

The Belarusian state authorities evidently aimed at transforming their policy from declarations and counter-conditions to actions, directed to re-launching cooperation with the European Union last week. There was carried on a campaign on releasing political prisoners.

The situation with an imprisoned ex-candidate to Presidency Alaksandar Kazulin is raising especial concern.

They say the authorities are going to solve the problem within the coming week or two weeks. Reportedly, the authorities proposed A. Kazulin to leave Belarus within 48 hours with his mortally ill wife (Iryna Kazulina died on Saturday, February 23, 2008).

It should be especially noted that all comments, delivered by the state authorities regarding the situation have no hints at all as for the changes in the domestic state policy, the revision of its principles, the recognition of some errors or extremes.

Just on the contrary, the state authorities explain that despite their doubtless rightfulness in all respects, including suppression of press freedoms ("the press has to be controlled"), criminal persecution of political opponents ("only for criminal activities") as well as moral prevalence in relation to the opponents and the EU, they make certain concessions as a gesture of good will and "a trade proposal".

This position gives grounds for catching new political hostages, when necessary, and displaying them for exchange.

The leaders of democratic opposition understand this aspect pretty well. Therefore, their comments upon the current situation are highly restrained.

At the same time, the individual entrepreneurs carry on their protest actions. The third protest rally this year didn't have as many participants as the previous ones. The entrepreneurs, obviously, fear further prosecution.

More than 70 people have been detained during the recent protest action of private entrepreneurs. Many of them were punished with administrative arrest. Others got fined. A criminal case has been filed in relation to a non-authorized protest action on January 10, 2008.

It should be mentioned that a special Statement in support of individual entrepreneurs had been adopted by the Coalition of United Democratic Forces of Belarus on the eve of the protest events.

#### OFFICIALLY

- Belarus Receiving European Commission Grant

#### SOCIETY

- Will MAZ Make Redundant Thousands of Workers?

#### POLITICS

- Diplomats Expect Release of All Political Prisoners in Belarus

#### ECONOMY

- The Level of Production Falling Down

#### CULTURE

- "Prisoners of Conscience" Documentary Premiere

The state authorities are very much afraid of such civil consolidation and reinforce a wave of repression.

Lukashenka's confessions in relation to one of his repressive institutions – the Public Prosecutor's Office attracted large interest both in the country and abroad. While making an official presentation of Ryhor Vasilevich in the position of Prosecutor General of Belarus, Lukashenka noted that he had scarce information about the real situation in the law machinery and lacked professional and unbiased evaluation. Among other, he confessed he felt some active personalities started acting around him with a purpose of guiding the Public Prosecutor's Office. Also, Lukashenka growled at some judges and public prosecutors, who "had begun dealing with politics".

Independent experts believe Lukashenka has a hard special psychological state, caused by the vivid expansion of the Russian capital in Belarus that activates different processes inside the leading elite. And it becomes more and more complicated for the ruler to control these processes. Also, he has no certainty as for the potential winner of the coming Presidential election in Russia, who seems to him to be an "alien".

Certain hopes in Miensk and Brussels are connected with opening the EC representation in Belarus. Lukashenka gave his official consent to founding the mission in the country. It is expected that this event will facilitate a dialogue between Belarus and the European Union. Lukashenka's regime is eager to hold it exclusively in the branches of Energetics, Transportation, Transit and Ecology. Still the EC officials still hope the representation will be able to supplement the directions of work with Human Rights and Media Freedom Defence.

Lukashenka believes that he may overcome the current state of relations with the European Union with the use of mutual economic interests and certain perspectives, e.g. "in the field of anti-missile defense system installations."

It may happen that Lukashenka will remind the West and the East about its significance during an informal summit of heads of CIS countries in Moscow on February 22, 2008. Apparently, it will be the last talk between Lukashenka and the President Putin.

## OFFICIALLY

### **Belarus Receiving European Commission Grant**

**The Belarusian Ministry of Emergency Situations has received a grant of the European Committee. One million Euros is intended for consolidating the programmes aimed at preventing and reacting at chemical disasters having international consequences in the bordering region of Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania.**

The project duration is two years. Its objective is to work out a mechanism of fast response of the emergency services of three

states at chemical disasters, exchanging experience and instructing the staff and the population about possible action in cases of disasters etc. Within the project it is planned to buy the cars of chemical protection and some other special equipment.

Numerous chemical objects are situated in the border region in northern Belarus which may potentially cause some chemical alert.

## SOCIETY

### **Will MAZ Make Redundant Thousands of Workers?**

**According to Nasha Niva, which was referring to the site Expertby, Minsk Automobile Plant is facing over-the-**

## **board layoffs which will touch upon five thousand people.**

The move is connected to the planned purchase of the plant. Layoffs are to be conducted before the enterprise is sold, according to the conditions of the buyer. Thus, the responsibility for the unpopular decision will be taken up by the government, which so far remains the owner of the plant. The representatives of MAZ management have denied the information.

## **POLITICS**

### **Diplomats Expect Release of All Political Prisoners in Belarus**

**A couple of days have passed since a political prisoner Andrei Klimau was set free. Some foreign diplomats in Belarus have shared their views on the event, RL/RFE reports.**

The Ambassador of Germany Dr. Gebhardt Weiss told that any positive reaction on the part of Germany may come as soon as "all political prisoners are released in Belarus."

Before Andrei Klimau got released from jail, the Ambassador of France Mirelle Musso had made a statement about the necessity of setting free all political prisoners in Belarus.

The ambassadors don't explain their actions in response if the Belarusian government meets the demands.

## **ECONOMY**

### **The Level of Production Falling Down**

**The production level of a number of manufactured products, including TV-sets, clocks, bicycles, buses, motorcycles etc. decreased in Belarus in January 2008. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, production of TV-sets fell down by 24%, while production of clocks slashed by 42% in the first month of 2008.**

At the same time, the stock of some kinds of ready-made products exceeded up to 35 times their monthly production rate.

## **CULTURE**

### **"Prisoners of Conscience" Documentary Premiere**

**A new documentary film "Prisoners of Conscience", produced by Volha Mikalaychyk was presented in Belarus.**

The People's artist of Belarus Zinaida Bandarenka is talking with the family members of political prisoners.

The film is dedicated to the well-known Belarusian politicians, put in prison for their democratic views: an ex-candidate to Presidency Alaksandr Kazulin, Paval Sieviarynets, Artur Finkievich, Zmicier Dashkievich and Andrei Klimau.



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) fills this gap. The site allows to order weekly reception of news in English, Polish, Belarusian, Russian.

