

### **Minister of Interior Uladzimir Navumau resigned**

On April 6 President Lukashenka accepted the resignation of the Minister of Interior Uladzimir Navumau, who had been leading the Ministry since September 2000. The official reason for resigning was stated as the minister's health. The President said that "certain persons who work poorly or badly or have grown tired will step down soon". He mentioned that one of reasons for Navumau resignation was "terrible tiredness". Navumau 's future plans are not yet known.

The Navumau resignation has been seen within the context of the recent efforts to improve relations with the EU. The ex-minister was banned from travelling to the EU and USA as the 2004 Council of Europe's report connects him with the as-yet unexplained disappearances of opposition leaders and one journalist in 1999 and 2000. In government circles, he was a supporter of hard line factions and the armed forces, as was Viktor Sheyman who also left his position as Security Council Chairman in summer 2008.

*Sources: Deutsche Welle, Office for a Democratic Belarus*

### **Thousands of people took part on a demonstration in Minsk.**

On March 25, 2009 approximately four thousand people gathered in the centre of the Belarusian capital to take part in a demonstration organised by opposition groups. During the demonstration the anniversary of formation of the first independent Belarusian People's Republic in 1918 was remembered. As the so-called Freedom day is not officially celebrated, regime opponents not only use the occasion to remember the occasion, but also by its celebration, to express their disagreement with current government policy.

According to witnesses, the demonstration was peaceful. Participants called for democracy and fulfilment of human rights. Police did not disperse the crowds, but it was reported that several activists were detained or in some cases prevented by police to attend the demonstration.

*Sources: Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, Office for a Democratic Belarus*

### **Belarus was invited to Eastern Partnership Program**

After long discussions, leaders of the EU countries decided to invite Belarus to the Eastern Partnership Program. The decision was taken at the EU Summit in Brussels on March 19. The Program offers a deepening of relations with the EU for 6 invited countries – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Program is aimed to support partner states in building democracy and a market economy, to contribute to their stability and to raise standards to an EU level. The program provides opportunities to cooperate and support countries in the fields of human rights, rule of law, migration and visa policy, as well as fighting corruption and strengthening energy security. The Eastern Partnership aims to support economic integration of the invited states and create intensive contacts between citizens from the EU and its eastern neighbours.

The European Partnership will be launched at a summit in Prague on May 7, in the presence of leaders of EU member states and representatives of the 6 invited countries. The decision to invite President Lukashenka to the summit was made by foreign ministers of EU countries during a summit in Hlboka nad Moravou in the Czech Republic at the end of March.

It was thought that if President Lukashenka was not invited, it could have led to a possible Belarusian boycott of the summit. On the other hand, the presence of the president of the so-called 'last dictatorship in Europe' could attract more attention than the Eastern Partnership

Program itself. The European Commission is assuming that Lukashenka will send the Minister of Foreign Affairs Siarhey Martynau or another government representative in his place.

*Sources: Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, Deutsche Welle, Office for a Democratic Belarus, Council of European Union*