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DOMESTIC

1. Valery Levanevsky to Stay in Prison for One More Month

The imprisonment term for Valery Levanevsky, National Proprietors' Strike committee leader, and member of the Coordination Committee of European Coalition, has been prolonged to August 15.

Senior investigator of Grodna Leninski District Alfred Tankevitch told this to the political prisoner's wife, Marina Levanevskaya. The imprisonment term for the Grodna proprietors' leader was prolonged for one more month "regarding the inquiry concerns". Valery Levanevsky has spent more than two months in prison already. On May 18, the proprietor was charged with Criminal Code article 368 (part II): "Public outrage against the President of Belarus committed by a person tried for outrage or libel, or joined with accusation of commitment of grave or particularly grave crime." The article stipulates a penalty in the form of a fine or reformatory work for up to 2 years, freedom limitation for up to 3 years or imprisonment for the same term. In the inquiry's view, the proof for outrage against the Head of state was found in the leaflets spread in Grodna before the proprietors' protest action of May 1.

[Text Revised by the Editor]

Source: Charter97; July 12, 2004; www.charter97.org

2. Referendum on a Third Term: In Your Dreams!

By the end of next week, Aleksandr Lukashenko must sign a decree regarding parliamentary elections. According to the Central Electoral Commission, it has already been determined that they will take place on October 17, but according to the legislation, the document must be signed by the head of state three months prior to the voting day. This means that the corresponding decree should appear by July 17.

The Belarusian president has about a week to think it over, should he go for a third term or not, and if yes, should the third referendum on this issue be held on the same day as the parliamentary elections. But, most likely (if Lukashenko has really decided to remain president after 2006), the plebiscite will not take place this autumn.

The head of state could have combined the referendum with parliamentary elections long ago. Some analysts and journalists even tried to guess the dates when he could publicly declare it; however, they were invariably mistaken. July 3 was the last predicted date. They thought it would be very convenient and beautiful if he made this announcement during his appearances marking Independence Day and the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Belarus, in the context of announcements of the achievements of ten years of his presidency. It is necessary to note, that analysts and journalists were mistaken not only about the concrete dates, but also about the season. For example, the third term referendum was even predicted last autumn.

It is possible that Lukashenko will not make a big announcement about his third term campaign, but will quietly mention it in conjunction with the parliamentary elections. That way there will not be a wide resonance in society. It would be rather inopportune, considering the population's attitude toward the idea of prolonging Lukashenko's presidency. According to NISEPI's national poll, only one-third of Belarusians do not oppose it.

Political scientist Viktor Chernov is confident, that even if the referendum is not combined with parliamentary elections this fall, Aleksandr Lukashenko will hold it sooner or later. There is plenty of time left between now and 2006.

Viktor Chernov believes that not only meager public support, but also external factors are preventing Lukashenko from announcing his third term and holding a referendum. First among these is the Kremlin's opposition to the prospect of prolonging the current Belarusian president's powers.

However, according to Chernov, if Lukashenko carries out a referendum and wins it, then he will be victorious in the first round during the 2006 presidential elections, rising above the 50% required votes.

This is of course if the opposition does not produce a politician who, in the public's opinion (and not just his own), is capable of seriously competing with Lukashenko. On top of that, Chernov believes that ineffectual economic policy will hurt Lukashenko. He also mentions the erosion of his presidential charisma. And finally, people are simply tired of Lukashenko because ten years of one man's presidency is no easy feat. Under such conditions, the current head of state's approval rating of 34% can hardly rise significantly.

But again, we repeat: if the opposition cannot offer the people a worthy contender to Lukashenko, the presidency, even after 2006, is in his pocket. People will vote for the current head of state by principle: "if not him, then who?"

Source: Kirill Poznyak; BelaPAN; July 9, 2004; www.naviny.by

3. Profile: Alexander Lukashenko

Ten years have passed since President Alexander Lukashenko swept to power in the former Soviet republic of Belarus. Voted in with a sizeable majority, he has spent the intervening decade consolidating his hold on the country. But while this grip shows little sign of loosening, time may be catching up with the 49-year-old president. His second and final term of office is due to end in two years' time, and he will have to decide whether to step down quietly or seek changes to the constitution through a referendum.

Humble origins

Although Mr. Lukashenko now appears firmly ensconced at the heart of the country's establishment, a look at his early life reveals rather humbler origins. Brought up by a single mother in a poor village in eastern Belarus, he first made his mark as the manager of a collective farm in the late 1980s. Moving into politics at the end of the decade, he quickly established his reputation as an outspoken man with firmly authoritarian instincts.

In August 1991, as a member of the Belarusian parliament, he declared his support for the attempted coup by hardliners against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The image has stuck ever since, and it is one he is perfectly happy to defend.

"An authoritarian style of rule is characteristic of me, and I have always admitted it," he said in August 2003. "You need to control the country, and the main thing is not to ruin people's lives."

Iron grip

Mr. Lukashenko's early years in power demonstrated his commitment to this belief. In 1996, he disbanded parliament, which had been seeking to impeach him, and also strengthened his control over the judiciary. The new parliament which emerged was hand-picked, and subsequent elections to its successor in 2000 were widely condemned.

Meanwhile, many former allies and government ministers have either fled abroad or joined the opposition. Others, such as former Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Hanchar and former Minister of Internal Affairs Yuryy Zakharenka, have simply disappeared.

Mutual dislike

It is an approach to power which has won Mr. Lukashenko few friends. Western governments accuse the president of suppressing human rights and the media, and express concern at allegations that Belarusian dissidents have been persecuted. The country's close links with states Washington has included in its "axis of evil" have also drawn censure.

Mr. Lukashenko, however, appears undeterred by the criticism, whether it be from home or abroad.

"We cannot accept the insolence of European officials who, along with a handful of people from the opposition, want to teach Belarus a lesson for its stubbornness," he said earlier this month. Relations with Russia are warmer, but certainly not smooth.

While Mr. Lukashenko has publicly championed unification and signed a series of accords, analysts believe a full merger remains a distant prospect. Summits with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin have been punctuated by disagreements and setbacks.

Sporting life

Back home in Belarus, however, Mr. Lukashenko feels rather more comfortable. He puts his passion for sport on public view, and is said to practise his favourite sport, ice hockey, on a daily basis. He has made a point of building ice rinks in all the country's major cities, while senior officials are often seen skiing or roller-skating alongside him in public. And while others may have their own opinion on the subject, it seems clear where Mr. Lukashenko believes his strength lies.

"My love of sport is my biggest forte," he once told reporters.

Source: BBC; July 10, 2004; www.bbc.co.uk

4. Belarusian Gypsies Want Recognition as WWII Holocaust Victims

The Gypsy community of Belarus will ask the parliament to recognize Gypsies killed during World War Two as holocaust victims, Oleg Kozlovsky, head of the Belarusian Gypsy community told Interfax on Monday.

"We will initiate discussion of Gypsy genocide in the WWII," he said. "We want Belarusian Gypsies murdered by the Nazis to be recognized as holocaust victims, the same as Jews and people of other nationalities."

Kozlovsky said they are collecting historical documents, which will be presented to the parliament. "The search for documents about Gypsies killed in the WWII years is very difficult because Gypsies did not have passports back then. Historians say that about 1% of pre-war Gypsies were left on the Belarusian territory after the WWII," he said.

The official Gypsy rate in Belarus is about 57,000-58,000 nowadays, Kozlovsky said. Belarusian Gypsies stopped wandering about 50 years ago and settled in towns. The majority of Belarusian Gypsies reside in the Gomel region," Kozlovsky said.

Source: Interfax; July 12, 2004; www.interfax.com

5. International Conference on Domestic Violence

A two-day international conference on how best to combat domestic violence began in Minsk today. The event is being supported by the OSCE Office in Minsk. More than 50 conference participants will discuss the legal and practical aspects of domestic violence, possible legislative solutions and the role of government bodies in the fight against this crime.

"Domestic violence is an infringement of a person's fundamental human rights," Ambassador Eberhard Heyken, Head of the OSCE Office, said at the opening of the conference.

"If we fail to address this crime it will undermine the OSCE's determination to eradicate violence against all human beings, men and women, and to create a safer environment for people at every level. Experience shows that effective mechanisms against domestic violence require a comprehensive approach and active cooperation among police, the judiciary and civil society."

The participants will also discuss a draft law on the prevention of family violence, the prospects for its adoption and the experience of other countries where such legislation already exists. The organizer of the conference is the local non-governmental organization, Legal Initiative.

Some 50 local and international academics, lawyers, social workers, members of parliament, representatives of non-governmental organizations and of judicial and law enforcement bodies have been invited to attend the event.

Source: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; July 9, 2004; www.osce.org

REGIONAL

6. Belarusians Don't Need the Hammer, the Sickle, or the Russian Ruble

Aleksandr Lukashenko often publicly, and quite sincerely, expresses nostalgia for the USSR in unison with many of our compatriot's feelings. So, appearing at the Palace of the Republic on July 2, the president again declared that the Soviet Union is "the Union in which the Belarusian people were preserved and developed to the level of a prosperous nation."

However, as the recent NISEPI national poll has shows, there are not that many Belarusians who mourn Soviet times. And the numbers are getting smaller and smaller. If in 1993 (Aleksandr Lukashenko was elected president in 1994) 55.1% of our population was in favor of restoring the USSR, 49.9% in 1997 and now only 39.5% of Belarusians would like to return to the Soviet Union once again. By the way, 50.8% of our citizens do not wish for such events.

The Belarusian people's attitude towards Russia cannot inspire much optimism in supporters of post Soviet integration. It seems that gas conflicts have finally undermined our people's faith in these processes. According to the NISEPI experts, "support for the idea of unification into one state, which was not that substantial to begin with, also declined to 15.5%, almost 21% less than a year and a half ago. The option of special relations between our countries within the CIS framework does not have too many supporters either. Today, less than half of those polled support this idea." Less than half is 49.7%. In December of 2002, before the gas wars, 51.7% were in favor of such a union. So, the integrated map is also losing its appeal.

By the way, if the referendum on ratifying the Constitutional Act of the Belarus-Russian Union is held, then it would fall through (if, of course, the voting is fair). Only 42.9% of those polled are ready to vote for such a Constitution. Exactly 25% are against it and 16.5% have declared that they will not participate in the vote at all.

And our compatriots are not too inspired by the plan of introducing the Russian ruble in Belarus. In September of last year, 42.2% supported introduction of the ruble and 34.4% opposed it. After only nine months, the situation has changed drastically. Today 35.6% support introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus and 48% are against it.

So who do the people believe is to blame for the deterioration of the relationship between Belarus and Russia? According to NISEPI, "the poll results show that 17.7% of respondents blame the Russian leadership, and 15.2 blame the Belarusian leadership. However, the overwhelming majority (56.2%) believe that both countries' leadership is to blame."

And now, regarding those who support the integration processes, restoration of the USSR and introducing the Russian ruble. As NISEPI noted, most are, "women, elderly and less educated, pensioners, inhabitants of Eastern regions of the country, small towns and rural areas. The majority of them support active state intervention in the economy and trust the justness of the Belarusian judicial system... They are not too concerned with the human rights situation of the country's international isolation... In the last elections the majority of them voted for him again. Their incomes are considerably lower than the country's median."

NISEPI's conclusion in regards to these people is categorical: "They are typical outsiders."

In relation to gradual transformations in public opinion, the Belarusian authorities will certainly be forced to make some changes to foreign policy and the contents of propaganda, whether they want to or not. Is it not for this reason that Aleksandr Lukashenko suddenly started talking about the country's integration into the European Union?

Source: Sergei Pulsha; BelaPAN; July 7, 2004; www.naviny.by

INTERNATIONAL

7. U.S. Presidential Candidate Endorses Belarus Democracy Act

U.S. Senator John Kerry, the Democratic Party presidential candidate, has cosponsored the Belarus Democracy Act that provides for the promotion of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 9 July. The bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Christopher Smith (Republican, New Jersey) in February 2003 and the Senate by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Republican, Colorado) in March 2003 (see "RFE/RL Newswire," 28 March 2003). If enacted, the legislation would in particular impose a travel ban on senior Belarusian officials, prohibit any financial assistance to the Belarusian government, and require U.S. representatives in all international financial institutions to oppose delivery of any nonhumanitarian aid to Belarus.

Source: RFE/RL; July 12, 2004; www.rferl.org/newswire

8. Adrian Severin to Serve as Rapporteur on Belarus at UN Human Rights Commission

Adrian Severin, former foreign minister of Romania who is honorary president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, has been appointed special rapporteur on Belarus at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Severin has been tasked with studying the situation in the country and presenting his report to the Commission at its next, 61st session.

At its last session, the Commission adopted very tough resolution that condemned violations of human rights in Belarus.

Source: Charter 97; July 12, 2004; www.charter97.org

9. Zapf: Minsk's Failure to Deliver on Promises Could Sour its Relations with the OSCE Assembly's Group on Belarus

Minsk's failure to abide by its commitments under a declaration signed last week by a Belarusian official delegation and the Working Group on Belarus in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly could seriously worsen their relations, Uta Zapf, head of the Group, told BelaPAN.

By signing that document, the Belarusian delegation pledged to contribute to bringing the electoral process into line with OSCE standards for free and fair elections.

For her part, Ms. Zapf withdrew her critical draft resolution on Belarus that was to be discussed during the Assembly's July 5-9 annual session in Edinburgh.

Ms. Zapf vowed to closely monitor every aspect of Belarus' parliamentary elections slated for fall, such the registration of candidates, equal access for all media outlets and the work of precinct commissions and international observers.

While commenting on strong criticism directed at the declaration by the Belarusian opposition, Ms. Zapf admitted that she cannot guarantee that Minsk would act as it promised in the document, but added that she can table the resolution before the Assembly next year.

Ms. Zapf said she had urged Mikhail Orda, head of the delegation, and Lidiya Yermoshina, head of Belarus' central election commission, to ensure that Minsk fulfils its promises.

Source: Charter97; June 13, 2004; www.charter97.org

10. European Lawmaker Said to Have Contributed to Belarusian Opposition Crackdown

Dmitri Bandarenka, a leader of the Charter-97 Belarusian opposition group, has said that Uta Zapf, head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Working Group on Belarus, "shares responsibility with [Belarusian President] Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime" for the current crackdown on the Belarusian opposition, Belapan reported on 9 July. Bandarenka was commenting on Zapf's decision at a session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Edinburgh on 8 July to withdraw a draft resolution condemning the Belarusian government and sign a joint declaration with Belarusian legislators (see "RFE/RL Newslines," 9 July 2004). Bandarenka also charged that it was Zapf who initiated procedures that allowed the Belarusian National Assembly to fill Belarus' vacant seat in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in February 2003. The move, Bandarenka added, was followed by a new round of persecution against the Belarusian opposition.

Source: RFE/RL; July 12, 2004; www.rfe/rl.org

11. Minsk Says OSCE Document on Elections Not Applicable in Belarus

The statement on the upcoming Belarusian parliamentary elections signed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Edinburgh does not have official legal status, Deputy Head of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry's Information Department Ruslan Yesin told Interfax on Friday,

"The statement is not an official document of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. It is in fact a statement from several Assembly deputies who are members of the Working Group on Belarus and a group of Belarusian parliamentarians," Yesin said.

The joint statement signed by head of the Assembly's Working Group on Belarus Uta Zapf and head of the Belarusian delegation Mikhail Orda says that they intend to aid the process of bringing the upcoming parliamentary elections in line with OSCE standards.

The statement expresses hope that the Belarusian Central Elections Commission and the Belarusian authorities will observe the OSCE's recommendations.

The OSCE's election standards include equal access to media for all candidates, balanced coverage of the election campaign by state media, ensuring that all parties are represented in elections commissions at all levels and allowing all candidates to freely conduct their election campaign, it says.

The statement also welcomes the presence of international observers, including OSCE observers, and expresses intent to strengthen cooperation between the Belarusian delegation at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Assembly's Working Group on Belarus.

Source: Interfax; July 9, 2004; www.interfax.com

12. Belarus, NATO to Cooperate on Military Supplies

Belarus and NATO have reached an agreement to cooperate in the field of military supplies, spokesman for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry Ruslan Yesin said at a news briefing in Minsk on Thursday.

A memorandum was signed at the headquarters of the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) in Luxembourg, he said.

Yesin said the signing of the memorandum opens new prospects for developing mutually beneficial practical cooperation between Belarus and NATO, including under the Partnership for Peace program and the Euro- Atlantic Partnership Council.

NATO experts have already started to provide assistance to the Belarusian military in disposing of stocks of anti-personnel mines in line with Belarus' commitments under the Ottawa convention, which the country joined in the spring of 2004, Yesin said.

Source: Interfax; July 8, 2004; www.interfax.ru

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

13. KGB Again Refuses to Release Mikhail Marinich

The politician's attorney tried to use the French ambassador's invitation to Marinich for a Bastille Day celebration to assist in the release of her client. "The feast is put off for me," is how the prisoner of the KGB inquiry Mikhail Marinich is reported to have commented upon receiving information regarding the KGB's preliminary investigator Skrebtsu's refusal to exonerate him on July, 14. The KGB officer explained his refusal to release Mikhail Marinich due to concerns regarding the inquiry.

Nevertheless, Marinich's attorney Vera Stramkovskaya keeps on insisting that there is a possibility of exonerating him through a written agreement not to leave the state since all the active inquiry actions in the case are now over, so the prisoner cannot stray from the court. As Vera Stramkovskaya said, it may be that the investigation's results will prove her client's innocence.

Ex-Minister and Ambassador Mikhail Marinich, who joined the opposition, was arrested by the KGB on April, 26. He was accused of illegal actions with weapons. According to this criminal code, Mikhail Marinich may spend up to 6 years in prison. Mr. Marinich does not acknowledge his guilt and confirms that the gun found in his cottage does not belong to him. Opposition politicians and lawyers believe that Mikhail Marinich was being punished for his oppositional activity.

On Monday July 12, the Central District Court of Minsk will consider the attorneys' complaint against the illegal (from their point of view), imprisonment of Mikhail Marinich.
[Text Revised by the Editor]

Source: Radio Svaboda; June 12, 2004; www.svaboda.by

14. Dmitri Zavadsky's Case: Four Years of Impunity

Four years after the disappearance of Dmitri Zavadsky, on July 7 2000 and with the investigation now closed, those responsible have still not been found and the possible implication of the highest levels of government has still not been properly investigated.

The young cameraman's body has never been recovered and aspects of the case remain murky despite the 2002 conviction of two members of the Ministry or the Interior's special units.

Reporters Without Borders and the Belarus Association of Journalists (BAJ) expressed their dismay at the determination of the authorities to do everything in their power to cover up the truth.

"The evidence is overwhelming of the part played by the authorities in the disappearance Dmitri Zavadsky. If Belarus wants one day to join the Council of Europe it will have to take the unavoidable step of holding an independent investigation to establish all the guilt in this case," the two press freedom organizations said.

Reporters Without Borders and the BAJ welcomed steps taken by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which recently established the authorities' implication in the journalist's disappearance.

On April 28 2004, the PACE called on the international community to "exert maximum political pressure on the current leaders of Belarus, including through sanctions" to obtain an independent investigation into the disappearance of four people in 1999 and 2000. These were: Yuri Zakharenko (former interior minister), Victor Gonchar (former parliamentary deputy speaker), Anatoly Krassovsky (businessman) and the journalist Dmitri Zavadsky.

"The information gathered by the rapporteur leads him to believe that steps were taken at the highest level of the state to actively cover up the true circumstances of the disappearances, and the suspicion that senior officials of the state may themselves be involved in these disappearances," the assembly concluded.

The Council of Europe's special rapporteur for Europe, Christos Pourgourides, in a report published in January 2004, referred to serious suspicions of three officials' involvement in the journalist's disappearance, as well as in similar cases involving public figures. These officials were: Prosecutor-general Viktor Sheiman, who was former head of the National Security Council, Yuri Sivakov, then interior minister and now minister for sports and tourism, and Dmitry Pavlichenko, commander of a police special unit.

Reporters Without Borders and the BAJ support in particular the following demands:

- The resignation, because of an unacceptable conflict of interest, of the prosecutor-general Viktor Sheiman;
- The opening of an independent criminal investigation with the priority of examining the roles played by Viktor Sheiman, Yury Sivakov and Dmitry Pavlichenko;
- Examination of the responsibilities of several high-ranking officials in the perversion of the course of justice, in order to protect the true perpetrators of the crime;
- To keep the family of the missing person fully informed of the progress and results of the investigation.

At the beginning of April 2004, Svetlana Zavadskaya, wife of the missing journalist, received a letter telling her that the investigation into his disappearance had been closed because "the missing individual had not been found." The Prosecutor General's office had earlier, on February 27 2003, decided to close the investigation before reopening it on December 10, giving no official justification, apart from "the need to pursue the inquiries."

Reporters Without Borders and the BAJ called unsuccessfully on the prosecutor-general Viktor Sheiman, to give Zavadsky's family reasons in writing as to why the officer in charge of the case, Ivan Branchel, decided to close the case.

The organizations also called on the prosecutor's office to list what steps had been taken to find the journalist and also what inquiries had been initially planned but not carried out and why not. Reporters Without Borders and the BAJ felt the family had the right to know if the two members of the interior ministry's special services, who were convicted of the kidnapping after a secret trial before the Supreme Court, had pleaded guilty and provided information about the fate of the journalist after the kidnapping as well as the spot where his body was buried.

The family also does not know if accomplices to the abduction who were referred to during the trial had been identified and if they had been able to provide any information.

The KGB did not respond to a request from the wives of the four missing men (including Svetlana Zavadskaya) asking them to take action against high-ranking officials suspected of links with these crimes.

Dmitri Zavadsky disappeared in Minsk on July 7, 2000. A former personal cameraman to President Aleksandr Lukashenko, he left his job at the state television channel in 1996 to work for the Russian channel ORT. He was imprisoned for two months along with a colleague, in 1997, after reporting on weaknesses in Belarusian security along the border with Lithuania.

On 16 July 2002, the Belarusian Supreme Court confirmed a life sentence against Valery Ignatovich, former head of special units at the interior ministry and a subordinate, Maxim Malik, for abduction and disappearance of the young cameraman and for the murder of five other people.

According to the official version of events, Ignatovich decided to seek revenge against Zavadsky because he felt himself the target of the journalist's remarks, when he said in an interview in 2000 with the daily *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, that he had met Belarusian nationals fighting alongside separatists in Chechnya. The trial did not allow the exact circumstances of the journalist's kidnapping to come out nor did it identify who ordered it.
[Text Revised by the Editor]

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; July 8, 2004; www.baj.ru

15. Demonstration Marks Anniversary of Belarusian Journalist's Disappearance

Some 200 people took part in a demonstration in downtown Minsk on 7 July to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the disappearance of Belarusian journalist Dmitri Zavadsky, Belapan reported. Two alleged kidnapers of Zavadsky, members of an elite Belarusian police unit, were sentenced to life imprisonment in 2002. The trial provided no answers, however, to questions about what happened to Zavadsky after he was kidnapped. The Prosecutor-General's Office dropped an investigation into the case in March. "The evidence is overwhelming of the part played by the authorities in the disappearance of Dmitri Zavadsky," the Paris-based press-freedom organization Reporters Without Borders and the Belarusian Association of Journalists said in a joint statement on 7 July. "If Belarus wants one day to join the Council of Europe, it will have to take the unavoidable step of holding an independent investigation to establish all the guilty in this case."

Source: RFE/RL; July 8, 2004; www.rferl.org

BUSINESS

16. Inflation in Belarus was 1% in June

The inflation rate in Belarus for June of this year was 1%. The Ministry of Statistics and Analysis reported that prices grew by 8.1 % since the beginning of 2004 compared to a 14.5% growth from January-June 2003.

Based on the Ministry's preliminary data, the average monthly gain of the consumer price index for the first half of 2004 was 1.3%. As a whole, the growth in the consumer price index from January-June of this year was below the planned monthly average parameter (1.4%), which confirms the slowed inflation rate this year in comparison with last year, Belta reports.

According to the Belarusian Basic Monetary and Credit Policy Directives for 2004, inflation is predicted to be between 14%-18%.

Source: BelaPAN; July 13, 2004; www.naviny.by;

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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