Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 6.10.2010 www.osw.waw.pl

Escalation of political conflict between Minsk and Moscow

On 1 October, during a press conference for Russian journalists, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka harshly criticised Russia's policy towards Belarus, describing it as hostile, and interfering in Belarus' internal affairs. In a reply on his videoblog, on 3 October President Dmitri Medvedev accused the Belarusian leader of instrumentally exploiting anti-Russian rhetoric before the upcoming presidential elections in Belarus. This is another symptom of the escalation of the Russian-Belarusian political conflict, which has been ongoing for several months.

Lukashenka directly accused Medvedev of inspiring a campaign in Russian media to discredit the government in Minsk, and of financing the Belarusian opposition. In reply, the Russian president accused Lukashenka of building an electoral campaign upon hysterical accusations towards Russia, and suggested to him that he focus on his country's internal problems, including clarifying the fate of several disappeared opposition politicians. This was the first time that such harsh exchanges were made between the presidents of both states; hitherto Lukashenka had principally addressed his criticisms to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

It seems that Russia is consistently working to weaken Lukashenka before the presidential elections on 19 December, and is pushing him to sell strategic economic assets. Everything indicates that the Belarusian response to Kremlin's tactics will be to emphasise the threat from Russia in the election campaign, and that Moscow will in turn not cease trying to achieve its goals. As a result the conflict will worsen, and one of its effects may be a deterioration in the conditions of deliveries of Russian energy supplies to Belarus next year, which will in turn harm the Belarusian economy. <kam, WojK>