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## Domestic

### 1. Voices of Freedom Are Stilled by Europe's Last Dictator

By this time in the college semester, Marina Puzdrova should be making her way from class to class in the drab brick building on Brovka Street. Her university has been shuttered, though, its students and professors dispersed by the authoritarian whim of this country's president, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko.

Miss Puzdrova, 19, would have been a second-year student at the European Humanities University, which since its creation in 1992 has been an outpost of liberal education in an increasingly illiberal place. It was, therefore, a threat to the new state ideology that Mr. Lukashenko is steadily building.

Although offered a place at Belarus State University, she and two philosophy classmates, like others at the university, plan to leave Belarus instead, continuing their studies in the Czech Republic.

"There," she said, "we hope to find some more personal freedom."

On Oct. 17, Belarus held a constitutional referendum that gave Mr. Lukashenko the right to seek unlimited terms in office. The vote, denounced as illegitimate by political opponents and international observers, consolidated political power in what is already considered to be Europe's last dictatorship.

Like the other nations that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union 13 years ago, this country of 10 million initially embraced its independence, only to have its democratic hopes fade along with Mr. Lukashenko's rise to power. Although Mr. Lukashenko was first elected in 1994 with a populist mandate to fight corruption and restore stability, the country has become one of the most repressive of the former Soviet republics.

Mr. Lukashenko's control extends far beyond politics. In 10 years in power, he has increased his sway over business, news media, civic organizations and schools - in short, over anyone or anything that might challenge him.

Journalists have been charged with criticizing the president, a crime punishable by fines, internal exile and up to four years in prison. What few private businesses exist - nearly 80 percent of the country's economy remains in state hands - have faced prosecution based on what critics call the slimmest pretenses.

Private organizations have likewise been closed or harassed by the authorities, especially those that have received financial support from Europe or the United States, which Mr. Lukashenko regularly denounces in language reminiscent of the cold war.

The Belarussian Helsinki Committee, the local chapter of the international human rights organization, has since August 2003 faced a prosecutorial assault for, among other things, failing to use quotation marks around its name on official stationery.

"We think it cannot be worse," Tatsiyana Pratsko, the committee's president, said in an interview in her small office. "And it becomes worse."

The United States and the European Union have increased their own pressure on Belarus, including a ban on travel to their countries by Mr. Lukashenko and other senior leaders suspected of involvement in the disappearances of political opponents in 1999 and 2000. Mr. Lukashenko has responded by strengthening his grip and intensifying his attacks on those he considers agents of the West.

Mr. Lukashenko, a former collective farm boss, has not only retained aspects of Soviet economics but has also moved to recreate the structures that allowed the Soviet Union to maintain order over society.

He issued a decree two years ago that required government agencies, factories and schools to hold "political information" meetings, like those once conducted by the Communists. Last year he created the Belarussian Union of Youth, which, like its Soviet-era inspiration, Komsomol, is a prerequisite to acquiring positions in the university or jobs. He has also established an official ideology, which remains ill-defined though it revolves around the unquestioned power of the presidency.

The government's campaign against the European Humanities University is typical of Mr. Lukashenko's operations. In April, the Education Ministry issued an order outlining 26 ways that

classes and activities should be regulated in the country's universities. They included restrictions on money from abroad, as well as on exchange programs. One measure called for monitoring of "the moral-psychological climate" in student dorms.

In such a climate, it was clear that the European Humanities University would become a target.

The university was established in the first heady days of Belarussian independence by a group of professors and the Belarussian Orthodox Church, which created its first department of theology. The concept was to create a private institution modeled on universities in Britain and the United States. It began with 67 students, but grew to nearly 1,000.

"People with free thought were formed here," said Grigor Y. Miniankov, the dean of the university's philosophy department. "They learned critical thinking. People like that are not wanted here."

In January, the country's education minister, Aleksandr Radkov, called for the resignation of the rector, Anatoly Mikhailov, who refused to go. In July, Mr. Lukashenko's administration ordered the university evicted from its rented building on Brovka Street. A week later the Education Ministry revoked its license, citing, in a Kafkaesque twist, its lack of space for classes.

Mr. Lukashenko made his motive clear in a speech last month, denouncing the university's educational mission as subversive.

"There was an implicit, though focal, intention to train here in Belarus, in the European Humanities University, first of all, the new Belarussian elite, aimed at leading Belarus to the West when the time is appropriate," Mr. Lukashenko said.

"And what about other Belarussian universities, located in Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel and Mogilev, not speaking about other leading universities in Minsk?" he went on, according to a transcript published in the official newspaper Soviet Belarus. "Whom are they training? Servants and slaves for this very new elite?"

The Humanities University is struggling to stay alive in a virtual state. Dozens of students have transferred to universities in Europe and the United States that have agreed to recognize credits already earned. Dr. Mikhailov has left the country, accepting a position at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard.

Vladimir Dounaev, the vice rector, said classes would continue online.

"It is very difficult to close a concept," he said. "We are living not in the era of Brezhnev, but of the Internet."

In 2003, the government closed a high school with a similar mission. The school, the Humanities Lycée, now operates underground, conducting classes secretly in apartments, one step ahead of the authorities.

The school's students - now down to fewer than 100 - continue to study, knowing their diplomas will not be recognized by the state.

Irina I. Sidorenko, the school's deputy director, said the parents of many students had received threats of punishment.

"We feel ourselves hanging in the air, not knowing if we can survive another month," she said. "One can only feel sorry for our society."

*Source: Steven Lee Myers; New York Times; October 27, 2004; www.nytimes.com*

## **2. 15 Students from European Humanities University to Continue Education in Poland**

The Bialystok government school is ready to accept 10 students from the European Humanities University (EHU). Additionally the private School of Humanities and Journalism in Poznan will accept 5 EHU students. WSAP will accept students in the following disciplines: international relations, philosophy and management.

After completing the WSAP, the students will receive a lycee diploma (analogous to a bachelor's degree). The students can continue their education and receive a master's degree in management at the University of Bialystok and in philosophy, sociology or cultural science in the school of social psychology in Warsaw. WSAP will waive tuition fees for EHU students. The university will also organize intensive Polish language classes which will be carried out alongside the other courses.

In the initial stage, the classes will be taught in Russian by highly skilled teachers, Poles of Belarusian origin who speak Polish, Belarusian and Russian. WSAP has promised to provide students with housing, registration papers and health services.

The School of Humanities and Journalism in Poznan can accept one student in each of the following specialties: political science, international relations, sociology, cultural science and computer science.

On July 27, 2004, Aleksandr Radkov, the Belarusian Minister of Education cancelled the EHU's educational license. EHU was founded in 1992. Roughly one thousand students, 100 graduate students and 50 doctorate students.

[Text translated by the editor]

*Source: BelaPAN; November 1, 2004; [www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by)*

## **3. European Parliament Not Recognized Belarusian Elections and Referendum**

The EU deputies have passed a resolution characterizing parliamentary elections and referendum in Belarus held on October 17 as not legitimate. According to deputies at the European Parliament, both votes in Belarus fell short of requirements for democratic elections, which is why they cannot be considered as free and fair. It is underlined in the resolution that the elected Belarusian parliament does not possess the democratic mandate to represent people of Belarus, and Aleksandr Lukashenka has no constitutional right to participate in the 2006 presidential elections. The deputies of the European Parliament also condemned repressions of the Belarusian authorities against students, opposition leaders and journalists during peaceful political demonstrations in Minsk.

*Source: Charter 97; October 29, 2004; [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org)*

## **4. Three Opposition Demonstrators Detained in Minsk**

On Thursday, police detained three participants in an unauthorized demonstration, which took place on the October Square in Minsk, not far from the president's administration. Six representatives from the opposition lined up on October Square, holding posters supporting the Belarusian opposition. After numerous warnings about the unauthorized nature of the demonstration, three of the participants were detained.

According to the police, they will be taken to the Central Police station where protocols on the administrative offence will be made.

Since October 18, the opposition has been carrying out daily unauthorized protests against the results of the referendum and parliamentary elections, which took place on October 17.

[Text translated by the editor]

*Source: Gazeta.ru; October 28, 2004; www.gazeta.ru*

## REGIONAL

### **5. On the Border and on the Brink: A Thrilling Election in Ukraine, a Sad Referendum in Belarus, and What They Mean for Russia and the West**

“Take a look at me,” says Victor Yushchenko, when asked about the mysterious illness that almost killed him last month—an illness, he believes, brought on by deliberate poisoning. His eyes peer out from a bloated, pock-marked, barely recognisable face. “I am absolutely convinced”, Mr Yushchenko says, “that I managed to survive an assassination attempt on my life.”

Damaged as he is, Mr Yushchenko may yet become Ukraine's next president. He has returned to the campaign trail ahead of the first round of voting on October 31st, exhilarating thousands of Ukrainians at mass rallies with his promises to fight corruption and uphold the rule of law. Their fervour, and the determination of Mr Yushchenko's opponents, are understandable. For the first time in Ukraine, real democracy is close enough to touch.

Since 1991, when Boris Yeltsin and the leaders of the two most “russified” Soviet republics, Ukraine and Belarus, together dissolved the Soviet Union, each of their countries has disappointed those who expected democracy to flourish in the rubble of communism. Belarus—squeezed, like Ukraine, between an expanded European Union and Russia—has for ten years been governed by Alexander Lukashenka, a capricious autocrat. After Mr Lukashenka's “victory” in a rigged referendum on October 17th, Belarus may have to endure another ten years of him, or more. Russia has experienced the volatility of Mr Yeltsin, and now the crescent authoritarianism of Vladimir Putin. Ukraine, meanwhile, has had ten years of corruption under Leonid Kuchma, its current president. If it now manages to stage fair presidential elections, the repercussions could spill across its eastern and northern borders.

#### Meet the candidates

According to Mr Yushchenko's supporters, and those of Victor Yanukovich, his main rival, Ukraine faces a choice of Manichean simplicity and dreadful consequence. Mr Yushchenko's team portrays him as an economic reformer, who, during a brief stint as prime minister in 1999-01, managed to reverse his country's economic decline, which had been even more precipitous than that of most other ex-Soviet states. Ukraine's economy suffered from many of the same ailments as Russia's: corruption, suffocating bureaucracy, unreliable courts and capital flight. Salaries and pensions were paid late; the population and life expectancy declined; villages emptied as young people went west to find work. Away from the glamour of downtown Kiev, much of the country is still painfully poor, and its middle class is small. But, so the story goes, Mr Yushchenko laid the foundations for the growth, and more reliable social security, of the past four years.

More than that, Mr Yushchenko presents himself as the champion of transparency and the rule of law, and the nemesis of corruption—which, under Mr Kuchma, has become brazen even by

Russian standards. For example, Mr Yushchenko says he will review the privatisation of a steelworks that was sold earlier this year at half its market value to the country's two richest men, one of whom, Victor Pinchuk, is Mr Kuchma's son-in-law.

According to Mr Yushchenko's team, Mr Yanukovich, who is the current prime minister—the 11th since independence—is a creature of the corrupt current administration and of the oligarchs. Mr Yanukovich's two criminal convictions, rumours of other malfeasance and his occasional, infelicitous use of prison slang do not burnish his image. But, says Serhiy Tihipko, chairman of Mr Yanukovich's campaign, "There are actions, and there is talk." Mr Tihipko points to the introduction, during his candidate's premiership, of a flat income-tax rate of 13%, which has helped to draw previously untaxed incomes into the legal economy. Pensions and other social benefits have risen (though how affordably remains to be seen). A privatisation review, says Mr Tihipko, would not be in the national interest.

During the campaign, Mr Yanukovich has appealed to the Russian-speaking population of east Ukraine by proposing to make Russian the second official language and to introduce dual Ukrainian-Russian nationality. This has helped to create an impression that, as president, he would be even more Moscow-friendly than Mr Kuchma has been. But Mr Tihipko insists that Mr Yanukovich's foreign policy would be "pragmatic". Meanwhile, Mr Yushchenko's opponents characterise him as an extreme nationalist, intent on favouring the Ukrainian-speaking west of the country. Anti-Yushchenko propaganda also portrays him as an American stooge ("Bushchenko")—an odd slur, given his pledge to bring home Ukraine's peacekeeping contingent in Iraq.

#### Milking two cows

But the choice, and its consequences, are not quite that stark. Some, such as Olexandr Moroz, a socialist leader who is also running for president, criticise Mr Yushchenko for failing to take a stern line with Mr Kuchma over the alleged government murder of a journalist in 2000. That casts doubt on the boldness of his leadership. A few shady characters lurk round him, too.

#### Was Yushchenko poisoned?

Then there is the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's fractious, juvenile parliament, which would prevent both candidates doing some of the things they are promising. Whereas those Russian oligarchs who are not either in jail or in exile now tend to keep tactfully shtum about the government, in Ukraine many of the oligarchs are in parliament (which, among other advantages, provides them with immunity). Parties are born and die, marry and divorce, with such frequency that any president will find sustained reform difficult.

And Ukraine's links with Russia—cultural, religious, historical and linguistic—are too profound to be casually severed. If Mr Yushchenko wins, the United States and the European Union will be friendlier towards his country; so too, probably, will western investors. But good will has its limits, and EU membership will remain a distant prospect for Ukraine whoever is its president. Given its handy location on the Black Sea and close to the unstable Caucasus, NATO membership may be more attainable. For his part, as Hryhoriy Nemyria, of Kiev's Centre for European and International Studies, puts it, Mr Yanukovich would probably "continue a strategy of milking two cows": cosying up to Moscow, without disavowing the long-term goal of European integration.

All the same, a win for Mr Yushchenko would be a symbolic vote for change, however thwarted and incremental. That is enough to worry Russia, which has more or less openly supported Mr Yanukovich. Mr Putin received the prime minister, along with Mr Kuchma, in Moscow earlier this month. He is also visiting Ukraine just before the election, ostensibly to observe a parade commemorating Kiev's liberation from the Nazis. His trip has included a television appearance, in which he praised Mr Yanukovich's economic record and promised closer links.

Why is Mr Putin so exercised? Partly because of Russia's business interests in Ukraine; partly because of Russia's naval base in the Crimea, and worries about what might happen to it if Ukraine really did join NATO. But mainly because of post-Soviet neuroses that can seem just as murky as the labyrinthine cross-border energy deals that have lined the pockets of both Russian and Ukrainian officials.

Many Russians feel humiliated by the diminution of the country's stature since the Soviet Union's collapse, especially by the West's intrusions into, and influence over, the ex-Soviet nations of central Asia, as well as the Baltics. On Mr Putin's watch, the Russian "sphere of influence" has already shrunk with the "loss" of Georgia. This sense of grievance helps to explain Russia's illogical support for tin-pot separatist regimes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two breakaway regions of Georgia, and the last vestiges of its territorial empire that Russia has yet to fully relinquish.

For Russia's derzhavniki (great-power nationalists), loss of influence over Ukraine—so close at hand, with its large ethnic Russian population and its Slavic heritage—would mean that Russia had forfeited all claim to greatness. As one senior western diplomat in Kiev bluntly puts it, "You don't have a Russian empire with a democratic Ukraine." For such Russians, western talk about the virtues of democracy is just a cover for the real goal: to push Europe's border eastwards yet again.

Will Mr Putin get his man, and his way? Given the dubiousness of Ukrainian opinion polls, the reluctance of many voters to admit their true intentions and the large number of undecideds, it is hard to say. Almost certainly, the two Victors will advance to a second-round run-off, which is scheduled for November 21st. The outcome of that would largely depend on how the votes cast for other candidates are redistributed, in particular those for the communist and for Mr Moroz, the socialist. Mr Moroz says that, should he not make it to the run-off himself, he will definitely not support Mr Yanukovich—but he may not support Mr Yushchenko, either.

#### A mystery plague and a curious egg

All this assumes, however, that the election will be decided by a fair count. In a campaign already notorious for the alleged poisoning of the main candidate, this looks optimistic. Whatever the cause of his horrible disfigurement—his exotic diet, say his opponents—the blight cost Mr Yushchenko several weeks of on-the-ground campaigning. That was a particularly cruel blow to him, since almost all Ukraine's television stations are controlled either by the state—by Viktor Medvedchuk, the head of the current presidential administration— or by Mr Pinchuk, and their coverage is skewed in favour of Mr Yanukovich. Meanwhile, a television station largely owned by Petro Poroshenko, one of Mr Yushchenko's closest aides, has been harassed.

#### Suppressed in Minsk

After the "poisoning", there followed a bizarre incident in the western town of Ivano-Frankivsk, in which Mr Yanukovich, who is not a small man, was struck by an egg and crumpled to the ground as if pole-axed. The rumour is that he was expecting a staged assassination attempt, which a teenage egg-thrower pre-empted. Other shenanigans have been less comic: bombs have allegedly been planted in the offices of a pro-democracy student movement ("terrorists", say the authorities). State employees have been bullied to support Mr Yanukovich. Opposition meetings have been disrupted.

Mr Yushchenko maintains that plans for large-scale falsification of the vote are already in train, and that they involve, among other things, stitched-up local electoral commissions, thousands of "dead souls" (deceased voters who have not been removed from the ballots), and fraud at the polling stations that have been set up for Ukrainians in Russia.

But any sort of peaceful transfer of power would be preferable to the still more sinister possibilities he and others are anticipating. The parade in Kiev, which is taking place nine days before the actual date of the city's liberation, is thought by some to be a pretext for bringing large military units to the capital. Bus-loads of criminals and miners from eastern Ukraine are also said to be en route to create havoc in Kiev—and thus justify the annulment of the elections or the declaration of a state of emergency by Mr Kuchma.

According to this view, Mr Medvedchuk and his oligarchic friends do not trust Mr Yanukovich, who is backed by a rival oligarchic clan. They will thus find a way for Mr Kuchma to remain in power, install a more pliant replacement, or perhaps dilute the powers of the presidency through constitutional reform. "For this kind of people", claims Mr Poroshenko, "this is a war, not a competition." Mr Yanukovich's supporters, meanwhile, allege that the opposition is planning a "chestnut revolution" (named for the trees that line Kiev's main drag), along the lines of the "rose revolution" in Georgia last year. They also say that it will not succeed: "Ukraine is not Georgia," says Mr Tihipko, firmly.

He is probably right. History has inculcated a certain resigned patience among Ukrainians. Like the other lands between the Baltic and the Black Sea, Ukraine has suffered 700 years of invasion and conquest, from the Mongols to the Nazis. Parts of western Ukraine were incorporated into its territory only in 1945; the Crimea was added in 1954. Until 1991, it had never been an independent state.

Sitting on the nail

The history of Belarus, to the north, has been if anything still more traumatic, and its political culture is still more quietist. In a joke Belarussians tell about themselves, a Russian, a Ukrainian and a Belarussian catch a train together, only to find nails sticking up from their allotted seats. The Russian throws the nail out of the window. The Ukrainian pulls it out and takes it home. The Belarussian assumes that it must be there for a reason, and so sits on it placidly. After centuries of domination by either the Lithuanians, Poles or Russians, ruination during the second world war and decimation by Stalin, the nail Belarus has been sitting on since 1994 is Alexander Lukashenka.

Mr Lukashenka's rigged referendum on October 17th gave him the right to change his country's constitution and stand for a third presidential term in 2006. He has already extended his tenure once, and neutered and suborned Belarus's parliament. It is hard, in fact, to see why he bothers with elections. Like Mr Kuchma, Mr Lukashenka has reason to worry about his future, and his freedom, should he ever step down; unlike Mr Kuchma, who could have stood for president again but hasn't, Mr Lukashenka is unlikely to go voluntarily.

Yet the opposition in Belarus commands nothing like the support that Mr Yushchenko can muster in Ukraine. A pre-referendum rally in Minsk, the capital, was attended by only a few hundred people. A few brave students waved the nationalist flag of Belarus that Mr Lukashenka has replaced with a Soviet-era one. Slightly bigger protests held in Minsk after the referendum were brutally broken up by the police. Anatoly Lebedko, an opposition leader, was beaten unconscious.

That sort of treatment helps to explain why Belarussians prefer grumbling in their kitchens to demonstrating on the streets. Human-rights groups and independent newspapers are routinely closed down and persecuted by the tax authorities (which are also deployed against political troublemakers in Ukraine). Recently, even a university was closed. Fear of being sacked is also a powerful deterrent to protest, since the Soviet-style economy offers few alternatives to working for a state-owned enterprise.

But the uncomfortable truth for Mr Lukashenka's western critics is that, though not so popular as his phoney referendum result suggests, he is still well-liked. Away from Minsk, with its daunting monumentalist architecture and preternaturally clean streets, Belarus is a poor country. But Mr

Lukashenka has seen to it that state salaries and the pensions of rural babushkas are paid on time, even managing modest increases. Mr Lebedko hopes that silent legions of the president's critics will one day realise they are not alone; but he may wait in vain.

### Lessons from Lukashenka

Belarus is a smaller and less pivotal country than Ukraine. The human-rights situation there is grim, though not as bad as that in some other countries of the world. Yet for two reasons, the West cannot ignore the antics of its tragicomic president.

The first is that Mr Lukashenka's Belarus is also part of Russia's buffer against western encroachment. The prospect of a full union between Belarus and Russia has receded, as relations have soured between Mr Lukashenka and Mr Putin. Mr Lukashenka's shameless abuses and anti-western rants are embarrassing. But, for Mr Putin, Mr Lukashenka is a useful idiot, if an exasperating one, and Russia continues to subsidise him with cheap energy sales.

The more important reason is the influence that little Belarus could be exerting on mighty Russia. Liberals in Ukraine fear that if Mr Yushchenko loses the election, their country will increasingly resemble Mr Putin's Russia. Liberals in Russia, meanwhile, fear that, under Mr Putin, their country will increasingly resemble Mr Lukashenka's Belarus. Witness, so the argument runs, Mr Putin's plan to appoint regional governors and his moves to recover the state's control over the economy and subdue the oligarchs (a class that has not prospered in Belarus). Rumours are also swirling in Moscow that Mr Putin may try to emulate Mr Lukashenka and, one way or another, stay in power beyond his second presidential term (though in his television appearance this week, Mr Putin hinted that he wouldn't).

Therein lies the other reason why the symbolism of Ukraine's election is so important: its outcome will help to define not just the borders of the shadow Russian empire, but will help to shape the prospects for democracy within Russia itself. A legitimate election, says that senior western diplomat in Kiev, will have a "very positive impact on all of its neighbours—including the big guy—in terms of democratic development". A properly democratic Ukraine would offer Russia a different model to emulate.

Mr Yushchenko rightly wants the international election observers who are pouring into Ukraine not to be "deaf and dumb" about electoral violations, and says that "the entire world should demonstrate its solidarity" by refusing to recognise an illegitimate president, should one be installed. So they should. But even if that happens this time, Ukraine is too lively, too European, not to get its democracy sooner or later. Russia, on the other hand, is a different story.

*Source: Economist; October 28, 2004; www.economist.com*

## **6. Russia, Belarus Sign Military Cooperation Plan**

The Russian and Belarusian defense ministers, Sergei Ivanov and Leonid Maltsev, have signed a plan of cooperation between their countries' Defense Ministries.

The document was signed after a session of the joint collegium of the Defense Ministries of Russia and Belarus in Moscow on Tuesday, an Interfax-Military News Agency correspondent reported.

The two countries' 2002-2006 program of military-technical cooperation was discussed during the session.

"The program envisions joint research on security, defense, military principles and actual steps to put them into practice. The document also calls for providing a scientific foundation for setting up

a military agency in the Russia-Belarus Union," the Russian Defense Ministry's press service told Interfax.

"Taking account of the fact that military-technical cooperation between Russia and Belarus is currently rising to a qualitatively new level in its development, the decision was made at the collegium's session to introduce amendments to existing documents that regulate the area of Russian-Belarusian military cooperation," the press service said.

*Source: Interfax; November 1, 2004; www.interfax.ru*

## **7. Belarus to Spend 30-fold More on Air Defense in 2005 than CIS States**

In 2005 Belarus is to spend almost 30-fold more funds on developing the Unified Air Defense System than all other CIS member-states, including Russia (2.2 billion Russian rubles (\$76.5 million)).

"Belarus plans to allocate 2.2 billion Russian rubles (\$76.5 million) to developing the Unified Air Defense System next year. Other CIS member-states, including Russia, plan to provide over 83 million Russian rubles (\$2.9 million)," Colonel Gennady Surkov, secretary of the CIS Air Defense Coordination Committee, told Interfax-Military News Agency on Wednesday.

He said that the decision on allocating assets for developing the CIS Unified Air Defense System in 2005 was adopted by the CIS Heads of State Council in Astana on September 15, 2004.

"In 2005 the overall budget of the CIS Unified Air Defense System will amount to 2.295 billion Russian rubles (\$79.8 million)," he said.

The official did not say what Belarus planned to spend such a great amount of money on.

A source in the CIS Military Cooperation Coordination Headquarters told Interfax-AVN that most funds, allocated by Belarus, will be spent on upgrading Buk air defense systems (over 1 billion Russian rubles (\$34.7 million)), as well as overhauling S-300P air defense systems (over 72 million Russian rubles (\$2.5 million)).

"Belarus plans to spend some of the assets on upgrading various types of relay stations and other Air Defense materiel," he said.

At the present time the CIS Unified Air Defense Systems includes the following eight states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Russia, and Tajikistan, with Uzbekistan and Ukraine participating on a bilateral basis.

*Source: Interfax; October 28, 2004| www.interfax.com*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **8. Belarus Diplomats Not Allowed to Observe US Elections**

Representatives of the Belarusian Embassy in the United States have been denied accreditation to be international observers in the November 2 presidential elections.

"The Belarusian Embassy made a written request to the heads of election organization agencies in Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia," Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Savinykh told journalists on Thursday in Minsk.

*Source: Interfax; October 28, 2004; www.interfax.ru*

## **9. Belarus Calls on USA to Fulfill OSCE Requirements**

On October 28, Viktor Gaisenok, the Belarusian representative to the Organization for Safety and cooperation in Europe (OSCE), appeared at Permanent Council session and raised the issue of the forthcoming presidential elections in the US.

Gaisenok stated that the leadership of certain states refused to accredit independent election observers from Belarus. Additionally information was received that several other US states have forbidden participation of international observers through legislation.

"Refusing to accredit international observers as well as carrying out the supervision of that observation are direct infringements of the OSCE's Copenhagen Document and the Istanbul Declaration of Obligations, which the US has voluntarily undertaken, but has not, and does not plan to meet. The authorities' actions are not creating transparent elections and putting their fair and free character, along with their entire democratic nature into doubt," Gaisenok declared.

The Belarusian representative has called on the OSCE's Bureau on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (BDIHR) to immediately inform member countries of the organization about which US states have made international observation of elections impossible. The Belarusian diplomat also addressed US authorities and appealed to them to immediately create necessary conditions for observation to be carried out.

[Text translated by the editor]

*Source: BelaPAN; October 28, 2004; www.naviny.by*

## **10. CIA Unmasks Links between Hussein and Lukashenko's Regimes**

The CIA has published a special report on weapons of mass destruction weapons in Iraq. An essential part of the report describes the documents and evidence on cooperation between Saddam Hussein and Aleksandr Lukashenko's regimes in areas of military equipment and technology trade, which defies UN sanctions. According to the report, Belarusian president Lukashenka and Hussein had special relations. Lukashenka agreed to support Hussein because the Iraqi president supported the presidential elections in Belarus in 2001.

As reported by Radio Svoboda, persons from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, who, according to Baghdad, have made a substantial contribution to Iraq's security, through shares in Hussein's sale of oil. Among the Belarusian recipients, according to the report, are Infobank director Viktor Shavtsov, former deputy head of presidential administration Vladimir Zamyatalin, current deputy head of the presidential administration Mikolai Ivanenko; director of the enterprise "BelFarm" Yuri Shabrov; officer of Belarusian security system, probably KGB, Aleksandr Raboty, and chairman of the Trade Union Federation Leonid Kozik.

The Central Bank of Iraq established relations with Lebanese, Jordanian and Belarusian banks to deposit cash received from overpriced contracts. Belarusian Infobank was used for hiding the regime's money on the accounts employees. Money from these accounts come from machinations on the UN "Oil-for-food" program.

[Text revised by the editor]

Source: *Charter 97*; October 27, 2004; [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org)

## **11. Belarus FM Begins Visit to Cuba**

Belarus is interested in broadening relations with Cuba in all fields, including economic cooperation, Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov, who arrived in the Cuban capital on Sunday night, said here.

The Belarusian foreign minister will hold with Cuban representatives consultations on issues of the two countries' political cooperation and interaction in international organizations.

On the results of the talks, the sides are expected to sign a protocol of intent to define main directions of bilateral relations.

During the visit, Sergei Martynov will hold talks with Chairman of the National Assembly of People's Power (parliament) of Cuba.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko paid an official visit to Cuba in 2000.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; November 1, 2004; [www.itar-tass.com](http://www.itar-tass.com)

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **12. Belarus Journalists' Group Wins Top EU Rights Prize**

The European Parliament on Thursday awarded its annual Sakharov human rights prize to the Belarusian Association of Journalists for striving to uphold a free media under an authoritarian regime.

The president of the European Union assembly said giving the 2004 prize to the association, "which fights for freedom of information against the attempts by President (Alexander) Lukashenko to smother it, is a very positive event".

Josep Borrell added: "The results of the latest elections in this country make it clear that those fighting for freedom of information in Belarus and everywhere else in the world deserve our support."

He was referring to polls and a referendum in Belarus earlier this month opening the way for the hardline Lukashenko to retain power indefinitely.

Western governments and election monitors, as well as opposition leaders, slammed the vote.

Lukashenko would have been legally barred from trying to hold office after his current term expires in 2006, but can now run as many times as he wants.

The EU and United States have imposed travel sanctions against Lukashenko's administration and both are debating toughening up their measures against the Minsk regime.

US President George W. Bush this month signed into law a measure calling for greater democracy in Belarus, saying it showed deep US concern that the government was becoming "a regime of repression in the heart of Europe".

The EU has also been taking a stronger line since the referendum.

The 25-nation bloc's Dutch presidency responded with tough words on Wednesday after a weekend opposition demonstration in Belarus was violently broken up by police.

"The political situation in Belarus is getting from bad to worse," Dutch Europe Minister Atzo Nicolai told the European Parliament in a speech.

"We are faced with a neighbouring country where one man on his own decides what is best for the population. Opposition and independent media are repressed; democracy is a far cry," he said.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists has complained of a campaign of intimidation and even murder at the hands of the authorities since Lukashenko took over as leader of the impoverished former Soviet republic 10 years ago.

Since plans for the referendum were announced, the government has closed down at least eight independent newspapers that have not toed a pro-Lukashenko line.

Last week independent reporter Veronika Cherkasova, 44, was found stabbed to death in her apartment in Minsk.

The Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists called for an independent investigation into her killing, accusing Lukashenko of "unleashing a wave of hatred" against opposition voices.

"Violence against journalists is very often the result when an atmosphere of intimidation overtakes society," IFJ general secretary Aidan White said in a statement.

The European Parliament plans to present the high-profile Sakharov award, named after the former Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov and accompanied by a 50,000 euro cheque, to representatives of the Belarus media association at a plenary session in Strasbourg in December.

Past recipients include Nelson Mandela, Myanmar opposition leader Aung Saan Suu Kyi and Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng. Last year it went to the United Nations.

This year's shortlist also included Ingrid Betancourt, a French-Colombian human rights activist held hostage by the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia group.

Natalya Estemirova, a Chechen human rights activist, and fellow Russian activist Sergey Kovalev were also put forward for joint consideration.

*Source: EU Business; October 28, 2004; www.eubusiness.com*

### **13. KGB Says American Lacks Immunity**

The United Nations demanded that Belarus free an American arrested in the ex-Soviet republic, but the country's spy service, the Belarusian State Security Committee (KGB), yesterday insisted that the man is not protected by diplomatic immunity.

KGB spokesman Alexander Bazanov said Ilya Mafter, a long-term employee of the Open Society Institute who also was working on a project organized by the U.N. Development Program, had set up an illegal communication facility and earned about \$100,000 in illegal revenue in six months.

The institute said Mr. Mafter was working on a project in collaboration with the Belarusian Ministry of Education to help expand Internet service.

*Source: Washington Times; October 30, 2004; www.washingtontimes.com*

## **BUSINESS**

### **14. Belarusian Parliament Ratifies Agreement with Russia on Oil Pipeline use in Belarusian Territory**

At its Thursday plenary meeting, the upper house of the National Assembly of Belarus unanimously ratified and submitted to the president the agreement with Russia on the use of main oil pipelines in the Belarusian territory, as well as two protocols to it concerning the recognition of Russian ownership of property complexes of the Zapad-Transneftprodukt and Telekomneftprodukt enterprises.

The documents were signed in Minsk at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Russia-Belarus Union State on June 8, 2004.

Prime-Tass said the agreement on interaction in exploitation of trunk petroleum products pipelines will annul the effect of an analogous agreement signed on July 20, 1992.

The new agreement, unlike the previous one, regulates issues of industrial, fire and ecological security during exploitation of oil-products pipeline, as well as matters pertaining to fixing and changing prices on transit services through the Belarusian stretch of the trunk line.

The agreement's fulfilment will promote effective load of the Belarusian section of the pipeline, as well as the development and implementation of investment programmes and projects to increase technical capabilities of oil product transportation systems.

After the agreement and protocols come into force the oil products transportation costs through the Belarusian section will increase from 0.58 to 0.89 U.S. dollars a tonne per each 100 kilometres.

According to calculations made by the Belarusian Economic Ministry, this will increase budget revenues 1.6 times and tax revenues 1.9 times.

Belarus hopes the documents' functioning will also make it possible to enhance transit volumes and will remove many problems in the process of development, coordination and execution of the fuel-energy balance of the Union State of Belarus and Russia.

[Text revised by the editor]

*Source: Itar-Tass; October 28, 2004; www.itar-tass.com*

### **15. Belarusian Upper House Passes 2005 Budget with 1.5% deficit**

The upper house of the Belarusian parliament has passed a budget bill for 2005 that specifies a deficit of 910 billion Belarusian rubles, or 1.5% of GDP, an Interfax correspondent reported from parliament.

The lower house had passed the draft 2005 budget on October 8. It sets revenues at 18.257 trillion Bel. rubles and spending at 19.166 trillion Bel. rubles.

Source: *Interfax*; October 28, 2004; [www.interfax.com](http://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 at [sanwaree\\_ilhr.org](mailto:sanwaree_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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