



# BELARUS BIWEEKLY NEWS DIGEST

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APRIL 1- APRIL 14, 2006

**APRIL 4:**

**LIKELY RISE IN GAS PRICES CONFIRMED**

The deputy head of Russia's Gazprom, Alyaksandr Ryazanov, confirmed his company's hopes to "at least" triple the gas price charged for Belarus by 2007. This supported recent statements made by company CEO Aleksei Miller.

[RFE/RL | RUSSIA, BELARUS ON VERGE OF DISPUTE OVER GAS PRICES](#)

**APRIL 5:**

**EU PARLIAMENT DISCUSSES RELATIONS WITH BELARUS**

In a plenary session led by the EU external relations commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, the European Parliament discussed further actions to be taken against the regime in Minsk, attesting that "the events in Minsk confirmed Mr. Lukashenka's determination to win this election come what may."

[EUROPA | EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PLENARY SESSION DISCUSSION ON BELARUS ELECTIONS](#)

**APRIL 7:**

**FORMER POLISH AMBASSADOR RELEASED**

Belarusian authorities released Mariusz Maszkiewicz, the former Polish ambassador to Belarus, after he had been sentenced to a 15-day prison term for his involvement in post-election demonstrations.

[BBC NEWS | BELARUS RELEASES POLISH EX-ENVOY](#)

[CHARTER97 | FORMER POLISH AMBASSADOR FREED IN BELARUS](#)

**MILINKEVICH MEETS WITH GERMAN CHANCELLOR**

Opposition Leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich ended his five-day tour of European leaders with a visit to German chancellor Angela Merkel.

[RFE/RL | BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER MEETS GERMAN CHANCELLOR](#)

**APRIL 8:**

**LUKASHENKA TAKES OATH FOR A THIRD TERM**

In his inauguration speech, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka made clear that Belarus had a "strong immune system" against "awkward attempts to induce a revolutionary virus" from the West. His accusations specifically addressed the country's European neighbors Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. No foreign heads of state were invited to attend the ceremony and military parade in Minsk.

[NY TIMES | BELARUS LEADER TAKES OATH, ATTACKING THE WEST](#)

**APRIL 10:**

**EU PUTS A BAN ON BELARUSIAN OFFICIALS**

European Foreign Ministers have extended the visa ban on travel into the 25 countries of the EU against President Lukashenka and 30 ministers, prosecutors and election officials. EU officials say further steps, such as a freezing of assets of the Belarusian leadership remain possible.

[BBC NEWS | EU BANS VISAS FOR BELARUS LEADERS](#)

[RFE/RL | EU IMPOSES VISA BAN ON BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT](#)

[EU OBSERVER | EU SLAPS VISA BAN ON 31 BELARUS OFFICIALS](#)

### **KOZULIN APPEALS TO SUPREME COURT**

Former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kozulin has requested Valentin Sukalo, chairman of the Supreme Court, to overturn the central election commission's refusal to invalidate election results.

[CHARTER97| KOZULIN REQUESTS SUPREME COURT CHAIRMAN TO INVALIDATE ELECTION RESULTS](#)

### **APRIL 12:**

#### **OPPOSITION TO ADDRESS RUSSIA ON DAY OF SOLIDARITY**

The organizers of the Day of Solidarity are urging Belarusian citizens to gather in front of the Russian Embassy in Minsk on April 16 to demand the end of Russian support for the current regime.

[CHARTER97| RUSSIA MUST STOP SUPPORT OF LAST DICTATORSHIP IN EUROPE](#)

### **APRIL 13:**

#### **PACE CALLS FOR A NEW ELECTION IN BELARUS IN LINE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has passed a resolution condemning undemocratic conduct in the March 19 presidential elections in Belarus. The Assembly has called for a new election and a revision of Belarus' Electoral Code. The Assembly, also encouraged the democratic opposition to remain united as well, addressed further measures that can be taken against the Belarusian officials to promote freedom and democracy.

[CHARTER97| PACE: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN BELARUS SHOULD BE HELD AGAIN](#)

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## WHY RUSSIA STILL MATTERS

BY ALINA TOURKOVA

The spotlights have faded, the journalists have left, and Belarusian politics has resumed its place among the background of international events. For the third time, Alyaksandr Lukashenka has been inaugurated as Belarus' president. Yet, despite the anti-climactic post-election reaction in the West, some leaders have continued to stand by the principles that they professed during the heated election season. Just this week, the European Union imposed visa bans for over thirty Belarusian officials and continues to consider more punitive measures such as freezing Belarusian bank accounts in Europe. The Russian Federation, viewed by most analysts in the West as a supporter of Lukashenka and his regime, has reaffirmed its determination to begin charging Belarus market prices for precious natural resources. It is quite probable that the politics of Belarus will resurface yet again as a theme of major international debates, but it remains unclear if the composition of each side will change or remain as they were during the elections.

Russia's announcement of a future switch to market prices for Belarus has left many questioning the true motives behind such actions. Is this an attempt to appease the West and assuage the anti-democratic criticism that has recently been increasing among international leaders in a pre-G8 atmosphere? Or has Russia finally "seen the light" and realized that supporting a dictator is not the best PR strategy for building one's international image? But even if the recent announcement only means that Lukashenka has become too hard to manage and a different leader is being sought, this signifies that the Russian government is in a position to bargain, and this might be an opportune time for the West to engage Russia in a constructive foreign policy toward Belarus. To ensure the effectiveness of its approach to Russia, the West must also identify a unified policy that will be repeatedly voiced, urging Russia not to abandon democratic ideals and the universal commitment to human rights and personal freedoms.

At the same time, the West must acknowledge the importance of Russia coming to such realizations independent of foreign influence. This could be a critical point in Russia's continued relations with Western governments. If pushed too far, Russia may intensify its already growing anti-Western rhetoric and continue to further sidestep democratic ideals. The decision to end support for oppressive regimes must be understood as an important development for Russia as well, not only the West. A continuation of a healthy relationship with its neighbors, particularly Belarus, should be encouraged not penalized, especially if this partnership is aimed at contributing to regional stability. Cooperation in security and development matters should outweigh the prospect of restoring Russia's past and the vast amount of territory it once controlled. Thus, as the G-8 summit nears, the best way to help Belarus in its struggle for freedom is by continuing to focus on Russia and its role in the region.

So what does a future of regional cooperation between the U.S. and Russia mean for Belarus? If such partnership was achieved and a unified foreign policy was agreed on by both sides on the Belarusian border, Lukashenka and his government could be effectively constrained. With economic exports in jeopardy and without gas subsidies, the need for a political compromise would be sought by the Belarusian authorities. Thus, this could turn into an opportunity to begin discussion and set in motion a peaceful transition process in Belarus. A possibly violent "revolution" scenario, a phenomenon feared by the Russians and the Belarusian authorities, could be avoided, while democratic reforms and economic progress encouraged. Such developments would not only encourage further stability and economic growth in Belarus, but would also increase the international legitimacy of the Russian government and its role in the post-Soviet space.

However, in order to achieve this peaceful transition, both sides of the Atlantic, U.S. and Europe, must realize the importance of Russia in Belarusian political development. And although visa bans and economic sanctions can prove to be an effective measure in sending a clear signal to the Belarusian elite, engaging Russia as an important partner in the region might prove a far more effective policy for all of the parties involved, especially the citizens of Belarus.