

It should be noted that the US Congress for the first time in history passed a special law on Belarus. American legislators were pushed to take such a decision by the consistent policy that the Belarusian ruler had been pursuing for 11 years. In the opinion of the world community, the baseline principles of this policy run counter to the generally accepted norms and standards. If previously these contradictions had been successively recorded by national parliaments of European nations, the Council of Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and the European Union, now the subject was brought before the UN, where a position of special spokesperson for Belarus was established. Over the past year, active critics of Lukashenko regime have been joined by Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. The object of this criticism has been known to respond by intensifying oppressive measures with regard to the opposition, NGOs, and mass media. The world community began to pressurize and criticize Moscow, which continues defend Lukashenko internationally and provide financial and material assistance to him. As many politicians and analysts believe, the opponents of the ruling circles are losing hope that the Kremlin will put the heat on Lukashenko with the purpose of democratizing Belarus. From the standpoint of several observers, the reforming of the government and strengthening of control over mass media that are currently taking place in Russia, is by no means an illustration of democracy. They also note the synchronism of anti-American propaganda campaigns observed in Russian and Belarusian mass media, especially on state-owned TV channels. And Belarus does not have any other kind of TV.

Ambassador Krol told the journalists that in view of the massive campaign launched by the Belarusian TV, which demonstrates hatred of extraordinary intensity for the American people, the US Embassy in Minsk was forced to impart to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus its apprehension of the «anti-American campaign in the state-owned mass media.» Such a position of the Belarusian authorities casts the relations between the two countries back to the worst cold war times.

Mr. Krol said that the United States interestedly observes the preparation in Belarus for the election campaign of 2006. The Ambassador noted that the Belarusian opposition is still separated from the Belarusian community by means of a media blockade. Belarusian citizens do not have free access to information and there is no free exchange of opinions, which is necessary for a free election process. This very much disturbs the world community and brings into a question if the 2006 election is going to be free, fair, and democratic. «Democratic election in Belarus is under threat,» US Ambassador George Krol stated.

Roman Yakovlevsky. 17.11.05.

BELARUS' MISSION

In 2006 Belarus intends to lead the process of collecting the lands of the former Soviet empire

Acknowledgement of the disintegration of the post-Soviet realm as historically inevitable by some of its entities is being postponed again, despite the recent trends. On the oppo-

site, some are still nursing schemes to turn back this process. In 2006 Belarus intends to lead the crusade for collecting the lands from Brest to Vladivostok. It is already known that, first, it has been tasked with organizing the anniversary summit of the NIS; second, it is going to take the chair in the EvrAzES (Eurasian Economic Community); and, third, its turn to preside in the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) is approaching.

The beginning of this year turned out to be exceedingly scandalous in the family of the former Soviet republics. Russia's «gas attack» on Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova caused them to burst with indignation with respect to the «big brother's» behavior and make sounding declarations of permanent alienation with Moscow as a center for unification processes in the post-Soviet realm. Their rather expressive negative attitude toward Belarus, which Moscow charged the old price for gas, allegedly for its «model behavior», was just as natural.

There is no doubt that both participants of this «gas war» and the remaining members of post-Soviet formations, such as the NIS, the EvrAzES, the CSTO, and the EEP (Uniform Economic Space), will not be able to free themselves from these feelings and emotions in the near months, or maybe even years. But they will never change their geographical coordinates with respect to Moscow. In general, the wounds received in that bickering are still green. Along with that, demonstrations of peaceful initiatives are inevitable. One of them is already known to be brought forward by Belarus in the current year.

The issues of the national policy in multilateral integration associations in the post-Soviet realm made the topic of a special meeting conducted by President Alexander Lukashenko. To quote him, Belarus is to accomplish «important tasks» in the framework of its current chairmanship in the EvrAzES and forthcoming chairmanship in the CSTO. «There are more than enough problems there and all heads of states are waiting to see what Belarus is going to do during its chairmanship in these organizations», Lukashenko noted. He demanded from his company to identify the scope of Belarusian initiatives for the forthcoming summits, «We need to introduce such proposals, which would give a nudge to the integration processes, revived them in some aspects and could just remedy the situation in other aspects.»

Sergey Martynov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who spoke in the meeting, pronounced the need for defining functions of the NIS in various fields with more precision. «It is necessary to enhance interaction in the spheres of combating terrorism and human trafficking and suppression of drug trafficking,» the head of the Foreign Service pointed out. He also spoke in favor of intensifying social and humanitarian cooperation.

Pointing out the strategic position of the EvrAzES member-countries in Eurasia and the substantial economic potential of the Community, Sergey Martynov did not rule out the possibility of giving this organization some political functions. To quote the Minister, the Belarusian side has prepared initiatives on development of the EvrAzES, which are drawn in the form of President's of Belarus Address to his colleagues.

Sergey Martynov named the main objective of the CSTO to be integration of the Organization into the international security architecture. To quote him, we need to achieve the international acknowledgement of this organization as an equal partner to other security structures.

Sergey Martynov brought forward a proposal for all concerned ministries and agencies to promptly and clearly formulate what they suggest for and look forward to gain from participation in the NIS, the Eurasian Economic Community, and the Collective Defense Treaty Organization. On the basis of these suggestions it is intended to develop and adopt President's directives on each of these integration formations.

President of Belarus also declared his personal standpoint at this meeting: it involves retaining and developing of the «broad» NIS in the 12-state format along with simultaneous strengthening of regional integration associations. «Lately there has been much criticism of the NIS, alleging that it is a mechanism for «civilized divorce» rather than integration of nations and that we will never reach the EU level. The positive role of the NIS is even further disclaimed by leaders of some countries, who try to earn a reputation with their foreign patrons by means of slogans of separation from the NIS. I mean such associations as GUAM (the union of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), the so-called Democratic Choice Community,» the Belarusian leader said.

To put it mildly, there are serious doubts that Lukashenko is going to succeed in «bringing to reason» the GUAM and DCC leaders, especially Yushchenko and Saakashvili, persuading them to abandon the «non-indigenous» neoformations in favor of the good old NIS order. Last year dictator Lukashenko and revolutionaries Yushchenko and Saakashvili «the» more than once displayed their mutual disaffection. On the other hand, it seems that the Belarusian leader hardly believes himself in such «rehabilitation» of his colleagues. As Yushchenko has been declaring, Ukraine is definitely not going to closely integrate with its former USSR «relatives» in the prejudice of the European vector.

Judging by Lukashenko's statements, Belarus none the less intends to focus its leading mission on integration of the post-Soviet realm within the structures where there are no «revolutionaries» and their influence, primarily in the EvrAzES. «We, as presiding party, do not have the right even to think that the EvrAzES should keep on «dying away». We are pondering on initiatives that could boost work. It all quite simple: we need to solve two or three major issues, which will be of interest and keep the states in the EvrAzES,» Belarusian President is convinced.

As such issues Lukashenko regards those of railway tariffs and custom union creation, «If Russia is unable to supply everyone with natural gas and oil, these natural resources are available in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Russia should not impede supply of hydrocarbon, say, to Belarus or Ukraine». In his opinion, settling of these problems will enhance attractiveness of the EvrAzEs.

At present a message from the chair of the EvrAzES Intergovernmental Council to the heads of its member-states is being prepared. To quote Lukashenko, at the forthcoming EvrAzES summit in St. Petersburg Belarus is going to bring forward «concrete proposals» for studying. «If the heads of states agree to them, we will move in this direction. This is rapprochement-oriented motion,» the Belarusian President believes.

Lukashenko explains his strive for integration and strong concern about the situation in the post-Soviet realm by the need to resist the adversaries in the name of the US and the EU, apart from everything else. However, it is necessary to understand that it is actually closely

linked to the presidential election in Belarus. The Belarusian leader once again lets both all his friends and foes abroad and his fellow countrymen see that absolutely nothing will change here after 19th March. Maybe it will not, indeed. But another thing is also true: after this date the official Minsk will definitely have less desire to make a fuss about integration.

Mikhail Dashuk. 19.01.06.

RUSSIAN BEETLE AND EUROPEAN BLOCK

Europe has never been in such consensus with regard to Belarus

The observers are unanimous: during the past weeks Europe displayed unprecedented fervency, or even ostentation, in tackling the «Belarusian issue». The degree of interest in this issue is rising as 19th March is approaching – the date of the presidential election in the country with a consistent reputation of the «last dictatorship in Europe.» At that, unprecedented attention is paid to contacts with top oppositionists. Alexander Milinkevich, a potential rival to the irremovable President Lukashenko, was given the green light to make an impressive tour of the Old World's political centers. After the New Year Milinkevich managed to meet Phillip Dust-Blazi, Foreign Minister of France, Polish President Lech Kaczynski, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso, and other EU leaders. A bit earlier he had met Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus. The leader of the Belarusian opposition also was given the floor in Poland's Seim, the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and, in addition, spoke at a series of important international forums and informal executive meetings. This is truly an unprecedented thing. None of the political opponents of the system had been honored with such a cascade of receptions in the Old World capitals. And this looks especially spectacular against the background of blind confrontation between the official Minsk and the West, whereupon President Lukashenko has not been invited to Europe for a long time.

In the meantime, harsher overtones have sounded in declarations made by European bodies on the «Belarusian issue». This concerns both assessments of the state policy and possible measures of retaliation to be applied to the top officials in the event of failing to ensure a fair election. Europe is preparing to make a massed lodgment of observers. Besides, Brussels accelerated the startup of a large project on independent broadcasting on Belarus. The leader of the Belarusian opposition himself thinks that «Europe has never been in such consensus with regard to Belarus.» Hot on the trail after his voyage through the Old World capitals, Alexander Milinkevich gave an interview to «Wider Europe» portal.

Summarizing the results of your tour – what is in the «dry residue»?

A.M. «It is of the greatest importance that Europe has seen a clear democratic perspective in Belarus and is willing to actively assist it as never before. Previously they took different positions with regard to the Belarusian issue over there. Some said that maybe he should not be messed with at all; if Belarusians love their president so much, let their society mature to democracy. Others advocated a very hard approach. At present, as I became convinced at my