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BELARUS IN 2014: SAME OLD STORY

Most of us agree that we should not expect fundamental changes in Belarus in 2014. Aliaksandr Lukashenka will play same old internal and geopolitical game. Thus, in the final issue of „The Bell“ this year, two analysts are predicting the possible development of Belarusian politics next year.

Belarus in 2014 will hold local elections but more attention will be given to forthcoming presidential elections in 2015. Economic situation in the country will remain challenging and no changes in its foreign policy will happen. However, some trends can be foreseen at the moment.

In the first article, head of the board of the Belarusian Independent Centre for The European

Studies Pavel Usov states that no pro-European shift neither any geopolitical U-turns should be expected. He overviews three – governing, opposition and foreign policy – dimensions and gives his opinion on what will happen in 2014. In the second article, Ryhor Astapenia looks deeper into forthcoming local elections as well as presidential elections in 2015 and states that it will only highlight the polarization of the opposition. Also, he looks at the economical perspectives of Belarus in 2014.

Finally, as in previous issues, we present you a third article of a young analyst Vadzim Bylina, which gives a broad overview of the peat extraction and use in Belarus. Thank you for reading „The Bell“ and happy 2014!

Vytautas Keršanskas, Editor

POLITICAL SCENARIO FOR 2014

Pavel Usov

The new year will see the Belarusian political system and Belarusian society in a state of routine developments and predictability. Belarus cannot expect a social rebel, a revolution, the growing strength of the opposition, the unexpected collapse of the political system, or democratisation after a flash of genius for the leadership. There will be no geopolitical U-turns, improving relations with the West, or a pro-EU shift. Society and the state will stay in a political and economic drift and the general civilisation stagnation, which indicates the slow death of the state machine body.

Government: ruling rather than managing

There are no social or political factors in Belarus today to shatter the established state model or to provoke a major change of the system. Economic instability or the Russian factor are the only two aspects that can revitalise Belarus. However, experience shows that economic challenges force the population into an even deeper depression, as the authorities resort to command-and-control methods of decision-making. The Belarusian establishment reacts to any challenge mechanically rather than thoughtfully, sticking

to the concept “we do not want to, but we have to”. Today’s situation will make the country path dependent for the long run. The paradox of this situation is that **the ruling elite wants to rule rather than lead, govern or manage.**

Under the geopolitical patronage of the Eastern neighbour, the permanent economic crisis can hardly lead to any positive change, because people see it as normality. What we should mean by a positive change is a process towards weakening authoritarian control and the democratisation of politics.

With the dawning of 2014 there is no reason to expect a positive change. The political regime is at the stage when the ruling elite is preoccupied with attempts to keep its own sustainability, i.e. conditions for continued ruling. Any attempts to introduce pivotal changes in the system would result in a major destabilisation. Not only is the ruling elite afraid of initiating any political reforms; it has neither the funds nor staff to implement a deep social and political transformation, including modernisation, on which the government could rely in making

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statements in 2014. This is why one cannot assume that Belarus is on the verge of a major political shift from *ruling* towards *leading* and thoughtful *management*. Change in the nearest future will be spontaneous and unmanageable, with the leadership focused on reacting to external challenges rather than preventing them.

Inability to function in a reality of change and a fear of a democratic transformation rule out even a façade of democratisation, games with the opposition or any dialogue with it. Seeing the opposition as a bogey rather than a partner, the regime will make every effort to destroy it. The political uprising in Ukraine at the end of 2013 is likely to confirm the Belarusian government in its strategy and the need to follow it in the future. Staying under the same pressure, the opposition will not see any difference next year. It will undergo a continued deactivation and neutralisation outside the political field, even in the background of formal political routines. Amendments of the electoral law, harshening sanctions for open political activities and non-stop repressions against activists in 2013 confirm the regime's ambition to terminate the opposition politically. The agenda is to preserve some formal legal bodies labelled "the opposition parties", with a clear condition to refrain from any real political activities. This process will probably extend, given the local elections in 2014 and preparations for presidential elections in 2015.

The abovementioned factors will prevent the authorities from any bold steps towards liberalisation. Even despite a chance for improving relations with the EU by "democratising" local elections, Lukashenka will not dare to, because of the experience in 2010 and the fresh example of Ukraine. The unwillingness to release political prisoners is a clear confirmation of the elite's intentions. Unless forced, Lukashenka will not do it in 2014 either, because the regime has to control the system in the run-up to the presidential polls. The opposition could see the unconditional release of all political prisoners as a weakness and become inspired. For sure, the government will create a democratic "smokescreen" and involve the opposition in the electoral process as a 'legitimising service' with a result well known in advance.

Opposition: escaping the consolidation

For the opposition, the year 2014 will be marked by never-ending attempts and aspirations to create joint and individual strategies for local and presidential elections. However, they will not result in a consolidation or a single candidate. The democratic community seems to have finalised and institutionalised its divisions, with two clear blocks – the People's Referendum and Talaka – most likely going to compete rather than agree,

since they have almost no common ground. Just as the ruling regime lacks reasons to move towards reforms, the opposition has no reasons for consolidation. Despite some conventionalities, the history of the democratic community is the history of escaping its own consolidation. Two blocks in the opposition do not mean the end of fragmentation. The opposition's ability in general, just like the leadership of Talaka and the People's Referendum in particular, have dubious skills for creating an attractive strategy to change people's political preferences.

The opposition is likely to focus on preparations for the presidential elections. The year 2014 will see a range of statements from opposition politicians on their readiness to run in the 2015 campaign. In total, there will be at least five opposition candidates, none of them strong enough to change the situation and compete with Lukashenka. The lack of certainty is present in opinion polls as well, with 81 per cent of Belarusians seeing no one who could be an alternative candidate, according to IISEPS.

Under the regime's persistent pressure, one can hardly expect the opposition to be super active and successful. Logically, the opposition members will focus on a process of participation in polls, rather than a real fight for a position in office.

Society: captive of patience

Adhering to its deep political apathy, the Belarusian public will continue "heroically" suffering, exposed to economic difficulties and absurd new ideas of government. The potential for patience is not exhausted. Though they see negative economic and social trends and feel bad about them, 51 per cent of the population finds the situation "still possible to tolerate".¹ Locally, there are outburst of dissatisfaction and tensions from time to time, caused by decision-making in construction towards urban densification, deteriorating labour conditions or reduced wages. However, protests are not likely to become massive in 2014. Society is atomised and avoids open conflicts with the state. Moreover, the upcoming local and presidential elections will force the leadership to increase salaries, creating an illusion of stability and confidence for part of society.

The mental adaptability of the population, the weakness of the opposition and the environment of permanent pressure are the components of the proof-strength of the Belarusian regime.

¹ IISEPS, September 2013, <http://www.iiseps.org/dannye/42>

What the Belarusian President would prefer in international relations is full stagnation.

Foreign policy: harboured in the bay?

Contrary to the domestic politics, the foreign agenda will remain dynamic, because of growing pressure from Moscow rather than Lukashenka's will or activities. What the Belarusian President would prefer in international relations is full stagnation. However, the stage of quiet dabbling between two coasts is over for Belarus. The country is facing major geopolitical choices, though the general geopolitical direction is already clear. In my opinion, the economic and political dependence on Russia is so obvious and unsafe that Lukashenka would not be able to switch his own foreign policy priorities without vast problems for his power. A need for new loans and low energy prices in the run-

up to elections will force Lukashenka towards further concessions, on both the privatisation of companies and the Eurasian Economic Union. Developments in Ukraine will provoke more aggression from Moscow in relations with "partners".

Completely destroyed ties with the EU make the geopolitical situation of Belarus worse. The government is not in a rush to improve them. The agenda of Belarus towards the West in 2014 will mostly repeat the activities of the previous year. In its turn, the EU will continue its "dialogue for the modernisation" strategy, even with some further concessions possible. But it will have no influence either on the domestic situation, or on the foreign policy priorities of Belarus.

BELARUS 2014: ECONOMIC THREATS AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

Ryhor Astapenia

Local elections do not politicise society in Belarus. This is why the opposition is most likely to use them for internal fight.

The year 2014 will be a year of preparation for presidential elections both for the government and the opposition. It carries several tests for political actors of Belarus. The opposition has to implement a visible local election campaign and define its strategy for the presidential elections. In its turn, the government has to stabilise the economy and ensure growing well being, which is crucial for the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime.

Neither the government, nor the opposition seem to be ready to fulfil their tasks. The status quo will be preserved in Belarusian politics next year, though some initiatives might irritate the regime of Lukashenka. However, the deteriorating state of the economy will remain the central threat for the authorities. The year 2014 will not be the year of the Rubicon for Belarus, but it can influence the political temperature for 2015.

Local elections and presidential candidates

Officially, the year will be marked by elections to local councils. The government has scheduled elections for 23 March 2014 to elect about 21,000 local councillors. The local legislatures will stay sterile and democracy-free. Five oppositionists succeeded in fighting their way through a system of fraud during the local elections in 2010. One can hardly expect this number to grow in 2014. The average competition during the last local elections was 1.2 candidates per mandate. The majority of districts will stay non-competitive in 2014, too.

The opposition actors are now preparing their

short lists of candidates. The People's Referendum coalition, created by the Movement for Freedom, Tell the Truth campaign, and the BPF party, will use the electoral campaign to collect signatures both for their candidates and for a referendum.

A second coalition, For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka", is still silent on its plans. Driven primarily by the United Civil Party, this alliance could choose a boycott strategy; however, local elections are valid with any turnout, making a boycott agenda pointless.

Local elections do not politicise society in Belarus. This is why the opposition is most likely to use them for internal fight. The blocks have to choose a procedure for selecting presidential candidates in 2014, and even to define the personalities of Lukashenka's rivals.

According to informal sources, the People's Referendum might convoke a congress, and the Talaka will organise their own primaries. It makes a single candidate option almost impossible. What can be a concern for Lukashenka's regime in 2014 is the People's Referendum. If democrats manage to collect the planned half a million signatures, the government will have to react.

Emergence of new opposition organisations and leaders is also possible in 2014. Aliaksandr Kazulin emerged shortly before the presidential elections in 2006, and Uladzimir Niakliaueu's Tell the Truth campaign in 2010. Having ensured support from donors, some personalities from today's opposition establishment or its entourage can launch their campaign as early as 2014.

The power elites will tolerate the incumbent ruler until his defeat looks obvious.

Experts claim that the Belarusian economy needs USD 9 billion to survive until the Presidential elections in 2015.

Many people in Belarus hope that some government officials might be willing to join the opposition or even run against Lukashenka in the elections. This is not a realistic scenario. The power elites will tolerate the incumbent ruler until his defeat looks obvious. Everyone who could not work under him for ideological reasons has already left.

Economic challenges

The regime-created economic situation rather than the opposition is the government's number one enemy. The inefficiency of the economy and its reliance on external funding pose major threats for the stability of the political system. The year 2014 will be a major test for the Belarusian economy.

According to the Ministry of Economy, the average salary in Belarus grew by 18.7 per cent in 2013, reaching USD 600. The gap is opening between the growth in productivity of labour and wages. Now it is 16.4 per cent. The authorities are repeating the scenario of 2010, hoping that the crisis of 2011 will not return.

Belarusian officials start reducing their own forecasts for growth in 2014, approximating the World Bank's predictions. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank claim that the state-dominated economic system proved inefficient. Officials have made statements about their anti-crisis package, but the proposed changes are not likely to produce growth in 2014.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Real GDP, %	5.5	1.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
Gross external debt, % GDP	57.9	53.5	56.7	63.0	62.7

Source: World Bank

The government will continue inventing increasingly odd ways to refill the budget, as

the forex reserves fall under USD 7 billion. The authorities have recently reflected on a USD 100 duty for people crossing the Belarus-EU border, because they take out much-needed currency. The plans were dropped later and replaced by a toll for vehicle participation in traffic.

Rather than solving problems, the absurd decisions by the government mask them. The Belarusian ruble is increasingly in a need of devaluation, since a weak currency is the only chance to reinforce export. Psychologically, the authorities feel unprepared for devaluation of the ruble, but they might need to do it in 2014.

Experts claim that the Belarusian economy needs USD 9 billion to survive until the Presidential elections in 2015. The government is facing a choice: to sell strategic enterprises to Russia, to launch economic reforms, or to ask Russia or the IMF for loans. Belarus is most likely to continue increasing its national debt, because Belarusian decision-makers see the privatisation of companies or reforms as a threat to their rule.

Surviving 2014

The next year will be hard for Belarus, but all political actors are already thinking about 2015. Developments in 2014 can determine the situation of the opposition and the government by the beginning of the presidential campaign. The local elections will show who in opposition are politicians rather than dissidents, and who is capable of agreeing on a single candidate.

Authorities hardly have a chance of correcting the Belarusian economy. This means that Lukashenka will have to participate in elections without delivering on his promises, e.g. USD 1,000 average wage. Belarus will borrow more in 2014 or even devalue the ruble. The state of the economy challenges Lukashenka's rule, giving the opposition a chance to leave their marginal situation and start meeting society's expectations.

DEVELOPMENT AND PROBLEMS RELATED TO PEAT EXTRACTION AND USE IN BELARUS

Vadzim Bylina

The economic crisis and constant price increases of Russian energy resources force Belarusian officials to search for new energy sources. The Belarusian government sees domestic peat as one of the alternatives to imported natural gas. According to the state programme "Peat" established in 2008, peat extraction must double before 2020.

To increase the volumes of peat extraction, the Energy Ministry intends to extend mining onto protected areas including eight natural mires, which are reserved as important areas for biodiversity and water protection. The Environment Ministry and environmental NGOs oppose the destruction of nature reserves. They do not agree with peat extraction in areas of significant importance for

preserving biodiversity recently rewetted with the financial support of international donors. They stress the need to ensure continuous provision of ecosystem services provided by mires to all the people of Belarus, overweighing short-term profit for a few companies.

Peat resources in Belarus

Belarusian peatlands are by far the most extensive in Eastern Europe amounting to 24,000 square kilometres (more than 10% of the territory of Belarus). Peat has been extracted on an industrial scale and has been used mostly as fuel for boilers for many years, with the highest consumption during the 1970s and 1980s. As a result 1,505,000 hectares or 51.2 % of the peatlands of Belarus were drained.

Before the large-scale excavation, the total area of peatlands was 2.939 million hectares. However, only one third of them have been preserved in their natural condition. Detailed analysis of satellite images carried out in recent years provided reliable data on the areas of swamps. It turned out that only 862 600 hectares remained untouched.¹

All the peatlands in Belarus are distributed according to the purpose of use between different land-use funds. These funds are the Nature Protection Fund, the Agricultural Land Fund, the Developing Fund and the Reserve Fund. In addition, there are peatlands where the use has not yet been defined and peatlands not included in any funds.

According to the assessment of the peat fund, prepared by the Natural Resources Institute of the National Academy of Science in Belarus, there are 41 peat fields, where construction of briquette plants is economically viable. The total geological reserves of the fields are estimated to be 631.3 million tonnes of peat. But most of the peat fields are situated on territories which are not intended for extraction activity. As much as 58.4% of reserves are on the Land Fund, 34.6% belong to the Nature Protections Fund; just 7% of reserves can be extracted. They belong to a fund, which is not in use. This means that in Belarus there are no "free" large reserves of peat deposits, which could be a source of raw materials for the production of fuel.²

Recent developments in peat extraction and use

In the 1950s and 1960s more than 60% of electrical and thermal energy in Belarus was produced by burning peat. The production of peat reached its peak in the 1970s, when more than 40 million tonnes of peat was extracted annually. From the 1970s, the extraction volume began to decline. This was the consequence of the development of gas fields in Siberia and the increase of using gas and oil as cooking and heating fuels. As a result in the mid-1990s peat production decreased to 3-4 million tonnes per year.³

Today, of the more than 200 peat briquette plants of the 1970s, only 24 are in use. State enterprises under the Ministry of Energy had extracted 2.8–3.2 million tonnes of milled peat and 7-10,000 tonnes of sod peat per year before the new plan for expansion was adopted. Peat is mostly used for producing peat briquettes and soil for horticulture.⁴

The rapid rise in the costs of Russian energy resources at the end of the 2000s forced the Belarusian authorities to look for alternative sources of energy. At that period Belarusian political elites initiated several projects to increase energy security.

In 2007 two documents, which determined the energy policy of the country until 2020, were issued: The concept for energy security and "Directive No. 3 Economy and thriftiness – the main factors of the economic security of the state". To implement the objectives defined in the documents, the Government approved several regulatory acts. Among them "The programme on achievement of 25% of total production of thermal and electric energy through the use of alternative energy sources and local fuels for the period up to 2012" and later on "The national programme 'Development of local, renewable and alternative energy sources for 2011-2015'".

The objective of the strategy is to overcome dependence on natural gas imports from Russia through usage of local resources including peat. The documents mention the need to increase the usage of peat as a fuel.⁵

A detailed plan on how to increase the extraction and usage of peat as a fuel is described in the programme "Peat" approved by the government

¹ <http://wildlife.by/node/19290>

² А. П. Гаврильчик, Л. С. Лис, В. Б. Кунцевич, Т. И. Макаренко, А. В. Осипов. ОЦЕНКА ТОРФЯНОГО ФОНДА РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ В СВЯЗИ С АКТУАЛЬНЫМИ ЗАДАЧАМИ ЕГО ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ НА БЛИЖАЙШУЮ ПЕРСПЕКТИВУ / ПРИРОДОПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ. ВЫП. 22. 2012

³ Снежана Михайловская. Универсальный ресурс. / О становлении торфяной отрасли. Белорусская думка Люты 2009

⁴ http://www.dompressy.by/ru/press-center/pres-relisty/rol-torfjanov-otrasli-v-obespechenii-energeticheskoy-bezopasnosti-belarusi_i_0000001371.html

⁵ <http://www.eneca.by/ru/unece/233/236/>

in 2008. According to the programme, peat extraction must double by 2020 to reach 4.3–4.4 million tonnes per year. It is mentioned in the document that in 2008–2020 12.1 million tonnes of peat should be part of the fuel balance of the country, which will have to replace 10.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas imported from Russia. For comparison, in 2012, Belarus imported 20.3 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Russia.⁶

High-level Belarusian officials have declared on several occasions the intention to increase the production of peat. For example in 2011, the Vice-Prime Minister of Belarus Uladzimir Siamashka declared that the golden era of peat briquette plants is coming and pointed out that the government was making huge investments in peat enterprises.

Despite the fact that according to the official statistics in 2011 enterprises increased the production of peat by 27.5%,⁷ several facts indicate, that the peat industry of Belarus is doing not so well. In April 2013 information that the Starobin briquette plant had thousands of tonnes of unsold peat briquette in storage appeared in the media. The article claims that the decline in the demand for peat in the domestic market is related to the fact that most households chose natural gas instead of using peat briquettes, because the gas is more convenient to use. The plan to use peat as a fuel for cement plants was not feasible. Furthermore, the demand for peat from abroad has decreased, as customers from European Union countries are replacing peat with renewable sources of energy – wood chips, sawdust and straw.⁸

Government Decision No. 794

On 17 June 2011, Government Decision No. 794 was issued. The document included the list of prospective areas for peat extraction. In order to begin the extraction of peat from peatlands, which belong to the Nature Protection Fund, the document introduced changes to the allocation scheme of protected areas of national importance until 1 January 2015. The decision provides peat extraction on 8 mires in territories of 8 different protected areas.⁹

The document contradicts the Law on Specially Protected Natural Territories of 20 October 1994.

Article 11 of this law requires that in declaring the transformation and termination of specially protected natural territories environmental interests take precedence over economic interests. The same Article requires scientific justification on the appropriateness of the transformation of protected territories. In the case of the wildlife sanctuaries Vetrevechsky and Aziory the justification claims the inexpediency of cutting the territories of protected areas for peat extraction.¹⁰

On the territories of protected areas where it is planned to extract peat, there are two natural mires, which are on the list of wetlands of International Importance protected by the Ramsar Convention (Vygoshchanskoye and Morochno). Moreover, Vygoshchanskoye mire was rewetted within the GEF Small Grant Programme, which aimed at the restoration of hydrologic conditions of the largest peatlands of Belarus.

Peatland rewetting projects

Over past few years, the Belarusian authorities have actively cooperated with foreign donors to implement projects to rewet peatland areas. Financial assistance for these projects is coming from abroad.

From 2006, several international projects for the restoration of damaged peatlands have been implemented. In 2006–2010, the UNDP/GEF's international project, in close corporation with the Ministry of Forestry implemented the restoration of more than 28,000 hectares of damaged peatlands.¹¹

In 2008, the same year that the government approved the “Peat” programme, a strategy for the implementation of The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat for 2009–2014 was developed. The government approved the strategy by Decision No. 177 on 10 February 2009. The strategy aims at the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of wetlands.

At the beginning of 2011, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) declared the new project for peatland rehabilitation, which will be completed by 2015. The budget for the project is USD 3.7 million.¹²

⁶ <http://export.y/?act=news&mode=view&id=49163>

⁷ http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/economics/Beltopgaz-v-2011-godu-uvelichilo-dobychu-torfa-na-275-do-316-mlnt_i_592855.html

⁸ http://www.ng.by/ru/issues?art_id=74701

⁹ <http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=C21100794&p2=%7BNRPA%7D#%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BB>

¹⁰ ОБРАЩЕНИЕ НЕПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННЫХ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ БЕЛАРУСИ ПО ВОПРОСУ ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЯ СОВЕТА МИНИСТРОВ РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ №794 «О НЕКОТОРЫХ ВОПРОСАХ ДОБЫЧИ ТОРФА НА ОСОБО ОХРАНЯЕМЫХ ПРИРОДНЫХ ТЕРРИТОРИЯХ» ОТ 17.06.2011

¹¹ <http://www.mlh.by/ru/news/1122.html>

¹² <http://news.tut.by/society/216331.html>

The opinion of the public and stakeholders on the expansion of peat use

One person who symbolises the new round of peat use expansion is Dr Ivan Lishtvan, the author of the "Peat" programme who works at the National Academy of Sciences. Supporting the extension of peat use in the media, he advocates the plans of the Energy Ministry. According to Dr Lishtvan, there are 3.3 billion tonnes of peat in Belarus, which can be extracted for energy needs. This statement is not supported by his colleagues from the Academy of Science or by the Environment Ministry. The Research Institute of Nature Management of the Academy of Science claims that there is only 631.3 million tonnes of peat which can be extracted for industrial needs and most of these resources are on territories which belong to the Land Fund and Protection Fund.¹³

Obviously, Dr Lishtvan understands that. Otherwise, there would be no need to extend peat extraction to the areas of the protected fund. Moreover, except for the preserved areas mentioned in Government Decision No. 794, he also proposes to extract peat in internationally known reserves such as the Biarezinsky Biospheric Reserve, the Belavezhskaya Puscha National Park and the Prypiatski National Park.

Answering questions on the harmful impact of peat extraction on the protected territories, Dr Lishtvan argues that in the 1960s and 1970s these territories were considered a source of raw materials and according to his reasoning if the country has economic problems and a lack of energy resources peat extraction on protected territories is justified.

At the end of 2011, several environmental activists of the Green Alliance and Ecohouse NGOs initiated the campaign In Defence of Belarusian Wetlands. During the campaign, dozens of activities aimed at spreading information about the plans of the Belarusian government were carried out. More than 15,000 people signed the online petition, which appealed to the government to abandon plans for the destruction of protected areas.

Arguing that peat extraction cannot extend to the protected territories, environmentalists are using obvious arguments on preserving biodiversity, negative influence on climate and depletion of

water resources by extraction. Furthermore, they claim, that it is possible to obtain economic benefits using peatlands without peat extraction. Peatlands could be used for recreation and tourism, which could be popular with foreigners. The local villages surrounding the peatlands use the mires to harvest wild berries every autumn. Instead of using peat as fuel, environmentalists are suggesting harvesting biomass instead of peat for bricks. Vegetation could be used as a resource for biomass.¹⁴

In summer 2013, environmentalists had their first success. The Prosecutor's Office declared the decision of Pukhavichy regional Executive Committee for the reorganisation of natural reserve Vetrevichsky as an illegal act and thereby also prevented peat extraction in a protected area near Minsk.

Some conclusions

Declaring the intention of conservation, restoration and sustainable use of wetlands Belarusian officials gladly accept the assistance of international donors for peatland rewetting. At the same time the declarations made to international donors do not correspond to the reality. Peat extraction on protected areas has nothing in common with sustainable use of wetlands.

It is obvious that Belarus lacks a unitary program of peatland control. The Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of the Environment cannot agree on the issue of peat extraction. All the decisions concerning peatland use are taken individually. In this situation, environmentalists played a crucial role. Opposing government plans on peat extraction, they provoked discussions in the media and gained the attention of the public. Their activities can be considered partially successful since they have interrupted the plans for peat extraction at least once.



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¹³ А. П. Гаврильчик, Л. С. Лис, В. Б. Кунцевич, Т. И. Макаренко, А. В. Осипов. ОЦЕНКА ТОРФЯНОГО ФОНДА РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ В СВЯЗИ С АКТУАЛЬНЫМИ ЗАДАЧАМИ ЕГО ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ НА БЛИЖАЙШУЮ ПЕРСПЕКТИВУ / ПРИРОДОПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ. ВЫП. 22. 2012

¹⁴ <http://news.open.by/country/52592>