

Russia raises gas price for Belarus

Russia will raise the price of natural gas to Belarus from \$119 to \$128 per 1,000 cubic meters in the second half of this year, a Russian deputy economic development and trade minister said on March 21, 2008.

In December 2006, Russian energy giant Gazprom and Belarusian pipeline operator Beltransgaz signed a contract on gas transits in 2007-2011. The document envisioned the price of \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters for 2007 and a formula for prices for 2008. The price of natural gas would be calculated according to this formula, Russian Deputy Economy Minister Andrei Belousov said and the Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov amended that Russia was not going to review the formula any time soon.

Traditionally, for almost 15 years, Russia has supplied former Soviet Union countries with cheap gas, nowadays it seeks to raise the price to reach the level of other foreign customers. According to the contracts, the price for Russian gas to Belarus is set at 67 percent of the average price of gas to Europe in 2008, which is according to Dmitry Medvedev's statement from last December among the lowest of CIS states. The average European level of prices should be reached by 2011.

Moscow raised gas prices for Belarus by \$19 per 1,000 cubic metres starting this year from \$100 in 2007, although government sources in Minsk have said Russian gas export monopoly Gazprom was seeking an increase of up to 60 percent. Although the expectations were that Moscow intends to double the price for the second quarter of year 2008 and seeking at least 60 percent, Gazprom increased the price only for \$9 for 1,000 cubic metres. Therefore according to some experts the question is whether Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has not created intentionally the row with the US to make a large gas price hike politically unviable for Moscow.

Sources:

Reuters, Office for a Democratic Belarus

Police in Minsk stroke against unauthorized demonstration

On March 25, 2008 about two thousand supporters of Belarusian opposition gathered on unauthorized rally on occasion of 90th anniversary of declaration of the first, short-lasting Belarusian independence in 1918. After police crack down more than 80 people were arrested.

The authorities didn't permit demonstration to be held on the intended route in the center of Minsk and after previous prompt to dismiss the march police and Special Forces stroke against the peaceful protesters. They beaten the demonstrators with truncheons and took them away in prepared police cars and busses. Beside that there were assaulted and arrested prominent oppositional leaders and several domestic and foreign journalists.

In the consecutive judicial trials against the arrested protesters there were delivered several dozens of judgments for fines and prison sentences from three to fifteen days.

The intervention was declaimed by high EU officials such as External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Jacek Protasiewicz, Chairman of Delegation for Relations with Belarus of the European

Parliament. Repulsion to the proceedings of the police was expressed also by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and Lithuania.

Commemoration of the Liberty Day, as this feast of Declaration of Belarusian National Republic is called by the opposition, is forbidden in Belarus and the President Lukashenko has spoken out against the celebration as disloyal to the Belarusian state. On the other hand the opposition avows this heritage and colors of former Belarusian flag (white-red-white) declared its symbol.

Sources:

Office for a Democratic Belarus, Charter 97, AP, Bellorusskije Novosti