

## Gas to be sold to Belarus at \$200 in 2009

Russian natural gas may be sold to Belarus at \$200 for 1000 cubic meters next year, Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Surikov told reporters in Minsk on June 9, 2008. The information was confirmed on the Gazprom website, according to which the company plans to supply Belarus with 22.1 billion cubic meters of natural gas worth a total of \$4,420 million in 2009, which is \$200 per 1000 cubic meters.

Ambassador Surikov stated that the Belarusian government would like the contract with Gazprom to be revised in order to receive gas at a lower price, adding that the government used a gas price of \$140 per 1000 cubic meters when computing Belarus' 2009 national budget.

Under the five-year contract with Gazprom, signed on December 31, 2006, the gas price for Belarus was raised to \$100 for 1000 cubic meters in 2007 compared with \$46.68 in the previous two and a half years. The price was to gradually increase to the European market level by 2011. It was to be 67 percent of the level in 2008, 80 percent in 2009, 90 percent in 2010, and 100 percent in 2011. The price increased from \$100 to \$119 per 1000 cubic meters on January 1, 2008 and to \$128 on April 1.

Source: Novosti

## Amendments to Single List of Candidates

The Political Council of the United Pro-democratic Forces (UPF) on June 8 added three new names to its list of nominees for the autumn elections for the lower chamber of the Belarusian parliament, the House of Representatives of the Belarusian Republic. The opposition either boycotted or lost all the previous elections, which makes the "single list" of opposition candidates a breakthrough in approach.

The "single list" of UPF should present candidates of almost all major opposition parties and groups that are to compete for 110 seats of the House of Representatives, thus uniting the Democratic Forces and raising the chances of its nominees to pass the threshold for the parliament. But despite the efforts for a united approach towards the elections, several groups including Alyaksandr Milinkevich's Movement „For Freedom“, the Youth Front and groups associated with the civic campaign European Belarus promoted by Charter '97 have rejected the idea and formed their own election strategies ("For Freedom" will run a campaign for free and fair elections while European Belarus plan to boycott the elections).

Taking into consideration President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's recent statements, it is possible that several opposition candidates will make it into the parliament: "To be honest, I would like people to back a few opposition candidates, so that you stop accusing us of the absence of opposition in parliament. But this is up to people: My task is to ensure a normal voting process". The presence of opposition candidates in the National Assembly is also among the conditions which the EU set for Minsk in order to re-start dialogue with Belarus.

Independent Belarusian analysts believe the authorities' only realistic goal might be to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the EU by allowing a few candidates from either true or quasi-opposition parties to be elected to the National Assembly's House of Representatives. Therefore, they suggest that despite this, the September parliamentary elections provide a legitimate chance for the opposition to reach out to mainstream

population and boost its position in the country. This, they conclude should be the only realistic goal of the United Democratic Forces for the upcoming election.

Sources: TOL, Novosti, Reuters

### **Bush extends asset freeze, targeting Lukashenka and other Belarusian officials**

On June 6, 2008 US President George W. Bush extended a measure freezing any property in the United States owned by the Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka and a number of other Belarusian government officials for another year.

The order blocks all property and property rights of the listed persons. It prohibits US companies and individuals from engaging in any transactions with the named persons. These persons will not be able to access any assets that they might have in the United States. In addition, US financial institutions, wherever they are located, will not be able to provide any financial services to them.

In an official reply Andrey Papow, spokesman for the Belarusian foreign ministry, stated that "the Belarusian side is once again calling on the USA to enter an equal and mutually beneficial dialogue. The decision was not news; [...] it is a continuation of the existing restrictive measures." No further steps by the Belarusian side were made so far.

Sources: Novosti, BelaPAN