

October 13 – October 19, 2005

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

## Table of Contents

### I. Domestic

1. Fearing Ukrainian-Style Uprising, Belarus Cracks Down (*The New York Times*)
2. To Become Free (*Charter97*)
3. Protest Against Lukashenko (*Euro-reporters.com*)
4. Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus on Cybercrime (*E-Belarus.ORG*)
5. Belarus Opposition Sets Up Committee to Probe Political Deaths and Disappearances (*MosNews.Com*)

### II. Regional

6. Vadim Popov: Introduction of Post of Union State President Is Premature (*BelTa*)
7. Russia Prepares Document On Common Air Defense System With Belarus (*RIA Novosti*)
8. Belarus and Ukraine Simplify Border Crossing Regulations (*BelTa*)
9. Lukashenko Says Relations with Ukraine Should Be Built On Pragmatic Basis (*Kyiv Post*)
10. Yuri Yekhanurov Ukrainian Prime Minister Visited Belarus (*ForUm*)
11. Day of Solidarity With Belarus in Moscow (*ZUBR*)
12. Russia-Belarus Commission To Consider Draft Union Constitution October 20 in Moscow (*The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*)

### III. International

13. Belarus Reporter's Death Prompts EU questions (*EUobserver*)
14. Shushkevich and Gavin to Present Democratic Forces Vision of Belarus' Foreign Policy Priorities (*AFN*)
15. Syria and Belarus Ink Party Agreement (*Arabic News.com*)
16. Belarus and Lithuania Favor Stepping Up Cooperation In Transit Sphere (*The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*)
17. Carrot for Belarus (*Polskie Radio*)
18. Europe Welcomes Day of Belarusian Solidarity on October 16 (*ZUBR*)

### IV. Human Rights & Independent Media

19. *Narodnaya Volya* Journalist Died Of Traumatic Brain Injury (*Charter97*)
20. The Family of Veranika Charkasava Is Summoned To the Office of Public Prosecutor (*BAJ*)
21. Is "Lack Of Cooperation With Local Authorities" the Main Drawback Of Cable TV? (*BAJ*)
22. Criminal Action Denied to Mikita Sasim (*ZUBR*)
23. Belarusian Editions Claim That the President's Decree "On Preventing Human Traffic" Is Being Violated (*BAJ*)

### V. Business

24. Belarus' National Bank To Sell Gem Stones To Retail Customers (*Itar-Tass*)
25. Belarusian Trade Surplus \$677.2 Million in January – August (*Interfax*)

## DOMESTIC

### 1. Fearing Ukrainian-Style Uprising, Belarus Cracks Down

Ten men gathered in a dim three-room apartment one recent evening to plan the unseating of this country's autocratic president, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko.

They have little money, no slogans, no songs and, so far, no color like the orange that thousands rallied around during the popular uprising last year in Ukraine.

What they have is a hope, admittedly slight, that the wave of democracy that washed over Ukraine and other former Soviet republics in the last two years might next hit here.

"Lukashenko has exhausted the possibility of strengthening his power," said Aleksandr Milinkevich, a physicist who leads an improbable coalition of politicians and civic leaders mounting an even more improbable challenge in the election for president next year.

"Sometimes he thinks if he raises wages a bit, people will love him again, but not everything is measured by bread and salo," he said, referring to the salted pork fat that is considered a delicacy in this part of the world. "There is such a notion as human dignity."

Few here or abroad believe that Belarus's beleaguered opposition can win the election, expected before July. But with American and European support, its effort is shaping up as a new struggle over democracy in what was once the Soviet Union. It is likely to inflame tensions not only with Mr. Lukashenko's government, but also with that of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, who opposes Western efforts to democratize former Soviet republics.

"There will be a road to democracy in Belarus," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared in April after meeting with Mr. Lukashenko's opponents in neighboring Lithuania, calling his government "the last dictatorship in the center of Europe."

It is hard to overestimate how difficult that road will be.

Mr. Lukashenko, first elected as a corruption-fighting reformer in 1994, has ruled this country of 10 million with ever increasing authoritarianism, weakening the other branches of government and stifling independent news media and businesses. He is able to run because of a referendum last year lifting the constitutional limits on his term, a vote that was widely denounced as illegitimate.

When people gathered then on October Square in Minsk to protest that referendum, police officers in riot gear swiftly suppressed them, beating and arresting dozens. They have done so repeatedly during all public manifestations of dissent ever since.

"The Belarusian authorities are particularly concerned with preventing any small thing from becoming a big thing," a senior diplomat here said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of diplomatic protocol. "They're not going to let people put up tents in October Square."

As it has in the months before previous elections, Mr. Lukashenko's government has intensified efforts to stifle any voices of opposition.

A former student, Nikita Sasim, when asked about his arrest, replied, "Which one?" He was expelled from a university last year, like dozens of others, and served 10 days in prison after joining the underground youth movement Zubr. Last month he was beaten at an unauthorized rally. On Oct. 7 he was arrested after posting anti-Lukashenko leaflets and held over the weekend by the secret service, still known, as in Soviet times, as the K.G.B.

"The pressure from the authorities," he said, "is becoming stronger."

Mr. Lukashenko has closed independent organizations by forcing them to reregister with the government, then denying permission to those deemed disloyal. This summer security forces raided the Union of Poles, a group that represents the ethnic Polish minority, prompting a dispute with Poland.

A decree by the president requires all government employees - in a country where the state controls 80 percent of the economy - to work under one-year contracts, which dissenters say are used to enforce loyalty.

The state media distribution monopoly last month ordered newspaper stands to stop selling the last independent daily newspaper, *Narodnaya Volya*, or People's Will. The order, denounced by the European Union as an assault on a free press, has left its survival in doubt.

"They are trying to mop up the media, so that the voters can receive information from only one source," said the editor, Iosif Seredich.

Mr. Milinkevich, the opposition leader, said the events in Ukraine last year, when thousands poured into the streets to protest a rigged election for president, inspired many Belarusians. But he noted the essential ingredients of the Orange Revolution that are lacking here.

"They had television, radio, newspapers," he said. "They had oligarchs who supported them. Our rich businessmen who support us are either in prison or abroad."

Mr. Lukashenko's opponents do have support abroad. The United States has pledged \$5 million to support democracy in Belarus, but it has not detailed how the money would be spent. The European Union is paying the German radio channel Deutsche Welle to broadcast into the country, prompting complaints of cold-war-like tactics from Belarus and Russia.

"The West will not spare any expenses," Mr. Lukashenko said earlier this year. A popular uprising like Ukraine's, he said, is "the last thing that we need."

There are indications, though, that external pressure - and the continued isolation of Mr. Lukashenko and several other officials, who are prohibited from traveling in Europe - may be having some impact.

Mr. Lukashenko agreed last month to allow 800 representatives of the opposition to meet in a cultural center in Minsk. After meeting on Oct. 1 and 2, delegates from across the political spectrum, from Communists to liberals, selected Mr. Milinkevich as a unified opposition candidate.

Mr. Milinkevich, a professor and television commentator, once served as a deputy mayor in Grodno and then headed an independent organization, which Mr. Lukashenko's government banned in 2001.

Belarusians, he said, are ready for a change in leadership, something suggested by opinion polls. The main challenge is to overcome people's fear of openly opposing Mr. Lukashenko's state.

"We are only for a peaceful election," said Mr. Milinkevich, who has been arrested and fined but has not led the street protests. "We do not want blood. And if we have to come out to defend our choice, then we shall go out on the streets, but without stones or pistols."

For all its control, he added, Mr. Lukashenko's government has fissures in popular support and in the support of those now on its side.

"If 100,000 people come out on the streets, I don't think that the government will stand," he said. "One general, during an illegal rally in Minsk, said if you come out with 2,000, we will continue to beat you, as we have. But if we see that 100,000 come out in the street, then we will join you."

Source: Steven Lee Myers, *The New York Times*; October 18, 2005; <http://www.nytimes.com/>

## 2. To Become Free

More than 100,000 citizens of Belarus have taken part in the Day of Solidarity on October 16. The action has been supported in many Belarusian towns and in many countries of the world. In this connection representatives of the civil society of Belarus proposed continuing holding Days of Solidarity with political prisoners, disappeared oppositionists, their families, independent journalists, with all who fight for freedom and democracy in Belarus, on the 16th day of every month. They called upon the Belarusians to switch off the light in their apartments on November 16, 2005 at 8 p.m., and to light candles of Freedom. "According to our estimation, more than 100,000 people have taken part in the action on October 16, and about 500,000 have been informed about it. It is very good for a start. We offer holding the next solidarity action on November 16. Now we have almost a month to make every endeavour so that a considerably large quantity of people would take part in the action in November. Probably, it would be difficult to take people to the streets in December, January, February. But if we would carry out solidarity actions every month, we would be able to protest openly in spring," told a well-known Belarusian journalist Iryna Khalip at a press conference in Minsk.

One of the initiators of the day of Solidarity on October 16, Zubr coordinator Mikita Sasim told about the result of the action:

"The Day of Solidarity has shown that the authorities are afraid of our solidarity. I was detained the day before by KGB officers. They tried to recruit me, intimidated me, told that I would be sent to the army. After the action on September 16, when I was beaten up by riot policemen, I spent a week in a hospital. Despite of this, policemen took me to the military enlistment office in Baranavichy by force, and made me sign the summons. Arrests of other Zubr activists have taken place for distribution of leaflets with information about the action. ON the Day of Solidarity, October 16, absurd things were happening. In the houses where most windows were dark with candles on them, policemen were running up and down the stairs in confusion, not knowing what to do, as they cannot prohibit people to light candles," Mikita said.

During the preparation to the Day of Solidarity, Zubr activists organized an interesting experiment. "In one of the houses with 500 apartments we put newspapers and leaflets with information about the Day of Solidarity in every apartment. We called every apartment and entered every door. As a result about 25% of dwellers in this house switched off the light and lit candles. Many people simply switched off the light. It shows that if information is communicated to people, the number of participants would be great. Many people are dissatisfied, many are ready actually to resist the regime," the coordinator of Zubr believes.

Participants of the press conference expressed gratitude to all people who had taken part in the Day of Solidarity, and to all mass media that informed about this protest.

As said by Mikita Sasim, one of the most important problems in Belarus now is deficiency of independent newspapers, as far as most of the newspapers are liquidated, and radio and TV are under the total control of the authorities. However, it is not only the matter of lack of the press. "I would like to emphasize that not all mass media considered to be democratic had supported the Day of Solidarity. Unfortunately, the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in Belarus, *Belorusy i rynok*, *Belgazeta* have not written anything about the protest," Mikita Sasim said.

The Zubr coordinator was supported by journalist Iryna Khalip. "They probably think that nothing is threatening them, if they are pretending that nothing bad is happening in the country. It is a big mistake. I am greatly disappointed. On Sunday evening, staying with a burning candle by my

window, I recalled our journalists' solidarity of the middle of the 1990ies. It is a model of solidarity for me. Just recall, it were journalists who managed to release Pavel Sheremet from prison. It was not Yeltsin, Nemtsov, not Russian politicians, but our rallies, our protest. Where is it all gone? Maybe journalists are afraid now, like everybody else," Iryna Khalip supposed.

"In such situations I always call to mind the thing my father has explained me once. We were talking about human dignity. I told that a person, who has fear, may forget that he is human. But my father said: yes, he may forget, but human dignity is an unbelievable thing. Human dignity resembles grass. It can grow through stones and crumble the stone. And then the desire to become free is to become so strong that one would not be able to disregard it. This desire would be effectuated somehow or other," the journalist said.

Commenting on the opinion of some journalists and politicians about ineffectivity of such actions, Iryna Khalip said:

"One cannot say that the Belarusians are kindle ignite badly. If we remember the Great patriotic War, our partisan resistance movement was one the strongest. Even the Italian resistance cannot come near the Belarusian one. And what about the rebellions of the 19th century, which were taking place every 30 years? As soon as the new generation grew up, it joined the resistance immediately," the journalist reminded.

Mikita Sasim reminded that on November 16, when the next Day of Belarusian solidarity is to be held, is the day of Our Lady of Ostra Brama, a patron of Belarus," Zubr coordinator said.

*Source: Charter97; October 18, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>*

### **3. Protest Against Lukashenko**

Students from as far away as South Africa, Nepal, Ghana, and Taiwan are marching through campuses, parks, and streets to protest against Alexander Lukashenko's government. "The Worldwide Walk, which will include Belarus language slogans, t-shirts, signs, and a pledge drive, also seeks to place pressure on Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko and his government to observe international human rights standards, including the right to free and fair elections," said Charlie Szrom, Founder and President of US-based Students for Global Democracy International.

The march, on 15 October, is part of a six-month fund-raising campaign with volunteers raising money for Belarus student group Zubr-Bison as well as underwriting the efforts of another pro-democracy group, Third Way Belarus, to unite the opposition into one political force for upcoming elections. It takes place this Saturday, two days before the first anniversary of a referendum organized by President Lukashenko to extend his mandate.

Azeri Rüstem Azimov studies at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. "Azerbaijan and Belarus have exactly the same problems. So we can understand the emotional state of Belarusians very well. That's why we are marching. We want all dictatorships to be free." Azimov will be protesting at the Boğaziçi University. "We are also raising awareness amongst university clubs about the march and encouraging people to write articles in their journals," he said.

UK Research student Simon Bance will not be marching, but is taking part in another series of actions. For 16 October 2005, opposition groups are urging people in Belarus and beyond to turn out electric lights and place a candle in their front windows. "There are not many people in the UK or elsewhere who are aware of the situation or even know anything about Belarus. It is sad, though, that a country, so close to us, cannot enjoy democracy or political and journalistic freedom," said Bance.

The candle protest is, according to Zubr coordinator Mikita Sasim, "... a Day of Solidarity with Belarus political prisoners, disappeared opposition members, their families, independent journalists, and with all who struggle for freedom and democracy in Belarus." Sasim joined Iryna

Krasouskaya, founder of the association 'We Remember' and Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta's Deputy Editor Iryna Khalip in calling for the candle protest. Khalip, herself, was fined \$25,000 in April and her newspaper another 25,000 on 30 September, in what even the OSCE has termed a campaign to silence the independent press.

*Source: Euro-reporters.com; October 14, 2005; <http://euro-reporters.com/>*

#### **4. Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus on Cybercrime**

According to Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs Public Relations Department illegal access to computer information, illegal modification of computer information, computer sabotage and credit cards theft and fraud are the most typical computer crimes in Belarus.

In 2005 cooperation of Russian and Belarusian Ministries of Internal Affairs resulted in uncovering international criminal network specializing on computer crimes and on crimes in the HiTech sphere.

In June 2005 Belarusian militia uncovered international criminal group which stole USD 112 000 from the Citibank (USA) clients accounts in August - November 2003.

In 2003, criminal group specializing on child pornography online dissemination was uncovered in Minsk. The total profit of the group totaled USD 3 mln. Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs participates in the international special operation Innocent Images Task Force.

Ministry of Internal Affairs spokesman stressed that 60%, of computer crimes are committed by people aged from 18-29, and 8% - by juvenile delinquents.

*Source: Mikhail Doroshevich, E-Belarus.ORG; October 13, 2005; [www.e-belarus.org](http://www.e-belarus.org)*

#### **5. Belarus Opposition Sets Up Committee to Probe Political Deaths and Disappearances**

Belarus' opposition party, the Council of Democratic Forces, has decided to set up a committee to investigate the supposedly politically motivated deaths and disappearances of prominent opposition leaders, Rosbalt news agency reported Thursday.

The initiative came from Liudmila Karpenko, the widow of the late Belarus parliamentary vice speaker Gennady Karpenko who died six and a half years ago under what his family calls puzzling circumstances. The committee's headquarters will be in Germany, where Liudmila Karpenko has lived for the past few years.

Karpenko's case is on the committee's future agenda, as well as several other disappearances. Former Interior Minister and opposition figure Yury Zakharenko vanished while walking home on May 7, 1999. On Sept. 16, 1999, former Central Election Commission chairman and opposition leader Victor Gonchar and his associate, Yury Krasovsky, also disappeared without a trace, as well as Dmitry Zavadsky, a Belarusian cameraman for the Russian public television station, ORT, who disappeared on July 7, 2000.

To date, the Belarusian authorities have not provided any explanation for the whereabouts of these individuals.

The committee is going to question witnesses, including those who emigrated from Belarus and collect possible evidence of the authorities' involvement in the disappearances. Both could later be regarded as evidence in court.

*Source: MosNews.Com, October 13, 2005; [www.mosnews.com](http://www.mosnews.com)*

## REGIONAL

### **6. Vadim Popov: Introduction of Post of Union State President Is Premature**

The issue on introduction of the post of the Union State president has been repeatedly considered by the Belarusian-Russian commission on the draft Constitutional Act of the Union State. The commission decided that this is an untimely step. "This is a very radical step and we are not ready for it yet," deputy chairman of the Union State Parliamentary Assembly, head of the Chamber of Representative's permanent commission for international affairs and CIS Vadim Popov told in an interview with BelTA.

We remind that on October 20 Moscow will host a regular sitting of the union commission on drafting the Union State Constitutional Act.

Vadim Popov informed that the previous meeting of the joint commission was held on September 19 in Minsk. The two sides set up a group of experts that considered proposals on the draft. The Union State Treaty makes a basis for the Constitutional Act.

The interlocutor noted that "the Union State Treaty makes a basis for the Constitutional Act", which determines that the major governmental body is the Supreme State Council /SSC/ which takes the final decision. "For instance, the union government works out the budget, the Parliamentary Assembly adopts and the SSC approves it", Vadim Popov stated. At the same time, according to him, there is a proposal to choose as head of the union government a person not presiding in neither of the governments since the new executive power should work independently.

The draft Constitutional Act envisages a provision on the two-chamber parliament that will approve laws within the union property. The draft also stipulates issues on human rights and the capital movement. By the end of the year the two sides plan to work out 4 Belarus-Russia agreements in this part, the parliamentary informed.

Vadim Popov underlined "the Constitutional Act – is not the Constitution itself, but an interim document of the future Union State". Regulations that lead to revision of the Belarusian-Russian agreement should not be introduced into the Constitutional Act. Alongside with this, it is a dimensioned document, which embraces all spheres of the Union State activity. So far it includes 8 chapters and 68 articles, the foundations of the political system and the structure of the legislative bodies.

When the draft Constitutional Act is considered on October 20, members of the commission will decide what the experts should do next. If the draft is not finished the commission will report about the stage of its development at the sitting of the Supreme State Council, if the draft is completed, then the Supreme State Council will finalize it," Vadim Popov said.

*Source: BelTA; October 19, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>*

### **7. Russia Prepares Document On Common Air Defense System With Belarus**

The Russian Defense Ministry is planning to submit a document to the government on the creation of a single regional air defense system for the Russia-Belarus Union, Minister Sergei Ivanov said Wednesday.

"The document, which specifies how the system will function, is passing through bureaucratic procedures," Ivanov said after a joint session of the Russian and Belarusian defense ministries, which approved a comprehensive program for military science cooperation in 2007-2010.

The minister also said that, in the near future, Russia would start supplying Belarus with S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to build up the common regional air defense system.

*Source: RIA Novosti, October 19, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>*

#### **8. Belarus and Ukraine Simplify Border Crossing Regulations**

The Belarusian and Ukrainian parties have signed a protocol today signifying simplification of border crossing regulations for the residents of the frontier regions of both the countries, Belarusian premier Sergei Sidorskiy told reporters after the meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Yuri Erukhanov.

In turn, Yuri Erukhanov noted that Ukraine addressed the Belarusian party with a proposal to consider simplification of border crossing regulations for the employees of the Chernobyl power plant since the station will soon be involved in massive construction efforts. According to him the governments of the two states will be able to consider this issue before the meeting of the presidents of Belarus and Ukraine.

*Source: BelTA; October 18, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>*

#### **9. Lukashenko Says Relations with Ukraine Should Be Built On Pragmatic Basis**

Belarus' president told Ukraine's premier Oct. 17 that relations between the neighboring ex-Soviet republics should be built on a foundation of pragmatism.

It was the first meeting between high-ranking officials of the two countries since Ukraine's Orange Revolution.

"We have always sacrificed something and will continue to do so for the sake of the future and are prepared to solve problems on mutually acceptable terms," President Alexander Lukashenko said.

Lukashenko has accused the West of plotting to overthrow him in protests similar to the Orange Revolution, which ushered pro-western Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko into office last year. Belarus holds presidential elections next year.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov gave Lukashenko a message from Yushchenko, and said a meeting between the two was expected this year.

"We need meetings. And we need to listen to one another," Yekhanurov said.

His discussions in Minsk are expected to include cooperation on energy.

U.S. and EU officials have regularly condemned Lukashenko's regime for its attacks on the media, minority activists and religion leaders.

The Belarusian leader, however, continues to receive solid support from neighboring Russia.

*Source: Kyiv Post; October 18, 2005; <http://www.kyivpost.com/>*

#### **10. Yuri Yekhanurov Ukrainian Prime Minister Visited Belarus**

A misbalance which partially emerged in trade - economic relations between Ukraine and Belarus, could be removed through boosting exports of energy products from Ukraine, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuri Yekhanurov, who arrived in Minsk on one-day official visit, said at a meeting with President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus Tuesday.

The Ukrainian Premier agreed with Lukashenko that all issues emerging between Ukraine and Belarus could be settled in a neighborly way.

As the Belarusian President noted, many issues of the Belarusian - Ukrainian relations were not being solved through the Ukrainian side's fault. As he noted, these issues were set long ago and they have reached a settlement point. According to him, Belarus, on its part, is ready to settle them and to compromise.

The parties to the talk agreed that Ukraine and Belarus should more actively study joint accession to markets of third and fourth countries.

The President of Belarus highly assessed the level of trade-economic relations between Ukraine and Belarus and noted a positive trend in the political sphere. He referred to the two states' peoples "as not merely neighbors but almost the united people".

The Belarusian President thanked Yuri Yekhanurov for his consent to postpone a visit for several days.

*Source: ForUm; October 18, 2005; <http://en.for-ua.com>*

#### **11. Day of Solidarity With Belarus in Moscow**

On October 16 activists of Russian democratic movement "We" held picketing, dedicated to Day of solidarity near Belarusian embassy. At 8 p.m. activists of "We" unrolled poster "Stop Luka!" and portrait of journalist Dmitry Zavadsky who was kidnapped 5 years ago.

*Source: ZUBR; October 18, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>*

#### **12. Russia-Belarus Commission To Consider Draft Union Constitution October 20 in Moscow**

A meeting of the joint Russian-Belarusian commission on the draft Constitutional Act of the Union State will be held on October 20 in Moscow. It will be headed by spokesman of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus Vladimir Konoplev and head of the State Duma of Russia Boris Gryzlov, a BelTA correspondent was told in the press service of the Parliamentary Assembly of Belarus-Russia Union.

The press service reminded that the previous sitting was held September 19 in Minsk. Boris Gryzlov stated that at the end of the year the draft Constitutional Act is set to be submitted for the consideration of the Supreme State Council of the Union State.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; October 17, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **13. Belarus Reporter's Death Prompts EU questions**

A Belarusian opposition journalist has been found dead in suspicious circumstances, prompting EU efforts to find out if the incident represents Minsk's latest attempt to gag independent media in the country.

The body of Vasil Grodnikov, a writer on political and social affairs for the independent Minsk-based *Narodnaya Volya* newspaper, was discovered by his brother lying next to a telephone in his home in Zaslau, near the capital, on Tuesday (18 October) morning.

The reporter's family claims he was murdered, saying his head and the wallpaper were covered with blood but with no signs of a break-in to the property, according to a statement forwarded to the Belarusian NGO Charter 97.

One western embassy in Minsk told EUobserver that an internal police report confirms the family's fears and states that Mr Grodnikov was killed by a blow from a blunt instrument to the head.

But a different opinion appears to have been given by the editor-in-chief of *Narodnaya Volya*, Iosif Syaredzich, who was quoted by the BelPAN news agency as saying that following telephone conversations with government investigators, he had "no grounds even for supposing that he has been murdered".

Belarus NGO Civil Initiative spokeswoman Olga Stuzhinksaya indicated that "No one really wants to make any statements at this stage", adding "It [the BelPAN report] doesn't make any sense to me".

*Narodnaya Volya* is currently printed in small runs in Smolensk, Russia, after Belarusian state printers pulled the paper's contract earlier this month.

EU does its bit for free speech

EU authorities on Wednesday sent out feelers to member states' embassies in Belarus to try and get confirmation of the facts before reacting.

The UK, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, the Czech republic, Slovakia and the US all have formal seats in Belarus.

"We are following the situation in Belarus very closely with a particular emphasis on the freedom of the media", EU external relations' spokeswoman Emma Udwin said in reaction to the news. "We very much support the efforts of those who are trying to maintain an independent voice in Belarus".

The EU is currently trying to set up a €2 million radio station project to pump information about the outside world into the country, with work ongoing on a shortlist of potential bidders.

The unit is set to be up and running in January 2006.

The EU in 2004 imposed a travel ban on Belarusian politicians who were linked in 2004 to alleged vote-rigging and "severe human rights violations", including the disappearance of other opposition journalists.

On top of this, member states are discouraged from meeting with members of President Alexander Lukashenko's cabinet under an EU resolution dating back to 1997.

Diplomatic contacts

Despite this, Belarus' foreign minister Sergei Martynov will come to Brussels in early December for a NATO EuroAtlantic partners' meeting, which brings together NATO's 26 foreign ministers as well as its 20 "partners" which also include Ukraine, Russia and some western Balkan states.

His schedule is unclear.

Last week, Belarus' deputy foreign minister Alexander Mikhailovich reportedly visited the European Commission to talk with trade experts about textile exports and Belarus' WTO prospects.

But an EU diplomat said that barring "a couple of incidents" the 1997 ministerial ban is well-respected by member states.

A Belarusian source indicated that "This [regular contact at expert level] is necessary, or else how can we move forward with things, when Belarus has a direct border with the enlarged EU ?"

Source: Andrew Rettman, *EUobserver*; October 19, 2005; <http://euobserver.com>

#### **14. Shushkevich and Gavin To Present Democratic Forces Vision of Belarus' Foreign Policy Priorities**

According to the unified candidate's press service, Stanislav Shushkevich and Tadeush Gavin will take part in international conferences, devoted to the situation in Belarus, as the trusted representatives of Aleksandr Milinkevich, the unified candidate for presidency.

On October 27-28, Tadeush Gavin will present Milinkevich's vision of Belarus' foreign policy priorities at the conference entitled Polish Easter Policy. The conference is organized on the initiative of the Polish Foreign Affairs Ministry in Wroclaw, Poland.

On October 31, Professor Stanislav Shushkevich will visit Copenhagen, where he will speak at the conference organized by the Danish Foreign Affairs Ministry, along with the Scandinavian Council of Ministers Secretariat and the Danish Foreign Research Institute.

"Today it is necessary for the democratic forces to influence the policy of foreign states towards Belarus. The level of conferences both in Poland and Denmark underscores the level of seriousness, with which the foreign leaders are approaching the development of transparent and promising Belarus related policy. During these conferences Stanislav Shushkevich and Tadeush Gavin will present an objective picture of current events in Belarus, and also will discuss concrete plans for developing bilateral cooperation with Belarus," said the unified candidate Milinkevich regarding the upcoming trip of his trusted representatives.

*[Text translated by the Editors]*

Source: AFN; October 18, 2005; <http://www.afn.by/>

#### **15. Syria and Belarus Ink Party Agreement**

Al-Baath Arab Socialist Party and Belarusian Communist Party on Monday signed a cooperation agreement following official discussions between the two parties headed by al-Baath Assistant Secretary General Abdullah al-Ahmar and the Belarusian Party's First Secretary Natiana Golopiva.

"The agreement paves the way for enhancing ties between both parties as well as it will contribute to boosting and developing bilateral relations between the two friendly countries," Al-Ahmar and Golopiva told reporters at the end of their meeting.

Golopiva, for her part, underlined her party's solidarity with Syria's firm stances in dealing with current threats and challenges, expressing admiration of the Syrian experiment in the field of developing society and regarding Syria's role on the regional and international arenas.

Earlier, the Belarusian Communist party delegation paid a visit to the Baath Damascus Countryside branch.

During a meeting with the Party's Branch Secretary Da'as Isseden, both sides stressed the importance of enhancing and developing cooperation between the two parties and countries.

President Bashar al-Assad Monday morning received the Belarusian delegation headed by Mrs. Tatiana Golopiva where talks focused on regional and international latest developments.

*Source: Arabic News.com; October 18, 2005; <http://www.arabicnews.com>*

### **16. Belarus and Lithuania Favor Stepping Up Cooperation In Transit Sphere**

Interaction between Belarus and Lithuania in the transit sphere is the priority area in cooperation between the two states which considerably shapes the atmosphere of the bilateral relations, the Office of the Belarusian government told BelTA.

The Office reported that given the decision of Russia to re-orient its exports channeling it through the Russian ports Lithuania views Belarus as one of the most significant and stable sources of transit.

The Office of the government also reminded that the volume of the Belarusian exports by means of transit in trade with Lithuania accounted for USD 74,8 million in 2004 (106 per cent against 2003), imports – USD 28,5 million (209 per cent). Belarusian and Lithuanian freight make up only 20 per cent of the total volume of railway transit across each of the two countries.

Besides, at the meeting between the ministers of transport and communications of the two countries this March in Druskininkai the parties agreed to elaborate joint projects to enhance the infrastructure of the 9th Pan-European corridor.

According to the office of the Belarusian government, the sides pay special attention to transshipment of the Belarusian cargos through the Klaipeda seaport bearing in mind the fact that for several years they annually have made 20-25 per cent of the total port's turnover of freights. It mostly concerns oil products (about 2 million ton a year are transshipped), potash and nitrogen fertilizers (about 1,5 million ton), metal production and scrap metal, timber (total about 0,5-0,8 million ton a year).

The Belarusian side considers the insufficient use of the Klaipeda port's facilities to be a decisive factor in the talks with Lithuania to get more favorable transport (transit) tariffs and rates for cargos transshipment by stevedoring companies, the office of the Belarusian government underlines.

At the same time, keeping in mind the work performed in Belarus on creating its own merchant navy the Lithuanian side offers to consider its possible registration in the Klaipeda port promising to give corresponding discounts for harbor dues at the rate of 40 per cent.

On the whole, the transit issues are settled by Belarus and Lithuania on the mutual partnership basis, the office of the Belarusian government says.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; October 13, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

### **17. Carrot for Belarus**

At the height of the conflict between the Belarusian government and Poland, the two countries were on the verge of breaking off diplomatic relations. Now the Polish foreign ministry has decided to reinstate its ambassador in the Belarusian capital Minsk.

Polish-Belarus relations have not gained any momentum, and the Polish minority in Belarus is still under the watchful eye of the country authorities while Poland is seen a country acting for the detriment of Belarus on US orders. But the Polish foreign ministry has nevertheless decided that the Polish ambassador to Minsk must return to his post.

The Polish ambassador Tadeusz Pawlak is to return to Minsk after a three month absence, caused by repressions against the Polish minority in Belarus and the accusations levelled against Polish diplomats by Belarus authorities. Aleksander Čečko, the spokesman of the Polish foreign ministry , says that the situation of the Polish Union in Belarus has changed to some extent.

'The climate is different for sure, which is one of the reasons why the ambassador has to return to Minsk. The other is that there are certain decisions of our EU partners which points that Poland is not the only country which sees the need to have its representative in Belarus.'

However, Marek Bućko, former first secretary of the Polish embassy, who was expelled from his post in Minsk by Belarus authorities, thinks that the return of the ambassador is proof of Poland's weaknesses in its foreign policy for the controversial Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko, often described as Europe's last dictator.

'Since the repressions against the Polish minority still continue, then return of Poland's ambassador shows that there is no consistency in Poland's foreign policy towards Belarus, and secondly it is a stab in the back towards all those Polish democratic campaigners in Belarus, who hoped that the Polish foreign ministry would support them in all their endeavours.

Tomasz Sajewicz from Radio Polonia's Belarusian Service argues however, that the decision of the foreign ministry lies in the interest of Poland, simply to prevent the alienation of Minsk, which would propel it further into Moscow's orbit.

The Polish foreign ministry says that it is vital that Poland should cooperate with the Belarus opposition, which has joined forces and elected a possible rival to Aleksander Lukashenko in next year's presidential elections.

Tomasz Sajewicz says that thanks to the election, people in Belarus may finally shed the illusion of what the Lukashenko regime represents.

It will be interesting to see whether the return of the Polish ambassador to Minsk will improve the relations between Poland and Belarus and change the attitude of its authorities towards the Polish minority.

*Source: Polskie Radio, October 13, 2005; <http://www.radio.com.pl/polonia>*

### **18. Europe Welcomes Day of Belarusian Solidarity on October 16**

The head of subcommittee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Human rights, a MP from Cyprus Christos Pourgourides on behalf of the committee "go all out in support" of the idea of Belarusian civil society representatives to declare a Day of Solidarity with the repressed citizens and their families, the press-service of the Council of Europe informs.

Representatives of civil society of Belarus have proposed holding a Day of Solidarity with Belarusian political prisoners, disappeared oppositionists, their families, independent journalists, with all who struggle for freedom and democracy in Belarus. 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 on October 16 at 8 p.m. and to burn a candle by their windows in solidarity with the victims of political repressions.

After the meeting of the PACE subcommittee on human rights in Geneva (Switzerland) on October 12, Mr.Pourgourides said that the members of the subcommittee are "shocked" by the fact that the PACE resolution on the disappeared people, and the call to investigate their cases are still left without the response from the Belarusian regime.

*Source: ZUBR; October 13, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>*

## HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

### 19. *Narodnaya Volya* Journalist Died Of Traumatic Brain Injury

A string correspondent of the independent newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* Vasil Hrodnikau died of a traumatic brain injury. The BelaPAN was informed about that by the department of medico-legal investigation of Minsk regional clinical hospital. As said by the duty doctor, he died a day or two ago. The doctors' opinion is to be sent to the prosecutor's office of Minsk region, which is in charge of this case.

The brother of Mikalay Hrodnikau said that it was stated in the official document that Vasil Hrodnikau died if a brain injury caused by blunt object trauma. Mikalay Hrodnikau refused to comment on possible caused of the death before the official results of the investigation by the prosecutor's office.

Vasil Hrodnikau (born in 1938) was found dead on October 18 in the morning in his private house in Zaslau, Minsk region. As told by the niece of the deceased, Natallya Hrodnikava, at 10.20 a.m. he was found by his brother. The head of Vasil Hrodnikau was covered with clotted blood. There were blood stains on the wallpaper; a stool was broken. As said by the niece, the house was locked on the inside, windows were undamaged, no traces of housebreaking were found, no values had been stolen.

Source: Charter97; October 19, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

### 20. The Family of Veranika Charkasava Is Summoned To the Office of Public Prosecutor

On October 18 Veranika Charkasava's (a journalist killed a year ago) mother, Diana Tsimafejeuna Charkasava, and son, Anton Filimonau, will have to come to Minsk Office of Public Prosecutor again. They will have to come and bring their passports to the head of the criminal investigative force of Minsk Office of Public Prosecutor Victor Feshchanka.

The investigation has already been held for a year, but it has not brought any results yet. The last information announced by the Office of Public Prosecutor was that "the investigation goes on" - and that "there are 10 versions of this murder". This was announced on June 23 by Victor Prus, deputy attorney-general of Belarus. Still, even Veranika's relatives do not have access to any other information.

Let us remind you:

On October 20, 2004, there was savagely murdered Veranika Charkasava, a *Solidarity* independent newspaper journalist, in her private apartment. The police assumed it had been a domestic crime.

The lady journalist's 15-year-old son Anton Filimonau and farther-in-law Uladzimir Mialeshka were included into the list of suspects on November 19, 2004.

Among other, the Public Prosecutor's Office stated that there had been received information that, possibly, Anton Filimonau and Uladzimir Mialeshka bore relation to the journalist's murder. However, as a result of a journalist investigation, held by a press-man Siarhiej Sacuk, there was obtained certain data that allowed supposing Veranika Charkasava had been murdered by a professional killer, who imitated a domestic crime.

On January 31, 2005, Uladzimir Chumachenka, the chief legal investigator of Minsk Public Prosecutor's Office signed a resolution on implementing an in-hospital psychiatric expertise of Veranika Charkasava's son. The expertise was personally authorized by Mikalaj Staravojtau, the

associate Public Prosecutor of Minsk. The necessity of holding the expertise was grounded on the fact Anton Filimonau had been registered as a patient of the City Children's Psycho-Neurotic Health Centre after the death of his mother. Then, he was hospitalized in the National Psychiatric Clinic at the end of November 2004. The expertise was entrusted to the experts of the State Service of Medical Court Expertise, subordinate to the Public Prosecutor's Office. In particular, the medics were to clear out if Anton Filimonau wasn't mentally ill "at the moment of crime".

At the beginning of February 2005, Anton Filimonau left for Moscow. He was taken by his father residing in the Russian capital, who had been in divorce with Veranika Charkasava for a long time.

On April 28, the murdered lady journalist's close relations received a resolution from the Public Prosecutor's Office of Minsk, signed by S. Ivanou, the Investigating Department head. It was stated that the criminal prosecution in relation to Anton Filimonau and Uladzimir Mialeshka was seized "subject to the absence of legally defined crime in their actions".

Viktar Prus, deputy to the Attorney General held a press conference on June 23, 2005. According to Viktar Prus, there's had been implemented active investigatory work on Veranika Charkasava's case. However, "there wasn't achieved any positive result".

Viktar Prus informed the press that the Public Prosecutor's Office was "verifying" 10 versions of this murder. As for the investigatory actions in relations to Veranika Charkasava's son, the state official noted that he "sooner hadn't been regarded" as a suspect. He noted that "there hadn't been any law violations in relation to Veranika Charkasava's son", as the investigator considered him to know some facts regarding the crime.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, October 17, 2005; www.baj.ru*

## **21. Is "Lack Of Cooperation With Local Authorities" the Main Drawback Of Cable TV?**

Officials from Homel Region Executive Committee think that the main drawback of cable TV is lack of cooperation with local authorities. This idea was pronounced by Anatol Katsila, head of the Executive Committee's Ideology Department, at a seminar in Mozyr where officials from the Ministry of Information and Belarusian TV Association, heads of Ideology Departments of Region and District Executive Committees and owners of cable networks from various districts of Homel Region gathered to discuss their work. A report on this seminar was published in *Homelskaja Prouda* (## 159-160 of October 13).

According to the publication in *Homelskaja Prouda*, "cooperation between cable TV and local authorities and Ideology Departments appears to be logical and useful". "Cable operators, in their turn, complained about defects in the legislation regulating the sphere of their activities, - informs *Homelskaja Prouda*. - And this is true. However, according to analysts, everything will fall into place when a new "Law on Mass Media" is passed.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, October 17, 2005; www.baj.ru*

## **22. Criminal Action Denied to Mikita Sasim**

Police of the Tsentralny district of Minsk refused to initiate a criminal case against riot policemen, who beaten up Mikita Sasim, Zubr activist, on September 16. Mikita Sasim was detained during the street action on the anniversary of Viktar Hanchar and Anatol Krasouski, and beaten up on the way to police department.

In the hospital he was diagnosed "cerebral concussion caused by head injury". The evidence of Sasim was written down by the investigator of the Tsentralny district of police department, but it

has been decided not to initiate a case. Mikita Sasim stated that he will continue to wage grievance, until his application would be satisfied.

In July under the same circumstances during the street rally riot policemen have beaten up Svyatlana Zavadskaya, who protested against hindered investigation of the abduction of her husband, ORT cameraman Zmitser Zavadski. The criminal case against the riot policemen has not been initiated until now.

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 on October 16 at 8 p.m. and to burn a candle by their windows in solidarity with the victims of political repressions.

*Source: ZUBR; October 13, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>*

### **23. Belarusian Editions Claim That the President's Decree "On Preventing Human Traffic" Is Being Violated**

Many Belarusian editions have started facing a strange problem lately: members of the editorial staff are called to the Ministry of Trade and accused of violating the President's Decree #3 "On preventing human traffic". The problem is connected with advertisements containing photos of people: now the Ministry of Information demands that that the Belarusian origin of necks and shoulders in the pictures should be proven. Some editions are facing the risk of judicial proceedings. On October 14 BAJ sent an inquiry to a number of state organizations to find out how the decree should really be interpreted.

According to the document, "goods produced and sold in Belarus can be advertised only with the use of images showing Belarusian citizens".

"Unfortunately, this decree is often misinterpreted", - stressed BAJ. Some officials tend to broaden the decree's sphere of influence on goods that are produced abroad. This leads to the bureaucratization of the decree.

The inquiry was sent to the President's Administration, the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Justice and the Council of Ministers.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, October 17, 2005; [www.baj.ru](http://www.baj.ru)*

## **BUSINESS**

### **24. Belarus' National Bank To Sell Gem Stones To Retail Customers**

Wealthy retail and corporate customers in Belarus will soon be able to buy precious stones legally, deputy chairman of the country's National Bank Vasily Matyushevsky said on Friday.

The sale of precious stones will begin on October 20, Matyushevsky said.

The first lot on offer consists of 250 carats of 1,055 certified diamonds. Stones of different forms and shapes vary in color from transparent to yellow. All stones were cut at a diamond-cutting factory in Gomel. Each stone has a quality certificate. Prices range from 500 U.S. dollars to 5,000 U.S. dollars per carat.

Matyushevsky said Belarus plans to satisfy demand for precious stones on the domestic market first and then to enter the international market upon completion of applicable procedures.

*Source: Itar-Tass; October 14, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>*

**25. Belarusian Trade Surplus \$677.2 Million in January - August**

The trade surplus in Belarus in January- August amounted to \$677.2 million, compared with a deficit of \$703.9 million in the same period last year, a source in the Belarusian Foreign Ministry told Interfax.

Belarusian foreign trade in January-August this year increased 10.7% year-on-year to \$22.392 billion. Exports increased 18.2% to \$11.535 billion, with imports up 3.8% to \$10.86 billion. rd

*Source: Interfax; October 14, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>*

\*\*\*\*\*

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the Belarus Human Rights Support Project of the International League for Human Rights, [www.ilhr.org](http://www.ilhr.org). The League, now in its 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](mailto:cis@ilhr.org) or Olga Tarasov at [otarasov@ilhr.org](mailto: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.

\*\*\*\*\*