

Belarus asks IMF for a stabilization loan

On October 27, representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Belarusian Government launched talks in Minsk about provision of a \$2 billion reserve loan to Belarus.

Minsk applied to the IMF after attempting in vain to obtain a loan from Russia and to agree reduction of prices of gas delivered from Russia to Belarus.

According to Belarusian National Bank spokesman Anatoly Drozdov, the loan "will pursue only one goal - the creation of a safety cushion" and is planned to be spent on replenishing Belarus' gold and currency reserves.

The decision of the Belarusian government to attempt to obtain a loan from IMF was made at the time when Minsk held negotiations about a similar loan with Moscow. During his meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Sochi, Aliaksander Lukashenka had been offered reduction in gas prices and a \$2 billion loan in exchange for recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Despite the assurance of the Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin on October 21 about tentative agreement of the Russian government to issue the loan, Belarus hasn't got it so far. Under such circumstances, Belarus requested a loan from the IMF. However, prior to the current negotiations with the IMF, Aliaksander Lukashenka paid yet another visit to Moscow on October 25 to hold a meeting with Dmitry Medvedev. According to the information available to media, the talks have not brought any fruits in form of concrete results.

The IMF experts are planning to stay in Belarus until November 6 – by that day, they will decide whether Minsk will be granted the \$2 billion loan or not. Asked if the IMF had made the loan conditional, Belarus' deputy central bank head Vasily Matyushevsky said: "So far experts haven't raised such conditions. But in any case, Belarus will move toward liberalizing the key economic policies."

If agreed, it will be the second stabilization loan provided to Belarus in last years after a \$1.5 billion loan provided by Russia in 2007. Also, it would be the first loan by IMF since 2004, when Belarusian authorities decided to withdraw from further talks on stabilization loans with the IMF.

Sources: Kommersant, Itar-Tass, Interfax, Bloomberg, Reuters

***Budzma!* campaign launched**

On October 1, 2008 eleven Belarusian non-governmental organizations launched a nationwide campaign reviving the Belarusian cultural identity called *Budzma!* (Let's be!).

According to the organizers the role of the campaign is to recognize the values of Belarusian nation thanks to what "we [Belarusians] will manage to build on this base our modern, wealthy, European Belarus." The activities of the campaign vary from the release of compilations of modern Belarusian music, lectures about Belarusian history and culture, concerts of Belarusian musicians and bands to art expositions, meetings with writers, presentations of books, magazines and musical projects.

All the events organized by the partners of the campaign have a common goal: to awake Belarusians to the interest towards Belarusian culture and to its awareness as a personal value, to unite all Belarusians, all the citizens of the country irrespective of their national origins.

Any organization, initiative or private party sharing the ideas and aims of the campaign is welcomed to join. More information on the campaign is available at the official website www.budzma.org in Belarusian.

Source: www.budzma.org