

November 23 – November 30, 2005

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DOMESTIC

1. Belarusian Government Adopts Draft Program of Socio-economic Development of Belarus For 2006-2010

The Belarusian government adopted draft program of socio-economic development of Belarus for 2006-2010. Belarusian premier Sergei Sidorskiy told a meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers that the draft program is a comprehensive document which incorporates all the principal document which concern the development of the country within the outlined period. The program aims at improving the well-being of the Belarusian population, the head of the government noted. The document will be finalized in the forthcoming 10 days with an emphasis being placed on anti-unemployment measures, encouragement of low-income population, and health care.

Economy minister Nikolay Zaichenko said that the document is a kind of "distillation" of the hands-on experience of building socially-oriented market economy. It sets forth measures to boost state-supervised economy management and improve living conditions of the Belarusians. The document is expected to become the most important stage on the way to the strategic goal of the country – stepping up well-being of the population by means of rational employment and social security and pulling it up to the level of the advanced world powers.

The meeting voiced the vital parameters of the socio-economic development of Belarus for 2006-2010: GDP growth is expected at 46-55 per cent or 8-9 per cent per year. Industrial output is forecast at the level of 43-51 per cent or 7.5-8.6 per year.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; November 29, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

2. Belarus Is Planning To Launch 4G Mobile Communications Standard

Belarus is negotiating with Siemens and Ericsson, in order to launch 4G pilot projects. That was an announcement made by Minister of communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Goncharenko at the press-conference held on Friday, November 25.

Minister Goncharenko informed that he met with Siemens representatives on November 24. Before he negotiated about the project with Ericsson.

It is planned a new, fifth, mobile operator will provide 4G services. But the Minister haven't specified whether it will be a state-owned company.

As of November 2005, there were 3,74 mln mobile phone users. There are four mobile operators in Belarus: Velcom, MTS (GSM 900/1800 standard), BelCel (NMT450 and IMT-MC-450 standards), BeST which is planning to put its network into operation by the end of 2005.

Source: Mikhail Doroshevich, E-Belarus.ORG; November 26, 2005; www.e-belarus.org

3. Belarus Leader's Crackdown Backed

Alexander Lukashenko, the dictatorial president of Belarus, yesterday secured preliminary parliamentary backing for a law aimed at reinforcing his defenses against any attempts to stage a Ukrainian-style popular revolution.

Mr. Lukashenko, who is seeking re-election next year, has been cracking down on possible threats to his regime including opposition groups, non-government organizations and the independent media.

The Belarusian leader has been condemned in the west for human rights infringements but enjoys some support from Russia, which fears that an anti-Lukashenko revolt could damage Moscow's interests and benefit the US and the European Union.

Source: Stefan Wagstyl, The Financial Times; November 26; <http://news.ft.com>

4. Belarus: Tough New Penalties For Anti-government Actions Punishable With Prison Terms

Belarus' parliament gave preliminary approval Friday to tough new penalties that would make anti-government actions punishable with prison terms of two years or more.

The former Soviet republic's security service, known under its Soviet-era name KGB, said the measures were needed to prevent the mass uprisings following elections that brought opposition leaders to power in three other former Soviet republics.

"We have to protect national security and prevent color revolutions like those that happened in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan," KGB chief Stepan Sukharenko told lawmakers, referring to those countries' so-called Rose, Orange and Tulip revolutions.

President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled with an iron hand for 11 years and has been dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by the United States, is to seek another term next year. He has accused Western nations of seeking to foment an overthrow of his government.

Lukashenko has reintroduced Soviet symbols, closed independent media and maintained rigid Soviet-style state controls over the economy. Many opposition leaders have either been jailed or have disappeared.

The new penalties were backed by 94 out of 110 lawmakers, with only one voting against. They still must receive final approval in a second reading within the next 10 days.

Under the new measures, those who finance or direct participants in mass disorders could be sentenced for up to three years in prison. Likewise for those who urge the seizure of government buildings or a forceful constitutional change. If such calls are made in the media, perpetrators could get five years imprisonment, while discrediting Belarus' international reputation could bring up to two years in prison.

"This is a return to Stalinism," opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich said.

"This is the final preparation for the presidential elections. Lukashenko understands that people are going to defend their rights in the streets, and he is ready to put them in jail," he said.

Meanwhile, some 200 workers from a Minsk plant that produces motorcycles and bicycles held a protest rally in one of the capital's main streets to demand payment of back wages.

"I am in despair at this government, and my children are going hungry," said 44-year-old worker Igor Krutenya, who complained that he had not received his monthly salary equivalent to US\$110 (₮94) since October, AP reports.

Source: Pravda.RU; November 26, 2005;
<http://newsfromrussia.com/world/2005/11/26/68535.html>

5. Lukashenko On Retirement

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said Wednesday that if he were defeated in the 2006 presidential race, he would most likely retire.

"I spent all my life in politics - 10 years as president - and before that, as a member of parliament," he told a news conference with Russian journalists, referring to his years in the Belarusian parliament where he joined the opposition to the first and last Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev.

Lukashenko, who has been at the helm of the former Soviet republic for more than 11 years, added that he had worked as head of a production facility and a collective farm so he saw no reason to worry about the future.

"I will hardly have any difficulty finding an occupation, but it does not mean that I will sit in an office," said the president, who has defended his authoritarian style of rule in the past, adding that he would rather retire.

He also said he had no intention of meddling with Belarusian politics if he was not elected president.

"I will behave decently and will not interfere, although I still have 10 years before retirement age," Lukashenko concluded.

Source: RIA Novosti, November 23, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

REGIONAL

6. Gazprom To Launch Belarus Stretch of Yamal-Europe Gas Pipeline

Russian natural gas monopoly Gazprom is planning to bring the Belarus segment of the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline to its full capacity of 33 billion cu m in the fall and winter seasons of 2005-2006, a senior Gazprom official said Wednesday.

Speaking at the third international forum Russian Gas 2005, Gazprom Deputy Board Chairman Alexander Medvedev said the company intended to commission two additional compressor stations in Belarus until the end of 2005.

On July 1, 2005, Gazprom put into operation two more compressor stations on the Polish stretch of the pipeline in addition to the existing two compressors to bring the pipeline's capacity to 28 billion cu m, he said.

From January 1, 2006, the Polish segment of the pipeline will receive a fifth compressor in order to reach full capacity, he said.

The Yamal-Europe 2,000 km-long gas pipeline was commissioned in 1999 and runs across Poland, Belarus and Russia.

Source: RIA Novosti, November 30, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

7. Ukrainian "Pora" Proposes Stepping Up International Pressure On Lukashenka's Regime

On November 28 the civil party "Pora" expressed deep concern over the fact that the illegitimate parliament of Belarus adopted amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Penal Procedure, which envisages criminal liability for taking part in the work of public associations and political parties. "Pora" believes that the policy of appeasement and the "culture of relations", about which they talk in Ukraine, would not work with the dictator, which understands only the language of power and international pressure, and proposes to increase international pressure on Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime to the extent of introduction of international embargo.

"In a result of such changes we can finally speak of destruction of any signs of democracy in Belarus and advancement of an "ice age" of dictatorship. After adoption of the new law almost every citizen of Belarus could be imprisoned for any political activism, expression of his thoughts at an international conference and even for contacts with foreign politicians. All these actions could be treated as actions which damage the external security of Belarus, its sovereignty, and the fact of damage would be detected by pro-governmental law-enforcers," told the member of

the civil party "Pora" Serhiy Evtushenko. "Lukashenka has proved once again that he is not reacting to all efforts of the West and Ukraine [to make him] adhere to at least any norms and standards in relations with opposition," Evtushenko emphasized.

Source: ZUBR; November 30, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

8. Belarus To Receive Russian Air Defense Systems In March 2006

The first batch of S-300 air defense systems will be delivered from Russia to Belarus in March 2006, the secretary of the Belarusian Security Council said Tuesday.

Gennady Nevyglas said he had discussed the issue with his Russian counterpart, Igor Ivanov.

According to Nevyglas, deliveries will be made throughout next year and Belarus planned to form two S-300 divisions, which, according to previous media reports, means Belarus will have 24 complexes by the end of the year.

The Belarusian official said the complexes would cover the country's western regions, doubling the army's capability to destroy targets.

Source: RIA Novosti, November 29, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

9. CIS To Develop Due To Objective Factors - Lukashenko

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said objective factors will push for the development of the Commonwealth of Independent States despite the fact that the CIS problems outnumber the solutions at present.

"The CIS is a huge market, it's almost 300 million people, and in terms of territory, energy resources and capital it's simply a huge chunk of the planet which can rival, in a good sense, any country in the world: Europe, the United States or China," Lukashenko told Chinese reporters on Monday.

That presidents and governments meet and discuss problems within the CIS framework is of much value, Lukashenko said.

"Belarus views in this respect the very dynamic Shanghai Cooperation Organization," he said noting that the SCO's latest moves enabled many peoples of the world to hope for the emergence of another center of force which may stop the world's being unipolar.

In his view, "Americans will never agree to our having fraternal allies' relations within the CIS framework because the mighty of this world wish a disunited CIS."

Initially, the CIS aimed at pursuing a single policy and transferring to a single currency unit, but for a number of reasons, the paths of member-states separated, the Belarusian leader said.

Source: Itar-Tass; November 28, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

10. Contract For Gas Supplies To Belarus In 2006 To Be Signed Next Week

In 2006 Russia will supply to Belarus 21,5 billion cubic meters of gas at the price of USD 46,68 for one thousand cubic meters. These figures are stipulated in the contract, which has already been coordinated at the level of specialists, prime minister of Belarus Sergei Sidorskiy told reporters November 25.

According to him, next week Belarus and Russia plan to sign the contract. Sergei Sidorskiy noted that Belarus was completely paying for the Russian gas: "three years ago we stopped using mutual-offset schemes". The debts of subjects of economy are successfully paid off; every month

the government controls this process. "Today "Gazprom" has no claims concerning payments for gas made by Belarus", the prime minister stated.

This year the Belarusian side has taken all necessary measures to put into service two compressor plants of the gas pipe line "Yamal-Europe", what will increase gas transportation volumes to the European consumers, Sergei Sidorskiy said. At the same time the terms of placing the compressor plants in operation were reduced two times. "We have repeatedly demonstrated fulfillment of our union obligations", Sergei Sidorskiy added.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; November 28, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

11. Sergei Sidorskiy: Introduction of Single Currency Should Crown Belarusian-Russian Integration

Introduction of the single currency should crown the Belarusian-Russian integration, prime minister of Belarus Sergei Sidorskiy told reporters November 25.

Introduction of the single currency will become the final stage of implementing the action plan on leveling economic conditions. It envisages creation of equal conditions for economic subjects of the two states, forming the single customs area and leveling prices for energy resources. Only after that the issue on introducing the single currency can be settled, Sergei Sidorskiy said.

When speaking about the processes going on in this field the prime minister reminded of the experience of the European Union, where introduction of Euro had become the final stage of the unification. "The single currency cannot be introduced without conditions for equal competition", Sergei Sidorskiy said.

According to the prime minister, the course of implementing the action plan on leveling economic conditions will become one of the articles of the agenda of the forthcoming December 20 meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Union State.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; November 25, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

12. Lukashenko Attempts to Avoid Moscow Hoof

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko rebuffed the mere chances of introducing a post of the president into the Russia-Belarus Union State. Lukashenko made this statement over the news conference held for Russia's media yesterday. Minsk will never back up establishment of any Union State with Russia "to the detriment of its sovereignty," Lukashenko said, signaling he goes against the Russia's draft of the constitution in an effort to avoid complete dependence on Moscow.

We will never agree to the Union State if the underlying principles are thrown under the hoof, Lukashenko was emphatic Wednesday. "Russia's authorities are clear about it. The common things are foreign and defense policies. Everything else is the national priority," Lukashenko said, adding Russia's hoof won't smash the social policy of Belarus.

Russian president views the experience of the European community as an example, we would like to pattern the Soviet Union, Lukashenko postulated the basic disagreement, which, in his interpretation, hinders the adoption of the constitution.

The roots of the yesterday's activity of the Belarus president could be easily spotted. Minsk received Moscow proposals Tuesday to amend the draft constitution of the Union State. Although Lukashenko preferred not to shed light on the actual changes yesterday, he was obviously ill at ease because of the latest initiative.

Source: Kommersant; November 24, 2005; <http://www.kommersant.com/>

13. USSR Breakup Planned And Paid For - Belarus president

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said Wednesday that the breakup of the Soviet Union had been orchestrated and paid for.

"Such things do not just happen in politics unfortunately. A lot of money was paid for that," Lukashenko said.

The leaders of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine met in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha Natural Reserve in Belarus in 1991 and signed an agreement, founding the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The agreement said all the members were sovereign and independent nations and, thereby, effectively abolished the Soviet Union.

Stanislav Shushkevich, the former speaker of the Belarusian parliament, who signed the agreement for Belarus, did not have the right to do so, Lukashenko said.

"This was Shushkevich's initiative. He should have received permission from Belarus' parliament for signing the documents."

According to Lukashenko, this was a tragic mistake. He said there had been no reasons for the USSR to disintegrate. If the union were to collapse, it would have collapsed later for objective reasons, he said.

"The Alpha [commando unit] should have gathered the Belovezhskaya Pushcha signatories, wrapped them up with barbed wire and let them call and report back to Bush senior what they were signing," Lukashenko said.

Source: RIA Novosti, November 23, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

INTERNATIONAL

14. Condoleezza Rice Concerned Over State of Democracy In Belarus

The questions of "extending the boundaries of democracy" were discussed on Tuesday at the 45-minute meeting of the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the new German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who has arrived for his first visit to Washington. "They spoke about the importance of extending the boundaries of freedom and democracy in Belarus," State Department spokesperson Sean McCormack said. He has not disclosed further details of the discussion.

As said by Mr. McCormack, in view of the visit of Condoleezza Rice to Kyiv, the heads of the foreign policy ministries of the two countries "also discussed the importance of consolidation of the Orange Revolution achievements for the Ukrainian government".

Among other themes touched upon by Rice and Steinmeier, the representative of the Department of State named Iran, and endeavours of the European Troika in negotiations with it, Afghanistan, relations between the USA and EU, and German-American bilateral relations, RIA Novosti informs.

Source: Charter97; November 30, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

15. Belarus Joins International Organization For Migration

At a session of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Geneva on 29 November, it was unanimously agreed to grant Belarus IOM membership, Belapan reported, quoting the Belarusian Foreign Ministry.

Speaking at the session, Belarusian Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau reportedly praised the IOM for helping the country better manage migration flows and handle their negative consequences. Meanwhile, Belarusian KGB chief Stsyapan Sukharenka told Reuters on 28 November that Washington and Brussels do not provide Belarus with sufficient help to curb the movement into the EU of migrants who could pose a terrorist threat. "It must be said that the level of interaction between Belarus and foreign intelligence services and security forces is largely determined by the political situation," Sukharenka said.

Source: RFE/RL; November 30, 2005; www.rferl.org

16. Belarus: Reporters Without Borders Condemns Closing of File on Grodnikov Case

Reporters Without Borders has condemned the 28 November refusal to open a criminal investigation into the death of opposition journalist Vassily Grodnikov, in a letter addressed to the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko.

Paris, 30 November 2005

Dear Mr President,

In a letter on 22 November, we conveyed to the interior minister the need to open a criminal investigation into the death of Vassily Grodnikov, taking into account a number of elements to support the theory that he was murdered for reasons linked to his profession.

We now wish to express our deep concern following the announcement by the Minsk district prosecutor's office on 28 November of its refusal to open an investigation into this case.

Vassily Grodnikov was found dead in his apartment in the Minsk suburbs, on 18 October 2005. Investigators found blood stains on the wallpaper, a broken table and dried blood on the victim's head. A post mortem examination revealed that death was caused by a blow from a blunt object.

Shortly before his death, the journalist was working on the sensitive issue of elderly people living alone being swindled out of their apartments. In addition, according to the independent weekly *Zhoda*, the journalist had left on a table a rough copy of an article headlined "A booked office or several uncompromising questions for the president of the country and the agencies under his control."

We fear we will never know the exact circumstances of the death of Vassily Grodnikov, as was unfortunately the case for two other journalists, Veronika Cherkasova and Dmitry Zavadski.

The first was found murdered at her home in Minsk, on 20 October 2004 with several dozen stab wounds. Since opening their investigation, police have worked on the theory that it was either a crime of passion or linked to a family quarrel, to the detriment of the professional lead.

Dmitry Zavadski went missing at Minsk airport on 7 July 2000. The investigation into his disappearance was closed twice. Suspicions that the authorities were implicated in the case and that they are trying to cover up the truth are still current. Once again, the silence and inactivity of the justice system are very worrying.

These murders should not remain unpunished. The families of the victims and the Belarus people have the right to know what really happened.

That is why we urge you to not to close the Vassily Grodnikov case without thoroughly exploring the possibility of murder and without finally obtaining tangible results on the suspicious deaths of Veronika Charkasova and Dmitry Zavadski.

I trust you will give this request your careful consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Ménard, Secretary General

Source: Noticias.Info; November 30, 2005; <http://www.noticias.info>

17. Belarusian President Dismisses Idea of Country's Isolation As "Simply Ridiculous"

President Lukashenka has told Chinese journalists that Belarus is not an isolated country, Belarusian Television reported on 28 November. Lukashenka was being interviewed by Chinese media ahead of his trip to China on 4-7 December.

"We are often criticized by those who say Belarus has allegedly become isolated because some European countries have a cool attitude toward our country and the United States is blocking Belarus," Lukashenka said. "To this I reply unambiguously that we have good relations with China, Russia, India, the Middle East, and many countries in Latin America and Africa. So it's simply ridiculous to speak of any isolation."

Source: RFE/RL; November 29, 2005; www.rferl.org

18. West Gives Little Help On Terror - Belarus KGB Chief

Belarus, its leaders criticized by Washington and the European Union, is not getting enough Western help to curb the movement into the EU of migrants who could pose a terrorist threat, the head of its the security service said.

Stepan Sukhorenko, head of the body still known by its Soviet-era acronym KGB, said the number of illegal migrants had more than doubled since three of Belarus's neighbors -- Poland, Latvia and Lithuania -- joined the European Union last year.

"It must be said that the level of interaction between Belarus and foreign intelligence services and security forces is largely determined by the political situation," Sukhorenko told Reuters in a rare interview late last week.

"It therefore cannot be said that Belarus is getting sufficient or appropriate help for its efforts."

Keeping watch on the movements of migrants is a key element in the U.S.-led war on terror launched after the September 11, 2001 attacks on targets in the United States.

States bordering the newly-expanded 25-nation European Union have been urged to step up measures to control such movements.

But the EU and the United States regularly shun Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and accuse him of targeting dissents, closing down media outlets and falsifying elections.

Lukashenko, in power since 1994, is seeking re-election next year after winning a referendum on constitutional change the West says was rigged. Parliament is considering laws imposing tough sentences on anyone accused of fomenting protests like those which helped unseat governments in Georgia and Ukraine.

Routers to Western Europe

Sukhorenko said the West should recognize Belarus's position at the heart of routes to the West through central Europe.

"There are migrants from regions with heightened terrorist activity. Many illegal migrants are influenced by international criminal or terrorist organizations and pose a real threat to the stability not only of Belarus but Western Europe," he said.

"In Belarusian we have a word 'toloka'. It means the entire world extending help to someone to solve a difficult problem. That's the way it should be with this."

Sukhorenko said the flow of migrants had increased to an annual rate of 100,000 from 30,000-50,000 prior to EU expansion.

The KGB, he said, had recently detained 54 groups made up of 755 people. Among them were 20 individuals "suspected of links to international extremists and terrorist organizations".

Despite its internal stability, Belarus could not rule out the use of its territory as a transit point for terrorists.

"Belarus is playing a sort of buffer role in the network of illegal migration to the countries of western Europe," he said.

"We have a stable internal situation. But owing to a series of factors our country cannot be totally free of global negative factors linked to the escalation of world terrorism.

"The main thing is early detection and removal of all pre-conditions for terrorism. We constantly work towards this."

*Source: Andrei Makhovsky, The Star; November 28, 2005;
http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2005/11/29/worldupdates/2005-11-28T212409Z_01_NOOTR_RTRJONC_0_-225351-1&sec=Worldupdates*

19. Polish Newspapers Black Out Front Pages in Protest Against Belarus Media Repression

Poland's two leading newspapers have blacked out large sections of their front pages Wednesday in an eye-catching protest against media repression in neighboring Belarus, Associated Press reported.

The main pages of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* looked as if a censor had taken a black marker to them, with most text and photographs crossed out. Amnesty International, which led the protest, wrote at the bottom of both front pages: "This is what freedom of speech looks like in Belarus."

Amnesty also ran an advertisement in *Rzeczpospolita* calling on Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko to observe human rights treaties protecting freedom of expression.

Polish Parliament Speaker Marek Jurek supported Amnesty's campaign and called for international rights to be observed by Minsk.

"We must take strong action in defense of the accepted international principles and we must demand that they are observed in Belarus and in the nations that have relations with it," Jurek said on state radio.

The U.S. government has been a vocal critic of Lukashenko, whose government fears opposition attempts to foment political change in the tightly controlled country. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has called Lukashenko's regime "the last dictatorship in the center of Europe."

Source: MosNews.Com, November 24, 2005; www.mosnews.com

20. Belarus: "Just silence" Reply To UN Deadline

Belarus has not met a 12 November deadline, set by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, to report its correction of a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In a decision with implications for many religious communities, Belarus was found to have violated two Hare Krishna devotees' religious freedom rights by refusing to register a nationwide Hare Krishna association. Without registration the association's activity is illegal under Belarus's harsh religion law. One of the devotees, Sergei Malakhovsky, told Forum 18 News Service that the only reply the state had given them was "just silence. They were supposed to respond and publish what they had done within 90 days, but that period is over." The devotees have formally asked the Belarusian Supreme Court to review earlier court decisions violating their ICCPR-guaranteed religious freedom. The head of the UN Human Rights Committee's petitions department told Forum 18 that Belarus "will reply – they have said that they will – but they didn't give a specific date." Aleksandr Kalinov of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs told Forum 18 that his body was "examining the issues."

Belarus has failed to meet a 12 November deadline, set by the United Nations Human Rights Committee established under article 28 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to report its correction of a religious freedom violation identified by the same Committee's resolution of 23 August. Speaking to Forum 18 News Service from Geneva on 23 November, the head of the UN Human Rights Committee's petitions department thought that Belarus would respond, however. "They will reply – they have said that they will – but they didn't give a specific date," Markus Schmidt remarked. Once a response is received, he added, it will be analyzed by a Special Rapporteur before being referred to the UN Committee.

Asked about Belarus' response to the UN Human Rights Committee's resolution on 3 November, Aleksandr Kalinov of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs told Forum 18 that his body was currently "examining the issues" connected with it.

In a decision with clear implications for other religious communities, the UN Human Rights Committee found that Belarus had violated the religious freedom guarantees of Article 18 of the ICCPR. Its 23 August resolution (Communication 1207/2003) came in response to a formal complaint by two Hare Krishna devotees, Sergei Malakhovsky and Aleksandr Pikul, and stated that the pair's rights had been violated by Belarus' refusal to register their republic-wide Hare Krishna association. The UN Human Rights Committee examines alleged violations of the ICCPR, which entered force for Belarus in 1976.

Starting from the 23 August date of the resolution and thus expiring on 12 November, the UN Human Rights Committee also specified a ninety-day period for the Belarusian state to confirm that it had taken measures to correct the violation.

Speaking to Forum 18 from Minsk on 22 November, Sergei Malakhovsky said that he has still not received any form of response to the UN resolution from state representatives. "Just silence," he remarked. "They were supposed to respond and publish what they had done within 90 days, but that period is over." On 18 November Hare Krishna devotees submitted a formal request to the Supreme Court to review earlier court decisions violating their religious freedom as guaranteed by the ICCPR.

Malakhovsky also reported that, while previously assured by officials at Minsk City Executive Committee that the local [not republic-wide] Hare Krishna community could be re-registered as soon as it found a suitable legal address, the city authorities referred its re-registration application back to district level when the community recently managed to find such an address after a year's difficult search. "They were clearly surprised that we had found somewhere," he told Forum 18, "but it is with a private landlord not so dependent upon the state." On 16 November, according to Malakhovsky, officials representing the Soviet District of Minsk – where the address is located – began to make new demands regarding the content of the community's re-registration application.

The UN Human Rights Committee's decision has implications for cases such as the charismatic New Life Church in Minsk. The acquisition of a state-approved legal address – a requirement for the compulsory registration of religious communities under the harsh 2002 Religion Law – is notoriously difficult in the Belarusian capital.

While four Hare Krishna communities have successfully re-registered under the 2002 law, the Belarusian state has made no secret of its hostility towards the group. In October 1997 an expert council attached to the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs concluded that the Minsk Hare Krishna community was a "destructive totalitarian sect infringing personality, health, citizens' rights and the national security of the Republic of Belarus." A state schoolbook also maintains that for Hare Krishna devotees "psychiatric help is certainly required". Some in Belarus have told Forum 18 that the state's hostility to many religious confessions is closely connected to Soviet-style militant atheism, which is still propagated by the state and exerts a strong influence on officials.

Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; November 24, 2005; <http://www.forum18.org>

21. World Bank Advises Belarus To Liberalize Trade

World Bank experts said the Belarus government should review its trade legislation, which it says is characterised by extensive non-tariff barriers, in order to liberalize trade, BelaPAN news wire reported.

In its new economic memorandum on Belarus, the World Bank said there are a large number of restrictions on trade in Belarus which are limiting the import of consumer goods.

The report also said that while Belarus has made considerable progress in its WTO membership bid, the country has not yet signed a single market access agreement.

The government should reduce its subsidization of agriculture and industry, including exporters, the report said. 'In addition, much more progress is needed in liberalizing and de-monopolizing a number of sectors such as financial services and telecommunications', the World Bank said.

Source: Forbes.Com; November 23, 2005; <http://www.forbes.com/>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

22. Sayuzdruk Enterprises Cancel Contracts With Independent Publications

Minharsayuzdruk [the Minsk division of the state printing and distribution enterprise – Ed.] cancelled its contract with an independent newspaper *Salidarnast*. The head of the enterprise, Dudzich, sent a letter informing about it to the newspaper's editorial staff. The reasons for the cancellation of the contract signed in the middle of September were not mentioned in the letter.

The newspaper's editor-in-chief Aliaksandar Starykevich explained to BAJ that there could have been no violation of the contract terms because it even did not come into force - it was a contract for 2006.

Not long ago *Vitebsky Kuryer* received a similar letter from the head of Vitebskabsayuzdruk [the Vitebsk division of the state printing and distribution enterprise – Ed.] Uzhyk. The letter only informed that the enterprise cancelled the contract with the edition starting from January 1, 2006.

Such enterprises as Vitebskabsayuzdruk and Minharsayuzdruk constitute the system of the Ministry of Information. These enterprises deal with distribution and subscription for editions.

Text Revised by the Editors

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; November 30, 2005; <http://www.baj.ru/>

23. Strikes In Belarusian Economic University

The Students' Committee of the Belarusian State Economic University has decided to start daily 30-minute strikes. The Rector of the BSEU signed an order about expulsion of Tatsyana Khoma two days after she was elected to the Executive Committee of the ESIB - the National Unions of Students in Europe.

The official excuse for expulsion is the fact that she attended ESIB's European Student Gathering "Higher Education and European Citizenship", without notifying the university. As the "Belarusian Partyzan" informs, the students' committee of the BSEU has ruled to start daily 30-minute strikes. Every day at 9 a.m. they ask to gather by the entrance of the main building of the university and simply stand there.

"If you are at the classes, refuse to answer the questions or just leave the classroom for 30 minutes," the members of the students' committee say. "We are going to continue that until Rector Shimau (Shimov) would not reinstate Tatsyana Khoma. We cannot tolerate the nasty trick of the university administration any more".

Source: *ZUBR*; November 29, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

24. Belarusian Prosecutors Drop Slander Case Against Human Rights Defender

The Minsk city prosecutor's office has dropped a slander case against human rights advocate Hary Pahanyayla that was reopened in May, Belapan reported on 28 November. Pahanyayla, a deputy chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, was accused of slandering President Alyksandr Lukashenka and other officials during an interview last year with a Swedish television station.

Pahanyayla said in the interview that Lukashenka, along with former Prosecutor General Viktor Sheyman, former Sports Minister Yury Sivakou, and Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau, might be involved in the disappearances of three opposition figures and a journalist in Belarus in 1999 and 2000. "[City prosecutors said] that I slandered no one, which means that all I said in the interview was true," Pahanyayla told the agency. "We can keep on suspecting the officials of involvement in the disappearances and demand that they be subjected to questioning."

Source: *RFE/RL*; November 29, 2005; www.rferl.org

25. Minsk District Prosecutor's Office Will Not Open Criminal Case Regarding Journalist Vasily Grodnikov's Death

Today, the Minsk District Prosecutor's Office decided not to open a criminal case regarding the death of Vasily Grodnikov, a correspondent with the independent *Narodnaya Volya* newspaper, said Dmitry Kirilchik, the investigator handling the case, in an interview to BelaPAN.

According to him, the decision not to initiate a criminal case was made because of the absence of *corpus delicti* [material evidence in a homicide – Ed.]. However the investigator noted that he cannot disclose to the press the details of the official autopsy results because only the victim relatives have the right request this information.

Kirilchik noted the public interest in this case, including that of the mass media. He expressed confidence that this interest did not influence the conduct of the initial investigation.

Vasily Grodnikov, who was born in 1938, was found dead in his home in the Minsk region city of Zaslavle on the morning of October 18th, 2005. His dead body was discovered by his brother. There was dried blood on the victim's head; there also were blood stains on the walls and on a broken chair. The Minsk Clinical Hospital's medical examination showed that Vasily Grodnikov died of head injuries. According to the Prosecutor Office's medical examiner's statement,

Grodnikov died as the result of "contact with a blunt object." Based on examination of Grodnikov's home and the medical examiner's report, Kirilchik earlier declared that he does not exclude that the victim could have fallen down and struck his head on the corner.

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: Euramost.ORG; November 28, 2005; <http://www.euramost.org>

26. Belarusian Student Expelled From University for Traveling to France

Belarusian student Tatyana Khoma was expelled from the Belarusian State Economic University for attending a student conference in France without approval from the institution's leadership, according to the text of the University head's decree.

The university administration is basing its decision on this year's presidential decree on battling human trafficking, which forbids students to travel abroad for the purpose of studying without the permission of the Education Ministry.

"Considering the complex internal political situation and the introduction of the state of emergency in French cities, Tatyana Khoma's action could have led to unpredictable tragic results. The student's behavior must be qualified not only as an extremely harsh violation of internal regulations, but also as disrespectful to the Belarusian State Economic University. // Reuters

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: Gazeta.Ru; November 28, 2005; <http://www.gazeta.ru/>

27. Public Prosecutor's Office Reviews *Borisovskije Novosti* Articles

Borisov Office of Public Prosecutor has to consider several articles published in *Borisovskije Novosti* (##29-31, 2005), and "take a decision on the measures that should be taken". This order was given by Minsk Region Office of Public Prosecutor that, in its turn, received it from the Republican Office of Public Prosecutor. The edition's editor-in-chief Anatol Bukas informed BAJ about it on November 21.

The letter from the Republican Office of Public Prosecutor says that a number of *Borisovskije Novosti*'s articles were analyzed to find out whether any "abuse of free public information took place " but "no reason for penalizing the newspaper according to the "Law on Mass Media" was found". Nevertheless, the Ministry of Information applied to the office of public prosecutor and asked to analyze the same articles.

The matter concerns such articles as "The freedom of speech is being suppressed ", "Will Alexander Grigorijevich be replaced by Victor Alexandrovich?", "I will protect the regime armed", "Belarusian miracle", "Does a laurel wreath become?", "The position of the EU infuriates", "He placed his sons in jobs", "Linguinists" are not necessary", "The last building of communism ", "Diplomatic scandal", "Avoid the use of weapon", "The Kremlin is dragging the "Dad" out of hell", "Elections without Lukashenko", "The dream of President Lukashenko", "The first lady is in the village ", "We are called to go to the forest, but we have to go to the swamp ", "Mikola Statkevich is sent to a penal labour camp", "How not to get trapped again ".

"I think that this decision was taken to hinder distribution of information *through Borisovskije Novosti* in Borisov", - claimed the edition's editor-in-chief Anatol Bukas. He also reminded that not long before "Minabsajuzpechat" cancelled the contract according to which the newspaper could be distributed in news stalls and Brest Region Post Office refused to include the edition in the subscription catalogue.

Text Revised by the Editors

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists; November 24, 2005; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

28. Lukashenko Admits That State Pressures Media

Alexander Lukashenko admits that state pressures Belarusian media significantly.

„Yes, I admit that we apply very serious pressure on media,“ – told Lukashenko to Russian journalists on Wednesday.

„But this does not mean that I am crushing them,“ he added. „Media means a lot. And now, in conditions of information war and tightened ring of enemies we cannot ignore media battles. There is pressure and I am significantly involved into this process.“ // *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*

Source: *United Civil Party; November 23, 2005; <http://www.ucpb.org/eng/>*

BUSINESS

29. GDP in Belarus To Grow By 46-55 Percent in 2006-2010

In 2006-2010 GDP in Belarus will grow by 46-55 per cent as against the previous five-year period. GDP growth should average 8-9 per cent a year. These parameters are stipulated in the draft program of socioeconomic development of Belarus for 2006-2010. The document was discussed November 29 at a sitting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers chaired by Prime Minister Sergei Sidorskiy.

In line with the draft program, industrial output in the five ensuing years should grow by 43-51 per cent (7.5-8.6 per cent), agricultural manufacture – by 34-45 per cent (6-7.8 per cent), investment – 65-75 per cent (10.5-12 per cent), retail trade – 57-65 per cent (9.5-10.5 per cent). During the next five years the country is expected to construct over 20,5-23 million square meters of housing, or no less than 4,5-4,6 million square meters a year. Real money income of people should rise by 46-56 per cent (8.3-9.3 per cent a year), real wages – by 52-58 per cent (8.7-9.6 per cent). The number of low-income people will be cut down two times.

Most important parameters of the draft program were adjusted taking into account the president's instructions.

According to economy minister Nikolai Zaichenko, the idea of the five-year term has been generated: increasing competitive power based on economy modernization and its motto: “Man-innovations-well-being”. The main targets of the program have been set – further improving the well-being of the population based on the efficient use of human potential, technical reequipping and development of the economy's structure.

The program is focused on a man, his development, intellectual, education and creative potential. According to Nikolai Zaichenko, this is the most effective method for Belarus to occupy its fitting place in the global world.

The most important instrument to achieve the goals set should become active social policy, which is also the main result and the sense of the socio-economic development of the republic, the participants of the meeting underscored.

Source: *Belarusian Telegraph Agency; November 29, 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.
