

September 30 – October 5, 2005

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DOMESTIC

1. Hackers Shut Down Belarus Police Web Site

Hackers on Wednesday temporarily shut down the website for Belarus' national police, the Interfax news agency reported.

It was the first ever successful computer hacker attack against Belarus' Ministry of Internal Affairs (BMIA), the top government agency in the authoritarian former Soviet republic for law enforcement.

The cyber break-in halted operations of the BMIA's main Internet portal for more than two hours, before the site was brought back on lines, the report said.

Police were investigating a variety of leads, but suspected the attack was linked to opposition groups of President Aleksandr Lukashenko, who runs the country almost single-handedly.

The Lukashenko government represses dissent and has identified the Internet as a favorite means for opposition groups to attack authoritative.

Rapid transfer of information over the Internet was an important factor in neighboring Ukraine's recent Orange Revolution, when authorities attempted to control news reports over election fraud, but failed to do so against an Internet-using opposition.

Lukashenko is scheduled to run for re-election in Belarus in October. He has promised he will win the race, and that public disturbances similar to Ukraine's Orange Revolution "will not happen here".

Source: Khaleej Times; October 5, 2005; <http://www.khaleejtimes.com>

2. Belarus: Opposition Candidate Hopes To Have Broad Public Support

Allied Belarusian opposition activists yesterday (2 October) named opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich as their single candidate to challenge President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in next year's presidential election. Milinkevich talked to RFE/RL in a wide-ranging interview.

RFE/RL: Mr. Milinkevich, do you think you have a chance of defeating Lukashenka?

Milinkevich: It's impossible to beat Lukashenka in the elections, because we haven't had real elections in Belarus in a long time. We will use the elections -- which are our constitutional right -- to conduct a broad political campaign. We hope to win this campaign.

RFE/RL: All of Belarusian media is in the hands of the authorities. How do you plan to deliver your message to the voters?

Milinkevich: It's really very difficult. For 10 years already, Belarusian politicians have not been allowed to use radio and television. Nobody ever sees them [on TV]. So it's no wonder they have low ratings. But during these years of dictatorship, we've learned how to use one very good method for making our case. It works even in the West and in democratic countries. It is delivering the message straight to people's doors.

RFE/RL: If any other candidate emerges claiming to represent a democratic alternative to Lukashenka, will you try persuade him to give up his candidacy on your behalf?

Milinkevich: It would be better if one candidate represents all the democratic forces and that was the aim of the congress [that elected Milinkevich] -- to reduce the number of competitors. But we cannot prevent Lukashenka from providing candidates who would work for his sake.

RFE/RL: If you win, would you support Belarus joining the EU and NATO?

Milinkevich: We would like to preserve the current constitution and remain a neutral country. As concerns the EU, of course, cooperation with Europe is extremely important for us because the current regime has taken the country to a state of complete self-isolation.

RFE/RL: What is your attitude regarding a union with Russia?

Milinkevich: As concerns the union with Russia, we - including the Communists, - think we should be a sovereign independent state that has very good relations and cooperates closely with Russia.

RFE/RL: What is your attitude towards privatization in the country, including the privatization of land?

Milinkevich: Privatization in Belarus will take place. It was frozen at one point because it was being handled by practically only one man -- [Lukashenka] -- and only for his own benefit. He privatized the country. Privatization is needed to give the country a new dynamic. As concerns land, we need to give land to private owners.

RFE/RL: What reforms should have priority in Belarus?

Milinkevich: The main thing is to bring Belarus back to the ranks of civilized countries. We need to restore independence of the three branches of power. We should give freedom to press, and we should start economic reforms.

Source: Valentinas Mite, RFE/RL, October 3, 2005; www.rferl.org

3. Belarus: Can The Opposition Unite To Challenge Lukashenka?

A 1-2 October congress of pro-democratic forces in Minsk selected Alyaksandr Milinkevich as its candidate to challenge President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in next year's presidential election. More than 800 delegates cast their votes for three contenders aspiring to represent the unified Belarusian opposition in the 2006 presidential ballot: United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka, Party of Communists leader Syarhey Kalyakin, and Milinkevich, a representative of Belarus's civil society. Kalyakin dropped out after the first round, and Milinkevich edged out Lyabedzka in the second round, with 399 votes to Lyabedzka's 391.

Milinkevich, 58, holds a doctorate in physics and mathematics, but has been a civil-society activist for most of the past decade, leading the Ratusha nongovernmental organization (1996-2003) and the Belarusian Association of Resource Centers (since 1998). Milinkevich previously worked with the Physics Institute of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences and the University of Hrodna in western Belarus, and served as deputy head of the Hrodna Oblast Executive Committee from 1990-96. In addition to Belarusian and Russian, he speaks English, French, and Polish.

A Relative Unknown

To date, Milinkevich has participated little in Belarus's political life and is relatively unknown to the broader public. Paradoxically, this may be an advantage in the presidential campaign next summer. All the other opposition leaders in the country, including Lyabedzka, have been repeatedly vilified by official propaganda and, according to independent polls, are distrusted by the overwhelming majority of Belarusians, who are highly skeptical of party politics in general. Milinkevich has not been targeted by the state media. In addition, his nonpartisanship gives him a certain edge over other opposition politicians in what seems to be the uphill task of maintaining the unity of the cantankerous Belarusian opposition until the 2006 election.

Milinkevich seems to be taking a realistic view of the political situation in Belarus and does not pin much hope on beating Lukashenka. He told RFE/RL on 3 October that Belarus's Central Election Commission will confirm any election result that Lukashenka dictates without actually bothering to count the votes. The real aim of his presidential bid, Milinkevich stressed, is to launch a wide "door-to-door campaign" to mobilize people and take them to the streets to defend "their dignity." Regime change in Belarus, according to Milinkevich, can only occur following a wide popular protest, similar to Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004.

Milinkevich said the 1-2 October congress in Minsk actually gathered all important democratic forces in Belarus, except for the Social Democratic Party, which is led by former Belarus State University rector Alyksandr Kazulin. Milinkevich does not rule out that Kazulin or other opposition figures might run in the 2006 presidential election, claiming to represent the democratic opposition. Such a development, according to him, would be deplorable, since the opposition's strength is in unity.

Ready For Change?

According to independent surveys, some 45 percent of Belarusian voters think Lukashenka, who has served as the country's president since 1994, should be replaced in 2006. Ten percent of respondents declare that they will back any presidential candidate from the united opposition. Thus, in theory, there is a potential for a "colored revolution" in Belarus. It is up to the opposition in general and Milinkevich in particular to determine how the democratic camp will exploit this potential.

During the 2001 presidential election campaign, the Belarusian opposition -- influenced strongly by Hans Georg Wieck, then the head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk -- made a disastrous choice, selecting Soviet-era trade-union functionary Uladzimir Hancharyk to challenge Lukashenka. The result of that choice was that some opposition forces refused to campaign for Hancharyk, and Hancharyk disappointingly failed to mobilize Belarusians for an anticipated post-election anti-Lukashenka protest.

Milinkevich, if he wants to be successful in his "door-to-door campaign," should now be prudent and flexible and steer clear of any conflicts in the tentative coalition formed at the opposition congress in Minsk. As of today, he appears to have a good chance of managing this.

Source: Jan Maksymiuk, RFE/RL, October 3, 2005; www.rferl.org

4. Belarus Opposition Closes Ranks

Opposition groups in the former Soviet republic of Belarus have chosen a single candidate to run against the country's long-standing president.

The candidate, Aleksandr Milinkevich, said only a united opposition could challenge what he called the dictatorship of Aleksandr Lukashenko.

This was an important moment for the opposition, which was inspired by the recent Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

The presidential elections are due to be held next year.

The opposition says President Lukashenko, who has led Belarus for more than a decade, has become increasingly authoritarian, suppressing free speech and jailing democratic dissenters.

Its candidate, a former science professor, says he cannot promise victory, but believes it is possible.

Rigging fears

He says he will be out in the streets protesting until the bitter end.

Mr. Lukashenko has warned that there will be no revolution in Belarus, saying he will preserve stability, whatever it costs.

As next year's poll approaches, Mr. Lukashenko has intensified his attacks on civil rights activists and the independent media.

He has also accused Western governments and neighboring Poland and Ukraine of sponsoring subversion.

The opposition ran a joint candidate in the last presidential elections in 2001, but he was defeated.

Although many activists say Mr. Lukashenko is less popular now, they believe that the polls will be rigged, and that victory can only be won through mass protests.

Source: Matthew Collin, BBC News: October 3, 2005; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

5. Internet in Belarus: Some Statistics

According to Sergei Rudnev, Ministry of Communications Informatization Department leading expert, the year of 2004 showed a record 50% increase of the number of Internet users in Belarus (2 461 093 users by the end of 2004, compared to 1 627 048 in 2003). The average annual increase of the number of users is some 30%.

Beltelecom data communications network consists of some 16 000 ports. Internet access points operate in 40 of 118 local centers, and it is planned to put into operation 73 more by the end of 2005.

Beltelecom is developing broadband Internet access services. By now some 1 000 people use ADSL Internet access. There are plans to put into operation up to 18 000 ADSL ports by the end of 2006.

Yri Galiakevich , chief of Beltelecom Data Transmission Department announced that RSA Beltelecom is planning two times increase of its outer channel capacity: from 465 up to 935 Mbit/sec.

According to Galiakevich, one of the three operating STM-1(155 Mbit/sec) channels will be replaced by STM-4 (625Mbit/s).

The information was announced at the press-conference on Internet Growth in Belarus 2005 which took place in Minsk on September 29, 2005.

Source: Mikhail Doroshevich, E-Belarus.ORG; October 1, 2005; www.e-belarus.org

6. Belarusian State Security: No Destabilization, Revolution in Country

The Belarusian State Security Committee's deputy chairman said Thursday that the committee would prevent any attempt at destabilization or a revolution in the country.

"Any color revolution in Belarus is obviously impossible," Viktor Vegera said, referring to the popular uprising against former regimes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan that resulted in a change of power in the countries.

"The KGB [the committee] is controlling the situation in the republic," he said. "We will crush any destabilization attempts."

Source: RIA Novosti, September 29, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

REGIONAL

7. CIS Experts in Minsk To Discuss Illegal Migration Issue

The 3rd session of the joint commission of CIS countries that are parties to the agreement (dated March 6, 1998) on cooperation in efforts to curb illegal migration opens here on Tuesday. Information on the migration situation in CIS countries is to be presented at the session. Those present will share experience in the work to optimize the list of documents that give the right to cross the border and will exchange information on the status of work to raise the degree of dependability of the protection of passports, including those with the use of the person's biometric data.

Participants in the session will also discuss the establishment of a database on illegal migrants and persons are banned from entering countries under the provisions of their national legislations.

Those present are also to discuss a plan of activities aimed at implementing the provisions of the 2006-'08 Programme for Cooperation in Counteracting Illegal Migration.

In the opinion of specialists, interaction between the law enforcement agencies of Belarus and Russia to counteract illegal migration is most successful. The Interior Ministries of the two countries conduct joint operations to prevent illegal aliens from traveling across the border regions of Belarus.

Two to three thousand illegal migrants are detained at Belarus border every year. The number of transit illegal aliens from Asian and African countries, who were detained in the republic's territory over the past decade, amounted to more than 30,000.

In February 2003, the issue of Russian migration cards was started at the Belarus state border to the citizens of third countries and stateless persons who go in transit to Russia.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; October 4, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

8. Lukashenko Emphasizes Importance of Military Cooperation With Russia

Aleksandr Lukashenko emphasized the importance of military cooperation with Russia while speaking at a session of the Security Council on September 30. He called Russia a strategic partner and the main ally, and stressed that Minsk strictly abides by its commitments under the agreements providing for the creation of a joint regional group of forces. "We have made considerably progress in the defense sphere," Mr. Lukashenko noted.

Joint tactical and command post exercises have become a usual practice, he said, adding that a "military and administrative game" involving governmental agencies of the two countries would be held in February 2006 to practice the procedure of decision-making in the Belarusian-Russian Union State.

According to Mr. Lukashenko, inspections conducted in the spring and summer of 2005 established that the level of combat readiness and the maintenance of equipment and weaponry were not up to the mark in some military units. He suggested that the new plan of the development of the Belarusian Armed Forces in the next five years, which was on the agenda of the meeting, should preclude any chance of such shortcomings.

"We should clearly realize our aims and purposes in the conditions of the dynamic development of the military and political situation in both the world and our region, and assess our potential and the challenges and threats to security, above all in the military sphere," Mr. Lukashenko said.

Source: Charter97; October 4, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

9. Ukrainian Prime Minister To Visit President of Belarus

The visit of Yuri Yekhanurov to Belarus is planned in the middle of October, Vasily Pugachyov the First Deputy of Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus informed it.

According to Pugachyov, "we have to discuss lots of questions of mutual relations between Ukraine and Belarus especially in commerce and economic spheres. We prepare basis for constructive discussion."

In response to the question about Ukraine's mediation for solution of Minsk-Warsaw conflict, Pugachyov stated that Minsk would resolve it without mediators' help.

Source: ForUm; October 3, 2005; <http://en.for-ua.com>

10. Russians Ponder Unification with Ukraine, Belarus

Many adults in the Russian Federation would welcome the creation of a new country with a neighboring former Soviet Republic, according to a poll by the Yury Levada Analytical Center. 71 per cent of respondents believe forming a single state encompassing Russia and Ukraine would be positive.

In Ukraine, a series of public demonstrations took place in Kiev after the November 2004 presidential run-off. The Ukrainian Supreme Court eventually invalidated the results of the second round, and ordered a special re-vote. In late December, opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko received 51.99 per cent of all cast ballots, defeating Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich. Russian president Vladimir Putin openly backed Yanukovich in the election.

In July, Putin voiced his support for a proposed economic unification of Russia and Belarus, saying, "Russia needs the union. We need it in a geopolitical sense and most important of all, we are a single nation on the whole. (...) In a broad sense, we are a single nation and we will only benefit if we unite, having gained advantages in relations with other countries."

Putin and Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko signed a bilateral treaty in late 1999, where the two nations agreed to eventually merge their tax systems and currencies. An actual constitution for the proposed union has not been drafted. 40 per cent of Russian respondents prefer a union with Belarus, while 18 per cent would choose Ukraine.

Polling Data

What is your opinion on the association of Russia and Ukraine into a single state?

Positive 71%; Negative 24%

Not interested 8%

Hard to answer 7%

Which is more preferable for you? A union with Ukraine or a union with Belarus?

With Belarus 40%

With Ukraine 18%

Neither 22%

Hard to answer 7%

Source: *Angus Reid Consultants, October 2, 2005; <http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/9211>*

11. Aleksandr Lukashenko: Belarus-Moldova Trade And Economic Turnover Skyrockets

Belarus and Moldova enjoy rapid growth in the trade and economic turnover which is the foundation of the bilateral relations, Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko said receiving credentials from Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Moldova to Belarus Ion Filimon.

The Belarusian president noted: "When I visited Moldova for the first time I did not think we would ever approach the mutual turnover worth of USD 200 million. Then we talked about some USD 5-10 million, about by-the-piece tractor deliveries". Aleksandr Lukashenko said that Belarus would do everything possible to maintain today's pace of development of the bilateral relations and strengthen them. Belarus is ready to purchase from Moldova the goods Belarus does not manufacture and deliver Belarusian products there, the head of state noted.

Aleksandr Lukashenko voiced confidence that "an eternal problem of transit of the Belarusian goods across Ukraine will be resolved soon". "I see how president of Ukraine Viktor Yushenko strives for this. We have been talking a lot about the transit corridor and the Ukrainian president supports these cooperation areas", the Belarusian leader explained.

Source: *The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; September 30, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

12. Russian Foreign Ministry: European Parliament Resolution on Belarus Counterproductive

Moscow considers a resolution adopted by the European Parliament on Belarus on September 28 as not corresponding to the aim of strengthening democracy, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin told journalists.

"Russia supports the development of a dialogue between the European Union and Belarus, which is an independent state in the heart of Europe and an active member of international cooperation, including in the fields of security and antiterrorist cooperation," Kamynin said.

Text Revised by the Editors

Source: *Interfax; September 30, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>*

INTERNATIONAL

13. Independent Media is the Key Issue in Belarus

The European Commission said Wednesday that access to independent media is crucial in the lengthy process of bringing democracy to Belarus.

"We attribute the greatest importance to changing the society in Belarus, but it will take time," the EU's External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner told the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee. "People there need to have access to independent information. At the moment, the free media is completely blocked."

The EU's executive Commission has signed a one-year contract with the German station Deutsche Welle, which will start broadcasting daily 15-minute news programs to Belarus by radio and over the Internet in November. The Commission will fund more extensive TV and radio broadcasts from next year.

Relations between the European Union and Belarus have deteriorated as authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled since 1994, has quashed dissent, closed independent media and suppressed opposition parties.

Last week, the European Parliament called on EU governments to freeze the assets of Belarusian authorities if the former Soviet republic does not improve its human rights situation. EU lawmakers also called for member states to expand a visa ban on Belarusian officials who the EU holds responsible for human rights abuses and persecution, and condemned Lukashenko's regime for its attacks on the media, minority activists and religion leaders, reports the AP.

Source: PRAVDA.Ru; October 5, 2005; <http://newsfromrussia.com/>

14. Lukashenko: Belarus Willing To Cooperate With India in All Areas

Belarus is willing to cooperate with India in all sectors, including science, technology, and defense, President Alexander Lukashenko said Wednesday.

During Tuesday's talks with visiting Indian Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Lukashenko said there were no "no-go areas" in cooperation between the two countries.

The Belarusian leader said India and Belarus had come a long way in their political and diplomatic relations, and even had "an almost identical viewpoint on major international issues, including the problem of UN reform."

"We will continue adhering to coordinated positions with the Indian side on key issues of international cooperation and on the development of global processes," said the Belarusian leader.

Both countries are affiliated with the Non-Aligned Movement, Lukashenko said, adding that Belarus is the only European member. He said additional impetus could be given to the movement by joining efforts with India, one of the key players.

Text Revised by the Editors

Source: Olesya Luchaninova, RIA Novosti, September 15, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

15. EU Tells Belarus To Reform Labor Rights

The EU warned Belarus Monday it would withdraw preferential trade rates unless it reforms its labor rights rules.

Belarus has 14 months to make changes guaranteeing trade union independence or it will face paying an extra 3 percentage points in trade tariffs.

In a September 2004 report, the International Labor Organization said that Belarus had "seriously infringed" on the basic civil liberties of its independent trade union leaders and called for guaranteed freedom of action for unions that have suffered interference in their internal affairs.

In a notice posted online, the EU executive Commission said it had carried out an investigation into "alleged systematic and serious violations of the freedom of association in Belarus."

"The Commission considers that the findings justify the temporary withdrawal ... and has decided ... to monitor and evaluate the situation in Belarus for a period of six months."

Belarus has another eight months after that to introduce changes.

The EU press office said it did not know if Belarus had made any commitment to change its rules.

Countries have to meet social norms to receive the EU's preferential trade tariffs.

Source: *Business Week*; October 3, 2005; <http://www.businessweek.com>

16. European Union Calls for Freezing of Belarus Assets Contingent Upon Improvement of Human Rights; Institute Applauds Action, Calls for Steadfast EU Commitment to Human Rights in Belarus

The European Union stalwartly condemned the government of Belarus, calling on EU governments to freeze Belarusian authorities' assets if Minsk does not improve its human rights situation.

In a strongly worded resolution, EU lawmakers also repeated their call for member states to deny visas to Belarusian officials whom the EU holds responsible for human rights abuses and persecution, and condemned the government of President Aleksandr Lukashenko for what they called indiscriminate attacks on the media, minority activists and religious leaders.

"The European Parliament has taken a strong and determined stand against the only dictatorship remaining in Europe," commented Institute on Religion and Public Policy President Joseph K. Grieboski. "This is a first step but significant step in holding Lukashenko responsible for the direct and immediate discrimination, persecution, and oppression he has wrought on the people of Belarus. I call on the European Parliament to remain steadfast in their commitment to human rights and democratization in Belarus and truly to hold Lukashenko accountable."

This is the latest in a series of actions taken by the European Union to call attention to Belarus' atrocious human rights record. The European Union applied sanctions to Belarus in June 2, 2004, after the disappearance of three leaders of opposition groups and one journalist. On September 16, the Council of Ministers of the European Union denounced Lukashenko's government for their "persecution" and "intimidation" of civilian militants and independent journalists.

The strong-worded resolution blasting Aleksandr Lukashenko's government demands the immediate release of several activists whom it called political prisoners. In particular, the resolution calls for recognizing the current Belarusian regime as a dictatorship and Mr. Lukashenko a dictator, and "identifying and freezing the personal assets of President Lukashenko and those other senior members of the regime who ensure the continuation of the dictatorship."

The resolution comes as the EP's reaction to what it called "an arrogant reply" by Belarusian Ambassador Vladimir Senko to European Parliament President Josep Borrell's letter of concern about the imprisonment of opposition politician Mikhail Marinich.

The resolution is based on the European Union's draft action plan in support of democracy in Belarus approved by the EP delegation for relations with Belarus in February and submitted for consideration to Benita Ferrero Waldner, EU commissioner for external relations, and Javier Solana, foreign policy chief of the 25-member bloc.

The resolution will be sent to the European Commission, the EU Council, the governments of the EU member states and Belarus, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Should Lukashenko's regime fail to comply with the EU's demands for human rights improvements, the government would face harsh penalties, the most damaging of which would be expanding sanctions to include "freezing of assets of Belarusian authorities abroad."

Source: *Institute on Religion and Public Policy*; September 29, 2005; <http://www.religionandpolicy.org/>

17. Belarus: Lukashenko Accuses West of Propaganda War

The West is waging a propaganda war on Belarus in a bid to engineer a regime change, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko said at a meeting of the country's Security Council, local media reported. He lashed out at the opposition for advocating the imposition of economic sanctions on Belarus and criticized Poland and the Baltic states for hosting NATO radio-electronic installations.

"Taking into account the new geopolitical realities we should assess the current condition and efficiency of the information security," the President said, stressing that Belarus must protect its citizens "from the foreign information onslaught and from the instability sown by the anti-Belarusian information resources".

To engineer a regime change in Belarus, Lukashenko said, Poland, which has a common border with Belarus, and the Baltic states, have become "bridgeheads for NATO's jamming and radio-electronic warfare equipment" and are going to host a much-hyped broadcasting programme.

In his opinion, Belarus authorities have to hinder the distribution of opposition newspapers that also take part in a propaganda war declared by the West to oust current government. Lukashenko also lashed out at the country's Communist Party, accusing it of asking NATO for financial support.

Meanwhile, on Saturday two Polish MPs heading for Democratic Forces Congress in Minsk were banned from entering Belarus. Authorities explained it by saying they did not have a letter of attorney on driving their car.

Source: MosNews.Com, October 1, 2005; www.mosnews.com

18. Belarus and Germany Agree To Avoid Double Taxation

The Belarus Republic and Germany concluded an inter-government agreement on Friday to avoid double taxation of incomes and property. The Belarus side believes the document will contribute to the still more active development of commercial, economic and investment cooperation between the two countries.

Today, the Belarus Foreign Ministry reports, Germany is second after Russia in the country's foreign trade turnover. Last year the total amount of trade between Belarus and Germany grew by 27.5 per cent as compared to the previous year and added up to 1583.8 million U.S. dollars. Trade turnover grew by another 13.9 per cent in the first half year of 2005, mostly due to the almost 39 per cent growth of Belarus export trade.

Approximately two-thirds of the Belarus export to Germany traditionally consists of mineral products, timber and processed timber goods, textiles and textile articles. However, deliveries of machinery and equipment, instruments, electronic and optical goods have grown notably in the past five years. Today, this group of commodities accounts for about eleven per cent of the Belarus export trade.

Germany's deliveries to the Belarus Republic mostly consist of high-tech goods and chemical products. In addition to this, Germany is also a very important investor in the Belarus economy. German investments added up to 105.75 million U.S. dollars last year. This is the third largest figure after that of Switzerland and Russia. As to the attracted credits, Germany holds first place among the countries-creditors of Belarus, lagging only behind Russia.

Source: Itar-Tass; September 30, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

19. OSCE Urges Belarus To Not Shut Down Newspaper

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's media rights wing today urged Belarus to not close down the daily *Narodnaya Volya* newspaper.

In a statement issued today, Miklos Haraszti, the OSCE's Representative on Freedoms of the Media, said the shutdown of the paper is "unprecedented in the OSCE region."

Haraszti said the closure of the paper would be a "major setback" in the development of the free press in Belarus, and a great loss to Belarusian society.

Yesterday, *Narodnaya Volya* received notification from two state newspaper distribution companies, as well as the paper's publishing house, that they are unilaterally canceling contracts with the newspaper, citing unsubstantiated claims of violations of the law, lack of public demand for the paper, and an outstanding payment.

Source: RFE/RL, September 30, 2005; www.rferl.org

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

20. A New Issue of *Narodnaya Volya* Is Printed

On October 5 *Narodnaya Volya*'s subscribers received one more issue of the newspaper, printed in Smolensk, Russia. The deputy editor-in-chief Sviatlana Kalinkina informed BAJ about it. The issue was dedicated to the Congress of Democratic Forces that took place last weekend. According to S.Kalinkina, the newspaper will be printed 5 times per week, as usual.

Let us remind you that on October 3 *Narodnaya Volya* completed an agreement with Smolensk Publishing House, where such Belarusian editions as *BDG.Delovaja Gazeta*, *Salidarnast*, *Tovarishch*, *Mestnaja Gazeta* are now printed and were *Dien* used to be printed. Josef Siaredzich, *Narodnaya Volya*'s editor-in-chief informed radio "Liberty" that he hoped that *Narodnaya Volya* would be sold in news stalls again as soon as possible".

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*, October 5, 2005; www.baj.ru

21. Exit Permit Stamp Remains In Force

On Tuesday, October 4, the Belarusian Constitutional Court announced the decision, according to which the obligatory mark in internal passports, necessary for the temporary departure abroad, will not be cancelled as of January 1, 2006.

While announcing the court decision on Tuesday, Grigory Vasilevich, the Constitutional Court Head, stated that the state authorities did not adopt necessary measures regarding the timely realization of the Court's September 27, 2002 conclusion. According to the conclusion, the Council of Ministers was to create a registration system by December 31, 2005, which would allow the Belarusian citizens to exit the country using internal passports with no special mark in them.

At the same time Grigory Vasilevich noted that "the Constitutional Court, taking into consideration the government's suggestion, which was supported by House of Representatives of the National Assembly," extended the terms implementing the conclusion to the completion of creating the registration system for the persons who, according to the law, are restricted in exiting and entering Belarus."

According to the Constitutional Court Chairman, it was suggested that the government and subordinated bodies responsible for implementing the constitutional norms on freedom of movement "inform citizens about the prospect of abandoning the mark in passports and the legal regulation of exiting and entering Belarus, in as soon as possible, and create the most favorable conditions for this."

"Also, it was suggested that while the passport marks for going abroad remain in force, the government adopt additional steps to simplify process of obtaining the stamp, which should

especially apply to those citizens who have had the stamp in their passports and whose marks were not annulled

[Text translated by the editors]

Source: *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*; October 4, 2005; <http://www.bdg.by/>

22. Belarus Leader Wants Strict Control of Media, Internet to Prevent Western «Disinformation»

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko called Friday for strict control over the media and Internet in order to protect his people from alleged Western disinformation, and accused the West of trying to manipulate public opinion with the goal of regime change.

Lukashenko said his efforts at information security were aimed at preventing "the imposition of dissent and instability in society through the use of anti-Belarusian information resources."

He accused neighboring Poland and the former Soviet republics in the Baltics of turning into a beachhead not only for NATO eavesdropping but also for an information campaign aimed at Belarus, and said they were trying to unleash religious and interethnic strife.

Lukashenko, who has ruled since 1994, has quashed dissent, closed independent media and suppressed opposition parties. He has also come under criticism for his government's crackdown on Belarus' small Polish minority.

Source: *Charter97*; October 4, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

23. Narodnaya Volya Completed an Agreement With Smolensk Publishing House

Narodnaya Volya has completed an agreement with Smolensk Publishing House, where a new issue of the newspaper will be published on October 4. The newspaper's deputy editor-in-chief Sviatlana Kalinkina informed BAJ that *Narodnaya Volya* will probably be printed 3 times a week. In general, according to Ms. Kalinkina, the editorial staff will try to do everything possible to continue providing its readers the needed information.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*, October 3, 2005; www.baj.ru

24. Detention for Distributing Euronews Programs in Belarus

Andrei Malosai, a 19-year-old activist of a non-governmental organization (NGO) For Clean Borisov! was detained in the city of Borisov while distributing the Belarusian programs of the news television network Euronews. Malosai is a student in the Borisov Professional Ecological Lyceum. 330 leaflets were confiscated from the young man.

Andrei Malosai was taken to the local police headquarters, where his statement and fingerprints were taken. The young man was videotaped.

The next day, the lyceum administration reviewed Malosai's case. According to the Human Rights Center Viasna, during the review, Malosai received unambiguous indication that he may be expelled from the lyceum.

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: *AFN*; October 3, 2005; <http://www.afn.by/>

25. Belarus Authorities Move To Shut Down Main Opposition Newspaper

Belarus's main opposition newspaper, *Narodnaya Volya*, did not appear on the streets of Minsk on October 1. On September 20, its assets were seized by the Lenin district court in Minsk, and the printing house and factory responsible for distributing the newspaper annulled their

agreements on the grounds that *Narodnaya Volya* had published materials that contradict the laws of the Republic of Belarus, specifically the law "On the Press and other Mass Media." On September 28, the directors of Belsayuzdruk and Mingorsoyuzpechat (M. Padhainy and I.V. Dudich) issued separate resolutions canceling agreements with the newspaper, and on the same day, the Chyrvonaya Zorka (Red Star) publishing company followed suit, declaring that the newspaper had failed to pay off its outstanding debts (*Narodnaya Volya*, September 29).

According to one of the paper's writers, the ruling regime became irritated with the newspaper at the time of the 2004 referendum on whether President Aleksandr Lukashenko could be eligible to run for a third term in office. It used the premise of an alleged attack on one of the political allies of Lukashenko, Liberal-Democratic leader Syarhey Haidukevich, in an article on March 1. The article in question exposed a business contract between Haidukevich and the Iraqi oil minister under the regime of Saddam Hussein, including a faxed message from Iraq requesting that Haidukevich cover a debt of \$1 million for oil deliveries (CPJ News Alert, 2005). Haidukevich subsequently sued *Narodnaya Volya* successfully for the sum of BR100 million (\$46,500) for defamation of character, although the newspaper stood by its story.

The newspaper also ran into problems after publishing 10,000 signatures supporting a new informal association called "The Will of the People," when nine people on the list claimed that they had never agreed to their names appearing. This time the fines amounted to around \$7,000 (*Reporters sans Frontieres*, July 26). The newspaper failed in its appeal to the Lenin regional court to have the sum reduced.

Edited by Iosif Syaredzich, *Narodnaya Volya* is the most important socio-political newspaper of the opposition in Belarus. It sells approximately 150,000 copies per week, publishing on five days, and it runs articles in both Belarusian and Russian. Its bright red crest bears the name of People's Will, a 19th century Russian revolutionary movement that brought about the assassination of Tsar Aleksandr II in 1881. Though the fines proved to be a formidable threat, it was able to pay off BR70 million through donations from its readers, and the authorities therefore resorted to pressure on its distributors.

According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, state officials chose to annul the agreements between the services that printed and distributed the newspaper and *Narodnaya volya*. It described the actions as lawless and calculated to destroy the only independent newspaper at a time when the Congress of Democratic Forces was assembling at the Palace of Culture in the Minsk Automobile Factory to elect its candidate to oppose Lukashenko in the 2006 presidential election (*Narodnaya Volya*, September 30). By preventing distribution of the newspaper at kiosks in Minsk, the authorities thus ensured minimal publicity about the Congress, which elected its single candidate on October 2.

In the past, the authorities have resorted to various means to try to stop the newspaper, which for a time was printed in Vilnius, Lithuania, because of difficulties publishing in Minsk. One of its leading journalists "defected" to the main state daily, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, causing speculation that she may have been a government "mole." In a bitter editorial in the final issue to be disseminated, Syaredzich focused on the malaise of Belarusian society, observing that in terms of demographic losses, Belarus loses a "rayon" each year, that the lifespan of Belarusian men is 20 years less than their counterparts in Japan, the majority of villages are dying out, drunkenness is rife in the country, many state officials are corrupt, and the country has had no free, open, legal elections since 1994. It is not only *Narodnaya Volya* that is living through dramatic days, he concluded, all Belarusian people are experiencing difficult times (*Narodnaya Volya*, September 30).

Lukashenko has accused Western countries of unleashing an information war against Belarus, and opposition leaders of betraying their own people by uniting under the banner of NATO (Itar-Tass, September 30). The perspective that criticism of the official government is somehow disloyal is one common to dictatorships, and it has led to the dissolution of several national and

regional newspapers and radio stations, as well as firm control over the three national TV stations that serve as mouthpieces for the regime. The attack on *Narodnaya Volya* follows the closure of the European Humanities University and information outlets like the Independent Institute for Social-Economic and Political Research (NISEPI). It continues the policy of silencing the opposition to attain a government monopoly of information.

Logically such a campaign can never succeed completely. Enterprising Minsk residents can access the Internet (there are two access points directly opposite the president's residence, for example) or radio broadcasts critical of their government, though outside the capital such resources are negligible. But without any legal media outlets, the opposition's fortunes would be bleak indeed.

Source: David Marples, The Jamestown Foundation; October 3, 2005; <http://jamestown.org/>

26. L&J Delegation Turned Back At Border With Belarus

A delegation of Poland's Law and Justice Party has been denied entry into Belarus. The group, headed by two MPs, Filip Libicki and Norbert Napieraj, had been stopped at the Kuznica Bialostocka crossing by Belarusian border guards and turned back on grounds they did not have a notary confirmed ownership certificate for the vehicle they were driving. The Law and Justice delegation had been on its way to Minsk for the joint Democratic Congress of Belarusian opposition forces who are to name their candidate in the upcoming presidential elections. On Friday the Congress organizers did not make available the list of some one hundred invited foreign guests anticipating they could encounter difficulties in entering Belarus.

Source: Polskie Radio, October 1, 2005; <http://www.radio.com.pl/polonia>

27. BDG. Delovaya Gazeta In Danger

According to a court decision, taken by the judge Basko from the Kastychnitski City District Court of Minsk on September 30, 2005, the *BDG. Delovaya Gazeta* has to pay out a moral compensation in the amount of 50 million Belarusian rubles (approximately USD 23,000) to a former riot police officer Siarhiej Biadrytski. Moreover, the newspaper journalist Siarhiej Satsuk has to disburse to the claimant 5 million Belarusian rubles.

The claim had been registered in June 2005. It related to "An Advertising Action" article by S. Satsuk, published in "BDG" No.70 on May 2003. The publication dwelt upon a legal investigation within a criminal case, filed in relation to the special police officer.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, September 30, 2005; www.baj.ru

28. Lone Independent Belarus Journal Threatened With Closure

The only independent weekly magazine printed in Belarus was facing closure today after the magazine's printing house said it would cancel the magazine's contract on 1 October.

Minsk's printing house and a company distributing *Narodnaya Volya* informed the journal's editorial office about the decision to break contracts with the magazine.

The Information Ministry had twice warned the magazine about violations during the last year.

" *Narodnaya Volya* lost several lawsuits and was ordered to pay compensation amounting to some \$47,000.

The Belarus' Association of Journalists released a statement saying authorities in Belarus acted illegally in order to close the magazine.

Source: RFE/RL, September 29, 2005; www.rferl.org

BUSINESS

29. For 9 Months Belarus' Banking System Fulfills All Forecast Indices of Socio-economic Development

October 4 president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko met with chairman of the National Bank Piotr Prokopovich to receive his regular report. As the head of the National Bank informed, in January-September the banking system and the National Bank fulfilled all forecast indices of the socio-economic development for 2005, BelTA was told in the president's press service.

The exchange rate of the national currency remains stable and is gradually strengthening against other currencies. Since the beginning of the year the Belarusian ruble rouse against the US dollar by 0.9 per cent, against the Russian ruble – by 3.4 per cent, against the euro – by 12.6 per cent. All the abovementioned improves the stability of the Belarusian economy and financial system.

Piotr Prokopovich noted that the prices are growing much slower this year in Belarus than in Ukraine and Russia, with their reading falling 1.9 times from 2004. This positive trend is a good spur for active economic expansion in the short term.

The president was informed about the accomplishment of a number of his instructions including one concerning construction of the second phase of the rowing canal in Brest.

The meeting touched upon the issue of strengthening of the relations with the banking system of Russia and with the central bank of the Russian Federation. The head of state was informed on the upcoming meeting of the interbank foreign currency council, due October 7-8 in Minsk.

The Belarusian leader pointed to the necessity to firmly stick to the 2005 economic targets and put a task to prepare the entire banking system for a more intensive activity in 2006.

Source: BelTA; October 4, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

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 Maria Kabalina at cis@ilhr.org or Olga Tarasov at otarasov@ilhr.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.
