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## DOMESTIC

### 1. The Revolution Is On Hold, OK?

The U.S. calls Belarus 'an outpost of tyranny,' but many of its citizens are in no rush for democracy

The moment seemed ripe for revolution. Rose-laden protesters in Georgia had ousted leader Eduard Shevardnadze; mass public demonstrations had brought an opposition democrat to power in neighboring Ukraine; even the small republic of Kirgizstan had dumped its autocratic government. So why not my country, wondered Aliaksandr Atroshchankau, as he joined a pro-democracy demonstration in front of this capital's Republican Palace recently.

He soon had the answer: The thousand or so protesters who bothered to show up were scattered by police; the organizers were roughed up and tossed behind bars; state-run television stations barely acknowledged the incident. "Everyone is moving forward, and we're going back, back to the U.S.S.R.," said Atroshchankau, 24, whose political activities got him expelled from the university in Minsk. "Revolution can't happen just because you want it to."

Maybe not, but calling for a political transformation in Belarus has become a hallmark of President Bush's international campaign for democracy--a theme he is addressing during this week's visits to Russia and Georgia. The Bush administration decries this former Soviet republic, a nation of 10 million, as an "outpost of tyranny" --and denounces its leader, President Alexander Lukashenko, for running the "last remaining dictatorship in Europe." Unlike its erstwhile Soviet brother Ukraine, though, Belarus may not be ready to overthrow its leader, whose archaic regime

and centrally planned economy are best described as "Soviet lite." Still, change seems inevitable--the question is, how and how soon? "Lukashenko is a powerful individual as a politician, and the economy has not collapsed," says a senior western diplomat in Minsk. "What will set people off in feeling that a change needs to be made is hard to judge."

Eye candy. Look around the streets of this sleepy capital, whose law-abiding residents rarely jaywalk, and one wonders whether the Soviet Union ever really collapsed. In the center of town, a statue of Vladimir Lenin is adorned with fresh red carnations. Down the block, a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, medals dangling from his epaulet, is buying stale bread at a Soviet-style grocery called, simply, Bread Store. But turn the corner, and there are dozens of giant yellow cranes and brightly painted billboards heralding luxurious business centers and shopping malls. There are also a Benetton and a dozen McDonald's restaurants and several sushi bars--capitalist eye candy against a backdrop of grim Stalinist architecture. Russian hinterland or European backwater? Belarus can't make up its mind.

Beneath the veneer of a crime-free society and nascent market forces is a corrupt system of tight control and limited personal freedoms. It may not be tyranny--opposition figures still distribute anti-Lukashenko literature, and a handful of independent papers criticize the president--but it does smell of dictatorship. In fact, Belarus is the only post-Soviet state where the secret police continue to be called the KGB. "The Belarussian opposition operates under the harshest circumstances, and the regime is only becoming more and more oppressive," says Anatoly Lebedko, an opposition figure with the centrist United Civic Party. On the wall behind him hang framed photographs of six political dissidents who disappeared or were arrested in the months leading up to Lukashenko's re-election, four years ago. "If we can break the information blockade," Lebedko says, "then we can win."

It may take more than that to claim victory at the polls next year, when Lukashenko will run for a third term. The opposition remains weak and divided. At a recent gathering in neighboring Lithuania, a frustrated American expert working with the opposition candidates played the Elvis Presley hit with the lyrics "A little less conversation, a little more action please" and told the candidates, "It's going to be the theme song for all of you."

It will also be an uphill battle. The presidential elections next year are expected to be rigged to give Lukashenko a massive majority. "It's not Election Day; it's the day after that's important," says a senior European diplomat. "It's a tossup between Lukashenko staying in forever and a violent overthrow where unpredictably people say they've had enough. [But] there has to be something that is the last straw."

For now, many Belarussians seem to prefer the status quo to the possible alternative, the kind of economic turmoil they have seen befall other former Soviet states. Products here are cheap, the official unemployment rate is low, and the government pays pensions regularly and relatively amply. "Lukashenko has given us a good life," says pensioner Maria Balzevich, 61, who lives in a dilapidated village an hour from the capital. When asked if she misses the Soviet Union, Balzevich looks around her two-room dacha, smiles, and replies, "What do you mean? I still live in the Soviet Union."

"Total control." While Belarus lacks the level of paranoia characteristic of Soviet rule, there is a culture of fear, enforced by a bureaucracy with far-reaching tentacles. "There will always be a rule you will break, there will always be a way to punish you, and this way you'll always have something to lose: your money, your job, your life," says attorney Vitali Braginets. At least 80 percent of the Belarussian economy is centrally planned, and what little private business is permitted is heavily regulated and taxed. The laws and regulations change practically daily. "We have a joke in Belarus," Braginets says, "that psycho asylums have a separate room just for accountants and lawyers."

Last year, Lukashenko pushed a law through the puppet parliament requiring that all government jobs be reviewed and renewed annually. "As soon as a person complains about what's going on, he loses his contract, and this is done publicly in order to instill fear in others," says a leading pro-western opposition figure, Sergey Kalyakin of the Party of Communists of Belarus. "And this system will be sustainable as long as fear trumps people's desire to change the situation."

Analysts say that what keeps the centrally planned economy from collapsing is the permitted coexistence of a symbiotic, shadow economy. Big business rarely declares more than 30 percent of income, but in return it subsidizes the dying collective farm industry. Foreign companies can invest in Belarus, but they must donate money to a "voluntary" civic projects fund, which finances hundreds of construction ventures. "Lukashenko uses corruption as another measure for exerting power on the people," says the senior European diplomat.

What will bring change to Belarus is evolution of civil society and grass-roots democracy, say western diplomats. While Washington uses highly charged language to describe the current political scene--words like tyranny, dictatorship, and outrage--the amount of overt U.S. government spending for democracy-building projects in Belarus is relatively modest, roughly \$7 million a year. This money goes to groups like the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, which have been banned from Belarus by Lukashenko and so conduct operations from neighboring countries. Rather than give money directly to the opposition, which has been accused of squandering U.S. aid, these groups use the funding for a range of activities from teaching aspiring politicians how to run effective campaigns to paying for their gas when they drive out to the villages to spread their message.

For Belarus's western neighbors, the change can't come fast enough. The Baltic nations--Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which joined the European Union last May--boast some of the fastest-growing economies in the world and need Belarus for both its disposable income and its cheap labor force. "It is in our national interest to have a neighbor which is democratic," says the Lithuanian ambassador to Washington, Vygaudas Usackas. "It is an immediate market of 10 million consumers."

To the east of Belarus lies Russia, where President Vladimir Putin viewed the democratic uprisings in Georgia and Ukraine as Kremlin foreign-policy failures. So far, he has stood by Lukashenko--with Belarus providing a buffer between Russia and the NATO alliance.

Belarus lacks the geopolitical weight to stand on its own and will have to latch on to the West or to the East. A recent poll conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, a group that runs its western-funded operation from a private apartment, found that more people wanted to integrate into Russia than the European Union, but almost a quarter of those polled said they would like to go for both.

In one direction, there is the glittery promise of Europe; in the other, there are the bonds of culture and history--and the tug of economic dependence on Russia as a supplier of cheap gas and a major export market for Belarussian goods. Revolution isn't in the wind, but the "last dictator in Europe" must wonder if his days are numbered.

*Source: Ilana Ozernoy; U.S. News & World Report; May 7, 2005; www.usnews.com*

## **2. Belarus to Amnesty More than 8,500 Prisoners**

More than 8,500 prisoners will be amnestied in Belarus in connection with the 60th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II.

The amnesty will apply primarily to war veterans, war invalids, Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster victims, minors, single and pregnant women, single men who have underaged children, and people of pension age.

People who were sentenced for grave and very grave crimes and those who are wanted by police for evading their prison terms will not be amnestied.

The last amnesty was announced in Belarus in 2004 on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the country from the Nazi troops.

*Source: Itar-Tass; May 7, 2005; www.itar-tass.com*

### **3. Belarus: A Partisan Reality Show**

The greatest challenge to Lukashenka's almost Stalinist version of World War II may lie in simply representing Belarusians as ordinary people desperate for peace.

If anyone thought Russia's celebration of the World War II victory anniversary was an ideological showcase, they should look at Belarus. Red flags everywhere. Pompous military parades so numerous that they easily outscore those from the Soviet era. Giant billboards with cut-outs of military decorations on all main buildings. Veterans from all over the former the former empire. Speeches and proclamations reciting the slogans of 1941 verbatim. Celebrations of Victory Day in Belarus are often described as the best indicator of how far the former Soviet republic is returning to the past. The reality is that it never really left the past.

#### **NO BELARUSIAN OTHER THAN A SOVIET BELARUSIAN**

Without World War II – the Great Patriotic War, as Belarusians know it – it is utterly impossible to understand Belarus, the mentality of its people, and the politics of the state. There are numbers that will never evaporate from the collective memory. More than 2.5 million Belarusians perished in this war – every fourth Belarusian. Some estimates even suggest every third resident died. This is more than French, British, and American casualties combined. Six hundred villages were burned, together with their residents; life never returned to 200 of them. An entire country – that is, every single major city – was left in ruins. The population returned to its pre-war level only in the mid-1970s. This horror of war transformed and created 'the Belarusian mentality' as it is known today: ingrained in the collective psyche is a deep, subconscious fear not just of war but of any conflict. "At least, there is no war" is a typical reaction of a typical Belarusian to a typical day-to-day hardship. "As long as everything remains quiet" is a typical thought about the future.

But the public memory stores and succors figures not just of death and destruction. Over 300,000 guerillas, known as partisans, who took to the forests to fight Nazis. Two-thirds of Belarusian territory under guerilla control for most of the war. Heavier German casualties than on the entire western front (at least, that is what official historians claim). And innumerable names of defiant heroes immortalized ever since, names such as: Kanstancin Zaslonau, organizer of the 'railway war' that cost the Germans a gigantic amount of ammunition and manpower; Marat Kazei, a 13-year-old who blown himself up with a grenade rather than be captured by the enemy; and Minaj Shvyrou, 'Father Minaj', commander of partisan units, whose four children were taken hostage and executed after their father refused to turn himself in. Innumerable poems and novels studied at high school, movies and documentaries watched on TV, obelisks in every town and village – all these tributes to the war are kept alive not only the memory of fear, but also pride.

This fear and pride has become crucial in forming what some historians and political scientists refer to as the "Soviet Belarusian nation." For a multitude of historical reasons, Belarusians, unlike most of their neighbors, never succeeded in developing a strong sense of national identity. Domination by external powers, centuries-old policies first of Polonization, then of Russification, left the collective memory without a sense of the past. The Soviet regime filled that gap with its

own ideology, mixing the communist doctrine with the heroics of the guerilla resistance during World War II. According to one scholar of Belarus, Kathleen Mikhalisko, "resistance fighters and Red Army liberators filled the role of the missing popular heroes of Belarusian history, and that, in turn, abetted the process of forging a strong national identity at the mass level."

Seen from the official point of view, the communist regime gave Belarusians everything. It created their state in 1919, in the form of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus. It unified Belarus in 1939. It saved the nation from annihilation by the Nazis. And it rebuilt the republic afterwards into the most prosperous part of the Soviet Union, giving Belarusian their golden age in 1965-80, under the rule of party leader Piotr Masherov.

Masherov was an immensely popular and charismatic personality, a man who himself had been a guerilla and was awarded the star of a Hero of the Soviet Union at the age of 26. He is still revered by Belarusians for Belarus' unprecedented prosperity during the Brezhnev era. It was Masherov who transformed the partisan war into a national myth and made it a trademark by which Belarus is still identified – at least in the former Soviet Union. It was during his rule that some of the most gigantic World War II monuments emerged. These include an almost 200 foot high spear-headed man-made Mount of Glory on the outskirts of Minsk; an immense concrete monolith to commemorate the defense of the Brest Fortress; and perhaps the most human war memorial of all – a breathtaking architectural tribute to the villagers of Khatyn burned by the Nazis with their residents inside a barn. In the center of the memorial, there is a symbol of shocking simplicity and laconism: three birch trees, with an eternal fire instead of a fourth tree – a tribute to the one in every four Belarusians who died at war. (Human it may have been, but the memorial was also deeply political: this site to commemorate all the villages that perished in the inferno was chosen to be easily confused with Katyn, the site near Smolensk where Stalin's secret police, the NKVD, executed many thousands of Polish officers.)

Architectural symbolism was augmented by the mass production of cultural testimonies. Belarusfilm, the local movie-making company, was known in the former Soviet Union as Partisanfilm because of its endless output of war-related canvasses. War was the central theme of most literary production in the post-war republic. And the song of the best-known Belarusian folk-rock group, Pesnyary, created the image that instantly conjured up the republic in the minds of Soviet compatriots:

My youth – Byelorussia,  
The songs of partisans – pine trees and fog.

#### WAR'S ROLE IN RECREATING EDEN

When the Soviet Union collapsed, it was for many Sovietized Belarusians as if they had been expelled from Eden. The Masherov-era prosperity and security collapsed all of a sudden, along with the entire world of meaning that cemented it. For many, the new life, with its turbulent politics and collapsing economy, could only be understood by what it was not: it was not what they were used to. It was simply inevitable that someone would exploit this confusion and anxiety to reap political benefits. That someone happened to be a 39-year-old head of a collective farm, a man known for the past decade as President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Campaigning for power in his anti-corruption crusade, Lukashenka carried a simple and understandable message to the electorate: things went wrong because the Soviet Union was destroyed, and with it went the foundations of a good, simple, safe, and prosperous life.

Not only did Lukashenka play on the nostalgia for tranquility and security. To distinguish himself from his opponents, he exploited public memory and the only frame of self-understanding that ordinary Belarusians had to distinguish between what was good and bad. And so he initiated, in February 1995, his first referendum, to establish Russian as the second official language and to restore the Soviet-era flag and coat of arms as the country's official symbols. The independence-era symbols, the white-red-white flag and the Chase (Pahonya) coat of arms from the era of the Great Duchy of Lithuania were found guilty as charged: they were used by Nazi collaborators

during the war. Ipso facto the opposition, which returned these symbols, was nothing but a collection of Nazi sympathizers. The referendum was held on 14 May, almost coinciding with the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the victory in World War II. Set against that favorable ideological backdrop, the proposal duly passed with ease, with 75% of those participating voting yes. Speaking about that occasion one year later, Lukashenka declared to his most loyal voters – war veterans – that “we have returned to you the flag of the country for which you fought. We have returned to you both memory and a sense of human pride.”

In November 1996, Lukashenka repeated the trick when he tried to push through a referendum to disband the defiant parliament and institutionalize unlimited presidential rule. He added to that ballot a proposal to establish 3 July, the date on which Minsk was liberated from the Nazis in 1944, as the Belarusian Independence Day. The new official holiday replaced the Independence Day of post-communist Belarus, which was observed on 27 July to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty in 1990. The new official view was that 27 July was another leftover from the ‘fascist’ and ‘nationalist’ rule in 1991-93: it was, so the claim goes, deliberately chosen as the date for the Declaration of Sovereignty to coincide with the date in 1942 on which the Nazi governor of Belarus allowed the white-red-white flag and the Chase coat of arms to be used together with Nazi insignia. That was an outright lie: that decree was signed on 27 June. Still, Lukashenka had found another way to claim that the spiritual descendants of the Nazi collaborators put Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on the same level.

Lukashenka recreated for Belarusians the symbolic and ideological atmosphere of the Marshero era – adding to it a big-fingered pinch of Stalinism. The new independence holiday was celebrated with giant street fairs and gigantic military parades, which, in contrast with the late Soviet period but in keeping with Stalin’s, included air shows and sportsmen’s displays. (Later, he added one more element: a leader arriving in a generalissimo-style uniform, a uniform with no military rank attached but with regalia richer than that of any general.) ‘Partisanfilm’ was revived and once again ordered to produce war-related movies. Remarkably, the company’s first product in post-Soviet era was the movie *The Moment of Truth*, which extolled the activities of the NKVD, Stalin’s secret police, on recaptured Belarusian territory in 1944. A course entitled ‘The Role of the Belarusian People in the Great Patriotic War’ eventually became compulsory in the state curricula. Independence-era history textbooks were banned from schools and universities, and the ‘correct’ Soviet view on history was once again imposed by veteran ideologues who returned to prominence under Lukashenka’s wing. Thinking about Belarus outside the confines of the Soviet version (and now Lukashenka’s version) became a sign of sympathy towards Nazis.

This year, just before the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the victory in World War II, Lukashenka once again confirmed the centrality of the war in his ideology by bizarrely renaming the central streets in Minsk. The central avenue shed the name of Francysk Skaryna (printer of the first books in Belarusian, in the 16th century), and was renamed Independence Avenue (read: independence from Nazi occupants). Lukashenka even turned the avenue named after Masherov into Victor’s Avenue, relegating Masherov to a new avenue formed from three old streets. (This decision seems particularly bizarre, since Masherov is firmly associated with the Soviet Belarus. It seems to be an attempt to downgrade his rival for public affection and a move that may have something to do with the emergence of Masherov’s daughter as an outspoken opponent of Lukashenka’s.)

## WAR AS AN ANOINTMENT OF AUTOCRACY

Lukashenka’s ‘think tank’, the Institute of Social and Political Studies of the Presidential Administration, justifies this endless World War II worship as a political fight: “The real history of the all-people fight of the Belarusian nation with the Nazi occupants not only unmask the ‘lies’ of pro-Western scholars about the guerilla warfare but also shows the anti-people character of their programs of ‘democratization’ and ‘Europeanization’ of the modern Belarus. ... The so-called ‘opposition’ tries to impose on Belarusian people the very same politics of ‘Europeanization’ and ‘civilization’ that the German occupants tried to carry out with the help of their collaborators.”

Exploiting the symbolism, history, and mythology of World War II certainly has a practical political significance for Lukashenka. First, it helps squeeze the opposition from the moral, political, and physical high ground. Cracking down on 'non-Soviet' Belarusians is a continuation of the glorious guerilla warfare and liberation struggle. Here is another quotation from a memo by the presidential 'think tank': "In the philosophical-ideological and spiritual-moral aspect, so to say, the 'Battle for Belarus' still persists, because theoreticians and historians of 'new formations' still somehow emerge; they are ready to rewrite history in their own way, to revise moral values so that they can be portrayed as anti-values, to interpret the major victories in the people's fight with the aggressors as losses; moreover, they search for 'enemies of the Belarusian people' among the leaders of the country, from whom they want to 'liberate Belarus.'"

Lukashenka's authoritarian rule is vindicated by claiming a special place for himself not only as a defender of Belarus' glorious past against the Nazis, but also as the sole guardian of the tradition of the Great Victory anywhere in the post-Soviet space. Hence attacking Lukashenka means encroaching on the sacrosanct: the heroic sacrifice of the Belarusian, and entire Soviet people, during the war.

Whenever possible, Lukashenka himself invokes memories of the war to denounce his critics. For him, the whole of Belarus is the Brest Fortress (a site that an NKVD garrison defended for 26 days against German attack). Attacking Belarusian autocracy simply shows a lack of gratitude; or may even be an act of revenge for a war lost. Denouncing Western criticism of the 2001 presidential elections, Lukashenka lashed out at his inauguration ceremony: "One cannot disrespect the great Belarusian people, who have made their choice – and who, not long ago, just half a century ago, presented the world, together with Russian soldiers and other compatriots from the former Soviet Union, with the Great Victory."

Likewise, when Russia briefly cut off supplies of natural gas to Belarus over non-payment of arrears, Lukashenka swiftly deployed war rhetoric: "Gazprom is reducing the supply of natural gas by 50 percent. They say they do not have enough to supply Germany, Italy, etc. This issue is, of course, an emotional one. I believe it was we who rotted in the trenches alongside Russians in the Great Patriotic War, not the Germans and others..."

And, preparing for last year's referendum that granted him the right run for office ad infinitum, Lukashenka attacked his foreign critics, claiming they were the heirs to the ignominious deeds of their grandfathers. "And now, inside the European Union, the most democratic union of all, they, the SS veterans, parade and remember their 'valiant past.' And their children and grandchildren like to dictate what order should be imposed in Belarus."

Needless to say, Lukashenka is idolized by the war veterans. One of them, when receiving a medal from his hands on 8 May this year, called the Belarusian leader "the last outpost in the fight against evil."

In order to be able to connect himself to the Soviet past and present his opponents as followers of the Nazis, Lukashenka and his propaganda machine needs to carefully control what version of World War II is presented to every audience, particularly to the younger generations. That is why textbooks, dissertations, fiction, and movie productions about the war are all strictly censored. Lukashenka's ideologues have attacked the entire nationalist version of Belarus' past, but they have attacked with special gusto on issues relating to the Great Patriotic War. Lukashenka's propaganda machine is particularly adamant about not even admitting there is any debate on two issues.

The first is the righteousness of Stalin's regime and of the Father of the People himself. Any discussion about the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, for example, is denounced as a sacrilegious attempt to divide the blame for starting the war between the Soviet 'motherland' and Nazi Germany. Moreover, Stalin's crimes are routinely justified, amounting to a creeping rehabilitation

of Stalin. Just a few months after Lukashenka finally consolidated absolute authority in his hands through last year's referendum, a group of Stalinists organized into Historical Knowledge society (unsuccessfully) called for a revision of the mass executions in the Kurapaty gorge near Minsk. This site of NKVD executions has become, since it was uncovered in 1988, a powerful symbol of Soviet atrocities against its people. The Historical Knowledge society claims the victims were Nazis.

The second issue that is beyond doubt and beyond discussion are the causes and impact of the guerilla war. In reality, from the tales recounted by their parents and grandparents many Belarusians are aware of the forest war and its complexities: the partisans were no angels. Peaceful residents unengaged in warfare had to withstand pressure and harassment from both sides, being forced to supply food for both Soviet and German antagonists and facing execution if one side discovered they had previously 'given' food to the other. Reappraisals of the partisan warfare picked up after independence in 1991, with new publications and analyses, many discovering unflattering truths about looting, the private lives of some guerilla commanders, and even about the retribution teams that the NKVD sent to tame some most outrageous harassment of locals by their alleged defenders. Critics also wonder if the guerillas deliberately pulled ordinary people into the maelstrom by their hit-and-run attacks tactics, which, while often causing little damage to the enemy, provoked acts of extreme retribution. The Nazis could execute hundreds and thousands of civilians after one partisan attack. The Nazi policy was to kill dozens of locals for every slain Nazi, a policy the partisans were well aware of. Of course, Lukashenka's ideologues suffocate any reassessment of the partisan warfare.

#### CHALLENGING THE OFFICIAL DISCOURSE: ADAMOVICH AND BYKAU

To attempt to see the war and its impact from a different corner, a vantage point beyond the strict ideological confines of the Soviet-Lukashenka discourse, amounts to nothing less than an act of political defiance. 'De-Sovietizing' the war is an intrusion on a powerful discourse whose aim is to legitimate authority; it is also an attempt to reclaim the Belarusian identity from totalitarianism. No wonder that the propaganda machine resists such attempts as fervently as it did two or three decades ago. The challenge to the official doctrine mostly came through scholarship – and only rarely through art. The Soviet ideologization of the topic made it increasingly unattractive for 'alternative' artists and writers – which, paradoxically, eased the job for Lukashenka and his palace "historians." The first breakthroughs were made by the foremost Belarusian writers in the late Soviet period, Ales Adamovich and Vasil Bykau (perhaps better known to some as Vasil Bykov, a russification of his surname) – and it was almost 20 years before, in 2003, another work of art, an almost amateurish movie production, made a splash.

The first striking challenge to the official version of the war and guerilla warfare came in 1985, at the beginning of Gorbachev's perestroika. That year, Belarusfilm filmed *Come and See*, a movie scripted by Ales Adamovich, a prominent publicist and novelist who himself had been a partisan at the age of 15. Adamovich was also famous for his incessant clashes with Minsk's orthodox officialdom, who forced him into exile – to Moscow – in the late 1980s. The movie was seemingly a textbook example of Soviet cinematography. Its story followed a day in the life of a tiny Belarusian village as seen through the eyes of a young resident. The day, though, happened to be the village's last day: the village was that day torched by the Nazis. There is little dialogue and little said; all there is is the horror of scenes so graphic that Stephen Spielberg's cinematography seems mere melodrama. The psychological impact of the scenes seemingly followed the official line, serving as a condemnation of Nazism. Yet war veterans and communist ideologues attacked Adamovich relentlessly. Why? Because he showed the horrors of war, any kind of war, in the process effectively dissociating himself from the propaganda of Soviet patriotism and class warfare to which all art of that time had to be dedicated. More than that, the movie featured an NKVD operative who immediately suspects the young survivor of the inferno of defecting to the Nazis when the youngster eventually manages to make his way to a partisan base in the woods. Adamovich was charged with pacifism and humanism, high crimes in the eyes of Belarusian

guardians of party orthodoxy. He eventually had to move to Moscow, where he became one of the most visible intellectuals of the perestroika era.

If World War II formed Belarusians as they are known and know themselves, it is not surprising that its foremost contemporary author dedicated most of his writing to the subject. Vasil Bykau, a World War II soldier whose name was once mistakenly engraved on the tombstone in central Ukraine, was called by his contemporaries the conscience of the Belarusian nation. Yet, unlike the vast majority of Soviet war writers, Bykau avoided all things grandiose and avoided the stereotypes of Soviet heroes. He focused rather on the psychology of individual characters, on mixed motives, and on the grim reality of war. Nor was he afraid to contrast the stoicism and heroism of individual soldiers with the brutality of the Stalinist regime. In his war prose, the conflict between good and evil did not follow the frontlines on war charts: instead, it cut through human minds and souls. The choice between good and evil was not reduced to 'fighting for' or 'betraying' the Soviet motherland. The choice was how to show and maintain basic human dignity in extraordinary circumstances. The line between good and evil divided a comrade who betrayed a comrade in a scouting mission; an NKVD operative busy framing and incriminating soldiers who miraculously escaped death on the frontline; and a school teacher who surrenders to the Germans to liberate pupils who have been taken hostage. To put it simply, in Bykau's prose being Soviet did not automatically mean being righteous.

Bykau was not a dissident writer in the Soviet period; in fact, he avoided taking on anything except for the war until perestroika was in full swing. But although he received all possible Soviet state decorations (first-rank titles like the Hero of Socialist Labor and the Lenin Prize included), these did not save him from accusations of defaming the Soviet system. They did not stave off the attentions of the Soviet censors, who demanded often pettifogging changes to ensure political correctness. In the Lukashenka era, the attacks by the Stalinist orthodoxy resumed with increased power (and now, they had Bykau's anti-Stalinist prose to backlash against because, from perestroika until his death, most of his fiction was dedicated to Stalinist genocide). State publishers refused to print his books. He was branded a "literary policeman" by the chief ideologue of the Presidential Administration. This literary policeman of Lukashenka's also called upon literary magazines not to publish Bykau (as well as several other "renegade" writers, such as Ryhor Baradulin and Nil Hilevich, both of whom were laureates – people's poets – of Belarus). He lived most of his last six years in exile, first in Finland and Germany, and then in the Czech Republic. A documentary Vasil Bykau: The Comeback was banned on the grounds that it features a short clip of Hitler, and that could "offend the feelings of the veterans." (Naturally, no Soviet-produced movie that had had a scene with Hitler in his bunker was ever banned.)

Bykau confronted Stalinist orthodoxy all his life – and even in death. He passed away in 2003 on 22 June – the exact date on which the German onslaught against the Soviet Union became. His funeral drew a crowd of 30,000 mourners (an indication that the defamation campaign had fundamentally failed) – and a sea of banned white-red-white flags. On that day at least, the riot police did not dare to confiscate them. Bykau's family rejected an official honor guard that would have borne the Lukashenka-era red and green flag; his sons personally covered his body with the independence-era flag. A national icon recognized and respected by most Belarusians regardless of their political hue, and a Soviet war veteran whose coffin was draped in a white-red-white flag: this was one rare ideological defeat for Lukashenka's propaganda machine. It could not forgive that. Next day, the official media presented the funeral as if Bykau's body had nearly been hijacked by nationalists in his family clan and forcibly covered with the 'Nazi' flag.

#### CHALLENGING THE OFFICIAL DISCOURSE: OCCUPATION

For years, Bykau was the sole artistic challenge to Lukashenka's presentation of history. Then, in 2003, an obscure movie release resounded like a thunderclap. This was not even the full-fledged production, just a collection of three short essays united by one topic – the partisan war, shown as Belarusians were never supposed to see it. No wonder it was immediately banned in Belarus – only to go on to make splashes at several film festivals, including one in Moscow (a source of

especial displeasure to ideologues in Minsk). Occupation: *Mysterium*, which was directed by Andrej Kudinenko, challenged the entire Soviet mythology about the partisan war. It did not turn the picture upside down, as the critics claimed; this was not a “Germans are good, Soviets are bad” picture. Instead, the movie tells the stories of Belarusians, people who are neither Soviets nor Germans; stories of all sorts of Belarusians – those in the partisan brigades, those trying to get on with their lives amid the war, and those serving the Germans in the police corps.

The movie opens with a scene of two young local villagers serving in the German police. One of them sings Soviet songs from the pre-war propaganda movies and expresses his dream of making movies after the war. “Which ones?” his colleague asks. “German? Soviet?” “No,” responds the dreamer. “Ours, Belarusian ones.” “You are a fool! There is no Belarus, and there will be no Belarusian movies.”

The first part of the movie shows a Belarusian teenager named Adam who is taken into the partisans’ camp by a Russian guerilla delegated from Moscow to ‘organize’ the war. His first assignment: to assist in the execution of another villager who defected from the partisans to live a quiet life with a Polish mistress. Unable to stand by and see a fellow villager killed, Adam finally kills the Russian. In the second part, a mother whose child was run over by a German motorcycle treats a wounded Nazi, feeding him with milk from her own breast. She eventually goes insane and burns herself in her own house.

The third section is the most dramatic. A small kid pines for his father, who was taken into the Red Army. His mother, meanwhile, has an affair with a policeman. Suddenly, a “dad” comes back. He is in fact a partisan, who claims to be the little boy’s father in order to glean information that could help the partisans in their plan to kill the policeman. A few days later, the reprisal squad arrives. Alongside “dad” are three other partisans: a Russian, a Tatar, and Jakub, a local boy who takes special pride in the fact that his grandfather fought alongside Kastus Kalinouski, a leader of the 1863 uprising on Belarusian soil against the Russians. When the house is captured with the help of the gullible kid, the policeman is killed and the Tatar slits the throat of his mistress – only to die on the spot at Jakub’s hands. “My grandfather did not fight alongside Kalinouski so that some Tatar could slit the throats of our women,” Jakub explains to his two ‘comrades.’

The movie’s message is astounding and not simply anti-Soviet. Its heroes want a return to a normal life, to dream great, sometimes lofty dreams. They join the combatant parties – whether Soviets or Germans – simply because they believe that in circumstances such as they are this choice will help them to fulfill this basic human desire. They are still Belarusians – not Russians, not Germans, not Poles; they are local people trapped in tragic circumstances and forced to make choices.

#### THE POWER OF PARTISAN ART

History is written and identity formed by the victors. The Soviet understanding of World War II will frame the self-understanding of yet another generation of Belarusians: Soviet-style textbooks and official TV will take care of that. Whether one likes it or not, the mythology of the Great Patriotic War has made an indelible impact on the Belarusian character.

So perhaps the greatest threat to the power of the Soviet-Lukashenka version of the war is not the danger of the war being forgotten, but the of the war’s most powerful symbol, the “partisans,” being reinterpreted as quiet, peaceful locals, who, once driven to the edge, take up arms and take to the woods. Perhaps, that is why one of the most interesting underground art magazines in today’s Belarus is called pARTizan. And it is this that the leading Belarusian language rock group NRM (who, since they are banned from radio, are now technically partisans themselves) sings about in one of its songs:

We are the partisans, the forest brothers;  
We are the partisans, we know how to fight;

We are the partisans, we love our land;  
We will clear our land of hostile packs.

The meaning is transparent – and it is not what Lukashenka likes.

*Vitali Silitski, a longtime contributor to TOL from Belarus, is currently a Reagan-Fascell democracy fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States.*

*Source: Vitali Silitski; Transitions Online; May 11, 2005; www.tol.cz*

## **REGIONAL**

### **4. Belarus Opposition Leader Seeks Meeting with Bush in Tbilisi**

Visiting leader of the Belarus opposition Anatoly Lebedko, who chairs the United Civil Party, said in Tbilisi that he does not rule out the possibility of holding talks with U.S. President George Bush during the latter's visit to Tbilisi on May 9-10.

"Nothing happens occasionally in politics," Lebedko said in an interview with the Rustavi 2 television on May 9, when he was asked to comment about his arrival to Tbilisi coinciding with the U.S. President plans to visit Georgia.

He also said that a scenario similar to those which occurred in Georgia and Ukraine may develop in Belarus as well.

"We rely upon the population, the majority of which is ready to support a new person [as the leader of Belarus]. I do not know which color will be chosen [referring to Georgia's Rose and Ukraine's Orange Revolutions], but I am sure that justice will triumph finally," Lebedko added.

*Source: Civil Georgia; May 9, 2005; www.civil.ge*

### **5. Georgian Leader Vows To Aid Democracy In Belarus**

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said in televised statements yesterday that his government is committed to helping the United States spread democracy worldwide, including in Belarus.

Saakashvili made the comments before tens of thousands of Georgians who had assembled on Tbilisi's Freedom Square to hear visiting U.S. President George W. Bush.

"I want to tell you one thing: We are collectively responsible before our countries," Saakashvili said. "We are all responsible for spreading democracy throughout the world, starting with Belarus, whose people deserve freedom."

In an editorial column published in yesterday's edition of "The Washington Post," Saakashvili urges new European democracies to join forces with a view to extending the rule of liberty throughout the former Soviet Union and beyond.

In Saakashvili's words, one of the priority tasks of what he calls a new "Yalta conference" -- in reference to the agreement that led to Europe's division after World War II -- should be to press for liberty in Belarus, in particular through expanded support for President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's opposition.

The Georgian parliament a few weeks ago adopted a resolution expressing support for democratic changes in Belarus.

*Source: RFE/RL; May 11, 2005; www.rferl.org*

## **6. Lukashenko Congratulates Leaders of CIS Countries**

President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko congratulated leaders of CIS countries on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of victory in World War II.

"On this great day we pay respects to the immortal feats of heroes who took on the initial impact of the enemy at the walls of the Brest fortress, shattered the enemy in the suburbs of Moscow, and erected the Banner of Victory above the Reichstag," Aleksandr Lukashenko said to Vladimir Putin, president of Russia.

The head of the Belarusian state noted that problems of peace and security are as valid today as never before. He expressed his deep conviction that the indestructible unity of the people of Russia and Belarus, with the Great Victory as its symbol, will promote a unification of the two countries.

The press service of the Belarusian government announced that Aleksandr Lukashenko also received congratulations for Victory Day from CIS leaders.

The Victory Day wishes of the President of Russia, in particular, said that a close brotherhood and unity which were forged during the war define today's special relations between Russian and Belarus.

Vladimir Putin expressed his conviction that May 9th will eternally remain in our hearts as a symbol of heroism, greatness of spirit and the commonness of our people's destiny.

Aleksandr Lukashenko also congratulated the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Alexy II, Mikhail Fradkov, Boris Gryzlov, Sergei Mironov, Dmitry Medvedev, Pavel Borodin, Yuri Luzhkov, Boris Yeltsin, Mikhail Gorbachev and other public and political figures.

[Translated by the Editor]

*Source: BelaPAN; May 9, 2005; www.naviny.by*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **7. Bush Urges Elections in Belarus**

President Bush yesterday urged Russia to support democratic nations on its borders and called for free elections in Belarus, a Russian outpost the president labeled "the last dictatorship in Europe."

Standing beside the leaders of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia -- all freed from communist occupation after the Soviet Union fell in 1991 -- Mr. Bush said: "All the nations that border Russia will benefit from the spread of democratic values -- and so will Russia itself.

"Together, we have set a firm and confident standard: Repression has no place on this continent," he said in a joint press conference at a Riga cultural center.

Belarus gained independence in 1991, but has retained close economic and political ties with Moscow. The country, which has borders with Latvia and Lithuania, has been ruled since 1994 by the authoritarian Alexander Lukashenko, who has said he intends to hold onto power until 2010.

While Mr. Bush said the United States will not make "secret deals" with nations to topple Mr. Lukashenko, he added that the people of Belarus "should be allowed to express themselves in free and open and fair elections."

The president had some firm directives for the Baltic leaders, each of whom governs a nation relatively new to democracy. Reminding them of the oppression they suffered at the hands of the Soviets, Mr. Bush urged the leaders to move beyond past bitterness and embrace minorities -- including Russians, who make up as much as a third of each nation's population.

"Whatever the historical causes, yours is now a multiethnic society, as I have seen on my visit," he said to Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga. "No wrongs of the past should ever be allowed to divide you, or to slow your remarkable progress."

For several weeks before the presidential visit, Baltic leaders had demanded that Russian President Vladimir Putin apologize for Soviet occupation after World War II, which occurred after a secret pact between Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia that divided up spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

The bitterness runs so deep that the presidents of Lithuania and Estonia will boycott ceremonies in Moscow tomorrow to celebrate the official end of World War II.

In his own mea culpa, Mr. Bush acknowledged that the United States played a role in the occupation of the Baltics, citing the Yalta accord signed by Soviet leader Josef Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin Roosevelt, which set forth the postwar reorganization of Europe.

"Once again, when powerful governments negotiated, the freedom of small nations was somehow expendable," he said. "Yet this attempt to sacrifice freedom for the sake of stability left a continent divided and unstable. The captivity of millions in Central and Eastern Europe will be remembered as one of the greatest wrongs of history."

Still, the president's acknowledgment of American culpability sets up what likely will be a tense meeting tomorrow with Mr. Putin. The Russian president refuses to offer an apology to the Baltic states, saying on Friday that "the only thing we hear now is that our country must admit the illegality of these decisions and condemn them."

"I repeat: We have already done so. Must we do this every day, every year?"

But the Russian leader did offer a small concession about the secret pact that plunged half of Europe into Soviet oppression.

"In effect, these Baltic countries were treated as pawns in world politics. And that is a tragedy for these nations. This must be stated plainly," Mr. Putin said in an interview with two German television networks.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bush held bilateral talks with the Latvian president, who awarded him the "Three-Star Order" -- the country's highest honor.

The two leaders also laid a wreath at Freedom Monument, a 160-foot-tall column that was the site of the first pro-independence protest against Soviet rule in August 1987.

Police arrested about 30 protesters from a radical, pro-Russian group, the National Bolsheviks, after they hurled smoke bombs in a central street in one of scattered demonstrations against Mr. Bush.

Late yesterday, the president flew to the Netherlands to pay tribute to American soldiers who died in World War II.

*Source: Joseph Curl; Washington Times; May 8, 2005; www.washingtontimes.com*

## **8. Belarus Tells U.S. to Keep Out of its Affairs**

President Bush said on Saturday free elections should be held in Belarus but the Russian-backed country swiftly accused the United States and its Baltic neighbors of interfering in its internal affairs.

Bush, who calls Belarus Europe's last remaining dictatorship, said in Latvia there would no secret deal with Moscow to let President Alexander Lukashenko stay in power.

Lukashenko is due to attend ceremonies in Moscow on Monday marking 60 years since the end of World War II in Europe alongside Bush and other leaders.

"The only deal that I think is a necessary deal for

people is the deal of freedom," Bush told a joint news conference with the leaders of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the Latvian capital.

"They should be allowed to express themselves in free and open and fair elections in Belarus," he added, keeping up U.S. pressure on Belarus to have fair presidential elections in 2006.

There are fears in Belarus' neighboring Baltic countries that Lukashenko will cut a deal to remain in power. Russia and the United States have clashed over Belarus with Moscow rebuffing calls by Washington for change.

Bush's comments drew an angry response from the foreign ministry in Minsk, which said any U.S. attempt to "thrust a wedge between the fraternal peoples of Belarus and Russia will fail" and that Belarus would determine its own path of democratic development.

"The Baltic states are embarking on a dangerous path of interference in Belarus's internal affairs. This is unacceptable and can create regional tensions," it said in a statement.

"Attempts by certain countries to implant democratic values in Belarus 'through the back door' are at variance with the building of civilised and pragmatic relations," it added.

Lukashenko, accused of crushing dissent and rigging elections, says he will tolerate no upheavals like those which unseated governments in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

He is eligible to run for a third term as president in 2006 after securing a constitutional change in a referendum last year dismissed as rigged in the West.

Police in Minsk on Saturday briefly detained several dozen opposition activists at a rally staged in defiance of a ban.

NO DEAL

Asked about the possibility of striking a deal to help Lukashenko, Bush said: "Can you make a deal to determine somebody else's fate?"

"I think that's what we're lamenting here today about what happened to the Baltics -- one of those secret deals among large powers that consigns people to a way of governing. No, we don't make secret deals," he said.

Bush was apparently referring to the secret 1939 pact under which Hitler and Stalin divided up spheres of influence in eastern Europe, leading to Soviet control over the Baltics.

Lukashenko, accused abroad of crushing opponents and the media, has warned the West against stirring up trouble in the country of 10 million people wedged between Russia and European Union members Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.

(Additional reporting by Andrei Makhovsky in Minsk)

*Source: Steve Holland; Reuters; May 7, 2005; www.reuters.com*

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **9. Minsk Gets Tough On Arrested Ukrainians**

Hostilities are rising between Minsk and Kyiv over a case involving five Ukrainian pro-democracy protesters arrested in the Belarus capital last week. Belarusian officials ruled on 5 May the five will be deported within the next several days.

Some 200 young Belarusian opposition activists as well as youth-movement protesters from Russia and Ukraine staged an unauthorized demonstration in front of the presidential administration in Minsk on 26 April, the 19th anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear accident.

The demonstrators wanted to hand a petition to the presidential administration demanding that authorities report on steps taken to solve lasting problems related to Chornobyl and that they stop producing food in areas contaminated by radiation. Riot police dispersed the rally within 15 minutes, arresting five Ukrainians, 14 Russians, and a dozen Belarusians.

The following day, Belarusian courts punished the arrested demonstrators with jail terms varying from five to 15 days. One of the Belarusian demonstrators was fined \$2,000, a lump sum in a country that claims an average monthly pay of just \$200.

Lukashenko was deeply vexed by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and is determined to prevent a similar scenario in Belarus.

In other words, it was business as usual for the repression machine of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenko. Further developments, however, have broken the Belarusian authorities' routine in dealing with dissent in their country and led to what appears to be a serious diplomatic row between Minsk and Kyiv.

### **Ukraine Fights Back**

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry on 27 April issued a statement saying that Belarusian authorities violated the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by denying the Ukrainian detainees access to proper legal defense.

The same day, activists from the Ukrainian National Alliance -- the youth organization of which the five detainees are members -- staged a picket in front of the Belarusian Embassy in Kyiv, which has continued in subsequent days. The five jailed Ukrainians, as well as three of their Belarusian colleagues, went on a hunger strike on 28 April over their arrest.

The arrest of the 14 Russians -- primarily activists from the Yabloko and Union of Rightist Forces youth organizations, as well as reporters from "Moskovskii komsomolets" and the Russian edition of "Newsweek" magazine -- was met with indignant cries in the Russian press. In a strongly worded report on 28 April, "Moskovskii komsomolets" said the antirally crackdown in Minsk was the work of "trained mongrels belonging to the fascist Lukashenka."

In an apparent effort to subdue the rising wave of negative press coverage in Moscow, Lukashenka ordered that the jailed Russian demonstrators be freed. On 30 April the Minsk City Court granted early release to the Russians, following an appeal by Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Blokhin, which was broadcast by the NTV channel the previous day. After the Russians were released, a spokesman from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry said the move "once again shows Belarus' readiness to further strengthen allied relations with Russia."

A 'Special Attitude?'

The five Ukrainians appealed to the Minsk City Court for early release as well, but the court rejected the appeal on 3 May, with no specific explanations. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk ascribed Minsk's reluctance to free the five Ukrainians to what he described as Belarus' "special attitude" toward Ukraine. Minsk denied it harbored any "special attitude" toward Kyiv, but at the same time warned Ukraine against "copying pseudo-democratic methods and forms of building interstate relations imposed by certain countries and international organizations."

What was it all about?

Many Ukrainian and Belarusian commentators maintain that Lukashenka -- who is going to seek a third presidential term in 2006, following a controversial constitutional referendum in October 2004 -- was deeply vexed by the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine and is determined to do anything necessary to prevent a similar scenario in Belarus.

Referring to both the Orange Revolution and the 2002 Rose Revolution in Georgia during his annual address to the legislature on 19 April, Lukashenka said, "all those color revolutions were in fact no revolutions." He added: "It was plain banditry disguised as democracy. The limit of such revolutions was fully exhausted by the Belarusian people in the past century." He also said he would deal "harshly and adequately" with all those trying to "stir up the situation" in Belarus.

Lukashenka's Fear Of Orange

The fear of a Ukrainian-style revolution in Belarus is surely one of the main motives behind Lukashenka's tough approach to street demonstrations in Minsk. "You see, today they are working on what we will be doing in 2006. Ukraine is forming camps -- so to say, we will sent you revolutionaries from there," Lukashenka said in a somewhat paranoid stream-of-consciousness passage of his 19 April address. Whatever it meant, it is clear the Belarusian president believes Ukraine's Orange Revolution may prove infectious to some Belarusians.

But there may also be some other, less obvious reasons behind Lukashenka's dislike of Ukraine and Ukrainians under the rule of President Viktor Yushchenko. In mid-April, Ukraine backed a UN resolution condemning Belarus' human rights record. Earlier that month, in a visit to Washington, Yushchenko issued a joint statement with U.S. President George W. Bush pledging "to support the advance of freedom in countries such as Belarus and Cuba."

Lukashenka is not a man likely to take such things lightly. The Belarusian Interior Ministry on 5 April ordered that the five Ukrainian detainees be deported from Belarus after serving their jail terms and banned for five years from re-entering the country.

"The dialogue between Lukashenka and Belarus' western neighbors is developing very dynamically. Will breaking diplomatic ties be the next step?" the Belarusian independent weekly "Nasha Niva" commented sarcastically on Lukashenka's 19 April address, in which he accused Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine of working jointly to destabilize Belarus, and unspecified Western embassies of channeling "bagfuls" of money into Belarus to support the opposition.

Breaking diplomatic relations with Kyiv may not be an option for Minsk in the near future, but we need to remember that it is still more than a year until presidential election in Belarus. Lukashenka has amply proved in the past that he is capable of taking bewildering measures to counteract what he sees as threats to his rule.

Source: Jan Maksymiuk; RFE/RL; May 7, 2005; [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)

#### **10. The Court Restores in Office the *Glos znad Niemna* Newspaper's Former Editor-in-Chief. *The Union of Poles* Suspends the Periodical Publishing in Response**

On May 6, 2005, "The Union of Poles in Belarus" General Board decided to suspend the *Glos znad Niemna* periodical from publishing for two weeks after the Leninski City District Court in Hrodna had resolved to restore in office the newspaper's former editor-in-chief Andrei Dubikouski. It should be reminded that Andrei Dubikouski was discharged from the *Glos znad Niemna* editor-in-chief's office by *The Union of Poles in Belarus* General Board in mid-April. Andrzej Pisalnik was appointed to hold the vacant position. The new editor-in-chief managed to publish three issues of the periodical before the court's decision to restore Andrei Dubikouski in his office. Moreover, the court urged *The Union of Poles in Belarus* to pay out around 1 million rubles to Andrei Dubikouski and to cover the legal costs.

*The Union of Poles in Belarus* General Board adopted a statement, noting that Andrei Dubikouski had been discharged in accordance with the organization's Statute. The organization's General Board emphasized that de facto the court interfered into the organization managing structures' activities and created a dangerous situation of dualism in the Union.

- We ousted Dubkouski, as under his direction there had diminished the number of "Glos znad Niemna" sales and the newspaper expressed no more interest in the Poles' affairs. However, I learned from the authorities that Dubikouski was a good editor-in-chief and that the decision on his dismissal was harmful, - noted the Union's chairperson Angelika Borys.

The organization's management is going to appeal against the legal verdict in the City court of Hrodna.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; May 11, 2005; [www.baj.ru](http://www.baj.ru)

## **BUSINESS**

### **11. U.S. Democracy Aid for Ex-Soviet States Falls Despite Bush Call**

U.S. funding for programs to promote freedom in the nations of the former Soviet Union has steadily declined in recent years, State Department budget figures show, even as President George W. Bush made advocating democracy in the region the focus of his trip there this week.

Bush yesterday wrapped up a five-day trip during which he urged Russia to stay on a path of democracy, praised Georgia, Latvia and Ukraine and vowed to help sustain the "freedom movement" in the region. "The idea of countries helping others become free, I would hope that would be viewed as not revolutionary, but rational foreign policy," he said in Riga, Latvia on May 7.

Meanwhile, the administration's 2006 request for the countries covered under the Freedom Support Act -- designed in 1991 to ease the transition of the former Soviet republics to democracies with free-market economies -- is \$482 million, down from a \$556 million request for 2005 and a \$585 million appropriation in 2004.

The assistance to the former Soviet republics has been superseded by other U.S. foreign policy priorities, particularly in the Middle East. For example, funding for the Middle East Partnership Initiative, a program to promote political, educational and economic development in the region, has grown from \$29 million in 2002 to a request for \$120 million in 2006.

"There's no question the overall program funding in Eurasia and in Russia in particular has declined and is declining further," said James Collins, U.S. ambassador to Russia from 1997 until 2001. "If you're appropriating billions of dollars for the Arab world, how you cannot maintain an acceptable level of these kinds of programs in other parts of the world, which remain vital to us, is beyond my comprehension." Thomas Casey, a State Department spokesman, declined to comment on the cuts.

#### Falling Funding

Twelve nations are covered by the Freedom Support Act: Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. In 2003, the U.S. budgeted \$144 million to help Russia become a democratic, free-market economy. In 2004, the total dropped to \$97 million, and in 2005 funding has dropped to an estimated \$85 million. The 2006 request is down to \$48 million.

"For Russia, it absolutely means there's a gap between the rhetoric and the reality," said Michael McFaul, a senior fellow at the Stanford, California-based Hoover Institution and an expert on Russian governance. "Russia is the one country in that region, arguably the most important country in the region that is backsliding in democracy. Now is the wrong time to cut Freedom Support Act money to Russia. It makes no sense."

#### 'Shortsighted'

Collins called the cuts, especially reductions in exchange programs that foster ties with future regional leaders, "extremely shortsighted." Programs designed to deepen relations between the two societies are "not very expensive," he said. "And this is being gutted, frankly."

Russia "is still the country with the biggest nuclear force in the world. It is the place we have vital interests at stake," said Collins, international adviser at the law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Fell in Washington.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, where the U.S. recently backed a revolution, funding dropped from \$38 million in 2003 to \$37 million in 2004 to \$34 million in 2005.

The story in Ukraine is slightly different. In 2004, the U.S. spent roughly \$17 million on election monitoring and training politicians, a contribution that coincided with the revolution that brought the pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko to power in January.

#### Furthering Reforms

U.S. funding for Ukraine dropped from \$140 million in 2003 to \$97 million in 2004 to \$80 million in 2005. Congress last week passed \$60 million in one-time supplemental assistance to Ukraine "to further political and economic reforms and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law."

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice last month referred to Belarus as the "last true dictatorship in the center of Europe," and Bush said in Riga that the nation's citizens "should be allowed to express themselves in free and open and fair elections."

Meanwhile, U.S. funding dropped from \$9 million in 2003 to \$8 million in 2004 to \$6.5 million in 2005. The supplemental funding provides an extra \$5 million over the next year for the development of political parties, independent media and civil society there.

#### Belarus's Opposition

"We are continuing to work to promote democratic development," Rice said during a visit to Moscow and Vilnius last month before meeting with members of the Belarussian opposition opposed to President Alexander Lukashenko's rule.

The U.S. government last October said a referendum that approved a third term for Lukashenko fell short of international standards. Lukashenko has been president of Belarus, which lies between Russia and Poland and has a population of 10 million, since 1994. He extended his term after winning a referendum in 1996 and won a second five-year term in elections in 2001.

Georgia, which Bush visited yesterday, saw an initial drop from 2003 to 2004 from \$84 million to \$72 million and then an increase to \$86 million in 2005. Georgia has strong support on Capitol Hill.

"In general, I think it's true that funding has been going down year by year," said Nadia Diuk, director of the Central Europe and Eurasia program at the National Endowment for Democracy, which received a portion of its funds from the Freedom Support Act allocation. "It was, even within the first Bush administration. That was because there were other priorities. We all knew when the Freedom Support Act was first put on the books in the early 1990s that funding was not going to last forever."

#### No Diminution

At a Feb. 16 hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Rice said the reduction "by no means reflects any diminution in our interest in the continued democratization of the former states of the Soviet Union."

She attributed the reductions to a graduation schedule established at the time the act was passed.

"On the Russia program, a significant part of the reduction is on the economic-reform side, but there are some reductions on the democracy-program side, too," Rice said. "And frankly, I think we will have to take a look at that as we go over the next six months to a year to see what more we need to do."

*Source: Bloomberg; May 11, 2005; www.bloomberg.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

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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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