

Supreme State Council meeting postponed

A meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Russia-Belarus Union State, planned at December 1 in Moscow, was delayed at the very last moment upon a request from Belarus. Belarusian President Lukashenka should have met his counterpart Medvedev there.

According to the official Kremlin resources, Belarus had proposed to postpone the meeting "so that the two heads of state can meet beforehand". Neither Belarusian President nor Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus provided official comments.

Russian daily Kommersant reported that the preliminary agenda of the meeting included several issues sensitive to both sides, including discussion about setting up a unified air-defense system, adoption of the Union State's Constitutional Act and transition to a single currency, Russian ruble. The Constitutional Act has been discussed since the establishment of the Union in 1999 without any substantial progress. Also, until today, Belarus has not implemented necessary steps to facilitate the adoption of Russian ruble as a single currency.

Media maintained that the meeting had been postponed because of the two sides' disagreements over the future development of the Union State. A source close to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka told Interfax that Minsk "was concerned over the Russian volatile attitude to the Union State development". In his reaction to the abrupt cancellation of the meeting, Kommersant's source in the Kremlin stated that "Minsk's statements are a lie. It tries to change a real negotiating process with a farce. Russia confirmed its desire to step up integration, but Belarus did nothing to support us."

The new date of the postponed Supreme State Council meeting was not announced yet.

Sources: RIA Novosti, Itar-Tass, Kommersant, Interfax, Trend News

European Commission announced the Eastern Partnership

On December 3 the European Commission presented the Eastern Partnership – an initiative aiming to improve ties of the EU with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, developed on the basis of a proposal by Sweden and Poland presented earlier this year.

According to the Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner the Commission "prepared an ambitious and at the same time well-balanced offer". The proposal envisages new association agreements with all 6 countries, free trade deals, closer energy ties, visa liberalization, and financial assistance programs as a reward for making democratic and free market reforms. The plan also suggests an addition of 350 million Euros to the planned EU resources for these countries in the period 2010-2013.

Even though the Eastern Partnership counts on Belarus participation in this scheme, its membership is conditioned by the overall development of the EU-Belarus relations. The progress in these relations depends on whether Belarus initiates democratic reforms and country's commitment to upholding human rights. In reaction to the announcement of the Eastern Partnership, press secretary of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Andrei Papou informed that "Belarus has already confirmed it is ready to work in conjunction with the European Commission".

The Czech Republic, which will be presiding over EU in the first half of 2009, would like to formally launch the Eastern partnership by an "Eastern summit", organized in Prague, in spring 2009 with participation of EU27 and the invited Eastern partners.

Sources: EurActiv, European Commission, RFE/RL, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Government of the Czech Republic