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DOMESTIC

1. Nikolai Bordiuzha: Belarus Has No Preconditions For Colored Revolutions

Belarus has no preconditions for colored revolutions, secretary general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization /CSTO/ Nikolai Bordiuzha told a news briefing in Moscow.

"Having been many times in Belarus, I find it impossible", Nikolai Bordiuzha stated.

According to him, the Belarusian people praise stability and order and do not want any revolutions. "From my standpoint I believe it is awful to see a full destabilization in the state, complete destruction of the state machinery", the CSTO secretary general stated.

Colored revolutions are intention of those coming to power to gain money and use the state service, Nikolai Bordiuzha considers.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; November 8, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

2. Belarus' Lukashenko Confident of Winning 2006 Presidential Elections

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said he is confident that he will win the 2006 presidential elections, Interfax news agency reported on Friday.

"If I am reelected, I will continue to do what I have been doing for the past ten years. I am not going to ask anybody to vote for me. The people will make the right choice if no pressure is put on them," Lukashenko said during a working trip to the Glusk district in the Mogilyov region to the east of Minsk, capital of Belarus.

"The issue is not whether you will elect me or not. I will continue to work if you are satisfied with my performance. I will offer you my services and program and tell you what I am going to do," the president said.

Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, is accused by Western countries of undermining democracy by cracking down on opponents, squeezing out independent media and clinging to Soviet-style economics in the country of 10 million people.

He said he never deceived or robbed the Belarusian people, and the country, unlike other countries, has not received any aid over the past decade. "Nobody has given us a kopeck. We owe nothing. We can openly look into the eyes of Europe, America and Russia," the president said.

Lukashenko expressed the hope that "if a new person comes to power after the elections, he should pursue a policy that will meet the people's interests."

He has been accusing certain Western countries, especially the United States, of interfering in Belarus's affairs and is determined to follow the self-selected way. Source: Xinhua

Source: People's Daily Online; November 5, 2005; <http://english.people.com.cn>

3. "E-Belarus programme" Behind Schedule

According to Belarus' Ministry of Communications and Information, the country's "E-Belarus programme"; aimed at bringing the country's networks, services and technology up to date, is running behind schedule. 102 projects are currently underway within the programme, but only ten of these are financed fully by the e-Belarus budget, and only four meet the term's requirements.

*Source: PriMetrica, Inc.; November 4, 2005;
http://www.telegeography.com/cu/article.php?article_id=9768&email=html*

4. Belarusian President Boosts Own Economic Prerogatives and Gives Preferences To Pro-Government Trade Unions

President Aleksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree that gives him the final say in the economic sphere, including on key budget, tax, and monetary issues, BelaPan reported on 3 November, quoting the presidential press service. In particular, Lukashenka will decide on support for companies and individual entrepreneurs, preferential treatment, and state programs concerning the protection and use of land, forests, water, vegetation, animals, air, and natural resources. Some of the decree's provisions take effect 10 days after its official publication, while the full document will be effective on 1 June 2006. JM

The Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) has condemned as discriminatory last month's presidential decree that allowed the pro-government Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) to use government-owned premises free of charge, BelaPan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 3 November. In particular, the document allows the FPB to use such premises for meetings, offices, clubs, and other activities. The BKDP says the decree runs counter to the country's constitution and the law that stipulates that all trade unions must enjoy equal rights.

Source: RFE/RL; November 4, 2005; www.rferl.org

REGIONAL

5. Belarus-Russia Draft Agreement On Equal Rights

The Belarus Republic and the Russian Federation have settled all the disputable aspects of the draft agreement on the equal rights of the citizens of the two countries, pertaining to their movements and choice of places, which they wish to visit or where they prefer to live on the entire territory of the Belarus-Russia Union State, First Deputy Interior Minister of the Belarus Republic Alexander Shchurko told Itar-Tass on Wednesday. Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko had authorized him to hold talks with the Russian side on the draft.

According to Shchurko, all the Belarus and Russian national structures concerned had agreed with the text of the document on the equal rights of the citizens of the two countries to move freely on their respective territories. Now the draft agreement will be submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State.

"The draft document, drawn up in accordance with an instruction issued by the presidents of the two countries, grants the Belarus and Russian citizens much broader rights on the entire territory of the Union State than those enjoyed by the citizens of other countries. Most noteworthy are their equal rights to free movement and free choice of domicile," Shchurko noted.

For instance, it has long since been much easier for Russian citizens to get residence permits in the Belarus Republic than vice versa. This gives rise to serious problems linked with pensioning and medical aid. Moreover, Belarus citizens are often obliged to fill in migration cards in the hinterland regions of Russia, although the two countries had verbally agreed that Belarus citizens can do without this in Russia.

"All those, as well as several other problems, will be settled after the foregoing accord is endorsed," Shchurko stressed. The document, he added, prolongs the permitted time of the stay of Belarus citizens in Russia and of Russians in the Belarus Republic without having to be registered at police stations, from three to thirty days. It also envisages an easier procedure for getting residence certificates. Russian children, aged up to fourteen, will be allowed to stay in the Belarus Republic if they have a birth certificate. The agreement also indicates that the citizens of the Belarus Republic and of the Russian Federation will not have to fill in any migration cards on the territory of the Belarus-Russia Union State.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; November 9, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

6. Vladimir Andrianov: Russia Favors Stability in Belarus and Intensification of Integration

The Belarus-Russia Union State is the most “tangible, advanced and promising” formation of all integration projects on the territory of the former Soviet Union, aide to the Russian government Vladimir Andrianov reported.

“The integration is successful enough, although, as any integration process would have it, there are problems connected with promoting national interests of the two countries. This is a common and inevitable process”, Vladimir Andrianov believes.

The Union State worked out a wide legal-treaty base that regulates the issues on the economic policy, customs-tariff regulation, taxes, environment protection, equal conditions for economic agents. The union’s further development will be promoted by the Union State Constitutional Act which is still drafted.

According to Vladimir Andrianov, Russia shows interest in the Belarusian stability and integration strengthening for developing the common market and implementing economic potentials. “We are able to make mutually beneficial decisions”, he noted.

Source: *Belarusian Telegraph Agency*; November 8, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

7. Kiev Says Media Distorted Premier’s Remarks About Lukashenko

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk said on 4 November that some media incorrectly interpreted the recent remarks of Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov about Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenka, Interfax-Ukraine and UNIAN reported. According to media reports, Yekhanurov said in Washington on 1 November: “Two weeks ago I was in Belarus and met with Mr. Lukashenka. He made a good impression on me, he is a good propagandist. Now I understand why German women in the 1930s shouted, ‘I want to have a baby with the Fuehrer.’ You know, he is a man of great talent and he knows how to work with large masses of people.” Minsk subsequently asked Kyiv for clarification of these words. “This is an arbitrary interpretation by the media,” Tarasyuk said on 4 November, without elaborating. Tarasyuk said Kyiv is not going to respond officially to Minsk about Yekhanurov’s statement in Washington.

Source: *RFE/RL*; November 7, 2005; www.rferl.org

INTERNATIONAL

8. EU Ready To Impose Sanctions Against Belarus

The European Union is ready to impose sanctions against Belarus if the country’s 2006 elections fail to meet international norms, an EU commissioner said Wednesday.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighborhood Policy, told a Moscow news conference that the EU could expand the range of measures against Belarus to include freezing its foreign bank accounts.

She said Europe was extremely concerned about Belarus’ self-imposed isolation and expressed hope that Russia could convince the country’s leadership to adhere to international obligations, although Russia and the EU have had different approaches toward relations with Belarus.

The EU commissioner emphasized the importance of stability in Europe and urged Russia to cooperate on the issue.

Ferrero-Waldner, who is currently visiting Russia with EU High Commissioner for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency, will discuss broadening EU-Russia cooperation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and other officials Wednesday.

Source: *RIA Novosti*, November 9, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

9. Polish Journalists Protest Outside Belarusian Embassy

Polish media journalists in Lithuania are planning a protest against the persecution of their national colleagues in Belarus.

The protest is planned to take place outside the Belarusian Embassy in Vilnius on Friday, organizers say. Belarusian diplomats will also be handed an address on the matter.

In a written document, Polish media representatives expressed indignation over the Grodno court conviction of *Glos Znad Niemna* newspaper Chief Editor Andrzej Pisalnik, representing the Belarusian Polish Society.

The address described Pisalnik as a "journalist who has been fighting for the freedom of press in Belarus for many years."

Representatives of the Polish media expressed their solidarity with the newspaper, which has lately been under pressure from the Belarusian administration, as well as the Polish population in Belarus.

Relations between Belarus and Poland began to collapse after Minsk declared it would not recognize the board of the new Association of Poles in Belarus that was elected in March 2005, and accused Warsaw of trying to destabilize the situation using its staff and the Polish ethnic minority.

Source: *The Baltic Times*; November 9, 2005; <http://www.baltictimes.com>

10. Defense Ministry Wanted To Do Business With Belarus

The Slovak Defense Ministry selected in a tender for rocket systems parts a firm that wants to import the parts from Belarus. Though arms exports from Belarus are not embargoed, the country still has an undemocratic regime, writes the daily *SME*.

On November 7, the European Union said it would impose sanctions on Belarus if President Lukashenko does not implement democratic elections in the country.

The ministry announced a public competition with two firms, Ralas and Chemica from Košice. Chemica is a representative of a Russian firm, which produces the original parts and which supplied Slovakia with whole systems.

The commission picked Ralas, which made a bid several millions of crowns lower. Ralas, however, declared that it would provide the parts from a Belarussian firm.

When the competition warned that the deal might be sensitive, Ralas said that it might buy the parts from a firm from the Belize Caribbean.

However, based on the agreement the firm was supposed to provide the parts by December 15, 2004, but the license was given to them only after that date. The firm intended to change the supplier after the license was issued and the firm needs a new license for each new supplier.

Balázs Jarábik of the Pontis Foundation, which is involved in the fight for democracy in Belarus, said that weapon trading with Belarus could harm Slovakia.

Source: Beata Balogová, *The Slovak Spectator*; November 9, 2005; <http://www.slovakspectator.sk/clanok.asp?cl=21543>

11. Latvia To Voice Concern About Democracy in Belarus at Meeting in Brussels

Latvia is concerned that the human rights situation in Belarus is not improving, which Latvia will state at a meeting of the European Union's General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on November 7.

At a meeting of Saeima European Affairs Committee today, Normunds Popens, director at the Foreign Affairs Ministry's EU Department, spoke about the Belarusian governments' repression against the mass media and non-governmental organizations.

Latvia wants democratic elections to take place in Belarus next year, but does not support imposing economic sanctions against Belarus as this could affect all population strata.

Popens also told the European Affairs Committee on other matters Latvia would address during the General Affairs and External Relations Council.

The European Affairs Committee today also considered Latvia's position on Iran. According to Popens, a task force has drafted a resolution that condemns the Iranian president's statements about Israel.

As for the situation in Western Balkans, Latvia approves the European Commission's appraisal of Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress with reforms.

The European Affairs Committee today also discussed Latvia's position on Kosovo, Syria, bird flu, Iraq, the Middle East peace process and others.

Source: *Charter97*; November 8, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

12. EU Threatens Belarus With Sanctions

European Union foreign ministers have threatened to freeze bank accounts and deny travel rights for Belarus' ruling political elite if President Alexander Lukashenko does not allow next year's presidential election to be free and fair, Associated Press reported.

"In the event of failure to uphold international standards, the draft conclusions make it clear that measures such as asset freezes or visa bans could be taken against those responsible," said British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who chaired the EU meeting on Monday.

The draft was later adopted by ministers from the 25 EU nations, stating their "readiness to take further appropriate restrictive measures" against individuals responsible for election abuses.

Belarusian election officials last week refused to register opposition presidential candidate Zyanon Paznyak, saying his 10 years of living in self-imposed exile in Poland disqualified him.

The EU joint statement calls on Lukashenko's government to stop pressing opposition parties, NGOs and mass media, and to let the forthcoming elections meet the standards of the UN and the OSCE.

Source: *MosNews.Com*, November 8, 2005; www.mosnews.com

13. Polish Ambassador To Belarus Resigns

Tadeusz Pawlak, the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Poland to Belarus, resigned on Monday, Polish Foreign Affairs Ministry confirmed to RIA Novosti.

No information has been provided as to the reasons for this step.

As expected, the new head of the Polish foreign policy agency Stefan Meller will review Pawlak's resignation request on Tuesday.

This summer the Polish Ambassador to Minsk was recalled from Belarus for consultations due to a conflict situation surrounding the Union of Poles in Belarus. However, he returned to Minsk in early October 2005.

Meller, who is currently in Brussels, told journalists that the decision will be made on Tuesday. He added that "Belarus is an important country for Poland and an Ambassador should be there."

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: RIA Novosti; November 7, 2005; <http://rian.ru>

14. EU: Foreign Ministers' Meeting To Focus On Belarus, Iran

European Union foreign ministers travel to Brussels on 7 November for their monthly meeting. Diplomats say the main items on their external relations agenda are Belarus and Iran. Belarus will be warned that sanctions are likely if next year's presidential elections fall short of international standards. Iran will be urged once again to give up processing nuclear fuel and return to talks with Britain, Germany, and France, amid reports that Tehran itself is interested in resuming such a dialogue. The ministers will also hear a report on Kosovo, but will not yet go beyond a general pledge to work closely with the United Nations in determining the province's future status.

EU foreign ministers will hold an unprecedented hour-long discussion on Belarus to examine ways of putting pressure on the country to democratize.

While no immediate sanctions will be announced, a draft declaration seen by RFE/RL says an existing visa ban affecting some top officials could be extended if the 2006 presidential elections are not free and fair. The EU also holds out the threat of an asset freeze.

Emma Udwin, a spokeswoman for the European Commission, tells RFE/RL the EU is watching with "great concern" the run-up to the presidential elections, which the commission believes is a "key period" for the country.

"The council discussion on Monday -- which will be an hour-long debate, reflecting the importance the EU attaches to this issue -- will, I think, look at what exactly we want to see in Belarus in the run-up to the elections -- the free and fair treatment of candidates, the equal treatment of candidates, the positive response to the possibility of an international observation mission from the [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe]. These are some of the things that I think will be raised, that we would like to see in the run-up to the elections."

Another Brussels official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the problem presented by the authoritarian regime of President Aleksandr Lukashenka on the EU's eastern border is now a "mainstream issue" in EU foreign relations. Belarus' elevation on the list of EU concerns is largely attributed to the efforts of the current British EU presidency, which sets the foreign ministers' agenda.

Diplomats say there are growing calls within the EU to apply more pressure on Minsk. Poland, especially, is seen as leading this effort.

However, the prevailing mood within the EU is still to wait with punitive measures. One official said that if sanctions were applied now, the Minsk regime "would simply go ahead and do what it wants regardless."

Spokeswoman Udwin says the EU is also being careful not to alienate the Belarusian population as a whole: "Member states will also discuss how ready they feel to take further restrictive measures -- bearing in mind that our strategy has always been to avoid broad economic sanctions that can harden the population -- with whom we have no quarrel whatsoever. But rather, to target any action on those who are responsible. We hope that there is no cause for any such action to be taken and that we can see international standards respected in Belarus as the population deserves."

This is why, EU officials say, they prefer to talk about "restrictive measures" rather than sanctions. Sanctions, they fear, could easily be presented by Minsk as targeting the country and its people, rather than the leadership responsible for the breaches of international standards the EU wants to punish.

The EU has had a limited visa ban in place since 2004, which currently affect six Minsk officials considered responsible for the disappearance of four pro-democracy activists, as well as last year's crackdown on demonstrators.

Poland has led calls to include another five officials in the ban for their role in suppressing nongovernmental organizations -- among them Polish minority groups.

Commission officials say the EU is also refocusing the limited assistance it currently provides Belarus. Brussels is already shifting an increasing proportion of aid money into funds which can be used without the need to consult the Belarusian government first. When the EU adopts its next budget for 2007-2013, overall spending on such projects is likely to become more flexible and independent of the whims of the governments of recipient countries.

Belarus is likely to remain a long-term problem for the EU. A member state diplomat notes that the EU needs to look beyond the best-case scenario for the 2006 elections -- as even a fully free and fair poll would likely return Lukashenka to power.

On another matter, officials say the EU is still looking to rebuild confidence with Tehran in the wake of Iran's resumption of work on the nuclear fuel cycle in the summer.

However, the ministers' discussion will also take place under the shadow of the remarks made last month by Iranian President Mahmud Ahmedinejad, in which he said Israel should be "wiped off the map." As one official noted on 4 November, Ahmedinejad's comments "go in the opposite direction" from EU attempts at resuming dialogue with Iran.

European Commission spokeswoman Udwin tells RFE/RL that the ministers are likely to once again express their outrage at Ahmedinejad's comments.

"The EU is still reeling over the declarations by President Ahmedinejad on the subject of Israel," she said. "We found his remarks deeply shocking and wholly unacceptable. It is a matter of deep concern because the Middle East is one of the four priority areas that we have always spelled out as the prerequisites for a deeper EU-Iran relationship."

The other three priority areas for the EU are human rights, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. The EU has said for years that Iran's cooperation on all four is essential if it wants to build closer links.

Udwin said that, despite the continuing downturn in relations, the EU is still seeking to reopen talks with Tehran with the goal of returning to a full suspension of all fuel-cycle activities, including the processing and enrichment of uranium: "Our attention is still with the nuclear issue, where what we would most like to see is a diplomatic solution to this problem. But we can only get back round the negotiating table if Iran abides by the resolution in September of the Board of Governors of the IAEA, of the [UN's] atomic energy authority."

It is extremely important that Iran should do so, and do so rapidly." Reports from Tehran today said Iran had sent a letter formally asking Britain, France, and Germany to reopen the stalled talks on its nuclear program.

Officials say the foreign ministers will tomorrow also examine ways of improving contacts with civil society groups inside Iran.

Regarding Syria, officials say the EU ministers will tomorrow adopt what has been described as a "very tough" declaration on Syria. It will note that the EU finds the recent report of UN investigator Detlev Mehlis into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri "extremely worrying," according to an EU diplomat.

The EU will call on Syria to fully cooperate with international investigators and open up its own planned inquiry to international scrutiny.

Syria will also be urged to play a more positive role in promoting regional stability. EU officials say this means Damascus must actively support the political process in Iraq and clamp down on the movement of insurgent combatants to Iraq; refrain from intervention in Lebanon; and prevent armed groups involved in the Middle East from operating on its soil.

EU officials say that, in view of the toughening EU stance vis-a-vis Syria, there is currently no prospect of a signature of the association agreement initialed by both sides in late 2004.

On the Middle East, the EU ministers will hear a report from a fact-finding mission that visited Palestine over the weekend to look at ways the EU could send a monitoring mission to the border between Gaza and Egypt. Both the Palestinian Authority and Israel have said they would welcome such a mission.

Officials say it remains unclear as yet what experts the EU could contribute and in what numbers.

Source: Ahto Lobjakas, RFE/RL; November 6, 2005; www.rferl.org

15. Belarus: Will UN Decision Help Religious Communities?

Belarus has yet to meet a 12 November deadline, set by a UN committee, for confirming the correction of a religious freedom violation against Hare Krishna devotees, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. In a decision with implications for other religious communities (such as the New Life charismatic church), the UN Human Rights Committee found that Belarus had violated citizens' rights under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights by refusing to register a nation-wide Hare Krishna association. Two devotees, Sergei Malakhovsky and Aleksandr Pikul, complained to the Committee, which set a 90 day deadline from 23 August for correcting the violation. Aleksandr Kalinov, of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs, initially claimed to Forum 18 that all Krishna communities had registration, but then, questioned about the nation-wide association, claimed it did not have the right to register. Sergei Malakhovsky told Forum 18 that Krishna devotees had taken the UN Committee's decision to the State Committee and other government departments, "but they just shrugged their shoulders and said nothing."

Belarus has not yet formally responded to a 12 November deadline, set by a UN committee, for confirming that the country has corrected a religious freedom violation against Hare Krishna devotees, Forum 18 News Service has learnt.

In a decision with clear implications for other religious communities, the UN Human Rights Committee established under article 28 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), found that Belarus had violated the religious freedom guarantees of Article 18 of the ICCPR. The 23 August resolution (Communication 1207/2003) came in response to a formal

complaint by two Krishna devotees, Sergei Malakhovsky and Aleksandr Pikul, and the Committee found that their rights had been violated by Belarus' refusal to their republic-wide Hare Krishna association. The UN Committee examines alleged violations of the Covenant, which entered force for Belarus in 1976.

The ninety-day period in which the UN Human Rights Committee specified that it should receive confirmation from the Belarusian state that it has taken measures to correct the violation expires on 12 November. (The 90 days deadline is set from the date of the resolution - 23 August - and not the date of the meeting on 26 July.) On 3 November, however, UN Committee media liaison officer David Chikvaizde told Forum 18 from Geneva that it had not yet received a response from the Belarusian state.

Also asked on 3 November about the state's reaction to the UN Committee resolution, Aleksandr Kalinov of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs initially maintained to Forum 18 that all Krishna Consciousness communities in Belarus held registration. Asked specifically about the republic-wide association, he said that it did not have the right to register under the 2002 religion law. When Forum 18 pointed out that its registration application was submitted prior to that law's adoption, he remarked "we are currently examining these issues." On 28 October Sergei Malakhovsky told Forum 18 that Krishna devotees had tried taking the UN Committee's resolution to the State Committee and other government departments, "but they just shrugged their shoulders and said nothing."

In their complaint to the UN Committee, Malakhovsky and Pikul argued that, by refusing to register the Belarus-wide Krishna Consciousness Society at the building used as a temple by the 500-strong Minsk community since 1992, the state authorities had denied them "certain activities which are essential to the practice of their religion," such as establishing monasteries, missions and educational institutions, and inviting foreign clerics to Belarus to preach or conduct other religious activity, "resulting in a decline of spiritual standards due to their inability to associate with more spiritually advanced believers."

Under the 2002 Belarusian religion law, these rights are not enjoyed by individual religious communities, only republic-wide associations with a minimum of ten affiliate communities in at least four out of six regions, of which one must have conducted its activity for no less than 20 years. The country's Krishna devotees are unable to meet these criteria.

Malakhovsky and Pikul submitted their association's registration application on 10 May 2001 – well before the 2002 religion law came into effect. They finally received a refusal on 2 August 2002, however, on the grounds that the temple building was unsuitable for use as a legal address. Appeals against this refusal were rejected at all levels of the Belarusian court system.

Like the charismatic New Life Church in Minsk, the Minsk Krishna Consciousness Society does not have the state approval required by the 2002 religion law to use its own premises for worship, and was refused re-registration as a result.

In its 2004 submissions to the UN Committee, Belarus insisted that Malakhovsky and Pikul "are able to practice their religion unobstructed both personally and in association with others," and that the authorities' refusal to register their association at the requested address was justified, since inspection of the premises revealed violations of sanitary conditions and fire safety. The state also claimed that the 2002 law's provisions "are not discriminatory in nature."

However the UN Committee noted in response to these claims that Article 18 of the Covenant does not permit any limitation whatsoever to freedom of conscience, but that the right to manifest this freedom may be subject to limitations "necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others... directly related to and proportionate to the specific need on which they are predicated."

Inviting foreign clerics and establishing monasteries and educational institutions form part of the Krishna devotees' right to manifest their beliefs, the UN Committee affirmed. While the requirement for premises adhering to relevant public health and safety standards is a reasonable limitation of the right of a religious association to carry out its religious activities, it agreed, there is no reason for such premises to be required for the act of registering such an association at a legal address: "Appropriate premises for such use could be obtained subsequent to registration."

Concluding that the registration refusal thus amounts to a disproportionate limitation of the Krishna devotees' right to manifest their religion under the ICCPR, the UN Committee considers that Malakhovsky and Pikul "are entitled to an appropriate remedy, including a reconsideration of the authors' application in accordance with the principles, rules and practices in force at the time of the authors' request" - that is, prior to the adoption of the 2002 law.

In an individual opinion, committee member Ruth Wedgwood, Burling professor of international law and diplomacy at Johns Hopkins University, stated that the issues that the Hare Krishna devotees' complaint specified were not the only serious problems in the 2002 religion law. She observed that "the right of a religious community to establish monasteries, educational institutions, or missions, and to invite foreign religious figures to speak, has been sharply restricted by the government of Belarus. Only those groups officially registered with the state as 'religious associations' can enjoy these aspects of the free practice of religion."

Professor Wedgwood noted, for example, the 20 year registration delay imposed by the 2002 law and the law's barring of newer faiths from engaging in religious education. She commented that "it is well to remember that the Covenant recognizes and guarantees the freedom of every person 'either individually or in community with others and in public or private to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.'" This right is not limited to old and established religions, or to large congregations, and it is fundamental to the freedom of religious conscience."

The Minsk Krishna community was also refused compulsory re-registration following the 2002 law's 16 November 2004 deadline and 25 November 2004, as were for example autonomous Orthodox communities. The Minsk Krishna community has since continued to seek re-registration as well as to register a new local organization in the city, Malakhovsky told Forum 18. While the community's charter (which is essential for registering) for the latter was "practically dictated" by state officials, he continued, it too was rejected by Minsk City Executive Committee on 4 October 2005. A copy of the decision, received by Forum 18, lists the charter's alleged faults, including "numerous contradictions connected with outlining the competency of administrative bodies of the community" and "other shortcomings."

Malakhovsky also told Forum 18 that the original Minsk community is still unable to re-register for want of a suitable legal address: "Whatever state officials suggest is OK for commercial organizations, but we can't afford it." The community likewise sought re-registration at its temple building, in which, according to Malakhovsky, it has invested tens of thousands of dollars worth of renovation. He added, however, that there has been no move by the state to liquidate either the Minsk community or that similarly refused re-registration in Bobruisk [Babruysk] in Mogilev [Mahilyow] region. "Everything is up in the air, and this suits the authorities, I think – on the one hand we exist, on the other we have no rights."

Aleksandr Kalinov of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs told Forum 18 that the executive committees in Minsk and Mogilev region were currently dealing with the relevant re-registration applications.

Religious organizations registered prior to the 2002 law's adoption are now able to function only to the extent that their charters conform to its provisions. For fear of heavy fines (which have been imposed in the similar case of the Minsk New Life Church), the Minsk Society for Krishna Consciousness is consequently unable to meet for worship at its temple building. An 8 October

1997 analysis by experts attached to the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs declared the organization a "destructive totalitarian sect" and recommended its closure.

Besides New Life Church and the Hare Krishna devotees, other religious organizations (such as a Baptist church) – particularly in Minsk – are also unable to worship legally on the grounds that they do not have suitable premises.

Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; November 4, 2005; <http://www.forum18.org>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

16. Belarus: Orthodox Parish Banned From Worshipping

In what its priest has described to Forum 18 News Service as "the crudest violation of religious freedom," state officials in the south-western region of Brest are refusing to register a village parish in conflict with the local Moscow Patriarchate diocese, imposing fines for worship in private homes on four occasions in early 2005. "But we will carry on praying no matter what the state does," the priest, Fr Ioann Grudnitsky, told Forum 18 on 28 October.

Fr Ioann's parish was part of the local Moscow Patriarchate diocese but, following escalating disputes with state authorities and the diocese, in July the 120-strong parish of SS Sophia and her Three Daughters, Faith, Hope and Charity in the village of Ruzhany joined the US-based Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) under Bishop Agafangel (Pashkovsky) of Odessa and Tavriya in Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian diocese's website, services are currently not held by the ROCA's four parishes in Belarus due to the state's refusal to register them. Non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Christian communities can only gain Belarusian state registration if they have the approval of a local Moscow Patriarchate bishop.

Under the restrictive 2002 religion law, which was strongly backed by the Belarusian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), state registration is compulsory for all religious communities and unregistered religious activity is illegal - against international human rights standards. Belarus' registration policy has been condemned by the UN Human Rights Committee.

Earlier this year the second ROCA priest in Belarus, Fr Leonid Plyats, was interrogated by local officials in Minsk region about his "illegal religious activity."

Speaking to Forum 18 on 27 October, parish warden Lyubov Isakova explained that her community stopped attending the Moscow Patriarchate church of SS Peter and Paul almost three years ago in 2002, due to suspicion that its then parish priest had stolen a significant number of its icons. "We don't trust the new priest [Fr Aleksandr Sen] either," she added, maintaining that another valuable icon - bearing Second World War bullet holes - had been recently removed for renovation "but a completely different one came back." In a 24 December 2004 letter to the Ruzhany parishioners, Brest region's public prosecutor agrees that the criminal case into the disappearance of church plate and icons from SS Peter and Paul church between 1991 and 2002 was "not sufficiently investigated" before its closure by Pruzhany district police in July 2004. The letter announces that the case has now been re-opened and will be conducted by the regional authorities.

Another reason for the parishioners' distrust of Fr Sen is that, before being transferred from Brest to Ruzhany in 2002, he was dismissed as assistant priest by Fr Ioann Grudnitsky (then a priest in Brest) after Fr Sen had protested against the dismissal of his relative, the Brest parish's treasurer, under whom over three million Belarusian Rubles (9,250 Norwegian Kroner, 1,188 Euros or 1,394 US Dollars) were allegedly unaccounted for. Bishop Ioann (Khoma) of Brest and Kobrin responded to Fr Sen's dismissal by retiring Fr Ioann Grudnitsky from parish duties in late 2002. Fr Ioann disputes the validity of both this and the decision to defrock him.

On 18 January Ruzhany Village Council refused a parishioner of Fr Ioann's, Liliya Yukhnovskaya, the right to host services in her own home on the grounds that it did not comply with fire safety norms.

On the basis of testimony from two local police officers, 65-year-old Yukhnovskaya was fined three times the minimum wage, or 72,000 Belarusian rubles (214 Norwegian kroner, 27 Euros or 32 US dollars) on 2 February by a local administrative commission for "making her house available for a religious event at 10am on [Sunday] 23 January... despite being warned" on 20 January.

On 1 February the local district court in Pruzhany fined the Brest-based Fr Ioann Grudnitsky 20 times the minimum wage, or 480,000 Belarusian rubles (1,424 Norwegian kroner, 183 Euros or 215 US dollars) for "conducting a religious service at 10am on 7 January [Orthodox Christmas] with the inhabitants of Ruzhany village... not having obtained permission for the organization and holding of religious events in the lawfully prescribed manner." Fr Ioann denied to the court he had committed an offence, maintaining that he led the service at the villagers' request and "as a free priest, has the right to conduct a service in any church or home." On 16 March the same court fined Fr Ioann 150 times the minimum wage, or 3,600,000 Belarusian Rubles (10,682 Norwegian Kroner, 1,372 Euros or 1,610 US Dollars) for holding subsequent "religious events" at the same address at midday on 15 February (the Orthodox feast day of the Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple) and at 11.30am on Sunday 20 February.

In a 2 February 2005 letter to Liliya Zasimovich of the Ruzhany parish, the chairman of Brest region's Council for Religious and Ethnic Affairs explains that the local authorities "took lawful measures to curtail the unsanctioned activity" of Fr Ioann's parish because it is unregistered. Vasili Marchenko also urges its members - four-fifths of whom are aged between 60 and 80 - to attend the local village Moscow Patriarchate church of SS Peter and Paul, where "normal conditions have been created for the performance of religious rites by all who wish."

"In our opinion," continues Marchenko, who is responsible for registration of organizations in Brest region, "the behavior of your associates in bringing about a schism in the parish does not conform to Orthodox teaching, which calls for meekness, unity and love for one's neighbor. The only sensible way out of the present situation is for everyone who has broken away to return to the normal life of the Orthodox parish of SS Peter and Paul."

In the wake of these fines, Liliya Zasimovich wrote to Brest region's public prosecutor asking for measures to be taken "to prevent the state organs from interfering in church affairs, in particular in relation to Fr Ioann Grudnitsky." A 25 February reply from Pruzhany district's public prosecutor explains that, while the 2002 religion law requires all religious communities to register with the state, a check-up on the Ruzhany community revealed that it was conducting religious events at a residential address while unregistered. The prosecutor's reply also points out that Fr Ioann Grudnitsky "was defrocked by the Synod of the Belarusian Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate on 30 January, depriving him of all rights connected with performing divine office (Vespers and Matins in Ruzhany village on 7, 9, 16 and 19 January 2005)."

In an undated letter to Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksii II, the Ruzhany parishioners maintain that they do not intend to join or form a rival community: "We are faithful Orthodox people and we have one Mother - the Russian Orthodox Church." On 14 January Liliya Zasimovich tried unsuccessfully to obtain the support of Bishop Ioann for the community's state registration as a new parish of the Moscow Patriarchate's Brest diocese, with Fr Ioann Grudnitsky as their chosen priest. It was only after this attempt to stay within the Moscow Patriarchate failed that the parish joined the ROCA.

The Ruzhany parishioners also complain about the state restrictions on their holding of "religious events" at home in a 16 March telegram to both the Russian patriarch and President Aleksandr Lukashenko: "Surely prayer is not an 'event'? And where is there a law banning us from praying?"

Source: *Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; November 9, 2005; www.forum18.org*

17. Mass Detentions for Preparation to Day of Solidarity

Belarusian authorities are doing their best to prevent dissemination of information about the Day of Solidarity. Yesterday nine activists of different oppositional organizations were detained for distribution of leaflets, stickers and newspapers. 10 activists were detained a day before. The reports have been drawn up against them for violation of the article 172 (violation of legislation on mass media) and 173 (unsanitary conditions creation) of the Administrative Code. Despite of the detentions, the preparation for the Day of Solidarity continues.

Representatives of the civil society of Belarus proposed holding the Day of Solidarity with political prisoners, disappeared oppositionists, their families, and independent journalists, with all who fight for freedom and democracy in Belarus, on the 16th day of every month. The first Day of Solidarity took place in October. More than 100,000 people have taken part in the action on October 16. On November 16, 2005 at 8 p.m. the Belarusians are to switch off the light in their apartments again, and to light candles of Freedom in their windows for 15 minutes.

Source: *ZUBR; November 9, 2005; http://www.zubr-belarus.com/*

18. Svetlana Zavadskaya Summoned to Minsk Court

Svetlana Zavadskaya was summoned to Minsk's Central District Court. According to Radio Svaboda, she must come to court on November 11, "as the plaintiff in the complaint regarding refusal to open a criminal case."

The wife of Dmitry Zavadsky, the disappeared ORT television network cameraman, filed a complaint against a Tsentralny District Prosecution's investigator, who failed to open a criminal case regarding the assault of Zavadskaya by a riot police (OMON) officer during a street rally. A video tape exists which shows the policeman striking Svetlana Zavadskaya in the face. However, the Prosecutor found this evidence insufficient.

According to Oleg Gulak, a human rights defender from the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, "the fact that Svetlana has been summoned to court does not mean that the investigation of the assault will begin." "Criminal cases can be opened only by the prosecutorial investigator, and he not only adheres to the law, but also follows the orders of his superiors," Gulak added./ Source: AFN.

{Text translated by the Editors}

Source: *BG. Delovaya Gazeta; November 8, 2005; http://www.bdg.by*

19. Detention For Distributing of *Tovarishch*

72 issues of *Tovarishch* (an edition of Belarusian Communist Party) were taken away from a BCP member Marya Bahdanovich. It happened on November 7 in Homel at Lenin Square where she was distributing the newspaper for free. Each issue contained a loose leaf informing about problems of housing and communal services.

According to BelaPAN, Marya Bahdanovich had to spend two hours in the police office. All the newspapers were taken away. No statement of the case was drawn up. Marya Bahdanovich noted that they think that the detention was connected with the loose leaf because it did not contain a date-line and, in their point of view, could not be distributed. (The loose leaf contained a comparison table of public utilities' prices in 2001 and 2004, and the opinion of people and authorities about them).

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists; November 8, 2005; http://www.baj.ru/*

20. Valyantsin Stefanovich: “Authorities Refuse to Investigate Cases of Battery and Tortures of Oppositionists”

Zubr coordinator Mikita Sasim has received a decision of the court of Maskouski district of Minsk. According to the court decision, the initiation of a civil case was denied to him. As we have informed, Mikita Sasim addressed a complaint against the actions of Minsk riot police unit on September 16. On that day Mikita Sasim was brutally beaten by riot policemen during disbanding of a protest rally timed to the day when Viktor Hanchar and Anatol Krasouski were abducted. Sasim was beaten up by riot policemen. Sasim was diagnosed a traumatic brain injury and brain concussion. “Actions of the court demonstrate reluctance of the authorities to take measures to investigate such incidents, incidents of tortures. It has become a tendency long ago,” the lawyer of the human rights center “Viasna”, Valyantsin Stefanovich believes.

The reason for the denial to initiate a case on the ruling passed by the judge T. Vnukevich, was that Mikita Sasim had failed to comply with the rules of pre-trial appealing from decision.

The lawyer human rights center “Viasna”, Valyantsin Stefanovich comments on this situation: “We consider the ruling of the court illegal, as the legislation envisages a right of a citizen to appeal from the illegal actions of a policeman to a higher officer, or in the court. In general, actions of the court demonstrate reluctance of the authorities to take measures to investigate such incidents, incidents of tortures. It has become here a tendency long ago. The police department of Tsentralny district of Minsk denied initiating a case on the fact of Mikita Sasim beating on September 16. Before that the Prosecutor’s office refused to open a criminal case on beating of Svyatlana Zavadskaya. A criminal action’s initiation after Anatol Lyabedzka’s beating up has been denied as well. In fact all complaints to the prosecutor’s office end in the same way: initiation of criminal actions on the facts of tortures is denied. The prosecutors wither do not find confirmation to the facts, or answer that policemen had acted within their capacity”.

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

21. The Court Did Not Cancel The Decision To Close *Dien*

On November 3, 2005 the City Court of Minsk did not cancel the decision of Minsk City Executive Committee to close “Dienpress” Ltd. (the founder and editor of *Dien*).

The decision to close “Dienpress” Ltd. was taken on July 4. The reason for it was “not running business for 6 months on end and not giving any reason for it”. Minsk Central District Tax Inspectorate was the initiator of the liquidation.

“Dienpress” Ltd. considered that this was a political decision and lodged an appeal. According to Mikola Markevich, the head of “Dienpress” Ltd., the authorities do not wish to accept the fact that the enterprise had run business: on May 26 it printed an issue of the newspaper in Smolensk, let contracts of its distribution, gave out service payment etc.

Now “Dienpress” Ltd. is going to lodge a complaint to a court of higher authority.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; November 4, 2005; <http://www.baj.ru/>

22. Svetlana Zavadskaya Calls Upon Belarusians to Support Day of Solidarity

“I call upon Belarusian citizens to switch off the light on November 16, and to light candles in remembrance of the repressed, murdered, abducted citizens of Belarus, and to give thought to the fact that it could happen to everybody in this country. For example, I always thought that as my husband is a journalist and never took weapons in his hands, nothing could happen to him... But I was wrong...” – the wife of the abducted Belarusian journalist Zmitser Zavadski, Svetlana Zavadskaya, a leader of the civil initiative “We Remember”, a member of the Council of Civil Initiatives “Free Belarus” told to the Charer’97 press-center.

"The Day of Solidarity is simply indispensable. Today we need to consolidate the Belarusian society around the problems of political abductions, repressions, problems of defense of independent journalists. This day should help to remind once again that we are living in a society where basic human rights are violated, and we must make every endeavour to make our Belarus a free, democratic and prosperous country. Belarusians should understand that only together we are a power, and only together we would be able to turn the tide," Svetlana Zavadskaya said.

Representatives of the civil society of Belarus proposed holding the Day of Solidarity with political prisoners, disappeared oppositionists, their families, and independent journalists, with all who fight for freedom and democracy in Belarus, on the 16th day of every month. The first Day of Solidarity took place in October. More than 100,000 people have taken part in the action on October 16. On November 16, 2005 at 8 p.m. the Belarusians are to switch off the light in their apartments again, and to light candles of Freedom in their windows.

Source: ZUBR; November 4, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

BUSINESS

23. International Reserve Assets of Belarus Up by 69% in January-October

The international reserve assets of Belarus calculated following the IMF methods increased by 69 per cent up to USD 1301,4 million in January-October this year. In October they grew by 9.4 per cent, BelTA has been told in the information department of the National Bank.

Assets in foreign currency account for 90 per cent or USD 1173,3 million while monetary gold for 9.7 per cent or USD 126,5 million. In January -October assets in foreign currency surged by 70 per cent, monetary gold – by 59.3 per cent.

According to the IMF, international reserves of the Republic of Belarus are high liquid foreign assets consisting of monetary gold, special drawing right in the IMF, the reserve position of the country in the IMF and currency reserves. They can be used for intervention operations on foreign markets to maintain the exchange rate of the Belarusian ruble, finance the imports of goods and services by the government, pay off the state foreign debt and other purposes.

Text revised by the Editors

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency: November 9, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

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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.
