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The decision of the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the member States of the European Union to extend the suspension of restrictions in respect of several high officials of the Republic of Belarus became the country's most important foreign policy event. And it was met with ambiguous reaction within the authorities and the

opposition. For the regime-in-power this decision allows to maintain a pragmatic dialogue between the Republic of Belarus and the European Union, and most of opposition figures interpreted it as a "canonization" of Lukashenka's absolute power. In their opinion, extension of an invitation to Lukashenka to the EU summit to be held in Prague in May would be an "extremely wrong step" which could mean only one thing – European values are sacrificed to economic pragmatism. "If it happens (symbolically, on the twentieth anniversary of the Prague Spring), Lukashenka's appearance in Prague may be perceived as the decline of many ideals of the European Union and Europe as a whole", said Alaksandar Kazulin, former presidential candidate.

A series of critical remarks to the address of the European Union were made on the eve of a scheduled visit of Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations, to Minsk. However, she had to postpone her visit to Minsk – Alaksandar Lukashenka suddenly turned out to be "busy" with a working-recreational trip to Yerevan. Judging by the events' chronology, Benita Ferrero-Waldner's and other European leaders' remarks on the eve of the visit prompted the Belarusian authorities to show that demands for changes in the political situation in Belarus are regarded in Minsk as excessive.

It cannot be argued that the unexpected visit of Lukashenka to Yerevan is triggered only by a desire to

avoid European Commissioner's preachments. However, this desire might be an extra motive for the trip and especially for its timeframe. In 1996 Lukashenka, invoking its tight working schedule, could not meet in Miensk Lenny Fisher, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. But in fact he played football on that day.

However, Belarus and Armenia are linked by rather tight military-technical cooperation. And taking into account the sharp displeasure of Baku by information about arms supplies to Armenia and Miensk's traditional role of intermediary in supplies of Russian armaments (after their refurbishment and modernization at Belarusian enterprises of the military-industrial complex), no wonder that Lukashenka showed up in Yerevan practically simultaneously with the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Baku.

There is another motive for the meeting between Lukashenka and Sargasyan: energy cooperation related to plans of supplies of Iranian energy resources to Europe. During Lukashenka's stay in Armenia, Manouchehr Motakki, Iranian Foreign Minister, paid the official visit to Yerevan. At a meeting with Armenian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Motakki reaffirmed the strategic nature of two countries' partnership.

The Agency of Financial News which is consistent in its defence of Russian business' interests in Belarus even put forward a hypothesis that Alaksandar Lukashenka could lobby the Nabucco project in Yerevan.

Far greater attention to recent unexpected visits of the Belarusian leader abroad (to Serbia and Armenia) should have been attracted by his latest visit to

Moscow. The press service of the Belarusian head of State announced all of a sudden on March 17 that Lukashenka will meet President Medvedev on March 19 in Moscow. However, the seeming spontaneity of this event was not truly so. According to some sources, Lukashenka received an insistent invitation from Medvedev to visit him already in early March. It is worth to point out that no media reported this visit to Moscow before its date was made public by Lukashenka's press service. Usually Russian media like to show their familiarity in issues of relations between Russia and Belarus making reference to some anonymous sources in Kremlin. That time the degree of secrecy surrounding the meeting of presidents of two countries may indicate the importance of the moment in relations between Russia and Belarus. It could be no mere chance that before the official announcement about the forthcoming visit of Lukashenka to Moscow there was a statement or, rather, a warning of Javier Solana to Belarus regarding the expected recognition by Miensk of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which are still regarded by the European Union as parts of Georgia. It is no secret that declarations of some Belarusian officials that contrary to promises made earlier the issue of recognition of these two Russian protectorates might be considered at the autumn session of the Belarusian parliament rather than at its spring session provoked an irritation in Moscow. It cannot be excluded that fragmentation of the second trench of the Russian USD two-billion credit was linked to this ambiguity in allied commitments of Belarus. Instead of the expected billion Miensk received only a half for the time being.

Meanwhile, observers note manifestations of disagreements in the Belarusian government regarding

further economic policy and exit ways from the crisis. The position of the group which have taken decisions up to now, i.e. of the team Chairman of the National Bank – Prime Minister, despite all problems on record (growth of the negative trade balance, accumulating arrears in economy and increasing foreign debt, inefficient spending, risks of the financial system), remains unchanged. Its essence is that while changing the business environment very progressively and unhurriedly and thus creating conditions for attracting investments to maintain employment parameters and, therefore, the State support of inefficient enterprises and the redistribution model (from efficient enterprises to inefficient ones), and also to keep spending borrowed resources to support inefficient enterprises and entire sectors of economy.

At the same time some government officials criticize prospective of this policy. So, Deputy Minister of Economy Tacciana Starchanka believes that the global financial and economic crisis created a threat to the survival of the Belarusian economy. "The cluster of financial difficulties affected the real sector above all". "These problems affect all sectors, and in the first place the largest gross-output-creating enterprises in mechanical and metallurgical engineering, construction materials industry, light and woodworking industries", she added.

Georgij Hryc, Deputy Director of the System Analysis and Strategic Studies Centre of the National Academy of Sciences, pointed out that the devaluation of the Belarusian rouble had not lived up to expectations because the main trade partner – the Russian Federation – made a larger-scale devaluation of its currency

– by 56%. As a result of this non-parity devaluation Belarus “erodes its gold and foreign currency reserves – an “airbag”, Georgij Hryc believes.

Hryc said that a special address of the country leader to the nation is needed. He believes that such address is necessary in order to prevent escalation of social tensions in conditions of the crisis. “The situation is very serious. Social tensions are growing, and if they are allowed, irreversible effects are possible”, Hryc believes. At the same time, in his opinion, the Belarusian government does not have now a clear strategy of overcoming the crisis.

“To safeguard the Belarusian economic model with the high degree of the State regulation is impossible”, Hryc says.

However, it is hard to expect that this criticism may be heard in the near future.

POLITICS

Javier Solana Called Lukashenka not to Recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, calls the official Miensk not to recognize independence of Georgia's territories.

He declares that otherwise the relations between the European Union and Belarus will be revised and “will changes in not so good a direction”, [GHN](#) reports.

“The way Miensk will decide on the issue of recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be of utmost importance for further relations between Belarus and the European Union. Otherwise the relations between the Union and Miensk will be revised”, the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy stated in Brussels on March 16 after the meeting of Foreign Ministers of EU countries.



Charter'97

SOCIETY

Nazi Camps' Prisoners File a Claim to the United Nations against Belarusian Authorities

Prisoners of Azarychy concentration camp file a claim against the State of Belarus to the United Nations Human Rights Committee by reason of failure to comply with a decision of Nuremberg Tribunal.

Azarychy was the only camp in the Nazi-occupied Europe where the civil population was held in swampland in cold season, without shelter, heat and food. Prisoners were deliberately infected with typhoid fever, so that this disease spreads to the Soviet army's soldiers who liberated these territories.

More than fifty-five thousand non-combatants were held in the camp, and a half of them were children under thirteen. More than twenty thousand prisoners died because of starvation, cold and typhoid fever.

However, according to an instruction of the Presidential Administration, a scientific qualifying commission was established in 1995. Contrary to a decision of the Nuremberg Tribunal which qualified Azarychy as a concentration camp, the commission changed its status to a “death camp”. The change of definition “concentration camp” to a “camp” resulted in downgrading compensation payments to prisoners which were made by Germany.

Prisoners, not consenting to the change of status, petitioned the German Chancellor, Bundestag, the German “Memory, Responsibility and Future” Foundation, and its board of trustees. But the German party, when answering all these queries, explained that the right of definition of any given place of detention was given to the Belarusian party, i.e. the scientific qualifying commission.

The registered Republican Public Association of Former Nazi Prisoners of Azarychy Concentration Camp, which counts 8042 members, filed a claim to the Supreme Court of Belarus against the Presidential Administration demanding the restoration of the status. However, they got a reply that conclusions of the scientific qualifying commission may not be revised by judicial process.

Ezhednevnik

[OPPOSITION

The United Democratic Forces Stand Up for Belsat and Agnieszka Romaszewska

The Presidium of the United Democratic Forces made a statement in support of Agnieszka Romaszewska, former director of Belsat. The UDF leaders are worried that staff changes may put paid to the very existence of the TV channel which is indispensable for Belarusians.

The statement points out that different political forces hold an interest in continuation of Belsat's work, because the TV channel provides opportunity to get objective information to any Belarusian.



- It is what Belsat is providing today as one of few Belarus-oriented information projects which proved its efficiency in a short period of time, the statement says.

Opposition politicians point out that they are not aware of “true reasons for Ms. Romaszewska-Guza’s sudden dismissal”. They stress, however, that the former director of Belsat is not only an official but also a journalist and a manager devoted to the high mission of the freedom of speech, and that she is held in respect for this in Belarus.

The UDF presidium would not want to see that such “radical and not publicly motivated staff change in a just started cause harms Belsat, in whose success

all Belarusians and Poles, who want our region of Europe to be a space of freedom and democracy, are interested,” Radio Racyja reports.

[OFFICIALLY

Prosecutor’s Office to Check Security at Ski Resort in Silichy

The Prosecutor’s Office of Lahojski district of Miensk region will carry out a technical expertise in the Republican Ski Resort Silichy. Adherence to safety standards at ski slope will be checked.

In particular, an expertise of security standards in constructing the cable way, in installing fences on the slope, in organizing the movement of snowmobiles will be carried out. A whole set of expertise of visitors’ security at the ski resort will be carried out.

The investigation of the death of a skier in Silichy that was extended by the Prosecutor’s Office of Miensk region in February should be completed by April 19. Forensic medical examination has already been done. According to forensic scientists’ conclusions, he had died in consequence of a blunt trauma of the body.

We will remind that on January 15, 2009 in on a ski slope in Silichy a snowmobile had run into a skier who died from injuries.

[ECONOMY

Bonuses Will Not Be Paid at Loss-Making Enterprises

From now on workers at loss-making enterprises in Belarus will not be paid bonuses and rewards.

The Government of Belarus has prohibited to managers of enterprises of all forms of ownership to assess and pay any forms of bonuses and rewards in case of growth of losses from sales of goods (works, services) during the reporting period, [Bsb.by](#) reports. This is provided for by the Council of Ministers’ resolution № 288.



Also, the directors of the enterprises may not count on getting bonuses, increments or payments from income if there are wages arrears to workers.

[CULTURE

Belarusian “Journalists” Have Travelled around the World

The documentary film “Journalists” shot by an independent director Aleh Dashkievich takes parts in one of the largest festivals of documentary films in Canada. Today Belarusian “Journalists” started the projection day in the nomination

“Panorama” in the framework of which about five hundred authors from different countries of the world show their films.



For a number of reasons Aleh Dashkevich could not go to Canadian city of Montreal where the festival takes place. However, at organizers’ request he sent a welcoming address to participants and guests of the festival, in which he said, in particular: “Every Canadian, getting up in the morning, may choose its favourite newspaper, radio channel or TV station. It is a usual thing, like getting a morning cup of coffee. However, it does not happen this way in every country of the world. At least, in my country, Belarus, it is not like this. Here, journalists who work in independent non-governmental media had to make a very distinct choice: between freedom and lack of it, between dignity and low conduct, in substance – between the good and the bad.”

The subject of the film is artistic and personal destiny of journalists in today’s Belarus, as exemplified by such well-known persons as Sviatlana Kalinkina, Slavamir Adamovich, Zmicier Zavadzki and others. After the participation in the movie festival in Amsterdam, Belarusian “Journalists” was invited to take part in movie forums of dozens of countries on all continents: the United States, New Zealand, South Korea, Italy, and Hungary.



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.