

Information concerning the EP delegation to Minsk:

A visiting delegation of European Parliament members met with Lidziya Yarmoshyna, head of the Belarusian central election commission, and Mikalay Lazavik, the commission's secretary, in Minsk on Friday to discuss the country's electoral regulations. "The conversation focused mainly on matters related to the amendments to electoral regulations adopted at the end of last year, as well as concerning the application of the regulations in the local elections," Mr. Lazavik said. (BelaPAN, BelTA)

The delegation of the European Parliament met Friday in Minsk with activists of the so-called unofficial Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB). The meeting lasted more than three hours, with the Union being represented by Andrzej Poczobut, chairperson of the UPB Main Council, and Teresa Sobol, chairperson of the UPB chapter in Ivyanets, UPB spokesman Igor Bancer said. "Our activists gave a detailed, chronological and reasoned account of the conflict over the Polish House in Ivyanets and authorities' actions regarding the unregistered UPB in the context of the general situation in Belarus, which is characterized by violations of citizens' rights and liberties," Mr. Bancer said. (BelaPAN)

Belarusian opposition leaders flatly oppose the National Assembly's full-fledged membership in the EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly (EURONEST PA), Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party said following a meeting with a visiting delegation of the European Parliament. "But we are ready to agree to the proposal that there should be five government officials and five opposition activists in the EURONEST PA," he said. "I think that it would be a concession on the part of both the European Parliament and the Belarusian opposition." (BelaPAN)

Other important information:

Poland and Belarus will set up a team of experts to resolve the Polish minority conflict, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski told reporters following his meeting with Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Kyiv on February 25. "The President of Belarus assured me that the group of experts would try to find solutions satisfactory to both parties," Polskie Radio quoted Mr. Sikorski as saying. Mr. Sikorski noted that he had arrived in the Ukrainian capital city with a special view to meeting with the Belarusian leader. The meeting reportedly lasted more than an hour instead of the expected half an hour. The fact that Mr. Lukashenka agreed to the meeting suggests that Belarus "takes seriously the Belarusian-Polish relationship and the Belarusian-European relationship," Mr. Sikorski said. (BelaPAN, Interfax)

The trial of Vawkavysk businessman Mikalay Awtukhovich and his associate Uladzimir Asipenka will begin at the Supreme Court of Belarus on March 10. As Mr. Awtukhovich's lawyer, Pavel Sapelka, said, Judge Alyaksey Tsyatsyukhin will preside over the trial. He said that the proceedings would be open to the public, but the judge could order the trial held behind closed doors if either the prosecution or the defence requested this. In November 2009, the pair was charged with preparations for an act of terrorism in addition to the previously brought charges of perpetrating a series of arsons and explosions targeting the property of local officials in Vawkavysk, Hrodna region. (BelaPAN, Interfax)

A judge of the Maskowski District Court in Minsk on February 26 imposed a penalty of 8,750,000 rubels (\$3,000) on New Life Church, Syarhey Lukanin, lawyer of the Protestant community said. The hearing was initiated by the environmental protection department of the Minsk city government, which charged the community with damage to land, an offense that carries a penalty of up to 17.5 million rubels (\$6,000) under Article 15.11 of the Administrative Offenses Code. "Apart from the penalty, we were ordered to

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pay 263 million rubels as compensation for the alleged damage. That is, we have to pay a total of nearly 100,000 dollars," Mr. Lukanin said. (BelaPAN)

An opposition youth organization called Malady Front on February 28 filed an application for registration with the justice ministry. This is the sixth attempt of the group to obtain legal status in Belarus since 2006. Malady Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich said that he had little hope that the justice ministry would grant registration to the group. "But the more attempts we will make to get registered, the more difficult it will be for law enforcers to press charges against us under Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code that penalizes acting on behalf of an unregistered organization, he noted. Malady Front plans to hold founding conferences every quarter. (BelaPAN)

The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament so far have not approved the European Investment Bank (EIB)'s loans for Belarus, the bank's press office said. The European Investment Bank is expected to provide a total of €3.7 billion in loans to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine for the implementation of transport, energy, telecommunications and environmental projects between 2007 and 2013. The loans for all the countries but Belarus have already been approved. In an interview with Poland's newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* earlier this month, EIB Vice President Marta Gajecka said that "European Investment Bank loans are in fact the only opportunity for financial pressure on Minsk that the EU has." (BelaPAN)