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Note by the Editor: Due to staff vacations, *Belarus Update* will be put on hold for the last two weeks of August and will resume publication on September 1. We apologize for the temporary suspension.

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ELECTION NEWS

1. Analysis and Preliminary Conclusions of the Parliamentary Election

The Election of deputies of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus was announced by Ordinance of the President of the Republic of Belarus # 332 of July 14, 2004. October 17, 2004 was determined the date of the election. The social and political situation before and after the announcement of the election, in 2003 and the first half of 2004 remained as complicated as in the previous years. The regime continued to pursue the policy of establishing full control over the society, allowing no reforms which could make the social and political life of the country more democratic.

In 2003 the authorities increased the pressure on non-governmental organizations. In the course of 2003 and in the first half of 2004 the Ministry of Justice continued to initiate legal processes to close down NGOs. As the result of the action designed by the authorities, more than 50 NGOs were shut down by courts. It was typical that the authorities primarily shut down the most active NGOs, which took part in previous elections: either in election observation or mobilization campaigns.

In the end of 2003 and the first half of 2004 the authorities continued to prosecute (administratively and criminally) public and political activists. During the last 6 months (January – July 2004) the authorities brought 10 new politically-motivated criminal charges. Activists of political parties, NGOs, human rights organizations, youth and trade union movements became victims of politically-motivated persecution.

During the whole period there were numerous cases of administrative detention of NGO and political party activists. Only on July 21, 2004 the police detained more than 100 people in Vitebsk and Minsk; 15 of them were sentenced to different terms of administrative arrest.

Activists face increased pressure at their place of employment or studies. In 2004 we registered cases of KGB pressure on the activists of the youth independent movement. Some of them were excluded from educational institutions and fired from work.

Human rights organizations registered the cases of political figures and activists being beaten by unknown individuals.

In 2003 and the first half of 2004 the state national TV channel continued to broadcast documentaries and shows discrediting both individual political and public figures and political parties in general. In their turn, political parties had no access to state mass media and had no opportunity to refute libelous reports about them.

In 2004 the contract system, initiated by the authorities, has been introduced vigorously. Workers and state company employees were forced to sign short-term contracts. In the majority of cases, the contracts were signed for the term of 1 year. This system allows for high-level manipulation. Thus, members of election commissions can be easily manipulated, because most of them are employees of state-owned enterprises and institutions.

Despite the unfavorable social and political conditions, pro-democratic parties of Belarus made the decision to take an active part in the parliamentary election. The single party declaring a boycott was CCP BPF (Christian Conservative Party BPF). Several election blocs have been created: People's Coalition "Five Plus", European Coalition, Young Belarus, and Respublika parliamentary group.

However, in the end of 2003 the authorities made significant changes in the legal regulation of activities of political parties. The changes had a serious effect on further political campaigning. Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus # 20 of 11.09.2004 amended Decree of the

President of the Republic of Belarus # 2 of 26.01.1999 “About some measures to regulate activities of political parties, trade unions, and other non-governmental organizations”. Now associations (unions) of political parties are also subject to state registration. Respective alternations have been made to the Rules of processing documents in the application for state registration of political parties, trade unions, other NGOs, and of their organizational structures. The alternations were made by the Ruling of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus # 25 of 29.10.2003.

Meanwhile, the Law “About Political Parties” does not require state registration of associations (unions) of political parties. The Chamber of Representatives did not pass the new draft of this law before the election. It’s worth mentioning that neither Decree # 20, nor the Ruling of the Ministry of Justice contain the term “coalition”. In spite of that, in June and July 2004 the Ministry of Justice issued a warning to five political parties, which are members of the People’s Coalition Five Plus. The Ministry demanded from the People’s Coalition Five Plus to apply for registration in 30 days. Simultaneously, the Justice Ministry warned the political parties that any activity on behalf of unregistered organizations, including coalitions, is illegal.

In order to ground its position, the Justice Ministry referred not to the norms of the law, but to Ozhegov’s Explanatory Dictionary of Russian Language. That way they tried to prove that “coalition” corresponds to the term “association”, and thus, is subject to state registration.

In July 2004 the Justice Ministry has reinforced pressure on political parties, which are members of the People’s Coalition Five Plus. The Ministry initiated liquidation procedure of one of them, the Labor Party, just before the election was announced. On August 2, 2004 the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus ruled close down the Labor Party.

At the same time, numerous proposals and demands of the international community and Belarusian society to amend the Election Code in order to improve it did not get much reaction. Official representatives responded they had no time to do that and would not change the election rules several months before the election.

Thus, in the run-up to the election the authorities deliberately changed legal regulation of political party activities, and created “legal conditions” for pressure on the formed coalitions, keeping the opportunity to use that as a ground for closure of political parties.

Part II

President Lukashenka’s Position on Elections

Taking the power concentrated in the hands of the President into account, assessment of Pres. Lukashenka position on election is an important element of the election process assessment in Belarus. Alexander Lukashenka has a real possibility to influence the social and political processes in the country through the executive “vertical”, and is able to impact the work of the Central Commission for Elections and National Referendums by personal appointment of 50% of its members.

During the press conference on July 20, 2004, Lukashenka responded to the question about his influence on the composition of the next parliament: "There will be no pressure. But I will see how the local authorities follow my instruction: 30% of the incumbent deputies must be in the next parliament, in order to ensure continuity and stability of the legislative power. Do I have to worry about that? Yes, I do. I gave a commission that women should make up no less than 30, up to 40% in the new parliament. Is that bad, or uncivilized?" During the same press-conference Alexander Lukashenka outlined his attitude to the pro-democratic opposition: "People will discern betrayers, renegades and those who are wolves in sheep's clothing. If people don't do it themselves, we will help them to do so".

July 27, 2004, speaking at the special meeting on the issues of preparation and holding the election, Alexander Lukashenka continued to elaborate upon his sense of the oncoming election process. In the presence of representatives of the Central Commission, representatives of the President's office and executive power, who will be responsible for holding the election, as well as representatives of the official media Lukashenka repeated his requirements to the composition of the future parliament. He pointed out that "not less than 30% of people's representatives who are already experienced in law-making" should become members of the new parliament. He stressed: "We are obliged to keep the most constructive part of the deputies of the present convocation". Besides, "women, youth, and veterans must take a decent place in the parliament".

A. Lukashenka believes that "the legislative body of the next convocation will be the most active and the most capable of successfully solving the crucial tasks on the new stage of the country development, a single team of all branches of state power".

Another message of Mr. Lukashenka about desirability of one-round elections was quite of interest as well: "In no circumstances should we get involved in some additional rounds, because this is money, this is losing attention, and this is losses in the economy".

Again, when characterizing representatives of the pro-democratic opposition and their possible participation in the election, A. Lukashenka clearly outlined the position of the executive authorities in the election process: "People should be told exactly, who is who... We cannot let the processes develop as they might. The authorities must actively influence all of these issues, in order not to allow anarchy and destabilization of the situation in the country... The unbridled and destructive opposition does not have support from our society and will hardly get support from the people in the oncoming election".

Evaluating the speech, representatives of 5 pro-democratic political parties and influential NGOs signed a statement, which says: "The authorities have determined in public, what categories of the population and in what ratio should get to the Chamber of Representatives... The authorities have already made the decision who personally deserves being a deputy, and who shouldn't be let to the Chamber of Representatives, no matter they enjoy voters' support. This is the real attitude of the authorities to voters and citizens of Belarus. It is disrespectful and cynical".

It should be pointed out, that the executive presidential vertical takes directions of A. Lukashenka

as an order for execution. Every official on the national and local level and their work efficiency will be evaluated by their ability to execute the directions. This is what their further career depends on. That is why there is no doubt that the presidential vertical will do everything to carry out the instructions regardless of the election legislation and the fact that they are contributing to non-transparency and non-fairness of the election.

Obviously, the executive authorities do not perceive the democratic opposition as a political and social partner worth of respect. Through President A. Lukashenka they call its representatives “betrayers and renegades”, creating an extremely negative image of the opposition in the Belarusian society.

And again during his speech Lukashenka stressed his vision of the parliament as a dependent branch of power, which should exist in “a single team of all branches of state power”.

Thus, analyzing speeches of A. Lukashenka during the press- conference and the special meeting on the issue of elections, we point out an extraordinarily high level of assumed interference of the executive authorities with the election process (direction to carry out the elections in one round); and in composition of the next parliament (indication of the percentage of deputies who “must” stay in parliament and the percentage ratio of deputies by age and gender). Such “parameters” of the next parliament can be achieved only through full usage of the administrative resource, strict control over the election commissions, falsification and other kinds of abuse by the executive authorities in the course of the election.

Part III

Legal Regulation of the Election

All hopes of the Belarusian democratic community for democratization of the Belarusian election legislation before the parliamentary election were in vain. The ODIHR/OSCE recommendations, given after the elections in 2000 and 2001, have not been implemented. Members of the Respublika parliamentary group managed to introduce the draft law with amendments to the Election Code to the parliament. However, the proposal was voted out. The deputies made their decision in spite of the termless hunger-strike of MPs V. Fralou, U. Parfianovich, S. Skrabets, and several activists of democratic parties.

In July 2004 the OSCE and the official representative of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus MP Mikhail Arda signed the Declaration about the parliamentary election. In the Declaration the Belarusian authorities declared their intention to hold democratic and transparent election according to the standards, worked out by the OSCE. However, it should be pointed out that the signed document was of the declarative nature and did not contain obligations for the Belarusian side.

Thus, the election of the deputies to the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly will be regulated by the current Election Code of the Republic of Belarus and the Rulings of the Central Commission.

According to Art 33 of the Election Code of the Republic of Belarus, the Central Commission has the right to issue Rulings with the purpose to explain application of certain articles of the Election Code of the Republic of Belarus.

On the July 15, 2004 session the Central Commission passed 11 Rulings, and adopted methodical recommendations "Organizational and legal issues of the work of district election commissions for election of deputies to the Chamber of Representatives of the Republic of Belarus" and "Organizational and legal issues of the work of divisional election commissions for election of deputies to the Chamber of Representatives of the Republic of Belarus". It should be pointed out that the majority of the Central Commission Rulings was placed on the CC web-site with a delay. The methodical recommendations on the work of divisional election commissions did not appear on the Central Commission web-site at all.

As for the Rulings of the Central Commission, they did not make any new explanations on organization and holding of the election process in comparison to the previous elections.

Just as previously, divisional and district election commissions do not have individual stamps. According to the Central Commission Ruling # 17 of 15.07.2004, district commissions are to use the stamps of district, city (cities of oblast subordination), local administrations (in the cities with district division). According to the same Ruling, divisional election commissions are to use the stamps produced during the previous elections. Ballot boxes will stay the same: collapsible wooden boxes with folding lids.

As for the procedure of nominating observers to polling stations, the Central Commission Ruling # 13 of 15.07.2004 improved the situation in comparison with the previous local elections and resumed the procedure which regulated this issue during the presidential election-2001. According to the Ruling, national-level bodies of political parties and non-governmental organizations have the right to nominate observers to sessions of election commissions of all levels and to polling stations.

Methodical recommendations "Organizational and legal issues of the work of district election commissions for election of deputies to the Chamber of Representatives of the Republic of Belarus", approved by Central Commission Ruling # 5 of 20.05.2004 contain recommendations for the work of election commissions on all major stages of the election campaign:

Status and powers of district election commission members;

Creation of election districts;

Nomination and registration of candidates to the Chamber of Representatives;

Campaigning;

Recording voting results in a district; etc.

It should be pointed out that, unlike in the previous election, the Central Commission made those recommendations available for public. At the same time, thorough examination of the Central Commission recommendations indicates that some of the provisions might lead to certain difficulties in holding the election.

Thus, the chapter of recommendations regulating the order of registration of an initiative group of citizens for nominating a candidate has the provision that a commission should check for Belarusian citizenship of every initiative group member before registering the group. At the same time, it is not explained how they should do the check-up. In some election districts, in particular, in Vitebsk-Horki district #17, application documents of one of the contenders were turned down on the ground that he failed to bring passports of all initiative group members.

The chapter of recommendations regulating the order of filling in the subscription lists gives an incorrect formulation of the rules to fill in the “date of birth” column. The recommendations say: “As for the voters who turned 18 this year, day, month, and year of birth should be indicated; as for other voters, only the year of birth may be indicated”. Meanwhile, there is no indication, if these data can be abbreviated, there is no model given. At the same time, the part of the chapter which explains the order of filling in the “date of voter’s signature” column indicates, that the day, month, and year of putting a signature may be written in full or shortened version. There is a model of doing so: 10 August 2004, or 10.08.2004, or 10.08.04.

In practice it might lead to incorrect filling of the “date of birth” column. Members of initiative groups might fill it in by analogy with the “date of voter’s signature” column, which could lead to invalidation of a signature.

The chapter of the methodical recommendations regulating production of campaign posters has the provision which directly contradicts the Election Code. This chapter states that in order to produce campaign posters candidates are to use only the means from the state budget and off-budget fund, created by the Central Commission. It does not allow using the means of candidates, proxies, political parties, other non-governmental organizations, institutions and citizens. At the same time, Art 45 part 8 of the Election Code says that from the moment an appropriate commission registers a candidate political parties, working bodies, citizens who nominated candidates, and candidates have the right to produce campaign posters, slogans, statements, inscriptions, leaflets, and photo-materials (posters).

As for methodical recommendations “Organizational and legal issues of the work of divisional election commissions for election of deputies to the Chamber of Representatives of the Republic of Belarus”, the issues of maintenance of ballot papers and ballot boxes during the early vote are not explained.

Special attention should be paid to the chapter of recommendations regulating the vote count procedure at a polling station. The procedure of the report on the results of counting the votes in three ballot boxes (early voting box, mobile ballot box, and Election Day ballot box) is described in the following way:

“The data about the number of ballot papers in each of the above-mentioned ballot boxes, and the results of vote count should be reflected in the report of the meeting of the divisional election commission. The report on voting results drawn up under the model set up by the Central Commission indicates the aggregate result of voting”.

Thus, divisional commissions will work with two reports: report of the meeting of the divisional commission, and the report on the voting results, which is drawn up under the model set up by the Central Commission.

This contradicts the requirements of Art 55 of the Election Code. It provides for a single report, which should be posted up immediately after its completion for anyone to find out the results of the election. According to the Central Commission recommendations, only one report (completed under its model) is to be posted up. Recommendations do not oblige divisional commissions to make the “report of the commission meeting” available for public.

That means that in practice observers and candidates’ proxies will not be able to see these reports. Correspondingly, they will not be able to find out the results of vote count of separate votes (early voting, home voting, and Election Day voting). That is because the report filled in according to the model of the Central Commission indicates only the aggregate voting results.

Recommendations also do not say where the first report (of the commission’s meeting) should be attached. There is no regulation whether this report should be delivered to district commissions. There is no instruction to keep it or to deliver it to a district commission together with other materials. These circumstances create additional possibilities for falsification of voting results at a polling station.

According to Art 21 of the Election Code, lists of citizens are available for public 15 days before the election. Citizens are ensured the possibility to familiarize themselves with the lists and check their correctness at a polling station.

However, methodical recommendations “Organizational and legal issues of the work of divisional election commissions for election of deputies to the Chamber of Representatives of the Republic of Belarus”, approved by the Central Commission, made serious restrictions to the right of voters to see voters’ lists, and created the possibility to conceal the real number of voters, registered at a polling station, from observers and general public. The procedure of familiarization with voters’ lists is described in the recommendations in the following way: a divisional commission provides a voter with a possibility to check the fact that he/she is included in the voters’ list and to correct the data about them and their family members. At the same time it is not allowed to hand the whole list or some parts of the list to a voter. The process of familiarization should be carried out by members of divisional election commission who should fulfill the requirement of keeping voters’ lists in safety. Proceeding from this explanation, one might come to the conclusion that lists of voters will not be posted up and not be available for public. By this explanation the recommendations go beyond Art 21 of the Election Code and contradict the principle of transparency of the election process. It makes the information about the number of registered voters unavailable for citizens, representatives of political parties, and NGOs.

Lists of citizens, who have the right to participate in the election, are re-defined by divisional election commissions before each election round. In conjunction with the Central Commission recommendations, concealment of the number of voters at a polling station will provide divisional commissions with additional possibilities to manipulate the lists of voters and make uncontrolled

changes in the number of voters. Obviously, that creates further possibilities to falsify the voting results.

Part IV

Formation of District Election Commissions

In order for the election to the Chamber of Representatives to take place, 110 election districts have been created.

Under the schedule of organizational events to prepare and hold the parliamentary election, approved by the Central Commission, an average number of voters at an election district was to be determined no later than June 1, 2004. According to the Central Commission Ruling # 4 of May 20, 2004, the average number of voters at a district is 64 585.

The Central Commission Ruling # 11 of July 15, 2004 defined the election districts at the suggestion of oblast executive committees and Minsk city executive committee. According to Art 15 of the Election Code of the Republic of Belarus, the number of voters at a district should not be at over 10 % variance with the average number of voters. Meanwhile, at some of the formed election districts the number of votes is more than 10% less than the average. For instance, Hlybokaye election district # 22 (57 300 voters); Miory election district (57 400 voters); Pastavy election district # 30 (57 500 voters); Talachyn election district # 31 (56 200 voters); and Buda-Kashalova election district # 40 (57 225 voters).

Nomination of representatives to district election commissions began from the moment when the list of election districts was published and ended on July 30, 2004.

The procedure of nominating representatives to district election commission is regulated by Art 35 of the Election Code. The Central Commission did not issue any rulings on that issue. Samples of documents for nominating representatives of political parties, non-governmental organizations and by signature collection, adopted by the Central Commission, were published on its official web-site. However, it was done with a delay, several days after the beginning of the nomination process.

According to Art 35 of the Election Code, political parties, non-governmental organizations, working bodies of organizations or their structural divisions, as well as citizens by application can nominate only one representative to an appropriate district election commission.

National-level governing bodies of political parties have the right to nominate their representatives to become members of district election commissions. Political parties are to nominate their representatives at sessions of their governing bodies. 100 citizens living in a district have the right to nominate their representative to a district election commission by application.

District commissions were formed by the Presidiums of oblast and Minsk city councils and oblast and Minsk city executive committees.

It's worth mentioning that neither the Election Code, nor the Central Commission Rulings contain the criteria for selection of representatives to the commissions. The Election Code does not oblige the bodies forming the commissions to call individuals who applied for membership in a commission to their meetings, to respond in a written form, or to carry out interviews with contenders, etc.

The inquiry of U. Navasiad, member of the Chamber of Representatives, to the Central Commission with the request to give official explanation of the criteria for selecting committee members received no response. The reason for that was that "the Central Commission lacks the power to give extended explanation of the norms of the election legislation".

Meanwhile, during one of the press-conferences head of the Central Commission Lidya Yarmoshyna determined her own criteria to the principle of forming election commissions. In particular, she mentioned she was not the supporter of the first-come, first-served principle. According to L. Yarmoshyna, individuals with higher education in law and experience of working in election commissions are to be the most welcome. In spite of the fact that formally the Central Commission has no relation to the process of forming election commissions, these words could serve as a certain criteria for selecting candidates to commissions.

Political parties and non-governmental organization have actively nominated their members to the district commissions. Below you will find the table of members of pro-democratic political parties, nominated and admitted to the commissions.

BPF (nominated: 50)

Included:

Minsk City 1

Minsk oblast 0

Brest oblast 1

Vitebsk oblast 0

Homel oblast 0

Hrodna oblast 0

Mahilow oblast 0

UCP (nominated: 61)

Included:

Minsk City 0

Minsk oblast 0

Brest oblast 1

Vitebsk oblast 1

Homel oblast 3

Hrodna oblast 0

Mahilow oblast 0

BSDH (nominated: 23)

Minsk City 0
Minsk oblast 0
Brest oblast 0
Vitebsk oblast 0
Homel oblast 0
Hrodna oblast 0
Mahilow oblast 0

PCB (nominated: 78)

Minsk City 4
Minsk oblast 0
Brest oblast 4
Vitebsk oblast 6
Homel oblast 5
Hrodna oblast 0
Mahilow oblast 0

Labor Party (nominated: 26)

Minsk City 0
Minsk oblast 0
Brest oblast 0
Vitebsk oblast 0
Homel oblast 0
Hrodna oblast 0
Mahilow oblast 0

BSDP(NH) (nominated: 80)

Minsk City 0
Minsk oblast 0
Brest oblast 1
Vitebsk oblast 1
Homel oblast 0
Hrodna oblast 0
Mahilow oblast 0

The total number of candidates nominated by democratic parties to district election commissions was 318. Only 20 people became members of district election commissions.

Pro-democratic opposition parties represent 2 % of the election commissions. Together with representatives of pro-governmental parties, the number of representatives of political parties is a little over 7 %. Representatives of non-governmental organizations make up 20% of the total number of district commission members. The overwhelming majority of them are the representatives of pro-governmental NGOs (Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM), Federation of Trade Unions, Union of Veterans of Afghanistan, etc.). BRSM is represented by 94 people in 110 election districts, Federation of Trade Unions – 80, Union of Veterans – 66, Belarusian Union of Women – 28. Meanwhile, representatives of such large national NGOs such as BPF “Adradzhennie” (35 people nominated, 2 got in), Belarusian Helsinki Committee (11 nominated, 1 got in) were practically not included in the commissions.

Thus, already at the stage of forming district commissions the authorities create the conditions for full control over the election process and possibilities for manipulation and falsification.

The majority of commission members were nominated by working bodies of state-owned enterprises and institutions (28.5%), and by citizens (33.4%). At the same time we should point out that in the majority of cases the official mass media when publishing the lists of commission members failed to indicate occupation of commission members. Out of 6 oblasts and Minsk city, the above-mentioned data were published only in 2 cases. We believe this is done with the goal to conceal the fact that the created district commissions are dependent on the structures of the executive power. The majority of commission members were nominated by citizens. However, just as during the previous elections, we observe the tendency, that chiefs of state organizations and institutions and representatives of local executive power get nominated by application of citizens. For example, the following people became members of district election commissions through nomination by citizens' application:

Barysau rural election district # 78 -- L. D. Belahurava (chief expert of the department for registration and distribution of public housing of Barysau city executive committee); M. V. Hurko (deputy head of correctional center # 14);

Lahoisk election district #82 – I. K. Babrouski (chief of Residence of the President of the Republic of Belarus “Aziorny”);

Salihorsk election district # 90 – L. U. Palchanka (engineer for labor protection and accident prevention at the education department of Salihorsk city executive committee);

Shchuchyn election district # 62 – I. Yu. Sakalouski (deputy head of Shchuchyn district executive committee); T. P. Sidor (head of the board for labor and social protection of Voranava district executive committee).

One could observe the same tendency in nomination by working bodies. For example, the following people were nominated to district election commissions by working bodies:

Zhodzina election district # 81 – A. E. Kurakou (head of Smalavichy district inspectorate of the Ministry for Taxes and Duties); T. F. Shapkouskaya (deputy head of Smalavichy district executive

committee);

Stoubtsy election district # 92 – A. V. Kavalenia (head of department for youth affairs of Uzda district executive committee); Ya. U. Kramko (head of department for housing and utility services of Stoubtsy district executive committee);

Navahradak election district # 59 – I. I. Korbal (chief legal adviser of Navahradak district executive committee), etc.

Composition of district election commissions by oblast:

1. Representatives of political parties: Brest -19; Vitebsk-13; Hrodna-4; Homel-16; Mahilou-4; Minsk-7; Minsk city-38;
2. Representatives of NGOs, trade unions: Brest-47; Vitebsk-51; Vitebsk--3; Homel-37; Mahilou-26; Minsk-34; Minsk city-71;
3. Representatives of the local self-government bodies, local authorities, state structures: Brest-33; Vitebsk-0; Hrodna-7; Homel-31; Mahilou-4; Minsk -34; Minsk city-32;
4. Representatives of working bodies of enterprises (incl. state-sponsored companies): Brest-70; Vitebsk-60; Hrodna-6; Homel-49; Mahilou-70; Minsk-41; Minsk city-53;
5. Commission members, nominated by citizens: Brest-55; Vitebsk-84; Hrodna-140; Homel-88; Mahilou-63; Minsk-105; Minsk city-40;

Total: Representatives of political parties-101; Representatives of NGOs, trade unions-269; Representatives of the local self-government bodies, local authorities, state structures-141; Representatives of working bodies of enterprises (incl. state-sponsored companies)-350; Commission members, nominated by citizens-574;

The total number of members of 110 district election commissions is 1 430 people.

The composition of the district election commissions was analyzed by the way of commission members' nomination. In the analysis we used the information published in the official mass media.

Information about representatives of political parties and non-governmental organizations applies to all political parties and NGOs, including pro-governmental parties, official trade unions, and state-run NGOs. Below you will find information about the number of seats representatives of political parties and NGOs got in district election commissions at every oblast:

Vitebsk:

Parties: PCB – 6, LDP-3, Patriotic Party-1, BSDP (NH) -1, UCP-1, CPB -1
Organizations: Veterans' Association -- 14; FTU – 13; BRSM – 15; "All-Belarusian United Cossacks" – 1; BPF "Adradzennie"-1; Belarusian Union of Women – 7.

Homel:

Parties: PCB – 5; CPB – 5; UCP – 3, LDP -- 3

Organizations: BRSM – 13, Veterans' Association – 12; FTU – 10; LKSB – 1, BPF "Adradzennie"-1

Minsk:

Parties: CPB – 4; LDP - 3

Organizations: FTU -11; BRSM -14; Veterans' Association – 6; Belarusian Union of Women – 2; Belarusian Red Cross Society – 1

Minsk city:

Parties: CPB –14; Social-Sports Party – 4; Agrarian Party – 4; LDP – 11; PCB – 4; BPF Party --1

Organizations: Belarusian Union of Women – 17; BRSM – 18; Veterans' Association –14; FTU – 12; Belarusian Red Cross Society – 5; Belarusian Association of Parents with Many Children – 2; "Health – to Children" – 2; Belarusian Union of Veterans of War in Afghanistan – 1

Mahilou:

Parties: CPB -2, LDP -2

Organizations: BRSM -9, FTU -10, Veterans' Association -5, Belarusian Union of Veterans of War in Afghanistan -1, Belarusian Red Cross Society -1,

Brest:

Parties: LDP -5, CPB -8, PCB -3, BSDP (NH) -1, UCP -1, BPF -1,

Organizations: BRSM - 12, FTU -15, BHC -1, Veterans' Association -7, Belarusian Union of Women -12,

Hrodna:

Parties: CPB - 4

Organizations: Veterans' Association -3

In Hrodna oblast several ways of nomination were used simultaneously:

Nomination by a working body and by citizens' application;

By political parties or NGOs and by citizens' application;

By NGO, a working body, and by citizens' application.

The information was published in the official newspaper Hrodzenskaya Prauda. Possibly, that kind of double nomination was used also in other oblasts of the country. In the above mentioned analysis we took only one way of nomination into account (citizens' application).

Information about representatives of the local self-government and executive bodies who became members of election commissions includes only those commission members who were selected by respective Presidiums of oblasts Deputy Councils and executive committees.

First sessions of the created district commissions were to take place no later than August 5, 2004. District election commissions started their work since that day. However, the operation mode of election commissions causes a lot of complaints from election participants. In numerous cases district commissions refuse to accept applications for registration of initiative groups and lists of initiative group members. They grounded their refusal on the fact that under regulations

they had passed, they would start their work only on August 8. Besides that, the commissions referred to the schedule, approved by the Central Commission. The schedule says that candidates' nomination starts on August 8, 2004.

At the same time, recommendations for district commissions say, district commissions are to always have one person on duty with the following open hours for voters: Monday – Friday 10 a.m. – 7 p.m. (with the break at 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.); Saturday (10 a.m. – 2 p.m.). Refusal to accept applications for initiative group registration before August 8 contradicts Art 65 of the Election Code. It does not contain such term restrictions (an application and a list of initiative group members are to be submitted no later than 65 days before the election, i.e. no later than August 12).

Thus, district commissions have created artificial and illegal obstacles during registration of candidates' initiative groups, trying to restrain the beginning of signature collection campaigns.

Part V Conclusions

This analysis enables us to state:

1. The Belarusian authorities changed the legal regulation of the order of activities and procedure of registration of political parties just before the election. That step has significantly limited the capabilities of political parties during the election campaign.
2. The Belarusian authorities did not take any steps to democratize the election legislation of the country in order for the parliamentary elections to meet the principles of openness, publicity, and transparency.
3. The Belarusian authorities failed to take OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, worked out after the elections of 2000 and 2001, into account.
4. Massive failure to include representatives of democratic parties of Belarus to district election commissions allows concluding that the election process will be completely controlled by the executive authorities.
5. Mass propaganda in the official mass media just before the elections against the parties in opposition and individual citizens planning to run for the parliament is evidence of deliberately unequal conditions for candidates in the oncoming campaigning.
6. The methodical recommendations for election commissions, approved by the Central Commission, significantly limit the voters' rights and create extensive possibilities for falsification of the voting results.

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

2. Socialist International Concerned Over Closure of Belarusian Party of Labor

The Socialist International has taken interest in the circumstances surrounding the closure of the Belarusian Party of Labor (BPL), Nikolai Statkevich, chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada, a consultative member of the Socialist International (SI),

told BelaPAN.

According to Mr. Statkevich, he had phone talks with SI officials and they expressed concern over what had happened to the BPL. "We've also reported the case to our partners, the Social Democratic Parties of Germany, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania, as well as the Party of European Socialists, and they are ready to come out in support of the Belarusian Party of Labor," he said.

We realize that this is just the beginning of the Belarusian authorities' crackdown on political parties. Given this situation, it is our duty to display solidarity with the BPL, he added.

The Socialist International is a worldwide organization that unites more than 160 democratic, socialist and labor parties and organizations.

Source: BelaPan; August 9, 2004; www.naviny.by

3. Opposition Could be Outdone from the Start

On August 8 the nomination of Chamber of Representatives' candidates began. According to electoral legislation this can be done in three ways: by gathering one thousand signatures of citizens living in the given constituency, or from a political party or a labor collective with no less than three hundred workers.

District electoral commissions have already started registering initiative groups for nominating candidates. This stage of the campaign will go on until August 12, inclusive. Nomination of candidates will come to an end on September 6. Registration will go on from September 7 to September 16, after which registered applicants can begin their campaigns.

And thus we will soon see the faces of the election.

For example, the coalition "Five Plus" will already nominate 220 candidates on August 11. Of these, 110 will be the principle candidates and another 110 will be substitutes in case the first group is not registered.

And the opposition does not doubt that this will be a mass phenomenon. This conclusion was arrived at based on the experience of the last elections to local councils. And also from the fact that there so few representatives from opposition parties in the district electoral commissions: only a few dozen out of 1430 commission members in the country.

The exclusion of a large percentage of the opposition nominated candidates at an early stage would obviously allow the opposition an occasion to accuse the authorities of undemocratic methods.

However this may be better for the opposition's image. It would be much worse if a large percentage of the opposition lose in the first round of elections. To recall, the president has stated

his wishes to carry them out in one round, that is, very fast, in order to economize public funds. And, probably, in order to talk about the elegant victories of the administration's candidates.

Political scientist Vitaly Silitsky says that the problem of registering candidates from opposition parties really exists, that is why the tactics of putting forward as many people as possible is quite reasonable.

However there is also another problem, recognition and, most importantly, the nominated candidates' ability to compete. Will quantity translate into quality?

According to an expert from *Belorusskie Novosti*, the opposition has not been a part of public politics for 8 years (if we don't count presidential elections), that is why the possibility of its representatives becoming deputies is not so high, "except for ten or twenty young people who have proved themselves at local elections."

It will be difficult for opposition candidates to compete against the creatures of authority. According to Vitaly Silitsky, the specificity of the situation of our parliamentary elections, as with local elections, "is the problem of lightbulbs in entranceways and the laying of asphalt. And the opposition is not engaged in this."

For once there is a peaceful socio-economic situation in our country. People are indifferent to themes traditionally presented by the Belarusian opposition. Only an insignificant portion of the public will be affected by them. And on top of that society is silent on these issues.

So the opposition can already start to count its wounds, and count its casualties.

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

4. Minsk Bans Four U.S. Senators from Travel to Belarus

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry has refused to issue visas to four U.S. senators, including John McCain (Republican, Arizona), who planned to visit Belarus later this month, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 11 August. "The time of the visit proposed by the American side did not satisfy us," Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Savinykh told RFE/RL. "We have proposed to reschedule the visit for a later date, namely -- after the end of election campaigns in both Belarus and the United States." "I am disappointed -- but frankly not surprised -- by the latest antidemocratic action by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka of Belarus," McCain said in a statement. "Because he feared that we might criticize his totalitarian rule, Mr. Lukashenka refused us visas, rejected our visit, and denied us entry into the country." McCain is one of the most vigorous advocates of Belarus's democratization in the U.S. Congress.

Source: Jan Maksymiuk, RFE-RL; August 12, 2004; www.rferl.org/newsline

DOMESTIC & REGIONAL

5. Lukashenko Approves Belarus-Russia Union Budget for 2004

Belarusian President Aleksand Lukashenko on Friday okayed the budget of the Russia-Belarus Union for 2004. The budget was presented to Lukashenko by Union secretary Pavel Borodin. He said in particular that budget implementation would improve.

While in the first years of the Union it was implemented by 60-70 percent, last year implementation was 85 percent. The draft budget for 2004 was approved by the governments of the two countries and all concerned ministries and agencies.

Russian contribution to the budget is 1.6 billion Russian rubles. Belarus will provide about 900 million Russian rubles. With credit and interest payments, the overall budget will exceed three billion Russian rubles. The funds will be used to finance industrial, military-technical and social programs. [text revised by the Editor]

Source: Itar-Tass; August 7, 2004; www.tass.ru

6. Mikhail Marynich's Interrogation

The subsequent interrogation of well-known political figure Mikhail Maryinich was carried out on August 6 in a KGB investigatory cell.

The new detective in the investigatory group Boris Ragimov, known for his participation in the Pavel Sheremet case, led the questioning.

After the interrogation both Marynich and his lawyer Vera Stremkovskaya applied for Ragimov's removal.

As Stremkovskaya stated to BelaPAN, the interrogation stretched beyond the charges against Marynich. Ragimov was interested in the actions of public organizations such as the Belarusian Association of Business Initiative, office equipment, the authorized duties of members of the organization, and he also repeated questions from earlier interrogations. Both Marynich and his lawyer found the inspector's behavior to be another attempt at drawing out the investigation. Because of this, an application for his removal was made.

A special commission must make decision on this application by August 10. At the same time, on August 5, Belarusian Prosecutor General Viktor Sheiman rejected the petition to change preventive punishment of Marynich. Ivan Sukhoverko, an employee of the public prosecutor of the Republic, informed Vera Stremkovskaya of this decision. As he said, there is "no basis" for releasing Marynich, BelaPAN reported.

Source: Beloruskaya Delovaya Gazeta; August 9, 2004; www.bdg.by

INTERNATIONAL

7. Greek Visa Denial to Belarusian Sport Minister Not Yet Settled

The question of Greek visa denial to the Belarusian sport minister has not yet been resolved, Theophilos Zafirakos of the press service of the Greek Foreign Ministry told RIA Novosti on Friday.

"The question is not clear yet. The corresponding services of our ministry are now working on it", Zafirakos said.

RIA Novosti learned on Friday from the Sport and Tourism Ministry of Belarus that its Foreign Ministry has not yet got the official papers on the refusal of visa to Sport Minister Yuri Sivakov. He is going to lead the Belarusian delegation at the Olympics.

"Yuri Sivakov is going to the Greek Olympics as a member of the team and, in this case, visa plays no role. He only needs accreditation, which he has", said Anatoli Artemyev, press secretary of the Belarusian Sport and Tourism Ministry. According to him, Sivakov is to go to Athens on August 12.

Earlier, some Western media said, referring to the Greek Foreign Ministry, that the issue of entry visa to Greece was denied to Sivakov.

"The spreading of such rumors on the eve of such an important international event as the Olympic Games is impermissible", Ruslan Yesin, deputy head of the information board of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, told RIA Novosti. "The position of Minsk is that the Belarusian team has been filed for the Olympic Games and it will take part", he noted.

Fifty nine Belarusian athletes from 22 sports have been filed. At the last Olympic Games in Sydney Belarus won 17 medals (3 gold, 3 silver, 11 bronze). Commenting on the statement of the Belarusian Sport and Tourism Ministry that the Belarusian minister needs no visa because he has the Olympic accreditation, the Greek diplomat noted: "It is the opinion of the Belarusian side. Anywhere, the Foreign Ministry of Greece will take a decision".

Yuri Sivakov, holding the post of the interior minister before last January, is called "one of the key figures" in the special report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in connection with the disappearing of people in Belarus [for complete report, visit www.belarusupdate.org- Ed.]

On Friday The Netherlands, the EU chair country, published a statement, in which the presence of the Belarusian minister at the Olympic Games is called wholly "out of place" and urged his keeping away from the momentous sport event.

Source: RIA Novosti; August 6, 2004; www.rian.ru

8. EU Poised to Ban Belarus Sports Minister Ahead of Olympic

The European Union was preparing to impose a visa ban on the Belarusian minister of sport and tourism and prevent him attending the Olympics because of his alleged involvement in human rights abuses, Greece's foreign ministry said Thursday. It was not clear if Yuri Sivakov was

planning to travel to Athens for the Aug. 13-29 games to accompanying his country's 181 Olympic athletes. Sivakov and Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko have been implicated in the disappearances of prominent opposition political figures.

Foreign ministry spokesman Giorgos Koumoutsakos said an announcement on the visa ban could come from the EU's Dutch presidency Friday. The EU's political and security committee was discussing the issue in Brussels, he said.

The Netherlands currently holds the EU's rotating six-month presidency.

"According to our information, the committee has decided to begin the procedures to issue a ban on visas," Koumoutsakos said. "We have been informed that there will soon be an announcement from the Dutch presidency."

A spokeswoman for the Dutch presidency said EU nations agreed Sivakov should not travel to Greece to attend the Olympics and were considering practical measures Thursday to keep him out.

"EU members consider it undesirable because of his background," Carola Baller said.

She referred to a report of the Council of Europe criticizing the human rights situation in Belarus.

"It is not suitable for him to travel there," Baller said. "Now we are looking into how to prevent him from coming."

On April 29, the Council of Europe said that political pressure, including sanctions, should be applied against Belarus in connection with the suspicious disappearances of four men including two prominent opposition figures. The Council's parliamentary assembly had earlier called for a criminal investigation to be launched into the alleged involvement of senior Belarusian officials into the disappearances in 1999 and 2000. The missing include a former interior minister and a senior legislator.

The assembly also called for a criminal probe to be launched against Sivakov, who was then interior minister. The Council of Europe, formed in 1949, monitors standards of human rights and democracy in 43 countries, including Russia and Turkey.

Source: Patrick Quinn, Associated Press; August 6, 2004; www.ap.org

9. Irina Krasovskaya Meets Condoleezza Rice

Dr. Irina Krasovskaya, President of the We Remember Foundation, member of the European Coalition Free Belarus, whose husband, businessman and public figure Anatoly Krasovsky disappeared without a trace in 1999, met with US National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice in Dr. Rice's office in the West Wing of the White House on August 6. Irina Krasovskaya had the opportunity to brief Dr. Rice on the latest developments in the search for justice for the

relatives of political opposition leaders and journalists who have disappeared in Belarus, on the impact of her meetings with President George W. Bush and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder at the NATO Summit, and on the July 21st demonstration in Minsk against the Lukashenko regime.

Dr. Rice expressed her support and sympathy for the relatives of the disappeared leaders. Dr. Rice also expressed her strong support for the peaceful protestors who were beaten and jailed at the July 21st demonstrations and her solidarity with all those who are fighting for freedom and democracy in Belarus. Senior NSC officials declined comment on the substance of discussions, describing their conversation as a "personal meeting" between the two women.

Friday's meeting with Dr. Rice was the culmination of a week of meetings in Washington for Irina Krasovskaya which included discussions with NSC Senior Director for Europe and Eurasia Ambassador Daniel Fried, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Tefft and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy and Human Rights Michael Kozak. Earlier in the week, Dr. Krasovskaya joined Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili for a working dinner on democratic change and reform.

Source: Charter 97; August 8, 2004; www.charter97.org

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

10. Belarusian Opposition Paper Resumes Publication

The Belarusian opposition newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* has resumed publication. An amount of money equivalent to 65 million Belarusian rubles has been deposited in the newspaper's account in a Lithuanian bank so that the paper can pay court-imposed fines, the First National TV Channel reported. Court marshals from Minsk's Leninsky District Court suspended the publication of the newspaper and dispersed its assets last week.

"The court has ruled that the paper must pay 15 million Belarusian rubles to Sergei Atroshchenko, the editor-in-chief of the independent *Obozrevatel* weekly, for moral damage caused by libelous reports on him," a court official said.

"The court decided earlier that the paper must pay 50 million Belarusian rubles for libelous reports on Yegor Rybakov, former chairman of the Belarussian National TV and Radio Company, who is currently in police custody," he said.

Source: Interfax; August 9, 2004; www.interfax.ru

11. Commentary: If a Newspaper Does Not Give In, It Gets Destroyed?

Bailiffs have seized the property of the newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*. According to a court decision, the editorial office must pay 15 million rubles in compensation to Sergei Atroschenko, a businessman and founder of the newspaper *Obozrevatel* and 50 million rubles to Igor Rybakov,

former head of Belteleradiokompanii. In all, including legal costs, *Narodnaya Volya* will have to pay 67 million rubles, i.e. more than 30,000 dollars.

The bailiffs seized practically everything in the editorial office, from computers to office desks. They can begin selling the property (through pawn shops, for example) if the editorial office does not pay the indemnification within ten days.

On August 5, readers did not receive the latest issue since the printing house Krasnaya Zvezda refused to print the circulation. The bailiffs' actions served as the basis for this refusal.

It would seem that this whole story has no relation to politics, that it is just a normal "ownership disputes," as it is called in Russia. However certain instances can testify to the fact that there is an interested party. In particular, *Narodnaya Volya's* editorial employees found the bailiffs' and other individuals' actions rather strange. For example, *Narodnaya Volya's* assistant editor-in-chief Ales Silich is even questioning the legality of these actions. "The bailiffs were at the editorial offices on Monday and Tuesday concerning Rybakov's claims. This is the largest sum and there is still time for us to appeal this judgement. Aside from this bailiffs generally allow ten days for collecting money and for payment of the penalty, but this was not granted in our case. And it is completely unbelievable that bailiffs can tell the printing house which newspapers it should print and which it cannot. Even on the basis of the act of seizure of property and freezing of accounts, it seems obvious to me that the refusal to print a newspaper is not up to bailiffs.

On August 5, *Narodnaya Volya's* editor-in-chief Yosif Seredich took letters requesting the resumption of the newspaper's printing around to official channels, from the presidential Administration to the Ministry of Information.

The newspaper's accounts were frozen and the newspapers' workers were not able to receive their salaries, which were due on August 5. According to Ales Silich, the editorial staff is ready to work without pay and hopes to resume printing the newspaper under any conditions. "We can work from home, bring in our material on disks, as we have done before. The important thing is to print the newspaper. Of course we are considering printing *Narodnaya Volya* abroad, as other publications have done, but this is not the optimal solution. One can print a weekly publication abroad, but it would be certain death for a daily publication. We would simply not be able to deliver it in time, we will lose out logistically.

On top of this, Ales Silich does exclude the possibility that both Belpochta (Belarusian Post), the current distributor of periodicals, and Belsoyuzpechat, which sells publications in kiosks will receive orders forbidding distribution of the newspaper. In that case *Narodnaya Volya* will cease existence as a daily newspaper.

Mikhail Pastukhov, a lawyer, provided his point of view on the events surrounding *Narodnaya Volya* in an interview with *Belorusskie Novosti*. First, in his opinion, "the pretext of refusing to print the publication because the paper on which *Narodnaya Volya* is to be printed has been seized" does not hold water. "Secondly, the judge has refused *Narodnaya Volya's* appeal to postpone the execution of the court order. The editor has filed a complaint regarding this refusal. The

complaint has not yet been considered and no response has been issued. For this reason, the newspaper cannot be until this is done.”

Mikhail Pastukhov believes that the “usual aspiration of certain powers to destroy *Narodnaya Volya*” is behind the bailiffs’ and printing house’s actions. “I believe that the firm desire to destroy the newspaper arose after the material printed on August 3. On that date, the issue of ‘major disappearances’ in Belarus was brought up again along with General Lopatik’s report testifying to the possible involvement of Belarusian high-level officials in these disappearances,” said Mikhail Pastukhov.

A couple of publications had been closed earlier as a result of libel lawsuits. For example, in 2002, Committee of State Control Chairman Anatoly Tozik’s lawsuit against *Nasha Svaboda* resulted in a fine that caused the publication to close down. In 1999, *Naviny* was closed after a lawsuit by the current Prosecutor General Viktor Sheiman.

And this is far from a complete necrology.

In Russia similar “ownership disputes” led to mass media’s falling under state control. In Belarus, where non-governmental socio-political publications can be counted on one’s fingers, there is apparently another method: if a newspaper does not give in, it is destroyed.”

Source: *Sergei Pulsha; BelaPAN; August 5, 2004; www.naviny.by*

12. Authorities Strike Double Blow Against Opposition Press

Reporters Without Borders today accused the Belarus authorities of denying the population the right to independent news in the run-up to elections after they announced the permanent closure of opposition weekly *Rabochaya Solidarnost* on 2 August and suspended printing of the independent daily *Narodnaya Volya* on 4 August. The information ministry said *Rabochaya Solidarnost* would have to remain closed because the supreme court has dissolved the Belarus Labour Party, one of the newspaper’s co-founders. Printing of *Narodnaya Volya* was ordered suspended until it paid damages to a former head of the state television and a businessman.

Reporters Without Borders said these two decisions constituted further serious attacks on an independent press that was already subject to widespread harassment in Belarus. “Every means possible is used to silence voices that are not in harmony with the president’s way of thinking,” the organisation said.

The *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star) printing house received an order to stop printing *Narodnaya Volya* on 4 August, a day after a regional court confiscated equipment belonging to the newspaper. Editor Iosif Seredich said at a press conference yesterday that the value of the equipment and material seize was more than the damages claimed by businessman Sergei Atroschenko, although this was the reason given for the seizure.

The newspaper is also required to retract allegations made about former state TV director Yavor Rybakov although he is being detained on corruption charges and has been in prison for several

months. The state prosecutor has announced the confiscation of 500,000 dollars from Ryabakov on the grounds that it was illegally obtained. One hundred thousand dollars have already been seized. "And yet we have to publish an article saying he is the world's most honest man." Seredich complained.

The Belarus supreme court on 31 May confirmed a lower court conviction on 17 November 2003 ordering Narodnaya Volya to pay Ryabakov 20,000 euros in damages for libel because of an October 2001 interview with Eleonora Yazerskaya in which she accused him of mismanagement. The other newspaper, Rabochaya Solidarnost, was originally suspended for three months by information minister on 3 June for "violating the media law" by allegedly failing to update its registration details with the authorities. The information ministry now argues that the newspaper has ceased to exist because of the supreme court's dissolution of the PBT, one of the organisations that founded it.

PBT leader Alexandre Bukhvostov told Reporters Without Borders that the newspaper was the target of official hostility because it criticised the pro-government Federation of Belarus Trade Unions.

Reporters Without Borders condemned the administrative harassment of the independent press in its 2004 annual report. These papers are seen as too critical of President Lukashenko's regime, which Reporters Without Borders lists as one of the 37 "predator of press freedom" worldwide.

During 2003, the authorities suspended and repeatedly sanctioned more than ten newspapers, prevented around 15 independent media from appearing and shut down several human rights organisations that were providing the media with a valuable service.

Source: Reporters Without Borders; August 6, 2004; www.rsf.org

BUSINESS

13. Belarusian President Anticipates Good Harvest Performance

Alyaksandr Lukashenka held a televised conference on 5 August with officials and collective farm managers to discuss this year's harvest, Belarusian media reported. Lukashenka said Belarus could expect to reap between 6.5 million-7 million tons of grain this year and promised to buy foreign-made harvesters for any farm that brings in more than five tons of grain per hectare. Lukashenka also compared this year's harvest to the performance of Belarusian athletes in the summer Olympics. "As I see it, there is a sort of plot developing [before us]: an inconspicuous competition, a somewhat strange competition, peasants versus great, talented athletes," Belarusian Television quoted Lukashenka as saying. "Summing up our results in August, we will see who will win, who will bring more joy to the people, who will give the best gift: either the athletes with their [anticipated] 25 medals or the peasants who may gather 6.5 or perhaps 7 million tons of grain nationally."

Source: Jan Maksymiuk, RFE-RL; August 6, 2004; www.rferl.org/newsline