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Two recent congresses of youth political associations “Young Democrats” and the founding congress of the Belarusian Christian Democracy party may bear evidence of regrouping processes in opposition’s youth movements.

For a long time “Young Democrats” was considered to be and was indeed a youth wing of the United Civic Party (UCP). And now in late February as many as two congresses of “Young Democrats” took place – the congress of the UCP’s youth organization “Young Democrats” as such and the founding congress of the Youth Christian Social Union “Youth Democrats” (YCSU-YD).

The main point of the rift, as leaders of the youth organizations comment the events, is mainly in

the position on the format of cooperation with “grown-up” political organizations. UCP’s “Young Democrats” will still be subordinated to the United Democratic Forces (UDF) which is made up of the United Democratic Party, The Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC), the BPF Party, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party “Narodnaja Hramada” (BSDP NH), as well as of other associations, including the Movement for Freedom of Alaksandar Milinkievich.

YCSU-YD “Young Democrats” believe that the UDF only imitates political activities and is under the influence of communists, and that is why the new youth organization intends to orientate itself on the Movement for Freedom which, while being part of the UDF, prefers to act on its own on many occasions.

A founding congress of the Belarusian Christian Democracy party (BCD) was held on February 28 in Miensk. The congress adopted the programme documents of the party and its statute. Four co-chairmen of the party were elected.

The National Council (the governing body of the established party) alongside with the four BCD’s co-chairmen elected at the congress is composed of Zmicier Dashkievich, chairman of the international youth organization “Young Front” (Czech Republic), Andrej Kim, former political prisoner and leader of the public movement “Initiative”, Artur Finkievich,



head of the organizing committee of the movement “Young Belarus”, singer-songwriter Andrej Mielnikau, Rev. Ernest Sabila, and Dzianis Sadouski, executive secretary of the BCD organizing committee. Thus, other youth movements, public associations and initiatives may be involved in BCD’s activities.

In the nearest future the organizing committee intends to submit documents for registration to the Ministry of Justice. In conformity with the law it must be done within a month of the date of the founding congress. Also within a month from the date of the submission of the documents the Ministry of Justice must register the party or deny registration. The BCD’s registration will become an indicator of the authorities’ commitment to democratization.

It is logical to expect that BCD’s founding will either speed up the departure of activists from the Youth Front or conclusion of a union between these youth

organizations. In a similar way, the foundation of the YCSU-YD will seriously thin out the youth core group of the UCP.

Apparently, youth activists are not satisfied with the very format of cooperation with “older brothers-in-arms”, with political parties and the monopoly on representation of interests of the entire democratic coalition which they imposed. Also, the parties have an extremely low vertical mobility, and the UDF has an overbureaucratized and extremely snail-paced mechanism of decision-making.

The inevitability of resolution of this kind of conflicts through emancipation of youth movements from parties and their search of new forms of self-organizations were predicted already in 2006 after the “tent town” in Kastychnickaja Square in Miensk. It became clear then that parties’ leaders are not ready and do not want to cooperate efficiently with youth activists.

The attention to the youth resistance was drawn also by appearance of a new political prisoner. Arciom Dubski, a person involved in the “trial of fourteen”, was arrested in Homiel on his way from Ukraine. The opposition member is charged with violating rules of servicing the sentence for having participated in entrepreneurs’ action of protest. He faces from 6 months to 3 years of imprisonment. Dubski lived in Ukraine because of new criminal proceedings which had been initiated against him in the home country.

We will remind that the “trial of fourteen” is a case initiated under article 342 of the Criminal Code of

the Republic of Belarus against participants in the peaceful action of protest of entrepreneurs which was held in Miensk on January 10, 2008.

In the meantime a decline of household income is registered in Belarus amidst the crisis on against the background of growth of unemployment (official and hidden).

Thus, real (i.e. adjusted for inflation) gross average wages in January 2009 comparing to the previous month dropped straight at 11.7% to 919.6 thousand Belarusian roubles. Moreover, with a breakdown for some industries, the situation looks even worse.

At the same time, there is a growth of unemployment in the country. Thus, in January 2009 the number of unemployed grew at 8.9% to 40,600 persons (0.9% of economically active population). The practice of registering officially as unemployed is not wide-spread in Belarus. In particular, the unemployment benefit (47.6 thousand Belarusian roubles, or 20.3% of the minimum subsistence level, or USD17)



is not an incentive to get registered, and people look for new jobs on their own. In the current situation Belarusians logically start cutting down consumption of goods and services.

Nevertheless, the government calls from enterprises' management to keep staff from going, to pay wages and to maintain the volume of output at a maximum possible level. At the same time the prognosis of increase of GDP, industrial production and wages for 2009 has not been revised officially, and the budget adjustment is being postponed.

OFFICIALLY

Ministry of Labour: One Hundred and Forty-Five Thousands of Belarusians Worked Part-Time in February

Workers of two hundred and forty Belarusian enterprises worked part-time in February or had to take days off on the initiative of employers. These data were made public by Piotr Hrushnik, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection.

According to him, the largest share of such enterprises is located in Mahilou, Brest and Homiel regions, and the smallest – in Viciebsk region. The total number of workers at these enterprises amounted to one hundred and forty-five thousand.

Deputy Minister pointed out that days off on the initiative of employers and part-time work should be

seen as anti-crisis measures directed at the “preservation of labour collectives”.

At the same time, Piotr Hrushnik noted that the increase in volume of inefficient use of working hours at the place of production is a potential basis for the growth of unemployment and of the emergence of social tension.

BelaPAN

POLITICS

Belarusian Foreign Ministry Did Not Register the Independent TV Channel Belsat



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus denied registration to the bureau of Belsat channel in Belarus.

Improper execution of documents was the official reason given for the denial, Agnieszka Romaszewska, director of the TV channel, told to BelaPAN. “At

first they did not accept documents in the course of a month saying that something was missing. Then they accepted them and studied them for more than two months, and afterwards they denied, they said that they had been executed in some improper way”, Agnieszka Romaszewska told.

According to her, the management of the channel, after consultations with specialists, will try again to get registered its bureau in Belarus.

SOCIETY

Mass Fingerprinting of Under-Age Started in Belarus

Policemen together with the administration of Lida College carry on an illegal mass fingerprinting of students.



A mass fingerprinting is under way in Lida College affiliated with Janka Kupala Horadnia University, the Youth Front press service reports quoting a lecturer of this educational institution.

A policeman and a department manager capture fingerprints downright during the classes, both from girls and boys. They explain their actions by the need to have fingerprints “for military commissariat and for passports”.

Students who refused to get fingerprinted were threatened with problems in their studies. This is a first known case of an illegal mass fingerprinting of under-age boys and girls in an educational institution in Belarus.

OPPOSITION

Youth Front Activists Fined with Million-Rouble Fines

Trials of the Youth Front activists who protested against political terror near Alaksandar Lukashenka's residence on March 2 resulted in huge fines.

Julia Mikhajlava, Mikola Dziemidzienka and Vadzim Khaniauka, the Youth Front activists, were brought to the court of Leninski district of Miensk on March 3 from the Akriescina pre-trial detention centre. The day before, the youngsters were detained for picketing the residence of Alaksandar Lukashenka. Members of the Youth Front held a banner "No to political terror", and afterwards they submitted a petition to the Presidential Administration demanding to end the prosecution of Arciom Dubski, their like-minded fellow.

Julia Mikhajlava was tried by the judge Lubou Valevich. The trial lasted for five minutes only. Julia Mikhajlava pleaded not guilty. She was fined in the amount of thirty base rates, which corresponds to one million sixty thousand roubles (USD 369).

Huge fines were also given to Mikola Dziemidzienka (1,875 million roubles, or USD 653)

and Vadzim Khaniauka (875 thousand roubles, or USD 305).

Radio Liberty

ECONOMY

Belarus Will Face a New Devaluation of the Rouble

At the time of the visit of an IMF mission to Belarus experts predict that the Belarusian rouble will face a new devaluation.

"I believe experts will evaluate how the crisis is developing in Belarus, how agreements which were reached earlier are being implemented", Stanislau Bahdankievich, former chairman of the National Bank of Belarus told to Bielaruski Partyzan.

The expert asserts that the Belarusian authorities spend credits "on "consumption only".

"Gold and foreign currency reserves are spent inefficiently, Stanislau Bahdankievich believes. The volume of gold and currency reserves does not decrease, but they are spent very



inefficiently. All credits were used to support the exchange rate of the Belarusian rouble which is fundamentally wrong, as for me. We spend our gold and currency reserves on consumption only. I believe that the IMF mission will recommend a further liberalization."

Stanislau Bahdankievich thinks that the Belarusian authorities will proceed with another stage of the devaluation of the rouble.

"I believe that the Belarusian authorities will go the length of making a discretionary, administrative decision in this matter, the expert points out. What will it be – it is difficult to say. The economy needs further devaluation. I would insist on announcing a totally new economic policy first. The one which is based on the market economy, and on market laws. The first step is reforms, real reforms, and not a disguise; and the second step could be devaluation. Reforms should have been started fifteen years ago already, and not today."

CULTURE

Pazniak and Marakou Are the First Winners of Francishak Alakhnovich Prize

Zianon Pazniak and Leanid Marakou became the first winners of Francishak Alakhnovich Prize awarded by the Belarusian Voluntary Society of Protection of Monuments of History and Culture. This decision was taken at a meeting of the award adjudgement committee on March 3 in Miensk.



The award ceremony will take place on October 29, the Memorial Day for Victims of Stalinism in Belarus celebrated by representative of society, BelaPAN reports.

We will remind that the prize named after Francishak Alakhnovich, a renown Belarusian playwright and theatre worker, prisoner of Soviet concentration camps, is awarded to public activists, artists, historians, regional ethnographers, writers and journalists for an important contribution to the cause of memorialization of victims of the Stalinist repressions.

Zianon Pazniak is a discoverer of Kurapaty, and Leanid Marakou is a compiler of a multi-volume encyclopaedic reference book on victims of Stalinism.



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.