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Edited by Nate Young
International League for Human Rights

Belarusian Diaspora to Hold Protest at UN

On Thursday June 17, 2004, representatives of the Belarusian Diaspora in the United States will hold an action of solidarity with the democratic forces in Belarus and with hunger strikers in Minsk. The demonstration will take place at 4:00 PM near the United Nations Headquarters, on 1st Ave and 43rd Street in New York City.

On June 3, three members of the Belarusian parliament and 12 representatives from political parties of the opposition went on a hunger strike. They are protesting President Lukashenko's dictatorial policies, demanding a ban on the unconstitutional third term for Lukashenko, and calling for changes in election legislation and the release of political prisoners.

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DOMESTIC

1. Lukashenko Toughens Control on Scientists

During a graduation ceremony for Corresponding Members of the National Academy of Sciences, Aleksandr Lukashenko announced that productivity requirements on Belarusian scientists' work will be toughened.

According to Lukashenko, henceforth candidates of the sciences, doctorates, academicians and Corresponding Members will be required to reconfirm their 'high status.' "We will go as far as considering the stripping of corresponding titles. Or we will just 'unhook' you, live and earn as you wish. We are very seriously considering this," the Belarusian President said.

Lukashenko based his initiative on the fact that academics and Corresponding Members receive additional funds from the budget.

The current president of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, Mikhail Myasnikovich, is appointed by Aleksandr Lukashenko, because science is directly subordinate to the president.

Earlier, Myasnikovich headed the presidential administration.
[Translated from the Russian]

Source: Gazeta.ru; June 14, 2004; www.gazeta.ru

2. In Minsk, Entrepreneurial Leader Detained

On June 11, Anatoly Shumchenko, leader of the entrepreneurial organization Perspektiva, was detained in Minsk. He had in his possession 330 leaflets of support for the parliamentary deputies from the fraction "Respublika" who are carrying out a hunger strike.

The seized leaflets called for a general strike of entrepreneurs on June 17 in solidarity with the deputies who are requiring democratization of the Electoral Code and the release of Mikhail Marynich, who has been convicted of possession of firearms. They are also calling for a ban on the referendum on the continuation of Aleksandr Lukashenko's presidential rule.

Anatoly Shumchenko was charged with violating Article 172 of the Administrative Code: dissemination of printed material without proper contact information listed.
[Translated from the Russian]

Source: Prima News; June 11, 2004; www.prima-news.ru

3. Popov and His Parish

"Everything, that goes on beyond the walls of the Oval Hall, is beyond our scope ", Vadim Popov, Chairman of the National Assembly's House of Representatives declared this week. Now the people's elected representatives can proudly object to the opposition's provocative charges that the Belarusian parliament is a 'puppet' by saying, "not a puppet, Messrs. Democrats, it's oval!"

Amateurs will ask, "What's the difference? " Let us explain. The difference between these two characteristics is equal to the area of the floor of the House of Representatives. The author of these lines, along with some of his colleagues, had the opportunity to make sure of the fairness of this statement. As is well known for the past several days, Deputy Valery Frolov and two of his colleagues have been carrying out their political hunger strike.

The president's security service has responded to this maneuver asymmetrically: it has ceased to allow accredited journalists from entering the parliament building. This innovation did not apply to only a few representatives of the official media. Some may ask, "What's the logic?" One can ask even more naive questions, such as, "What about the law, equality for journalists, etc.?" We don't have answers to these questions, which does not mean that we did not try to find them. The rascals who surround the parliament are silent, like statues. Their leaders, too. The nationally elected guarantor of legality and defender of the Constitution, Aleksandr Lukashenko, remains quiet as well, though only he can command his security service. Some parliamentarians have tried to clarify these questions. However, the leadership of the House of Representatives could not provide an intelligible response, except for: "Everything, that goes on beyond the walls of the

Oval Hall, is beyond our scope.” Although, to be fair, we must note that they promised to clear up the situation. At the same time, the parliament’s press service claims that they have nothing to do with this, and that if the accredited journalists are able to get into the parliament building, then no one will obstruct their work.

Unintentionally, a thought arises: what if, for example, reticent, fearless fighters from Lukashenko’s security service and the police forces who have joined them begin to throw journalists and passers-by in the construction ditch which Independence Square has now become? What will Vadim Aleksandrovich say? That this is internal business? I would like to think not.

[Translated from the Russian]

Source: Valery Levkov, Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta; June 4, 2004; www.bdg.by

4. Belarusian European Humanities University May Lose its University Status

The European Humanities University, Belarus' only private higher education institution which has university status, may lose that status, Valery Ovsyannikov, director of the Education Ministry's education quality control department, told Interfax on Monday.

"Checks have suggested that the European Humanities University does not meet university status requirements in a number of aspects," Ovsyannikov said.

"The European Humanities University is not running any scientific programs commissioned by governmental bodies. It has no dormitory and student canteen. This is only a small part of all our complaints to this university," he said.

"The European Humanities University is the only private university in Belarus, and it would have been given significant advantages. We [the Education Ministry] saw the European Humanities University as a unique educational institution. But, unfortunately, it has not lived up to our expectations," Ovsyannikov said.

The European Humanities University told Interfax that its "administration will do everything in its power to keep the university and take steps that the Education Ministry is not expecting."

Source: Interfax; June 14, 2004; www.interfax.com

REGIONAL

5. Belarus and Lithuania Sign Protocol on Demarcation of State Borders

On June 10, at the Raigardas (Lithuania) checkpoint, a joint Belarusian-Lithuanian Commission on the Demarcation of State Borders protocol was signed, thereby legalizing the first complete demarcation of a section of the border between the two countries, in accordance with all existing requirements.

Official delegations from Belarus and Lithuania participated in the event. The Belarusian delegation was led by the Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Mikhnevich and the Lithuanian delegation by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs Ministry Darius Jurgelevicius.

Also in the Belarusian delegation were the Belarusian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in Lithuania Vladimir Garkun and the First Deputy Representative of the Belarusian State Committee on Border Patrol Forces Evgeny Kovalev and their Lithuanian counterparts, Jonas Paslauskas and Rustamas Liubajevs, respectively.

In the course of the event, meetings were held between Mikhnevich and the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Antanas Valionis and Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Ministry Jurgelevicius. The two sides exchanged opinions about issues related to the two countries relations, reports *AFN*.

[Translated from the Russian]

Source: BelaPan; June 11, 2004; www.naviny.ru

6. Czech EP Elections Watched by Belarusian Opposition Member

The preparation and course of the elections to the European Parliament are being watched by Vasil Hlavatskish, a member of the opposition Belarusian National Front.

In autumn, the opponent of Aleksandr Lukashenko's authoritarian regime will run for the Belarusian parliament. Hlavatskish is now a member of the city council in Novopolotsk.

"I want hear from Czechs what they expect from their deputies in the EP, what they expect from their membership of the EU. The media in Belarus does not inform us correctly about the EU and I want to have as much as possible information to compare and pass the details to our people," Hlavatskish said.

Although Belarus is ruled by a regime which suppresses opposition and tries to curb the freedom of speech, its opponents are thinking of joining the EU, Hlavatskish said.

"Our proximity to the EU will certainly influence politics. At present, it is difficult to live in Belarus, a neighbor of the EU on one side and of Russia on another. Making ourselves part of the European community is one of our aims. It would be a solution for the sake of preservation of our independence," Hlavatskish said.

Given the backward economic system in the country, it will not be easy, he added.

General elections will be held in Belarus in autumn. Information is of the greatest help for the opposition, Hlavatskish said.

"For us, it is important that you receive our people, sharing your experience. But we ourselves must work on the victory," he added.

There is no opposition deputy in the current Belarusian parliament.

Source: Czech News Agency; June 11, 2004; www.ctk-online.cz

7. Ambassador Says Russian Broadcasts in Belarus Down 70%

Russia is concerned about issues related to the creation of a common information space for Russia and Belarus, Russia's ambassador to Minsk Aleksandr Blokhin told journalists.

The ambassador said that "over the last two years, the amount of Russian television programs in Belarus decreased by 70%."

The number of programs broadcast by Russia's Kultura channel has decreased to almost nothing, while the number from Rossia and NTV has showed a decline. "Social and political discussion programs that are produced in Russia air very rarely. Entertainment programs are preferred," Blokhin said.

Blokhin said the halting of broadcasts from Russia's Mayak and Yunost radio stations in Belarus

is a violation of the agreement on creating a common information space.

He also expressed concerns over the way that life in Russia is portrayed in Belarus's state-run mass media. "We are concerned with the fact that in several Belarusian newspapers, including *Sovetskaya Byelorussia*, the majority of articles about Russia are dedicated to covering negative events," Blokhin said.

Source: Charter 97; June 14, 2004; www.charter97.org

INTERNATIONAL

8. Belarus' Terrorist Ties

When Saddam Hussein's closest aide, Abid Hamid Mahmud Tikriti, was apprehended in Iraq a year ago, U.S. officials were alarmed to find him carrying Belarusian passports not only for himself but also for other high-ranking members of the former regime -- including Hussein's two infamous sons. A year later Washington's continuing concern about this matter is understandable, given that some of Hussein's top officials and others in his regime may have escaped via Syria to the European pariah state of Belarus during and after the war.

Belarus has a history of close cooperation with rogue states, and of extremely poor relations with the United States. Nevertheless, before the Iraq war, Washington ignored signals that clearly indicated Belarus was not only Iraq's most active ally in Europe but was also willing to provide refuge for members of Hussein's regime.

Belarus may have been the only country where Hussein's henchmen might have expected to find government-sanctioned safety. It is Europe's last Stalinist state and is controlled by an erratic leader who was among Hussein's closest allies. It is also a country that, according to the United Nations was perhaps the worst violator of U.N. arms sanctions against Iraq, secretly assisting Hussein with ballistic missile development and supplying Baghdad with advanced anti-aircraft defense equipment and training.

Belarus's dictatorial president, Alexander Lukashenko, made Hussein such a key military, political and economic partner that Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, in testimony to Congress a year after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, singled out Belarus as the country most likely to accept Hussein if he were to flee Iraq.

While this testimony was largely ignored by the media and seemingly forgotten by Rumsfeld, Belarus actually increased its cooperation and assistance to the Iraqi regime to the point where Hussein's son Uday was scheduled to make a high-profile visit to that country in March of last year. The outbreak of war was the only reason this much-hyped trip did not take place. Saddam Hussein did manage, however, to dispatch Baghdad's then-mayor, Adnan Abed Hamed, to Belarus two weeks before hostilities began to publicly thank the government for its strong support and to tour a truck factory that is widely believed to have supplied Iraq with vehicles that were adapted to carry missiles.

Ominously, Belarus has not only reportedly sold weapons to six of the seven countries on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism but has also continued to defy Washington in doing so -- even with the war on terrorism in full swing. In the case of possible Belarusian involvement in weapons sales to Syria, Lukashenko has not even attempted to conceal his military assistance. "No matter how severely we are admonished for it," he has been quoted as saying, "we'll continue to help Syria militarily, because they have promised to help us in the same way."

Being as diplomatically isolated as he is, Lukashenko has little regard for world opinion. He also has a record of providing asylum to international criminals and thugs.

Over the past eight years, two U.S. administrations have halfheartedly tried to convince Russia of the need to change the situation in Belarus. Russia, however, has chosen not to use its overwhelming leverage on Lukashenko to improve his dangerous behavior. As a result, the Belarusian regime has become more belligerent and increasingly dictatorial, and it now openly provides economic and military assistance to state sponsors of terrorism.

The Bush administration must formulate a clear and independent policy on Belarus, not only because the country may be harboring members of Hussein's regime but, more important, because it continues to actively support state sponsors of global terrorism while acting as a destabilizing force in Europe.

Andrei Sannikov is former deputy foreign minister of Belarus and currently the international coordinator of Charter 97, a human rights group. Mark Lenzi is a former Peace Corps volunteer and Fulbright scholar in Eastern Europe.

Source: Andrei Sannikov and Mark Lenzi, Washington Post; June 12, 2004; www.washingtonpost.com

9. Belarusian Foreign Affairs Ministry Welcomes UN Security Council Decision on Iraq

The Belarusian Foreign Affairs Ministry welcomes the UN Security Council decision on Iraq, noting its compromise-oriented nature.

"The current resolution is a compromise. It is necessary to analyze a realistic process of transferring power legitimately to the elected government of Iraq," stated Andrei Savinykh, Belarusian Foreign Ministry Press Secretary.

He noted that the Belarusian Foreign Ministry "welcomes the international community's efforts in seeking a settlement in the complicated situation which arose in Iraq.

He underscored that the Iraqi government "should be a legitimately elected and representative government body, formulated as a means to a general election... The only way out of this situation is the transfer of power to the Iraqi people," *Interfax* reported Savinykh as saying. [Translated from the Russian]

Source: Interfax; June 14, 2004; www.interfax.ru

10. President Says Situation in Belarus No Worse Than in Europe

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka told the OSCE's chairman in office, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Pasi, in Minsk on 9 June that the situation in Belarus is "not a bit worse than that in any other European country," Belarusian Television reported. "We are reasonable, calm people, like Bulgarians," Lukashenka said. "But we will never put up with being told what to do or being forced by some abnormal actions to work the way someone else wants us to work. We build our life based on the will of our people." Pasi told journalists the same day that the main goal of his visit, the first by an OSCE head to Belarus in six years, was to ensure that the OSCE and the Belarusian government continue and develop their dialogue, Belapan reported. The previous day, Pasi met with the three Belarusian lawmakers who are currently on a hunger strike (see "RFE/RL Newline," 9 June 2004) and leaders of the Belarusian opposition.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; June 10, 2004; www.rfe/rl.org

11. Belarus Will Not Feel the Impact of Europe's Decline

European Parliamentary elections, which came to an end on Sunday, have caused practically all global press to make Spenglerian statements about, "The Decline of Europe." Under the heading "Apathy Takes the Shine off Triumph of Democracy," The Times informs its readers that, "voters across Europe have staged a spectacular democratic rebellion, rejecting their national governments, rejecting the European Union and rejecting Europe's first continent-wide election by simply refusing to vote."

"The revolt was so large that the European Union was suffering an acute crisis of legitimacy just a week before it is supposed to agree its first constitution," the newspaper says.

In Eastern European countries only about 29% of voters came to the polls. However, in 'old Europe,' voter turnout was only 47.7%.

The ruling parties of Germany, France and Poland suffered a defeat, and the main successes were felt by parties and movements which oppose the European Union. According to experts, new EU citizens either do not yet understand the importance of the European Parliament or think that its tone will be set by rich Western countries, regardless of their votes.

Meanwhile, supporters of Belarusian accession to the European Union do not consider European apathy to be a big problem. For example, one of the coordinators of the European Coalition Free Belarus, Andrei Sannikov, has told *Belarusian News* that he does not see a crisis in Europe.

"Low voter turnout in Europe is not the same thing as no turn out at all. The elections have taken place, their results were predictable, and they were established by internal political conditions in EU countries. Europe is an evolving organism, the elections occurred after the induction of ten new members, and this also affected the outcome. But I do not see a crisis. As for Europe's future policy towards Belarus, I do not link its development with the elections, but rather with our neighbors' accession to Europe. Rivaling forces within the EU look upon our country from the same position. And I hope that Europe's attitude towards us will become more sober, that support for civil society and democracy in Belarus will grow."

Andrei Federov, a political scientist, also does not predict particular changes in the EU policy towards Belarus. However, he is more skeptical than Sannikov, "European problems with elections are not over yet. Adoption of the EU Constitution is planned for the near future. Europe will deal with its problems for a long time. Thus, I do not think that the EU policy towards new neighbor countries will change or be somehow amended. Most likely, because it will be busy dealing with difficult internal problems, Europe will not lay a hand on Belarus for even longer than it would have if the election results had been different. Unfortunately, it is futile to wait for European attention to our problems now."

Thus, most likely, foremost Europe will be overcoming its citizens' apathy and internal dissension. In this situation, neighboring countries, with whom Belarus also has relations, should not expect much attention from Europe.

[Translated from the Russian]

Source: *Sergei Pulsha, BelaPan; June 14, 2004; www.naviny.ru*

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

12. *Narodnaya Volya* Has No Indifferent Readers

On June 10, about 400 people took part in a street display of solidarity with the newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*. Around 6 PM, the protestors formed a live chain along the intersection of Skorina Avenue and Oktyabrskaya Square, at the very heart of the city. Scores of policemen observed the rally, however no protesters were arrested. The action was organized after the Panel of Judges of the Supreme Court refused to change the fine imposed on *Narodnaya Volya*

for slandering former Belarusian TV head Egor Rybakov (the newspaper was fined USD 23,000). The ultimate authority that can overrule the sentence is the Supreme Court Presidium. Instead of usual banners and posters, the protesters were holding copies of *Narodnaya Volya*. Besides readers, famous politicians, community leaders, musicians and writers came to support the newspaper. The editor-in-chief of *Narodnaya Volya* Iosif Seredich walked along the chain of protesters, shaking hands with everybody. Mr. Seredich stated that he will not tolerate the shutting down of *Narodnaya Volya*. However, the editor has no intention of paying Mr. Rybakov for moral damage. At about 7 PM, some of the protesters marched to Krasnoarmeyskaya Street to express their solidarity with the hunger strikers from the deputy group Respublika.
[Text Revised by the Editor]

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; June 11, 2004; www.baj.ru

13. Two NGOs Ousted from Offices for Letting *Den* Journalists Work on Their Premises

On June 3, communal authorities in Grodno appealed to the Economic Court of the Grodno region demanding the eviction of the Grodno affiliate of the Belarusian Language Society and the local NGO Batskauschyna from their premises. According to the communal services, the two NGOs violated the rent agreement when they allowed the *Den* newspaper to operate on their premises without proper sanction. The communal authorities unilaterally terminated the lease agreement on May 21. The NGOs have not vacated the premises so far, causing communal authorities to appeal to the court.
[Text Revised by the Editor]

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; June 14, 2004; www.baj.ru

14. KGB Pressure on Zubr Activists

Officers of the KGB (State Security Committee) have visited the apartment of underage Zubr activist Sergei Gorelov today.

On June 11, 15-year-old Sergei Gorelov was detained in the trade center "Maximus" in Malinauka district of Minsk for handing out a bulletin "Kommersant". In the bulletin there is a call to the businessmen to take part in a strike on June 17 and express protest against the authorities' arbitrariness. Two more Zubrs were detained on Friday with Sergei Gorelov. They are underage as well. They all were released.

Today the KGB officers asked Sergei Gorelov to tell about the circumstances of his detention on June 11 in front of a video camera. In addition, he was asked to tell about activities of the Zubr movement and its members. One of the secret service men, who presented himself as a KGB major Hrakhouski, left his phone numbers with Mr. Gorelov.

Source: Charter 97; June 14, 2004; www.charter97.org

BUSINESS

15. Belarus to Get Tangible Economic Benefits After Introducing Ruble

The introduction of Russian ruble in Belarus that is forecasted on January 1, 2006, will bring tangible benefits for the Belarusian society and economy, Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Blokhin told journalists on Friday.

In particular, he noted that Belarusian business loses about 160 million dollars in trade with Russia yearly. A single currency will also be suitable for citizens of the countries who make frequent trips to each country. The Russian side also considers the issue of compensations for losses the Belarusian budget sustains over the use of the VAT tax in mutual trade according the

principle of a country where a product was made. The amount of this compensation is estimated at 600 million dollars and makes about 11-12 percent of the Belarusian annual consolidated budget.

According to Aleksander Blokhin, some other compensations will also be paid, for instance, for re-evaluation and reprocessing of bonds, securities in Belarusian rubles. These compensations will reach about one billion dollars, the diplomat pointed out. "Meanwhile, Belarus will get the stable Russian currency," Aleksandr Blokhin remarked.

In reply to a query about financial and economic cooperation of the countries the ambassador also noted that the Russian side confirms readiness to allocate a loan of 200 million dollars on the easy terms to Belarus. The loan will be provided to smooth the consequences of the recent rise of Russian gas prices in Belarus.

Source: Itar-Tass; June 11, 2004; www.itar-tass.com

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.

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