

October 6 – October 12, 2005

Edited by Maria Kabalina and Olga Tarasov
International League for Human Rights

Table of Contents

I. Domestic

1. Lebedko Agrees to Head Shadow Government (*BG. Delovaya Gazeta*)
2. National Investment Agency To Be Set Up in Belarus (*BelTa*)
3. Aleksandr vs. Aleksandr (*Transitions Online*)
4. Lukashenko Does Not See Deserving Opposition Candidates (*Interfax*)
5. October 16 - Day of Belarusian Solidarity (*ZUBR*)

II. Regional

6. Russia Angered by Deutsche Welle Broadcasts in Belarus (*MosNews.Com*)
7. Armenia Shows Interest In Military Cooperation With Belarus (*The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*)
8. Russia, Belarus Central Banks Conclude Cooperation Agreement (*Itar-Tass*)
9. Moldova To Import Diesel Oil From Belarus at Lower Prices (*Moldova.org*)
10. Russia: Post-Soviet Groupings Unite (*RFE/RL*)
11. Opposition Leader: Belarus, Russia Should Build Relations Honestly (*RIA Novosti*)
12. Belarus Opposition Leader : Russia-Belarus Union Has No Future (*Interfax*)
13. Russia Grants \$146 Mln To Belarus To Cover Gas Price Hikes (*RIA Novosti*)

III. International

14. Recalled Polish Ambassador Returns to Minsk (*Interfax*)
15. Belarus Presidential Candidate Appears at Forum 2000 (*Radio Prague*)
16. Belarus Supports Initiative "Partnership Against Slavery And Human Trafficking in 21st Century" (*The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*)
17. European Union to Continue Isolation of Lukashenka's Regime (*Charter97*)
18. World Bank To Start Developing New Strategy of Cooperation With Belarus In November (*BelTa*)
19. European Diplomats Urge Steps To Oust Belarus Leader (*RFE/RL*)
20. Russia, Belarus Ready To Notify OSCE About Major Exercises (*Interfax*)
21. EU Ambassadors Met the Editorial Staff of *Narodnaya Volya* (*BAJ*)
22. India-Belarus Pact on Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters (*Rediff.com*)

IV. Human Rights & Independent Media

23. Court Got Ashamed? (*United Civil Party*)
24. Regime Afraid of Our Solidarity (*ZUBR*)
25. Mikhail Marynich's Health Declined (*Charter97*)
26. Mikita Sasim Detained Again (*ZUBR*)
27. The *Narodnaya Volya* Distributors Get Detained (*BAJ*)
28. Day of Solidarity October 16 Is On the Web (*ZUBR*)

V. Business

29. Inflation in Belarus Makes Up 0.1 Per Cent in September (*BelTa*)
30. Alcatel Shanghai Equips Belarus' BeST (*E-Belarus.ORG*)

DOMESTIC

1. Lebedko Agrees to Head Shadow Government

The United Civil Party (UCP) Political Council recommended that Anatoly Lebedko head the National Committee. This decision was adopted during the party's Political Council meeting. The united candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich also took part in the meeting and had to answer numerous questions of the UCP Political Council members.

The questions concerned the structure of creating the unified candidate's headquarters, conducting the upcoming election campaign, the principles of preserving the coalition in the regions, the mechanism of raising the unified candidate's ratings, creating printed materials, and preparing election monitors who will observe on the election day.

There were also questions regarding problems revealed during the Democratic Forces Congress preparation.

"Today we admit that we had these problem moments, but if you weigh these problems against the responsibility for the future of Belarus, the last one obviously outweighs," said Anatoly Lebedko.

UCP leader emphasized that he will fulfill the Political Council recommendations and declared his readiness to head the National Committee.

The UCP leader clarified the shadow government's functions in the following manner: "the National Committee is the intellectual platform for developing and preparing the strategic vision of the future Belarus; it is the instrument of winning over people's support. It means that in addition to developing the economic program, programs concerning all spheres of life, including foreign policy and security will be developed." // Source:AFN

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: BG. Delovaya Gazeta; October 12, 2005; <http://www.bdg.by/>

2. National Investment Agency To Be Set Up in Belarus

Belarus plans to set up its own National Investment Agency, a correspondent of BelTA was informed by head of the international investment cooperation department of the economy ministry Oleg Zinoviev.

At present a corresponding draft has been submitted for consideration of the Council of Ministers of Belarus.

According to Oleg Zinoviev, the agency's task will be to develop an investment project on a turn-key basis. In particular, the agency is expected to render assistance to Belarusian companies to search for investors and to foreign companies – to scan for optimal investment projects in Belarus.

The organization will be working in line with the "one-window" principle. "Investors will not have to visit different departments and organizations, to get licenses and permission; the agency will do it", Oleg Zinoviev underlined.

The National Investment Agency is supposed to be subordinate to the economy ministry of Belarus.

According to the specialist, the economy and foreign ministries have already started developing the agency's site. It will provide all necessary information about the state of the Belarusian investment market, investment projects, programs and offers of investors. The site will also post

assessment, expertise and analysis of branch investment markets as well as legal-standard base, etc.

“The agency will have an exclusive right to provide these services. The infrastructure of the comprehensive information servicing of the investment process will be based on the partnership between professional participants of this market,” Oleg Zinoviev emphasized.

Source: BelTA; October 11, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

3. Aleksandr vs. Aleksandr

The Belarusian opposition unites to choose a single leader to challenge Lukashenko.

In the end, it was undoubtedly the largest indoor gathering of the Belarusian regime’s enemies in many years: on 1-2 October more than 800 opponents crowded the Palace of Culture in the gigantic state-owned MAZ industrial plant. An officially sanctioned meeting, let alone in such an imposing setting, had seemed deeply implausible until recently. Initially, the congress’ organizers had received 54 refusals from potential hosts right across the country. When it became obvious that nobody would dare to harbor an opposition gathering, the opposition even contemplated heading to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv to hold the congress, at which they were to choose a single candidate to represent the united opposition in presidential elections in 2006.

Ironically, they struck lucky at the 55th attempt thanks to the man they want to unseat: President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Unexpectedly, during one of his TV appearances in September, Lukashenko urged the mayor of Minsk, Valery Paulau, to provide a building for the congress. In the blink of an eye, the congress’s organizing committee had a "palace" at its disposal. Moreover, when the delegates arrived on 1 October, they found no police blocking their way. There was anti-opposition graffiti – “Glory to the [Soviet] Union, no to European Union!” and “No to the corrupt opposition!” – but the doormen equipped with James Bond-style wireless headsets were, like them, opposition supporters.

A United Front...

Quite why Lukashenko was willing to give the opposition such a prominent stage is unclear. Perhaps he wanted to claim democratic credentials for his regime. Or perhaps he hoped that the opposition would very publicly fail in its stated goal – to find a single candidate – and would instead display disunity.

Certainly, the members of the congress make up a varied group. Belarus’ many political parties sent delegates, as too did non-governmental organizations. Officially, the former deputies of the first Belarusian parliament (including Lukashenko) and the deputies of a parliament dissolved by Lukashenko in 1997 were also invited, as well as the opposition activists who ran for parliament in 2003 but were not given a chance to win a seat because of massive election fraud. Among the delegates were also editors-in-chief of independent publications as well as a number of VIPs – stand-alone opposition politicians such as General Valery Fralou or Uladzimer Kolas, head of the Belarusian Lyceum, a deeply symbolic institution for Belarusian nationalists closed down by Lukashenko.

But the most important men at the congress – Lukashenko’s four potential challengers – all stressed unity when they put their cases, standing below a big banner with a symbol of the congress: a red tree with its crown in the shape of a map of Belarus under a white sky, which (not coincidentally) are also the colors of the white-red-white national flag banned by Lukashenko.

Siarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Communist Party, said not a word about himself, concentrating instead on the importance of uniting around a single candidate, whoever he might be.

Stanislau Shushkevich, former speaker of the parliament and one of the country's social-democrat leaders, won a long round of applause for withdrawing from the race.

Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, swore an oath on three books: the Bible, the Belarusian constitution of 1994, and a volume by Belarus' most famous writer, the late Vasil Bykau. Belarus could, he suggested, be "as prosperous as Norway and as neutral as Switzerland."

By contrast, war was the keynote of the fourth candidate's speech. Aleksandr Milinkevich, ex-deputy mayor of the western Belarusian city of Grodno and a civil-society leader, said that next year's presidential elections would be "a war, a serious war."

The war, of course, was not to be within the opposition but to topple Lukashenko, and all four signed an agreement pledging to respect and support the choice of the congress, no matter who won most votes.

But a Squeaky Coalition

But, for all the united front, the congress was anything but a meeting of like-minded politicians. Fralou insisted that the opposition should become more tolerant towards Russia. "I always associate the word 'nationalist' with the word 'fascist,'" he said, prompting boos from a fair majority of the delegates, used as they are to hearing the same equation made by Lukashenko.

Zmitsier Dashkevich, leader of the youth organization Malady Front, declared that his organization would support any candidate ... except a Communist. The Communist activist Valer Berazijenka retorted by stating that "screaming and waving the white-red-white flag will not deliver more votes to any candidate." The delegates reacted by chanting "*Gan'ba!*" ("Shame!"). To smooth things over, the Communists' candidate Kalyakin (who happened to be wearing a red tie on a white shirt) intervened. "We should concentrate our efforts on bringing Belarus back to the path of democracy," he declared. "We are not strong enough to quarrel over matters that, though serious, are not vital at this point."

There was also a serious disagreement between Lyabedzka and Milinkevich about how the campaign should be run. Milinkevich stressed iron discipline, a highly centralized campaign team, and the candidate's "near-dictatorial authority" over the resources and activities of his team. Lyabedzka called for a very different organization, saying that the campaign should be coordinated by a special administrative body empowered by the congress, ensuring that all parties were able to contribute to the strategy.

Eight key Votes

The vote itself highlighted a deep cleavage. Milinkevich fell just shy of the 50-percent majority needed for victory in the first round of voting, gaining 383 votes or 47.1 percent of the total. Lyabedzka trailed significantly behind, with 263 votes (32.3 percent), followed by the Communists' Kalyakin, with 152 votes (18.7 percent). Despite that commanding position, Milinkevich only narrowly won the second round, gaining 16 votes to take him to 399, while Lyabedzka added 128, to finish on 391.

This congress was called to instill a sense of solidarity among the rank and file of the various opposition groups with the memory of the 2001 presidential campaign still fresh. Four years ago there was widespread unhappiness when the opposition's single candidate, Uladzimir Hancharyk, was picked behind closed doors by the five would-be challengers. And a note of unity was again struck immediately after the result was announced. The delegates rose from their seats to chant "*Zhyvie Belarus!*" ("Long live Belarus!"). Milinkevich told delegates, "I do not believe that I am better than any of you at all. I do not call myself a winner. We are strong only when we are united." The runner-up, visibly worn out and disappointed, took up the theme. "I don't believe I

have lost today," Lyabedzka said. "I could lose neither to Milinkevich, nor to Kalyakin, nor to Shushkevich. The only loss there can be is to Aleksandr Lukashenko."

Still, despite the warm welcome, many delegates were disappointed with the outcome. Some in the ranks of Lyabedzka's party swiftly displayed their dissatisfaction. Concerned that the Milinkevich-affiliated network of NGOs would play first fiddle in the campaign, the United Civic Party's Mogilev, Brest, and Minsk regional branches refused to throw their support behind the winner. The strength of the coalition was put to the test on 5 October, when Lyabedzka asked the party's political council for a vote of confidence. If he failed, he promised to resign as party leader, a step that would have left the future of the opposition coalition uncertain. In the event, Lyabedzka won full support for himself and his desire to abide by the coalition agreement.

Milinkevich's first moves were conciliatory. He asked Kalyakin to supervise the campaign, and offered Lyabedzka the leadership of the committee tasked with formulating the united opposition's political strategy. He may be hoping to forestall a repeat of what happened in 2001, when many of those who worked for the early frontrunner to challenge Lukashenko, Syamion Domash, refused to work for the opposition's eventual candidate, the trade union leader Hancharyk. Milinkevich led Domash's campaign.

Challengers To the Challenger

Much of the patchwork quilt of Belarus' political opposition can now be found in the coalition. Some patches, though, are still missing. If a truly united front is to be stitched together, more work needs to be done, as a number of politicians, such as Aleksandr Vajtovich, former head of the upper chamber of the Belarusian parliament, and Belarusian Lyceum director Kolas, who also heads the Council of Intelligentsia, have promised to bid for the presidency if Milinkevich performs poorly.

Another source of worry for the coalition is Aleksandr Kazulin, former rector of Belarusian State University and now head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada). His party members actively took part in the congress, but were given no instructions on how to vote. Some party members felt an affinity with the winner. Milinkevich "is closer to me thanks to his ideas, which are the ideas of Belarusian moderation," said Ales Shcharbak from the town of Shklow. "We don't need the aggression shown by Anatol Lyabedzka." Kazulin himself, however, did not attend the congress, instead going on a political fundraising tour abroad.

One man who will not join a united front is Zyanon Paznyak, perhaps Belarus' foremost leading communist-era dissident and once the leading light of the nationalist Belarusian People's Front. Now, though, he leads, from exile, only a splinter party – the Conservative-Christian Party of the Belarusian People's Front – and habitually expresses disgust at every opposition candidate and the whole coalition project. "The so-called democratic opposition was created with the help of Russian and German intelligence services," Paznyak asserted in an interview for RFE/RL. "This opposition is not based on national principles; it is Moscow-oriented." Paznyak promised to run for the presidency in 2006.

Few believe that the Kremlin, which has – like Lukashenko – frequently expressed concern at the possibility of another "color" revolution in the Soviet successor states following those in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, supports the opposition. There was, though, a Russian presence, in the form of Nikita Belykh, the new leader of the Russian liberal party Union of Right Forces. "Of course, our party has some personal sympathies, on which I would rather not elaborate" he told TOL, hinting at Lyabedzka, known in Russia as a liberal and a Russia-friendly politician. "Still we will support any candidate selected by the congress," Belykh said and promised that his party would send around 1,000 election observers to Belarus next year.

Belarus' southern neighbors also paid close attention to the Congress. Serhiy Evtushenko, deputy leader of the Ukrainian Pora movement, told TOL that the congress had "complete legitimacy" and that Milinkevich truly represents the collective choice of Belarusian democrats.

Support from the United States and the European Union for a single candidate was very evident: U.S. Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain sent a video to the congress and Janusz Onyszkiewicz, the Polish vice-president of the European Parliament, appeared on stage to urge the delegates "to go to the end with a single candidate."

Striking the Differences

There is no hint that any of the candidates have the skeletons in their closet suggested by Paznyak. But it was notable that three of the four felt the need to bring political skeletons out on show and apologize for them. Lyabedzka sought to justify being a member of Lukashenko's team in 1994 and helping him to gain power; Kalyakin excused his inability to speak Belarusian, and he also felt obliged to explain that the present-day Communists have nothing in common with their Stalin-era predecessors; and Shushkevich repeatedly defended signing the Belavezha treaty that dissolved the Soviet Union, an issue still painful for many in the Communist Party and beyond.

Only Milinkevich's closet so far seems bare. Even the state's propaganda teams have had difficulties targeting him, and he remains a little-known figure across the country. Milinkevich is certainly rather different from his main rival at the congress. Unlike Lyabedzka, he favors stronger presidential rule in the early phases of democratization. He is also less tolerant towards the present regime. In his speech Lyabedzka promised to guarantee security for Lukashenko and for his financial assets, a position not supported by Milinkevich, who said he would not offer protection to Lukashenko or any other state official if they had committed a crime.

Milinkevich is also very different from Lukashenko – from his haircut and his way of speaking (smooth and calm) to his vision of Belarus as a truly European country rather than a throwback to the Soviet era. There are also major differences between the president and his challenger on a personal level. Milinkevich's first words as a single candidate were dedicated to his wife Inna Kuley, who, smiling and bowing to the jubilant public, took the stage next to her husband. In 11 years in power, Lukashenko has never appeared in public with the first lady – let alone let his wife drive him in a car, as Inna did for her tired but happy husband.

In the throng at the congress – 160 journalists representing nearly 80 press and broadcast outlets as did diplomats from almost every Western mission and political figures from Ukraine and Russia – the usually deeply intrusive regime seemed crowded out. The event was also a tightly controlled affair, with 40 activists of the opposition National Alliance youth organization providing security, checking delegates' badges, and sealing off all entrances and exits.

Still, the state machinery found a way in after, rather reluctantly, the opposition permitted three crews from the most notorious Belarusian state television channels to film the event. Their first subject was a group of actors in clown suits, two of whom posed as gay men. They ambushed the delegates on the front steps of the Palace of Culture, foisting balloons on them, and told the cameras that they would support a candidate who promoted gay marriage and could perform a kiss. The footage was used two days later on all major state channels in order to show "what kind of people are interested in choosing a single candidate." One state television program, *At the Center of Attention*, ended with the mocking slogan "Take Belarus into Europe through the arse."

Surprisingly, the programs did not attack Milinkevich personally. Other, less pleasant surprises may be in store.

Source: Aleksandr Kudrytski, *Transitions Online*; October 10, 2005;
<http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/home>

4. Lukashenko Does Not See Deserving Opposition Candidates

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has said he does not see any prospects for a single united Belarusian opposition candidate in the presidential elections in 2006.

"You should not be misled about the so-called single opposition candidate. There are so many of them now that you will lack the fingers to count them," Lukashenko told journalists on Saturday.

Commenting on a congress of Belarusian democratic forces, recently held in Minsk, Lukashenko said, "Some people, not authorized by anybody, gathered and elected a man. They did not even break up, but other oppositionists aired their desire to run in the elections," he said.

"Who can guarantee that he [Alexander Milinkevich, a Belarusian opposition presidential candidate] is the most promising candidate capable of competing with the incumbent president?" Lukashenko said.

"There will be ten or twelve more such candidates. We are taking this calmly and not worrying on this score," he said.

"When the time for elections comes, it is people who will decide everything. I have something to tell the people, I have the confidence to run in the elections, and I am calm when I hear that the West is financing someone and that Russia is giving money to somebody else. This is just a waste of money. If you don't have anything more to do and if you have lots of money, go ahead. But I don't believe that people in Russia don't know the value of money," he said.

There are no conditions in Belarus for a replay of the so-called colored revolutions, Lukashenko said. "We are determined to defend the country and the people and not allow for the mocking of them," he said.

"Look what is happening in the countries where the colored revolutions were held. Belarus and Russia exhausted the limit of revolutions last century," he said.

Source: Interfax; October 8, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

5. October 16 - Day of Belarusian Solidarity

Preparation for the action of Belarusian solidarity on October 16 has started in twenty Belarusian towns. New graffiti - a number 16 in a circle, and leaflets with the same symbol, have appeared in Baranavichy, Slonim, Hrodna, Polatsk, Vitsebsk, Maladzechna, Vilejka, Barysau, Mahilyou, Homel, Babrujsk, Zaslau, Smargon, Navagrudak, in different districts of Minsk and in other towns. Zubr activists and activists of other organizations have taken part in their dissemination.

A week ago one of the Zubr coordinators Mikita Sasim, the head of the civil initiative "we Remember" Iryna Krasouskaya and a well-known journalist Iryna Khalip called upon the Belarusians to switch off the light in their apartments for 15 minutes on October 16, at 8 p.m. and to put a burning candle to their window boards as a sign of solidarity with political prisoners and victims of political repressions.

Source: ZUBR; October 5, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

REGIONAL

6. Russia Angered by Deutsche Welle Broadcasts in Belarus

A new radio program by Deutsche Welle for listeners in authoritarian-ruled Belarus is creating tension between Berlin and Moscow, Der Spiegel magazine reported.

The daily 15-minute broadcast in Russian, which can also be found on the Internet, offers information on the opposition in Belarus that is not reported by state-controlled media in the state of President Alexander Lukashenko. The EU is subsidizing the program on air with an initial amount of \$110,000 annually.

Sergei Yastrzhembsky, President Vladimir Putin's authorized agent in charge of relations with the EU, accused the Europeans of using "methods from the Cold War arsenal." According to Yastrzhembsky, the shortwave program is a form of "interference in the affairs of a sovereign state" - that is, Belarus, whose regime counts itself among the Kremlin's allies.

Moscow and Minsk fear that Lukashenko's opponents will attract support, since the opposition recently agreed on physicist Alexander Milinkevich as the joint candidate for the presidential election next July. Yet the concerns of those in power about the destabilizing influence of Western media is possibly unfounded.

A study commissioned by Deutsche Welle shows that more than 83 percent of Belarus' citizens have never received Russian-language programs from the German broadcasting station. More than 42 percent of those polled are even of the opinion that the state-controlled media in Minsk portray the politics and life of Western countries "appropriately". Hence the director of Deutsche Welle, Erik Bettermann, places his hopes primarily "on the coming generations" in the country.

Source: MosNews.Com, October 11, 2005; www.mosnews.com

7. Armenia Shows Interest In Military Cooperation With Belarus

Armenia shows great interest in development of the military and military-technical cooperation with Belarus, first deputy defense minister – head of the main staff of the Armenian army Colonel-General Mikhail Arutiunian stated in Minsk October 10.

Analyzing the talks with head of the general staff of the Armed Forces of Belarus Lieutenant-General Sergei Gurulev, Mikhail Arutiunian noted that "the two sides discussed a wide range of issues, especially on the CSTO military constituent". "We showed mutual understanding in many issues", he underlined.

The Armenian party is interested in training of its military in Belarus, the record of military reforming, modernization of the military equipment, in particular, new automated control systems. "As yet the issue of Karabakh has been unsolved and we cannot curtail the army and should hone the military skills. As for the acquisition of the new equipment, it should satisfy us in price, technical characteristics and ability to operate in mountains", Mikhail Arutiunian said.

The program of the visit of the Armenian delegation includes trip to the 120th mechanized brigade and the military academy of Belarus.

According to Mikhail Arutiunian the present day meeting is a preparation to the visit of the defense minister of Belarus Leonid Maltsev to Armenia, with is due in the end of 2005.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; October 11, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

8. Russia, Belarus Central Banks Conclude Cooperation Agreement

The National Bank of Belarus and the Bank of Russia have concluded an agreement on cooperation in the field of bank surveillance.

As the Information Department of the Belarusian National Bank reported on Monday, this document was signed during the 22nd meeting of the Interbank Currency Council of the two union countries held on October 2.

The signed agreement envisages, in particular, an exchange of information in the field of licensing, the holding of inspections, as well as active opposing to legalization of criminal profits and financing of terrorism.

Participants in the meeting have also approved a plan of actions of the two countries' central banks to ensure the introduction of the Russian ruble as a single legal paying means on the territory of Belarus.

Besides, they have approved a draft agreement between the governments and the central banks of the two countries on common principles of currency regulation and currency control in of the Union State.

Now this document will be submitted to the governments of Belarus and Russian for coordination.

Source: Itar-Tass; October 10, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

9. Moldova To Import Diesel Oil From Belarus at Lower Prices

Moldova will import diesel oil for agricultural needs from Belarus at reduced prices. The respective decision was taken during the meeting of Premier Vasile Tarlev and Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko in Minsk.

The interlocutors agreed that Belarus would deliver at least 20,000 tonnes of cheaper diesel oil to Moldova till the end of the current year, and about 150,000 tonnes in 2006.

Aleksandr Lukashenko has also asserted that Belarus will contribute to the liquidation of all barriers that hinder the functioning of the green corridor created between Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic Countries.

Vasile Tarlev appreciated highly the active participation of Belarus in providing the car and tractor stations of Moldova with technical units. The Prime Minister has expressed interest in opening Moldovan-Belarusian joint enterprises to design tractors and trolleybuses.

In another context, the two officials said they are willing to extend the relations of cooperation in the field of culture, voicing hope that on the Day of Moldovan Culture, which will take place on October 16 in Minsk, they will essentially contribute to Belorusians' familiarization with Moldova's potential in this area and to the promotion of Moldova's image.

Source: Moldova.org; October 7, 2005; <http://economie.moldova.org/stiri/eng/5138/>

10. Russia: Post-Soviet Groupings Unite

The Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) -- a grouping of Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan -- will merge with the Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec), a body seeking to establish a single economic zone comprising Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan, and Belarus. Such was the decision taken by CACO leaders at a summit in St. Petersburg yesterday.

The Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) was born in 1994 as the "Central Asian Economic Community."

It adopted its current name in 2002 to stress that cooperation had extended to political and security matters.

The CACO, however, will soon become a thing of the past. It will be merged into the Eurasec, set up in 2000 to promote the economic integration of former Soviet republics into a single, free-trade, economic zone.

The decision was announced yesterday by the five CACO leaders at a meeting in Russia's northern city of St. Petersburg.

President Vladimir Putin told a news conference after the meeting that Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko, who holds the Eurasec presidency, had formally approved the decision by telephone.

Putin, who turns 53 today, praised the agreement with marked enthusiasm. He went so far as to declare the decision his best birthday present.

"We have just spoken to Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko; he support the CACO's decision to join the Eurasec. So all that remains is formality," Putin said. "I consider this decision from my colleagues and friends the best birthday present."

"We have just spoken to Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko; he support the CACO's decision to join the Eurasec. So all that remains is formality."

Speaking to reporters today, after a second day of talks with CACO leaders, Putin expressed hope the merger could soon be implemented.

"I am happy the decision that took place yesterday and that we have announced was taken in our country," Putin said. "I hope the concrete steps we have planned toward the realization of the decisions will be implemented in the very near future."

CACO leaders admitted both organizations had increasingly similar goals and said they were therefore joining forces to save time and money.

Despite its central role in both groupings, Russia is actually a newcomer in the CACO. It joined the organization in 2004, in a move illustrating Moscow's growing strategic interest in the Central Asian region.

Sergei Ponarin, a Central Asia expert at the Russian Academy of Sciences, said he sees the CACO-Eurasec union as a sign of further rapprochement between Russia and Central Asian countries.

Russia, he said, has three good reasons to be interested in Central Asia.

"Firstly, to maintain its status in Central Asia," Ponarin said. "Secondly, to improve cooperation in the security sector, this is certain. Thirdly, Russia is possibly hoping its capital will expand further in Central Asia. Our big industrial heritage can't just be thrown away, we have to find offers somewhere."

Not Without Its Critics

Many observers, however, have scoffed at both CACO and the Eurasec. The groups, they say, have proved little more than a talk shop and has so far largely failed to produce results.

Will their merger be able to breathe new life into post-Soviet republics' unification project?

Ponarin said he thinks not.

"No, it won't help. Because Russia's representatives in various unification organizations linked to Central Asia are as a rule what we describe, excuse me, as 'rubbish,'" Ponarin said. "All intelligent, interesting people seek to join structures linked to the West. Those who do not make it there, losers, end up here. It's sad, but it's a fact."

Georgia, Turkey, and Ukraine had observer status in the Central Asian Cooperation Organization.

Source: Claire Bigg, RFE/RL, October 3, 2005; www.rferl.org

11. Opposition Leader: Belarus, Russia Should Build Relations Honestly

A Belarusian opposition leader, who will challenge President Alexander Lukashenko in next year's election, said he was in favor of good and solid relations with Russia.

"We should build our relations honestly, on mutually beneficial conditions, and not base them on myths and manipulations, as Lukashenko does," Alexander Milinkevich told Thursday's edition of the respected *Izvestia* newspaper.

"It is a personal project of Lukashenko, who is still hoping to get a place in the Kremlin," he said in a reference to a plan to eventually unite Russia and Belarus into a single state, which has been discussed for many years even though few practical steps have been made.

He dismissed what he said was Lukashenko's tactics of "cheap gas in exchange for kisses" as fruitless because "when Russia joins the WTO and stops selling energy resources to Belarus at discount prices, the kisses and friendship will vanish."

Russia has been supplying Belarus with natural gas at preferential prices.

Milinkevich also said Russia was a key strategic partner and close ally of Belarus.

"It is important that the Russian authorities realize that we are sincerely willing to respect Russia's interests," Milinkevich said. "But we are not going to sacrifice our interests, either."

On October 2, opposition groups in Belarus named Milinkevich, a former science professor, as a single candidate to challenge Lukashenko in next year's presidential election.

Despite criticism from the West, Lukashenko remains popular in his country of 10 million.

Text Revised by the Editors

Source: RIA Novosti, October 6, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

12. Belarus Opposition Leader: Russia-Belarus Union Has No Future

Alexander Milinkevich, the single Belarusian opposition presidential candidate, does not like the idea of a union between Russia and Belarus.

"Relations must be honest and mutually beneficial and should not be based on the myths or manipulations so much liked by Lukashenko. There is no Russophobia in Belarus. But the ten civic movements in the opposition coalition--from right-wing conservatives and communists to democrats and liberals--advocate sovereignty," Milinkevich said in an interview published by *Izvestia* on Thursday.

Text Revised by the Editors

Source: Interfax; October 6, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

13. Russia Grants \$146 Mln To Belarus To Cover Gas Price Hikes

Russia will extend a \$146 million loan to Belarus by the yearend to let the republic pay for Russian natural gas, the Belarusian finance minister said Wednesday.

Nikolai Korbut said the Russian and Belarusian Finance Ministries had agreed on the terms and the size of the loan.

Russian state-controlled natural gas monopoly Gazprom said that limitations had been imposed on Russian gas supplies Wednesday because independent gas supplier, Trans Nafta, had fulfilled its obligations to supply 360 million cu m of gas. Belarus did not conclude any new contracts, Gazprom said.

Gazprom had been supplying Russian natural gas to Belarus from 2002 to 2004 at preferential prices. The Belarusian side was expected to help set up a joint gas transportation enterprise based on Gazprom and Beltransgaz.

The deliveries stopped as the two sides disagreed over the price of the planned deal. Gazprom said it would not discuss further gas supplies unless it could obtain a 50% share in Beltransgaz, setting the price at \$600 million. Belarus, however, insisted on the \$5 billion figure.

From January 1, 2004 Belarus received gas from independent suppliers such as Trans Nafta.

Source: Olesya Luchaninova, RIA Novosti, October 5, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

INTERNATIONAL

14. Recalled Polish Ambassador Returns to Minsk

Polish Ambassador to Belarus Tadeusz Pawlak, earlier recalled to Poland "for consultations," has returned to Minsk.

"The consultations are over and the ambassador has resumed his work," the Polish embassy in Minsk told Interfax on Wednesday.

Pawlak was recalled to Warsaw when a conflict over the Union of Poles in Belarus caused tensions in Belarusian-Polish relations.

Source: Interfax; October 12, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

15. Belarus Presidential Candidate Appears at Forum 2000

In Belarus this month allied opposition activists agreed on a single candidate to challenge the autocratic rule of President Alexander Lukashenko in next year's presidential elections. Alexander Milinkevich, the man picked to take on "Europe's last dictator," traveled to Prague this week at the invitation of former Czech president Vaclav Havel, a vocal opponent of the Lukashenko regime. Mr Milinkevich discussed the current situation in Belarus at the Forum 2000 meeting.

Former president Vaclav Havel, who founded the Forum in 1996, was among 70 foreign guests invited to October's congress in Minsk, where Mr. Milinkevich was chosen as a candidate to unite the opposition to President Lukashenko. Also present was another famous communist-era dissident turned president, Lech Walesa of Poland.

M.r Milinkevich told Forum 2000 that regime change in Belarus can only occur following a wide popular protest, similar to Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004, or Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution of 1989. International pressure, he says - and financial support for a free, independent press - can help stir up that critical mass. Brian Bennett is Britain's ambassador to Belarus.

"I think it's very good that someone with the profile of Vaclav Havel is interested in Belarus - is personally interested. The more people who talk about Belarus, the more people are concerned about it, then the better it will be for the people there."

Eight years ago Belarusian opposition groups set up the Charter 97 organization, modelled on Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 human rights group, co-founded by Vaclav Havel. Charter 97 has an

office, a website and a press officer. But most civil society and opposition groups keep a lower profile. Ambassador Bennett again:

"The other side of the coin is that some of these initiatives are best conducted with a low profile, because if they attract the attention of the authorities, they may themselves get into difficulty. We need to be discrete about the assistance that we're making, because in some instances it causes difficulties for people in the country and causes the authorities to block the bank accounts that the money is going through."

Alexander Milinkevich represents a broad coalition of ten political parties and more than 200 non-governmental organizations, bringing together communists and liberals. Mr. Milinkevich admits he has no chance of winning next year's elections. Belarusian opposition groups are pinning their hopes instead on a mass expression of peaceful opposition which has so transformed the former Soviet bloc in the last 15 years.

Source: Radio Prague; October 11, 2005; <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/71544>

16. Belarus Supports Initiative "Partnership Against Slavery And Human Trafficking in 21st Century"

Belarus appealed to the countries of origin, transit and destination of victims of the trade in people, bodies of the United Nations Organization and nongovernmental associations to support an initiative to form a global movement "Partnership against slavery and human trafficking in the 21st century" under the UN aegis.

The appeal was made from a rostrum of the third committee of the 60th UN General Assembly in New York dedicated to crime prevention, criminal justice and international control over drugs. As BelTA was informed in the foreign ministry of Belarus, representatives of this republic drew attention to the issues on human trafficking raised by the Belarusian leader in the course of the UN World Summit. In particular, to the necessity to protect women and children from this criminal phenomenon and to hold slave-traders to answer a criminal charge.

The Belarusian delegation informed about the additional measures undertaken by this republic in 2005 on preventing human trafficking and protecting its victims.

During the meeting the Belarusian delegation expressed hope that the international community would support the country's national efforts on combating illegal drugs turnover. The delegation also noted the necessity of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to attract more attention to the problems of the countries, drugs are illegally transported through.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; October 12, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

17. European Union to Continue Isolation of Lukashenka's Regime

The EU won't change its tough stance towards Belarus, until it wouldn't proceed in the direction of democracy. It was stated by the member of Lithuanian delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Emanuelis Zingeris. "Neither in the Council of Europe, nor in the EU, there are signs that sanctions against Belarus are lifted," Mr. Zangeris said at a press conference on Tuesday. At the PACE plenary session, in which the Lithuanian parliamentarian took part, a report on the EU neighbourhood policy has been passed. In this document it is proposed to surround the EU by a "circle of friendly states". The report mentions Belarus as a state, which amity is questioned in the neighbourhood policy implementation.

Mr. Zingeris said that he vigorously opposes the statement that the EU should moderate the current policy of international isolation of Belarus, Rosbalt informs. "Do you see any signs of the

Belarusian regime's changing? There is no progress with human rights in Belarus. That is why there is no evidence of changing in the EU policy towards Belarus," Zingers said.

Source: Charter97; October 11, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

18. World Bank To Start Developing New Strategy of Cooperation With Belarus In November

The World Bank will start developing new strategy of cooperation with Belarus in November 2005, head of the World Bank mission in Belarus Vladimir Voronin informed. According to him, the strategy will be ready by mid 2006.

We remind that the previous strategy of cooperation between the Bank and Belarus expired in 2004. The head of the Bank's mission in Belarus emphasized that the opportunities spelled out in the strategy had not been used in full.

The new strategy is supposed to be drafted in line with the forecast of the country's socio-economic development for 2006-2010 taking into consideration the Country Economic Memorandum prepared by the Bank.

According to Vadim Voronin, the new strategy will focus on rehabilitation of the Chernobyl affected regions and development of large objects of infrastructure in Belarus, in particular, funding of road and housing construction, municipal facilities, etc.

The World Bank will make a survey of the fuel-energy sector and will carry out a research connected with the accession of Belarus and its neighbors to the World Trade Organization. Attention will be also paid to the research activities in this republic.

The consultations will be held with the Belarusian government, representatives of nongovernmental organizations and potential donors.

BelTA's reference: the Republic of Belarus became a member of the World Bank in July 1992. Belarus and the Bank have been implementing several projects. Since 1992 Belarus has been given USD 184,8 million of loans. Apart from the credit activities the World Bank has rendered gratuitous aid worth of more than USD 15 million to implement several projects in ecology, social security and privatization. The project "Infrastructure modernization in the social sphere of Belarus" aims to fulfill the obligations by Belarus in line with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Source: BelTA; October 11, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

19. European Diplomats Urge Steps To Oust Belarus Leader

European diplomats today recommended tough international action including trade sanctions and freezing assets to support opponents of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

The diplomats made the recommendations at Forum 2000 -- a Prague conference backed by former Czech President Vaclav Havel.

Brian Bennet, Britain's ambassador to Belarus, said that today in Belarus the human rights situation "is getting worse."

Bennett, whose country now holds the EU presidency, suggested using EU funds to back the Lukashenko opposition.

Boris Nemtsov, a Russian politician and advisor to the Ukrainian government, called Belarus "a real dictatorship."

Belarus opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich, who hopes to run against Lukashenko in an election next year, likened the current situation in Belarus with Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet era.

Source: RFE/RL; October 10, 2005; www.rferl.org

20. Russia, Belarus Ready To Notify OSCE About Major Exercises

Russia and Belarus will fulfill the OSCE understanding on advance notification about major military activities in their territories at the same level as other countries, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated.

The OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation recently approved a statement by its chairman on advance notification about major military activities below the threshold set by the 1999 Vienna document on the Negotiations on Confidence-Building and Security measures.

The ministry statement received by Interfax on Monday says that the document expresses the readiness of OSCE member-states to voluntarily notify each other about the largest military exercises, including multinational ones, conducted in their territories during the year.

Source: Interfax; October 10, 2005; http://www.interfax.ru/e

21. EU Ambassadors Met the Editorial Staff of *Narodnaya Volya*

On October 6, 2005 a meeting of the editorial staff of *Narodnaya Volya* with UE and US ambassadors took place in Minsk. The reason for the meeting was the statement of the EU concerning the problems of the only independent Belarusian weekly which is now under the threat of being closed.

The ambassadors of Great Britain, Germany and the USA claimed they supported the independent press of Belarus and mentioned that the persecution of independent editions is bad taste in democratic countries.

The leaders of diplomatic missions supported the editorial staff and the editor-in-chief of *Narodnaya Volya* and promised to help the independent newspaper continue to be printed. Mr. Siaredzich thanked the ambassadors for their help and noted that his edition was in need of moral support and moneyed assistance.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, October 6, 2005; www.baj.ru

22. India-Belarus Pact on Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters

India and Belarus on Wednesday signed an agreement on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters during Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat's visit to the east European country.

The agreement was signed by Secretary (Coordination) Vijay Kumar and Belarus Justice Minister V G Golovanov in the presence of Shekhawat and First Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus Vladimir Semashko. The pact was the highlight of the first ever two-day Indian Vice-Presidential visit to Belarus.

Belarus belongs to the Commonwealth of Independent States. It came into existence after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The two countries that share their concern on the issue of terrorism have been for some time, also discussing the draft of an extradition treaty.

Shekhawat, who flew to Minsk from Bucharest on Tuesday on the second leg of his three-nation tour, had a "very successful" meeting with Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, official sources said. Belarus, which has close ties with Russia, has been supportive of India's

candidature for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council. Lukashenko told Shekhawat that his country has been supportive of India in all international fora.

Source: Rediff.com India Limited; October 5, 2005; <http://in.rediff.com/news/>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

23. Court Got Ashamed?

Brest regional court pleaded Anatoly Lebedko not guilty in administrative offence. Initially, UCP leader has been charged with participation at the meeting for the nomination of delegates to the Congress of Democratic Forces. However the court ruled out to dismiss the case.

To remind, on July 9 in Domachevo town of Brest region there was a meeting for nomination of delegates to the Congress. Local administration got prepared in advance to the arrival of Anatoly Lebedko, Stanislav Shushkevich, Alexander Buhvostov and other oppositionists. The cars of party leaders were stopped and blocked in the center of town. UCP leader was detained immediately. However, in the beginning no one could clearly explain the reasons for detaining Anatoly Lebedko – either for identifying his person or for trespassing into border area. In the end, militia made two copies of records and finally charged Anatoly Lebedko with the organization of unsanctioned meeting where he did not take place.

"The ineptitude of charges against me was so obvious," told Anatoly Lebedko in his interview to UCP press-room. "Statements of 'witnesses' in court were contradictory to each other. Militia people testified that they were not at the meeting. There were no names of these people and written description of their evidence in the case folder. And I had a feeling that militia people were ashamed for all the lie they had to tell to the court."

Press-room asked UCP leader where he counted for the acquit sentence.

"I have been communicating with Belarusian justice for so long that neither result – positive or negative – would be unexpected for me. It once happened to me that the court accepted my claim against Azarionok. However, later the Supreme Court abolished the decision of lower court. So I would not call the decision of Brest regional court a final one. Lets see what happens later," told Anatoly Lebedko.

Source: United Civil Party; October 11, 2005; <http://www.ucpb.org/eng/show1prel.shtml?no=1638>

24. Regime Afraid of Our Solidarity

Two Zubr activists are detained in Minsk yesterday for dissemination of leaflets, calling upon Belarusians to take part in the Day of Solidarity with the victims of the regime on October 16. Maxim Venyarski and Yauhen Alekhu were detained by policemen after they threw off several hundreds of leaflets from the roof of a high-storey building by the Kamarouski market.

Young people were taken to the police department number 96. Reports have been drawn up against them for violation of the article 143 of Administrative Code (unsanitary condition). At that moment a police detail was called up, and policemen started hastily collecting leaflets, which were not taken by passers-by.

Last Friday one of the leaders of the Zubr movement Mikita Sasim was detained for distributing leaflets with the call to participate in the Day of Solidarity. He was charged with petty hooliganism and imprisoned for three days.

Mikita Sasim together with the leader of civil initiative "We Remember" Iryna Krasouskaya and a well-known journalist Iryna Khalip called upon the Belarusians to switch off the light and burn a candle on October 16 at 8 p.m., as a sign of solidarity with victims of political repressions.

Source: ZUBR; October 10, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

25. Mikhail Marynich's Health Declined

A political prisoner, former minister and ambassador Mikhail Marynich was visited in the colony by his lawyer Valyantsina Shikhantsova, who confirmed that his state of health has worsened. "His state of health for today can be called unsatisfactory. He has an illness that complications occur from time to time," she said to Radio Svaboda.

In spring in the colony of Vorsha Mikhail Marynich has a stroke, which consequences have been complicated by the fact that the prisoner had not received adequate medical treatment for several days. As a result, half of his body was paralyzed partially. Until now his arm and leg have not regained sensitiveness. Besides, Mikhail Marynich has problems with heart, his eyesight dropped.

The lawyer reminded that Mikhail Marynich has five illnesses; each of them is on the list of conditions for early release. A week ago the head of Minsk colony received an application for Marynich's early release because of his state of health. There is no answer still, the lawyer says. Nevertheless, she noted that her client is optimistic, he has not lost hope for release and interest in life.

"He does not give up. He does not despair, though he is hanging on by the skin of teeth. He shows interest to everything, to the situation in the country, to recent events. He reads the "Narodnaya Volya", as he is subscribed to it," the lawyer said.

Representatives of the Minsk colony refuse to comment on the information about health deterioration of Mikhail Marynich.

Source: Charter97; October 11, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

26. Mikita Sasim Detained Again

Zubr coordinator Mikita Sasim is not granted freedom. Mikita Sasim was arrested on October 7 in Minsk for handing out leaflets with the call to take part in the Day of Solidarity on October 16. Today he has been sentenced to three days of arrest on a frame-up. As the three days of arrest have expired, he was released. After the trial he went to police department of Tsentralny district of Minsk, and there he was detained again. It's impossible to communicate with him at the moment. According to preliminary information, Zubr coordinator would be escorted to the military enlistment office of the town of Baranavichy where he is registered.

It is clear that the authorities are going to exclude the Zubr coordinator from the active political life. The regime is alarmed by Zubr activism and the initiative announced by him. Several days ago Mikita Sasim, together with the leader of the civil initiative "We Remember" Iryna Krasouskaya and a well-known journalist Iryna Khalip, called upon the Belarusians to switch off the light on October 16 at 8 p.m., and to put candles to their windows as a sign of solidarity with the victims of political repressions, abducted oppositionists, with all who struggle for freedom and democracy in Belarus.

Today the court of Tsentralny district of Minsk has sentenced the coordinator of Zubr movement Mikita Sasim to three days of imprisonment. The Zubr coordinator was arrested in Minsk on October 7 for handing out leaflets with the call to participate in the Day of Solidarity with victims of the regime on October 16. Since that time he was kept in a remand prison of Interior Affairs Department of Minsk city executive committee. The oppositionist allegedly used indecent language in a public place. Judge Alyaksei Bychko found Mikita Sasim guilty of violation of the Article 156 of Administrative Code (petty hooliganism). This situation reminds of the trial over Georgian activists of Kmara movement, Luka Tsuladze and Giorgi Kandelaki. They were accused

of hooliganism and sentenced to 15 days of arrest for fear of possible contacts with Belarusian activists.

Policemen are capable of anything in order not to see Sasim at the streets of Minsk, including sending him to the army. As we have informed, recently Mikita Sasim signed out from a hospital, where he had spent a week with a brain injury caused by beating up by riot policemen.

Source: ZUBR; October 10, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

27. The *Narodnaya Volya* Distributors Get Detained

The *Narodnaya Volya* will be published according to its normal schedule this week, i.e. 5 issues a week, as reported by Sviatlana Kalinkina, the *Narodnaya Volya* Deputy Editor-in-chief. In the meantime, the police has started detaining the newspaper distributors in different Belarusian regions.

Thus, there was detained Ivan Roman, a *Salidarnasc* newspaper correspondent and a Free Trade Union activist from Hrodna. He was taken to a police department for an hour for distributing the *Narodnaya Volya* newspaper issue, dedicated to the Congress of Democratic Forces, at the Auto Equipment plant on October 7, 2005.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, October 10, 2005; www.baj.ru

28. Day of Solidarity October 16 Is On the Web

Web page dedicated to Day of solidarity with Belarusian political prisoners, families of kidnapped politicians, independent journalists and with those who is fighting for freedom and democracy in Belarus -- <http://solidarity16.org/>. Representatives of civil society of Belarus - wife of kidnapped person Anatoly Krasouski, leader of civil initiative Iryna Krasouskaya, well-known Belarusian journalist Iryna Khalip and one of Zubr leaders Mikita Sasim called upon the Belarusians to switch off the light on October 16 at 8 p.m. and to light a candle by their windows in solidarity with the victims of political repressions.

Source: ZUBR; October 8, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

BUSINESS

29. Inflation in Belarus Makes Up 0.1 Per Cent in September

Consumer prices in September in Belarus increased by 0.1 per cent against August 2005, BelTA was informed in the ministry of statistics and analysis. The consumer prices in September increased by 4.6 per cent against December of 2004. We remind that the deflation in August 2005 was 0.3 per cent.

The consumer prices in 2004 increased by 14.4 per cent. According to the main guidelines of the monetary and credit policy of Belarus for 2005 the inflation is forecasted at the level of 8-10 per cent.

According to the ministry's data, in September prices for industrial output went up by 1 per cent against August 2005 and by 7.8 per cent as of the beginning of the year.

Source: BelTA; October 12, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

30. Alcatel Shanghai Equips Belarus' BeST

According to the agreement signed by Belarus GSM 900/1800 operator BeST and Alcatel Shanghai Bell Co., Ltd. on September 26, 2005, Belarusian mobile operator is to purchase the Chinese company's telecommunications equipment for U.S. \$234 million.

Alcatel Shanghai Bell Co., Ltd. won the bidding in which four other major telco equipment producers participated: ZTE Corporation (China), Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd (Hong Kong), Siemens (Germany), LM Ericsson International AB (Switzerland). Alcatel Shanghai Bell received a contract at a tender on June 29 to supply equipment to BeST and since then the two companies have been finalizing the deal.

On September 1, Belarus' Communications Minister Vladimir Goncharenko said that Alcatel Shanghai Bell supplied the first batch of \$10 million in telecommunications equipment to BeST in advance.

Source: Mikhail Doroshevich, E-Belarus.ORG; October 10, 2005; www.e-belarus.org

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.
