" are in a similar situation.

During his presentation at the "Problems of forecasting and state regulation of social-economic development", Uladzimir Pinigin, who is the deputy director for scientific work at the Institute of Economics, noted that the Belarusian economy is "overheating", and needs modernization. According to Pinigin, measures should be taken before Belarus is faced with economic stagnation. "The usual remedies against overheating successfully used worldwide include economic modernization, increased foreign direct investment, economic restructuring, and radical changes in managing institutions," - the expert said.

With this goal in mind, the Institute of Economics has developed a concept of Belarus' economy modernization.



Additionally, Lukashenka charged Prapakovich with preparing and submitting regulation documents that would allow Belarus to become one of the world's top 30 countries with the most favorable credit climate.

OFFICIALLY

MPs Approved the Bill "On Information Security"

On October 9 the Belarusian MPs approved the bill draft "On information, programming and information security".

The developers say that the bill "On information, programming and information security" will define the order in which citizens can access information, regulate information exchange and information security, as well as the rights and obligations of program-technical instruments' holders and owners.

But independent analysts think that the bill will seriously restrict the citizens' constitutional rights for freedom of speech and information.

According to the head of BAJ's legal defense office, lawyer Mikhail Pastukhov the bill violates articles 33 and 34 of Belarusian Constitution, in which Belarusian

citizens are guaranteed free access to information.

The new law will be implemented in 6 months after its official publication.

POLITICS

A Diplomatic Nonsense

The parliaments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been granted the status of constant observers at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Belarus and Russia.

The controversial decision was taken, following corresponding requests from the parliaments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, during the 34th session of the Union State's Parliamentary Assembly, held in Moscow on October 17, 2008, the BelTA news agency reports.

The decision is highly odd as Belarus hasn't recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by the present moment, Consequently, the countries' administrations do not legally exist for the Belarusian governing structures.

SOCIETY

Belarusian Party "The Greens" in Europe

According to BelaPan news agency, Belarusian party "The Greens" became an observer in European Green Party. The decision was taken at the EGP congress in Paris and was initiated by the Belarusian party.

Observer status is a transitional stage to becoming EGP member and it can take up to three years. According to EGP's regulations, Belarusian party "The Greens" can become a full member of the organization.

"We think that this decision is a very important step which will strengthen Belarusian ecological movement position," — BPG's leader Aleh Novikau said. He noted that EGP is the third largest party in the European Parliament. If BPG became a member of EGR that could give Belarus an opportunity to raise ecological issues at the highest levels.

Currently, the documents is being reviewed by the state managing bodies in a variety of industries.

On October 17, while meeting with Head of National Bank of Belarus Piotar Prapakovich, Aliaksandar Lukashenka gave his go-head to preparing a presidential decree that would insure all bank deposits no matter the amount. This decree will also allow banks to accept deposits of any amount – and without requiring a declaration – from foreign citizens. Deposits privacy is to be ensured as per Belarusian legislation.

OPPOSITION

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UDF Plan to Change the Election and Criminal Codes The United Democratic Forces (UDF) are eager to change the Election and Criminal Codes of Belarus. A working group has been created for working out the contents of the new legal documents.

The UDF activists emphasize that the changes in the election legislation are required for holding normal elections instead of “election campaigns” in Belarus. At the same time, the democratic activists have declared a necessity of changing

a range of articles in the Criminal Code of Belarus that provide for severe responsibility for holding activities in political and non-governmental organizations.

Moreover, there have been processed the proposals on creating equal working conditions for the state and non-state media as well as the proposals on introducing more liberal working conditions for NGOs and political parties.

ECONOMY

State-regulated Economy is Belarus' Advantage in Global Crisis

In the global financial crisis Belarus has several advantages comparing to other countries, Chairman of the Belarus-EU Business Cooperation Council James Wilson said at the Belarusian Finance and Investment Forum in Minsk on October 22, BelTa news agency reports.

These are highly-qualified personnel and favorable production conditions which might interest the companies seeking to reduce production costs, he said. State-regulated economies have advantages in the global

financial crisis comparing to other countries.

According to James Wilson, it is unlikely that Belarus' regional position will strengthen and that capital will flow in Belarus from European stagnating markets.

Founded in May 2007, the Belarus-EU Business Cooperation Council is a non-profit organization based in Brussels. It aims at developing the relations between Belarus and the European Union, first of all, in the trade and economic area.

CULTURE

Pope John Paul II Museum in Belarusian Paris

Pope John Paul II Museum was opened, and also catholic church and a symbolical “Eiffel Tower” were consecrated in village Paris, Vitebsk oblast.

The opening and the consecration was initiated by padre of Mosyr village Yosas Bulka. The padre noted that Belarusian Eiffel tower differs from the French because it has a Christian cross on it.

The tower consists of an iron frame with a panoramic view ground. Figures of two angels and Mother of God stand near the tower.



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