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

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DOMESTIC

1. Belarusian President Signs Decree On Setting Prices for Medicine, Medical Goods and Equipment

On August 11 president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko signed into action decree #366 'On setting prices for medicines, goods for medical purpose and medical equipment'.

The document envisages the upper limit of wholesale and retail markups which are differentiated depending on the price of medicines, goods for medical purpose and medical equipment. The upper limit of wholesale and retail markups is fixed regardless of the country of origin of the goods.

As BelTA was told in the presidential press service, the markups fixed in the decree are lower than those that exist now.

The introduction of these markups for medicines and other medical goods would allow to ensure considerable economy of budgetary means.

More so, the decree envisages that the exchange rate of the National Bank will be applied if medical goods are purchased for foreign currency. This move would undoubtedly strengthen financial discipline in the health care establishments.

Text revised by the Editors

Source: The National Center of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; August 12, 2005; <http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/0/FEE7EBA7DD8D40C0C225705B00310372?OpenDocument>

2. Belarusian Opposition Asks Lukashenko for Help

The Belarusian opposition decided to ask President Aleksandr Lukashenko for help with receiving premises for the National Congress of Democratic Forces.

The opposition unified candidate in the 2006 presidential race will be elected during this congress. This decision was made during a permanent working council of democratic forces meeting in Minsk.

According to Sergei Alfer, the United Civil Party Deputy Chairman, this decision was spurred by the fact that "local authorities one by one decline to rent out premises for the Congress," while the President of Belarus is "the guarantor of the Constitution and laws."

According to Alfer, the option of moving the Congress abroad is also a possibility.

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: Annews.ru; August 11, 2005, www.annews.ru

3. Over 6,000 Belarus Settlements Suffer From Storm

According to latest reports, 6,028 settlements have suffered from downpours and gale-force winds, which have been raging in Belarus this week, the Ministry for Emergency Situations reported on Thursday. One person was killed in the Vitebsk region.

Over 6,000 cities and settlements have been left without electricity. About 1,000 houses and industrial buildings have been damaged, as well as almost 7,000 kilometers of electric power lines and 253 telephone stations.

A 67-year-old man, who had arrived in Belarus for a holiday from Moscow, Russia, was killed by a falling tree. At least two people were injured.

Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko has issued an instruction to liquidate the aftermath of the storm in cities, settlements and at industrial enterprises by the end of the day. He said the priority task was to take care of the people.

Source: Itar-Tass; August 11, 2005; www.itar-tass.com

4. Belarusian President Asks to Eliminate Consequences of Storm by Tomorrow Night

At today's intercom sitting on liquidation of destructions caused by the storm president of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko has set a task to eliminate the damages by tomorrow night.

'Aftermaths of the storm in towns and villages should be eliminated by the end of Thursday, August 11,' the head of state said. At the same time he emphasized that 'no one should be left unattended. We should first of all take care of people'.

According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, 'the storm did not cause serious damages'. Only 50 houses suffered destructions. 'By the end of tomorrow they have to be restored,' the president emphasized.

He commissioned governmental officials to make sure that the people affected by the storm were provided assistance.

Parks and public gardens should be cleaned and restored by tomorrow

The fallen trees in forests should be cleared during August. According to the president, the damage to forest plantations was not that big as compared to the previous years.

The head of state instructed to involve, if necessary, military men and ordinary people in the work on eliminating the consequences of the hurricane. "Not a single person can refuse today to do this or that job", Aleksandr Lukashenko believes.

He stressed that the decisions taken by the regional authorities and the staff which will be shortly set up in the government must not be discussed but executed immediately. "Only in this case the actions of the authorities on eliminating the hurricane consequences can be commended by the population, the president says. There is a need to involve the government bodies and the society in the work of the emergencies units and militia on eliminating the destructions".

Text revised by the Editors

Source: The National Center of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; August 10, 2005; <http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/0/AF4FB8A6A2E65D79C225705A002F4515?OpenDocument>

5. Opposition Can Not Find Its Place

Most likely, as predicted, the National Congress of Democratic Forces, during which the opposition activists will name the unified candidate for the 2006 elections, will take place in one of the neighboring countries. Time after time, the forum's Organizing Committee's applications to rent spacious rooms (approximately for 800 people) are rejected.

The oppositions received rejections from 10 out of 21 Executive Committees, to which they submitted the special requests. Negative responses also came from the administration of 17 out of 51 culture palaces [entertainment facilities – Ed.]. This is more than a tendency. The organizers already hold no illusions that the action will not be held in Belarus.

It is also supported by their intention to start collecting donations for the Congress. These means will go toward organizing the Congress abroad, not to cover the bribes to the Executive Committee officials and culture palaces administrations, in order to make them say yes to the renting out the desirable space.

The donations collection for conducting the National Congress of Democratic Forces is probably a naïve attempt to demonstrate the popular character of the forum and the absence of foreign donors in the organization process. Although undoubtedly the state propaganda will tell the people its own truth about whose money will enable the opposition to meet in order to define Lukashenko's competitor. Especially as the United States does not make a secret of the fact that it provides millions of dollars in aid for the democratization of Belarus.

At the same time, even the opposition's supporters might become increasingly pessimistic regarding what kind of Belarusian Maidan [referring to Ukraine's Orange Revolution – Ed.] can be expected if Lukashenko's opponents do not even have the means to hold the Congress during which they will announce the name of the revolution's leader?

According to the Organizing Committee, the Congress may take place in Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania or Poland. The Polish option has appeared recently. Earlier it was thought that several hundred Belarusian oppositioners might find shelter in Smolensk, Chernigov or Vilnius. In the context of fundamentally ruined official Belarusian-Polish relations, holding the Congress somewhere in Warsaw or Belostok may add oil to the fire of the conflict, which will still be smoldering in the fall, when the Congress takes place.

Valery Karbalevich, a political scientist, believes that holding the Congress in Poland will be a huge mistake of the opposition because authorities will use it against the opposition to the full extent. For example it may claim that is precisely where the puppet opposition gives birth to its political projects and leaders. However, they will also spin their way the temporary Ukrainian and Lithuanian residence of the democrats. Meanwhile, the opposition does not access to television or state controlled newspaper and does not have distribution channels for its own information and propaganda. According to the expert of the *Belorussky Novosti* the best counter-propaganda for Lukashenko's opponents will be holding the congress in Russia.

And in the interest of pressuring Lukashenko to continue negotiations with Putin in Zavidovo, the Kremlin might provide the opposition with the premises somewhere in Smolensk.

However, the location of the National Congress of Democratic Forces will not seriously influence the political process in our country. First of all, the difficulties with finding the premises for any kind of the opposition's functions have stopped being out of the ordinary. Second of all, only a few Belarusians know about the Congress. According to Valery Karbalevich, it may be more advantageous for the authorities to keep silence about the Congress because even negative publicity is still publicity. They risk going too far in discrediting the opposition and as a result a significant portion of the electorate will at least know the name of the politician alternative to Lukashenko.

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: Kirill Poznyak, BelaPan; August 8, 2005; ww.naviny.by

REGIONAL

6. Borodin Advises Ayatskov to Explain Himself in Minsk

Pavel Borodin, State Secretary of the Union State, believes that Dmitry Ayatskov, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Belarus will arrive in Minsk by August 15-20.

"I think that the sides will come to an agreement. Maybe, Ayatskov will come to Minsk by August 15-20 and will comment on his statements," Borodin said during a *RIA Novosti* press conference.

Earlier, during a press conference in Saratov, Ayatskov allowed himself to make statements concerning the President of Belarus, which were regarded negatively by the official Minsk. In particular the Russian politician said that Lukashenko “needs to understand one main thing that Russia is Russia and Belarus is Belarus; Putin is Putin and Lukashenko is Lukashenko. And he should not get huffy and think someone has to run errands for him because he has worked there for a long time. No one will run errands for him. He is an equal among equals. If he would like to develop relations, he will develop relations,” Ayatskov said.

Borodin believes that the new appointed ambassador should not have made harsh statements regarding Belarus. “I do not want to assess him as an ambassador, however, firstly one must examine the situation and then make comments... When one makes statements concerning a Union State leader, one must first take a look at what is going on in Belarus, talk to people,” the State Secretary noted.

The new Ambassador was supposed to arrive in Minsk by the end of July, but the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry delayed his departure to Belarus citing the need to conduct “additional consultations.” In its turn, the Belarusian Foreign Affairs Ministry stated that Minsk was “quite surprised” by the new Ambassador’s words. “These statements absolutely do not correspond with the warm and friendly relations between our states and leaders.”

During a meeting on domestic and foreign policy issues, Aleksandr Lukashenko stated, “You know the statements of Dmitry Ayatskov, the future, or may be not the future Ambassador of Russia in Belarus, his extravagant statements. We are looking into them.”

Source: Lenta.ru

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: *Belorusskaya Delovaya gazeta: August 11, 2005; www.bdg.by*

7. Russia, Belarus to Introduce Single Currency from January 1, 2006

State Secretary of the Russia-Belarus Union State Pavel Borodin confirmed both countries' intention to introduce a single currency from January 1, 2006.

The Higher State Council of the Union State will convene in November to define the timeframe for a referendum, the adoption of the Russia-Belarus Constitution, and the delegation of powers to supra-national bodies.

Source: *RIA Novosti; August 10, 2005; www.en.rian.ru*

8. Union State Supporters Ask Presidents of Belarus and Russia to Reconsider Appointment of Dmitry Ayatskov as Ambassador of Russia to Belarus

The management of the interregional public organization Russian-Belarusian Brotherhood and the Peter Academy of Sciences and Arts have addressed heads of two states Aleksandr Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin with a request to reconsider the decision on appointment of Dmitry Ayatskov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Russia to Belarus.

Addressing the Russian leader the authors voice their opinion that “political actions of Dmitry Ayatskov, his views and moral outlook are incompatible with the policy pursued by the Republic of Belarus”. The authors of the address have reminded that “the former Saratov governor was the first to put up the main people’s asset for auction – the land, the official also proposed to legalize prostitution to provide opportunity for its “legal development”. The eternal Slavonic assets, which Belarus holds dear and preserves, such as collectivism, high moral and social justice, by no means fit into his “free-market moral”.

Without a day in office of the duly authorized ambassador, Dmitry Ayatskov "has already made unforgivable insults against the Belarusian president, insults unworthy of any ambassador", the address runs.

Addressing Aleksandr Lukashenko the authors of the letter voice their request not to agree upon the candidature of Dmitry Ayatskov.

The authors of the address consider that "today when the progress is taking shape in the Union State construction, Russia's ambassador to Belarus should be a person who expresses the desire of the two brotherly Slavic peoples for close unity which relies on special closeness of their histories, economic links, cultures and geographic proximity".

According to the patriotic information agency *Rus* the address is signed by chairman of the council of the Russian-Belarusian Brotherhood Academician of the international academy of organizational and managerial sciences Professor Aleksei Vorontsov and president of the Peter academy of sciences and arts Dr. in Technical Sciences, Professor Leonid Majboroda.

BelTA reference: the interregional public organization Russian-Belarusian Brotherhood unites dozens of prestigious organizations, universities, academies, leaders of creative and artistic unions, business structures, veteran organizations, war veterans, Heroes of the Soviet Union and Socialist Labor.

Text revised by the Editors

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; August 5, 2005; <http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/0/B22BAAD56945972FC225705400276673?OpenDocument>

9. Belarus's Reaction to EU Criticism Excessive - Ukraine

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry is concerned about "the harsh and disproportionate" reply from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry to a statement by the European Union and a number of European countries on the Belarus-Poland issue.

"Ukraine gives special attention to the provision of democracy and fundamental human rights and freedoms, including rights of national minorities, in Europe and the CIS. It thinks that pressure and interference by the authorities of any country in the legal activities of non-governmental organizations and the media are impermissible," says a ministry commentary released on Thursday.

The ministry reaffirmed Ukraine's policy of friendly and constructive cooperation with Belarus and an open dialog in all areas of relations.

Source: Interfax; August, 4, 2005; www.interfax.ru/e/

10. Belarus, Russia to Sign Agreement on Healthcare Before Year End

Belarus and Russia are likely to sign an agreement on the mutual extension of free medical services before the end of the year, sources in the Belarusian Health Ministry told Interfax.

Another agreement, on the mutual extension of medical services available only in the territory of one of the two states, is likely to be drafted by the end of the year.

"This issue has been under discussion for many years. The delay was due to differences in the Russian and Belarusian legislation. In Belarus, healthcare is funded by the state and Russia has a public-insured healthcare system," the Health Ministry sources said.

Source: Interfax; August, 4, 2005; www.interfax.ru/e/

INTERNATIONAL

11. Aid for Poles and Opposition in Belarus

Collection of aid for the persecuted Poles in Belarus and members of the opposition begins in Warsaw tomorrow. The city authorities appealed to the people to support the action, which will last until next Friday.

Basic necessities, like canned food, tea and coffee as well as detergents, electric heaters and school equipment are most needed.

*Source: Polskie Radio; August 11, 2005;
<http://www.radio.com.pl/polonia/article.asp?tid=26115&j=2>*

12. Belarus and Italy Sign Convention Against Double Taxation in Minsk

Belarus and Italy have signed a convention for elimination of double taxation in regard to income and capital taxes and for prevention of tax evasion. Anna Deiko, the Belarusian minister of taxes and duties, put her signature under the document representing Belarus, and the Italian party was represented by Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Italy to Belarus Guglielmo Ardizzone.

The Belarusian minister told reporters that the convention would enable the citizens and businessmen of the two states not to pay certain taxes in one of the countries in case they have already paid them in the other. "Italian businessmen work in Belarus today and this convention creates a wholesome atmosphere for their further business growth", the minister said. The document sets out more privileged taxation in regard to certain taxes, in particular capital and dividend taxes, than it is for other businesses in Belarus, Anna Deiko explained.

The convention is conceived to regulate tax relations between the two states by entitling each of them to levy taxes on certain types of income received by the citizens of one country in the other. The convention formulates the order of payment of income tax, profit tax, tax on income of individual persons received by citizens of one country in the other, and taxes on property which is located in one country and which is in possession of citizens who are on permanent residence in the other country.

The document will come into force following its ratification by the two parties and possibly by the end of 2005.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency, August 11, 2005; www.belta.by

13. Belarus Targets Ethnic Polish Group

Some analysts say Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko's crackdown on the Union of Poles in Belarus has to do with his determination to stamp out political dissent, his search for targets for anti-Western rhetoric, and his desire to please Russia.

At first glance, the current spat between Belarus and Poland over Belarus' treatment of an ethnic Polish organization might appear to be just another in a long line of ethnic disputes that have befallen Eastern Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The disagreement, however, has more significant dimensions, with the ethnic angle perhaps the least important. Various interpretations have surfaced over the past several weeks, all of them attempting to explain the actions of the Belarusian authorities - in particular, authoritarian President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

Among other explanations, analysts have pointed to Lukashenko's determination to stamp out potential dissent, his search for targets for populist, anti-Western rhetoric, and his desire to

please an on-again, off-again suitor, Russia. The latest incidents have also illustrated the continuing challenge for the EU of coming up with a coherent Belarus policy, highlighted as dramatically as ever with the repression against the ethnic kin of a member state.

The persecution began this spring after the authorities claimed that the Union of Poles (UoP) had elected its new leader illegally. Except for a period early in Belarus' post-1991 independence - before Lukashenko took power in 1994 - the UoP has been a thoroughly docile organization, concentrating on the promotion of Polish culture and heritage. Until the recent election, the long-time leader of the UoP was a Lukashenko supporter. Estimates vary, but probably around 400,000 ethnic Poles live in Belarus (between 4-5 per cent of the population), predominantly in the Western parts that belonged to Poland until World War II. Around 20,000 are members of the UoP.

Following the change in the UoP leadership, the authorities began a crackdown that has culminated in the arrest of officials and other regular members of the group. They have been jailed under charges ranging from participating in an unsanctioned demonstration to illegally meeting with visiting foreign dignitaries (in this case a Polish member of parliament). The Belarusian authorities have also forcefully reinstalled the previous, loyal leader of the UoP. In the ensuing controversy, both Poland and Belarus have expelled three of each others' diplomats, while Poland recently recalled its ambassador in Minsk for consultations.

Not an ethnic issue

Despite news reports that have stressed the ethnic issue, Belarusian analysts warn against viewing the conflict through that prism. "Initially it was not and it has remained not an ethnic conflict," says Alex Znatkevich, who works in the Belarusian service at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). He points out the generally good relations between normal Poles and ethnic Belarusians, despite the government's heavy-handed treatment of the minority.

Znatkevich and others interpret the UoP as simply another in a long line of supposed enemies that Lukashenko routinely trots out to boost his own political fortunes. Targets have included the independent media, opposition politicians, trade unions, and nongovernmental organizations. "Lukashenko doesn't want any NGO - especially such a big one - not under his control," says Znatkevich. "He has used the situation [the change in leadership] to have both things: to take the Union under control and to whip up anti-Western, anti-Polish feelings."

"The Union of Poles did not really play a political role and its deposed leadership was not really going into politics of any sort before it [the crackdown] started," agrees Vitaly Silitski, a Belarusian who is currently a Reagan-Fascell democracy fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington. "Most Poles are just ordinary Belarusian citizens with a generally strong sense of ethnicity/Catholicism but most of them are still apolitical - like ordinary Belarusians." They also live mainly in the countryside, isolated from the more urban independent press and nongovernmental sector. "The Union's destruction is just one of various precautionary or preemptive measures taken just in case," adds Silitski.

Similar to Znatkevich, Silitski also noted Lukashenko's calculated use of these attacks to foment anti-Western hysteria - a key factor in his appeal to certain segments of society. A frequent refrain, expressed by the president and then parroted by the state-run media, is the West's secret financing of internal enemies (NGOs, the opposition, etc.) to undermine the regime and incite a "revolution" such as those that recently occurred in Georgia and Ukraine. With presidential elections looming next year (and Lukashenko planning to run after the approval of a referendum that erased the two-term limit from the constitution), such rhetoric will only increase in coming months.

The attacks on the UoP have also represented a convenient way (and one of the only ways) for Lukashenko to strike back at the Polish government, which the president has accused of helping

to instigate the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine and to fund groups (including the UoP) within Belarus that supposedly seek to overthrow the government. Lukashenko fears Poland’s growing role as a regional leader, determined to wrest control over the EU’s Eastern policy and to use its own experiences to promote democratic reform in the Union’s “new neighbors”.

Ukraine, for example, has been a central target of Poland’s assistance and support, with Polish President Aleksandr Kwasniewski helping broker a settlement after last December’s flawed presidential elections and Warsaw consistently pushing for the future possibility of EU membership for Ukraine.

“Lukashenko has a paranoid fear of the ‘Orange Revolution’ next door and this is the primary reason behind his moves,” says John Micgiel, director of the East Central European Center at Columbia University.

Unable to launch any physical attack against NATO-member Poland, Lukashenko has chosen one of his only available options: lashing out against a weaker, defenseless member of the family. Lukashenko’s reaction has also convinced some Poles that Russia may be urging on the Belarusian president behind the scenes. In a cover story last week, the Polish right-wing weekly *Wprost* suggested that Russia had a hand in the crackdown on the UoP, the supposed first stage of a Belarusian/Russian cold war with Poland. One of the aims of the repression of the UoP, the magazine wrote, was to test the EU’s reaction in the lead-up to other attacks on the Baltic states - EU members where Russia has frequently complained about discrimination against the Russian minorities.

Polish-Russian relations have long been strained, and took another blow recently when three sons of Russian diplomats were robbed in Warsaw. While the Polish authorities insisted the attack was not political, Russian President Vladimir Putin called it an “unfriendly act” and other Russian officials claimed the Polish government had helped create a climate that supported such attacks, the Associated Press reported. This Sunday, unknown assailants beat an employee of the Polish embassy in Moscow.

Russian interference?

Under the scenario envisioning Russian interference, Lukashenko has also manipulated his own need to quash internal dissent to curry favor with Putin - in effect, to do things that the Russian president might like to do (i.e. intimidate an EU member state) but cannot without jeopardizing the ever-closer relationship between the EU and Russia. RFE/RL’s Znatkevich says Lukashenko often invokes Belarus as a buffer between the West and Russia, “shielding” Russia from Western influence.

Yet the idea that Putin is pulling the strings seems confined to a small minority. “I do not think that these are concerted activities of Lukashenko and Putin,” says Jacek Kucharczyk, director for programming at the Warsaw-based Institute of Public Affairs. “There seems to be a kind of consensus in Poland that Lukashenko is acting independently, although everybody thinks that Putin derives a lot of satisfaction from the current poor state of Polish-Belarusian relations.”

“On the other hand, there are - as *Wprost* rightly points out - similarities,” Kucharczyk says. “Both leaders whip up their propaganda against Poland in search of an enemy on whom they could focus the negative emotions of the people - the well-known mechanism of searching for scapegoats.”

If some part of the plan, whether hatched in Minsk or Moscow, was actually to test the EU, the result has not been impressive. The EU, accused by many Belarus-watchers of failing to develop an effective policy for dealing with Lukashenko, has done little. Upon prompting from Warsaw, Brussels issued a strongly worded statement condemning “a climate of growing political repression in Belarus”.

"This arbitrary use of force is unacceptable and we extend a message of solidarity to the people who are arbitrary victims of the use of force," read the statement. But EU officials initially labeled the dispute only a bi-lateral affair between Poland and Belarus and then said it was too early to implement stronger sanctions against Belarus.

Little leverage over Lukashenko

While the issue has been making front-page news in Poland over the past month, Brussels may be viewing the latest episode as nothing new for Lukashenko, another crackdown against opponents, another disregard for "normal" diplomatic propriety. "The latest belligerence from Minsk is in fact just the latest in a decade-long string of boorish diplomatic episodes," says Christopher Walker, director of studies at Freedom House. "For example, in 1998, the Belarusian regime precipitated the Drazdy diplomatic compound fiasco, where Western diplomats in Minsk were uprooted from their diplomatic residences. In 2002, OSCE representation in Minsk was similarly abused and effectively shut out of that country. This terse and unconstructive behavior from the regime in Minsk all fits within a very clear and well established pattern."

Silitki even questioned how motivated Brussels might be to act, given the Poles' consistent support for US foreign policy on a wide variety of issues, especially Iraq. "I wonder whether some at the EU will be happy with the situation because the pro-American Poles were finally whipped by someone," he said. "The EU is totally clueless about how to deal with Belarus so I believe Lukashenko will be the clear winner."

To be fair, the issue of sanctions is complicated. Trade with the EU has risen significantly: meaning the effect of trade sanctions would be felt by the regime and represents a tool that the US, for example, cannot effectively employ against Lukashenko. The question, as always with trade sanctions, is how to ensure that the Belarusian people do not suffer instead of the political elite.

"Ultimately, neither Poland nor the EU has much leverage with Lukashenko," says Columbia University's Micgjel, "and pressure from the West merely drives him closer to Moscow. Change will come either from below, or ... from the East."

Source: Jeremy Druker, International Relations and Security Network (ISN); August 11, 2005; <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=12429>

14. Poland Gives US \$290,000 to Create Independent Belarusian Radio

According to a Polish Radio August 8 report, the Polish Prime Minister made a decision to provide 950,000 Zloty (US \$290,000) "to aid in creating an independent radio broadcasting Belarusian-language programming to Belarus."

The means will be taken from the state budget reserves and will be given to NGOs engaged in creating the radio.

Last week it became known that the Polish Foreign Ministry is in negotiations with the European Union and USA regarding financing the broadcasting.

At the same time, a discussion is taking place regarding the technical capabilities of the new radio station. According to Danuta Wanek, head of the Broadcasting and TV National Council, instead of building a new high power transmitter, it would be better to use the frequencies and transmitters of the Belarusian radio station Racyja. Racyja broadcast out of Białystok but a few years ago was forced to suspend work due to lack of financing.

At the same time Polish diplomat Marek Butko, who was declared a *persona non grata* during the diplomatic scandal between Minsk and Warsaw, believes that Racyja's transmitters are weak and only a small portion of Western Belarusian population can receive the signal.

On August 5, Vladimir Tesluk, Belarusian Deputy Minister of Communication and Information, announced that installation of transmitters requires an agreement of the country to which the radio station will broadcast. Representatives of the Polish side, in particular Marian Kislo, Deputy Director of the Broadcasting and TV National Council, also point to this.

Source; BelaPan.

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*; August 9, 2005; www.bdg.by

15. Polish Euro Parliament Deputies Not Allowed to Belarus

Belarus frontier guards have not let a delegation of Polish deputies of the European Parliament enter the country.

The delegation containing of four Polish deputies was headed by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, deputy speaker of the European Parliament. He coordinates the Eastern neighborhood politics in the parliament.

The deputies planned to get acquainted with the Polish minority situation in Belarus, meet the opposition and non-governmental organizations. They also planned to meet the members of the local Union of Poles.

Relations between the two countries have deteriorated during the last months. One of the reasons was the situation around the Union of Poles in the Belarus city of Grodno. In March, the union elected its new leadership but Belarus found it illegitimate and insisted on the former leadership being reinstated. In April, the Belarus authorities stopped the edition of the union's periodical, *Glos znad Niemna*, and arrested its reporters. After that, the authorities started to release a new periodical under the same name but not authorized by the Union of Poles. Poland's Senate condemned this step stressing that the new periodical claims it is supported by the Polish Senate, although Poland stopped financing the magazine after the incident.

On August 27, union activists were detained by Belarus police. They were all released overnight but the police have not let them back into their headquarters referring to an order by the Justice Ministry that states the former leadership of the union must be reinstated.

After this incident, Poland decided to recall its ambassador from Belarus. Over the last three months, Belarus expelled three Polish diplomats, prompting Poland into tit-for-tat deportations of Belarusian diplomats. Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko said his country will not let Poland interfere with its interior affairs.

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

16. Ethnic Poles Leader in Belarus is Warned

Leader of the Union of Poles in Belarus Angelica Borys has been officially warned by prosecutors in the western city of Grodno to stop her activities otherwise she will be charged. She was instructed not to organize meetings outside the UPB seat in Grodno, which the Belarusian authorities regard as instigation to civil unrest.

Borys said after the questioning that she did not intend to stop meeting other Poles. Earlier she handed out leaflets calling on Poles to boycott the forthcoming congress of ethnic Poles in Belarus.

Source: *Polskie Radio*; August 4, 2005;
<http://www.radio.com.pl/polonia/article.asp?Id=25869&j=2>

17. Poland's Relations With Belarus Fray After Raid on Ethnic Poles

Poland's relations with neighboring Belarus, a country the U.S. calls Europe's last dictatorship, have slumped into crisis as the former communist allies trade insults over the arrest of ethnic Poles and expulsion of diplomats.

Security forces in Belarus on July 27 raided the offices of an association of ethnic Poles in Grodno, 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) from the border, creating a "serious crisis," said Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rotfeld. Poland's ambassador in the Belarus capital Minsk was recalled. Belarus says the group's leaders are guilty of embezzlement and illegal gathering.

Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko, an ally of Russia's Vladimir Putin and set to run for a third term in 2007, is wary of the influence of Poland, a former communist ally and now a member of the European Union and NATO, said Warsaw Mayor Lech Kaczynski. Lukashenko accused Poland of "efforts to spark a revolution in Belarus" through 20,000 members of the Polish association, Warsaw-based daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* said July 27.

"Lukashenko is terribly afraid of a repeat of what happened in Ukraine," said Kaczynski, a Polish presidential candidate, in a July 30 interview.

Polish President Aleksandr Kwasniewski helped mediate between the Ukrainian government and opposition leaders when hundreds of thousands protested a Russian-backed candidate's victory in November presidential elections. Viktor Yushchenko, who wants Ukraine to join the EU, won the rerun in December.

Lukashenko, in power since 1994, is eligible to run for a third term after winning a referendum last October that scrapped a constitutional two-term limit.

"Last True Dictatorship"

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called Belarus the "last true dictatorship in the center of Europe" in April. President George W. Bush in May called for "free and open elections" in Belarus. International monitoring organizations say Lukashenko has rigged elections.

After communism fell in Poland in 1989, that nation focused on catching up with its western neighbors. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 prompted Belarus to strengthen ties with Russia. Relations between Poland and Belarus cooled further when the former joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1999, and took a turn for the worse in March when Belarus said the Association of Poles elected a new leader illegally.

In July, Lukashenko said his priority is to gain Russian support as he runs for re-election, reported U.K.-based news service Oxford Analytica Ltd. The two countries have discussed a political union and a common currency for several years.

Hunting Poles

Many Poles are calling on their government to take stronger action in response to the arrests of dozens of the independent association's members in recent weeks. About 400,000 ethnic Poles live in Belarus, or about 4 percent of the population.

Headlines on the front page of Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* since the July 27 raid include "Belarus: Hunting Poles" and "Poles Under Lukashenko's Whip." *Rzeczpospolita* said "Lukashenko Terrorized Poles." On Aug. 2, 500 ethnic Poles gathered in front of a church in Grodno to protest the arrests.

"Lukashenko isn't interested in things like human rights," said Mariusz Chodzen, a 27-year-old Polish hairdresser in Warsaw. "We should break all diplomatic ties with Belarus, evacuate the Polish minority and close the border."

Polish Foreign Minister Rotfeld said July 28 that the ambassador to Belarus was recalled until relations "normalize."

Lukashenko 'Afraid'

Belarus has shut down more than 100 organizations on suspicion they may encourage opposition to the regime, said political analyst Pawel Kazanecki in a phone interview.

"Lukashenko is afraid of international organizations," Kazanecki, president of the Warsaw-based East European Democratic Center, said. "Russia was not happy about Poland and its role in Ukraine last year. As far as it is concerned, these pro-democratic movements are not the way forward."

Belarusians living in Poland said Lukashenko is concerned Poland may show support for the opposition movement in Belarus.

"Lukashenko is mainly concerned with taking care of himself, and what Poland could bring is a threat to him," said Siarzuk Wolkowycki, a 26-year-old Belarusian student in Warsaw.

Belarus has expelled three Polish diplomats, with the first two leaving in May. Poland has retaliated by kicking out three Belarusian diplomats. Belarus says it didn't start the troubles.

"We are having a crisis at the moment but it began with the Association of Poles breaking the law when it voted for a new president this year," said Andrzej Frolkow, Belarusian consul in the Polish city of Gdansk, in a July 28 interview.

The association voted for Angelika Boris as president in March after members protested the previous head, Tadeusz Kruczkowski, was put in place to carry out government orders.

"The election was carried out legally," said Kazanecki of the East European Democratic Center. "But the Justice Minister refused to accept the registration of the new board."

*Source: Katya Andrusz, Bloomberg L.P.; August 4, 2005;
<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000085&sid=aExX1U3eI8ok&refer=europe>*

18. Belarus Accuses EU, U.S. of Political Pressure

The Foreign Ministry of Belarus has accused the European Union and the United States of exerting political pressure on it and inciting inter-ethnic discord.

The ministry released a statement rejecting accusations made by the EU and U.S. that non-governmental organizations were being oppressed in Belarus. "The unilateral and politicized approach of evaluating the situation in Belarus confirms [their] aim to change the independent course of the Belarusian state," the Foreign Ministry said.

Brussels and Washington had earlier criticized Minsk over the situation surrounding the Belarusian Union of Poles. The government refused to recognize elections to the top posts of this organization, which led to relations between Minsk and Warsaw deteriorating. Six diplomats in all have been expelled in tit for tat moves in the last three months.

Ukraine and Moldova supported the EU statement, which led to the Ukrainian ambassador and Moldova's representative being summoned to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry over the "unfriendly nature of this step."

"The European Union, by supporting the unfounded claims to Belarus of a member country, has entered the slippery slope of inciting inter-ethnic discord on its borders," the statement continued. The ministry said the Moldovan and Ukrainian diplomats had been informed about the efforts the Belarusian authorities were making to ensure national minorities, including Ukrainians and Moldovans, enjoyed their rights.

The ministry said the heads of the two diplomatic missions had been summoned in the hope that Moldova and Ukraine would pursue balanced policies in the spirit of friendship and the good neighborly relations that the countries had long enjoyed with Belarus.

Source: RIA Novosti, August 4, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

19. No Journalists Please

On August 4 in Smargon a meeting of the heads of Smargon District with members of Smargon affiliate of The Union of Poles in Belarus took place. The delegates for the regional meeting of the organization were to be elected there. Local journalists came to the meeting too. However, the head of the regional affiliate Teresa Piotrova claimed that all journalists should leave the meeting because they only stir up the conflict connected with the Union of Poles.

Attempts to make Svetlana Stankevich, *Mestnaya Gazeta's* reporter, Oks-TV's camera crew including Hanna Shaturka and Aleksandr Burau, and Ina Dabrydzen, a state regional newspaper's reporter, gave no results. But Mechyslav Hoj, the head of Smargon District Executive Committee, made the journalists leave the room saying that "the nation demands it" The journalists left the meeting.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, August 11, 2005; www.baj.ru

20. No Change in Andrei Klimov's Verdict

The Minsk City Court upheld the sentence of the Tsentralny District Court against the opposition politician Andrei Klimov, according to Radio Svaboda.

On June 10, 2005, the Tsentralny District Court found Andrei Klimov guilty of organizing the March 25 opposition street protest and sentenced him to one-and-a-half years in prison. Due to the fact that the politician has been held in a temporary detention facility since April 22, he will serve one year and three months of his sentence.

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta; August 9, 2005; www.bdg.by

21. Belarusian Scientist Released Early From Prison

A prominent Belarusian scientist who was given a lengthy prison sentence after criticizing the way in which the authorities dealt with the Chornobyl disaster has been released early.

Yuri Bandazhevskii, a nuclear scientist, arrived home in Minsk late on 7 August. He told the AFP news agency he had not expected an early release and was still half "in shock."

Bandazhevskii was given an eight-year sentence in 2001 after accusing the government of irresponsibility for allegedly concealing the effects of radiation from the Chornobyl disaster in neighboring Ukraine.

Amnesty International had listed him as a prisoner of conscience.

Source: RFE/RL, August 8, 2005; www.rferl.org

22. Polish Photojournalist Expelled, Banned from Belarus for Five Years

A Polish photojournalist was expelled from Belarus on Saturday and banned from the country for five years. The Committee to Protect Journalists said today it is disturbed by the expulsion of Adam Tuchlinksi, 25, of the weekly news magazine *Przekroj*.

Belarusian security agents detained Tuchlinksi as he was about to board a Poland-bound train in the western city of Grodno, according to international reports. Agents took him to a local police station where he was held for several hours and told he lacked proper accreditation to work in Belarus. He returned to Poland on a later train on Saturday, The Associated Press reported.

Tuchlinksi was visiting Belarus on a tourist visa, the Polish news agency PAP reported, citing information from the local Polish Association of Belarus. It was unclear whether he had done any journalism work during his visit to Grodno, which has a sizeable population of ethnic Poles.

Tuchlinksi had been detained before by Belarusian security services (KGB). During local elections in March, KGB agents detained him and two other Polish journalists at a polling station in Grodno, citing a lack of accreditation. The three were released after three hours after the Polish consul intervened on their behalf, the AP reported.

Saturday's expulsion follows the recent arrests of several members of the Polish Association of Belarus stemming from demonstrations in Grodno. Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko has accused the group of scheming to overthrow him, the AP said.

Also on Saturday, Belarusian authorities refused to admit independent Polish journalist Marcin Smialowski, PAP reported. The news agency said Smialowski had a proper press accreditation and visa.

"We're concerned by the restrictive actions taken against our colleagues, and we urge Belarusian authorities to allow both Adam Tuchlinksi and Marcin Smialowski to report in Belarus without fear of repercussions," CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper said.

Source: *Committee to Protect Journalists; August 8, 2005;*
<http://www.cpj.org/news/2005/Belarus08aug05na.html>

23. Belarusian Police Disperse Minsk Demonstration

Reports say Belarusian police today dispersed an opposition rally outside the Polish Embassy in Minsk, detaining five demonstrators.

Agence France Presse says the demonstration was organized by supporters of a Polish Community Association that Belarusian authorities accuse of fomenting revolution in the country.

The agency says the five detainees are activists of Belarus' opposition Youth Front who said they had come to express solidarity with the Union of Poles in Belarus and the Polish people.

Also today, a rival anti-Polish demonstration was organized by supporters of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

Relations between Minsk and Warsaw have deteriorated in the past few weeks, with Belarusian authorities accusing Poland of spearheading alleged U.S.-backed efforts to topple Lukashenko.

Source: RFE/RL, August 5, 2005; www.rferl.org

24. Belarus Sentences Another Ethnic Polish Leader

Belarus sentenced the editor of a Polish-language newspaper to 10 days in jail -- the sixth member of a Polish cultural union to be punished in a recent crackdown.

Andrzej Pisalnik was found guilty of taking part in an unlicensed demonstration on 3 July, Belarus's independence day.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry in Minsk today dismissed as farfetched statements by the United States and European Union earlier this week condemning moves against Belarus' ethnic Polish community.

The ministry accused both the United States and the EU of interfering in Minsk's internal affairs. Neighboring Ukraine said today that it is concerned by what it called Belarus's angry and "inadequate" reaction to Kyiv's backing the EU call for Minsk to respect the human rights of its 500,00-strong Polish minority.

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

BUSINESS

25. Belarus' GDP Grows in January-July

The gross domestic product (GDP) of Belarus in January-July grew by 8.8 percent in comparison with the same period of 2004, Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky of Belarus reported to President Alexander Lukashenko on Thursday, the presidential press service reported on Friday.

The prime minister pointed to a high growth of industrial production, despite the fact that several biggest enterprises are under technological repair in the summer period.

According to the ministry's preliminary data, industrial enterprises increased in January-July the volume of production by 9.6 percent.

The Belarusian government forecasts that the country's GDP will grow in 2005 by 8.5-10 percent and its industrial production - - by 8-9.5 percent, the economic news agency PRIME-TASS reports.

Source: Itar-Tass; August 12, 2005; www.itar-tass.com

26. Belarus Harvested 37 Pct of Areas

Unfavorable weather complicates harvest campaign progress in Belarus. As of August 8, Belarus harvested grains and pulses from 785,000 hectares, which is 37 percent of total area against 24 percent a year ago. Total grain crop makes 2.468 million tones, up by 776,000 tones from last year, reports Agriculture Ministry of Belarus.

Current year yields are higher compared t last year. Average grain yield over Belarus makes 3.21 tones per hectare.

The government has already bought from producers 223,500 tones of grain, which is 22.3 percent of the volume, which government intends to purchase.

Source: APK – Inform Information Agency; August 8, 2005; <http://www.agrimarket.info/showart.php?id=27527>

27. Belarus Bans Russian Poultry Over Bird Flu

Belarus has banned poultry imports from Russia following a bird flu outbreak in eastern Russia, Novosti reported Thursday.

The nation's agricultural ministry banned imports of poultry meat, eggs and fluff to prevent the virus from spreading to Belarus.

Meanwhile, Belarusian authorities have tightened veterinary control and sanitary measures at poultry farms.

Local veterinary services are to provide the Agriculture and Food Ministry with weekly information about epidemiological developments.

Belarusians have been advised to buy poultry from special shops with regular veterinary monitoring.

Source: WebIndia123.Com; August 4, 2005;
http://news.webindia123.com/news/showdetails.asp?id=103742&n_date=20050804&cat=Business

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