

May 27 – June 9, 2005

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DOMESTIC

1. President: Belarus Spends \$500 Million a Year on Army Upgrade

President Alexander Lukashenko said that Belarus annually spends about \$500 million on upgrading its armed forces.

The presidential press service told Interfax that during a visit to an air base in Brest region on Friday, Lukashenko said: "The state is trying to do its utmost for the army so that servicemen can fulfill their constitutional obligation to be ready to defend the people and the nation."

Source: *Interfax*; June 3, 2005; www.interfax.ru

2. Youth Driving Democratic Change in Belarus

The youth movement in Belarus is in the forefront of the fight against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's dictatorial regime, according to two Belarusian youth representatives. Siarhei

Salash, chairman of the NGO "Skryzhavanne" and Olga Stuzhinskaya, coordinator of the civic initiative "We Remember" told a recent RFE/RL audience in Washington that Belarusian youth are actively engaged in changing Belarusian society, to establish a new democratic government.

Salash said Belarusian youth value democracy and will play a major role in determining the results of the upcoming 2006 Presidential election. Salash predicted that youth will actively participate in creating democratic change, just as those in Georgia and Ukraine did during the revolutions in those countries. While the youth movements may be intense and impatient for change, Salash said that they should work under a legal framework and in accordance with current laws.

The opposition in Belarus, according to Salash, must select a single presidential candidate soon, in order to determine whether he or she is acceptable to the wide spectrum of groups. Moreover, he predicted that Belarus will not have a revolution similar to Ukraine or Georgia. Salash believes that hundreds of thousands of demonstrators must take to the streets for any chance of a popular democratic revolution to take place in Belarus.

Stuzhinskaya predicted that a potential revolution in Belarus could be more violent than those in Georgia and Ukraine, because the current regime has demonstrated that it is willing to use violence. She also believes that women will play a critical role in any potential revolution in Belarus. Stuzhinskaya said that a female presidential candidate could be popular among elderly voters who have become disillusioned with the current regime. Ultimately, according to Stuzhinskaya, "the Belarusian people are ready for change and action."

One of the challenges faced by those interested in organizing a successful democratic revolution in Belarus, according to Salash, is that the Lukashenka government controls most of the national media, including the Internet. Salash noted that Belarus has few independent newspapers, hardly any independent radio broadcasts and no independent television. Therefore, according to Salash, the only way to mobilize the electorate is through a door-to-door leafleting campaign and other grassroots activities designed to promote the democratic opposition's candidate.

Siarhei Salash's and Olga Stuzhinskaya advocacy trip to the United States was organized by the International League for Human Rights. [Ed.]

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

3. Belarusian President Considers Increasing Air Forces to Fend off "Anti-Belarusian Hysteria"

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said at a fighter air base near Byaroza, Brest Oblast, on 3 June that Belarus may increase its military aircraft fleet in response to increased "anti-Belarusian hysteria" in neighboring countries and NATO's eastward expansion, Belarusian Television and Belapan reported. "We're considering very attractive offers for purchasing Su-30 planes for our armed forces," Lukashenka said. "A decision has been made to buy [Czech-made] L-39 fighter-trainers to train future pilots theoretically and practically on the territory of Belarus." According to Lukashenka, foreign countries may be harboring military-intervention plans against Belarus under the pretext of spreading democracy. "A great military potential is being amassed on Belarus's borders," Lukashenka said. "We have no right and we cannot light-heartedly ignore today's realities and real threats to [our] security."

Source: RFE/RL; June 6, 2005; ww.rferl.org

4. Belarus MP Proposes Sterilizing Promiscuous Citizens for Gene Pool's Sake

A Belarusian parliamentarian proposed Thursday to introduce a law allowing forced sterilization of citizens, Interfax reports. This way the state will avoid the birth of handicapped children instead of having to support them, Sergei Kostyan claims.

"This law will be a strict warning for those whose sexual life is disgustingly promiscuous," Sergei Kostyan said at a meeting dedicated to problems of state-supported children.

"Everyone is talking about humanism, but is it humane to watch children of promiscuous parents suffer?" the MP asked.

"Animals lead orderly lives, and so do 99 percent of people. One percent live non-orderly and breed children, mostly unhealthy, mostly morons," he added. "Thus, every new generation breeds more morons than the previous one."

"We should solve this problem radically and accept a law on forced sterilization, otherwise the state will break down and not be able to support the unhealthy and abandoned children," Kostyan said.

Currently Belarusian citizens can get sterilized of their own free will, for medical reasons mostly and mostly women, chief Belarus obstetrician-gynecologist Olga Peresada told Interfax.

Neither being an alcoholic, nor a drug addict, nor having a mental disease indicates a necessity for sterilization, she added.

32,000 orphans are currently deprived of parental care in Belarus, and 86 percent are state supported, Itar Tass reports.

1,797 parents are imprisoned for evading their parental duty.

Source: MosNews; June 2, 2005; www.mosnews.com

5. Is Belarus a Dictatorship?

Several recent events have brought Belarus close to a dictatorship, a term used rather freely to describe the administration of President Alexander Lukashenka, but hitherto incorrectly. Over the past eleven years, despite the heavy hand of the authorities, there have remained important outlets for the opposition, such as newspapers and informal associations, as well as some basic civil rights. These now appear to be disappearing as part of a well-coordinated government campaign to close various loopholes that have permitted an opposition to survive.

In mid-May, a revised version of the law "On the Organs of State Security" was adopted, modifying the original law of December 1997, following the approval of a new draft law by the House of Representatives and Council of the Republic in April. The new law gives KGB officials the right to enter any house or apartment without prior permission, even if they damage a lock in so doing. They must then report to the State Procurator within 24 hours. The KGB also has the right to tap telephone conversations and infiltrate enterprises as regular workers. The secret police also has authority to use the forces and organs of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and the State Committee of Frontier Troops (*Belorusskiy rynek*, May 30).

According to Professor Mikhail Pastukhou, a former teacher at the Institute of National Security, "Some amendments to the law on organs of state security seriously encroach on the personal rights and freedoms of the citizens [as] stipulated in the Constitution," particularly the right of the inviolability of the home, one's personal life, and one's personal correspondence (*Narodnaya volya*, May 21).

A less intrusive, but nonetheless related, event was the signing of Decree 247 on May 31, which regulates the use of the words "national" and "Belarusian" in the names of commercial and nonprofit organizations. Henceforth, political parties, civic societies, trade unions, and banks may use the word "Belarusian" but have no right to use the word "national." Those organizations and media with names that contravene the law must be registered within three months (*Narodnaya*

volya, June 2).

Over the past decade, most non-government newspapers have been shut down or forced to close as a result of heavy fines. The last major newspaper to survive in Belarus is *Narodnaya volya* (circulation 30,000), a bilingual Belarusian-Russian newspaper, usually sold in the subterranean passageways that crisscross the central part of Minsk. Last month, however, it received its second warning of the year, which is sufficient for the authorities to instigate measures for closure. The paper stands accused of issuing false information by listing the names of five non-consenting people under the manifesto of the opposition movement Will of the People, which was founded in February. The leader of the group, Alexander Kazulin, maintains that pressure from the authorities may have forced the five people to revoke their signatures (Belorussiya segodnya, May 24-30).

In April, the leader of the pro-Lukashenka Belarusian Liberal-Democratic Party, Syarhey Haidukevich, sued the paper for the sum of \$93,000 for moral damage resulting from a report that there were commercial ties between his party and the former regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Such a sum would bring the newspaper close to bankruptcy if the suit were successful. Meanwhile, a reporter for *Narodnaya volya*, Volga Klasouskaya, was expelled from the School of Journalism at Belarusian State University, ostensibly for her poor progress in her academic studies, but more likely because of her complaint about the brutality of the militia following the March 25 demonstration in Minsk (Charter 97, June 3).

Attacks on opposition leaders have intensified. On May 25, Mikola Statkevich, leader of the unregistered branch of the Social Democratic Party, received a 10-day prison sentence for showing disrespect to the court, following his detention after a protest against the constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections last year (*Narodnaya volya*, May 26). On May 31, he and Pavel Sevyarynets, leader of the unregistered Youth Front (formerly affiliated with the Belarusian Popular Front) received sentences of three years of hard labor for violating Article 342 of the Criminal Code -- the organization of group activities that violate civic order or active participation in them -- a sentence criticized sharply by the U.S. Department of State (*Narodnaya volya*, June 3).

Other leading opposition figures have also been targeted. Journalist Maryna Bahdanovich, an activist of the United Civic Party, was fined 200 basic salaries (about 4.8 million Belarusian rubles or \$2,200) for participating in an "unapproved" protest by private traders on March 1. On April 28, court officials visited her apartment and expropriated property worth BR600,000 (\$30). However, by then Bahdanovich had taken part in the events of the Chernobyl anniversary and was informed on June 1 that further property would be taken from her (*Narodnaya volya*, May 31). Syarhey Skryabets, one of the former leaders of the Respublika faction in the pre-2004 parliament, has been accused of trying to bribe officials at the Office of the Procurator in Brest Oblast, a familiar means of persecution of opposition leaders (*Narodnaya volya*, May 25).

The dictatorship is beginning to take shape, and President Lukashenka emphasizes that there will be no "colored revolutions" in his country.

Source: David Marples; *Eurasia Daily Monitor*; June 8, 2005; www.jamestown.org

6. Revolution Rumored to Hit Europe's "Last Dictatorship," Belarus

Western high-ranking politicians refer to the republic of Belarus, headed by President Alexander Lukashenko, as "the last dictatorship" in Europe. Politicians promise not to save any money in their efforts to deprive the "European dictator" of his power.

Both the Belarusian opposition and its US and European supporters persistently repeat that the change of the ruling regime is coming in Belarus. They add, however, that it will happen in a peaceful way, avoiding the experience of Georgia and Ukraine. It is worth mentioning that

Alexander Lukashenko has not been noticed for his political likeness to former Georgian and Ukrainian presidents, Eduard Shevardnadze and Leonid Kuchma.

The Belarus authorities strictly control the local opposition. The West will have to make up new ways to overthrow Mr. Lukashenko. One may say that one method has been already found and tested.

Offices of several Belarusian newspapers received a statement from the formerly unknown Belarusian People's Liberating Army on May 31st. Members of the "army" urge to overthrow Alexander Lukashenko from the post of the president and to liquidate the political, ideological and propaganda machine of the incumbent Belarus administration. Political appeals from the People's Liberating Army say that one should establish the government of national confidence and run independent and free elections of both the parliament and the president. The organization called upon the authorities to conducting negotiations with representatives of the democratic opposition to extricate from the crisis urgently. Otherwise, the "army" promised to pronounce the territory of Belarus the battlefield of the People's Liberating Army of Belarus. The deadline was set on June 15th. The authors of the statement said that they would target banks, means of communication, governmental agencies and their employees, Belarusian News website wrote.

Several states of Eastern Europe - Belarus, Moldavia and Poland - are meanwhile panicking over the rumors about a breakdown, which supposedly occurred on a nuclear power plant of one of the neighboring states. It obviously goes about Belarus's Chernobyl. Needless to say that there was no breakdown at the station. However, the increasing panic among the population forced the Belarusian authorities to distribute an official rejection of the rumors.

The People's Liberating Army of Belarus issued a statement on June 3rd, in which it claimed responsibility for the message about the nuclear breakdown. It brings up the idea that such actions can be referred to as measures that the "Army" taking to dethrone the incumbent Belarusian administration.

The Belarusian opposition believes, however, that both the statement from the People's Liberating Army and the rumor about a breakdown on Chernobyl nuclear power plant originally came from special services of Belarus. The services supposedly started the rumors in order to launch repressions against Alexander Lukashenko's adversaries. The rumors can be easily ascribed to the opposition as well, which probably decided to take such measures to find out to which extent Belarus citizens trust the official information.

Most likely, the above-mentioned People's Liberating Army of Belarus does not exist. It is either the fruit of spin doctors' imagination, or there is one certain person (or a small group of people), who conducts such activities. It is noteworthy that the described affairs in Belarus can be compared to the ones in Russia. Any notorious or scandalous statement aimed against the incumbent administration receives an extensive coverage and response. As a rule, the source of such declarations does not represent a serious political force. Furthermore, such people do not have any chances to become such a force even in remote perspective. On the other hand, the West and certain post-Soviet states wish to see a strong and well-organized opposition to current Russian and Belarusian administrations. Such a wish is estranged from reality, though. One may continue calling Mr. Lukashenko a dictator, but there is no other person in Belarus, who could lead the nation.

Source: Vasily Bubnov; Pravda; June 7, 2004; english.pravda.ru

REGIONAL

7. Belarus is Russia's Leading Ally - Opinion Poll

Forty-five percent of Russians see Belarus as Russia's major ally, according to an opinion poll conducted by the Levada center.

The respondents were asked to name five countries, which could be described as Russia's closest allies, and also five countries that treat Russia with utmost hostility.

The list includes the top 20 countries, mentioned most often by those polled.

Twenty-three percent placed Germany after Belarus on the rating list. It is followed by Kazakhstan (20%), Ukraine (17%), India (16%), France (13%), China (12%), the U.S. (11%), Bulgaria (11%), Armenia (9%), Finland (6%), Italy (6%), Kyrgyzstan (5%), Poland (5%), Azerbaijan (5%), Britain (5%), Israel (5%), Uzbekistan (4%), Moldova (4%), and Japan (4%).

Ten percent of those polled failed to name any friendly countries whatsoever, and 14% found it hard to give an answer.

The list of countries unfriendly towards Russia is led by Latvia (49%), followed by Lithuania (42%), Estonia (32%), Georgia (30%), the U.S. (23%), Ukraine (13%), Afghanistan (12%), Iraq (10%), Japan (6%), Iran (6%), Azerbaijan (5%), Moldova (4%), Poland (4%), Armenia (4%), China (4%), Britain (3%), Israel (3%), Germany (3%), Belarus (2%), and Moldova (2%).

The opinion poll was conducted in late May in 128 cities and towns of 46 (out of 89) federal districts. The number of respondents was 1,600. The statistical error was within 3%.

[Text revised by the editor]

Source: RiaNovosti; June 3, 2005; en.rian.ru

8. Kasparov: There will be no Legal Transfer of Power in Russia

Garri Kasparov declared that the verdict announced after many months of a judicial farce "boldly underscores this entire stage of Putin's rule. The Kremlin officials have demonstrated that they are ready to undertake any measures in order to remain in power, and that democratic elections and the constitutional framework will not lead to a legal transfer of power in Russia.

Putin's regime has one final step to take to join the bright Turkmen-Belarusian future, and that is the use of force against public demonstrations. However, there is no doubt that the Sechin and Ivanovs are ready to order the suppression of protests using the cruelest methods. The question now is whether Russian citizens will allow themselves to be herded into totalitarianism.

It is clear that Khodorkovsky's sentence was made possible by the passiveness of Russian society. Especially because of the cowardice of the Russian elite, who openly indulged the authorities' actions. High ranking government and business officials hid their heads in the sand in the hopes that they would not be noticed. As for the Russian intellectual elite, they fell into hysterics trying to convince themselves and others that Putin's regime is the lesser of evils facing Russia today. Attempts to depict the Yukos affair as an annoying misunderstanding, rather than a perverse display of Putin's system are in actuality a part of the propaganda campaign aimed at covering up the Kremlin's lawlessness.

Khodorkovsky's and Lebedev's unlawful sentence will remain in effect as long as we allow Putin's clique remain in power. The current chekist-oligarchic regime has elevated lawlessness and corruption into the ranks of government politics. The sooner we are able to dismantle this regime and put Russia back on the path towards democratic development, there will be fewer unfair verdicts like the Yukos case.

[Text translated by the Editor]

Source: *Gazeta.ru*; June 1, 2005; www.gazeta.ru

INTERNATIONAL

9. Statement by Mr. Bodgan Klich on behalf of the Delegation for relations with Belarus

The Delegation expresses dismay at the imprisonment of the Belarusian opposition activists Pavel Sevyarenets and Mikola Statkevich; the de-legalisation of Belarusian democratic opposition parties, civil society organisations and independent mass media; the expulsion of democratic-minded Belarusian students from schools and universities; as well as attacks on the rights of the Polish minority in Belarus. The Delegation states that all the recent actions of the regime of Mr Lukashenka continue to flout the principles of democracy and the rule of law, while ultimately convincing the Delegation of the impossibility of democratic dialogue with the regime in Minsk.

The Delegation stresses the urgent need for the Commission and Council to respond to the European Parliament resolution of 10 March 2005 and to support alternative and accessible sources of independent and unbiased information for the people of Belarus.

It calls in particular for the creation of a network of independent radio stations broadcasting to Belarus from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and possibly Ukraine. It underlines the particular urgency of support for such a network in advance of next year's presidential elections and the need for the Belarusian voters to receive the objective news that they are currently denied in their own country by their government.

Source: *Charter97*; June 9, 2005; www.charter97.org

10. U.N. Rights Envoy Condemns Belarus Sentencing

A United Nations human rights investigator on Tuesday condemned the sentencing of two prominent opposition leaders in Belarus to compulsory labour for organising a rally against President Alexander Lukashenko.

Adrian Severin, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, said their sentence of three years of restricted freedom had been cut to two years due to an amnesty linked to the 60th anniversary of the end of World War Two.

Nikolai Statkevich and Pavel Severinets helped stage one of the ex-Soviet state's largest recent protests against Lukashenko in October after the veteran leader won overwhelming support in a referendum to enable him to prolong his stay in power. Western countries have denounced the poll as rigged.

In a statement, Severin, a Romanian lawyer appointed last year to the independent post, expressed "deep concern and strong condemnation" at the sentencing.

He also expressed concern about other political prisoners, urging the government to "secure their right to freedom of opinion and expression" in accordance with international human rights law. Severin, whose requests to visit Belarus have been denied, told the annual U.N. Commission on Human Rights in March that Lukashenko recognised no "constitutional, legal or institutional limitation".

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has described the country of 10 million people ruled by Lukashenko since 1994 as "the last true dictatorship in the centre of Europe".

A senior U.S. official said last Friday that the U.S. government was considering freezing the assets of Belarussian officials and limiting their travel abroad to raise pressure on Belarus to

allow greater freedoms.

Source: Reuters; June 7, 2005; www.alertnet.org

11. US Aids 'Blue' Belarus Opposition

The Bush administration is turning the US media spotlight towards Belarus--recently described by Condoleezza Rice, secretary of state, as the "last true dictatorship in the centre of Europe"--as the next domino ready to fall before the advance of democracy.

A senior State Department official on Friday told reporters the US was stepping up assistance to political parties, independent media and civic groups in Belarus opposed to President Alexander Lukashenko. He said the US and its allies were also considering excluding certain Belarusian officials from international cultural, sporting and political events.

The official, who requested anonymity, described his extensive travels through Belarus and how he had encountered "Lukashenko fatigue", even among local officials. But, drawing comparisons with events in Ukraine, he said it was not clear how the population would respond to domestic efforts to replace "a very strong dictatorial regime".

The US administration condemned the sentencing in Minsk this week of two prominent opposition leaders, Nikolai Statkevich and Pavel Severinets, to three years' labour for organising an anti-Lukashenko rally.

By seeking to shift the focus towards Belarus, a diplomat noted that the US was also diverting attention away from Uzbekistan following the crackdown on anti-government protesters last month in which hundreds of civilians were reported to have been killed.

In April, Ms Rice met Belarusian opposition figures in Lithuania. She included Belarus in a list of six "outposts of tyranny" at her Senate confirmation hearing. After the "orange" revolution in Ukraine, "rose" in Georgia and "cedar" in Lebanon, the senior official noted that an opposition youth front in Belarus was promoting "cornflower blue".

Western governments have refused to recognise the legitimacy of a referendum last October that allowed Mr Lukashenko to run for a third term in elections next year.

Source: Financial Times; June 3, 2005; www.financialtimes.com

12. Vice President Meets Belarus Defense Minister

Chinese Vice President Zeng Qinghong met here Friday with Leonid Semeonovich Maltsev, defense minister of Belarus.

Zeng said China and Belarus have maintained sound cooperation in the political, economic, and cultural fields. The two countries have always understood and supported each other in the international affairs.

"The Chinese government appreciates Belarus' adherence to one-China policy and thanks it for its support on the issues of Taiwan and Tibet," he said.

He said the Chinese government values its cooperation with Belarus and would like to bring bilateral relations to a new height.

Maltsev hailed the relations between Belarus and China, saying the military exchanges, as an important component of bilateral ties, have developed further in recent years.

"The two countries share common interests and have great potentials for cooperation," he said, adding that Belarus would like to further the relationship between the two countries and armed forces.

Maltsev arrived here Tuesday morning for a four-day official and good-will visit. Chinese Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan met with him on the day of his arrival.

Source: Xinhua; June 3, 2005; www.xinhua.net

13. China to Exchange Ideas with Belarus on Supervision of Government

A senior official of the Communist Party of China (CPC) said in Beijing Monday China will enhance the exchange of ideas with Belarus in supervision of government.

Wu Guanzheng (R), member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, shakes hands with Tozik Anatoly Afanasievich, president of the State Control Commission of Belarus.

The exchanges between China and Belarus in supervision of government will in return promote bilateral relations, said Wu Guanzheng, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

Wu made the remarks while meeting with Tozik Anatoly Afanasievich, president of the State Control Commission of Belarus, the most powerful supervisory body in Belarus.

Briefing Afanasievich on China's anti-corruption work, Wu said China will establish an effective system of preventing corruption, and give more weight to corruption prevention while severely punish corrupt officials.

The relations have developed in a stable manner since the two countries forged diplomatic ties about a decade ago, Wu said.

China values relations with Belarus, and the development of all- round friendly cooperation is in the fundamental interests of both peoples, said Wu, adding China will make joint efforts with Belarus to lift bilateral relations to a new level.

Source: People's Daily Online; June 1, 2005; english.people.com.cn

14. Outside View: Defusing a Clash on Belarus

The West clearly demands that Belarus should be freed of what it calls the last dictatorship in Europe.

I am afraid that Russia-West confrontation in this area could end in a head-on clash.

The president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko is not former Ukrainian leader Leonid Kuchma: He will suppress the slightest sign of protest, especially by young people. The West may intervene by providing help to the protesters, forcing Lukashenko to seek assistance from Russia, and the Kremlin will be hard put to deny it. After the defeat in Ukraine, Belarus has become doubly important to it for communications, defense and access to the Baltic Sea exclave of Kaliningrad. Belarus is very nearly the last ally of Russia in the former Soviet Union.

I do not think that Russia will send in troops. But there are special operations units and internal troops. Moscow may intervene if Lukashenko appeals for help and it is clear that his downfall will send Belarus in Ukraine's footsteps toward NATO without Russia.

This will mean NATO will be along the entire Russian border, complicating the Kaliningrad situation and putting enormous pressure on Vladimir Putin. He will have to think about how to

maintain political stability. Losing Belarus after Ukraine would be a new, serious blow to his authority at home.

If Belarus falls, or if developments there provoke a Russia-West confrontation, the domestic situation in Russia will be affected immediately. The country will be unable to develop a market economy and democracy if it is involved in a confrontation with the West.

The West will most probably not intervene in Belarus and the republic will remain allied to Russia. In this case, the West will take its "revenge" in Ukraine, the Baltic states and Georgia, and try to win over Azerbaijan and Armenia. Russia and Belarus will be completely surrounded by NATO countries.

NATO is neither an adversary nor a friend for Russia; it is a partner and, though the two sides disagree on some points, they also have many areas of interaction. But they will have to forget about it if Belarus is hit by a "color revolution."

If Russia develops relations with the opposition leaders of Belarus in good time (and some of them are living overseas), a choice between "Belarus with Lukashenko and with Russia" and "Belarus without Lukashenko and without Russia" will not figure on the agenda. But this would mean skating on very thin ice, because Lukashenko has actually outlawed the opposition. To develop contacts with it would mean acting against Lukashenko as the incumbent president. This would be difficult.

Revolutions, even such bloodless ones as recent color revolutions in former Soviet republics, cannot develop without a breeding ground. They need an ineffective and unpopular regime that is not supported by the vast majority of the people. For example, Ukraine was almost split by the time of its "orange revolution."

When half of the population does not support the regime, this is an alarming sign. It is a dangerous moment when external forces can influence the situation. Opinion polls show that the majority of the population and the political elite in Russia are more pro-etatist than the president. And no liberal revolution can happen here. On the contrary, nationalists and the radical Left might take to the streets, but not the rightwing forces.

Besides, we must not forget history: In the 1990s the right-wing liberals, who held ranking posts in the Russian power structure, if not directly ruled it, failed to carry through the reforms. This left people disillusioned. There was nothing of the kind in Ukraine or Belarus.

Russia must decide with whom it will work. In my opinion, it should work with the West and above all Greater Europe. Its relations with NATO should be promoted to a stage where Russia will not fear the accession of its close neighbors to the bloc. In other words, NATO should cease to become a hostile organization for Russia, but this depends both on NATO and Russia.

Their relations are crawling rather than moving, largely because of Russian ministries, including defense ministry, but also because of the West's unclear approach to Russia. The West does not want to outline unambiguous and lasting relations for NATO and the EU with Russia. Better and deeper relations may be not a goal but a process. Yet every process should have a goal, otherwise current policy will be reduced to tactical steps that completely overshadow strategy.

(Alexei Arbatov is a non-voting member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and head of the International Security Center at the IMEMO Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the RAS. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and may not necessarily represent the opinions of the RIA Novosti editorial board. This article is reprinted by permission of RIA Novosti.)

Source: Alexei Arbatov; Washington Times; May, 31, 2005; www.washingtontimes.com

15. Lukashenko to Accept Credentials of Ambassadors from Bulgaria, Iceland and Burkina Faso

On June 7, the president of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko will accept the credentials of ambassadors from Bulgaria, Iceland and Burkina Faso, the President's press service informed the Belta news service.

Belarusian-Bulgarian trade and economic relations are developing quickly. From January-March 2005, trade between the two countries was 9.2 million US dollars, a 17.7% increase compared to the same period last year. Belarusian exports have grown by 25% (5.3 million US dollars).

Trade between Belarus and Iceland from 2000 to 2004 increased by more than 15 times, comprising 32.9 million US dollars. Belarus exports carbonaceous steel to Iceland and imports frozen fish, fish fillet, crustaceans, and meat products.

[Text translated by the Editor]

Source: BelaPAN; June 6, 2005; www.naviny.by

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

16. Gil-Robles does not believe that Belarus is a Democratic State

"Belarus does is not a democratic state, because if it were one, then it would have been a member of the European Union," stated Gil-Robles in a press conference in Moscow on Friday.

He emphasized that if Belarus hopes to become an EU member, it should uphold the principles outlined in the European Convention.

"All of us are ready to help Belarus undertake various measures so that it can truly become a democratic state, and not just use pretty words about democracy," said the Council of Europe commissioner. In his opinion "it is impossible to accept" the existing problems in Belarus.

[Text translated by the Editor]

Source: Gazeta.ru; May 27, 2005; www.gazeta.ru

17. Belarus Students Go on Hunger Strike

As the regime of Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko cracks down on democratically-minded students, the country's youth are taking to hunger strikes to ensure they have the right to continue their educations.

Long known for its repressive tactics, Lukashenko's government has banned non-governmental organizations (NGO) and independent media in the former Soviet republic from including the words "Belarus" or "national" in their titles. Two opposition leaders have also just been condemned to two years of hard labor for allegedly "violating public order" when they staged a rally against Lukashenko in 2004.

Such actions have earned Lukashenko stinging criticism from the West for suppressing freedom of speech and freedom of the press. But now, young people from Belarus are also voicing their own strong criticism of the authoritarian regime.

Pressure on those parts of the population that support democratic reforms has increased in the past few months, as government leaders of the former Soviet republic who have been in power

for the past eleven years fear they may be losing their grip on power. Young people appear to pose the biggest threat, so more activists in democratic youth organizations are being expelled from universities and school because of their political views.

Now, to fight for the right for education, they're using the last weapon they have: They're going on hunger strikes. Pavel and Arthur, two students that are no longer permitted to attend university, now gather in front of the lecture hall.

"I was expelled because I attended a rally. I was arrested and sentenced to ten days' imprisonment. Three days later, I was expelled from the university," said Pavel.

Arthur told a similar tale: "They said I wouldn't be allowed to take an exam and a KGB agent went to my dean and put pressure on him."

Both young men are active in the "Youth Front" organization. About 2,000 people between 15 and 24 years of age belong to the group that works for democracy and human rights in their country. Since the beginning of the year, 33 young people have been dismissed from the university. Not only college students are endangered, but also high school students. If they are thrown out of school, they have no chance to finish their education, which is supposedly guaranteed by Belarus' constitution.

"At first, we protested against that, but no one heeded our demands. Everything just got worse. So we had to go on a hunger strike. That's our last hope," said Pavel.

The young people are demanding that the expelled students be permitted back in. The motto of their protest is called "Children Want to Learn" and their logo is a sun rising behind a school desk. Posters with the logo are all over city. More and more young people are going on hunger strikes. At the moment, the number stands at eleven, two of them are minors.

This past weekend, the director of the University's Ideology Department and a police officer visited the hunger-strikers, noted down their names, and suggested they stop. But the protestors won't hear of it.

"We're going to keep going until all the students and pupils can continue their education," said Arthur.

The young protestors are getting support from all sorts of Belarus citizens. Even well-known politicians and celebrities have started a petition in support and are demanding that the Belarusian government stop its repression of the students. Pavel and his fellow activists are optimistic.

"We'll succeed in ensuring a safe future for ourselves and our country. We have to stick together right now. That's the only way we can resist the government. We don't have any other choice," said Pavel.

Source: Deutsche Welle; June 1, 2005; dw-world.de

18. Belarus' Only Independent Newspaper Faces Closure

Belarus' only independent newspaper, the *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), is on the verge of bankruptcy and closure. A Minsk MP is seeking almost \$93,000 in moral damages from the paper, Itar-Tass reports.

The leader of the Belarus Liberal-Democratic Party, MP Sergei Gaidukevich, has accused the paper of publishing false information. An article in one issue of *Narodnaya Volya* reported on commercial ties between Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the Liberal-Democratic Party.

The politician is demanding about \$93,000 for the moral damage caused by the report, an enormous sum for Belarus. A Minsk court Friday started examining the lawsuit.

Another lawsuit against the paper was filed by the Belaruskaliy chemicals firm. The enterprise's employees claim that they never signed the opposition's "Address to the People of Belarus" that the paper published.

They are also seeking considerable sums for moral damages.

Independent experts predict the court will satisfy all of the complaints. It may, however, slightly reduce the sums demanded, Itar-Tass adds.

Source: MosNews; June 3, 2005; www.mosnews.com

19. Yury Azaronak Appointed Deputy Head of Belarusian National TV and Radio Company

Aliaksandr Lukashenka appointed Yury Azaronak to hold the position of deputy head of Belarusian National TV and Radio Company, as reported by the TV News Agency (www.tvr.by). Till recently, Yury Azaronak used to work as the press-secretary of Belarusian Public Prosecutor's Office. The Belarusian TV-viewers know this person as the author of such "denouncing" films about the political opposition as "The Children of Lie" and "Conspirology". A. Lukashenka presented Y. Azaronak to a special President's award for the latter film on January 7, 2005.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; June 2, 2005; ww.baj.ru

BUSINESS

20. Zhirinovskiy: No Minuses in Belarus Development Concept

Belarus has chosen one of the most optimal development concepts among other former Soviet republics, said Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia leader and Duma deputy speaker Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

"As far politics, economics and security are concerned, you have an excellent model," Zhirinovskiy said at a meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in Minsk on Tuesday.

"I can give only a positive assessment to all the processes that are taking place in your country. I cannot find any minuses in them," he said.

Source: Interfax; June 1, 2005; www.interfax.ru

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the Belarus Human Rights Support Project of the International League for Human Rights, www.ilhr.org. The League, now in its 63rd 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@hotmail.com

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.
