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**Edited by Sanwaree Sethi  
International League for Human Rights**

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:**

As you may have noticed, the *Belarus Update* is now being published by a new editor, Sanwaree Sethi. Sanwaree began working with the League in May 2004, as an intern for the Belarus project. She worked primarily on monitoring human rights developments in Belarus and assisted in publishing the *Belarus Update*. Sanwaree quickly became an invaluable asset to the Belarus Update, as well as the organization, as a whole.

After Nate Young left the League to pursue a graduate degree, Sanwaree agreed to assume responsibility for the *Belarus Update*, which will continue to be published weekly.

Prior to the League, Sanwaree interned with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., where she researched the issues of human trafficking in Russia and Eurasia.

Sanwaree is currently an MS Candidate in Georgetown University's prestigious Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. She holds a BA Magna Cum Laude from Amherst College. During Sanwaree's junior year of undergraduate studies, she studied abroad at the Hertzen University in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Sanwaree is proficient in Russian, as well as French and Hindi.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please feel free to reach Sanwaree at [ilhr@ilhr.org](mailto:ilhr@ilhr.org) or me, Olga Tarasov, CIS Program Officer, at [otarasov@ilhr.org](mailto:otarasov@ilhr.org).

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## ELECTION NEWS

### 1. Relishing Victory at Polls, Belarus Leader Denounces Critics

President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko revealed Monday in the results of a constitutional referendum that would allow him to remain in power indefinitely after an election that international observers criticized as deeply flawed and undemocratic.

Mr. Lukashenko, who has steadily consolidated power and crushed dissent in Belarus since he was first elected in 1994, dismissed criticism of the referendum, which lifted the constitutional limit of two five-year presidential terms.

He denounced his opponents and election observers as agents of the West, underscoring the country's deepening isolation from Europe and the United States.

The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, which dispatched 270 observers for the election, released a report on Monday that cited harassment of opposition candidates during the campaign and numerous irregularities on election day.

"What is said and written is 95 percent lies," Mr. Lukashenko said at a news conference broadcast repeatedly on state television and cited by news agencies. "There is no dictatorship here and no violation of human rights."

Several hundred protesters gathered on October Square here on Monday evening to challenge his assertion. Chanting "Lukashenko lost!" and waving the European Union's flag, they joined opposition leaders in protesting what they said was a flagrant electoral fraud.

Aleksandr Krivonosov, one of the protesters, compared Mr. Lukashenko to the dictators of the last century: Hitler, Franco and Stalin. "He has become so bold he feels untouchable," Mr. Krivonosov said. "Only power is important to him."

Although the government had not yet released official results, the chairwoman of the election commission, Lidiya M. Yermoshina, said earlier Monday that more than 77 percent of eligible voters had approved the constitutional change. In parallel elections for the Parliament's 110 seats, not a single opposition candidate won. She called the result "an elegant victory."

Mr. Lukashenko's opponents cited numerous accusations of irregularities at polling places, including signs of stuffed ballot boxes and discrepancies in tallying the votes.

The European group's report cited one case at a polling place in the Brest region where the election commissioner filled in official results in a separate room "apparently on the basis of a telephone conversation with an unknown person."

"The Belarussian authorities failed to ensure the fundamental conditions for the will of the people to serve as the basis for authority for government," Tone Tingsgaard, vice-president of the organization's Parliamentary Assembly, said at a news conference.

"Freedom of expression, association and assembly were seriously challenged," she added. "This calls into question the willingness of the authorities to respect the concept of political competition on a basis of equal treatment."

A separate delegation of observers from the former Soviet republics reported no violations, calling the election free and fair. Its report, not the European one, was featured on state television. At least one survey of voters leaving the polls also disputed the official results. The survey by the

Gallup Organization/Baltic Surveys indicated that only 48.4 percent of voters supported lifting the term limits, which would force Mr. Lukashenko to step aside in 2006.

At the Monday rally, the police detained several dozen protesters near Mr. Lukashenko's presidential residence, but later released them, the protest's organizers said. The protesters, many of them students, continued marching largely unmolested.

"The authorities can wipe their feet on the opposition," said Pavel Severinets, the leader of the Youth Front, a group of protesters, "but they have to reconcile with the young people."

*Source: Steven Lee Myers; New York Times; October 18, 2004; www.nytimes.com*

## **2. Referendum and Elections Results Rigging Proved**

Anatoly Lebedko, leader of the United Civil Party, showed proof of election results rigging at a press conference. The politician showed snapshots where a pile of ballot papers with checked "Yes" squares was represented. The photograph was taken on Saturday, the eve of election day, at the polling station at school number 4 in Minsk. Members of the local election commissions gave these ballot papers to the elderly citizens who came to the early voting.

The man who photographed these ballot papers told Radio Svaboda,

On Saturday at 4 p.m. I came to school number 4, near the National [former Lenin] Library, to photograph early voting at the polling station. One of the elderly ladies was given a ballot paper. I decided to take a close-up of the ballot paper, and I saw that there was already a mark in the column "Yes." The elderly lady also was surprised, and asked the commission why it was filled in already. Members of the election commission were confused and afraid; they started to babble something. I wanted to photograph the election commission table, and by the list of voters I saw a pile of ballot papers with a marked "Yes" column."

At today's press conference Anatoly Lebedko showed these pictures. It is convincing evidence that the parliamentary elections and referendum have been turned into a farce.

"These photographs are concrete proof of the falsifications and tricks the authorities have been resorting to," said Anatoly Lebedko.

[Text revised by the editor]

*Source: Charter 97; October 17, 2004; www.charter97.org*

## **3. Lukashenko's Competition Will Not Come Out of the Parliament**

The newly elected Chamber of Representatives remains pro-presidential. According to the Central Election Commission's official data, there is no member of the opposition political parties in its ranks.

This means that in the coming years political opposition will exist outside of the "system" and, no offense intended, will be marginal. This makes any chance of opposition's success in the 2006 presidential campaign unlikely, even if that campaign will be conducted under more hospitable conditions than the recent October 17 elections, which is highly unlikely.

This summer, the Belarusian president stated his desire for the parliamentary elections to go down speedily, in order to save budget money. That is, he wanted the elections to finish in one

round. The president should be pleased: deputies have been elected in 108 of 110 districts. Most of them became candidates through the so-called party in power, or they were representatives from parties loyal to the president's political course. In all, 12 other party members made it into the parliament. Of them 8 were from the Communist Party of Belarus, 1 from the Liberal-Democratic Party (whose leader is Sergei Gaidukevich) and 3 from the Agrarian Party.

Of the elected deputies, 47 are current members of parliament. Among them, Vasily Khrol, Mikhail Sosonko, Valery Lektorov, Igor Kotlyarov, Sergei Zabolotetz, Vadim Popov, and Vladimir Konoplev. However, Valery Frolov, leader of the deputy group Respublika, will not be in the parliament any more. And his group probably will not last either. However, perhaps the president will look kindly on some opposition members when creating the parliament, just as happened with Respublika once.

Many deputies were re-elected. Even more than the president had instructed when he said that for the new Chamber of Representatives to function optimally [for the president – Ed.], about one third of its members should be from the old structure.

As for Lukashenko's wishes for representation of women in the parliament, there was a shortage. The President said that of 110 deputies in the Chamber of Representatives, it would be nice if one third were women. In total 32 women were elected.

In general, the parliamentary elections, just like the referendum, went according to the authorities' plan. This is not surprising, since the parliament's loyalty is no less important for the Belarusian president than the referendum results allowing him the right stand for president at least one more time.

The logic behind the tough political battle is that the current head of state has no need to risk and to bring up in the parliament his own future rival for the 2006 presidential election. However there is no guarantee that the next Valery Frolov with presidential aspirations will not appear in the Chamber of Representatives.

The opposition has declared that both the referendum and parliamentary election results were falsified. It also claims that many democratic candidates won the first round. However, even if this were true, it is unsubstantiated. The opposition has nothing to stand on, unlike the referendum, there is no Gallup exit poll alternative to the Central Election Commission's official data, although it is very logical to argue that if there were falsifications in the plebiscite, there were certainly falsifications on voting for deputies.

But the supporters of authority can claim that one cannot trust the professionalism of this sociological service. However, the opposition could say the same about the Central Election Commission and the local district election commissions.

[Text translated by the editor]

*Source: Kyrill Poznyak; BelaPAN; October 18, 2004; [www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by)*

#### **4. Exit Poll Mess as Belarussians Vote**

Belarussians voted Sunday in a referendum on whether to change the country's constitution and permit President Alexander Lukashenko to run for a third term, a vote the opposition said was already tarnished by violations.

Voters were also electing lawmakers to the nation's 110-seat parliament, which has little power.

The European Union and the United States have expressed strong doubts that the vote would meet democratic standards, warning that it may further estrange Belarus from its European neighbors.

Lukashenko, branded Europe's last dictator, shrugged off the criticism as he voted Sunday, saying: "Turn to your own problems and resolve those. You don't need to worry so much about us."

The referendum asks whether Lukashenko can seek a third term and if the current two-term limit can be scrapped.

Independent opinion polls conducted before the vote found that Lukashenko was short of the majority support he needs from the nation's 7 million registered voters to see the referendum pass.

However, an exit poll conducted by a previously unknown analytical center, Ecoom, working under the aegis of the Belarussian Central Elections Commission, had 82.3 percent of 8,249 voters saying "yes" to Lukashenko's third term as of 1 p.m., said the center's director, Sergei Musienko.

Belarussian state television broadcast the exit poll's results throughout the day, in violation of a law that bans releasing their results before the polls close.

And while all political campaigning is forbidden on election day, state television on Sunday continued to broadcast pro-Lukashenko commercials.

An expected exit poll from the independent Gallup Organization/Baltic Surveys was in doubt after more than half of its 200 poll-takers were detained, opposition leaders said.

The head of the Lithuania-based group did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

Election observers from the opposition were barred from polling places, said Vintsuk Vyachorka, head of the opposition Belarussian Popular Front.

"What's happening here can't be described as an election. It is not an expression of the democratic will of our people," Vyachorka said.

At a polling station in a Minsk school, many of the early voters expressed unhappiness with Lukashenko and dismay at his move to stay in power.

"I saw them on television every night telling me to be a patriot and make the right choice" said Nikolai Glozkov. "I am a patriot, but right now our country is standing in place and not moving forward, so I voted against."

Lyudmila, who declined to give her last name, said she voted for the measure because "the most important thing is stability, and Lukashenko has given us stability."

During the campaign, the government has sought to emphasize that life has improved under Lukashenko. However, the average salary remains the equivalent of \$150 per month, some 80 percent of industry is state-controlled and many young Belarussians say they dream of leaving the country.

Lukashenko was first elected on an anti-corruption platform in 1994. His government has since cracked down on dissent, harassed the opposition and the independent media, and has been suspected of involvement in the disappearance of four opposition figures.

*Source: Yuras Karmanau; Associated Press; October 17, 2004; www.moscowtimes.com*

## **5. Belarusians Protest Presidential Referendum**

Hundreds of demonstrators rallied in the Belarusian capital today to protest a nationwide referendum called by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to extend his rule.

Reports say about 300 people attended the demonstration and that police arrested at least five protesters.

Anatoly Lebedko, leader of the opposition United Civic Party, told the crowd that Lukashenka wants to govern for life, a scenario he said "deprives Belarus of its future as a European nation."

Lukashenka's critics accuse authorities of barring dozens of opposition candidates from running in the October 17 parliamentary elections.

A referendum that day will also ask voters whether Lukashenka should be allowed to run again for president and whether they support striking the current two-term limit from the constitution.

*Source: RFE/RL; October 10, 2004; www.rferl.org*

## **6. Belarus Opposition Leaders Urge Public to Shun Early Vote**

Speaking at a rally in Minsk on 10 October, the leader of the BPF-Revival Party Belarusian People's Front , Vintsuk Vyachorka; the leader of the Party of Communists of Belarus PCB , Syarhey Kalyakin; and United Civic Party Chairman Anatol Lyabedzka called on citizens not to take part in early voting in the parliamentary elections and the national referendum on lifting a two-term constitutional limit on the presidency, both due on 17 October .

In his speech Vyachorka called on supporters of democratic change to monitor all district polling stations on the night of 17 October in order to prevent the replacement of early-voting ballots and to vote against the amendments to the constitution proposed by the president on 17 October. "We should become the sand which will destroy this well-lubricated falsifications mechanism," Vyachorka said.

PCB leader Syarhey Kalyakin noted that the Belarusian people "is tired of one man's rule for 10 years and wants changes". "Therefore, we will say yes to Belarus and no to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka at the referendum," he said.

The participants in the rally adopted a resolution expressing their protest against putting the question "which contradicts the constitution, the Belarusian Electoral Code, which engages our country in a legally negligible and politically adventurous campaign" to the referendum. "Our people does not need a lifelong dictatorship, but authorities which are democratically elected, competent, responsible and replaceable, when necessary. Authorities which are capable of democratizing state and public life and able to solve economic, social and foreign-policy problems of the Republic of Belarus on this basis," the resolution adopted at the rally reads.

The participants in the event also called on all compatriots "to deny Alyaksandr Lukashenka the right to scrap the country's constitution for the sake of satisfying his thirst for personal power over the 10m people of Belarus" at the 17 October referendum.

*Source: BBC Monitoring; October 10, 2004; www.bbcmonitoring.com*

## **7. OSCE Criticizes Belarus for Refusing Visas for Some Observers**

The pan-European OSCE rights and democracy watchdog Tuesday criticized Belarus for refusing visas to some of its observers due to monitor a controversial presidential referendum in the former Soviet republic.

Belarus informed the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's election monitoring mission Monday that observers from Greece and the Czech Republic would be refused visas, the OSCE said in a statement.

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on Monday had denounced local press and political attacks against its observers, who are in Belarus to monitor next Sunday's referendum that could keep strong-arm President Alexander Lukashenko in power.

"An OSCE country cannot pick and choose which observers they admit," said Christian Strohal, Director of the OSCE/ODIHR, Tuesday, adding that Belarus was in breach of its commitments to the 55-member body.

Belarus had explained the decision by citing bilateral problems with these two countries but this was not a justifiable reason, said a press statement issued by the ODIHR's headquarters in Warsaw.

Belarus, led since 1994 by Lukashenko, is one of Europe's most diplomatically and economically isolated states.

Eleven teams of observers have been working for a month in Minsk and eight other Belarusian cities to prepare for Sunday's referendum on deciding whether to prolong Lukashenko's mandate, which expires in 2006.

Belarusian voters are to decide whether to allow Lukashenko to run for a third mandate despite a constitutional limit to two five-year terms in power.

Lukashenko's authoritarian regime has been frequently condemned by the European Union and the United States for human rights violations.

*Source: Agence France Presse; October 12, 2004; www.lexisnexis.com*

## **8. Yermoshina: Amending the Constitution Would Require More Than 3.5 Million Voters**

For the amendments to the Constitution proposed by the president to be accepted more than 3.5 million voters will have to vote for the referendum on October 17, Lidiya Yermoshina, the Chairperson of the Belarusian Central Election Commission who is also in charge of carrying out the referendum announced at an October 12 meeting with journalists. She clarified that the referendum would be accepted if it is approved by more than 50% of registered voters. According to her data, roughly 7 million people in Belarus are registered to vote.

Compared with local elections, the number of voters declined by approximately 135 thousand people. Yermoshina stated that this is due to Belarusian legislation, which allows Russian Federation citizens who are permanent residents of Belarus to vote in local elections. The Chairperson of the Central Election Commission added that the voter lists have also decreased because of the "natural loss" of the Belarusian population.

It must be noted that independent observers periodically launch complaints with the Central Election Commission regarding the fact that local commissions deny them information on the number of voters registered at a given site. In the opinion of independent experts, the lack of this

sort of information creates the preconditions for manipulation of votes and falsifications of election and referendum results.

[Text translated by the editor]

*Source: Yuri Potemkin; BelaPAN; October 12, 2004; www.naviny.by*

## **DOMESTIC & REGIONAL**

### **9. Soviet Secret Police Chief Shrine Reopened**

A memorial complex dedicated to the founder of the Soviet secret police has been reopened in Belarus, the Moscow Times reported.

The memorial to Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka, the first version of the Soviet secret police, was reopened Thursday in his birthplace Dzerzhinovo in the Minsk region of the former Soviet republic of Belarus, the newspaper said.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko, who has been widely criticized by international human rights organizations for alleged abuses in his country, attended the ceremony along with the heads of security and special services from other former Soviet republics that, like Belarus, are now members of the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States.

"Common principles and the noble goals of our predecessors are a good foundation for consolidating cooperation between our special services," Lukashenko told the gathering.

*Source: Washington Times; October 8, 2004; www.washingtontimes.com*

### **10. Security Committee Keeps Track of Planned Terror Acts in Belarus**

The Belarussian State Security Committee keeps track of extensive information on planned terrorist attacks in the country, State Security Committee chairman Leonid Yerin said.

"We are not downplaying the threat of terrorism. Regular systematic measures in this area are in progress," Yerin told a news conference after the 17th session of the council of heads of CIS security agencies and special services in Minsk on Friday.

Several terrorist attacks, including a gas pipeline explosion and several hostage takings, have taken place in Belarus, he said. A number of contract killings have been prevented in the country, Yerin said.

The Belarussian State Security Committee confiscates about 10 kilograms of strong drugs annually, he said, adding, "These drugs arrive mainly from Europe, rather than the CIS."

*Source: Interfax; October 11, 2004; www.interfax.com*

### **11. President Lukashenko Stresses Social Role of Belarussian Orthodox Church**

President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus said Monday he would like to see the Belarussian Orthodox Church "get the role of an essential institute of Belarussian society".

"I wouldn't like to see a situation where the Belarusian Orthodox Church is ejected from the life of the state," Lukashenko said at a meeting with the members of the Church Synod at the Minsk House of Mercy.

The Belarusian Church is a division of the Russian Orthodox Church and reports to the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, but it enjoys the status of a broad autonomy in many clerical affairs.

Its supreme hierarch, the Metropolitan of Minsk and all Belarus, has the official title of the Patriarch's Exarch, which places him somewhat higher than other metropolitans.

"The Belarusian Church has always acted as a consolidating social force that kept our statehood together at times of hardship," Lukashenko said.

He added that he had always helped the Church and had always been cautious in his steps at the same time so as to "avert the break-up of a fragile peace and dialogue that the different religious confessions having disciples in the republic have established".

Belarus has 3,012 religious organizations representing 26 denominations.

In 2003, the Belarusian Orthodox Church and the government signed an agreement on cooperation. National legislation proclaims the Republic of Belarus to be a secular state.

Keeping peace among different confessions is a priority for the Belarusian government, Lukashenko said.

He accused the opposition and its overseas stooges of the attempts to restrict the domain of influence of the Orthodox Church by spreading the influences of other denominations and diverse sects.

"Their anti-Slavic plans and aspirations may have rather far-reaching impact and go beyond the Orthodox Church and the majority of the Belarusians, who espouse this creed," Lukashenko said.

"The oppositionists' goal is to deal a blow to this country's main achievements - social and political stability, peace and order," he said.

He said, though, he had a great deal of confidence that "their plans will flop in Belarus".

*Source: Larissa Klyuchnikova; Itar-Tass; October 11, 2004; www.tass.com*

## **12. Belarus Resumes Import of Russian Electricity**

Belarus this month resumed the import of Russian electricity, which it had suspended back last February, first Deputy Energy Minister Eduard Tovpenets said at an Energy and Ecological Congress on Wednesday.

Belarus's own electric power plants in January-September increased electricity production 22 percent on the year to 23.3 billion kilowatt-hours, but electricity import remains an alternative, provided the price is reasonable.

Tovpenets said natural gas was the main type of fuel for electricity production. At present it constitutes 76 percent in the country's fuel and energy consumption. Naturally, the issue of Russian gas supplies to Belarus is a topical issue. Coordination of the fuel and energy balance of the Russia-Belarus union state for next year is in progress. Belarus's demand for natural gas will grow by 19.5 billion cubic meters.

In the long term Belarus will be increasing the share of fuels produced locally (peat and timber) to 20 percent with the aim to reduce natural gas consumption.

"The price of Russian natural gas goes up by approximately 25 percent with every year. As Russia is steering towards WTO membership, Belarus should expect a world price level," Tovpenets said.

*Source: Itar-Tass; October 7, 2004; www.itar-tass.com*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **13. Belarus Democracy Act Unanimously Passes U.S. House**

The Belarus Democracy Act (H.R. 854), sponsored by United States Helsinki Commission Chairman Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), unanimously passed the House of Representatives late Monday. Among bipartisan supporters of the measure were Commissioners Rep. Joseph R. Pitts (R-PA), Rep. Louise McIntosh Slaughter (D-NY), and Rep. Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL). The move comes less than two weeks before voters in the former Soviet republic elect a new parliament and decide whether to extend the rule of President-turned-dictator Alexander Lukashenka. Consideration of the Belarus Democracy Act by the United States Senate is expected prior to adjournment.

Chairman Smith hailed passage of the bill as an opportunity to promote democratic development in a country held hostage by Lukashenka's dictatorial regime.

"With important parliamentary elections and a questionable referendum to extend Lukashenka's rule beyond his two-term tenure set to expire in 2006, the United States has demonstrated our unwavering support for pro-democracy forces in Belarus," said Chairman Smith. "With passage of the Belarus Democracy Act, we send a strong signal that we stand firmly on the side of those who long for freedom."

"Lukashenka's regime continues to trample upon basic rights and freedoms with impunity, giving Belarus the worst human rights record in Europe today," Chairman Smith added. High-ranking Belarusian officials have been implicated in the disappearances and presumed murders in 1999 and 2000 of political opposition leaders Yuri Zakharenka, Victor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky and journalist Dmitri Zavadsky. Not surprisingly, these cases remain unresolved. Furthermore, over the last year, Lukashenka has increased harassment, arrests, detentions and violence against independent media, non-governmental organizations, independent trade unions, religious groups and political opposition leaders.

"The Belarusian people - who have suffered so much under the current and previous dictators - deserve to live in a society where democratic principles and human rights are respected," Smith said. "As matters stand now, the cards appear to be stacked in Lukashenka's favor in the upcoming October 17 elections, since the regime has almost total control over the electoral process."

The Belarus Democracy Act is designed to promote democratic development, human rights and the rule of law in Belarus, as well as encourage the consolidation and strengthening of Belarus' sovereignty and independence. The bill authorizes necessary assistance for democracy-building activities such as support for non-governmental organizations, independent media - including radio and television broadcasting into Belarus - and international exchanges.

The Belarus Democracy Act also encourages free and fair parliamentary elections; supports imposition of sanctions on the Lukashenka regime; and requires reports from the president

concerning the sale or delivery of weapons or weapons-related technologies from Belarus to rogue states and reports on Lukashenka's personal wealth and assets as well as those of other senior Belarusian leaders.

The United States Helsinki Commission, an independent federal agency, by law monitors and encourages progress in implementing provisions of the Helsinki Accords. The Commission, created in 1976, is composed of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce.

*Source: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; October 5, 2004; www.csce.gov*

#### **14. Lukashenka Slams Belarus Democracy Act of 2004**

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 6 October that the Belarus Democracy Act, which was passed unanimously by the U.S. House of Representatives on 4 October and the U.S. Senate two days later, is a "step of foolish pressure on our country," Belapan reported, quoting official sources. "The authorities could not get a better gift," Lukashenka said. "If you [presumably, U.S. lawmakers -- ed.] scold me for seeking internal and external enemies, why are you giving me a pretext for finding such an enemy outside the country? Why are you supplying me with such a chance?"

According to Lukashenka, the adoption of the Belarus Democracy Act by the U.S. lower house "gives the [Belarusian] authorities a 10 percent bonus." He failed to explain whether he means the electorate's backing for the government or, specifically, enthusiasm for his proposal to lift the constitutional two-term limit on the presidency in a referendum on 17 October.

"With important parliamentary elections and a questionable referendum to extend Lukashenka's rule beyond his two-term tenure set to expire in 2006, the United States has demonstrated our unwavering support for pro-democracy forces in Belarus," Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ), chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, commented on the bill. "With passage of the Belarus Democracy Act, we send a strong signal that we stand firmly on the side of those who long for freedom."

The Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 is designed to promote democratic development, human rights, and the rule of law in Belarus, as well as encourage the consolidation and strengthening of Belarus's sovereignty and independence. The bill authorizes necessary assistance -- leaving the determination of its volume for the U.S. president -- for supporting Belarusian political parties and nongovernmental organizations; independent media, including radio and television broadcasting into Belarus; and international exchanges. The document also prohibits all agencies of the U.S. government to provide loans and investment to the Belarusian government, except for the provision of humanitarian goods and agricultural or medical products.

The bill obliges the U.S. president to present annual reports to the U.S. Congress on the sale and delivery of weapons or weapons-related technologies from Belarus to any country supporting international terrorism; goods, services, and credits received by Belarus in exchange for the weapons or weapons-related technologies; and the personal assets and wealth of Lukashenka and other senior Belarusian government officials.

Originally, the Belarus Democracy Act was introduced to the U.S. Congress in November 2001 -- shortly after the controversial presidential elections in Belarus -- with much harsher provisions regarding the Lukashenka regime than those approved this week. The 2001 bill proposed that the U.S. government freeze Belarusian assets in the United States, prohibit trade with Belarusian government-run businesses, and deny Belarusian officials, including Lukashenka, the right to travel to the United States. It also proposed the appropriation of \$30 million to assist Belarusian

democratic institutions and organizations, including funding for radio broadcasting in and to Belarus.

Another version of the Belarus Democracy appeared in March 2003, when it called for \$40 million over the 2004-05 fiscal year to promote democracy and civil society in Belarus. It also projected an additional \$5 million to support Voice of America and RFE/RL broadcasts into Belarus. The 2004 Belarus Democracy Act is "meeker" than its 2003 predecessor -- it does not contain provisions about the travel ban on Belarusian officials and the prohibition of U.S. strategic exports to Belarus. It also remains noncommittal about the volume of necessary assistance to democracy advocates in Belarus. And, notably, it leaves out a reference, enclosed in the 2003 version, about Russia's role in promoting democracy in Belarus.

"They have wanted to have democracy in Belarus, they have become worried about our elections and referendum," Lukashenka commented ironically on the Belarus Democracy Act on 6 October. "They have forgotten that they have enough of their own problems!" Lukashenka countercharged that the United States has "the most archaic election system" in the world. "As a result, the current [U.S.] president obtained fewer votes than the one who took second place," Lukashenka added. "Is it normal? And such people are worrying about the situation in Belarus!"

"What do the parliamentary elections and referendum have to do with the president's income?" Lukashenka wondered sarcastically, referring to the act's provision about his assets and wealth. "Anyway, I have ordered the immediate calculation of everything that I have been paid by the state and send [the result] to America. But afterwards our new parliament will convene and demand that [U.S. President George W.] Bush make public his own income. And we will compare [our incomes]."

Meanwhile, Belarusian independent media earlier this month cited two polling organizations, the Gallup Organization/Baltic Surveys from Lithuania and the Yuri Levada Analytical Center from Russia, which found in separate polls conducted in Belarus after the announcement on 7 September of a presidential referendum that Lukashenka's desire to run for the presidency for a third time is supported by 37 percent and 39 percent of eligible voters, respectively.

According to the Belarusian Constitution, a referendum may amend the constitution only if it is backed by more than 50 percent of all eligible voters. However, it is not clear how many eligible voters Belarus has at present. According to official data, there were 7.1 million eligible voters in the local elections in Belarus on 2 March 2003. But on 9 September, Belapan cited "preliminary data" from the Central Election Commission asserting that Belarus now has "some 6.5 million" eligible voters.

Thus, a question may arise: Where have some 600,000 voters disappeared to in the past 18 months in a country of 10 million people that did not register either a deadly epidemic or an outbreak of frantic emigration in that period? Some in Belarus worry that the "preliminary data" regarding Belarus's eligible voters may signal that the Central Election Commission is set to significantly slash their actual number in order to help the president win the referendum in an "elegant" way, as Lukashenka himself referred to his victory in the 2001 presidential ballot.

On 6 October, a representative of the opposition United Civic Party who is on the Central Election Commission with the right to a "consultative voice" proposed that election monitors be given the right to familiarize themselves with lists of voters in each constituency in order to make the 17 October parliamentary election and referendum more transparent. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the Central Election Commission flatly rejected this idea.

*Source: Jan Maksymiuk; RFE/RL; October 8, 2004; [www.rfe/rl.org](http://www.rfe/rl.org)*

## **15. U.S. Ambassador Says Belarus Sanctions Not Mandatory**

The sanctions named in the Belarus Democracy Act passed by the U.S. Congress are not mandatory, Washington's ambassador to Belarus George Krol said in Minsk on Wednesday.

He said the Democracy Act and the suggested trade and economic sanctions represent the opinion of Congress. In this case, Congress is expressing its opinion to the executive power branch, but the sanctions are not mandatory for the American government, he said.

In this sense, the act differs from the Jackson-Vanik amendment, he said.

Krol said the restrictions proposed by Congress have actually been in effect for some time. The operations of the U.S. Trade and Development Agency and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation in Belarus were suspended several years ago, he said.

The Democracy Act is by no means meant to pressure voters and the U.S. does not regard it as interference in Belarus's internal affairs, he said.

*Source: Interfax; October 14, 2004; www.interfax.com*

## **16. Captive Nations Still**

Belarus and Ukraine, considered "captive nations" under the Soviet Union, continue to act like captives today, said the chairman of the congressional human rights commission.

Both are still "vulnerable" to Russia's political and economic influence and "face serious challenges to democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration," Rep. Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey Republican, told the Heritage Foundation in a recent speech.

Mr. Smith, chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, said Belarus is "ruled by a dictator," Alexander Lukashenko, and Ukraine "has significant problems" in the areas of press freedom and freedom of association. Ukraine also suffers from official corruption, a weak court system and election fraud, he said.

However, Mr. Smith said Ukraine has developed some institutions that "act at least somewhat as a check" on the government.

As both countries prepare for elections this month, Mr. Smith warned that their "survival as independent countries" depends on the "full establishment of democracy, human rights and the rule of law."

He held out little hope for change in Belarus, where Mr. Lukashenko is determined to push through a referendum in the Oct. 17 parliamentary elections to extend his presidency beyond 2006, when his 10-year rule is scheduled to expire. He has "almost total control over the electoral process" and is sure to get his way, Mr. Smith said.

In Ukraine, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich and former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko are running to replace President Leonid Kuchma, who has ruled for 10 years, in the Oct. 31 election.

*Source: James Morrison; Washington Times; October 8, 2004; www.washingtintimes.com*

## 17. The U.S. Should Oppose Dictatorship in Belarus

President Alexandr Lukashenka of Belarus has added a referendum to the October 17 parliamentary elections, asking Belarusians to allow him to participate in the next presidential election (prohibited by his own tailor-made constitution) and to remove the presidential term limits from the constitution.

Lukashenka, an authoritarian, anti-Western populist and former collective farm boss, took office illegally after the 1996 constitutional coup. If the October 17 referendum passes, he will have taken a giant step toward becoming a "president for life"--an unseemly sight in democratic Europe. Not only could he run for a third term in 2006, but for an indeterminate number of terms thereafter. This would allow him to remain in office indefinitely--particularly given his policy of preventing political parties from competing in parliamentary elections, having equal access to the media, or placing their own observers on local and regional electoral commissions as provided by law.

The authoritarian Belarus has become a near-pariah state in Europe, especially after Lukashenka caused several opposition leaders to "disappear" in the late 1990s. Sources in Minsk confirmed that the dictator's henchmen murdered them. The U.S. and the EU countries responded by jointly agreeing to deny travel visas to a list of Belarusian officials from Lukashenka's inner circle. This may be a step in the right direction, but it is insufficient. Lukashenka can simply retaliate by banning U.S. and EU officials from visiting Belarus.

Moscow Apprehensive. Some in the Putin Administration are also apprehensive about Lukashenka and resent the basket-case Belarusian economy that is an albatross around their country's neck. Moreover, the Putin Administration is aware that Lukashenka nurses an ambition to engineer a unification between Russia and Belarus in such a way that he could run for president of Russia. In fact, Lukashenka has expressed his admiration for Hitler and Stalin.

Russians should know that, if they absorb Belarus or even tolerate the abuses of power, the influence of Lukashenka's authoritarianism may exacerbate their own country's uneasy relationship with democracy. Furthermore, the world's indifference to Lukashenka's power grab may encourage President Vladimir Putin's entourage to advise Putin to remain in power after 2008, when his term ends.

Cooperation with Europe. The U.S. and Europe have numerous interests at stake in Belarus, including how its failed democracy may influence its neighbors, particularly Russia and Ukraine, which will elect its next president on October 31. Belarus is also suspected of selling weapons to rogue regimes, such as Iran and Saddam's Iraq. Anti-Western arms dealers in Minsk may also be selling weapons to terrorist groups around the world, including those fighting in Iraq.

However, the West has some powerful tools for fighting the Belarusian dictator and his henchmen. In the past, the U.S. has worked with allies such as Italy and the U.K. to stop overseas shipments of Ukrainian arms to the Balkans in violation of international sanctions. Furthermore, the U.S. has never recognized an absolute sovereign immunity defense, which means heads of state can be prosecuted under U.S. law. The U.S. also has investigated leaders from the post-Soviet states, including Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma (and most of his senior team) and the late Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliiev. Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko and former Panamanian President Manuel Noriega have been convicted in U.S. courts. There are many opportunities for Washington, London, Paris, Berlin, and Brussels to cooperate on Belarus.

On October 6, Congress passed the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 (H.R. 854), sponsored by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) and others, to fund a broad range of measures to support democracy in Belarus. Although this is a beginning, the executive branch and Congress need to do more. Specifically, they should:

\* Denounce publicly Lukashenka's violations of the constitution and electoral procedures, and the State Department should amplify its criticism of Belarus's flawed political system.

\* Declare , with the EU, that the referendum and parliamentary elections are illegitimate if observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe find election falsification or other violations.

\* Use domestic and international law enforcement agencies, such as Interpol, in cooperation with EU members, to coordinate criminal investigations into homicides, money laundering, and illegal arms trading linked to the Lukashenka regime.

\* Investigate the disappearances of Lukashenka's political opponents, provided there is a jurisdictional nexus to the U.S. and/or Europe. Both the U.S. Justice Department and its European counterparts can do so. Moreover, Europe and the U.S. could initiate criminal proceedings against those in the president's circle who ordered and participated in the murder of opposition politicians and journalists.

\* Seize assets of Lukashenka and his inner circle through criminal proceedings against illegal arms sales and money laundering operations if Belarus violated U.S. or international sanctions. The U.S. and EU would be entitled to enforce such sanctions even if the violations did not occur in America or Europe.

\* Fund , together with the EU, an international broadcasting operation by opposition radio and television stations from countries around Belarus, and expand people-to-people and educational exchanges.

\* Consult with Russia regarding possible political changes that would make Belarus more democratic and predictable. Such a coordinated effort would benefit Russia by making the transit route for Russian gas to Europe less prone to Lukashenka's interference and would eliminate the need for Russia to support the Belarusian economy with subsidized natural gas at a cost of over \$2 billion per year.

Conclusion. Lukashenka thinks he is the permanent ruler of Belarus, but the people of Belarus deserve better. From day one, the next Congress and Administration should provide leadership to help make Belarus free.

*Source: Ariel Cohen; Heritage Foundation; October 15, 2004; www.heritage.org*

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **18. Russian Liberals Detained for Protesting Third Term for Belarus President Lukashenko**

About 50 youth activists of the Union of the Right Forces party held an unsanctioned rally near the Belarusian embassy in Moscow on Wednesday. They protested against a referendum in Belarus that can render a possibility to the current country leader, Alexander Lukashenko, to run for president for the third time.

The rally's slogans were "Yes to Belarus, no to Lukashenko", "No to tyranny" and others, Interfax news agency. The rally members passed a Lukashenko doll to Russian law enforcement officers. Two members were detained, the head of the party's public relations department, Denis Terekhov, was quoted by the agency as saying.

The referendum is set for the day of the parliamentary elections in Belarus, October 17. The only question for it is whether Belarussian people allow the first president of the republic, Aleksandr Lukashenko, to take part in the presidential elections as a candidate and whether they approve article 81 part 1 of the Constitution in the following edition: the president is elected for five years directly by the nation in the universal free, equal, direct elections via secret ballot.

According to Belarus' Constitution, the same person can be elected president for no more than two terms. Changes to the Constitution on this issue can only be made after a referendum.

Lukashenko was first elected president in July 1994 having received 80.4 percent of the vote in the second round. In September 2001, he was re-elected with 75.6 percent in the first round.

Belarus and Russia are discussing plans on a possible reunification.

The U.S. Congress passed economic sanctions against Belarus, calling Lukashenko's regime tyrannical. In response, Belarussian president called this act "stupid," the congressmen "dumb-asses."

Union of the Right Forces was one of the two liberal Russian parties (along with Yabloko) that failed to enter the parliament at the December 2003 elections.

*Source: MosNews; October 13, 2004; www.mosnews.com*

### **19. Aleksandr Lukashenko Takes Up 75% of Airtime**

Reports and programs about Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko consume 75 to 77% of all television and radio airtime during broadcasts on the upcoming parliamentary. Observers of OCSE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) concluded that the president plays the dominant role in the election campaign.

Until now the election campaign has had rather weak coverage in Belarusian media, limited to the work of Central Commission for Elections and Referendums. Electronic media hardly covered the elections at all, mostly reporting on the referendum. News reports and programmes "concentrated most on the work and the statements made by Aleksandr Lukashenko, which were presented in an explicitly positive light," say the observers.

Radio and television broadcasted only a few programs on Belarusian opposition and democratic parties, among them, the documentary *Deti Lzhi* (Children of the Lie).

The observers note that as a counterweight to Belarusian propaganda, information programs about Aleksandr Lukashenko on Russian TV channels (Channel 1 and Rossiya) were presented in neutral tone, and the view of leaders of the opposition was "clearly positive".

OSCE ODIHR points out that five-minute radio and television addresses present the main opportunity for the candidates to speak to the voters as they are unable to pay for advertisements in electronic or printed media, and there is no provision for debate.

[Text revised by the editor]

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

## **BUSINESS**

### **20. Belarusian GDP jumps 10.8% in 9 months**

The Statistics and Analysis Ministry reported that GDP jumped by 10.8% year-on-year from January to September.

Industrial production soared by 15.7% and agricultural production jumped by 10.2%.

Investments in capital assets in climbed 20% compared to the same period in 2003.

The production of consumer goods grew 13.6%, with food production going up 13.7% and the production of other goods going up 14.1%. Retail trade turnover increased by 11.3% and paid services by 13.3%.

Foreign trade turnover in January-August grew 31.5% against the first eight months of 2003, exports grew by 30.6%, and imports by 32.4%.

It has been estimated that in 2004, GDP will grow 9%-10%. In 2003, GDP increased 6.8%, up from 4.7% in 2002.

[Text revised by the Editor]

*Source Interfax; October 12, 2004; www.interfax.com*

## **21. Prosecutor: Shadow economy in Belarus accounts for 17-18%**

The shadow economy's overall share of the Belarusian economy is about 17-18%, or \$3 billion, Belarusian Deputy Prosecutor General Viktor Prus announced on Friday.

"These are direct losses of the state, and a significant part of it is losses from corruption," Prus said.

The law enforcement agencies are currently investigating around 75 people believed to be involved in corruption, he said.

The prosecutor insisted on the importance of passing legislation on fighting corruption, which the lower chamber of the parliament has twice declined. "This bill is a behavior code for government officials," he said.

"Some think for some reason that, if we pass the law, more people will be put behind bars," Prus said, adding that he believes just the opposite would happen. "We don't have this administrative eagerness," he said.

*Source: Interfax; October 11, 2004; www.interfax.com*

## **22. Talks on Belarus Accession to WTO Could Finish at Year-end**

Talks on Belarus's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) could finish in 2004, deputy head of the Foreign Affairs Ministry's department to coordinate foreign economic activity Anton Kudasov told Interfax.

"If the negotiation process's dynamics remain, then it could be finished this year, after which we will only need to discuss technical procedures of agreement," Kudasov said in commenting on the results of the latest round of bilateral consultations in Geneva on accession to the WTO.

He said major positions are becoming closer during the talks, in particular, documents on agriculture have been basically approved. A level of calculating budget financing for agriculture has been formed from current Belarusian programs to develop agriculture, therefore there were not significant objections at the meeting, Kudasov said.

In summing up the results of the talks, Kudasov said "a realistic boundary of openness has been achieved, although a field remains for compromises." The subsequent development of the talks will depend on bilateral negotiations with WTO member-countries, including the United States and EU countries, which will fight for the maximum concessions from Belarus, he said. There is also the possibility of political factors influencing the talks. "However, Belarus is not planning to pay for political concessions with economic ones," Kudasov said.

The next working group meeting for Belarus's accession to the WTO will take place in the first half of 2005

*Source: Interfax; October 7, 2004; www.interfax.com*

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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 Sanwaree Sethi [ilhr@ilhr.org](mailto:ilhr@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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