

November 18 – November 22, 2005

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

Table of Contents

I. Domestic

1. Opposition Presidency Candidate Website Launched in Belarus (*E-Belarus.ORG*)
2. Lukashenka Says Opposition Has No Support (*RFE/RL*)

II. Regional

3. President of Belarus to Meet With Governor of Moscow Region (*The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*)

III. International

4. EU May Engage Belarus in Its Northern Dimension Programs (*RIA Novosti*)
5. Belarus Bought Jammers for Internet in China (*Charter97*)
6. EU Committed To Change In Belarus (*The Jamestown Foundation*)
7. Russia Signs Four-Party Railway Freight Cooperation Agreement (*RIA Novosti*)
8. The Last Dictator (*The Washington Times*)
9. State-Owned Company To Cease Distribution of Privately-Owned Newspapers; IFJ Warns of "Ruthless Campaign" To Silence Media Before Presidential Election (*IFEX*)
10. United States Mission to the OSCE Statement On Belarusian Actions Limiting Freedom of Media and Information (*U.S. Mission to the OSCE*)
11. Assistance For The Independent States of The Former Soviet Union (*Unites States House of Representatives*)

IV. Human Rights & Independent Media

12. Belarus: Authorities Urged To Investigate Possibility That Vassili Grodnikov Was Murdered (*Noticias.Info*)
13. Andrzej Poczobutt's Passport Confiscated at Border (*Charter97*)
14. Belarus: State Losing Its Battle With Religious Believers? (*Forum 18*)
15. Belarus: State Postal Service Refuses To Distribute Seven More Newspapers (*Noticias.Info*)
16. Belarus Jewish Leader Deplores "Instances of Anti-Semitism" (*Interfax*)
17. 300 Belarusians Have Taken Part in Day of Solidarity (*ZUBR*)

V. Business

18. Belarus Boosts Industrial Output 9.5% in 10 mths (*Interfax*)

DOMESTIC

1. Opposition Presidency Candidate Website Launched in Belarus

In the situation of the growing pressure on the Belarusian independent media, democracy advocates are shifting their focus to online campaigns. The statement was made by Alexander Milinkevich, the opposition candidate, at the presentation of his website.

It was announced that milinkevich.org website will be mirrored at milinkevich.net, milinkevich2006.org, milin2006.com, milin2006.net, milin2006.org, milinkevic.com, milinkevic.net, milinkevic.org. The English version of the website will be presented at elections2006.org

At present only Belarusian language websites are available, but by the end of November Russian and English versions is to be launched.

milinkevichu.net domain name will readdress visitors to the Milinkevich's official website. That is meant to be a kind of protection measure against some provocative actions from the part of Belarusian authorities.

The website developing process took about a month and a half. 6 volunteers have been engaged in the project

Source: Mikhail Doroshevich, E-Belarus.ORG; November 18, 2005; www.e-belarus.org

2. Lukashenka Says Opposition Has No Support

Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said today those hoping to vote him out of office next year in presidential elections are losing support.

In remarks aired on state-run Bel-1 television, Lukashenka said anyone interested in staging a revolution in Belarus like those in Georgia or Ukraine would fail because they would receive no support from workers, factories, farmers, the military, or the elderly.

But he indicated that he had no plans to reduce or halt broadcasts of foreign television programs in his country. Lukashenka said 90 percent of the country's population are in favor of foreign broadcasts.

Lukashenka said while the government should be involved in media policy it should "do so in a civilized manner without playing favorites."

Source: RFE/RL; November 17, 2005; www.rferl.org

REGIONAL

3. President of Belarus to Meet With Governor of Moscow Region

Governor of Moscow region Boris Gromov will pay a visit to Minsk. On November 22 president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko is expected to meet with the governor.

In the course of the meeting Alexander Lukashenko and Boris Gromov will discuss issues on trade-economic cooperation between Belarus and Moscow oblast: development of cooperation links, creation of dealer and service centers, interaction in the scientific and innovation spheres and intensification of the relations between the Belarusian and Moscow oblast's regions.

As BelTA was informed in the presidential press service, in January-September 2005 the trade turnover between Belarus and Moscow oblast reached USD 713,8 million. Belarus exports to

Moscow oblast trucks, tractors, TV-sets, milk, condensed cream and butter and imports from this region chocolate, iron-and-steel scrap, flat sections made of iron or plain steel, liquid pumps.

[Text revised by the Editors]

Source: *The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; November 21, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

INTERNATIONAL

4. EU May Engage Belarus in Its Northern Dimension Programs

The EU could engage Belarus in its Northern Dimension programs, aimed at promoting cooperation across northern Europe.

At a meeting in Brussels Monday, the foreign ministers of northern EU member states, Russia, Iceland and Norway adopted a statement saying that experts from Belarus could be brought on board to work on issues designated as priorities of the Northern Dimension initiative.

"We hail the approach and deem it important to get all interested countries involved in cooperation within the Northern Dimension framework," said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The EU and its partner countries use Northern Dimension projects to address specific challenges and opportunities arising in northern Europe and to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in areas such as business, infrastructure, human resources, education, culture, scientific research, environmental protection and regional development.

Source: *RIA Novosti, November 21, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>*

5. Belarus Bought Jammers for Internet in China

An influential Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* informed last Friday that Belarus plans or have already bought recital equipment for filtering internet-traffic. It is informed that the new system of Internet censorship could be used by the Belarusian authorities this spring, before the presidential elections that are to take place on 2006. China is the world's leader for development and use of internet-filters.

According to **www.bybanner.com**, a research by OpenNet Initiative (ONI) shows that China operates the most extensive, technologically sophisticated, and broad-reaching system of Internet filtering in the world. It is called China's Great Red Firewall internationally. Thousands of state officials and volunteers are involved in the global surveillance over the internet-activities of Chinese citizens. Filtering of the content is carried out both with the use of software and hardware.

Information about oppositional parties and anti-communistic statements cannot be found in internet by the Chinese. Chinese citizens seeking access to Web sites containing content related to Taiwanese and Tibetan independence, Falun Gong, the Dalai Lama, the Tiananmen Square incident, opposition political parties, or a variety of anti-Communist movements will frequently find themselves blocked.

The methods of the ONI research include attempts to operate information outside the reach of the Chinese authorities and inside the country as well.

"China has the perfect and the most effective system of surveillance and censorship in Internet," the researchers conclude.

Source: Charter97; November 21, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

6. EU Committed To Change In Belarus

On November 17, Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenka declared that he expected to win 90% of the electoral vote in the presidential elections of 2006, a figure far exceeding anything he has achieved hitherto. At the same time he accused the European Union and the United States of using the "rhetoric of globalization" to try to "enslave" Belarus. Earlier in the week, the United States had stated its belief that the elections were unlikely to be free and fair, given the government's control over the media, the restrictions on free speech, and the authorities' refusal to permit observers to monitor the event (Pravda.ru, November 17; AP, November 15).

The EU in particular has recently been very forthright in its condemnation of the Belarusian regime in the wake of blatant attempts by the Lukashenka administration to silence potential opponents, as well as to prevent the holding of nongovernmental opinion polls during the election campaign. Lawyer Harry Pahanyaila commented, for example, that one of the few remaining sizeable NGOs in Belarus, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC), is on the verge of closure. An old legal case against the BHC has been resurrected in the Supreme Economic Court, according to which the organization owes a substantial sum in back taxes, despite the fact that earlier trials of the same case in different courts and in the state prosecutor's office had resulted in "not guilty" verdicts. According to Pahanyaila, the anticipated payment required -- around \$180,000 -- would force the BHC into dissolution (*Belarusy i Rynok*, November 8).

The EU (as well as the United States) also criticized the harassment and persecution of activists of the unregistered association "Partnerstva," which observes elections. The leaders of the association attempted to hold a founding congress recently in the hall of the Tsentralnyi movie theater. After 30-40 minutes, militiamen and OMON troops burst into the hall and arrested the entire group -- about 70 people in all. They were taken to the Moskovsky region militia headquarters and put into a large hall, where, to the surprise of the militia, they proceeded to continue their meeting and adopt documents for their registration. Most of the participants were released, but four leading figures, including the head of its organizing committee, Mikola Astreika, received short detentions and/or fines (*Belarusy i Rynok*, November 8).

Shortly after this event, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU Commissioner on Foreign Affairs, along with three EU Foreign Ministers, visited Moscow. In an interview with Deutsches Welles she stated that the EU was seriously concerned about the violations of human rights in Belarus and the worsening situation in the development of civil society. She emphasized the EU's desire that opposition candidates must have access to the mass media so that people have sufficient information to make a conscious choice in an election. The EU appealed to Belarus to allow observers to enter the country and repeated its assertion that the referendum results of October 2004 -- allowing Lukashenka to run for a third term -- were falsified (*Narodnaya Volya*, November 12).

From Moscow, Ferrero-Waldner went to Minsk, much to the irritation of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, which, together with its Russian counterpart, issued statements defending the status quo. The Belarusian statement declared that the Council of Europe was manifesting a "desire to impose its will on the authorities and society of Belarus" and that the EU was avoiding contact with the Belarusian government, thereby exhibiting a lack of respect for its sovereignty. It also denounced the EU's attempts to finance opposition groups, which it maintained is illegal in Belarus and other states. The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a more noncommittal statement that any steps to promote democratic processes in Belarus must be adapted to the "local reality" - it did not specify the meaning of the latter phrase (*Belarusy i Rynok*, November 14).

The EU tactic is to freeze accounts of Belarusian officials abroad rather than ban their travel outright, although "visa restrictions" would likely be imposed if the election campaign were not held on a legal and democratic basis. The goal is to keep open channels of dialogue with the authorities, particularly below the ministry level. The European Commission expressed its

intention to open an office in Belarus by the end of 2005, and Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council of the EU, plans to send his personal representative on human rights to Minsk to take responsibility for contacts with Belarusian civil society and for disseminating EU views among the authorities. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry expressed its doubts that an office could be opened so quickly, but in December a European Commission delegation will visit Minsk, and in January the issue of the "Belarus Question" will again appear on the agenda of EU ministers.

The message is clear. The EU intends to play an active part in ensuring that the 2006 election campaign is not a repeat of earlier rituals, and is seeking to establish its presence in Minsk. It would also prefer to work with, rather than against, Russia to ensure change in Belarus. Lukashenka continues to resist such incursions. Nevertheless, the regime's emotional responses to these maneuvers indicate that external pressure is having some impact.

Source: David Marples, The Jamestown Foundation; November 21, 2005; <http://jamestown.org/>

7. Russia Signs Four-Party Railway Freight Cooperation Agreement

Russia, Germany, Poland and Belarus have signed a joint statement on railway freight cooperation, the press service of Russia's railroad monopoly Russian Railways (RZD) said Sunday.

The four countries' railroad companies intend to switch to a uniform carriage document by next summer, and begin using an electronic system to improve the efficiency of document transfers, the press service said.

The heads of the countries' railroad companies participated in the joint project "Eurotransit 2005," during which a freight train successfully delivered cargo along the Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow route.

Source: RIA Novosti, November 20, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

8. The Last Dictator

November, not April, may be the cruelest month when it comes to politics.

While Americans enjoy freedom at the polls, other countries are plunged into election turmoil. I could only wonder the other day if the orderly lines of voters under brilliant autumn sunshine truly appreciated their freedom of choice.

In Azerbaijan, the recent parliamentary elections were declared fraudulent: ballot stuffing, and all that. Bordering Iran and Russia that oil-rich country is strategic for the United States and demonstrations planned in the city of Baku are likely to destabilize the situation, not to mention further derail big hopes of spreading democracy.

Of course, there is no such problem in nearby Belarus.

There will be a presidential election in the country next year, with one lone candidate. That will no doubt make voting much simpler. No need for election monitors or exit polls. Why? Because President Alexander Lukashenko (who refers to his detractors as "baby killers") has already declared himself the winner, which certainly ends the need for campaign spending and well-paid advisers.

What can you do? You'll elect me," said Mr. Lukashenko, also known as the "Fuehrer of the Slavs," a former chicken farmer who has expressed admiration for both Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin. Belarus was recently described as the "last true dictatorship in Europe" by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,

Mr. Lukashenko's regime rules with a rusted iron fist. Political opponents have "mysteriously" disappeared over the last few years, along with several prominent journalists and dissidents.

Last year, the city of Minsk was shocked by the brutal murder of investigative journalist Veranika Cherkasova, found stabbed to death in her apartment. She had been working on stories investigating the possibility Belarus sold arms to Iraq during Saddam Hussein's reign.

There has been no investigation. Her family still awaits answers.

his Oct. 18, the bloodied body of political journalist Vasil Grodnikov was discovered in his apartment. There were no signs of a break-in. In July, in another incident, a Polish journalist from TV channel TVP1 was detained and jailed.

There are no police in Belarus. The security guards still goes by the moniker "KGB" and prisons are filthy, overcrowded gulags.

Why should America care about Belarus? Because it is surrounded on all sides by reality, sworn to resist any Western influence and stubbornly maintaining its isolation among emerging civil societies. Like Osama bin Laden, Mr. Lukashenko has sworn vengeance against America.

The Belarus government is dogged by allegations of money laundering, drug smuggling and arms dealing to terrorist groups. The European Union in September placed travel bans on six Belarusian politicians for their roles in vote rigging and human rights violations.

Mr. Lukashenko, with his trademark mustache and perpetual scowl, was first elected in 1994. He changed the constitution last year to allow him to run for a third term. "What can you do? You'll elect me." Essentially, he is president for life.

His henchmen raid opposition political offices and harass campaign workers accused of "illegal protests." Recently, police beat United Civil Party leader Anatoly Lebedko, sending him to the hospital and no doubt political Siberia.

Even as European governments condemned Mr. Lukashenko's extension of term limits and would love to see his government -- like that of former Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma -- overturned, no one seems ready to take on the challenge. Belarus and the new democracy of Ukraine share a common border and trade agreements, that's about it. While Ukraine had it's "Orange" Revolution, Mr. Lukashenko has vowed there will be no "color" revolutions, yellow or banana, in Belarus.

Last October, the U.S. Congress unanimously passed the Belarus Democracy Act, pressing for reforms in a country "longing for freedom." Mr. Lukashenko responded that the U.S. has the most "archaic elections system in the world."

The Belarus Democracy Act also called for investigating human-rights violations. Since Mr. Lukashenko took office, hundreds of political protesters have been arrested and jailed. Well-known journalist Dimitri Zavadsky was murdered. Former Belarus officials confirm the president was involved personally in these bloody acts of vengeance. The regime routinely harasses religious groups, and the reign of terror strengthens every day.

Human Rights Watch called for a resolution condemning the repression and Reporters Without Borders has issued reports on the missing and dead journalists.

Mr. Lukashenko, who rarely travels abroad, still talks about "the good old days" of the Soviet Union, apparently nostalgic for long bread lines, genocide, mass executions, destruction of churches and misses the other atrocities committed by communists. Russia still supports the country by subsidizing natural gas at a cost of more than \$2 billion a year.

By law, heads of state can be prosecuted, including leaders of post-Soviet states, some of whom have been tried and convicted in U.S. courts.

If diplomacy doesn't make inroads, perhaps Miss Rice should consider asking the U.S. Justice Department to intervene. There is more than enough evidence to convict this man, who seems to have formed his own personal "democracy" without the bother of free elections. Assets could be seized if the country has violated international sanctions against illegal arms sales and money laundering. Perhaps prominent American journalists could take up the cause of freedom of the press.

Educational institutions could fund exchange information programs. Broadcasters could launch a radio and television blitz on Belarus. The Belarusians deserve free elections, which means a loyal opposition. They must understand freedom cannot be achieved under one man's thumb.

Last month, Britain's ambassador to Belarus said the human rights situation "is getting worse" and suggested using European Union funds to back an opposition party. The only candidate is Alexander Milinkevich, who has compared the current government to Stalin's dictatorship. His chances are slim to none.

Watching the recent election coverage and reading the post-victory stories this week, I was amazed by the frank and unintimidated tone of political opponents in America. The losers, like Virginia's Republican gubernatorial candidate Jerry Kilgore and Democratic presidential candidates Al Gore and John Kerry, aren't jailed. They write books and go on the lecture circuit.

No wonder the bully of Belarus, under his totalitarian tortoise shell, considers the United States his No. 1 "main enemy."

Worthy opponents are hard to dismiss.

*Source: Tsothe Bakuria, The Washington Times; November 20, 2005;
<http://washingtontimes.com>*

9. State-Owned Company To Cease Distribution of Privately-Owned Newspapers; IFJ Warns of "Ruthless Campaign" To Silence Media Before Presidential Election

The International Federation of Journalists today condemned the decision of the state-owned newspaper distribution company, Belposhta, to cease distribution of privately owned papers during the Presidential election year.

Belposhta, which has a monopoly on distribution, will stop publishing the papers from January 2006, which will prevent coverage of the election set for July.

"This is part of a cynical and ruthless campaign to silence independent voices in the run up to Presidential elections," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "The Belarus Authorities are abusing their monopoly over the distribution system to close down what remains of Belarusian independent media."

Independent Belarusian media have been surviving on a knife edge for years as they struggle against a litany of arbitrary closures, punitive fines, harassment and intimidation of journalists. In recent weeks the pressure on media has increased alarmingly.

At the end of September, the state printing house cancelled its contract to publish the independent daily *Narodnaya Volya*, forcing it to move to a printer in neighboring Russia.

Two weeks later, on 18 October, Vasil Hrodnikau, a freelance correspondent for *Narodnaya Volya* was found dead in his house in Minsk. He died of a traumatic brain injury. His brother told

the media that Vasil Hrodnikau had been constantly harassed by the authorities over the past year and that he believed he was killed for his criticisms of President Lukashenko.

Last October, freelance journalist Veronika Charkasova was stabbed to death in her apartment. She had been investigating alleged arms sales between Belarus and Iraq.

The list of media to be excluded from the state distribution system includes the *Narodnaya Volya*, *Salidarnasc*, *Zhoda*, *BDG*, *Delovaya Gazeta*, *Rehijanalnya Gazeta* and a range of regional, non-governmental, social and political periodical editions.

Some of the newspapers received letters informing them that due to violations of their contracts, their distribution agreements would not be renewed. Others only discovered they had been removed from the list when Belphosta published its subscription catalogue for 2006.

"The Belarus Association of Journalists has called on journalists and media groups around the world to come to their aid," said Arne König, Chair of the European Federation of Journalists. "We urge all journalists' groups to send messages of support to the BAJ and protest statements to the Belarus authorities."

The BAJ was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize in 2004 for defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Protests should be sent to the following:

President Lukashenko, fax: (+375 17) 226-06-10

The Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, fax: (+375 17) 222-66-65

The Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Belarus, fax: (+375 17) 227-21-57

The "Belposhta" Republican Unitary Enterprise, fax: (+375 17) 226-11-70.

Copies can also be sent to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, phone/fax: (+375 17) 203-63-66, 226-70-98.

Source: The International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX); November 18, 2005; <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/70572>

10. Assistance For The Independent States of The Former Soviet Union

The brief excerpt from the conference report below accompanies H.R. 3057, the "Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2006" , signed by the President on November 14.

Conference Report of House and Senate on Foreign Operations Appropriations Act 2006 re: Assistance to former Soviet Union under the Freedom Support Act.

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD-HOUSE H9523 November 2, 2005

ASSISTANCE FOR THE INDEPENDENT STATES OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Conference agreement

Belarus \$12,000,000

(OD Note: this Freedom Support Act funding represents the majority, but by no means total US government assistance for Belarus. It is a definite -- and welcome -- increase. The bulk goes for democracy programs.)

Source: Unites States House of Representatives; November 18, 2005; <http://www.house.gov/>

11. United States Mission to the OSCE Statement On Belarusian Actions Limiting Freedom of Media and Information

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley to the Permanent Council

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is disappointed that we need once again to raise the issue of Belarus' disregard for its OSCE commitments on free media and freedom of information here in the Permanent Council.

In recent days, the Belarusian state postal agency, Belpochta, informed several independent newspapers, such as *Narodnaya Volya*, *Salidarnasts* and *Zhoda*, that they would no longer be included in Belpochta's list of periodicals available for subscription in 2006. As a public monopoly, Belpochta should be expected to provide non-discriminatory treatment to all customers, whether government or private, paying for its services.

Mr. Chairman, Belpochta's actions are only the latest in a series of steps against independent information providers in Belarus over the last year. For example, *Narodnaya Volya* and *Zhoda* are being harassed through libel cases, the publishers of the newspapers *Den* and *Kuryer iz Borisova* have been shut down and several newspapers were forced to re-register under new names due to an arbitrary requirement that they not use the terms "national" or "Belarusian" in their titles. We are deeply concerned that the deaths of journalists Veronika Cherkasova in October 2004 and Vasily Grodnikov in October 2005 also remain unsolved.

The United States further notes that the Independent Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies was closed in April 2005. We understand that Belarus recently decided to require any organization that conducts public surveys on national political issues and elections to apply for accreditation to a special panel under the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences, which includes representatives of the Information and Justice Ministries.

In light of Belarus' record, the United States fears that such a requirement will prove yet another tool abused by authorities to control the flow of information in Belarus.

Mr. Chairman, in the 1999 Istanbul Charter for European Security, all participating States reaffirmed "the importance of independent media and the free flow of information as well as the public's access to information." They further committed themselves "to take all necessary steps to ensure the basic conditions for free and independent media and unimpeded transborder and intra-State flow of information."

The United States calls on Belarus to ensure private media's access to distribution through Belpochta, desist from libel cases and other forms of harassment against such media and facilitate, rather than restrict, the activities of independent research organizations.

Belarusian repression of free media and independent public opinion research is a disturbing trend in the run-up to presidential balloting in 2006. Such repression already calls into question Belarus' intention to hold an election in line with OSCE commitments.

Just what does the Government of Belarus fear? The judgment and intelligence of fellow Belarusians? How very elitist. How very intolerant. And what a great way to continue the prevention of progress economically, environmentally, educationally, and certainly democratically.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Source: U.S. Mission to OSCE; November 17, 2005; <http://www.usosce.rpo.at>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

12. Belarus: Authorities Urged To Investigate Possibility That Vassili Grodnikov Was Murdered

Reporters Without Borders today urged the Belarusian authorities to seriously investigate the possibility that journalist Vassili Grodnikov of the opposition daily *Narodnaya Volya*, whose body was found on 18 October, was murdered, pointing out that new evidence has emerged since the police conducted their initial enquiries.

“Grodnikov was working on a sensitive subject at the time of his death and it is not uncommon in Belarus that journalists are the targets of intimidation or physical attacks when they investigate matters that some people would like to cover up,” the press freedom organization said.

Dmitry Kirilchik, the investigator in charge of the case, said today that the preliminary enquiry would be concluded on 18 December, once the final conclusions were in from the forensic investigations. But the decision whether or not to open a murder investigation could be taken before that date.

Grodnikov was found dead in his apartment in a Minsk suburb, where investigators discovered blood stains on the wallpaper, a broken table and coagulated blood on the victim’s head. The autopsy revealed that his death was the result of head injuries caused by a blunt object.

Shortly before he died, he had been working on the third of a series of articles about criminal rings that specialize in swindling old people who live alone.

The independent weekly Zhoda also reported that, on the first page of a notepad found on his table, Grodnikov had begun the draft of an article which he had provisionally entitled: “Several intransigent questions for the president and the agencies under his control.”

Meanwhile, the investigations into the October 2004 murder of reporter Veronika Cherkasova and the July 2000 disappearance of cameraman Dmitry Zavadski are at a complete standstill.

Source: *Noticias.Info*; November 22, 2005; <http://www.noticias.info>

13. Andrzej Poczobutt’s Passport Confiscated at Border

The editor-in-chief of the *Magazyn Polski* Andrzej Poczobutt was detained yesterday evening by border guards, when he returned from Poland through border crossing Kuznitsa-Bruzhi. Mr. Poczobutt was detained for several hours, and then his passport was seized.

Andrzej Poczobutt was detained at 10 p.m. Minsk time together with Mieczyslaw Jaskiewicz, the head of Hrodna UCP branch, who had taken part in the meeting with Poland’s prime minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz in Warsaw as well.

As we have informed, the leaving permit in the passport of Andrzej Poczobutt had been cancelled. However, he managed to get to Poland via Russia and Ukraine.

All leading TV Channels and radio stations are speaking about the detention of Mr. Poczobutt today. According to unofficial information, received from the chancellery of Polish Prime Minister by the Radio Svaboda, Warsaw is preparing a note of protest relating the case of Andrzej Poczobutt for the official Minsk.

Source: Charter97; November 21, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

14. Belarus: State Losing Its Battle With Religious Believers?

A state report seen by Forum 18 News Service gives a rare insight into state attempts to contain religious activity, and official gloom at the state's failure. Vasili Marchenko, top religious affairs official in Brest region, is very upset that officials are not active enough in breaking up worship services and harassing, fining and controlling religious activity, writing of "an even more depressing situation." The report aims at "repairing defects" in controlling religious activity by 1 December 2005. Marchenko gloomily writes of the state's failure to return an alternative Orthodox community to the Moscow Patriarchate, failure to stop Baptists conducting two or three services a week, "freely and systematically distributing ... religious literature," and conducting "an illegal water baptism" lasting over four hours with over 300 participants. Local authorities are also castigated by Marchenko for failing to stop Eastern-rite Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Adventist and Pentecostal activity. Forum 18 has found an apparent link between Marchenko's report and subsequent increased action against religious communities.

A state report on the religious situation in the western region of Brest received recently by Forum 18 News Service gives a rare insight into government officials' attempts to contain religious activity. The 18 January 2005 report, by Brest region's top religious affairs official Vasili Marchenko, examines the religious situation in the region during 2004. Marchenko is in the report clearly very upset that officials are not in his view active enough in breaking up worship services and in other ways harassing, fining and controlling religious communities and believers, writing of "an even more depressing situation" in some areas of the region.

In a covering letter addressed to vice-chairman of Brest regional executive committee Leonid Tsuprik, Marchenko recommends that his report be sent to all 19 municipal and district executive committees in Brest region with a view to "repairing defects and stepping up control over the implementation" of laws and decrees on religious activity by 1 December 2005. The report is also intended for "thorough scrutiny" at meetings of commissions monitoring compliance with laws and decrees on freedom of conscience and religious organizations (whose legal provisions attack both), of which there is one such commission attached to every municipal and district executive committee in Belarus.

The report concentrates on several areas of concern to the state, particularly the rarity of prosecution under Article 193 of the Administrative Violations Code. This punishes unregistered – and thus, under the 2002 Religion Law, illegal – religious activity with fines of up to five times the minimum wage.

Thus, referring to a subsequently Russian Orthodox Church Abroad parish in the village of Ruzhany, Marchenko writes: "A group of Orthodox believers who have broken away from [the Moscow Patriarchate] SS Peter and Paul Church have been meeting for services illegally for two years. In that time state representatives have found neither the time nor the opportunity to influence these believers or to assist the local priest in returning them to the fold of the [Moscow Patriarchate] church. In their stead, however, Uniate [Greek Catholic] missionaries and even a representative of the Patriarch of Constantinople have visited the aforementioned group and each attempted to form their own subordinate community. Moreover, priest I. A. Grudnitsky, who was prohibited from performing services by the Synod of the [Moscow Patriarchate] Belarusian Orthodox Church in 2002, has begun to visit the group regularly. And even in this case, Article 193 of the Administrative Violations Code has not been implemented."

Within weeks of Marchenko's report, the authorities had fined a Ruzhany pensioner for making her house available for the "illegal" Orthodox services, and handed down two heavy fines to Fr Ioann Grudnitsky for performing them.

"An even more depressing situation," in Marchenko's view, exists in areas where groups of Council of Churches Baptists "have operated illegally for many years." (The Council of Churches Baptists refuses on principle to register with the state authorities in post-Soviet countries). He estimates that each of these congregations conducts two or three services a week, or 150 a year, "but in 2004 the regional law enforcement agencies brought only five charges under Article 193." This, Marchenko points out, is also despite his own 22 December 2003 instruction ordering municipal and district executive committees to halt the activity of unregistered Baptist organizations by 1 March 2004.

Soon after that instruction, Council of Churches Baptists in Brest region reported two warnings to register and one fine for unregistered religious activity, as well as a larger fine under Article 193 later the same year.

In his January 2005 report, Marchenko points out that a group of Council of Churches Baptists "is freely and systematically distributing throughout Brest city and other populous parts of the region religious literature printed in the USA and Russia" in violation of Article 26 of the 2002 Religion Law. This allows only registered religious organizations to distribute religious literature – after it has been assessed by the state, if imported – at locations designated by the local authorities. "Thus," laments Marchenko, "every Saturday in the Vulka suburb of Brest, a group of three to six persons sets up a mobile library and distributes Baptist literature from abroad which does not bear any details of its origin, and this is well known to the city executive committee."

Within weeks of Marchenko's complaints, the Council of Churches Baptists reported that their Brest street library had been broken up by police, although they did not state whether any charges were subsequently brought. In 2005 the Baptists reported being handed down four fines for unregistered worship in Brest region, all of which were significantly higher than in previous years.

While these fines were for religious gatherings in private homes, the Council of Churches Baptists has so far not reported obstruction to another form of their activity mentioned in Marchenko's report: "an illegal water baptism near Vychulki village in August 2004 which lasted more than four hours and had over 300 participants, including spectators." Brest region's top religious affairs official also catalogues local authorities' failure to prosecute unregistered groups of Eastern-rite Catholics [Greek Catholics], Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists and Pentecostals, even though they are familiar with the locations of their meetings. Following a fine in December 2003, Pastor Nikolai Radkovich of what Marchenko terms "an unregistered Pentecostal community in Kobrin operating illegally for many years" was fined a second time only on 17 October 2005.

Marchenko's report also expresses concern about "the unfavorable circumstances in which religious communities, especially Protestants, are situated." Thus, he writes, 121 religious communities have received permission from municipal and district executive committees to conduct services at residential premises, and religious communities have consequently developed "a practice of buying a residential building, usually in a populous area, with the intention of using it for prayer meetings." Without any form of official agreement, he continues, "such buildings are re-equipped as prayer houses, signs are hung up, services are conducted, while legally the house remains a residential property." In future, recommends Marchenko, executive committees should regulate the acquisition of residential premises for "religious needs," and public opinion must always be taken into account.

In June 2005 Evangelical Belarus News Service reported that two registered Baptist communities in Drogichin [Dragichyn] district and Ivatsevichi (Brest region) were unable to obtain permission to build new prayer houses on the sites of their old ones, both located in residential areas. New Generation Church, which is affiliated to the charismatic Full Gospel Union, also reports being unable to change to that of prayer house the designated usage of a building it owns in Baranovichy (Brest region).

Marchenko does praise Brest region's municipal and district committees for completing registration and re-registration of 662 religious organizations by the 2002 law's deadline of 16 November 2004. He adds, however, that six autonomous Baptist communities did not re-register, primarily because local state representatives "did not conduct any systematic or thorough work" in explaining the 2002 law to their members, the situation in the communities concerned was "insufficiently studied," and there was an absence of "trusted contact" with their leaders. (This may refer to KGB secret police attempts to recruit church leaders.) Here, Marchenko praises the "active work" of Bereza district executive committee in bringing the activity of its local autonomous Baptist community into line with the law: "There was a lengthy and serious article about the community's situation in the district newspaper, by its chief editor, which drew a great response from readers. ... What are the remaining executive committees waiting for?"

Soon after Marchenko's report, on 16 February, Pastor Vladimir Gritsuk of the Bereza [Byaroza] autonomous Baptist community was fined the unusually high sum of 240,000 Belarusian Rubles (698 Norwegian Kroner, 86 Euros or 111 US Dollars), or 10 times the monthly minimum wage, for leading an unregistered religious organization. By late April 2005, however, the autonomous Baptist communities in Brest region had managed to re-register, even though they continued to reject the 2002 law's territorial restrictions on religious activity.

While Marchenko acknowledges in his report that commissions monitoring compliance with laws and decrees attacking freedom of conscience and religious organizations have become somewhat more active over 2004, he maintains that the level of their work "does not yet shape up to the tasks ahead of them. It lacks thorough analysis of the religious situation in the town or district concerned, commission members do not keep records of compliance with the law of the charters [internal statutes] of religious organizations, and there is no close contact between commission members and leaders of religious communities."

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

15. Belarus: State Postal Service Refuses To Distribute Seven More Newspapers

Reporters Without Borders today condemned a decision by the state postal service, Belposhta, to stop delivering seven independent newspapers to subscribers on 1 January. Earlier this month, Belposhta had announced its intention to terminate its contracts with three other privately-owned publications at the start of next year.

The seven latest newspapers to be affected are the weeklies *Nasha Niva*, *Gazeta Slonimskaya*, *Volnaye Hlybokaye*, *Bretski Kuryer*, *IntexPress* and *Regionalnaya Gazeta*, and the biweekly *Vitebski Kuryer*.

In an interview for Radio Free Europe, *Nasha Niva* editor Andrey Dynko described the postal service's refusal to continue delivering the newspapers as a crime against Belarusian culture and as yet further evidence that the conditions do not exist for free elections to be held.

Source: Noticias.Info; November 18, 2005; <http://www.noticias.info>

16. Belarus Jewish Leader Deplores "Instances of Anti-Semitism"

The chairman of the Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Organizations and Communities, expressed anxiety on Thursday at "instances of anti-Semitism in Belarusian society."

"There are instances of anti-Semitism in Belarusian society, but there is no anti-Semitism at the state level," Leonid Levin told a news conference in Minsk.

"The greatest source of concern for the Belarusian Jewish community are acts of vandalism that are sometimes committed in Jewish cemeteries and against Jewish monuments," he said.

They "are not merely teenage hooliganism, but instances of anti-Semitism," Levin said. Stanislav Buko, chairman of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Committee, a Belarusian government agency, said, "There has never been any anti-Semitism at the state level in Belarus, nor is there any."

"Tolerance and respect for other peoples and ethnic groups is part of the Belarusian national character. The Belarusian people have never been nationalistic," he said.

There are 120 ethnic cultural associations in Belarus, Buko said.

The Union of Belarusian Jewish Organizations and Communities is the country's second ethnic association after the Union of Poles in terms of membership and reach, he said.

"The Union comprises 46 Jewish organizations, 13 of which are in Minsk," he said. Yigal Koifman, first secretary of the Israeli Embassy to Belarus, said Israel had conferred the title of Righteous Among the Nations on 500 Belarusians who rescued Jews from the Nazis during World War II.

Source: Interfax; November 18, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru>

17. 300 Belarusians Have Taken Part in Day of Solidarity

"This time much more people have taken part in the Day of Belarusian Solidarity. According to our common estimation, we can speak of 300 thousand Belarusians who on November 16 took part in the action of solidarity. I would like to note in particular the activeness of people in the regions. Many regional centers, settlements and villages lit up candles of Freedom," told a well-known journalist Iryna Khalip, who was one of the initiators of the Days of Solidarity, to the Charter'97 press center. "I think that by December 16 there would be even more supporters of the Day of Solidarity. It arouses understanding, strikes a deep chord in the heart of every concerned citizen. Those who are burning candles today, tomorrow are to form a basis of future mass resistance to dictatorship, and finally, this would lead us to victory".

"We are greatly thankful to Vaclav Havel, Bronislaw Geremek, Aldis Kuskis, Azim Mollazade, Christos Pourgourides and other emblematic personalities, who have supported the Day of Belarusian Solidarity. The Day of Solidarity has become a national day already, and very soon, I hope, it is to become the day of international solidarity with Belarus. More and more states, politicians, Human rights activists, common citizens are supporting us.

Another initiator of holding the Days of Belarusian Solidarity, a coordinator of the Zubr movement Mikita Sasim stated that the awareness campaign before the November 16 was much wider than before the October event. According to the estimation of the "Zubr" movement, about 1.5 mln of people have learnt about the action and about 300,000 have taken part in it.

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

BUSINESS

18. Belarus Boosts Industrial Output 9.5% in 10 mths

Belarus boosted industrial output 9.5% in current prices year-on-year in January-October to 49.527 trillion Belarusian rubles, the Statistics and Analysis Ministry told Interfax.

Industrial output in October grew 7.5% year-on-year, but was 2.8% lower than in September 2005.

The exchange rate was 2,151 Belarusian rubles/\$1 on November 18.

Source: Interfax; November 21, 2005; <http://www.interfax.ru>

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.
