

# Fifth place is not bad at all

Belarus up 29 points among most flourishing countries in the world — according to Legatum Prosperity Index

Belarus has jumped 29 points to claim 54th position on the Legatum Prosperity Index, which ranks prosperity across 110 nations (in 2009, Belarus was 85th). The British Independent Research Institute Legatum began publishing its Legatum Prosperity Index in 2006. In line with the project's methodology, a country's rating is defined by the average figure of its indices. This reflects such components of well-being as key macro-economic figures, levels of education and health, the development of democratic institutions, management organisation, business and innovations, social capital and personal freedom.

In 2010, Norway is ranked first and Denmark second, followed by Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. The most highly ranked nations among our post-Soviet countries are Estonia (35th), Lithuania (42nd), Latvia (47th) and Kazakhstan (50th). Meanwhile, Russia is ranked 63rd, Ukraine 69th, Uzbekistan 76th and Moldova 86th. Belarus is fifth in terms of prosperity across the former Soviet Union nations.



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Belarus ranked fifth for prosperity across former Soviet republics

Belarus has also improved its position in the Index of Economic Freedom, published by the Heritage Foundation (Washington) with the participation and support of *The Wall Street Journal*. In 2010, Belarus

is ranked 150th out of 183 countries, up 17 points on last year. The rating indicates improvements in Belarus regarding freedom of business, trade, fiscal matters and labour relations, in addition to state spending.

## Tourist benefits

By Andrey Asfurov

**Belarus planning to launch online interactive map providing information on its 5,000 tourist facilities**

An agreement has been concluded with Belgeodesiya to develop an online map marking Belarus' tourist attractions. Information is to be provided by the State Cadastre of Tourist Resources, whose database contains information on 20,000 sites. A quarter of all Belarus' tourist attractions will be available on the virtual map as a result.

Historical and cultural sites are to be marked, alongside places of natural beauty, and the most popular social facilities — such as hotels, leisure centres, spas and farmsteads. The interactive map will be placed on the national tourist portal of Belarus, with signs denoting each type of tourist site. On selecting an image, guests will be able to gain access to detailed information and view photos.

## Mission gets down to concrete work



OSCE Observation Mission granted permission

**OSCE observers receive first accreditation documents from Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda**

For Ambassador Geert Ahrens, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, it's his third electoral campaign. The Chair of the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda, Lidia Yermoshina, noted that the number three has mystical meaning for Slavs and hopes that 'this time, the work of the mission will be more successful and that previous failings have been overcome'. She has reported to the OSCE on how the electoral campaign is progressing, while explaining changes to legislation, stressing that many OSCE recommendations have influenced reform. Mr. Ahrens' welcome address left the impression that his mission aims to be constructive. He assures us that international observers 'won't compare these elections with those of other countries, since each state has its own traditions and is unique, which should be taken into account'. Meanwhile, he has praised changes to vote count monitoring.

Mr. Ahrens also noted that the reliability and security of early voting has been improved, emphasising that 'preliminary voting itself doesn't contradict OSCE principles'. Ms. Yermoshina has invited OSCE representatives to take part in training courses at district elec-

tion commissions, which will model situations for both early and major voting. The Chair of the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda and the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission have agreed to meet once a week to discuss current issues. Ms. Yermoshina hopes that the opinions of international observers, expressed in the media and via the Central Election Commission, will coincide with the results of the final report. OSCE General Secretary Marc Perrin de Brichambaut has noted at a press conference in Moscow that 'Belarus was very open in inviting observers'. He added that he 'doesn't remember the OSCE ever sending fewer than 400 observers to elections in Belarus' and expressed his wish that 'all countries work in a similar manner'. The official noted that the invitation was received 'almost the next day after the elections had been announced'.

While OSCE specialists are only just beginning their observation, the CIS mission has been present for almost a month, following the electoral campaign countrywide. It has monitored the process of signature checking by district and city commissions and has attended their sessions. "The commissions are working openly and publicly, providing all necessary information regarding the electoral process," explains Yevgeny Sloboda, the Head of Operations Office for the CIS Observation Mission.

## Ability to pay bills appreciated

IMF mission finishes its work in Belarus with clear results

By Vitaly Volkov

"Belarus has avoided recession and restored economic growth, while receiving access to international capital markets via its placement of Eurobonds," noted Chris Jarvis, the Head of the IMF Mission, announcing his assessment. The International Monetary Fund is impressed by the country's steps to allow privatisation and welcomes Belarus' initiatives 'on further liberalisation of the economy and development of entrepreneurship, with the focus on small and medium-sized businesses'.

However, the IMF is calling on the Belarusian Government to reduce its spending on various state programmes. Its experts believe that considerable salary rises could lead to a budget deficit. Nevertheless, they admit that the recent increase 'aimed to bring state salaries in line with those in the private sector'.

The financial deficit is being covered by the Government through foreign loans. Analysing this strategy, Mr. Jarvis asserted, "Belarus is a solvent country, with a low level of foreign debt compared to other states with developing mar-

ket economies." The IMF believes that the attraction of foreign loans is 'absolutely feasible' and calls the placement of Eurobonds 'one of this year's successes for Belarus'.

Several years ago, Belarus enjoyed high GDP growth without loans (although energy prices were different at that time). Our foreign debt is far from critical but it is better to be cautious regarding further loans. Approving the recent placement of Eurobonds, the IMF notes, "It's vital that the country's economic policy is strong, so that it does not solely rely on foreign borrowings."

## Counter motion observed

By Vladimir Yevseev

**Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, brings two pieces of good news to Minsk**

On meeting journalists at the Europe Hotel (the symbolism of which was clear) he explained that Brussels has a plan of co-operation with Belarus and that the EU is to begin talks with Minsk on simplifying the visa regime. Additionally, he stressed that steps to ease the visa regime won't depend on political issues.

This is Mr. Füle's second visit to Minsk. During his first visit, in July, he negotiated with Alexander Lukashenko and met several representatives of the opposition. However, in the midst of the electoral campaign, the European Commissioner is remaining neutral, refraining from meeting potential candidates for the presidency. Nevertheless, the elections were the focus of his conversation with journalists.

Mr. Füle was pleased to note progress in such issues as signature collection, registration of candidates



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Mr. Štefan Füle

and access of different political forces to the media. According to the European Commissioner, a shortcoming is that 'less than one percent of the opposition are members of electoral commissions'. However, he allocated no blame: either to the authorities or the opposition. Rather, he diplomatically noted that the figure 'doesn't meet expectations'. He added that the European Union has a range of questions regarding the procedure of early voting.

Speaking of elections, Mr. Füle underlined the most vital aspect of

the EU's position, "We hope that free and fair elections will take place in Belarus. The decisions will be made by the Belarusian nation and we'll respect its choice."

Mr. Füle also met Belarus' Foreign Minister, Sergei Martynov, and presented an EU intermediate plan regarding Belarus — likely to be launched after the presidential elections. According to Mr. Füle, it aims to promote reform and modernisation in various spheres in Belarus. The EU is keen to assist our country in developing democracy, human rights and economic transformations, while ensuring energy security (called 'very important' by Mr. Füle).

The European Commissioner noted that an EU working group will soon begin discussing how best to simplify the visa regime with Belarus. Of course, entry to the EU won't become easier straight away, since many bureaucratic procedures and agreements lie ahead. However, the fact that Brussels has stopped connecting visas with the political situation is certainly welcome news for Minsk.