

July 29- August 4, 2004

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## ELECTION NEWS

### 1. Belarusian Opposition Group Accuses Government of 'Plot Against Voters'

Leaders of the opposition Popular Coalition Five Plus issued a statement on 29 July saying that Belarusian authorities do not intend to hold fair parliamentary elections scheduled for 17 October, Belapan reported. The statement followed a conference at which Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka suggested that his supporters would fill all of the National Assembly's seats in the first round (see "RFE/RL Newslines," 28 July 2004). Belarusian authorities "aim to preserve the National Assembly as a department of Lukashenka's administration," Five Plus said, noting that the government's objectives and measures of achievement show "the existence of the government's plot against voters." Five Plus accused the government of planning to do whatever is necessary to fill all 110 seats in the Belarusian Chamber of Representatives with its loyal supporters. AM

Source: RFE-RL; July 29, 2004; [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)

### 2. Authorities Prepare For Vote Forgery: Almost No Opposition Representation In Election Committees

On average, a little more than 7% of political parties' representatives were included in the election committees on carrying out elections of the deputies of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly, said the Central Election Committee secretary Nikolai Lazavik at the press conference on August 4 in Minsk.

The formation of the election committees ended on August 2. According to the legislation, 110 committees consisting of 1,430 members were formed. Most of the places in the committees, 37, were given to the Communist Party of Belarus. The Liberal Democratic Party will have 27 representatives in the committees, and the Belarusian Communist Party received 19 places. After them followed the United Civil Party (5 representatives), the Belarusian Social Sport Party and Agricultural Party – 4 places each (all in Minsk), the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Gramada) – 2 places, the Party Belarusian Popular Front and Belarusian Patriotic Party – 1 representative each.

296 places (20%) in the election committees of the constituencies were received by public associations' representatives. Among them are the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (94 places), the Federation of Belarusian Trade Unions (80), the Union of Veterans (66), the Belarusian Women Union (28).

*Source: Charter 97, August 4, 2004; www.charter97.org*

### **3. Minsk Says U.S. Call to Opposition Next to “Meddling”**

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry is surprised over a U.S. congressional resolution calling for states and international organizations to aid Belarusian non-government organizations in the coming parliamentary elections, the ministry's Information Department representative, Ruslan Yesin, told Interfax.

"This borders on meddling into Belarus' internal affairs," Yesin said. He said that the U.S. Congress' resolution on parliamentary elections in Belarus contains "a standard description of the conditions necessary for fair democratic elections, so it could be addressed to any other country besides Belarus, including the U.S."

*Source: Interfax; July 29, 2004; www.interfax.ru*

### **4. Young Belarus Coalition Nominates More than 30 Candidates for Parliamentary Ballot**

The Young Belarus Coalition will nominate more than 30 candidates for deputy seats in the parliamentary election, according to a statement made by one of the leaders of the coalition, Pavel Severinets, at a press conference in Minsk on July 28. An absolute majority of coalition members will be running on the ballot in the regions. This is, underscored Severinets, one of the principle moments of Young Belarus' election strategy. "Give Way to the Youth!" will become the main slogan of the Young Belarus' electoral campaign, said Severinets.

Currently, members of the coalition are nominating their representatives to be included in the local district election commissions; they are preparing action committees, which will collect signatures for the nomination of candidates from the bloc, and preparing candidates to be included in the electoral commissions.

All representatives from Young Belarus will be nominated by means of signatures, reported Severinets. In his opinion, even a single candidate is capable of collecting 1,000 signatures, if active work is involved. The main problem is not the collection of signatures but the registration of the coalition's candidates. Severinets believes that it is in this [registration – Ed.] phase that the number of Young Belarus will be significantly truncated. Already, reports Severinets, activists and coalition leaders are subjected to repression by local authorities. Thus, in Zhodino, a Young Belarus coordinator from the Minsk region, Pavel Krasovsky, was arrested for distributing leaflets, as well as Nikolai Artyokhov in Nesvizh. On July 21, in Minsk, Artur Finkevich was arrested for participating in the protest of the tenth anniversary of President Lukashenko's rule.

The day before the press conference, one of the coalition leaders Aleksei Shein, who intends to be on the ballot for deputy in Rakov (Minsk district), was called to the local militia station, where

they reported he is wanted for not paying alimony. "I've never been married and I don't have kids," Shein himself said at the press conference. Shein believes that the purpose is to discredit him in front of voters.

According to Severinets, despite resistance by the authorities, Young Belarus is counting on victory for 10-12 of its candidates, already in the third round of voting. "The situation in the districts, as the sociological surveys confirm, allows one to count on this," says the political scientist.

According to BelaPan, the coalition Young Belarus was founded in January 2004. The coalition's membership consists of representatives of the unregistered association Malady Front, as well as members of the Belarus National Front, Belarusian Social Democratic Gramady, local council deputies, and representatives of entrepreneurial and ecological movements.

*Source: Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta, August 4, 2004; www.bdg.by*

## **DOMESTIC & REGIONAL**

### **5. Olga Zavadskaya Demands to Interrogate Lukashenko as a Witness**

The mother of disappeared cameraman of the Russian TV channel ORT Dmitry Zavadsky, Olga Zavadskaya, sent to the Prosecutors' Office of Belarus an application with a demand to restart the process on the case of her son, on "newly-discovered evidence", and interrogate Aleksandr Lukashenko as a witness. "On July 20 during a press conference the Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko made a statement concerning the legal proceedings instituted on the disappearances of Belarusian citizens, including my son Dmitry Zavadsky. This statement reveals that Lukashenko is a witness in this case, as he has information and documents that can be significant to the investigation of the case," said the mother of the disappeared journalist. On August 4 her request was received and registered in the Republican Prosecutors' office by prosecutor Boris Zhuldetsky.

At the press conference on July 20 Lukashenko said "what is surprising is if the relatives are so deeply distressed, why haven't they come to me? One person came, a woman, I cannot name her, you know why. She came to me, I received her, she asked me about one person, I couldn't say the name. I was amazed by this woman. Bravo! We were talking for three hours. I have shown her some documents. But if I publish them now, Zavadsky's case would turn into "anti-case". By the way, the only thing that hurts me is Dima Zavadky's story. I would give a lot to find out the fate of this person".

Olga Zavadskaya says that neither she, nor Zavadsky's widow Svetlana have turned to Lukashenko on this matter. She does not know who the woman was who went to Lukashenko on the matter of her son's disappearance.

Olga Zavadskaya asks the Prosecutor's office to check the facts informed by Lukashenko, and to restart the process on newly-discovered evidence, if there will be grounds for that. [text revised by the Editor]

*Source: Charter 97, August 4, 2004; www.charter97.org*

### **6. Powerful Belarusian Leader with One Foot in the Soviet Past**

It is evening in a bar on the shores of a small lake and the lights dance on the water. The terraces are crowded with drinkers taking in the views and the sounds of a jazz band. The talk is of family and friends, work and foreign travel.

Welcome to Minsk, capital of Belarus, Europe's last communist dictatorship. Five years ago,

President Aleksander Lukashenko's country seemed to be disappearing down an economic black hole following the 1998 financial crisis in neighbouring Russia.

The street lights went out early to save electricity and the hotels were struggling to secure food for breakfast. Today, Minsk is bright with neon signs and the restaurants serve everything from steak to sushi. "Minsk looks better than Warsaw," says Sergei Kostyuchenko, chairman of Priorbank, the only large non-state bank. But not everything is as it seems. Everyday life may no longer be as grim as it was in Minsk, but it remains dreary outside the capital, especially in the shoddy concrete blocks that are home to most Belarusians.

And after 10 years in office, Mr Lukashenko's grip on political life is as tight as ever. Opposition politicians say conditions have deteriorated since the last presidential elections in 2001, with Mr Lukashenko now working to ensure success in parliamentary elections due this autumn and presidential polls planned for 2006.

The European Union's eastward enlargement to Belarus's western border this year has so far done nothing to encourage Mr Lukashenko to pay more attention to western criticisms of his rule. His eyes remain firmly fixed on Russia.

Mr Lukashenko's officials argue that the country's record justifies his hardline policies. Pointing at Russia, they say rapid liberalisation produced corruption and chaos. They add that President Vladimir Putin's efforts to reimpose order prove Mr Lukashenko's slow approach to reform was correct. Sergei Paimtsev, a pro-Lukashenko businessman, says: "Lukashenko has done all the time what Putin is doing only now."

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the region's multilateral bank, ranks Belarus among the least liberal economies in the former Soviet Union with 75 per cent of output still in state hands.

Sprawling state-owned factories such as the Minsk Tractor Plant, with more than 20,000 employees, dominate industry. State-owned farms still run the countryside. Mr Lukashenko often talks of reform but his decisions are contradictory. This year, for example, the government increased its influence by assuming rights to block big decisions at any company in which the state had ever had a stake.

The International Monetary Fund has repeatedly questioned whether economic growth is sustainable and urged Minsk to pursue market-oriented reforms.

Mr Lukashenko's answer is that the IMF has been wrong so far. In contrast to the upheavals in Russia, economic output has grown consistently for a decade, including, says the government, a 6.8 per cent increase last year.

The IMF says the correct figure is closer to 4.8 per cent, but concedes that even at this lower level the performance is "solid". The population of 10m is hardly rich, but in comparison with most of the former Soviet Union poverty is low and education and health standards are good.

However, these results are possible only with outside support. Russia subsidises Belarus by supplying gas at cut-price rates and buying 50 per cent of Belarusian exports, including low-quality industrial goods that might not sell elsewhere. Also, an estimated 300,000 Belarusians work abroad, chiefly in Russia and Poland, and send their money home mostly in cash to avoid heavy Belarusian taxes.

Mr Lukashenko ensures there is little public criticism of his rule. Opposition leaders say they are constantly under pressure from the secret police, which has retained its Soviet-era name of KGB.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe has regularly asked for the full

investigation of the disappearance in 1999-2000 of several politically prominent people, including Viktor Gonchar, a popular opposition leader, and TV journalist Andrei Zavadski.

Human rights activists say that while there have been no new disappearances other forms of pressure have increased, including politically-inspired arrests and court actions. Sergei Martynov, the foreign minister, denies this, saying that singling out Belarus for criticism over human rights is not justified.

Outside Minsk and a few western cities, where Polish influence is strong, Mr Lukashenko remains popular. Among the sentiments he exploits is widespread nostalgia for the former Soviet Union.

While educated young people want to join the EU, many older citizens dream of unification with Russia. Mr Lukashenko has signed up to an economic union with Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan and has even agreed to introduce the Russian rouble next year, although preparations for the change have been delayed. However, the president seems to have abandoned his earlier plans for a full political merger.

Mr Putin is no fan of Mr Lukashenko but appears to tolerate his rule as long as Russian influence is maintained. Western diplomats say Moscow may tire of financing Belarus but is unlikely to support replacing Mr Lukashenko with a west-oriented opposition figure.

Russia would prefer a successor drawn from the presidential administration.

However, Mr Lukashenko shows not the slightest sign of preparing to relinquish power. He is toying with changing the constitution law to allow him to stand for a third term in 2006. Svetlana Kalinkina, editor of the independent BDG newspaper, says: "Lukashenko is obsessed with one idea - power."

*Source: Stefan Wagstyl, Financial Times; August 2, 2004; www.ft.com*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **7. UK Professor Expelled from Belarus**

A U.K. citizen and professor at Kingston University, Alan Flowers, has been expelled from Belarus without explanation, the Itar-Tass news agency reports.

The academic was issued the order to leave the country Monday by the passport and visa service of the Interior Ministry's directorate in one of Minsk's districts. He has also been banned from visiting Belarus for the next five years, the news agency reports.

Belarusian law-enforcement agencies have so far declined to comment. Flowers said that he has not received any comprehensible explanation either.

The professor believes his expulsion may be linked to his close ties with some Belarusian NGOs.

For more than a decade, Alan Flowers has been involved in scientific and humanitarian exchanges with Belarusian academics. He has recently taken part in a youth summer camp of the European Youth Parliament in Belarus.

Last week Belarus closed the offices of Russian broadcasting company VGTRK in connection with a VGTRK report on a protest rally against Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko. Belarus called the report "improper." [text revised by the Editor]

*Source: BelaPan; August 3, 2004; www.naviny.by*

## **8. Turkey and Belarus Sign Security Cooperation Agreement**

Turkish Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu and Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov of Belarus signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on security cooperation in Minsk on Wednesday.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Aksu said that Turkey was the first country that recognized independence of Belarus, and bilateral relations had been improved in last 12 years.

Aksu said that the "Cooperation Agreement in Fight Against International Organized Crimes, International Illicit Drug Trafficking and International Terrorism" signed in Ankara on July 25, 1996 constituted the security dimension of bilateral relations which were at a very good level, recalling that security authorities of Turkey and Belarus had met for five times under this agreement to hold joint commission meetings.

*Source: Turkish Press; July 29, 2004; www.turkishpress.com*

## **9. Israel to Reopen Embassy in Belarus**

Israeli embassy in Belarus will reopen within a month and Zeev Ben Arie has been appointed ambassador.

The announcement, which came this week from the Belarusian Embassy in Tel Aviv, was confirmed Wednesday by Foreign Ministry sources.

The Israeli embassy in Minsk was closed last August due to budgetary constraints and a series of widespread cutbacks. Minsk took "reciprocal steps" by recalling its ambassador to Israel and canceling consulate services in its Tel Aviv office.

"The measures are still in effect and will continue to be so until the Israeli embassy is reopened in Minsk," Alexander Ponomarev, a Belarusian embassy spokesperson told Haaretz. Ponomarev added that Ben Arie has not yet been approved, but that the reopening of the Israeli embassy would lead to the "reestablishment of full-fledged diplomatic relations" between the two countries.

*Source: Daphna Berman, Haaretz Daily; July 28, 2004; www.haaretzdaily.com*

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **10. Closure of Russia TV in Minsk Runs Counter to Union Relations**

The decision of Belarusian authorities to close the office of the second channel of Russian television in Minsk "runs counter to the union nature of relations between our countries and is an infringement on the freedom of speech," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Friday.

The ministry said the Charge d' Affaires ad interim of Belarus in Moscow was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry and handed a note in connection with the Minsk decision to terminate the activity of the news bureau of the All-Russian State Television and Radio Company (VGTRK).

"The Russian side demands ensuring the possibility of a soonest resumption of the activity of the Russian television company," the Russian Foreign Ministry Stressed.

*Source: Itar-Tass; July 30, 2004; www.tass.ru*

## **11. OSCE Expresses Grave Concern Over Closure of European Humanities University**

The Head of the OSCE Office in Minsk, Ambassador Eberhard Heyken, has expressed his grave concern over the closure of the European Humanities University (EHU) in Minsk, which yesterday led to a protest by several hundred students.

"The liquidation of the EHU contradicts the basic principles of the OSCE, which is committed to international co-operation, academic freedom and tolerance" said Dr. Heyken in the Belarusian capital.

His reaction came to an announcement on 27 July by the Minister of Education of Belarus, Alexander Radkov, annulling the University's licence, which had been renewed in May 2004. This was the final step in a series of measures undertaken by the Belarusian authorities against the University since January of this year.

The crisis around the University accelerated in the last two weeks as the Education Minister repeated a demand for the immediate resignation of Professor Anatoliy Mikhailov from his position of Rector of the EHU on 19 July.

Two days later, on 21 July, the EHU received a letter from the Presidential Administration which notified the EHU on termination of rent of the academic building and demanded that it vacate the building before 5 August.

The OSCE Office in Minsk is directly affected by the closure of the EHU. It contributes with its activities to the functioning of a Centre for European and Transatlantic Studies" (CETAS) project, established in 2000 in the framework of the European Commission/OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Programme on Belarus.

*Source: OSCE; July 29, 2004; [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org)*

## **12. Belarusian Musicians Deprived of Airtime**

Belarusian radio stations are not allowed to broadcast the bands that participated in the rally on July 21. According to an unofficial information from the first-hand sources, the audience of the First Belarusian Radio Channel, Stalitsa Radio and few non-governmental stations won't be able to listen to the bands Palats, N.R.M., Pomidorov Zet, Drum Ecstasy and Neuro Dubel. Nevertheless the Ministry of Information claims that there is no official document banning the broadcast of the above bands.

However, the Belarusian Association of Journalists and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper gained the information that some state-owned and private radio stations received a verbal recommendation to exclude the above-mentioned bands from the broadcast.

The leader of N.R.M and Zet bands Ljavn Volsky thinks that by depriving the musicians of air particular bureaucrats are trying to mount a career ladder. At the same time, Mr. Volsky wonders why the commercial and non-governmental radio stations obey the instruction. The musician thinks that by fulfilling the orders of the kind private radios will bury themselves.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; August 3, 2004; [www.baj.ru](http://www.baj.ru)*

## **BUSINESS**

### **13. Belarus National Bank Issues List of Terror Suspects**

The Belarusian National Bank has provided all of the country's banks with an extended list of people or organizations linked to terrorism or suspected of having ties to al Qaeda and the Taliban, which it has received from the country's Foreign Ministry.

The extended list was compiled by the UN Security Council's sanctions committee and includes 143 people, one Afghan bank linked to the Taliban, as well as 103 organizations and 162 people linked to al-Qaeda, the National Bank's information department told Interfax.

*Source: Interfax; August 4, 2004; www.interfax.ru*

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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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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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