

### Refusal Presented as Invitation

### European Parliament Approves a Resolution on Belarus

### Anti-personnel Equipment May Have Been Used against Participants of the Freedom Day Demonstration

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### Teacher Maryjana Hruzdilovich, Fired for Having Told about the Freedom Day, Reinstated in Her Job

### Exhibition of Prohibited Books Opens in Bierascie



**O**n the eve of an artificial holiday – Day of Unity of Peoples of Belarus and Russia on April 2 – Moscow and Minsk exchanged barbed remarks. An anonymous representative of the Russian Ministry of Finance announced that Belarus

would not receive its hoped-for credit of one hundred billion Russian roubles. “The borrower already has many liabilities before Russia”, the government source remarked acidly.

In the opinion of independent observers, it is most likely that this refusal is related to the elusive position of Minsk in the issue of recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia which is a matter of principle for Kremlin. It was not included in the agenda of the spring session of the Belarusian Parliament.

Alaksandar Lukashenka drags out in every possible way in this issue in spite of the pressure from Moscow which reminds from time to time about allied obligations. Experts predict that the recognition will not happen at least before May 7 when the founding summit of the new EU Eastern Partnership programme is scheduled to take place. Belarus is already officially included in the programme, and Lukashenka has a chance to get invitation to the summit. The recognition of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as it was said on many occasions by European politicians would spoil Belarus’ prospects to participate in the European Partnership.

Meanwhile, a part of Belarusian opposition speaks categorically against Lukashenka’s coming to the historic event in Prague (or, possibly, Brussels) on May 7. In the opinion of former political prisoner Alaksandar Kazulin, such invitation might be a major

mistake of Europe and a sign that it backs down from its moral values and yields to the dictatorship.

The discussion on this issue ran high also at an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in the Czech Republic on March 27 and 28. According to Radio Liberty, an unofficial agreement was reached to send the invitation to the President of Belarus but at the same time to make him understand that it would be better to delegate an official of lower rank, i.e., the foreign minister, to the event.

“It is certainly a smart move but there is a problem. The official Belarusian leader often does not react even to direct and rigid demands, and as for delicate hints, he does not sense them at all. I am afraid that the European diplomatic chess with its complex combinations may not work in cases where the opponent is capable of “playing” with chessboard at the head”, Miensk political analyst Valer Karbalevich notes on this occasion.

He also predicts that the official leader of Belarus having chosen a strategy of balancing between Moscow and the European Union may at first visit the inauguration summit of the Eastern Partnership, and after having shaken hands of Western leaders for the first time is likely to curtsy before Kremlin – to recognize the breakaway Georgian provinces.

Several Belarusian political analysts believe that even in this case the European Union will not expel Belarus from its new programme since otherwise it would lose its meaning to a great degree.

“Brussels has no other way but to swallow the pill. Especially as, to speak frankly, the sky will not fall to

the ground. The issue has rather symbolic and not a real geopolitical significance”, analyst Alaksandar Klaskouski remarks.

In his opinion, EU politicians are wrong to pedal so hard the issue of recognition of these Caucasian republics by Miensk because by doing so they only whip up “sports excitement” of Moscow. “It would be more logical to demand more clearly that Lukashenka eases off the nuts inside the country where he is the sole master and where a bit of liberalization is not so threatening to the system”, Klaskouski believes.

Meanwhile, clouds of the financial and economic crisis are piling up over the country. Recently Bielsat made public information that during the first two months of the year the negative balance of the foreign trade in goods reached one billion 92.4 million US dollars. This indicator is 2.5 times higher than in last year’s January – February.

If this trend develops the government will have no other choice but to make another devaluation in the manner of the one which happened on January 2, 2009 when the fall of Belarusian rouble’s exchange rate to US dollar by 20.5% shocked Belarusians. Now two concurrent processes are under way – wage reduction and price increase, which have noticeably undermined living standards of most Belarusians.

According to finding of a national poll conducted in March by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies which were published recently, the January devaluation affected in a considerable manner circumstances of 45.5% of respondents,

and affected in some way 35.4%. 42.4% of Belarusians have less trust in authorities after that.

At the same time the population does not believe much that opposition is able to initiate sweeping changes in the country. And the electoral rating of Lukashenka went down only by 1% from 40.2% to 39.2% from December to March despite forecasts of his political opponents who expected that the devaluation would considerably lower the president’s popularity.

The phenomenon of rather high support of Lukashenka in the Belarusian society 44.2% of those polled explain in the following way: “There is simply no other person who is better than him”. Analysts point out: this is an outcome of years long burning down of the political ground and weeding out of any political alternative. So the demands set forth in the European Parliament’s resolution adopted on April 2 are all the more relevant: reform of electoral legislation, securing the freedom of mass media, assembly and associations, ceasing persecution of opposition, and abrogation of those articles of the Criminal Code that give ground for persecution on political grounds.

The europarlamentarians note that the implementation of these conditions would create possibilities for “Belarus’ reintegration to the European family of democratic nations”. But Belarusian experts are sceptical about likelihood of Miensk’s aptitude for a considerable progress in the sphere of democracy and human rights during the next nine month when visa sanctions against Belarusian high officials remain suspended.



## POLITICS

## Refusal Presented as Invitation

*It was preliminary decided at an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers to send an invitation to Miensk for the summit of Eastern Partnership which will be held in Prague on May 7, at the same time making Alaksandar Lukashenka understand that it is not him but some other representative of Belarus who would be expected in Prague. However, the official decision on this issue was never made public.*

The main opponent of sending the invitation to the Belarusian president was Maxim Verhagen, Dutch Foreign Minister. He demanded guarantees from the head of the European Commission that Belarus would be represented at the summit by Foreign Minister Siarhiey Martynau, despite the invitation sent to Lukashenka. Otherwise, the Dutch diplomat threatened to denounce the Belarusian leader publicly at the summit.

*Radio Liberty*

## OFFICIALLY

## European Parliament Approves a Resolution on Belarus

*A resolution on developing dialogue between the European Union and Belarus was approved at a session of the European Parliament in Brussels.*



Five hundred and ninety-four parliamentarians voted in favour, and nineteen against.

In the resolution the europarlamentarians express their concern about the human rights situation in Belarus and voice a hope for a significant progress during the nine-month moratorium on visa sanctions against Belarusian leaders.

The European Parliament enumerates several steps that are expected from official Miensk: reform of electoral legislation, securing the freedom of mass media, assembly and associations, ceasing persecution of opposition, abrogation of “political” articles of the Criminal Code, introducing the moratorium on capital punishment, and recognition of the Union of Poles headed by Andzelika Borys.

When official Miensk implements all listed recommendations the European Parliament will stand for the full lifting of visa sanctions and will “speed up process of reintegration of Belarus to the European family of democratic nations”.

*Radio Liberty*

## OPPOSITION

## Anti-personnel Equipment May Have Been Used against Participants of the Freedom Day Demonstration



*According to demonstration participants, they saw razor wire on the Freedom Day. It may have been used for the first time at protest actions in Belarus.*

It should be reminded that youth activists marched to October Square from the Academy of Sciences on the rally on March 25, but police officers blocked their way. The action participants spoke about possible use of razor wire.

Razor wire is used in the army. It is a mesh of metal strips with sharp edges usually kept in 0.7-0.9 m coils that can be stretched out to 10-30 meters. Minimum two barriers of barbed wire are established, another coil is stretched above them to increase height.



“Razor wire as well as all types of wire net fencing is used to slow down movement of the adversary force, historian Anatol Taras explained. This barrier devised by a Frenchman named Bruno was for the first time used in the front lines of the World War I in 1914 - 1918. The main advantage of razor wire is that this fence may be quickly installed and quickly removed. Today in Belarus razor wire is not used anywhere, as far as I know. But, probably, law-enforcement executives decided to carry out experiments”

*Solidarity*

## ECONOMY

### Belarusian Foreign Trade Deficit Is to Beat the Record

*Belarus is all set to beat the record of the foreign trade deficit for the whole history of its sovereignty. According to Bielstat data, in January – February 2009 the balance of the foreign trade in goods was negative in the amount of USD one billion 92,4 million, having increased in 2,5 times comparing with the respective period of 2008. Moreover, in February the negative*

*balance accrued by USD two hundred million comparing to this January.*

If this momentum of fall of foreign trade volumes is maintained, by the year end Belarus will easily beat the last year record (minus USD 6,581 billion) and will set a new one.



“We are moving exactly in this direction, Alaksandar Chubryk, economist in the Research Centre of the Institute of Entrepreneurship and Management believes, explaining the increase of the foreign trade deficit by the growing crisis and a slump in demand for our products. And I would also call attention to the following. In January – February Belarus curtailed exports by 47,8%, and imports by 32,1%. So, imports were curtailed to a much lesser extent. It means that we are still working for warehouse and making products which nobody buys”.

*Naviny.by*

## SOCIETY

### Teacher Maryjana Hruzdilovich, Fired for Having Told about the Freedom Day, Reinstated in Her Job

*In the evening of March 31 Maryjana Hruzdilovich, teacher of SOL Minsk educational centre, was informed about the order which recalled the previous order about her dismissal.*

It should be reminded that English language teacher was fired on March 25 after he reacted to an insulting remark about those who celebrate the Freedom Day.

*Radio Liberty*

## CULTURE

### Exhibition of Prohibited Books Opens in Bierascie

*The exhibition “One Hundred Prohibited Books” opened in Bierascie regional library on March 31.*

“It is for the first time that such an exhibition is held in the library. It is a sort of history of the Soviet and foreign censorship from 1917 to 2000”, Ala Miasniankina, deputy director of the library for research said.

She reminded that bans concerned either all works of the writer who was recognized to be “enemy of the people” or a specific book if it mentioned “enemies



of the people” and if it had references to their statements. Books became inaccessible to the general reader for other reasons as well.

This exhibition is made of one hundred books of Russian, Soviet and foreign authors whose works were prohibited and were subject of recall from libraries' funds. Among them are “Demons” by Fiodor Dostoyevsky, “Chapajev” by Dmitri Furmanov, “Golden Lime Tree” by Ilya Dubinski, “For Future Use” by Andrei Platonov, “Lolita” by Vladimir Nabokov, “Gone with the Wind” of Margaret Mitchell, “For Whom the Bell Tolls” by Ernest Hemingway, and “Ten Days that Shook the World” by John Reed.

Visitors could learn about grounds and delays of bans on each of the represented books.

*Belapan*



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.