

March 15-22, 2004

Edited by Nate Young
www.belarusupdate.org

Note from the Executive Director:

With this issue, the International League for Human Rights is pleased to announce that Nate Young, CIS Program Coordinator, has assumed responsibility for the weekly editing of the Belarus Update.

We urge you to visit our revamped website: www.belarusupdate.org. You will note many new and expanded features, including news analysis, forthcoming Q & As, protest letters, and commentary.

We look forward to your feedback.

Sincerely,

Louise Kantrow

Week in Review

President Vladimir Putin's unsurprising victory in the Russian presidential elections was greeted with equally predictable support from Belarusian leader Alexandr Lukashenko. But Belarusian parliamentarians expressed skepticism about current Belarusian-Russian relations, as the two countries have been locked in a bitter and still unresolved dispute over gas deliveries into Belarus. In a timely visit to Minsk, Russian Duma Chairman Boris Gryzlov expressed reassurances that the Belarusian-Russian Union is still on the right track but will require an infusion of pragmatism to counter diminishing enthusiasm. The more pressing issue, however, has been the relationship between Belarus and the "other" union, the soon-to-be expanded European Union, which on May 1, 2004, will include ten countries of Eastern and Central Europe, creating a direct border with Belarus. The EU and U.S. issued a joint statement urging Belarus to implement democratic reform and end its assaults on human rights which go against international standards. Czech Senate speaker Petr Pithard, along with other leaders of the former communist country and newcomer to the EU, expressed support for the Belarusian opposition. In another EU conference devoted to the expansion, country representatives and NGO leaders noted with particular concern the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and the need for the enlarged Union to play a more active role in pressuring Belarus to adopt democratic changes.

On the domestic front, civil society came under attack, as two Lukashenko critics—political opposition leader Anatoly Lebedko and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (a branch of the Vienna based IHF)—faced criminal charges for slander and non-payment of taxes, respectively. Along with other human rights groups, the International League for Human Rights issued a statement condemning the unfair charges. Two Zubr youth activists were arrested for handing out leaflets. The office of the independent newspaper "Den" was raided by people allegedly working for the KGB. Meanwhile, three prominent free press advocates from Belarus convened in Washington at the offices of RFE-RL to discuss the increasing persecution and harassment of independent media outlets in the country.

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DOMESTIC

1. Changes to Electoral Code Discussed in Parliament

Original title: "Parliamentary commission accepts some of liberal lawmakers' proposals regarding Electoral Code"
Source: BelaPan; March 16, 2004; www.belapan.com

A special commission in the House of Representatives of the Belarusian National Assembly on March 16 discussed changes to the Electoral Code drafted by the Respublika group and sponsored by lawmaker Valery Frolov.

The commission backed the proposals that monitors should be allowed to observe the vote count and that election commissions should be obliged to issue copies of final protocols of the vote to observers at their request, Valery Lipkin, chairman of the commission, told BelaPAN.

He noted that many proposals by Respublika were redundant as they repeated clauses already written down in the Electoral Code.

"I think just a few really substantial amendments will be included in the final version," Mr. Lipkin said.

Vladimir Parfenovich, one of the authors, said that Respublika presses three points — guarantees of representation of political parties on election commissions, additional rights to observers and the abolition of early voting.

He said the authors are likely to reach a consensus with the commission on the two former, while it would be much more difficult to persuade it to support the latter. Mr. Lipkin said that the commission had constructive discussions of Respublika's proposals, noting that the bill can get on the agenda of the spring session if no unexpected difficulties arise in its preparation.

2. Belarus Opposition Leader Complains of “Political” Defamation Case

Source: RFE/RL; March 19, 2004; <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/>

United Civic Party leader Anatoly Lebedko told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 18 March that the criminal case that has been opened against him for allegedly slandering President Alexandr Lukashenko on a Russian television channel is of a "political" nature (see "RFE/RL Newslines," 18 March 2004). Lebedko was commenting on his meeting with prosecutors in Minsk earlier the same day, where he was officially notified of the criminal proceedings against him. If convicted, Lebedko could face a prison sentence of up to five years. Lebedko stressed that he is planning neither to leave the country nor to resort to self-censorship in his public statements.

3. Youth Activists Arrested

Original Title: "Two 'Zubr' Activists Tried in Baranavichi"

Source: Zubr; March 16, 2004; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/index.php?id=846&lang=2>

Two "Zubr" activists were arrested today in Baranavichi college of light industry.

Zmitser Schepau and Nasta Vasilenka were detained for handing out the second issue of the information bulletin "Zubr-Baranavichi," after college administrators notified police. The activists were accused of violating article 167-10 of the Administrative Code, which bans activities on behalf of an unregistered organization. After being detained, they were taken to court.

The Baranavichi court judge found Zmitser and Nasta guilty and sentenced each of them to 10 minimal salaries fine (about 80 euros). [text revised- Ed.]

REGIONAL

4. Belarus President Hails Putin's Election Victory

Source: Belapan; March 15, 2004; www.belapan.com

On the morning of March 15 Aleksandr Lukashenko congratulated Vladimir Putin on his election as president of the Russian Federation.

"This convincing victory bears witness to your great authority and to the voters' support for your policy of strengthening Russian statehood," says Lukashenko's message. "In the Republic of Belarus your re-election is linked to hopes for dynamic development of the process of integration. I am sure that consolidating the Belarusian-Russian Union will serve the interests of our peoples and create a reliable basis for a decent life for the current and future generations."

Lukashenko wished Putin "health and the realization of all the projects undertaken during your presidency, and the fraternal Russian people—peace and prosperity," says the press service of the president of Belarus. [omitted text- Ed.]

5. Belarusian Lawmakers Comment on Relations with Russia Following Putin's Reelection

Source: BelaPan; March 15, 2004; www.belaPan.com

The distance between the two nations is likely to continue increasing now that Vladimir Putin has been reelected as president of Russia, Sergei Skrebets, leader of the Respublika group in the Belarusian National Assembly's House of Representatives, told BelaPAN.

"The protracted conflict over gas deliveries shows that this process has begun," said Mr. Skrebets. "But this may be a blessing in disguise because Belarus will now have to depend on its own resources, not Russia's subsidies."

Disengagement from Russia's "gas teat" may be seen as the beginning of true independence, said the lawmaker.

He pointed out that Belarus would be able to both develop political and economic ties with its eastern neighbor and devote more attention to the West.

"Belarus will become a neighbor of the European Union on May 1," he said. "We should not engage in self-isolation but develop relations with the EU."

Lawmaker Andrei Losev described his vision of future relations between Belarus and Russia as "more pragmatic and stiff."

"Russia should abandon all courtesy and say what it expects from the union with Belarus and how it sees this union," said Mr. Losev.

He noted, however, that efforts to strengthen the union are "inevitable."

Lawmaker Valery Zakharchenko, leader of the pro-Lukashenko Communist Party of Belarus, expressed hope that Russia would continue to pursue a policy of integration regarding Belarus.

The Russian delegation's behavior at the next session of the Belarusian-Russian Parliamentary Assembly, scheduled to take place in Minsk on March 17, will show whether Russia is ready to abide by the 1998 Treaty on the Formation of the Belarusian-Russian Union State, said Mr. Zakharchenko.

6. Czech Chair of Senate and Ex-President Support Belarusian Opposition

Source: Charter97; March 22, 2004; www.charter97.org

A conference titled "Belarus – our new neighbor" took place in the Senate of the Czech Republic. "The main aim of the Czech Republic is to prevent an appearance of a new "iron curtain", which could separate the EU countries from other countries", said in his speech the Czech Senate Speaker Petr Pithart. "We know what an iron curtain is, and we do not want to live now even at the opposite side of it". The Belarusian opposition was supported also by a former Czech president Vaclav Havel. "Belarus is close to us historically, culturally, geographically, and we understand the type of its problems very well". Ivonka Survilla, Chairperson of the Belarusian People's Republic Rada, participated in the conference "Belarus – our new neighbor" as well. As said by her, the Czech Republic is the best ally of Belarus and propagandist of the Belarusian opposition in the international arena, Radio Prague informs.

7. Russia State Duma Chairman Optimistic about Belarusian-Russian Union

Source: Interfax; March 22, 2004 [translated by the Editor; for Russian version go to www.interfax.ru]

The Chairman of the Russian State Duma Boris Gryzlov believes that the Belarusian-Russian Union still has a future.

I view the prospects for the Union government are very well in the new future, and it is necessary for us to solve the existing problems as soon as possible," announced the speaker of the Russian State Duma to journalists on Tuesday in Minsk, where he was visiting as head of the Russian delegation to participate in the Parliament session of the Union of the two countries.

"There hasn't been a precedent before where two countries have decided to create such a Union. We are trailblazers," said B. Gryzlov.

The Chairman reported that "questions about the Constitutional act have been duly dealt with, but it is still necessary to go on the previous path as planned— a switch to a common currency of the Union, but as an intermediate phase—a switch to Russian currency.

We have a deadline- January 1, 2005. And in order to fulfill this plan, it's necessary to quickly answer those issues which the executive powers couldn't resolve," said the speaker.

According to him, the beginning of the Union's creation was celebrated with an 'enthusiasm of desire'.

"Today we are encountering practical problems, and therefore this enthusiasm must be supported with robust and constructive work," Gryzlov noted.

INTERNATIONAL

8. Statement on Joint EU-US Mission to Belarus (full text)

Source: US Embassy; March 19, 2004; <http://minsk.usembassy.gov/>

The joint EU-U.S. mission noted with regret that Belarus has failed conspicuously to make progress toward meeting its OSCE commitments and thereby realizing an improvement in its relations with the European Union and the United States. The status of individual and collective democratic freedoms in Belarus has worsened considerably with unacceptable infringement of freedom of the media; banning of non-governmental organizations active in the promotion of human rights; restrictions on the right to free association or to demonstrate; and unacceptable pressure on independent academic institutions and academic freedom.

The European Union and the United States have indicated previously that an improvement in relations would depend on the Belarusian authorities' willingness to make progress in implementing common values of democracy, respect for human rights, and freedom of speech. They noted in particular the importance of a free and fair process leading up to the October 2004 parliamentary elections. The joint mission reaffirmed the willingness of the EU and U.S. to initiate a serious discussion immediately on how to achieve these goals in Belarus.

On 1 May 2004, the European Union and Belarus will become direct neighbours. Recently, the Belarusian authorities have taken steps that widen the policy differences and values gap with the rest of Europe even as Belarus becomes geographically closer to the European Union. The new relationship between the EU and Belarus makes more pressing than ever that Belarusian policies and practices conform with the ideals of the Council of Europe and the newly enlarged European Union. If Belarus implements political reforms, both sides could reap the potential that flows from good neighbourly relations, anchored in common democratic values. The United States fully supports the European Union approach.

9. Subject of Human Rights in Belarus Discussed at EU Conference

Original title: "Belarusians Waited For In New Europe"

Source: Charter97; March 22, 2004; www.charter97.org

The conference "Towards a Wider Europe: The New Agenda", which took place in Bratislava on March 18-19, was held on the eve of the NATO enlargement and joining of the European Union by ten countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. The conference was held under auspices of Mikulas Dzurinda, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic.

For the first time great attention was paid to Belarus at such a high level. The majority of speakers to a certain extent touched upon the situation in Belarus, expressed concern about the escalation of antidemocratic processes in the country. Belarus was represented at the Bratislava conference by Irina Krasovskaya, leader of the civil initiative "We remember", participant of the European coalition "Free Belarus", Oleg Manayev, director of the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, and Andrei Sannikov, coordinator of the European coalition "Free Belarus". The Belarusian delegation had a number of high-level meetings. In particular, members of the Belarusian delegation met Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili and Secretary General of the OSCE Ján Kubiš.

Chairman of the conference Prime Minister Dzurinda, speaking about the issue of relations with Belarus, stated that "Europe must be clear that it cannot tolerate a black hole at its center. The

EU must continue to introduce sanctions for violation of human rights and move to the prosecution of state-sponsored crimes.”

Daniel Fried, Special Assistant to the US President, National Security Council, noted that the “black hole” is not a right definition for Belarus, and that the nation deserves better. The opposition to the ruling regime is not yet united, but we should be ready that it would unite and undertake appropriate actions.

Latvian Prime Minister Indulis Emsis devoted The majority of his speech at the conference to Belarus. According to him, the situation in Belarus is a challenge to the future of the whole region and the whole Europe. He mentioned aggravation of the situation with human rights and freedoms and called upon the world community to support the democratic forces and civil society in Belarus. Prime Minister Emsis also expressed certainty that the enlarged European Union should play a more noticeable and effective role in establishment of democracy in Belarus.

A very important statement was delivered by the Member of the European Commission, Commissioner for EU Enlargement Gunter Verheugen, who said: “People of Belarus should receive a clear message that we look forward to their full and free integration in Europe”.

In particular, at the meeting with the Secretary General of the OSCE Jan Kubis the OSCE plans on election monitoring were discussed. J. Kubis underlined that the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) plans to send its observers to the elections. The problem of invitation to the observers by Belarusian authorities does not exist, as it is one of the obligations of Belarus as the OSCE member. The activities of the OSCE mission in Minsk have been discussed. The OSCE General Secretary underlined that the situation with civil society and human rights in Belarus is an integral part of the mission’s mandate. [text omitted- Ed.]

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

10. Irina Kraskovskaya’s Speaks on Disappeared Persons to U.S. Congress

Source: March 10, 2004; http://wwwa.house.gov/international_relations/108/kra031004.htm

Note: The following is the full text of the statement by Irina Kraskovskaya, wife of disappeared husband Anatoly Kraskovsky, before the House Committee on International Relations on March 10, 2004. [Ed.]

I request my full statement and accompanying materials be submitted into the record in their entirety.

My name is Irina Krasovskaya. I am the mother of two beautiful daughters and the grandmother of a marvelous granddaughter Martha. I am the wife of Anatoly Krasovsky who provided financial assistance to the democratic opposition of Belarus for many years. Last year, it was the 25-year anniversary of our wedding. But I had to celebrate that occasion without my husband.

On September 16, 1999, my husband was kidnapped. That evening I was waiting at home for my husband and his friend, the Vice Speaker of the Belarusian Parliament Viktor Gonchar.

Normally on Thursdays, my husband would return home at 11:00 p.m. after visiting a sauna. That evening I started calling him at about midnight but there was no answer. After midnight, when his phone became disconnected and the operator repeated endlessly that the number was unavailable, something broke down inside of me. My husband always informed me of his whereabouts no matter what. With each passing minute, the thought that something had happened to him frightened me more and more. I stood near the window and looked into the darkness of the night. The sound of every passing car gave me a hope.... A few hours later, I

finally understood that something was really wrong. I called up all the police stations, hospitals, and morgues. There was no word of my husband.

On September 17, in the morning I received a phone call from the police. When I picked up phone, I was asked, "Your husband disappeared, didn't he?" I was surprised by how informed the police were. I went to them hoping to receive at least some information, instead I was interrogated. The room was filled with high-ranking police officers, saying shocking things and repeating constantly, "Admit it, you know where husband is."

The investigators arrived shortly after I returned home. They took pictures of every inch of our apartment. I asked them, "Why are you doing all this?" Their response was, "Maybe you killed your husband yourself." Other investigators, who came eight days later, in order to obtain information about the car which disappeared along with my husband and his friend Mr. Gonchar, said that we will find out the truth eventually, but not any time soon. After the search, my friends and I went to the place of the kidnapping. There we found only shards of glass, drops of blood and skid marks from the breaking car.

When the initial shock passed, Anatoly's friends and I began to come up with possible scenarios. We thought of everything from secret imprisonment to forcible hospitalization in a psychiatric institution. Two weeks later, however, my friends told me that I should be a realist and understand the facts: in our country, when people are kidnapped, it is not for the purpose of keeping them alive and hidden somewhere.

According to the investigators working on the case the kidnapping transpired as follows: my husband, together with his friend, left the sauna and got into our car. Immediately after they turned the corner, a car cut them off. My husband, who was driving attempted to back off, but was blocked by a second car. The doors of our car would lock if one hit the brakes abruptly, and that is exactly what happened then. People who jumped out of those two cars broke the side windows and pulled out my husband and his friend. The traces of Victor Gonchar's blood were found at the scene. Then they were forced into separate cars and taken away. Our jeep was left there, because it was automatically locked. Later on, our car was towed away. That night my husband, Anatoly Krasovsky, and his friend, Victor Gonchar, were shot in a forest.

...My psychotherapist told me that I should start living as if my husband had died. At that time I said to myself that I could not live and think that way. However, some years hence I realized that my husband was dead and that I could not live under illusions, continuing to lie to myself and to my daughters. My mind won over my heart that refused to believe that the person it loved eternally was dead.

Almost five years have passed since the kidnapping of my husband. Now I see him only in my dreams. Many nights I have dreams in which he comes back and I feel a great sense of relief. In the dream, I hug him and say, "I have been waiting for you so long. Finally you've come back."

My husband was an incredibly strong person. I never saw him cry. Many times, when my husband was alive, I would come home from work upset and cry. He would always calm me down and explain to me that there should be a far more important reason for tears. He was always my defender and a real support for me. After a few months had passed after the kidnapping, he appeared in my dream with tears running down his cheeks, saying, "Ira, please save me." I woke up and understood that I would never forgive those people who made my husband cry.

On September 16, 1999, in one instant, my life was destroyed because of a sick tyrant who is willing to kill people only to maintain his stronghold on power. All that I have done since then is to carry out a fight. This fight is for dignity of my husband, this fight is for the peace of my family, for my children's happiness; this fight is for my mother who can't walk after she helped me to live through our family's tragedy; this fight is for my country and myself. I do not want anybody else to see the nightmares I've seen.

Everything that I am telling you takes place in Belarus. At present my country is ruled by the last dictator of Europe. The Lukashenko regime violates the most basic human right, the right to live.

Sadly, I am not alone in accusing the regime of murder. Other prominent politicians and public figures have disappeared. I have brought the Committee a copy of the Council of Europe's report which concludes that documents and extensive testimony prove that Lukashenko and his associates have conspired to murder any Belarusian who opposes their rule.

I speak before you today on behalf of women like myself, whose husbands, well-known Belarusian public and political figures, disappeared. I speak before you as the founder of the civil initiative named "We Remember" whose aim is to unite the efforts of Belarusians and international organizations in the search of the truth about the fate of the members of our families.

Thank you.

11. Ukrainian Neighbors March to Support Free Media

Original title: Ukrainians March to Support Free Media

Source: BBC Monitoring; March 9, 2004; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3547183.stm>

Thousands gathered in central Kiev on Tuesday to protest against a spate of closures of opposition media outlets in recent weeks and the government's controversial constitutional reform plans.

A group of opposition journalists spearheaded the march, calling for an end to what they see as the government's campaign to stifle the free media ahead of the October presidential election.

Two independent radio stations which rebroadcast the US-funded Radio Liberty, the BBC Ukrainian Service and the opposition Public Radio on the popular FM band have been closed under various pretexts since the beginning of the year.

Radio Kontyent, which gave refuge to Radio Liberty after it lost its Ukrainian rebroadcaster, was jammed before its transmitter was seized by the police.

A court in Kiev has ordered the closure of the biggest pro-opposition national newspaper, Silski Visti, on charges of anti-Semitism.

And Channel Five, Ukraine's last national TV station regularly featuring opposition leaders in its programmes, is facing a court battle which the opposition says was orchestrated by the government in a bid to silence its critics.

Around 5,000 people took part in the demonstration. [text omitted- Ed.]

12. Independent Newspaper Offices Raided

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 19, 2004; <http://baj.ru/indexe.htm>

Three unidentified persons attempted to break into the editorial office of a nongovernmental newspaper "Den" March 18. Police detained two of them. The perpetrators claim to be unemployed and said that mistook the address. However, the editor-in-chief of "Den" newspaper Mikola Markevich says he recognized one of them as a KGB officer. The officials of Grodno Internal Affairs Department didn't answer telephone, and the person on duty refused to share information about the assailants with the Belarusian Association of Journalists.

Today the journalists of "Den" inquired Grodno KGB whether the arrested person works (or had worked before) for KGB. The journalists also inquired whether Grodno KGB department takes an

investigative action against Mikola Markevich.

Mikola Markevich commented on the incident to BAJ press service: "I don't consider it a demonstration of someone's stupidity or lack of professionalism, but view it as a delicate hint to the journalists of "Den": "We didn't forget about you, you are being molly-coddled". I will do my best to find out what these people wanted." [text revised- Ed.]

13. Criminal Case Against Belarusian Helsinki Commission Opened

Source: *Charter 97*; March 18, 2004; www.charter97.org

The Department of Financial Investigations opened a criminal case against the chairperson of the Belarusian Helsinki committee Tatiana Protsko and an accountant of the organization Tatsiana Rudkevich. They are accused of tax evasion for 78 million rubles (more than \$35, 000). The tax inspection checked the financial activities of the BHC earlier, and they were fined and faced other economical sanctions worth a total of 385 million Belarussian rubles (about \$180,000).

The Belarussian Helsinki Committee has mainly been working on projects for the TACIS program. They are exempt from taxes under an agreement between the European Commission and the Belarussian government.

Garri Pogonyailo said to Radio Svaboda that today the BHC representatives are to appeal the claims of the Department of the Financial investigations. [text omitted- Ed.]

14. International League for Human Rights Condemns Criminal Charges

Source: *International League for Human Rights*; March 22, 2004; www.ilhr.org

Note: For more information, please visit the International Helsinki Federation website, www.ihf-hr.org. [Ed.]

March 22, 2004

Dear Mr. Lukashenko:

The International League for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization based in New York with special consultative status with the UN ECOSOC, expresses concern about the criminal charges recently filed against a prominent opposition leader Anatoly Lebedko, chairman of the United Civic Party in Belarus and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, a well-known human rights group.

Lebedko was charged with allegedly defaming President Aleksandr Lukashenko in an interview given on a Russian state television network Rossiya and was issued a summons from the Minsk prosecutor's office on March 18. Under Article 367 of the Belarusian Criminal Code, defaming the president is a criminal offense, punishable by up to five years in prison.

Lebedko has been chairman of the United Civic Party since April, 2000. A long time opponent of Lukashenko's government, Lebedko's party refused to accept the results of the controversial 1996 referendum, which extended the president's term of office from five to seven years. Since the 1996 referendum, the government has increasingly adopted repressive measures against civil society and independent media.

Criminal prosecution and harassment of Lukashenko's opponents have become commonplace, especially since his dubious reelection in 2001. In 2002, reporters Mikola Markevich and Pavel Mazheika of *Pahonya* and Viktor Ivashkevich of *Rabochy* (Worker) received corrective labor sentences for libeling the president in pre-election articles. At year's end, all three were serving their terms. Recently, Irina Khalip, editor of *Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta* (Belarusian Business News) has been a key witness in a case of alleged libel against Prosecutor General Victor Sheyman.

In a related incident, on March 17, the Belarusian government's Financial Investigation Department brought criminal charges against the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, a branch of the Vienna based International Helsinki Federation, for failing to pay taxes and violating a Presidential Decree on declaring foreign financial assistance. The Committee faces a fine of 385,000,000 Belarus Rubles (\$180,000) in unpaid taxes and fines for alleged unlawful use of project funds received under the European Union's TACIS Technical Assistance Programme.

In a statement issued on March 22, the International Helsinki Federation disputed the charges and called for the Belarusian government to drop the case, claiming that the Presidential Decree does not apply to international technical assistance, such as the TACIS Programme. The Belarusian Helsinki Committee is exempt from taxation on foreign assistance according to the general rules agreed upon by Belarus and the European Union, noted Aaron Rhodes, Executive Director of IHF, in the statement.

The League stresses that exorbitant fines, overly broad interpretation of libel laws, and limitations on foreign funding are common methods used by Belarusian authorities to harass and ultimately silence civil society and critics of Lukashenko's government.

The League believes both the libel charges against Lebedko and the fines against the Belarusian Helsinki Committee are politically motivated and part of an ongoing campaign by Belarusian authorities to stifle dissent and public criticism. The League urges the government to drop the charges and cease its ruthless assault against Belarusian civil society.

Thank you for your attention, we await your response.

Sincerely,

Louise Kantrow
Executive Director

BUSINESS

15. Belarus Economy Expands

Source: Interfax; March 18, 2004; http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/26.html?id_issue=9681328

Belarus posted GDP of 6.112 trillion Belarussian rubles in January-February 2004, up 9.5% year-on-year in constant prices, the Statistics and Analysis Ministry told Interfax. Industrial production totaled 6.7 trillion Bel. rubles in current prices, up 13.2%. GDP is forecast to grow 9%-10% in 2004. The economy expanded 6.8% in 2003 and 4.7% in 2002. The official exchange rate on March 18 stood at 2,152 Bel. rubles for every dollar.

16. Belarus Among the Outsiders in Terms of Wage Levels

Source: Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta; March 16, 2004 [translated by the Editor; for Russian version go to www.bdg.ru]

The highest wages in Europe are in Denmark, and the lowest- in Moldova. These statistics were reported in a study published on Tuesday by the Federation of European Employers, an independent organization created in 1989 by the initiative of the European Commission.

The document analyzed statistics of 46 countries. Russia is number 40 on the list, coming in ahead of Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.

In absolute figures, the average hourly wage in Denmark is 27.89 euros, and in Moldova, .32 Euros. The official average wage in Russia, as in Romania, is 4% that of Denmark's. [text omitted- Ed.]

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the Belarus Human Rights Support Project of the International League for Human Rights, www.ilhr.org. The League, now in its 62nd year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the International Labor Organization. To send letters to the Editor or to subscribe/unsubscribe please contact Nate Young at: cis@ilhr.org.

For current and back issues, list of events, and more information about the League's advocacy activities in Belarus, please visit the Belarus Update website at: www.belarusupdate.org.

The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their case for the protection of civil society before the international community regarding Lukashenko's wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.
