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## DOMESTIC

### 1. Lukashenko Says KGB Should Do More Against Political Dissent

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko vowed Jan. 25 to retain tight control over the KGB, saying the widely feared security agency should do more to monitor political dissent in comments that caused alarm from rights groups.

Human rights activists warned that the move by Lukashenko signaled plans for a further crackdown against opposition groups in the former Soviet republic.

Lukashenko vowed during a speech to the KGB leadership in the Belarusian capital never to turn the agency over to civilian oversight. He said security agencies would answer to him alone, and that the KGB had responsibilities above and beyond that of normal law enforcement organs.

"You should work where neither the police, nor prosecutors, nor other agencies or enforcement authorities are able to work," Lukashenko said.

Last week, Lukashenko named Maj. Gen. Stepan Sukhorenko as the new head of the KGB, replacing Lt. Gen. Leonid Yerin who was sacked in November after he met with an opposition leader at KGB headquarters.

Sergei Anisko, an activist with the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, said the Jan. 25 announcement could herald a new crackdown on the opposition.

"Inasmuch as this concerns specific KGB divisions responsible for political surveillance, it follows that we can expect stepped-up pressure by the KGB on opposition parties ... their leaders and, in general, all dissidents in the country," Anisko said.

Lukashenko's comments come in the wake of last month's tumultuous "Orange Revolution" protests in neighboring Ukraine, which helped catapult opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko to power. Lukashenko and leaders from other former Soviet republics have reacted nervously to the Orange Revolution as well as to the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, which also saw an opposition activist - Mikhail Saakashvili - vaulted to the presidency.

Earlier this month, Lukashenko said the Ukrainian and Georgian upheavals would have little effect on Belarus. "There will not be any rose, orange or banana revolutions in our country," he said.

During his 10 years in power, Lukashenko has made Belarus into one of Europe's most repressive societies, bringing the media under a virtual state monopoly and leading the country into virtual international isolation. Many opposition leaders are either sitting in jail or have disappeared.

A referendum in October gave Lukashenko permission to stay on indefinitely as president by removing term limits. The vote was widely condemned as rigged, and prompted days of protests by opposition parties and youth activists. The former KGB chief Yerin held an hourlong meeting with leaders of the opposition Youth Front at KGB headquarters in Minsk amid the protests.

*Source: Kyiv Post; January 25, 2005; www.kyivpost.com*

## **2. Will Lukashenko Be Able to Build Nuclear Power Station?**

A prominent Belarusian opposition leader, Vladimir Parfenovich, has sensationally announced that the country's leadership has endorsed a program to build a nuclear power station in the republic. Mr. Parfenovich warned that if President Alexander Lukashenko were to get his hands on nuclear energy, Belarus would become the North Korea of Europe, *Gazeta* writes.

Mr. Lukashenko's desire to see a nuclear power station in the republic can be indirectly confirmed by his speeches: he did not rule out this possibility at a January 21 session on the country's energy security. The president also said that he had refused to sign an additional protocol to the agreement on the non-proliferation of nuclear technologies with the IAEA.

Belarusian scientists are convinced that there is no alternative to the construction of a nuclear power station from the viewpoint of the energy sector's strategic development. They believe a station could be built within five to eight years. However, Belarus does not have the money to build a \$3 billion, 1280-megawatt plant.

Apart from building its own station, Belarus is also considering the joint construction of a unit with Russia at the latter's stations in Smolensk or Kursk, which would be 1.5 times cheaper.

Russian experts do not believe that Belarus has any real reason for its plans. The possibility that Russia will build a nuclear power station in Belarus using an inter-government loan as, for example, it is building in India or China, cannot be considered even hypothetically.

Theoretically, not only Russia, but also France or the US could build a unit in Belarus. But a serious political question arises: would they want to do that? A Russian expert close to the Federal Atomic Energy Agency doubts they would.

Meanwhile, Mr. Parfenovich has already started setting up a committee of the Belarusian anti-nuclear front.

*Source: RiaNovosti; February 4, 2005; www.rian.ru*

### **3. Leader of Belarusian Liberal Democrats Makes Presidential Bid**

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has announced that it has started forming regional committees of a political movement called New Belarus-Unity to support Syarhey Haydukevich, LDP leader and a member of the Chamber of Representatives, as a potential candidate in the 2006 presidential election, Belapan reported on 31 January. "While others are only discussing who will become the common candidate, the LDP is acting," Haydukevich said, calling on the Belarusian pro-democracy forces to support his candidacy as a common candidate in the election. Haydukevich took part in the 2001 presidential vote, in which the Belarusian democratic opposition put forward Uladzimir Hancharyk to challenge President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Hancharyk officially obtained 15.4 percent of the vote, while Haydukevich garnered 2.5 percent. Two candidates from the Belarusian opposition, Mikalay Statkevich and Zyanon Paznyak, have already declared their readiness to run in the 2006 presidential election (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 19 January 2005). JM

*Source: RFE/RL; February 1, 2005; www.rferl.org*

### **4. Iron Man of Minsk Keeps Tyranny Alive**

The people of Belarus have long been familiar with the minutiae of Aleksandr Lukashenko's life. No television news bulletin in the former Soviet republic is complete without pictures of their authoritarian president opening a factory or haranguing a minister. His love of ice hockey is considered a matter of public interest.

Yet when Lukashenko took his mistress and sons to Austria on a luxurious skiing holiday last year, the trip was supposed to be a secret. As word leaked out, embarrassed aides claimed the president was there to meet leading western politicians.

Valery Levonevsky, a regional opposition leader, was incensed. He distributed a poem about the hardship of life in Belarus and a leaflet urging people to join a protest against "somebody going on a skiing holiday in Austria and having a good time at your expense".

Levonevsky paid a heavy penalty for his insubordination. First his son was arrested and held for two weeks; then his young daughter was briefly detained and strip-searched.

Finally, last spring, he and Alexander Vasilliev, a fellow critic of the regime, were sentenced to two years in prison for offending the president.

For months they were held in one of the country's worst remand jails, sharing a cell meant for 18 with more than 30 inmates, many of them suffering from tuberculosis. Levonevsky has since lost more than six stone and Amnesty International has declared both men prisoners of conscience.

"The truth about Belarus is it's a dictatorship," said Volodya, Levonevsky's son. "Everything is under Lukashenko's control and people live in fear. What happened to my father sent out a clear message: say anything against the president and you will be banged up."

To fly into Lukashenko's Belarus, a country of 10m people sandwiched between Russia and Poland, is to enter a Soviet time warp. Visitors joke that when you arrive you should put back your watch 30 years.

The culture shock begins at the airport in Minsk, the capital, where most of the lights are switched off to save electricity. It continues on the 30-mile road into the city. There are fewer than 30 billboards and several have been covered up after the president complained of seeing too many foreign models in Belarussian advertising.

The wide avenues of Minsk are almost empty: few Belarussians can afford a car. There are no kerbside vendors, beggars or stray dogs, and armies of workers keep the streets spotless.

The biggest hoardings feature police officers chatting to elderly women or giving flowers to children under the slogan: "We are always near". It is an ominous reminder the city is one of the most heavily policed in the world.

Lukashenko, 50, a former collective farm manager, was accused last month by Condoleezza Rice, the new American secretary of state, of turning Belarus into one of the world's six "outposts of tyranny", along with Iran, North Korea, Burma, Cuba and Zimbabwe.

A good deal of international opprobrium has accumulated since Lukashenko became president in 1994. In 1995, when a hot air balloon involved in a competition drifted into Belarussian airspace, the president had it shot down, killing the American pilot.

Three years later he ordered the eviction of a number of foreign ambassadors from their residences. When they refused to go he had their water and electricity cut off, forcing them out.

Almost all of the media have been placed under state control while the intelligence service — still known by its Soviet-era acronym, KGB — has become increasingly powerful.

Last October Lukashenko held a referendum, widely believed to have been rigged, that changed the rules to let him serve for more than two presidential terms.

While Belarussians struggle to survive on an average £120 a month, Lukashenko recently bought himself a £50m jet complete with gym, bedroom and shower. He will not be able to use it for a trip to America, however, since he is banned from travelling there. The same goes for several European countries.

The president has tightened his grip further since the "orange revolution" that brought the pro-western Viktor Yushchenko to power in neighbouring Ukraine. Several activists who attended the street protests there were beaten by KGB officers on their return.

Last month Mikhail Marinich, a leading opposition figure, was jailed for five years on charges of stealing computers from the American embassy — even though the embassy said it had lent them to him.

"Events in Ukraine have made him even more paranoid," said Zinaida Goncharova, the wife of Viktor Goncharov, an opposition leader who vanished with a friend nearly six years ago after leaving a Minsk bathhouse.

According to testimony from two former investigators and a KGB officer who fled the country, the men were abducted and killed by an interior ministry death squad accused of 30 political killings. Their car was apparently crushed by an armoured vehicle and buried with their bodies inside.

Increasingly fearful of growing dissent among the young, Lukashenko plans to strengthen a Soviet-era law prohibiting travel abroad without the KGB's permission.

Classes in state ideology have been introduced in schools and universities, while at least 75% of the music that radio stations play must be Belarussian.

If state television is to be believed, however, the country's youth has no wish to go abroad. Bulletins last week carried a report on children sent at state expense to ski at a local resort opened by Lukashenko.

"It's wonderful here. There is no need to travel abroad to ski," enthused one patriotic girl. Unless, she might have added, you are the president.

*Source: Mark Franchetti; The Times; February 6, 2005 [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk)*

## **5. New Laws from President Lukashenko take Belarus Back to the Soviet Union Era**

The up-to-date life in Belarus looks like a parody for the "best time" that people used to lead during the era of the USSR. The majority of Soviet citizens were fighting for healthy lifestyles, exemplary relations with work colleagues and moral image of the youth.

According to a recent order signed by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, every market booth, not to mention large stores or servicing enterprises, is obliged to have a so-called "Book of suggestions and complaints." Managers and directors of Belarusian enterprises have to organize mandatory "healthy lifestyle journals." FM-radio stations have a new rule too: Belarusian artists must take not less than 75 percent of music programs.

Khimvolokno enterprise launched the "healthy lifestyle competition" on January 1st. The company's administration hopes that the more time employees spend on physical exercises, the less time they will spend on sick-lists. Most active sportsmen will receive special prizes at the end of the year - a TV set and a fridge. Sports accomplishments will be registered in special healthy lifestyle journals that every shop of the enterprise has at the moment. Every employee of the company will have a record in the journal: participation in sports undertakings, other local sports events, as well as the time that a person spends being ill at home.

Belarusian FM stations have to stick to a new rule, according to official regulations from the Ministry of Information. Belarusian singers and musicians should appear on the air on a much more frequent basis as opposed to foreign artists - 3:1. It is worth mentioning that the Belarusian show business is not that rich to meet the new requirement. Local DJs have to find a way out of the situation: they play Russian artists who were born in Belarus or at least lived in the republic. Furthermore, radio stations play local singers at night time, when the number of listeners is the smallest.

Belarusian students have recently started collecting signatures protesting against the new law, according to which they might be sent to work to any region of their country after graduation. Such "coercive works" will last for five years. The mandatory assignment of young specialists was put in effect in Belarus several years ago. Such practice gives local authorities a possibility to send a young specialist to a region where he or she would never venture to go - a remote village,

for example. Needless to say that the wages for young specialists would be extremely low in such cases. The Belarusian government bears some resemblance to Soviet authorities at this point: "the state spends a lot of money on students and their education, so they will have to pay something back." If the law is approved, Belarusian students will have to work in the countryside for five years as a "token of their gratitude" to the state.

Furthermore, Alexander Lukashenko signed a special order, according to which all enterprises are supposed to have so-called "Books of suggestions and complaints." Belarusian officials try to explain to the population that Lukashenko's new rules do not repeat the Soviet model of the "complaint book." Clients and customers will be able to write their constructive suggestions in those books. The books will be obligatory even for private enterprises, which was not practiced during the Soviet era. Belarusian people start wondering if such books of suggestions appear in the presidential administration. To crown it all, Alexander Lukashenko has recently changed national traffic rules: the president cancelled the paragraph that required headlights-on driving in the daytime. Lukashenko ordered the Internal Affairs Ministry to develop a new regulation and present it to his office.

Belarusian citizens have an impression that Alexander Lukashenko (or *Batka* - translates as 'father') is a very reliable leader - he knows where he leads his country to. When the Belarusian authorities were working on new traffic rules, a special hotline was organized to accept people's suggestions on the matter. Someone said cars should be confiscated from those who drive in the state of alcoholic intoxication.

*Source: Pravda; January 31, 2005; www.pravda.ru*

## **6. Belarus President to get Tough on Drug, Human Traffickers**

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, is going to get a tougher line on drug and human trafficking.

In Belarus, human trafficking has not yet assumed massive proportions, but even isolated incidents of woman and child trafficking should be regarded as emergencies, Mr Lukashenko said. The Belarussian President spoke Thursday at a conference on measures to counter human trafficking.

"Tough and inevitable punishment" is in store for those who commit crimes related to human trafficking in Belarus, warned Mr Lukashenko. Smuggling people abroad for exploitative labor will be punishable under the republic's Penal Code, with the seizure of all property as a minimum penalty, he said.

Because of its geographical position, Belarus has now found itself vulnerable to drug trafficking, woman and child smuggling for exploitative labor in the sex industry, and to other types of crime previously unheard of here, said Mr. Lukashenko. One of the first measures to crack down on such crimes will be the re-registration of all agencies arranging for Belarussian citizens to get employment abroad. The Belarussian government will see to it that contracts such agencies offer to their clients for signing are reworded, in such a way as to make sure the migrant workers can return to their home country any time they like. This is not about banning things, but about bringing transparency, President Luksahenko stressed.

The government is also going to toughen its control over cross-country child adoption. Foreigners should be allowed to adopt Belarussian children solely with the aim of medical treatment and only in cases where proper medical care cannot be provided for the adoptees locally.

All regulatory mechanisms for Belarussian nationals' employment abroad and for the adoption of Belarussian children by foreigners are to be laid down in a special presidential decree, to be issued shortly, Mr Lukashenko announced.

*Source: RiaNovosti; January 27, 2005; www.rian.ru*

## **7. Lukashenko: Belarus Can Become a Strong and Beautiful Nation**

Only because of a healthy way of life, an active physical and sports culture can Belarus become a strong and beautiful nation. This was announced by President Aleksandr Lukashenko, on January 29, at the opening of the Republican skiing center Silichi in the Logoisky district.

The head of state emphasized that physical exercise and sports promote the development of a well balanced person, especially children. Attracting the younger generation to sports and the promotion of a healthy way of life is a priority for the country's leadership, Lukashenko said.

The main pillars of health and beauty are sports and healthy eating. The president believes that just devoting one hour a day to exercise and sports will improve one's state of health and vitality within one month. No trendy diets will help, only a normal nutrition, a healthy way of life, and sports - this is the president's recipe for health. "Try it, and if it does not help, then do not vote for me at the presidential elections, that is if I announce my candidacy," joked the president.

[Text translated by the editor]

*Source: BelaPAN; January 31, 2005; www.naviny.by*

## **REGIONAL**

### **8. Czech Diplomat Expelled From Belarus on Debauchery Charges**

Belarus' authorities have ordered the expulsion of Czech Embassy attache on debauchery charges.

Pavel Krivohlavy, Attache of the Czech Republic's Embassy to Belarus, has been declared persona non grata under Articles 9 and 41 of the Vienna Diplomatic Relations Convention. The man is accused of debauchery with minors and of involving minors in anti-social behavior.

Officials at the Belarussian Foreign Ministry today summoned Vladimir Lukastik, Czech Charge d'Affaires ad Interim, to notify him of the expulsion order.

Belarus' Interior Ministry told this RIA correspondent that Mr. Krivohlavy had been caught in the act of drinking alcohol with a local 16-year-old schoolboy at a cafe in downtown Minsk.

*Source: RIANovosti; January 22, 2005; www.rian.ru*

### **9. Prague Retaliates**

The Czech Foreign Ministry on 21 January expelled an unnamed Belarussian diplomat from Prague, reacting to the expulsion of Pavel Krivohlavy from Minsk earlier the same day, CTK reported. Belarussian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Savinykh commented on the expulsion by saying that the Czech authorities misunderstand the principle of reciprocity, Belapan reported. "Pavel Krivohlavy had to leave Belarus in connection with a properly documented and evidenced

violation of law punishable under two articles of the Criminal Code of Belarus," Savinykh added. Czech-Belarusian relations have deteriorated since the Czech denial of a visa to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka for a NATO summit in Prague on 21-22 November 2002 (see "RFE/RL Newswire," 15 November 2002). The Czech Embassy in Minsk and the Belarusian Embassy in Prague have been headed by charges d'affaires since then, not full-fledged ambassadors. JM

*Source: RFE/RL; January 24, 2005; www.rferl.org*

#### **10. OSCE Wants to Restart Dialogue Between Belarusian Authorities, Opposition**

A delegation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly led by Bundestag deputy Uta Zapf visited Minsk from 1-3 February to study the political situation in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. Zapf told journalists in Minsk on 3 February that the OSCE wants to renew a dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and the opposition. An attempt in this direction will be made in late May and early June when the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is planning to organize a "workshop" in Minsk on Belarus's prospects under the EU's European Neighborhood Policy.

*Source: RFE/RL; February 4, 2005; www.rferl.org*

#### **11. Borodin: Belarus to Get Ruble**

Russia and Belarus will establish a common economic zone by 2006, Pavel Borodin, secretary of the Russia-Belarus Union, said Wednesday.

Closer ties will benefit both countries, whose annual trade volume is \$17 billion, second only to Russia's \$25 billion bilateral trade with Germany, Borodin said.

"Now is the time to gather up the stones we threw around at the end of the '80s," Borodin said, musing that the European Union's shared borders, common currency and unified legal system were "copied from us."

Belarus already gets 95 percent of its energy from Russia, he said, and "a common legal and regulatory environment" would only encourage more common business.

Discussions over a monetary union between the two countries began in 1993, but talks stalled as Russian economic reforms outpaced changes in Belarus.

Alexei Titkov, regional politics analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center, said a renewal of ties is part of Russia's trend of distancing itself from the West and making foreign relations with CIS countries more of a priority.

However, Titkov remained highly doubtful about the proposed 2006 integration date. Russia's wish to have a single monetary authority to retain control over inflation and other financial indicators is still opposed by Belarus, Titkov said.

The next meeting on the issue is due to be held Friday in Grodno, Belarus.

*Source: St. Petersburg Times; January 27, 2005; www.sptimes.com*

## **12. Belarus Ready to Extradite Suspects in Klebnikov Murder to Russia**

The Belarusian authorities plan to extradite to Russia two ethnic Chechens who are suspected of involvement in the murder of Paul Klebnikov, the editor of the Russian version of Forbes magazine.

"A final decision will be made soon after all formalities have been observed," a representative of the Belarusian Prosecutor General's Office told Interfax on Tuesday.

*Source: Interfax; February 1, 2005; www.interfax.ru*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **13. Lukashenko Lashes Out at Bush's Inauguration Speech**

The leader of Belarus has denounced the US President's statement made during his inauguration speech that America is destined to bring the freedom of speech to every nation.

"The USA openly states that it is destined to carry freedom to every nation. But, perhaps, someone does not need their freedom, drenched in blood and smelling of oil," Alexander Lukashenko said at the Belarusian Security Council's meeting on Friday.

"I do not want to be a great leader that opposes Americans, NATO, and so on. The Belarusian people have not set these goals for me. But as we live in a democratic and, as they say, free society, we should have the right to say openly what is going on in the world," he said.

Belarus is ready to cooperate with NATO, but only if its national interests are observed and only on an equal and mutually beneficial basis, the President emphasized.

In its contacts with NATO Belarus will abide by the agreements signed within the Union State [with Russia], the CIS and the Collective Security Treaty Organization [that comprises Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Armenia], he said.

"We will first of all compare our steps against our commitments in these organizations. This is a sacred thing for us and in this respect we should be decent and, most importantly, reliable for our partners," Mr. Lukashenko stressed.

The meeting also took up the issue of Belarus's accession to the agreement between NATO and other countries participating in the Partnership for Peace program.

"The most important is to envisage efficient measures to protect our national interests. We cannot risk the lives of our Belarusian guys sending them for military adventures in the interests of the West, like the hostilities in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. And we should not carelessly invite foreign armies for maneuvers on our territory," the President said.

He did not rule out, however, that NATO units might be invited for the country's next military exercise.

*Source: RIANovosti; January 22, 2005; www.rian.ru*

#### **14. Analysis: Belarus Defies West**

President Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime in Belarus has long been a target of US criticism - and the Bush administration clearly has it on its radar.

The new US "outposts of tyranny" list presented by the incoming US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, mentions just one European country - Belarus.

President Lukashenko, who maintains an iron Soviet-style grip on Belarus, hit back on Friday, saying "some might not want this sort of freedom which reeks of oil and is splattered with blood".

The strength of "people power" in neighbouring Ukraine has fuelled speculation that Belarus might go the same way.

But some experts are sceptical about such a scenario.

"Lukashenko obviously rigged the last (October 2004) referendum, but nevertheless, according to independent observers, he received almost 48% of the votes, which amounts to colossal support," says Russian political analyst Andrey Piontkovsky.

Crackdown on dissent

Mr Lukashenko has used his security forces against non-governmental organisations and the independent media. Demonstrations are often broken up brutally.

Several prominent politicians have disappeared.

Mr Lukashenko, in power since 1994, also disbanded an elected parliament, installing a hand-picked group of loyal deputies.

Some might not want this sort of freedom which reeks of oil and is splattered with blood  
Aleksandr Lukashenko

Angered by such authoritarian practices, the White House adopted the Belarus Democracy Act last year.

It provides for sanctions against Belarus and the promotion of democracy by helping non-governmental organisations and fostering an independent media.

It also bans US federal agencies from giving any financial aid to the country.

Radek Sikorski of the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington think-tank, says "small amounts of money could go a long way" to promote democracy in Belarus.

He advocates "Cold War-style activity" to effect change in Belarus, such as "broadcasting real information into the country, supporting underground newspapers".

Instead of visa restrictions, Belarussian officials accused of involvement in "disappearing" dissidents should be encouraged to visit the West and then arrested, he told the BBC News website.

Shunned by EU

Mr Lukashenko, often dubbed "Europe's last dictator", is also a major headache for the European Union, three of whose members - Poland, Lithuania and Latvia - share borders with it.

Four key members of Mr Lukashenko's administration are banned from visiting EU countries over their alleged role in the disappearances.

According to Mr Sikorski, the EU "has much stronger instruments than the US" to influence Belarus, "for example, the promise of a European path for the country".

"If people can travel to the West, see the EU and democracy working, eventually a new generation will demand the same rights," he said.

He did not rule out a Ukraine-style popular revolt.

But according to Andrey Piontkovsky, Mr Lukashenko "remains popular, unlike the completely bankrupt regimes of Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia, Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia or Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine" - all of which succumbed to "people power".

Jim Dingley, a British expert on Belarus, describes the prospects for such an uprising in Belarus as "highly unlikely".

"I can't see a figure around which such a revolution could possibly develop."

Nationalism weak

Moreover, Belarus does not have much national identity around which a protest movement could coalesce, he says.

World War II largely destroyed the country's ethnic mix and nationalism was suppressed by the Soviet authorities.

Its once large Jewish population was largely exterminated by the Nazis, many Poles were deported by Stalin or fled and Belarussian identity was diluted by an influx of settlers from Russia.

In the long-term "a core of businessmen who are quite dissatisfied with the limitations imposed on the free development of private enterprise" could spearhead a revolt, Mr Dingley says.

But Mr Piontkovsky agrees that the prospects for a "velvet revolution" in the near future in Belarus "are not too rosy".

Russian influence

But Russia, which maintains close ties with Belarus, could play a significant role, analysts agree.

The US "can and should use President [Vladimir] Putin to put pressure on Lukashenko," says Mr Sikorski. "The regime couldn't survive a few weeks without Russian support."

Russia has been increasingly angered by Mr Lukashenko.

Russian newspapers speculated that he was aiming to become leader of a united state of Russia and Belarus - a country which has existed on paper since 1996.

But the leaderships disagree on key economic issues and relations with the West.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in February 2004 that "the Belarus president is responsible for systematic mistakes in domestic and foreign policy, which hamper economic development and lead to the international isolation of Belarus".

But other former Soviet republics might be more ripe for regime change in the near future, analysts say.

"Kyrgyzstan and Moldova are the first candidates, followed by Armenia," says Mr Piontkovsky.

He also believes that Russia's President Putin is now on shakier ground than Mr Lukashenko.

And Ms Rice did not include in the "outposts of tyranny" list the Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan.

Opposition demonstrations do sometimes take place in Belarus - but not even that limited dissent is tolerated in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where human rights abuses are widespread.

*Source: Leonid Ragozin; BBC News; January 21, 2005; news.bbc.co.uk*

## **15. Counterrevolution**

President Bush and other Western leaders are still celebrating the democratic revolution in Ukraine, but in other former republics of the Soviet Union an entirely different response is underway. Post-Soviet leaders who, like Ukraine's former regime, have lived by corruption, rigged elections and thuggish repression are frantically seeking to head off a repeat of the popular "orange revolution," or the earlier "rose revolution" in Georgia. In recent weeks they have banned opposition parties, thrown their most plausible democratic challengers in jail and cracked down on Western pro-democracy organizations. They have also sought help from a familiar address: the Kremlin of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

One visitor to Moscow last month was Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of Kazakhstan. The Central Asian nation's long-suffering opposition was inspired by the events in Ukraine; representatives of three opposition parties even traveled to Kiev. Mr. Nazarbayev, who had staged his own rigged parliamentary elections just a month before Ukraine's, responded quickly. He dissolved the leading opposition party; brought tax charges against the local branch of the Soros Foundation, which promotes democratic reform; and filed a defamation lawsuit against a leading opponent, Zamanbek Nurkadilov. He was then warmly received by Mr. Putin, who granted him a border treaty that will allow the two governments to jointly exploit a gas field. "God has given us each other," the grateful Kazakh tyrant said to the Russian leader.

Next to turn up in Mr. Putin's antechamber was Askar Akayev, president of Kyrgyzstan. Ruler of his small, mountainous nation for 15 years -- one year longer than its existence as a sovereign state -- Mr. Akayev has real reason to sweat. He has parliamentary elections scheduled on Feb. 27, and his opposition is openly modeling itself after Ukraine's freedom movement, adopting the color yellow and the tulip as its emblems. Mr. Akayev tried banning his principal opponent, former foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva, from the ballot, but that only made things worse: The opposition began organizing protests in the streets of Bishkek, the capital, and a defiant parliament passed a law repealing the regulation used to block Ms. Otunbayeva's candidacy. So Mr. Akayev, who in the past has sought alliance with the United States, turned to Mr. Putin. In Moscow last week, he promised to make a recently established Russian military base in his country "a key element of security in Central Asia"; unspoken, but implied, was a corresponding downgrade of a U.S. airbase that has been used since 2001 for operations in Afghanistan.

Some Western commentators have speculated that Mr. Putin might have been chastened by his failed attempt to install a like-minded thug as Ukrainian president. On the contrary: Mr. Putin's circle appears to have concluded that its only error was not insisting on the preemption of Ukraine's democratic opposition. As would-be freedom fighters are repressed or jailed around the region (the pro-Moscow dictator in Belarus also has dispatched his most plausible challenger to prison), Mr. Putin soothes nervous autocrats with Kremlin hospitality and economic favors.

President Bush, who has sworn to stand by democratic reformers facing repression, has some work to do in Eurasia -- unless, that is, he fears offending Mr. Putin.

*Source: Washington Post; February 4, 2005; www.washingtonpost.com*

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **16. Belarusian Media Will Be Forced to Serve Official Ideology**

The participants in the National Assembly's standing committee on Human Rights, National Relations and Mass Media have reached the conclusion that the adoption of new statutory wording in the Law on Press and other Mass Media is long overdue.

As said by the deputy minister of Information, Liliya Ananich, the new document is to correspond to the modern level of the socio-political situation in the country, and to embrace the whole sphere of the mass media activities. According to the deputy minister, the new version of the Law on Press and other Mass Media will define the relations of the state, a citizen and mass media as an instrument of official ideology.

[Text revised by the editor]

*Source: Charter97; January 26, 2005; www.charter97.org*

### **17. Belarus Launches Satellite TV Channel**

Belarus on 1 February inaugurated broadcasts of its first satellite-television channel, Belarus-TV, Belarusian Television reported. According to Belarusian Television's main newscast, "Panorama," Belarus-TV programs, which are aired through the Intelsat 904 satellite, can be received in 20 countries in Europe and Asia, including Poland, Germany, France, and the Nordic countries. "The main task of the [Belarus-TV] channel is to supply objective information about life in Belarus to the countries of near and far abroad," National Television and Radio Company head Uladzimir Matvyaychuk said. "We have accomplished a major breakthrough. Today we are in a single information space with the world's leading television channels."

*Source: RFE/RL; February 2, 2005; www.rferl.org*

### **18. The Number of Internet Cafes in Minsk Halved over Last Few Years**

The number of internet cafes in the capital has almost halved over the last few years. Today there are 93 internet cafes and centers in the city, 38 of which are open 24 hours. The clubs that have closed are those that had been placed on a blacklist. More than anything, this was tied to the fact that internet cafes have been put under the special control of the Minsk Municipal Executive Committee.

With increased oversight, the number of crimes in internet centers also declined. However, last year the Municipal Executive Committee police registered 45 offences, largely of hooliganism and thefts. More often than not, money and cellular telephones disappear, and clothing is stolen from internet cafes not equipped with coat checks, where the outerwear is simply placed on corner hangers.

To reduce the number of crimes, the police plans to introduce mandatory video surveillance systems in internet cafes. According to the *Minsk Novosti news agency*, currently, installation of such systems is simply recommended, informs.

[Text translated by the editor]

Source: *BelaPAN*; February 5, 2005; [www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by)

## **19. Russian Interior Ministry Confirms Detention of Officer**

Russian Interior Ministry officially confirms information about the detention by Belarus authorities of a group of Russian citizens, which included a lieutenant colonel from the interior ministry, announced head of the Russian interior ministry's information department Valery Gribakin.

Earlier, officials from the Belarus Committee on State Security told RIA Novosti that a senior interior ministry officer and five Russian citizens were detained in Minsk during an attempt to smuggle a shipment of rubies.

"The detained policemen is a lieutenant colonel who serves in one of the regional units of the Russian Interior Ministry," Mr. Gribakin stated.

The detainee's identity has not been revealed for the purposes of the ongoing investigation.

According to Mr. Gribakin, Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliev ordered the department of internal affairs at the ministry to conduct own investigation of the alleged crime.

"In addition, the minister instructed heads of all operative departments to provide all possible assistance to Belarus law enforcement agencies in their investigation of the crime," Mr. Gribakin said.

He pointed out that Russian and Belarus interior ministries had established close cooperation, which would certainly facilitate the thorough investigation of the case.

Earlier, officials from the Belarus Committee on State Security (CSS) told RIA Novosti that a senior interior ministry officer and five Russian citizens were detained by operatives from the Belarus CSS department for Minsk and Minsk region.

According to a Belarus CSS official, the detainees attempted to establish a traffic channel for smuggling precious stones to Belarus. During a personal search, operatives discovered 12 precious stones worth, according to experts, about \$400,000.

The CSS source revealed that a CSS operative posed as a buyer of the stones. He was offered a ruby at a price of \$9,000.

Source: *RiaNovosti*; February 7, 2005; [www.rian.ru](http://www.rian.ru)

## **BUSINESS**

### **20. Belarus Raises Tariffs for Russian Oil Transit by 75%**

Belarus has raised fees for the transit of oil products by nearly 75 percent to \$0.89 per tonne through one of its pipelines, the Belarus Economy Ministry said on Tuesday.

Russian oil majors Yukos, Lukoil, TNK-BP and Sibneft use Belarussian pipelines to send their oil products to Eastern and Central Europe.

"The decision was made in accordance with an agreement reached last June and it relates to Zapad-Nefteprodukt," an Economy Ministry official said.

The company shipped about eight million tonnes of oil products last year when the transit fee was \$0.51 per tonne per 100 kilometers.

*Source: MosNews; February 2, 2005; www.mosnews.com*

## **21. Belarus Reports 40 Percent Rise in Foreign Trade in 2004**

Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Savinykh said on 3 February that Belarus's foreign trade rose by 40 percent year-on-year in 2004 to \$30.1 billion, including \$19.1 billion with CIS countries, Belapan reported. Belarus's exports in 2004 increased by 38.3 percent and amounted to \$13.8 billion. Exports to Russia accounted for 46.6 percent of Belarus's total volume of exports in 2004. Belarus had a foreign-trade deficit of \$2.6 billion in 2004, comprising a \$4.5 billion deficit in trade with CIS countries and a \$1.9 billion trade surplus with other countries. Belarus's deficit in trade with Russia stood at \$4.7 billion in 2004.

*Source: RFE/RL; February 4, 2005; www.rferl.org*

## **22. Energy Debts of State Subsidized Organizations Comprise 7.4 Billion Rubles**

In 2004, state subsidized organizations have almost halved their debts for energy consumption. As of January 1, 2005, the debts of these organizations comprised 7.4 billion rubles. This includes 5.4 billion rubles for organizations financed by the central government budget and 2 billion for organizations financed by regional budgets.

As Aleksei Bogushevich, chief of sales of Belenergo, the Energy Ministry's concern, told the Regnum new service, budgetary organizations have paid 102.7% as a whole, including 101.2% by organizations financed by the central budget, and 103.7% by organizations financed by regional and local budgets.

Organizations financed by regional, local and Minsk budgets have paid in full for energy.  
[Text translated by the editor]

*Source: BelaPAN; January 24, 2005; www.naviny.by*

## **23. Belarus Repays Debts to IMF**

Belarus has fully repaid its debt to the International Monetary Fund. The last payment due to the fund was made on February 1, the press service of the Belarussian finance ministry has reported to RBC. At the same time the finance ministry did not announce the amount of the last payment; however, it noted that all payments had been made strictly in accordance with the payment schedule.

Earlier the IMF provided over \$290m in loans for Belarus. The country's foreign debts amounted to about \$800m at the beginning of 2005. In 2004, Belarus received foreign loans totaling about \$180m, of which Russia provided \$175m.

*Source: RosBusinessConsulting; February 7, 2005; www.rbcnews.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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