

November 10 – November 17, 2005

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DOMESTIC

1. Alexander Lukashenko: Belarusian People Realize That “Colored Revolutions” Have No Prospects

The Belarusian people realize that “colored revolutions” have no prospects, as they do not make life better but worsen it, Alexander Lukashenko stated today when delivering a speech before students of the Mogilev establishments of higher education.

According to him, oppositionists see that their social audience is constantly narrowing; the number of their supporters among students is reducing. Having proclaimed “fight to the death” as their motto to seize the power they had to admit that neither workers of industrial companies and peasants nor service men and old people will follow them.

According to the head of state, promises of the opposition to privatize all companies and to liquidate the state sector of economy are not approved by most citizens of Belarus any more. As state companies form the biggest part of the state budget. It means they ensure payments of wages to teachers, doctors, cultural workers, pensions, allowances, scholarships. “If the state property is privatized it will pose a threat to all these payments”, the Belarusian leader underlined.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency: November 16, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

2. In 2006 Belarus To Considerably Increase Defense Expenses

In 2006 Belarus will increase expenditures to finance the needs of the Belarusian army by 26 per cent, prime minister of this republic Sergei Sidorsky stated November 14 when delivering a speech before servicemen of mechanized brigade #120 in Uruchie, Minsk.

“The government has already approved the defense budget for 2006 presented by the defense minister”, Sergei Sidorsky informed.

When speaking about the military reform started in Belarus in 2001 Sergei Sidorsky noted that the effect from it had made more than Br305 billion.

Belarus is pursuing a peace-loving policy. At the same time “radical changes in the military-political situation in the world necessitated reformation of the national security system”, the head of the government underscored. In 2001-2005 the organizational-staff structure of the Belarusian army was optimized. Its strength was reduced to 65,000 people (including 50, 000 servicemen). It is an optimal level, the prime minister considers.

The state is doing everything to provide the army with modern equipment and weapons. Among new samples – automated control systems, multiple rocket launch systems “Grad”, T-72 tanks with thermal-vision sights, modernized in Baranovichi, SU-27 and MIG-29BM fighters. In the near future new S-300 systems will be added to the arsenal of the Belarusian army, the prime minister reminded.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; November 15, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

3. Belarus Education Minister Says University Staff Should Follow State Line

Belarusian Education Minister Aleksandr Radzkow believes that the provisions of the draft law “On higher education” under which the heads of private institutions of higher education will be appointed and dismissed on approval by the education minister are well-justified.

“The head of an institution of higher education is a political figure,” Radzkow said on 15 November at an expanded session of the Standing Commission for Education, Culture, Science and Scientific- Technical Progress of the Belarusian National Assembly's House of Representatives [parliament's lower house].

He believes that the "most worthy people" should be university heads. They should hold degrees of a candidate of science, and "even better, doctoral degrees".

Radzkow stressed that there should be no opposition figures among the leadership of institutions of higher education and that "lecturers should occupy the state position". "They should not spread disunity among youth but work for creativity," the minister said. Unfortunately, Radzkow said, quite often students "do not see the state position on the part of lecturers".

He said that if the Western states had paid more attention to youth problems, there would have been no riots in Europe that have been taking place for several weeks.

[Passage omitted: Radzkow praises the activities by the pro- government Belarusian Republican Youth League; Radzkow and MPs discussed privileges for separate categories of university applicants at the meeting.] / Excerpt from report by Belarusian news agency BelaPan

Source: BlackEnterprise.Com; November 15, 2005; http://www.blackenterprise.com/yb/ybopen.asp?section=ybng&story_id=85459924&ID=blackenterprise

4. Belarus Creating Unparalleled Conditions For High-tech

Republic of Belarus is creating unprecedented conditions for the progress of high technologies, Dr. Mikhail Myashnikov, the President of the National Academy of Sciences said.

"The Belarusian high-tech park will have a more encouraging environment than one may find in Russia, India and Ireland," he said.

"This park will have a major distinction from other high-tech parks, zones, or valleys – it will be extraterritorial," Dr. Myashnikov said in a comment on a recent decision by the national parliament to endorse President Alexander Lukashenko's decree on setting up the park.

"The regulations effective for that high-technology park will apply to any interesting projects if they are offered by any Belarusian company located anywhere in this country, or from foreign companies," Dr. Myashnikov said.

The companies and organizations domiciled in the Belarusian Silicon Valley will enjoy sizable tax benefits, as they will not have to pay the taxes on sales revenue and on works and services, as well as the customs duties and VAT for imported commodities.

"The income tax for private individuals will reduce to 9%," Dr. Myashnikov said.

President Lukashenko signed the decree on the high-tech park at the end of September. The document is called upon to boost Belarusian science, on the one hand, and to expand the exports of IT and original Belarusian soft, on the other hand.

Experts believe the high technology park will begin functioning early next year

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

REGIONAL

5. Ukraine and Belarus Agree on Defense Cooperation

Ukrainian defense minister Anatoly Gritsenko met Gennady Neviglas, secretary of the Belarusian Security Council, during his official visit to Belarus. The parties agreed that defense and technical cooperation would be focused on high-tech production, which would consequently imply new jobs

and joint steps to promote new products to third countries. The parties arranged for an exchange of working groups concerning the issue.

Gritsenko also discussed the state and development prospects for the military and technical cooperation with chairman of the Belarusian military and industrial committee Nikolai Ramazatov. He was told about the new designs of the Belarusian defense industry, particularly guidance and detection systems. In turn, Belarusian specialists showed interest in Ukrainian weapon designs.

At his meeting with Gritsenko, Belarusian defense minister Leonid Maltsev observed that all disputes should be settled on the political level through negotiations. As a result, the parties signed a defense cooperation plan for 2006, which stipulates for participation of Ukrainian and Belarusian troops in joint exercises in Ukraine, and expert exchange.

Source: RosBusinessConsulting; November 17, 2005; <http://www.rbcnews.com/>

6. Isolation Will Stall Democracy in Belarus - Yushchenko

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko said Belarus must not be isolated, and vowed to do everything possible to ensure the triumph of democracy in that country.

"I am convinced that Belarus must not be left in isolation. Contacts must be built and assistance provided for the country's advancement towards democracy," Yushchenko told businessmen and politicians in Paris on Tuesday.

The Ukrainian president said he had assured Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on many occasions that "Ukraine is prepared to be an active partner for Belarus in these democratic efforts."

"I want Belarus to be a democratic and prosperous country, and will do everything I can to help it attain this goal. Europe will make a mistake if it seals Belarus in a cocoon," Yushchenko said.

Source: Interfax; November 16, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

7. Alexander Lukashenko: Belarus Pays Overriding Significance to CIS Development

Belarus pays overriding significance to the CIS development, president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko stated at today's meeting with chairman of the Executive Committee – CIS executive secretary Vladimir Rushailo.

Alexander Lukashenko underlined: "The Belarusian side is ready to work together, take mutual decisions on the Commonwealth development. We have always supported all positive processes on the CIS territory".

The head of Belarusian state thanked Vladimir Rushailo for his regular information on the situation in the CIS. The chairman of the CIS Executive Committee has already met with practically all the CIS presidents and visited many international organizations, Alexander Lukashenko underscored. According to him, today the sides are expected to consider a number of important issues.

Vladimir Rushailo underlined that he would inform the president on implementing the decisions of the Commonwealth, in particular decisions of the Council of the CIS heads of state, which were undertaken in August in Kazan. The two sides will also consider working plans for 2006 handled on the initiative of the CIS member-states, including Belarus.

Vladimir Rushailo deemed it important that the meeting takes place on the eve of the sitting of the CIS Economic Council slated for November 16 in Moscow. The sitting will focus on the CIS draft budget.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; November 15, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

8. Belarus Union Moves Forward

A draft constitution to be submitted to national leaders today would unite Russia and Belarus in a new country, potentially establishing a way for President Vladimir Putin to stay in power after his second term expires.

Boris Gryzlov, the head of the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, announced last month that the draft was being prepared for Mr. Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. If approved, the constitution could go to referendums in both countries next year.

Although the so-called Russia-Belarus Union has been under discussion for years, some analysts think work on the project has been hastened ahead of Russia's 2008 presidential elections.

Mr. Putin yesterday named two key allies to top Cabinet posts, fueling speculation that he is paving the way for potential successors. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov was named deputy prime minister and will retain his defense post. Mr. Putin's chief of staff, Dmitry Medvedev, was named first deputy prime minister. Both have been touted as successors to Mr. Putin.

But few think Mr. Putin is closing the door on staying in power himself.

He has said repeatedly that the Russian constitution should not be changed to allow for more than two presidential terms. But the unification of Russia and Belarus would entail the adoption of a new constitution, opening the door to him retain power.

He really would like to remain in power, but he understands that prolonging his term will be badly perceived in the West and would put him on an equal footing with dictators in Central Asia," said Yevgeny Volk, the head of the Heritage Foundation's Moscow office.

So he and his people are preparing a scheme that would make Putin remaining president digestible in the West," Mr. Volk added.

Mr. Volk said another option being discussed inside the Kremlin is expanding parliamentary powers and turning the presidency into a largely ceremonial position. Mr. Putin then could become prime minister as head of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, the largest party in the Duma.

In a September poll of 1,500 Russians, 51 percent supported legislation to allow Mr. Putin to run again in 2008.

Russia and Belarus formed a loose union in 1996, but further integration has been hampered by Mr. Lukashenko's reluctance to cede power to Moscow.

Mr. Lukashenko has ruled his country of 10.3 million with an iron fist for more than a decade, imposing Soviet-style economic controls, silencing political opponents and running a series of flawed elections. The United States has called him "Europe's last dictator" and openly supports regime change in Belarus.

Pressure has been mounting on Mr. Lukashenko since democratic revolutions overthrew post-Soviet regimes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

This is a good time to put pressure on Lukashenko. He may be wondering about his political future and looking to keep at least something," said Nikolai Petrov, a political analyst with the Moscow Carnegie Center.

*Source: Michael Mainville, The Washington Times; November 15, 2005;
<http://washingtontimes.com>*

9. Trade Between Belarus, Ukraine Expected To Exceed \$2 bln in 2006

Trade between Belarus and Ukraine could exceed \$2 billion next year, Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Stanislav Stashevsky said following talks with his Belarusian counterpart Friday. "During the first nine months of this year, the volume of trade has reached \$1.3 billion, surpassing the indicator for the whole of 2004," Stashevsky said. "The figure is expected to grow to \$1.7 billion by year's end."

Stashevsky said the meeting between the two countries' presidents in Kazan, in Russia's Republic of Tatarstan, several months ago, had given a boost to economic cooperation. "It gave a kind of impetus to a number of mutually benefiting projects," he said.

Stashevsky and Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko signed an action plan for 2006 for implementing the 1999-2008 cooperation program.

The vice premiers also tasked related agencies with completing talks on the price and terms of Ukrainian electricity supplies to Belarus, also a former Soviet republic run by President Alexander Lukashenko, dubbed Europe's last dictator, to be launched in 2006.

"Belarus is confirming its plans to buy up to 2.5 billion kilowatt-hours of electric power from Ukraine starting from 2006," Semashko said. The ministries are close to reaching an agreement on the price, the terms and signing a relevant contract for next year, he said.

Source: Olesya Luchaninova, RIA Novosti, November 11, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

10. Russia Refutes EU's View of Belarus's Democracy

The Russian Foreign Ministry Thursday refuted the European Union's assertion that Belarus is "a problem zone", saying that the EU should consider the country's realities, the Itar-Tass news agency reported.

We cannot agree with the European Union's assertion that Belarus is a problem zone, as regards democracy," the foreign ministry said.

Russia maintains that "any steps to promote democratic process in Belarus, just as in any other country, should be adjusted to local realities," it added.

The ministry emphasized that imposing some universal schemes on individual countries does not help strengthen democracy and create a united Europe.

Russia backs expanded dialogue between the EU and Belarus and believes that "would help remove the existing concerns of the EU," said the ministry.

Source: Xinhua News Agency; November 10, 2005; <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english>

11. Survey: Lukashenko Is the Most Popular CIS Politician in Russia

Russians named Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbaev as the most popular politicians of the neighboring CIS countries' leaders. This is according to the report of the National Institute of Regional Research and Political Technologies Expert Community, which was released on Monday.

Lukashenko was favored by 52% of the respondents, followed closely by Nazarbaev with 47%. The report stresses that "Nazarbaev's results should be viewed as a big personal achievement of Kazakhstan's leader. Meanwhile, Nazarbaev's image should be recognized as the most successful among CIS leaders."

Ukraine's President Victor Yushchenko received the third place with 23%. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev is in the fourth place with 14%. The rest of the CIS leaders received less than 10% among those surveyed. / RIA Novosti

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: *Gazeta.ru*; November 10, 2005; <http://www.gazeta.ru>

INTERNATIONAL

12. Belarusian Embassy in Washington Got a Fright Over Picketers

Two student members of Vzglyad, a new civil initiative that strives for freedom and peace in Belarus through the use of non-violent and non-confrontational civil actions, today staged a peaceful action to coincide with the Day of Solidarity events planned in Belarus to protest the imprisonment of political prisoners; disappearance of oppositionists and their families; the censoring, imprisonment, and murder of independent journalists; and to demonstrate on behalf of all who fight for freedom and democracy in Belarus.

The action began at 9:00 AM in front of the Belarusian Embassy at 1619 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W. A white-red-white Belarusian flag was unfurled on the sidewalk and was displayed along with two "Day of Solidarity, 16" papers (in Belarusian and English). Embassy staff immediately took notice and went outside—a supportive and surprised member of the staff managed to take a picture of the demonstration before being ordered inside by an unknown colleague.

Six members of the United States Secret Service arrived on the location at approximately 9:37 AM, having received a call from the Embassy with regards to the action. The U.S. Secret Service agents were immediately met by an angered member of the Embassy staff who had to be sent back within the building until questioning of the two demonstrators could be completed and a proper I.D. check could be called in on the action organizer.

The demonstrators were moved across the street from the Embassy at 9:45 AM, at which point the two individuals continued the action in front of the International Eastern Star temple building, within plain site of the Belarusian Embassy.

Five vehicles and one patrol motorcycle from the DC Metropolitan Police Department arrived at the Embassy around 10:00 AM after having received three calls from the Embassy staff with reports that the demonstrators were "blocking traffic." After speaking briefly with the present U.S. Secret Service agents, it was determined that the demonstrators had acted in accordance with the law and that the Embassy's claims were false.

"The amount of false accusations the Embassy made in an attempt to stop our demonstration was just amazing," commented Henry Johnson, one of the two Vzglyad individuals present and organizer of the demonstration. "We [the demonstrators] found encouragement in the fact, however, that the harder the Embassy tried to remove us so as to prevent us from spreading the message about what is going on in Belarus, the more attention they actually gained for us. We had dozens of people from surrounding offices and embassies come out and talk with us after they had taken notice of the large amount of police."

The action ended at 12:10 PM after more than three hours of straight demonstration. "It has been a great success," stated Johnson. "It just goes to show you that when people have a vision and are determined to stand up for what is right, even in the face of persecution and intimidation, big things can happen. Belarus will be free one day, and it will be because of the actions of dedicated people who care to do things like these."

Source: ZUBR; November 17, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

13. U.S. Accuses Belarus Media Of Anti-U.S. Campaign

16 November 2005 -- The U.S. ambassador to Belarus has accused state-run media in that country of conducting an anti-American campaign.

George Krol said Belarusian state media routinely accuse the United States of working to destabilize Belarus, foment revolt, and subjugate Belarus to America's imperial will.

Krol was speaking to reporters late yesterday in the Belarusian capital Minsk.

Krol noted that government-controlled media outlets portray U.S. diplomats as spies whose only aim is to destabilize Belarus. The ambassador also said the state media does not inform the public but seeks to turn the Belarusian public against the United States as well as the values of democracy and free choice.

"We would like to see an independent, sovereign, democratic, and economically prosperous Belarus, as an equal partner addressing common challenges," Krol said. "What's so destabilizing about that?"

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has been accused in the West of ruling Belarus with an iron fist. Belarus is the only country in Europe not a member of the Council of Europe. That is because of its failure to meet democratic and human rights standards.

Source: RFE/RL; November 16, 2005; www.rferl.org

14. The European Union's Tough Message to Belarus

On November 8, 2005, British Foreign Minister Jack Straw addressed a hard-hitting message to Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko after a debate with the EU's 25 foreign ministers. The EU threatened sanctions against Minsk under the notion that Belarus does not respect civil rights properly and is allegedly unable to hold "fair and free elections."

Then, on November 14, a US official reportedly called for punitive measures against Belarus, judging that political repression in the country has reached levels that existed during Soviet rule.

The EU's concerns are focused on the 2006 presidential election in Minsk. It is no secret that the United States and the European Union aren't keen of Lukashenko -- who has been in power since 1993 -- since he remains the only Eastern European leader to overtly profess a pro-Russian geopolitical preference.

Lukashenko is now set to run for a third mandate. Washington, Brussels and especially the new pro-Western EU members such as Poland are committed to increasing the pressure against the Belarusian government and to help opposition parties and movements with the hope of repeating the success they had in Ukraine in late 2004.

Post-Soviet Belarus and its Friction with the EU and NATO

Unlike Poland, the three Baltic States, and other former communist countries, Belarus has not joined NATO. Additionally, Minsk has not shown any willingness to accept IMF.-inspired liberal economic reforms. Instead, Lukashenko's economic policy is founded on administrative control over prices and currency exchange rates, and aims at high growth through social spending and public intervention in the management of private enterprises.

This economic strategy has apparently brought positive results; the country's economic growth reached 6.4 percent in 2004 -- a much better result than any EU member could have hoped for.

However, the Belarusian inflation rate, although diminishing, is very high, and most of the country's produced goods would not be competitive in an open market. Therefore, Minsk's high economic growth depends on Russia's willingness to buy its products.

An interventionist economic model and a pro-Russian geopolitical orientation largely explain Washington's and Brussels' attitude toward the current rulers in Minsk. In fact, since Western powers tend to see the international system globally, they believe that a coherent Eastern European geopolitical region should share a common set of rules: a liberal and integrated market economy and a common security and defense policy based on NATO

Moreover, from a geo-strategic point of view, Belarus is still working as a "buffer" between NATO and Russia. Poland would like to have the regional leadership in the post-Warsaw Pact European region extend from the Baltic to the Black Sea, further integrating its trade and economic policy with Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Belarus. In order to do so, Polish elites have backed the creation of a "Commonwealth of Democratic Choice" formed by Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine and Georgia, which stands as an alternative to Moscow's proposed enhanced cooperation among Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan to regain political, economic and strategic influence at its periphery.

Since NATO is actively trying to integrate Ukraine (with a NATO-Ukraine Action Plan in place since 2002), Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted on November 9, 2005 by stating that neither Russia nor Belarus poses any threat to Ukraine, and that Ukraine's inclusion in NATO would damage peaceful cooperation between Moscow and the West.

A global power and interest competition between the West and Moscow hence overlaps with regional competition between Poland and the Russo-Belarusian combine. Indeed, influence in Eastern Europe is once again of crucial importance.

Minsk's Increasing Dependence on Russia

The EU and the US are increasing their pressure against Belarus because they both know the country's independence is in some aspects more apparent than real, and that some Belarusian social factions are afraid of the increasingly strong Russian role. The key is Minsk's dependence on Russia.

Without Moscow's support, Lukashenko's economic policy would encounter serious problems. For instance, in recent years Russian demand of Belarusian products has increased, and has undoubtedly helped Minsk to boost its economic growth. Russia is Belarus' first trading partner and energy supplier. Without Russian support, the Belarusian economy would quickly reach a high level of entropy since it would become a closed micro-system with unavailable energy and almost no turnover.

Such a fact increases Belarus' dependence on Russia, and paves the way to projects aimed at reunifying the two countries.

On October 10, 2005, the Interfax news agency reported that a program to introduce the Russian ruble as the Belarusian currency was approved by both the National Bank of Belarus and the Russian Central Bank. Although no date was suggested for the project to be implemented, the fact signals that Putin, Lukashenko and the relevant political factions in the two countries are pursuing plans to unify the countries.

Such plans are not to be intended as irreversible, but only as a possible integration scenario which has, however, historical grounds and geopolitical consistency. A draft constitution that calls for reunifying the two countries was recently prepared, and was scheduled to be submitted to national leaders on November 15, 2005. If approved, citizens in both countries would be called to approve it by referendum in 2006.

Paradoxically, Lukashenko's struggle to keep Belarus independent of both the EU and NATO could easily end up with the demise of Minsk's national independence and the return of Russian sovereignty over the country.

Historically, Belarusian inner divisions between a Polish-oriented Catholic identity and a majority Russian-oriented Orthodox identity have surfaced more than once. Both Russian rule and the Polish-Lithuanian one have historical roots in the country.

It looks as if today's Belarus is again a stake in the conflicting relations between Poland and Russia in Eastern Europe, with Warsaw being supported by the West.

Conclusion

With the 2006 election approaching, all relevant actors in this conflict are accelerating their actions. The EU's pressure, inspired and backed by Washington, is likely to give more confidence to Belarusian opposition parties. However, the EU's actions are also likely to increase Putin's and Lukashenko's attempts to secure Russia's grip on Minsk.

Lukashenko, therefore, will probably be obliged to give up national sovereignty in exchange for Russian protection. Whether he does this formally or informally remains to be seen.

If the project of union with Russia progresses, then the civil movements that oppose Lukashenko's rule will probably line up against such integration attempts, and will paradoxically fight for national independence, but this time they will be backed by the West.

In the coming months, the "information war" of the two contending sides will intensify. Civil and human rights discourse will occupy center stage since the US and the EU have singled out this issue as the one that can have the most success and serve the purpose of ousting Lukashenko.

In other words, after having triumphed in Ukraine and apparently losing in Azerbaijan, the West will try to cause a new "orange revolution" in Belarus. Lukashenko declared in February 2005 that averting such a scenario was the primary task of his administration.

With the final outcome still difficult to forecast, it is to be expected that projects to reintegrate Russia and Belarus will be heavily promoted by Moscow in the coming months. Notwithstanding Moscow's overtures to NATO and the EU for enhanced security cooperation, the US-EU combine will continue to support and to finance Belarusian opposition movements for the near-term.

Source: Dr. Federico Bordonaro, The Power and Interest News Report; November 16, 2005; http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=399&language_id=1

15. NATO Parliamentary Assembly Adopted a Resolution on Belarus

The Assembly,

1. **Recalling** its decision of 30 March 2001 to continue the suspension of its relationship with the Parliament of Belarus as well as the deliberations during the Rose-Roth Seminar on Belarus that took place in Vilnius 23-24 September 2005, and **considering** that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has still suspended relations with the national parliament;

2. Stressing that Belarus is a central part of Europe and a direct neighbour of NATO and the European Union, and that we all have a stake on reintegrating Belarus and its people into the family of European democracies, and **deeply regretting** that the policies of Mr. Lukashenko's government and the way in which the parliamentary election as well as the controversial referendum on 17 October 2004, allowing the President more than two terms in office were conducted have made this objective substantially more difficult to achieve;

3. **Welcoming** the release of Prof. Bandashevsky on parole in August 2005 but **strongly condemning** all the tactics of intimidation, harassment and repression employed against opposition candidates in the election, the non-state-owned press, representatives of independent trade unions, ethnic minorities and other organisations of Belarussian civil society as well as independent national observers;

4. **Denouncing** in particular the difficulties experienced by the opposition in obtaining access to state-controlled media - including electronic facilities - and the presidential decrees promulgated in order to curtail the basic freedoms of expression and association;

5. **Convinced** that the provision of alternative information for the population of Belarus through external broadcasting has become a top priority, and **recommending** that such broadcasting might be done from the neighboring countries, with involvement of the independent Belarussian journalists, and that the information should be broadcast in both the Belarussian and Russian languages;

6. **Outraged** by credible reports about the disappearance and murder of political opponents in 1999 and 2000 inspired by members of the government as stated in Resolution 1371 (2004) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe based on an investigation by Mr. Pourgourides MP, Cyprus;

7. **CALLS UPON** the President of Belarus, Mr. Lukashenko, and his government:

- to reverse the current deteriorating trend in respect of democracy and human rights, to ensure that the presidential elections in 2006 are conducted in a free and fair manner in accordance with international standards, and to abide by its commitments in the OSCE and the UN;
- to restore democracy and the rule of law in Belarus and to guarantee the protection of human rights, the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press and free enterprise;
- to free all remaining political prisoners immediately and to promptly set up impartial in-depth inquiries into the fate of persons who have disappeared and to bring those responsible for the abductions and killings to justice;
- to end the "militarisation" of domestic politics, i.e. to check the increase in militia forces;
- to ensure that all eligible candidates are allowed to register for next year's presidential election, to campaign freely, to enjoy equal access to state-controlled media, and to allow their representatives to participate fully in election commissions;
- to issue an early invitation to a full OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission, to which EU Member States are willing to contribute, in accordance with the 1990 Copenhagen document, and to allow it to operate unimpeded;
- g. to extend the powers of parliament so that it becomes a democratic institution capable of exercising legislative authority and political control over the government in accordance with the principle of the separation of powers;

8. **URGES** member governments and parliaments of the North Atlantic Alliance:

- to seize every possible opportunity to make clear to the Belarussian authorities that they are expected to honour all their OSCE commitments in the areas of human rights and democracy;

- to increase significantly support for independent initiatives directed towards strengthening the development of civil society and the NGO sector;
- to encourage bilateral contacts between NGOs in order to help overcome the country's isolation;
- to intensify people-to-people contacts by strengthening good neighborly relations (e.g. through student and scientific exchanges, scholarships, youth travel, contacts between small- and medium-sized enterprises, training local authority officials, etc.);
- to help disseminate unbiased reporting about events at home and abroad through media inside and outside Belarus in order to overcome the government's monopoly on information;
- to co-ordinate EU and US programmes for assisting the development of civil society in Belarus effectively;
- to seek active backing from the Russian government and parliament in support of approaches aimed at requiring the Belarusian authorities to bring their legislation and practices into compliance with OSCE standards;
- to emphasize to the government of Belarus that the further development of relations between NATO member and partner countries with Belarus will depend on the progress made towards democratization in the country;

9. **REITERATES**, at the same time, its willingness to have closer and better relations with Belarus and its parliament once the Belarusian authorities clearly demonstrate their willingness to respect democratic values and the rule of law.

Source: NATO Parliamentary Assembly; November 15, 2005; <http://www.nato-pa.int>

16. Europe Must Stop Coddling Despotic Belarus

Aleksandr Lukashenko's lunatic, dictatorial regime has no place in the European community of democracies

Lenin once said that capitalists were so cynical that they would sell the Soviets the rope with which they would hang them. Lenin and communism have passed away, but that cynical indifference to suffering when profits are involved remains.

Belarus provides a glaring example. The European parliament has consistently denounced Belarus as Europe's last dictatorship, yet EU member governments continue business as usual with Aleksandr Lukashenka, the country's wayward and near lunatic despot.

This is especially true when there is a chance to save or make money. For example, for more than a decade, Germany's police forces, customs service, and even the Bundeswehr have been ordering uniforms from a state-owned factory in the city of Dzherzinsky, named after the father of the Red Terror and founder of the Soviet KGB, Feliks Dzherzinsky. Similar examples of such indifferent cynicism abound.

By treating Lukashenka as a favored business partner at the same time that the EU is trying to isolate him as an international pariah, European hypocrisy stands naked. Instead of indirectly propping up Lukashenka's regime through such cozy deals, Europe's governments must begin to act in accordance with what Europe's parliament has long understood: underwriting Lukashenka economically only prolongs his misrule. It is more important than ever that European parliamentarians unite and make their position clear.

The European Parliament has, indeed, taken the lead. Since last year it has been enlisting people with historic knowledge and understanding of totalitarian regimes to help guide its response. This advice helped shape the parliament's strong stance against maintaining unnecessary economic engagement with Lukashenka and his henchmen.

But there are two radically different attitudes regarding Belarus's participation in European activities. On one hand, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has denied Belarusian politicians even informal access to meetings in Strasbourg. The Assembly condemned Lukashenka's usurpation of power when he twisted the constitution to grant himself a virtual lifetime presidency, and it has denounced the disappearance of those Belarusians who have dared to think differently from the regime.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has also taken a strong stand against the Belarusian dictator. As the Final Report of its mission last year to observe the Belarusian parliamentary elections clearly stated, the vote "fell significantly short of OSCE commitments."

Similarly, last year's referendum to eliminate term limits on the presidency "took place with unrestrained Government bias in favor of the referendum," and without "the conditions, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of the media, to ensure that the will of the people serves as the basis of government authority." But at the same time the OSCE is condemning these anti-democratic practices, its own Parliamentary Assembly maintains full-fledged cooperation with the Belarusian parliament. Indeed, the OSCE treats the Lukashenka-controlled parliament in the same way it does any EU parliament. So real parliaments and sham parliaments are treated as equals. The idea would be laughable if it were not so tragic.

This absurd situation must change. It is the duty of all members of EU national parliaments to reject this affront to their democratic dignity. Only democratic parliaments should sit as equals in Europe's democratic forums. The goal is not to ensure Europe's democratic purity, but to change the nature of Belarus's government. For that to happen, Europe's democratic voice must be heard within Belarus.

That won't be easy. Of the 1,500 different media outlets in Belarus today, only a dozen or so retain any form of independence. Even that small number is likely to diminish, as Lukashenka keeps up political, financial, and legal pressure on them. Indeed, Belarus's last independent daily newspaper recently went out of business.

The European Commission has allocated two million euros (US\$2.3 million) to establish an independent radio station for Belarus, which must operate outside of the country because of Lukashenka. Working with the Belarusian association of journalists, this independent media outlet will broadcast from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and perhaps Ukraine.

This meager effort, however, is an insufficient response by Europe's democracies to the full panoply of Lukashenka's dictatorship: his docile courts, brutal jails, and corrupt police. Are a few hours of radio broadcasting really all Europe and the democratic West can muster? If so, Lukashenka must be laughing.

Parliamentarians across Europe and the West must join their voice together in a well-defined, united and ringing declaration that forces Western leaders to apply real pressure to Europe's last dictator. Such pressure brought results a year ago, with the success of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Nothing less than a united position against the despot of Belarus is necessary if Lukashenka -- and his Russian backers -- are to be forced to change their ways.

Aldis Kuskis, a member of the European parliament from Latvia, is vice-chairman of its Delegation for Relations with Belarus.

Source: Aldis Kuskis, *The Taipei Times*; November 13, 2005;
<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2005/11/13/2003279988>

17. UN Envoy Asks Belarus To Probe Journalists' Murders

A United Nations human rights envoy on Friday urged Belarus to investigate the murders of two journalists and end "systematic harassment and persecution" of non-state media.

Adrian Severin, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, also called on authorities to ensure respect for the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The deaths of Veronika Cherkasova in October 2004 and Vasil Grodnikov last month must be resolved and the perpetrators prosecuted, he said in a statement.

"The special rapporteur urges the government ... to clarify the murders ... and bring those responsible for these crimes to justice," said Severin, a Romanian lawyer appointed last year to the independent post.

The ex-Soviet state, increasingly isolated by the West because of criticism of President Alexander Lukashenko's record on human rights and media freedom, has refused Severin's requests to visit.

Cherkasova, stabbed to death in her Minsk apartment, had investigated alleged arms sales by Belarus to Iraq and published articles on surveillance methods used by Belarussian authorities to monitor civilians' activities, Severin said.

Grodnikov, a freelance correspondent of *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), died of a traumatic brain injury, and his brother said that he had already survived an attack in January, the U.N. envoy added.

Severin said that "authorities had consistently harassed *Narodnaya Volya* this year because of its criticism of the president. State-run kiosks are reportedly not permitted to sell the newspaper, he added.

"The special rapporteur appeals to the government of Belarus to put an end to the systematic harassment and persecution of non-state media and to take all necessary steps to secure the right to freedom of opinion and expression," he said.

Severin warned in September that Belarus was sliding into totalitarian rule and he saw little hope that presidential elections due next year would be free and fair.

Source: *Reuters AlertNet*; November 11, 2005; <http://www.alertnet.org>

18. EU Threatens Sanctions, Urges Free And Fair Elections

The European Union is threatening fresh sanctions against Minsk as it steps up pressure for democratic reforms ahead of Belarus's presidential election in 2006. EU foreign ministers meeting in Brussels yesterday did not specify the measures they might take against the government of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, but some EU officials say they could include visa bans and asset freezes.

The EU appears to be getting serious about Belarus.

After an unprecedented, hour-long debate among the EU's 25 foreign ministers, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw delivered a tough, unanimous EU message to Lukashenka.

"[There was] profound concern at the democratic state -- or at the flaws to the democratic state in Belarus, and in particular, we want to see free and fair presidential elections," Straw said.

"And 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."

However, the formal EU declaration adopted later omitted any indication of the types of sanction the EU would apply. References to visa bans and asset freezes had been present in drafts initially examined by the meeting and seen by RFE/RL.

Their omission suggests that Poland was unable to achieve all it had sought.

Poland has been at the forefront of new EU states that have argued vociferously for a harder line from Brussels toward the regime in Minsk. But the European Commission, among others, has argued that the Lukashenka government must not be pushed too hard before it is given the chance to respond to EU calls.

The EU in general wants to see greater openness to democracy in Belarus. But the measures threatened yesterday specifically target the conduct of the 2006 presidential election, whose exact date has yet to be released.

Lukashenka is set to run for a third term in office. Voters in Belarus passed a referendum in 2004 to change the constitution to allow him to seek reelection. The EU, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United States condemned the plebiscite as not meeting democratic standards.

The EU wants next year's election to be fair and free and open for all eligible candidates. Yesterday's EU declaration also called for the election to be monitored by international observers, preferably under the aegis of the OSCE.

The EU is already refusing entry to six senior Belarusian officials. Four of them stand accused of involvement in the disappearances of opposition politicians in 2000, while the EU has penalized the other two for their roles in a violent crackdown on protests in 2004.

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said yesterday that any further visa bans would not extend to top politicians such as Lukashenka, as the EU wants to keep open some channels for political dialogue.

EU officials are keen to emphasize that any new sanctions will only target officials and not the Belarusian people at large.

The EU's assessment of the conditions in Belarus is sufficiently bleak to have provoked some measures already.

Ferrero-Waldner said after yesterday's meeting that the European Commission has begun reorienting its aid to Belarus.

"We have [the] greatest concerns on Belarus and on the pressure that is there on the democratic forces, on the civil society and also on the independent media," Ferrero-Waldner said. "For that reason, we in the [European] Commission have said we would like to focus our aid specifically to civil society and to media. And this is what we have started to do."

The type of EU money for which Belarus is eligible -- known as TACIS funds -- requires the prior approval of the recipient country's government before it can be spent. The EU is now re-channeling increasing amounts of aid to minimize the need to consult the Minsk regime on how it is spent.

The commission is also pushing for a large-scale reassessment of how the EU spends future aid in its immediate neighborhood.

The 2007-13 budget, yet to be adopted, is expected to make provisions for a new European Neighborhood Policy Instrument. This new fund would have a freer hand in directly financing nongovernmental and civil society institutions in countries such as Belarus.

Source: Ahto Lobjakas, RFE/RL; November 10, 2005; www.rferl.org

19. Iran Special Envoy Meets With Belarusian Official

Deputy Foreign Minister on Asia, Oceania and Commonwealth Affairs and President Ahmadinejad's Special Envoy Mehdi Safari met in Minsk with Head of Belarus Presidential Office Victor Shiman, said IRNA.

In the meeting, Safari discussed issues of mutual interest as well as Iran's peaceful nuclear activities with the Belarusian official.

He also met with Belarus Deputy Foreign Minister Pugachev and conferred with him political and economic issues.

In the meetings, the Belarusian officials announced support for Iran's position in the nuclear issue and emphasized Iran's rights to use peaceful nuclear energy. They also pledged to support Iran in the next IAEA meeting in Vienna.

Iranian delegation also met with Belarusian Industry Minister Roubestsky and discussed the expansion of trade and economic relations between the two countries.

Source: Iranmania.com; November 10, 2005; <http://www.iranmania.com/News/ArticleView/Default.asp?NewsCode=37575&NewsKind=Current%20Affairs>

20. Minsk Criticizes EU Resolution on Belarus

The European Union's resolution on the political situation in Belarus shows "a desire to impose its will on the [Belarusian] authorities and society, not stopping even at threats," the Belarusian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The EU foreign ministers issued a statement in Brussels on November 7 to express concern about the political situation in Belarus and warn that new measures could possibly be taken against the Belarusian leadership, including visa denials and the freezing of bank accounts.

At the same time, the EU foreign ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the improvement of relations with Belarus on condition that that country's government clearly demonstrate its respect for democratic values and the rule of law.

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ruslan Yesin told Interfax on Thursday that "such an approach is not constructive and has no prospects."

"Belarus has repeatedly said, including to our partners in the EU, that the upcoming presidential elections in 2006 will be held in strict accordance with existing electoral laws and international standards," Yesin said.

"Not to mention that the EU's persistent attempts to 'flexibly' finance political processes in our territory, bypassing the incumbent Belarusian authorities, show disrespect for our sovereignty. Such 'backdoor' financing is simply illegal in most countries," Yesin said.

Belarus is open to equal dialogue, he said.

Source: Interfax; November 10, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

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21. The Court Admitted That the Decision To Cancel the contract with *Narodnaya Volya* Illegal

On November 17 Minsk City Court entertained the action of *Narodnaya Volya* against such enterprises as "Minabsajuzdruk", "Belsajuzdruk", "Minharsajuzdruk" and "Chyrvonaja Zorka" publishing house that cancelled their contracts with the edition starting from October 1, 2005. The claim against "Chyrvonaja Zorka" publishing house was answered and the reasons for canceling the contract with the newspaper were declared inessential.

The decision of the court concerning the claim of *Narodnaya Volya* against "Belasajuzdruk" will be known at 14 p.m.

The claim against "Minabsajuzddruk" was put off till November 21 because the defendant was absent.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; November 17, 2005; <http://www.baj.ru/>

22. Mass Arrests of Zubr Activists in Mahilyou

Eight activists of the Zubr movement were arrested by police in Mahilyou. Today morning policemen came at homes of six activists, and took them to the police department of Kastychnitski district of Mahilyou. The names of the two of the detained are known for the moment: Vlad Zhenesku and Volodar Tiurpanau. The names of others are still to be confirmed.

At the moment mobile phones of all detainees are switched off. But they have managed to inform that the reports of detention or reports of crime are not drawn up. The detainees are questioned about the Zubr movement, about other oppositional organizations, about the Day of Solidarity. As said by them, the policemen have a list of about 30 other oppositionists in Mahilyou, and they could be arrested in a little while.

On November 16 in the evening the traffic policemen detained the car of Zubr coordinator Andrei Paluda, who together with the activist of the movement Yauhen Suvorau was on his way to Barysau, where he intended to take part in the action of solidarity. The Zubr activists were charged with violation of the Article 156 of the Administrative Code of Belarus (petty hooliganism) and are waiting for the trial in Mahilyou remand prison for the second day.

Source: ZUBR; November 17, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

23. Today Is the Day of Solidarity With Belarus!

November 16 is the Day of Belarusian Solidarity. Today in many windows of Belarusian cities the light will be turned off, and hundreds thousands of candles of our solidarity and Freedom are to be lit. "Dark cities, dark windows, where only burning candles are seen. This could become a mirror for us to see that we are really many," a journalist Iryna Khalip said. Actions of Solidarity with the Belarusian people are to take place abroad as well.

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. The first action was held in October. According to its organizers, 100,000 people have taken part in it.

Source: Charter97; November 16, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

24. Belarus: Religious Events Should Be In a House of Worship, Not On the Street

State authorities have insisted to Forum 18 News Service that religious literature was lawfully confiscated from a street library in eastern Belarus. Bobruisk City Executive Committee vice-chairman Mikhail Kovalevich told Forum 18 that the Baptists had both "ignored" and "violated" the legal procedure for holding religious events by acting without state approval. "Religious events should be in a house of worship, not on the street," he stated about the street evangelism. The Baptists have been told by the head of the local state Ideology Department that the confiscated literature - including copies of the New Testament - would be sent for expert analysis and might not be returned at all, and that a court will soon resolve the issue. In another recent case, a Baptist in Brest has been fined for leading an unregistered religious organization. Local Baptists have protested against this, pointing out that, under Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion... everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association."

Local state representatives have insisted to Forum 18 News Service that religious literature was lawfully confiscated from a street library in the city of Bobruisk [Babruysk] (Mogilev [Mahilyow] region) in eastern Belarus in late September. The library was run by Baptists belonging to the Council of Churches, who refuse on principle to register with the state authorities in post-Soviet countries.

Bobruisk City Executive Committee vice-chairman Mikhail Kovalevich said that the literature was currently being held by an administrative commission – he was unable to say precisely which – because the Baptists had both "ignored" and "violated" the legal procedure for holding religious events by acting without state approval. "Religious events should be in a house of worship, not on the street," he told Forum 18 on 14 November. Kovalevich also stressed that no action had yet been taken against the Baptists and maintained that it would not take the form of a court case.

Valeri Sidorenko, an assistant to Mogilev Region's main religious affairs official, told Forum 18 on 14 November that he had no information about this specific case. He did clarify, however, that the operation of a street library by unregistered Baptists would have violated Article 193 of the Administrative Violations Code, "because distributing literature counts as one form of their religious activity." Article 193 punishes unregistered religious activity – illegal under the 2002 religion law – with fines of up to five times the minimum monthly wage (i.e. up to 120,000 Belarusian Rubles, 357 Norwegian Kroner, 45 Euros or 53 US Dollars). Sidorenko also told Forum 18 that he thought such a fine would be handed down by an administrative commission rather than a court.

A police captain threatened Aleksandr Yermalitsky of the unregistered Bobruisk congregation with 15 days' detention or a fine equivalent to 135 US Dollars (291,375 Belarusian Rubles, 890 Norwegian Kroner, or 115 Euros) after he confiscated all the street library's literature on 25 September, the Baptist Council of Churches stated on 22 October. For two weeks Yermalitsky's attempts to have the literature returned met with no response, until, on 11 October, the head of the local Ideology Department reportedly informed him that it would be sent for expert analysis and might not be returned at all, and that a court would soon resolve the issue. On 14 November a secretary at Bobruisk City Executive Committee told Forum 18 that many evangelical churches have sent letters of petition regarding the situation.

Aleksandr Yermalitsky thinks that there will definitely be a court case against him but, speaking to Forum 18 on 27 October, said that he had no idea when it would be. Reluctant to comment further, he did say that the Bobruisk Baptists did not consider themselves guilty of any violation and were hopeful that the literature – which included copies of the New Testament – would be returned.

This is not the first time the authorities have cracked down on a Baptist street library. Religious believers in Belarus can also be fined for holding religious gatherings in private homes and the

activity of even registered local religious organizations is – as one regional official insisted to Forum 18 on 14 November 2005 - confined to the immediate area where they are registered, such as a particular city.

State registration is - against international human rights standards - compulsory for all religious communities and unregistered religious activity is illegal. This policy has been condemned by the UN Human Rights Committee, following a complaint brought by two Hare Krishna devotees. The policy is used against a variety of communities the state dislikes, such as non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox communities.

In another recent case brought under the Administrative Violations Code, a member of the Brest Baptist congregation in western Belarus, also belonging to the Council of Churches, was reportedly fined 127,500 Belarusian rubles (379 Norwegian kroner, 49 Euros or 57 US dollars) by a local administrative commission on 20 October for leading an unregistered religious organization in violation of Article 193 of the Code. This is over five times the monthly minimum wage. On 28 October, the Baptists called for prayer and petitions, "that the authorities will not force the church to register, as this goes against our Christian conscience, the Gospels and the Belarusian Constitution."

Under Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as the Brest Baptists point out, "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion... everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association." (END)

Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; November 15, 2005; <http://www.forum18.org>

25. Belarusian Poles Summoned to Police

On November 14 five representatives of the Union of Poles in Belarus, which is not recognized by the Belarusian authorities, were summoned for interrogation to Hrodna investigation department. Andzelika Borys and her four closed assistance was called in for questioning by the police. Andzelika Borys said that for a year she had been summoned for interrogations endlessly. This situation took place after Andzelika Borys opposed former chairman of the Union of Poles in Belarus Tadeusz Kruczkowski, supported by the Belarusian government.

Investigator Dzmitry Labouski forced the representatives of the UPB to confess where and how the funds and humanitarian aid to the organization had been allocated. For instance, the investigator asked about that Inesa Todryk, who worked as a layout person of the UPB newspaper. Inesa Todryk told that she was not a member of the UPB leadership and knew nothing about that. Investigator in his turn kept reminding of criminal responsibility for false testimony. He also added that a confrontation is scheduled for November 16.

The leader of the UPB Andzelika Borys is surprised by these interrogations, as no humanitarian aid had been received by the UPB while she was a chairperson.

"We have not received any aid during these two months. These are some speculations again, in order to trouble people not leaving them in peace," she said to the Polish Radio.

Andzelika Borys is convinced that by these interrogations the authorities want to intimidate the UPB members that support her.

Source: Charter97; November 15, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

26. Belarus: Authorities 'Cleanse' Media Ahead Of 2006 Vote

This week Belposhta, Belarus's state postal service decided to exclude three private periodicals from its subscription catalogue for the first half of 2006. Belposhta is a monopoly, which disseminates the country's press through subscription. The move seems to be a repressive

measure intended to marginalize the remainder of opposition-minded press in Belarus ahead of the 2006 presidential election.

The targeted periodicals are the daily *Narodnaya Volya* and the weeklies *Salidarnasts* and *Zhoda*. *Narodnaya Volya* has a print run of 27,000 copies, *Salidarnasts* 5,400, and *Zhoda* 3,000. Belposhta explained the move against the newspapers in three similar notifications saying that, "Each economic entity has the right to be guided by economic expediency in its commercial activities."

Apart from this explanation sent to *Narodnaya Volya*, Belposhta also charged that the daily failed to notify it about a change of the printer.

The newspapers' editors were bemused by the decision, to say the least. "It is unclear how this concerned the distributor, as the schedule of publication did not change and the volume remained the same," *Narodnaya Volya* Editor in Chief Svyatlana Kalinkina commented. *Narodnaya Volya* has filed a suit against Belposhta over the subscription stoppage. "Salidarnasts" Editor in Chief Alyaksandr Strykevich said that non-state media in Belarus are now entering "an era of the Internet and samizdat."

Both Kalinkina and Strykevich concur that it will be extremely difficult for them to organize an independent distribution network for their periodicals. *Narodnaya Volya*, *Salidarnasts*, and *Zhoda* have long struggled to remain afloat in an unwelcoming media environment. Both domestic and foreign human rights activists have accused the Belarusian authorities of trying to liquidate or gag the independent media.

Old Campaign

Narodnaya Volya, as the largest of the three periodicals, was a special target for the authorities in the past two years. The daily was initially plagued with libel suits -- since March 2004, *Narodnaya Volya* has received fines of some \$90,000 in four separate libel cases.

In a country where the official monthly wage is around \$200, such exorbitant damages were apparently intended to ruin the newspaper economically. However, each time the daily was able to collect the money for damages among its sponsors and readers and remain afloat.

In April, Zhanna Litvina, chairwoman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, predicted that the Belarusian authorities were seeking "a total cleansing of the information sector" in the country. Yelena Raubetskaya, chairwoman for the Fund for the Development of Regional Press, was even bleaker in her prognosis. She said that libel suits against independent media would be followed by the removal of major nonstate publications from state-run print shops and state-controlled press-distribution networks. "I am absolutely sure that by 2006, the nongovernmental press that writes about politics will no longer exist," Raubetskaya added.

Raubetskaya's prediction has unfortunately proved true. In September, Belsayuzdruk, Belarus's state monopoly that runs a nationwide network of kiosks and newsstands, terminated a contract for the distribution of "*Narodnaya Volya* after a court froze the newspaper's bank account and seized newsprint demanding payment of libel damages.

The same day, the Minsk-based printing plant Chyrvonaya zorka annulled its contract for printing the daily. *Narodnaya Volya* -- like nearly a dozen other Belarusian independent periodicals, including *Salidarnasts* and *Zhoda* -- was forced to find a printer in Smolensk, a Russian provincial capital near the Belarusian border.

Name Changes

Apart from restricting distribution and applying economic pressure, the authorities employ other, more indirect, tactics against the independent press. In August and September, some

independent newspapers in Belarus had to reregister under new names, because in May President Alyaksandr Lukashenka issued a decree limiting the use of the words "national" and "Belarusian" in the names of organizations. Private media outlets were not allowed to use both of these words in their names.

The presidential decree in particular compelled many newspapers to reregister: *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* (Belarusian Business Newspaper) as *BDG*; *Delovaya Gazeta, Natsionalnaya Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta* (National Economic Newspaper) as *Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta*, *Belorusskii Rynok* (Belarusian Market) as *Belorussy i Rynok* (Belarusians and the Market); and *Belorusskaya Gazeta* as *Belgazeta*.

Many Belarusian commentators said that the reregistration was primarily intended to confuse and disorient the readers of independent periodicals and make it difficult for them to find their preferred publications on newsstands or in subscription catalogues.

This year, the Belarusian authorities also set a precedent by de facto nationalizing a private periodical. The situation occurred in May, during a Polish-Belarusian diplomatic row over the new leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus (SPB), which was supported by Warsaw but not recognized by Minsk.

Warsaw was forced to suspend the sponsoring of the SPB weekly *Glos znad Niemna* (Voice From Over The Niemen River) after a state printing plant in Belarus refused to publish materials prepared by its editorial staff and published several fake issues of the weekly with articles reflecting only official Minsk's stance on the SPB standoff. "It is a de facto nationalization of an independent publication," Andrzej Poczobut, a ethnic Polish journalist in Belarus, told RFE/RL. "If you ask my opinion about who's behind this, I'm sure it is the [Belarusian] KGB."

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the Belarusian opposition's choice to challenge Lukashenka in the 2006 presidential election, believes that the official distribution restrictions against *Narodnaya Volya*, *Salidarnasts*, and *Zhoda* testify to the Belarusian regime's growing uncertainty about how Belarusians will behave during the ballot. "The authorities' move looks surprising at first glance, as there are almost no independent newspapers left in the Belarusian news industry," Milinkevich said. "This means that the authorities are seriously afraid of the forthcoming presidential election and are seeking to deprive our people of the opportunity to hear an alternative point of view."

But this move also leaves him and his election staff with a thorny dilemma about how, if at all, the opposition will manage to present an alternative point of view to the electorate in the presidential campaign.

Source: Jan Maksymiuk, RFE/RL; November 11, 2005; www.rferl.org

27. The Editorial Staff of Zhoda Received a Warning From The Ministry of Information

On November 9 the Ministry of Information of Belarus pronounced a warning to the editorial staff of an independent newspaper *Zhoda*. The edition is accused of distributing information that disgraces the President (art. 5 of the Law on Press). The editor-in-chief of *Zhoda* Aliaksey Karol received the warning by post on November 11.

The Ministry of Information considered that in some articles there was information that could disgrace the President. The Ministry drew such a conclusion after having read some articles in issues #1,5,6,10,12,18,19 of *Zhoda* in 2005, and the decisions of Partyzanski District Court of Minsk concerning the heads of the newspaper's editorial staff A.Karol and A.Sdvizhkou.

Zhoda's editor-in-chief Aliaksey Karol stresses the fact that the majority of those articles have already been mentioned in the cases against him and A.Sdvizhkou. (In September they were fined for 100 base amounts each for having violated art. 172-1 of the Administrative Code - distributing information disgracing the President through mass media).

The same way last year a Hrodna newspaper *Birzha Informatsii* was penalized for one and the same article twice: on September 30, 2004 the editor-in-chief Alena Raubetskaja was fined for 1.5 million BRB for the article "Treason in the name of the people" were she considered the questions set down for the referendum. Two months later the Ministry of Information considered the article again. On November 24, 2004 the newspaper received a warning and then an order forbidding the newspaper to be printed for 3 months was given.

"Probably a base for closure of all independent editions is being prepared. The authorities are getting ready to hold the presidential election not as a struggle of people, ideas and programmes but as a great influence on people's minds through the official propaganda", - noted A.Karol.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; November 11, 2005; <http://www.baj.ru/>

28. KGB Tries To Recruit Zubr Activist

KGB committed attempt to recruit Zubr activist.

Today morning policeman came to Zubr activist Alena Kopach. He gave her subpoena and taken her to room in Metro police department. Soon two people came in. one of them was in police uniform. He said that he was an officer of criminal police. The other was dressed in civil and he did not identify himself. He was asking questions about Zubr, about its structure, about Nikita Sasim and about places where printed production is printed and stored. He said that Alena will be expelled from university if she would not answer the questions.

After young lady refused to speak, she was released. But that man said that they would meet again.

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

29. Journalist Thinks He Was Beaten For His Articles

Borisovskije Novosti's journalist Aleksandr Abramovich is displeased with the actions of Barysau police that immediately set free the stranger that had assaulted him on November 8.

Police officers finally obeyed his requisition and told him the name of the stranger, who turned out to be an employee of one of Minsk private enterprises. But the journalist's request to start a criminal case will be considered only in 10 days.

Mr. Abramovich still thinks that the assault was connected with his professional occupation-namely with his work in *Zhoda* newspaper where he wrote many articles on political topics. *Zhoda's* editor-in-chief Aleksey Karol informed the BAJ Press Service that Aleksandr Abramovich works for his newspaper and that his articles could have led to that assault.

Let us remind you that on November 8 Ales Abramovich (*Borisovskije Novosti's* journalist) was beaten by a stranger in Barysau. A stranger beat him in the head, face and body. The journalist's acquaintances happened to be there and they managed to detain the assaulter and took him to the police. The police confirmed that an assault took place, still it was noted that "a conflict between Abramovich and that person" lead to it. The police will investigate this incident.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; November 10, 2005; <http://www.baj.ru/>

BUSINESS

30. Belarus Net Foreign Assets Up 70.5% in 10 Months

Monetary authorities in Belarus had net foreign assets of \$1.471 billion as of November 1, up 70.5% from the start of the year, the National Bank of Belarus said in a statistical report.

Net foreign assets grew 7.8% in October after growing 3.8% in September.

The increase in the first ten months was due to an increase in gross foreign assets by 58% to \$1.498 billion amid a drop in foreign liabilities by 68.3% to \$26.9 million.

Net foreign assets grew 43.5% in 2004 to \$862.8 million.

Source: Interfax; November 17, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

31. Next Year “Beltransgaz” Plans To Allocate Br3 billion To Third Gas-Holder Construction

Next year “Beltransgaz” plans to allocate about Br3 billion to the third underground gas-holder construction in Belarus, a BelTA correspondent was told by director general of the company Dmitry Kazakov.

According to him, in 2006 the project’s designing that is likely to involve Ukrainian specialists will receive capital investments. A final amount of the project’s expenses will be determined after its designing.

The gas-holder is expected to appear on the base of salt deposits in Gomel oblast. The time of its construction will hinge upon technical and geological peculiarities of the site. Here the head of “Beltransgaz” pointed to the necessity to bear in mind that the Belarusian specialists lack the experience in building of such sites.

Dmitry Kazakov reported that according to the preliminary data the capacity of the gas-holder will account for 80-100m³ million of gas. However, it will be expanded in the upcoming three years up to 300m³ million.

Today “Beltransgaz” is exploiting only two subterranean gas-holders. Such sites among other facilities secure safe functioning of gas system making up for seasonal coverage breakdowns.

According to resolution #578 of the Council of Ministers of Belarus “On the preparation of the national economy for the autumn-winter period 2005-2006” “Beltransgaz” created active natural gas resources in Osipovichy and Pribuzhie underground gas-holders of 360 and 300 million cubic meters respectively.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; November 16, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the International League for Human Rights (www.ilhr.org). The League, now in its 63rd year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations, and the International Labor Organization. To send letters to the Editor or to subscribe/unsubscribe please contact Maria Kabalina at cis@ilhr.org or Olga Tarasov at otarasov@ilhr.org

The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their case for the protection of civil society before the international community regarding Lukashenko’s wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.
