

Belarus – Russia friendship to disagree with the Western sanctions

The joint session of the foreign ministers Sergei Martynov (Belarus) and Sergei Lavrov (Russia) took place in Minsk at the end of January. After the meeting, both ministers announced the adoption of the program for coordinated foreign policy actions for 2008-2009 between the two countries. As the declaration says, based on their national interests, Belarus and Russia will coordinate their positions also towards European Union.

Even though Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed satisfaction with the positive developments of the EU – Belarus relations, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka recently sharply criticized ambassadors from the United States and the European Union.

Both EU and US stay clear towards Belarus: travel restrictions for regime's exponents and economic sanctions remain in force unless political prisoners are released and country embarks on political liberalization. At the same time, Russian opinion on the Western sanctions is clear: Russia considers the EU - US pressure as inappropriate interfering into Belarus internal politics.

Source:
Belta, Radio Free Europe

Artur Finkevich released, Andrei Kim officially charged

Artur Finkevich, well-known as the youngest political prisoner in Belarus and one of the leaders of a non registered organization *Young Front* was unexpectedly released on February 5, 2008. His and other prisoners' of conscience (e.g. Zmitser Dashkevich) release were due to increasing pressure from the United States and the European Union, which have imposed sanctions on President Lukashenka and his government.

However, the release of Mr. Finkevich and others (e.g. Zmitser Dashkevich, Mikalay Autukhovich and Yury Lyavonau), is accompanied by recent conviction of Mr. Alyaksandr Zdvizhkov for 3 years in a colony with a reinforced regime and a wave of short-term detentions during December and January protests of entrepreneurs in Belarus. The most recent is the example of Andrei Kim, who was detained during the rally of entrepreneurs on January 21 and is charged for "violence or a threat of violence against policemen". Mr. Kim might face up to 6 years of imprisonment.

21 years old Andrei Kim is member of youth group *Initiative*, which opposes president Lukashenka's regime. In November 2007, after *Initiative* members dressed up and gathered to celebrate Halloween in Minsk city centre, together with his mates, he was charged for petty hooliganism and spent 7 days in prison. To protest against his arrest, Andrei went on hunger strike.

Source:
Charter97, Viasna – The Human Rights Center