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The whole week in Belarus passed under the sign of active contacts with representatives of bodies of the integrated Europe. A rather unexpected visit to Miensk of Javier Solana and his meeting with Alaksandar Lukashenka is deemed to be the highest point of this process. It looks like the regime is coming out of years-long isolation after all, and, most likely, with minimal losses and

concessions to Europe. However, it got about, for example, that the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus have diverging views on how the comeback of Belarus to PACE could proceed. Inclusion of opposition to the delegation of the Belarusian parliament to PACE was, according to Göran Lindblad, head of PACE's delegation, a key issue discussed during the visit to Miensk. "We will find a way to include the opposition", he said. However, according to Foreign Minister of Belarus Siarhiej Martynau, Belarus may be represented in PACE only by deputies of the National Assembly. It should be noted that at his meeting with European parliamentarians Barys Batura, speaker of the Council of the Republic, did not preclude some possibilities of opposition's participation in the deliberation of certain issues at PACE's sessions. But any other official did not say anything about it and did not elaborate on opposition's opportunities. Only Lukashenka himself said that he would not build his relations with Europe on opposition's blueprints. In today's Belarus the opinion of the head of State is sufficient that things go one way and not the other.

Representatives of different European bodies that came to Miensk should have been impressed very much by the way Lukashenka gave public, TV-aired instructions in the form of formal demands to heads of the highest judicial authorities and the Prosecutor's Office to release a group of persons who had

committed a lynch-law murder. It gives an example of the independence of courts and the Prosecutor's Office in Belarus. According to some sources, the passages to the address of participants in the first meeting of the Consultative and Public Council affiliated with the Presidential Administration among whom there were some persons close to the opposition have had not a lesser impression on many. Lukashenka was rather rude in describing the eagerness of these participants in the meeting to assist authorities in overcoming the growing crisis. He simply turned down such help.

Despite optimistic information about contacts that happened in Miensk, which was disseminated by the presidential mass media, it became known that not all guests from Europe were expected enthusiastically by the Belarusian authorities. So, members of the delegation of the European Parliament for relations with Belarus underwent hardship in getting entry visas.

And this situation was triggered not only by a series of statements by Jacek Protasiewicz, head of the delegation, that he was disturbed by the "practice of the forced military draft" with active participation of secret service agents which exists in Belarus. "Such a practice gives rise to serious doubts that general conscription is not used as a method of political repression against opposition activists", said in the statement of the head of the delegation for relations with Belarus.

We will remind that on January 22 leaders of the United Democratic Forces published a statement in which they drew attention to the fact that the military draft of youth activists is done "as a rule, after

their expulsion from a university and irrespective of their fitness to the military service on medical indications." Among those who have been "politically drafted" already, leaders of the United Democratic Forces name Ivan Shyla, Franak Viachorka, Zmicier Zhalezniczenka, Ales Kalita, and Zmicier Salaviej.

"Secret services also interfere in drafting process of Fiodar Charankou, Paval Batujeu, Paval Kurjanovich, Zmicier Khviedaruk, Arciom Zabaryn, Ales Krutkin, and Uladzimir Siarhiejeu", said in the statement.

To these facts of outrage of human rights was added a so called "Vaukavysk case". Just on the eve of the visits of European delegations and Javier Solana to Miensk the authorities started to spin a case of a group of entrepreneurs from the town of Vaukavysk who were accused of terrorist actions against representatives of authorities and illegal keeping of weapons. Their apprehension was accompanied by a noisy propaganda campaign on television and a special operation of the riot police of the Internal Ministry who came expressly to Vaukavysk from Miensk.

According to the official version, Mikalaj Autukhovich, Jury Lavonau, and Uladzimir Asipienka are suspected of arson of the house of former Vaukavysk police chief and of the garage of a tax inspection employee which had happened in 2004 – 2005. At the same time, the victims of the arsons themselves do not have any claims against arrested entrepreneurs, because those guilty in these crime had been convicted a long time ago and now are serving prison terms.

There are reasons to believe that this subject was discussed during the meeting of Javier Solana and

Alaksandar Lukashenka. It should be noted that Solana came to Miensk after his visit to Moscow. In his interview to Radio "Moscow Echo" he admitted that the biggest contradiction between Moscow and Brussels remained the topic of aftermaths of the last-year war between Russia and Georgia. The European Union keeps criticizing the decision of Russia to recognize the independence of South Ossetia



and Abkhazia. Javier Solana pointed out that the European Union still considered them to be Georgian territories. As is known, Lukashenka still avoids recognizing the independence of these territories following Russia. It is quite possible that Javier Solana, as an experienced negotiator, tried to persuade Alaksandar Lukashenka into keeping this position towards preserving the territorial integrity of Georgia. It cannot be ruled out that during the conversation between Solana and Lukashenka attempts were made to offer some preferences, credits on favourable terms and EU projects for the Belarusian regime. However, as some observers believe, Solana could act in this way in Miensk in order to get on Kremlin's nerves and to intrigue against it. It is not a secret that Moscow follows very closely the temperature of current relations between the integrated Europe and Belarus. It is intriguing that for the first time ever the Russian

ambassador to Belarus was present at the meeting of the PACE's delegation with local diplomatic corpse. Earlier, as a rule, the Russian ambassador used to send his subordinates to such events with participation of European bodies. Numerous and regular statements of the Russian ambassador to Belarus on different subjects are also indicative of Russia's close attention. In these latter days these statements have increasingly provoked a rather nervous reaction of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry. And one day, according to some reports, the ambassador was even summoned to the Foreign Ministry for an "explanatory conversation".



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As is known, privatization plans of the Belarusian authorities arouse interest in the West, as well as in the East. Experts believe that Alaksandar Lukashenka de facto wrote it off for the next two years.

During his visit to "Babushkina krynka JSC" the question of possible privatization of reprocessing plants. "Who sells whatever during such a crisis? Today, in the midst of the global financial and economic crisis, nobody sells anything", Lukashenka told, as official sources reported. Lukashenka indicated that he was not ready to privatize this industry as a matter of principle, regardless of the crisis, as more than one billion dollars was invested in its modernization. One

may remind that this is exactly this "predictability" of the Belarusian leader foreign investors were afraid of. And they may influence the further development of the dialogue of Europe with Belarus in a much greater degree than different European officials.

OFFICIALLY

Supreme Court Deems Legitimate Military Agreements of Lukashenka with Russia

The Supreme Court did not grant the request of the Youth Front organization to file a motion to the Constitutional Court to declare agreements signed by Lukashenka in Moscow anti-constitutional and threatening to the sovereignty of Belarus.

The press service of the Youth Front reminds that in accordance with the legislation in force citizens and organizations cannot petition the Constitutional Court directly. It may be done only by Alaksandar Lukashenka himself, the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court or the Supreme Economic Court.

The Supreme Court refused to file such a motion and informed the Youth Front that it might file such a motion if it comes to the conclusion about the illegality of these agreements during court proceedings in a specific case.

POLITICS

Great European Week



photo.bymedia.net

This week Miensk is full of European visitors, Narodnaja Vola reports.

On Monday, a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe arrived in Belarus. During three days the representatives of PACE intend to discuss prospects of a further dialogue in the field of democracy and human rights with Belarusian authorities. Meetings are scheduled with officials – chairpersons of both chambers of the National Assembly, the Prosecutor-General, chairpersons of the Supreme and Constitutional Courts, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Administration, as well as with representatives of opposition.

SOCIETY

Aleh Vouchak: "More than Fifty Afghan War Veterans Turned Down Lukashenka's Medals"



On the date of the twentieth anniversary of the pullout of the Soviet troops of Afghanistan Belarusian veterans of foreign campaigns turned down anniversary medals in protest.

In this regard more than fifty persons sent a letter to Alaksandar Lukashenka and Prime Minister Siarhiey Sidorski, website ucpb.org reports quoting Aleh Vouchak, one of the leaders of the association "Defenders of the Motherland" and human rights activist.

The appeal to leaders of the country demanding the restoration of social guarantees was signed by former combatants in Afghanistan from different regions of Belarus.



"Some Afghan war veterans who were present at meetings where medals were distributed stayed in meeting halls but did not get up to accept them. Many more medals will remain in the military commissariats because of this silent protest", Aleh Vouchak believes.

The way authorities treat Afghan war veterans in Belarus is, according to him, "a shame for Lukashenka and it strikes a blow on authorities' image. Nowhere can you find such an attitude towards Afghan war veterans".

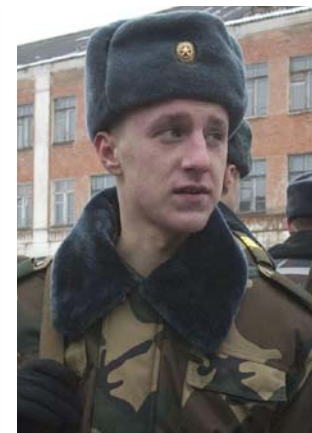
Aleh Vouchak believes that a meeting of veterans of foreign campaigns could have been organized in connection with the twentieth anniversary of the end of war in Afghanistan, for example, in the Palace of the Republic. "Authorities are afraid of incidents, he believes. Policy is understandable: to avoid assembling all Afghan war veterans together and to avoid undesired exchange of views and reproaches towards leaders of the countries as well as leaders of the Afghan movement".

OPPOSITION

Ivan Shyla Is Threatened with the Disciplinary Battalion in the Army

Commanding officers of the military unit began putting pressure on Ivan Shyla, Youth Front's activist who had been drafted to the army by force, Uladzimier Shyla, father of the youth activist told to Radio Liberty.

"Firstly, he is accused to be a faker, because he is frequently sick. Secondly, he is blamed for reading such "provocative" publications as Nasa Niva newspaper and Arche magazine. And private conversations that Ivan has with his comrades-in-arms they called "political activities" and have even started to threaten



him with the disciplinary battalion. Something like, he is engaged in political activities, and it is illegal, and we will do something about it", he says.

Ivan Shyla was examined at a hospital in Lepel, because he complains of backache and throat diseases that he also had well before draft. This is why the most part of his military service Ivan spent in the medical unit.

Today, preliminary hearings in the case of appeal against the decision of the draft commission which had authorized Ivan Shyla's draft without a medical examination will be held in the court of Salihorsk. According to Uladzimier Shyla, commanding officers of the military unit keep this information in secret from Ivan.

ECONOMY

Things Are So Bad that the Government's Report Is Cancelled

Alaksandar Lukashenka decided not to hold the meeting to discuss the results of the government's work in 2008.

The Belarusian leader said that he would assess the government's work in the conditions of the global crisis against the results of the first quarter. "The

evaluation will be made according to the results of the first quarter. It looks like everybody does something”, Lukashenka said.

“I do not have a final conclusion yet to evaluate the work of the government today”, he said, and noticed that “January-February is not a typical month”.



The government was getting ready strenuously to the meeting which was planned preliminary for February 10. Evil tongues were saying that several officials, up to the Prime Minister, might lose their post.

It is unlikely that Lukashenka simply decided “not to swamp horses in mid-stream”, AFN reports. If the meeting took place Lukashenka would have to give commissions to the officials: to revise prognostic indicators or not, to scale back or to stop production, to fire workers or to send them on days off paying them two thirds of their wages, etc.

Apparently, he did not want to assume this responsibility or, rather, he has nothing to suggest to the government. This is why Sidorski and his team were given an opportunity to act on their own for few more months. Depending on the way the situation will develop, Lukashenka will take decisions based on the quarter's results.

CULTURE

Art Exhibition of Barys Zaborau to Be Held in Miensk



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus together with the National Art Museum plan to hold an art exhibition of famous Belarusian artist painter Barys Zaborau in Miensk.

It was announced on Tuesday by Siarhiej Martynau, head of the Belarusian Foreign Service, at the official ceremony of hangover of Barys Zaborau's painting “Barnyard” to the National Art Museum. Our compatriot Barys Zaborau, one of the world's famous artists, who lives in Paris, came in Miensk in person to assist at this event. It is his third coming to Belarus in twenty-eight years of his stay in France.

Siarhiej Martynau pointed out that today's ceremony was important from the point of view of artist's name's comeback to the home country.

Barys Zaborau is renowned around the world; his works are exhibited at the best world's museums. Now his new painting will have a home in the Belarusian art treasury.

Minister of Culture Uladzimir Macviahchuk told that this event was of great importance for the cultural life of the country. The National Art Museum has paintings of Barys Zaborau's early period of creative work, and this is the first work from his Paris period.

BelTA



CENTRUM STOSUNKÓW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



EUROPEAN RADIO FOR BELARUS



Polish aid

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.