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DOMESTIC

1. Lukashenko: Belarus Will Not Change its Strategic Course

President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko has officially endorsed the results of a nationwide referendum that was held in Belarus on October 17.

"That was the victory of the entire Belarusian people, rather than the president. It was the people who made their choice," Lukashenko said.

"Belarus will not change its strategic course now that the Belarusian people have voted for it. We shall build strong and prosperous Belarus," he said.

Lukashenko by way of plebiscite of citizens of Belarus has won the right to run for presidency for a third term.

The clause stipulating that "one and the same person can be president for no more than two terms" has been excluded from the country's Constitution as a result of the referendum, which was approved by 79 percent of the electorate, said Chairwoman of the Central Election Commission Lidia Yermoshina.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; November 17, 2004; www.itar-tass.com

2. Belarus: Minsk Avoids UN Resolution On Its Human Rights Record

Belarus has avoided a vote on a proposed UN General Assembly resolution alleging serious violations of human rights by the government. The assembly's Human Rights Committee -- divided over the tactic of single-country resolutions -- voted to adjourn the discussion through a "no-action motion," marking a setback to the European Union and United States, which sponsored the original measure. The no-action motion effectively quashes discussion of Belarus's rights record during this assembly session.

Belarus has taken advantage of a little-used maneuver to elude a UN General Assembly vote on a resolution expressing concern about its human rights record.

The UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee late yesterday followed a recommendation by Russia to approve a procedural move known as a "no-action motion." Russia had complained that single-country resolutions are unnecessary and politicize the work of the committee.

The measure to drop the resolution was approved by a vote of 75 to 65, with Belarus getting support from many developing states opposed to such "naming and shaming" actions. There will now be no General Assembly action on Belarus's rights record. Such resolutions are nonbinding but carry enormous symbolic importance.

The envoy of current EU president the Netherlands, Koen van der Wolk, told RFE/RL that the vote set a bad precedent for confronting human rights problems. "This is killing for the debate, and that's exactly what we feel is very important," he said. "The debate should go on, the dialogue should go on, and this is exactly what we are not having with these kinds of motions." The resolution would have carried forward some of the concerns raised in a resolution adopted earlier this year by the UN Human Rights Commission against Belarus.

The United States and the European Union had co-sponsored the resolution, which raised concern about the disappearance of political opponents, electoral irregularities, and the beating and detention of demonstrators and journalists after the recent elections.

In the text, the assembly would have urged Minsk to rectify problems with the electoral process, cease politically motivated prosecution and harassment, and suspend from their duties officials implicated in cases of enforced disappearance. The resolution would have carried forward some of the concerns raised in a resolution adopted earlier this year by the UN Human Rights Commission against Belarus.

Belarus had rejected the charges and objected to what it termed the manipulation of human rights issues for political purposes. Russia's representative on the rights committee, Andrei Nikiforov, said Belarus is already engaged in a positive dialogue on rights issues. "This measure as we see it is not appropriate given the demonstration by Belarus of its readiness to engage constructively with the international community on human rights matters," Nikiforov said.

But a U.S. representative, Frank Urbancic, said it was the Human Rights Committee's responsibility to take steps to advance human rights. He said the Russian proposal undermined the committee's work. "This motion is a blatant attempt to silence the General Assembly's consideration of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus," he said. "As such, this motion would effectively prevent this body from fulfilling its mandate."

Earlier this month, Belarus had introduced a draft resolution seeking to scrutinize human rights practices in the United States. It withdrew that resolution last week. Nikiforov said the United States should have responded to that move with a similar gesture.

Source: Robert McMahon; RFE/RL; November 19, 2004; www.rferl.org

3. Opposition Will Travel All through Belarus

Political parties supporting the “Five Steps to a Better Life” program have decided that a single candidate will be chosen through primaries. Now the most difficult task of choosing the optimal plan for carrying this out and organizing preliminary voting remains.

The projects on the primaries of the Belarusian National Front and the United Civil Party are under review.

The United Civil Party’s planned project is based on the idea to make as many Belarusians as possible to participate in the election process of a single candidate. “The question of a single candidate must be resolved by Belarusian citizens. We are not artificially growing a candidate for the presidency; we are naturally arriving at a national leader, who is missing in today’s Belarus. There are many people of merit, but the leader is missing,” Anatoly Lebedko, chairman of the United Civil Party told *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*.

Members of the Belarusian National Front insist that in order for the question of the future presidential candidate to be resolved not only by the popular masses, but also through the participation of party structures. This is logical since the party structures will work with the candidate and should be in agreement on the selected nominee. The Belarusian National Front has proposed carrying out a complicated 4-level selection system of picking one of their own, that is a nominee from the opposition parties.

But if parties will only depend on their own candidates, then they will ignore those with presidential aspirations but no party card, as well as those who are said to be able to compete with Aleksandr Lukashenko for the presidential post. Off hand, we can recall the leader of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Unions, Aleksandr Yaroshuk; businessman and former Deputy of the Supreme Soviet Andrei Klimov; and former member of the Chamber of Representatives Natalya Masherova...

By the way, Andrei Klimov has positively responded to the idea of a primary, but he believes that they will not be necessary. “Discussions on a single candidate are already futile. The situation in and around Belarus has changed profoundly after the referendum. I believe that in 2006, Aleksandr Lukashenko will not take part in the presidential elections. Therefore the need to search for an opposition candidate will no longer exist. There will only be fair competition between all candidates seeking the presidency.”

The people’s opinion as to the name of the optimal single opposition candidate should become clear thanks to large-scale sociological study. It is believed that polls will be held by the Baltic Gallup Service, the Russian Levada-Center and sociological groups within Belarus, which are trusted by independent experts. These studies will make-up the primaries.

But how will they be carried out fully? In order to find out which one is the best, people must first be shown the opposition leaders. But the opposition does not have access to the state owned media. The door-to-door approach will not work. To cover a district on foot is one thing, to cover entire Belarus on foot is another. Problems can also arise with the polls. For instance, Gallup’s exit poll on October 17, the day of the election and referendum, was almost derailed.

However, Vladimir Dorokhov, an expert from the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research, does not see large problems with carrying out an all-out sociological study intended to serve as the primaries – as long as there is money and desire. “It there are resources there will also be experts who will design the questionnaire and conduct appropriate surveys,” he stated in an interview with *Belorusskie Novosti*

□[Text translated by the editor]

Source: Sergei Pulsha; BelaPAN; November 22, 2004; www.naviny.by

4. Belarusian President Lukashenko Complains About French Models

Speaking to parliament on Wednesday the president of Belarus, Aleksander Lukashenko, called for the restoration of order in the model business, the prevention of human trafficking and also said that advertisers must show a preference for Belarusian models to foreigners in their work, the Interfax news agency reports.

“We cannot allow for our youth, especially the girls, become a subject of commerce,” Lukashenko said. The president said that the police, prosecutors and the KGB must combine their efforts to prevent the multiplying of model agencies and clubs of disrepute.

“The fight against human trafficking will be effective if we concentrate our efforts on preventing this phenomenon,” the Belarusian leader said.

“We must provide young people with information and with possibilities of self-realization. Like advertising of clothing or services. We must force our enterprises to actively develop the advertising business and for those who prefer to work abroad we must thoroughly develop a legal basis. We must raise the level of responsibility for those who send our girls to work there,” Lukashenko said.

The president stressed that there were a lot of beautiful women in Belarus and there was enough work for them in their home country.

“The French girls with worn out faces should not be seen at every crossroads in Minsk, including the ones passed by the president,” Lukashenko said, obviously referring to billboards with pictures of foreign models.

“Put the photos of your own girls there and make them advertise the watches made by our factories and foreign watch [manufacturers] must pay our girls,” the Belarusian leader said.

Source: MosNews; November 17, 2004; www.mosnews.com

5. Windstorm Causes Serious Damage in Belarus

A heavy windstorm caused serious damage in 1,728 populated areas in Belarus over the past two days, the Belarusian Emergencies Ministry reported on Saturday.

The windstorm damaged almost 2,000 houses, public, farm and industrial buildings and communication and electro-transmission lines.

About 3,600 people are mobilised to deal with the storm consequences. Almost 700 units of various vehicles and equipment are used in the repair work.

Source: Itar-Tass; November 20, 2004; www.itar-tass.com

6. Belarusian President Sacks KGB Chief

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has dismissed Leanid Yeryn as chairman of the State Security Committee (KGB), Belapan reported on 18 November, quoting official news sources. Yeryn reportedly fell into disfavor with Lukashenka following his meeting on 18 October with several opposition demonstrators protesting the official results of the 17 October presidential referendum. Yeryn invited a small group of opposition activists and independent journalists for a chat in his office after a crowd of some 400 protesters gathered in front of the KGB headquarters on 18 October to demand the release of several prominent pro-democracy figures. Pavel Sevyarynets, leader of the opposition Youth Front, subsequently told the protesters in Yeryn's presence that the KGB chief vowed during the chat to provide explanations for the disappearances of Lukashenka's political opponents in 1999-2000.

Source: RFE/RL; November 19, 2004; www.rferl.org

REGIONAL

7. Belarusians Hailed At Concert In Kiev

In Kontraktova Square, where the Ukrainian youth organization "Pora" has erected a tent, a concert featuring the most popular Ukrainian rock bands is going on. At 4 p.m. about a thousand people had come to the square, but the number of participants is growing. Ukrainian, Georgian and Belarusian national flags, flags of the Ukrainian "Pora" and Belarusian "Zubr" are streaming in the wind over the listeners. People are chanting "Truth!" "We are together!" "We cannot be defeated!" The hosts of the show asked the audience to greet guests from Georgia and Belarus. The concert is to last until 7 p.m. After that its participants are to go to the Maidan Nezalezhnosti, where mass opposition rally and parallel vote count are to be held.

Source: Charter 97; November 21, 2004; www.charter97.org

INTERNATIONAL

8. EU Set to Sanction Belarus

The European Union is expected to ban some Belarus officials from its territory and freeze bilateral links between member states and Minsk to protest what it called fraudulent elections in the former Soviet republic.

A draft statement, due to be approved by EU foreign ministers on Monday, urges President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus to change his policies, which have isolated the impoverished nation of 10 million people.

It says the EU's 25 ministers will ban Minsk officials who were responsible for general elections last month and a referendum that scrapped a rule limiting Lukashenko to two terms as president. The EU said the voting was flawed.

Belarus police officers broke up rallies that followed the Oct. 17 elections, arresting dozens of opposition activists.

An EU diplomat said a tentative list of candidates for exclusion included the head of the state electoral commission, the head of the KGB security service, a deputy interior minister and the head of the presidential administration.

Source: International Herald Tribune; November 20, 2004; www.ihf.com

9. Belarus Hails UN Refusal to Mull Human Rights Resolution

The Belarussian Foreign Ministry has issued a statement following the decision of the United Nations not to discuss a draft resolution on human rights in Belarus submitted to the General Assembly by the United States and the European Union.

"The United Nations did not give in to massive pressure from the United States and other Western powers and declined to consider the draft they initiated. One hundred and three UN member-countries did not support the resolution, thus stripping the United States and the EU of the lever of political pressure on Belarus," a ministry statement said.

Most countries supported the Belarussian position that the submission of the resolution was a political step intended to put pressure on the country, the ministry said.

Source: Interfax; November 19, 2004; ww.interfax.com

10. Belarus Blasts U.S. for Double Standards

A Belarus official accused the United States Thursday of applying double standards to his country, Interfax news agency reported.

The State Department's report on human rights in Belarus shows "bias and preconceived notions in the United States' evaluation of the political and economic situation" in the country, Belarussian Foreign Ministry Press Secretary Andrei Savinykh said.

"In essence, the report on Belarus is a collection of subjective evaluations and often times incorrect information from unreliable sources," Savinykh said. "Against the background of America's many human rights violations, the criticism of the Belarussian administration is another example of a double standards."

"The position of principle for Belarus is that we are flat against the politicization of the human rights issue and using it as an instrument of interference in the internal affairs of other nations," Savinykh said.

Source: Washington Times; November 18, 2004; www.washingtontimes.com

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

11. Belarusian Opposition Accused of Libel

On October 21, in the *Moskovsky Komsomolets'* editorial office, six members of the Belarusian opposition accused authorities of rigging the elections and referendum. In turn, the Prosecutor's Office now accuses them of "libel" and "known false information."

On November 17, the Zavodsky District Prosecutor's Office summoned Aleksandr Koktysh, press secretary of the Belarusian-Russian Foundation for a New Belarus, an organization officially

registered in Russia. Sergei Bandarenko, the prosecutor's assistant, familiarized the journalist with the criminal code articles, under which he can face up to 5 years in prison. Koktysh believes that the criminal persecution of opposition activists was initiated by the Belarusian Prosecutor's Office. Koktysh stated that he saw "Prosecutor's Office Directive, dated November 12."

"I have no proof that the criminal case has already been initiated. But the summons to the Prosecutor's Office indicates a very serious inquiry; there will be criminal cases and there will be trials," Koktysh stated in his interview with a PRIMA-News correspondent on November 18.

Former parliamentary deputy Valery Frolov, Chairman of the Organization of Belarusian Intelligentsia Vladimir Kolos, Deputy Chairman of United Civil Party Aleksandr Dobrovolsky, Head of the board of trustees of the Foundation for a New Belarus Vasily Leonov and journalist Aleksandr Koktysh took part in the press conference held by *Moskovsky Komsomolets*.

[Text translated by the editor]

Source: *Prima news*; November 18, 2004; www.prima-news.ru

12. Zubr Struggles For Mikhail Marynich's Discharge

Zubr activists have carried out a new rally in support of political prisoner Mikhail Marynich. A banner with the words "Free Marynich!" was unfurled on November 16 in the evening over the Babrujskaya Street in Minsk. An eight-meter-long was hanging over a busy street for half an hour, attracting attention of the drivers and passengers of public transport. Activists were not detained.

As we have reported the former Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Belarus from the 12th Supreme Soviet was detained by KGB officers on April 26. Since that time he was placed in a pre-trial detention center. Now he has been charged with a violation of Article 295 Part 2 of the Administrative Code (illegal actions with firearms, ammunition and explosives); Article 210 Part 4 (embezzlement through abuse of office by an organized group or at a large scale). Mikhail Marynich is charged with illegal possession of firearms and stealing office equipment temporarily given to the public organization "Belarusian Association "Business Initiative," which he headed.

[Text revised by the editor]

Source: *Zubr*; November 17, 2004; www.zubr-belarus.com

13. *Mestnaya Gazeta* Editor Provides an Explanation of His Hunger Strike to the Police

On November 17, Andrei Shantarovich, editor-in-chief of *Mestnaya Gazeta* was called in to the Vaukavysk District Department of Internal Affairs. He was requested to give an explanation regarding the his "unauthorized action", i.e. his hunger strike, held from October 20 till November 9, 2004 as a protest against the Ministry's of Information decision to suspend publishing of his newspaper. The police officers showed interest in the protest action details. Among other things, they were curious about the nature of the leaflets containing information on the hunger strike, which had been distributed in Vaukavysk.

There was no new edition of *Mestnaya Gazeta* on November 17. According to Shantarovich, the "Plutos" Company printed 2,500 thousand copies of the periodical issue. The printing process was interrupted all of a sudden. The printing house accused the newspaper's publisher of "a backlog of debts." According to Shantarovich, the "Plutos" directorate hadn't said anything about the debts a day earlier.

The issue was dedicated to Shantarovich's hunger strike, a Vaukavysk businessman M. Autukhovich and the recent parliamentary election and the referendum results.

[Text revised by the editor]

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; November 17, 2004; www.baj.ru

BUSINESS

14. Belarusian Foreign Debt Shrinks 16.4% in January-September 2004

The foreign state debt of Belarus, not including short-term credits, decreased by 16.4% in January-September 2004, including 1% in September, to \$615.6 million as of October 1, the Finance Ministry reported. The foreign debt on October 1 included \$298.6 million in direct government debt, down 14.6% from the beginning of 2004. Foreign loans received by companies under government guarantees decreased by 17.6% to \$317 million.

The central budget sets a ceiling of \$2 billion for the foreign debt as of the end of 2004. Belarus' main creditors are Russia, Germany, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Kuwait. The Finance Ministry expects the foreign debt to shrink by 23.5% to \$563.4 million in 2004.interfax.com

Source: Interfax; November 19, 2004; www.interfax.com

15. Belarusian Currency-Stock Exchange Registers Lorobank

Lorobank was registered in Minsk's free economic zone (FEZ). Northern Investment Bank, a joint stock company, International Reserve Bank, International Bank of Economic Cooperation and Raton are already working in the FEZ.

Lorobank was created with foreign capital (American and Latvian) in July 2002. On the date of registration the authorized capital was 466,300,000 Euros.

[Text translated by the editor]

Source: Belapan; November 21, 2004; www.naviny.by

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the Belarus Human Rights Support Project of the International League for Human Rights, www.ilhr.org. The League, now in its 62nd year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the International Labor Organization. To send letters to the Editor or to subscribe/unsubscribe please contact Sanwaree Sethi at 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.

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.
