

President Will Be Elected Not Later than February 8, 2011

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The most serious implications of the financial crisis in Belarus will show themselves in February and March 2009, believes Professor Alaksandar Luchanok, expert of the Institute of Economy of the National Academy of Sciences. "There is a need in serious reforming of all our approaches, social strategies, and viewpoints in order to survive in actual economic conditions", BelaPAN quotes the expert.

Meanwhile, the government tries to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund about obtaining a credit of USD 2 billion in order to maintain the financial stability. The IMF mission worked in Miensk from October 27 to November 23. However, the decision whether to issue a credit has been postponed. The mission will come back to Miensk in mid-December.

According to some media leak, IMF set a twenty per cent devaluation of Belarusian rouble as one of the conditions under which the credit may be issued.

However, this condition is hardly acceptable for the Belarusian authorities. Belarusian propaganda made



a cult of the stable exchange rate of Belarusian rouble. The growth of average earnings of Belarusians is traditionally measured in the dollar equivalent. Alaksandar Lukashenka set an objective to bring this figure up to seven hundred to one thousand dollars before the end of 2001 (now it is about 450 dollars). In the event of a significant devaluation these plans will fail, and the head of State will suffer reputation damage.

On the other hand, some experts believe that the devaluation may be

advantageous for Belarusian exporters. Now the country has a negative foreign trade balance.

On November 28 the official exchange rate was 2156 Belarusian roubles per US dollar. This year the exchange rate must fluctuate within a range of 2100 to 2200 Belarusian roubles per USD, according to the guidelines approved by the President. In 2009 the exchange rate should be kept within a five per cent fluctuation from the exchange rate established on January 1st.

However the National Bank does not exclude a revision of the exchange rate police if the economic situation worsens, stated Pavel Kalaur, Deputy Chairman of the Board of the National Bank, speaking in the Chamber of Representatives on November 27.

In the meantime it is now confirmed that from 2009 Belarusian rouble will not be pegged to US dollar only, as it was before, but to a basket of currencies. This basket will include US dollar, euro, and Russian rouble. The management of the National Bank explains this decision by the fact that lately dynamics of dollar's

exchange rate to euro became unpredictable. Independent experts regard the transition to a basket of currencies as a positive step for the national economy.

Financial and economic difficulties compel the authorities to speed up the process of economic modernization. The Ministry of Economy drafted a relevant State complex programme.

“We will not survive without investments, and without new enterprises”, stated Prime Minister Siarhiey Sidorski at a meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers on November 26. The head of government criticized sharply government agencies for being bureaucratic and slow in their relations with foreign investors.

Meanwhile, experts recommend reducing budget subsidies to industrial enterprises. “There is a need to determine what enterprises are unprofitable, and to close them down. It will lead to the growth of unemployment, but we know from experience that it is better to pay unemployment benefits than to maintain plants which produce constantly at loss”, says Professor Luchanok.

In the situation of economic problems and the Russian pressure the



latest European Commission proposal to join the agreement on association and common market looks tempting for Miensk. In order to do so Belarus will have to adopt all legislative acts of the European Union and to recognize the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

The European Commission intends to propose such an agreement to six post-Soviet countries, namely

to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. It is expected that the European Commission proposal will be made public on December 3, and on December 11 it will be included in the EU policy at the European Union summit. Practically it is a development of a Polish-Swedish

initiative of Eastern Partnership. The project budget will amount to 2,1 billion euro.

Siarhiey Martynau, Belarus' Foreign Minister, spoke positively about Eastern Partnership. However, experts believe that the Belarusian authorities may have some political concerns. They want to carry out an authoritarian modernization without touching to the very essence of the political regime. But the engagement into pan-European processes necessitates also certain steps in fields of

democracy, human rights, and individual freedoms.

Inter alia, in order to demonstrate some progress in these fields to the European Union Miensk promised to start a dialogue with OSCE on ways of improving the election legislation, to return Narodnaja Vola and Nasa Niva newspapers in the official distribution circuit, and to take into account the opinion of independent media community when developing legislative measures to regulate Internet.

“Internet is free and will be free in Belarus”, stated Usievalad Jancheuski, Head of the Main Ideological Directorate of the Presidential Administration at the round-table “Internet media: challenges in XXI century” on November 24 in Miensk. The discussion was organized by OSCE and the Ministry of Information.

On its part, Andrej Bastuniec, Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, criticized the authorities for their intention to “find out an additional mechanism of control over Internet resources by extending regulations of the Law on Media on them”. This law adopted in summer has some repressive norms and does not comply with OSCE standards.

Leaders of the Belarusian Association of Journalists had a

meeting with Usievalad Jancheuski, main State ideologist, on November 26. Problems of the freedom of expression and creation of more civilized conditions for independent media were discussed. In particular, they spoke about a need to return all independent media to the official distribution circuit. After the meeting Zhanna Litvina, head of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, expressed a cautious optimism.

At the meantime, two disgraced brands – Narodnaja Vola and Nasa Niva – will return on the newsstands in a little while. The publications have



signed relevant contracts. They have also been included into subscription catalogues. It should be reminded that several independent socio-political publications were excluded from the official distribution circuit before

the presidential election of 2006 and since then they organize their distribution by their own means.

In analysts' opinion, the authorities make now some partial concessions for the sake of normalizing relations with the European Union. The Belarusian democratic community stresses that in this process it is important for the European Union to be adhering to principles and not to become satisfied with imitation of a socio-political thaw.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian opposition analyzed lessons of the recent parliamentary campaign at the conference in Vilnia (Vilnius) on November 21 and 22. After a heated dispute the majority of participants came to the conclusion that it would be better to preserve the broad coalition and to nominate a unique candidate at the next presidential election. The acting head of State has declared his intention to run again in his recent interview to France Press news agency.

In the opinion of independent experts, an opposition candidate should advance the motto of change in the existing conditions of crisis and reluctant transformation. Some political analysts recommended to titular opposition members to look for "a Belarusian Obama".

OFFICIALLY

President Will Be Elected Not Later than February 8, 2011

Deadlines for holding next local and presidential elections are December 14, 2010 and February 8, 2011, Mikalaj Lazavik, Secretary of the Central Election Commission told to BelaPAN.

According to the Constitution, the election is held not later than two months before the expiration of the term of office of the current president. The president assumed office on April 8, 2006, Lazavik reminded, so the election must be held not later than February 8. However, the Commission's Secretary stressed that the election can be held before the deadline.



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POLITICS

Narodnaja Vola on Newsstands

Promises became reality. Belarusians are able to buy the independent Narodnaja Vola newspaper on newsstands. The first copies made their appearance on newsstands on November 27, and the latest issue had a circulation of eleven thousand copies.



photo.bymedia.net

As for Nasa Niva, it will appear on newsstands starting from the next issue which will be published on December 3 and 4.

One can subscribe to both independent publications.

OPPOSITION

Opposition Has Discussed What to Do Next

A conference dedicated to the situation in Belarus after last

September parliamentary election was held in Vilnia (Vilnius) on November 21 and 22.

Civil activists, representatives of political parties and NGOs, and independent experts took part in this conference.

For the first time after the end of the election campaign civil society discussed the common strategy of opposition's actions for the period until the presidential election of 2010.

Participants at the conference had a heated discussion about possible mechanisms of nominating a unique presidential candidate, the need in nominating such a candidate, and also the possibility of dialogue with the Belarusian regime in the new situation.

The conference in Vilnia was organized through the efforts of the Council of Europe and the parliamentary group "For a Democratic Belarus" of the Lithuanian Seimas.

ECONOMY

Another Negotiation Instead of IMF's Money

The mission of the International Monetary Fund will continue in December its consultations with the Belarusian authorities

on the issuance of a stand-by credit in the amount of USD 2 billion, Radio Liberty reports.



According to a press release from the National Bank of Belarus in December the parties will discuss “issues of technical nature”. It was also communicated that in accordance with an existent IMF procedure “after having agreed on all technical issues, a relevant package of documents would be submitted to IMF Executive Board for a final approval.”

Belarus is a member of IMF since 1992. During this period Belarus received from IMF two trenches of credit under the systemic transformation programme in August 1993 (USD 98 million) and in February 1995 (USD 101,7 million), as well as one trench of a stand-by credit in September 1995 (USD 101,7 million).

Since then the Fund never issued a credit to Belarus because the economic policy of the country did not get in line with recommendations of this international organization.

SOCIETY

In Viciebsk Newly Wed Will Start Their Family Life in an Orphanage

Viciebsk regional branch of the Red Cross has decided to create a new tradition associated with marriage registration. Halina Zhalanava, the branch's head, wants to introduce a tradition in which newly wed receive their gifts in toys instead of flowers so that right after the Civil Registry Office they take these toys as gifts to orphanages, Euroradio reports.

The first action of this kind is scheduled for St. Valentine Day, and afterwards she wants to time it on holidays such as New Year, Mother's Day, etc. Now staffers of the Red Cross select couples which would start the new tradition.

Halina Zhalanava believes that after such visits children from orphanages will understand that the family is something good and beautiful, and newly wed, after visiting an orphanage at the very beginning of their family life, will think about family values.

CULTURE

Be2gether on Both Sides of the Border

The organizers of the largest Baltic rock music festival Be2gether intend to hold the next festival on both sides of the border between Lithuania and Belarus, Nasa Niva reports quoting Hiedrus Klimkiavicus, founder and general producer of Be2gether.



“We want people of both countries to have equal opportunities to enjoy the music, because the festival's motto is “Music opens borders”, Hiedrus Klimkiavicus told.

Edminas Bagdonas, Ambassador of Lithuania in Belarus told that one stage might be assembled in Lithuania, and the other in Belarus.

The organizers of the festival want to discuss this idea with the

Belarusian authorities before the year is out. Edminas Bagdonas told the press that his Belarusian counterpart Uladzimir Drazhin “had expressed a positive opinion about our wish”.



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.