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## **DOMESTIC**

### **1. President of Belarus Signs Decree Aimed to Eliminate Subjective Approach of Employers When Concluding Contracts With Employees**

On August 23 the president of Belarus signed decree #392 aimed to eliminate taking subjective approach by employers when concluding and renewing contracts with their employees.

As BelTA was informed in the presidential press service, in accordance with the decree, a contract of employment can be renewed for a minimum term of 1 year within 5 years stipulated by the Labor Code of the Republic of Belarus. A contract can also be renewed for a term shorter than 1 year with the written permission of an employee.

When a contract expires or if an employee is transferred to another position a new contract can be concluded.

In order to enhance protection of parental rights, in case with pregnant women, women and men on their maternal and paternal leaves the employment contracts will be concluded and renewed for the term not shorter than the leaves.

The document also aims to strengthen the social protection of employees of the pre-pension age. With women and men aged 53 and 58 respectively, who do not violate labor discipline, labor contracts will be concluded for a minimum of two years.

The decree contains a norm on the social protection of pregnant women, women having children under 3 (disabled children under 18), when labor contracts for an uncertain period are concluded. Employers can conclude such labor contracts with them only by mutual consent.

On the whole, the decree aims to legally regulate issues connected with additional guarantees to employees when a contract employment form is introduced. It also ensures strengthening the social protection and the labor rights of employees.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; August 24, 2005; <http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/0/8AAB370EF53EB879C2257067002869BD?OpenDocument>*

### **2. Belarus to Purchase New Combat Aircraft After 2010**

Belarus will start purchasing new combat aircraft after 2010, a senior Air Force officer said Monday.

Major-General Mikhail Levitsky, the deputy commander of the Air Force and Air Defense, told journalists: "Modern aircraft have a service life of 25-30 years. After 2010, we shall start purchasing new warplanes. We are currently thinking about purchasing Russian-made aircraft and helicopters that can be modernized."

Levitsky said it would be practical for Belarus to fly multi-functional Su-30 (Flanker) fighters.

"This is a reliable plane capable of providing air support and delivering strikes against various targets and troops and transport facilities deep in the enemy's defenses," the general said. "It is two to three times more efficient in terms of combat power and combat use compared with Su-24M (NATO reporting name Fencer-D) and Su-25 (Frogfoot) planes."

"The Belarusian Air Force will operate Russian-made Il-76 (Candid) medium-range military transport aircraft until 2015," Levitsky added. "After that, Belarus will purchase new modified transport planes in line with its state rearmament program."

Belarus intends to purchase Il-76MF planes instead of Il-76MD military transport aircraft. The Il-76MF has an extended cargo hold and increased fuel efficiency. The aircraft is outfitted with a

navigation system, which meets the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization, Levitsky said.

Belarus also intends to purchase An-74 (Coaler) military transport planes to replace An-26 (Curl) aircraft. The An-74 can carry five times more than the An-26.

The Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense are also considering buying Russian-made Mi-28N (Havoc) multi-purpose attack helicopters.

*Source: RIA Novosti, August 22, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>*

### **3. Belarus President Says Soviet-Style Agriculture Fits National Mentality**

Aleksandr Lukashenko, President of Belarus, said on Friday, Aug 19, that Soviet-style collective farms fit the mentality of Slavic people better than private land ownership. "It is our salvation that we did not rush to divide up our collective farms," Lukashenko, quoted by *Be/TA* news agency, said during a visit to a farm in western Belarus. "The main thing is that our people will not accept this. Slavs are simply not ready for this psychologically. I think there is no future in private farming. There is very little attraction in it for stable farming enterprises."

Lukashenko, accused by Western politicians of crushing civil liberties and clinging to outdated Soviet-era economics, had previously ordered loss-making farms turned over to individual producers, to be worked on long-term leases.

State and collective farms left over from Communist times account for the bulk of agricultural activity in Belarus, *Reuters* reports. The government plans big increases in aid to this sector, with allocations due to total \$30 billion over the next five years.

Other ex-Soviet states, like Russia and Ukraine, have all but abolished collective farms and operate with a mixed system made up of private farms, co-operatives and long-term leases. Small private plots, authorized in communist times, often provided vital supplies of food when harvests failed.

Lukashenko makes routine appearances during the harvest and prizes to top combine operators are awarded in the best Soviet tradition.

Belarus last year brought in its highest grain harvest in 15 years of seven million tones and forecasts for this year have predicted similar results.

Lukashenko has called for the harvest to be boosted to 8 million tones over the next five years to reduce imports of feed grain. Analysts believe harvests in ex-Soviet states depend more on favorable weather than on the form of property used.

*Source: MosNews.Com, August 19, 2005; [www.mosnews.com](http://www.mosnews.com)*

## **REGIONAL**

### **4. Ukraine To Join Moscow-Led Economic Project**

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko today said that his country will participate in a common economic pact with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

Yushchenko told reporters in Kyiv that Ukraine will make some 10 proposals at a planned 26-27 August meeting designed to review the prospects of the Russian-led Single Economic Space (SES). The SES was set up in 2003, but does not yet exist. Yushchenko also said his country will simplify tax and fiscal policies in order to attract more international investment.

"Keeping in mind that both directions [East and West] are crucial for us, it is important to understand our priority -- we cannot accept circumstances under which the organization of our eastern policy would block or come into conflict with the principles of our policy towards the European Union."

Yushchenko's statement contradicts earlier remarks made by his economic minister.

Addressing journalists after talks in Moscow with Russia's Economic Development and Trade Minister German Gref, Serhiy Teryokhin on 19 August ruled out Ukraine's participation in the project.

But Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko subsequently said Teryokhin's comments should be considered a mere "recommendation" and that the decision on whether Kyiv should call off its participation to the SES would be made "at the highest level."

*Source: RFE/RL, August 22, 2005; www.rferl.org*

## **5. Business Cooperation Council of Belarus and Moscow Consider Priority Guidelines on Partnership Development**

A sitting of the business cooperation council of the Republic of Belarus and Moscow was held on August 19 in Gomel. The Belarusian delegation was headed by plenipotentiary representative of the president of Belarus – deputy Prime Minister Vasily Dolgolev, the Moscow side was represented by Deputy Chairman of the government on regional cooperation and sport Mikhail Men.

The sides discussed priority guidelines of the partnership development, analyzed the agreements in the sphere of industry and improvement of the commodity distribution network of Belarusian companies in Moscow. The parties decided on increase in foodstuff deliveries to the Russian capital, interaction between construction compounds, creation of the Belarusian trade and information center in the Russian exhibition center. Besides, the sides considered issues on financing joint projects including the trade-investment project Minsk-Moscow, construction of the foodstuff wholesale trade compound Moscow-Republic of Belarus and trade-exhibition center Minsk.

On behalf of the Moscow authorities the delegation handed over 1300 books and periodicals to the Slavonic Library and Gomel region public library n.a. Lenin.

Members of the Moscow delegation also visited joint stock companies Gomeloboi and Gomeldrev, got familiar with product offerings of the food, light and processing industries.

On August 20 the council of business cooperation of the Republic of Belarus and Moscow held round-table discussions on cooperation on the Belarusian and Moscow markets as well as in construction. After the official part the participants made a tour of the city and visited Gomel Rumyantsev-Paskevich Palace and World War Museum.

*{Text revised by the Editors}*

*Source: BelTA; August 22, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>*

## **6. Situation in Belarus Discussed by Four Presidents**

President Aleksander Kwasniewski has expressed the hope that Lithuania, Ukraine and Georgia will join the dialogue with Belarus. The Polish head of state together with his counterparts from the three states is taking part in the celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the youth camp Artek in the Crimea, which during the Soviet times was said to be the first of its kind in the Soviet Union.

Unofficially it is said however that the main purpose of the presidents' meeting is the situation in Belarus. The heads of state of Georgia, Lithuania and Ukraine have expressed understanding for the Polish concern over the situation in Belarus. The president of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko has declared he will conduct talks with the Belarus head of state Aleksander Lukashenko during the oncoming Summit of CIS-the Commonwealth of Independent States.

*Source: Polskie Radio, August 18, 2005;  
<http://www.radio.com.pl/polonia/article.asp?tId=26396&j=2>*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **7. Most of US Assistance for Democracy Programs in Belarus Will Go Toward Presidential Election Monitoring, Ambassador Says**

Most of the money to be earmarked in the US 2006 and 2007 budgets for democracy programs in Belarus will go toward the monitoring of the 2006 presidential election, George Krol, the US ambassador to Belarus, said in an interview published by Belarus' private newspaper Obozrevatel on Friday.

Funds will be provided for election observation training and campaigns to inform voters about their rights, he said. Some part of the funding will be made available to the independent media, according to the ambassador.

In late July, the US House of Representatives approved a bill that would provide for the allocation of \$24 million for democracy programs in Belarus in 2006 and 2007. The draft legislation also stipulates that \$10 million is to be made available for expanding US broadcasting to the country.

As Mr. Krol said, his country does not seek to overthrow the Belarusian government with the help of violent protests but wants to ensure that the presidential election is fair.

However, he noted that the United States is concerned about the weak powers of the Belarusian national legislature, and the lack of freedom of expression.

The USA has nothing less than deep respect for the Belarusian people and wants to see a free and prosperous Belarus, he said. It wants the Belarusian authorities to respect the rights of people, the constitution and its OSCE commitments, he added.

Earlier this week, Belarusian leader Aleksandr Lukashenko issued a presidential edict that bans the use of foreign technical assistance in preparing and conducting elections and referendums, and staging demonstrations and gatherings.

It also prohibits its use "for seizing power or overthrowing the government, interfering in the internal affairs of the Republic of Belarus, or inciting such actions, propagating war, violence for political purposes, fomenting ethnic, religious and racial hatred and for other acts prohibited by the law."

Under the edict, international technical assistance includes the organization and conduct of workshops, conferences and public discussions.

*Source: Charter97; August 24, 2005; [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org)*

### **8. Growing Tension Between Belarus and Poland**

The arrests of members of the Polish minority in Belarus are an indication of the growing fears of President Lukashenka that Poland will support the opposition.

President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenka has ruled for eleven years, and the dictator would dearly like to win the upcoming elections in 2006. However, last year's 'orange revolution' in

neighboring Ukraine, which was supported by Poland, has led to growing tension between Minsk and Warsaw.

Recent weeks have seen the expulsion of Polish diplomats and the refusal of entry into Belarus of a group of Polish MEPs, led by European Parliament Vice-President Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, who intended to inspect the conditions of the Polish minority in the border area. Members of this minority have been arrested. The MEPs intend to start independent radio and TV broadcasting directed at the Belarussian public.

An open letter signed by a group of elder statesmen such as Vaclav Havel and Richard von Weizsäcker has recently called on the EU and the US to back the democratization of Belarus.

*Source: EurActiv; August 23, 2005; <http://www.euractiv.com/Article?tcmuri=tcm:29-143356-16&type=News>*

### **9. Slovakia's Business Delegation to Visit Belarus on August 22-26**

A delegation of the Slovakian business circles will visit Belarus on August 22-26. It will be headed by president of Slovakia's chamber of commerce and industry, vice president of the European Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry Peter Mihok.

As BelTA was informed in the Belarussian embassy in Bratislava, Slovakian businessmen will visit Brest, Minsk, Mogilev and Grodno oblasts. The regional chambers of commerce and industry will organize cooperation exchanges, talks with representatives of Belarussian manufactures, visits to Belarussian companies and free economic zones.

The Slovakian delegation is also expected to conduct meetings in the Council of Ministers and Belarussian economy ministry.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; August 23, 2005; <http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/0/47F9CA0C624F45B7C22570660025A702?OpenDocument>*

### **10. Feature: Belarus' Cuddly Stalinist Dictator**

He may be an anachronistic throwback to Soviet times, but Belarus President Alexander Grigoryevich Lukashenko uses resolutely 21st century methods of clinging to power. The Web site of "Europe's last dictator," as the Bush administration dubs him, is updated daily and now available in English for his legions of international fans.

Via the "President's Receiving Room," Internet surfers can even write an e-mail to the 51-year-old leader congratulating him on Belarus' whopping grain harvest - 5 million tons and counting -- and his decision to award the Chinese ambassador to Kiev the Order of Friendship of Peoples "in recognition of his great personal contribution to the strengthening and developing of scientific-technological and cultural ties between Belarus and China."

Lukashenko may be pilloried in the West for rigging elections, brutally suppressing any opposition to his regime, whipping up hostility to the country's Polish minority, fostering a leadership cult worthy of former communist dictator Joseph Stalin and freezing his country in Soviet time, but his personal Web site ([www.president.gov.by/eng](http://www.president.gov.by/eng)) introduces us to a kinder, gentler man who has only the interests of the Belarus people at heart.

We learn that the balding, mustachioed president grew up without a father and had to take care of his family himself.

That is why it is logical that as early as in childhood such qualities as perseverance, respect to work, sensibility to truth and verity as the main bases of the human soul were being revealed," reads the fawning biography of the president on his Web site.

Lukashenko's "in-depth understanding of events, hard work, sense of duty, realism, fairness and fidelity to principle" enabled the Belarusian Agricultural Academy graduate to rise rapidly through the ranks of the communist system. Before becoming president in 1994, he was active in the All-Union Lenin Communist Union of Youth, served in the Soviet army, managed a state farm and was elected to the Supreme Council of the of the Belarus Republic -- though his Web site strenuously denies that he was involved in the communist party or Soviet nomenklatura.

When Lukashenko, who favors a union with Russia, took over the reigns of state he inherited a country in tatters after its recent divorce from Moscow.

Pessimism and apathy were dominant in the society, centuries-old morals were being ruined, families were being broken, and thousands were slipping down to the abysses of poverty and loss of their individuality," says his Web site.

Luckily for the people of Belarus, they had elected a leader who was not only willing to toil 12-14 hours a day on behalf of his citizens, but who was prepared to take responsibility for his actions as head of state.

The activities of A.G. Lukashenko are inseparable from the life of the country, from the life of working collectives and ordinary people," says the president's official biography. "One can hardly find any notable event in Belarus for the last 5-7 years, which was not influenced by the energy and the will of this man."

Forget former Czech President Vaclav Havel -- who spent almost a decade in jail for standing up to the communist regime in Prague -- Lukashenko is "the only politician in Europe who perceives the truth as, above all else, a category of conscience." Also, pay no attention to those U.S. and EU sanctions against the Belarus president, for "A.G. Lukashenko enjoys enormous prestige both in our country and abroad."

The "Father of the Belarus people," as he likes to describe himself, is certainly no slouch. His Web site features pictures of the great leader clad in tight-fitting Lycra shorts at an in-line skating competition, inspecting wheat crops in the Grodno region of the country and wielding a hockey stick in a friendly match between the president's team and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In his spare time, the man the International Herald Tribune describes as the "complete Soviet-style dictator," likes to read classical literature.

Olga Stuzhinskaya, a representative of the Belarus opposition in Brussels, denies the regime in Minsk is communist. "It's Lukashenkist," says the member of the European Coalition. "He may use a lot of the techniques from the Soviet era, but basically he rules the way he likes."

Despite Lukashenko's strong-arm tactics at home and his pariah status abroad, the president has benefited from the backing of a large chunk of Belarus' voters since coming to power over a decade ago. But with elections due next year, Stuzhinskaya believes the hollowness of Lukashenko's support is about to be revealed.

To understand the regime in Belarus, picture a balloon -- on the outside it looks OK, but inside it is empty and about to explode."

It is easy to write off Lukashenko as a Stalinist for the Internet age, but as the presidential Web site observes: "Many are captivated by his honesty and openness, will and perseverance, energy, and constant willingness to learn from whomever his destiny brings him in touch."

The soccer-playing, literature-loving, post-Soviet Renaissance man is also renowned throughout the eastern European republic for his modesty, humility and reluctance to blow his own trumpet.

*Source: Gareth Harding, World Peace Herald: August 22, 2005; www.wpherald.com*

### **11. OSCE Concerned About Belarus Cartoons Libel**

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has expressed concern about a criminal libel case in Belarus that centers on satirical animated Internet cartoons featuring the president.

The two-minute cartoons feature caricatures of President Aleksandr Lukashenko and his administration and poke fun at him for his Soviet style of leading the country.

Last week, Paval Marozau, one of the founders of the cartoon series, told The Associated Press that security agents had questioned him and two others, accusing them of insulting the honor of Lukashenko.

The OSCE's media freedom representative, Miklos Haraszti, said that treating cartoons as acts of criminal libel or insult is completely against the concept of free political debate.

Lukashenko, who has ruled since 1994, has quashed dissent, closed independent media and suppressed opposition parties.

*Source: RFE/RL, August 22, 2005; www.rferl.org*

### **12. Thirteen Public People Issue Petition Criticizing Belarus President Lukashenko, Ask U.S. and UN for Help**

13 Western public figures, including George Soros and Mary Robinson, have signed a petition calling for the world to support democracy in the "Europe's last dictatorship", Belarus, Russian news agencies reported Saturday. They accuse President Lukashenko in violating human rights and systematic eliminating of the opposition.

Lukashenko violates human rights and civil freedoms on a daily basis, the petition says, he liquidates and imprisons his opponents and journalists. He also deceives people through the media that he fully controls, *Gazeta.ru* reported quoting the petition.

The letter calls UN and the United States to support democratic Forces in Belarus and help create independent media that would broadcast from neighboring territories, the *Ekho Moskvyy* radio station reported.

The petition has been signed by archbishop Desmond Tutu, former Czech president Vatslav Gavel, former Irish president Mary Robinson and billionaire George Soros.

*Source: MosNews.Com, August 20, 2005; www.mosnews.com*

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **13. Activists of Georgian Kmara Under Arrest in Minsk**

Two citizens of Georgia, activists of the Kmara movement, Georgy Kandelaki and Luka Tsuladze, are still under arrest in Minsk. The activists of the Georgian movement, as well as coordinator of the Belarusian movement Zubr Vladimir Kobets, were detained today in Minsk by people in mufti, who presented themselves as officers of a criminal investigation department. Activists of youth movement were placed to police cars and taken to a police department.

Vladimir Kobets, Georgy Kandelaki and Luka Tsuladze were first taken to a police department Number 1 of Maskovsky district of Minsk, and in an hour they were transferred to the criminal investigation department of the Internal Affairs Central Administration of Minsk Executive Committee. In two hours, after taking fingerprints, Vladimir Kobets was released. As said by Kobets, one of the high officers of the police department, police officer, offered his apologies,

saying that the detention was a “mistake during the identity check operation aimed against persons from the Caucasus”.

Kmara activists are still in the criminal investigation department. Their mobile phones are switched off, no information could be received from them.

It is not excluded that the citizens of Georgia can be expelled from the country. As we have informed, Georgy Kandelaki, a journalist of one of Tbilisi newspapers, had been already detained by pro-Kuchma special services officers during the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine.

*[Text revised by the Editors]*

*Source: Charter97; August 24, 2005; www.charter97.org*

#### **14. Slavery and Belarus**

"Human trafficking" is a fast-growing problem in society, and is now the third most profitable criminal activity in the world. Besides becoming highly lucrative, trafficking in people is increasingly transnational in scope. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, between 2 and 4 million people are trafficked worldwide every year, the majority in East Asia and as many as 500,000 people in Europe.

"Trafficking in Persons 2005", a report published in June 2005 by the U.S. Department of State, shows that trafficking likely extends to every country in the world. According to the report, which looks at trafficking in 150 countries, industrial nations are not the source of human trafficking, but rather its destination points. The less wealthy the country is, the higher is the number of "people in danger".

Belarus is one of the main source countries for women and children trafficked to Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Japan. There are several reasons for this: good geographical position (at the "crossroads of Europe"), low standard of living, and, of course, beautiful women. This last "fact" is subjective, but is, nevertheless, recognized by many men who come to Belarus.

Early in 2004, during a trip from his presidential palace to his residence, the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, decided there were too many faces of foreign women and girls on billboards. As a "preventive" step against human trafficking, he signed a decree that requires companies to use only Belarusian faces in their advertising. This is supposed to help more young Belarusian women get more modeling jobs in the country, instead of going abroad, where they may suffer an increased risk of being "trafficked". Lukashenko didn't bother thinking of the impact his decree had on lots of foreign companies, whose "brand faces" are not Belarusian. Shell Oil, whose "brand face" is Michael Schumacher, now refuses to advertise in Belarus, as do a number of other companies.

"The Government of Belarus does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking," says the Trafficking in Persons report. "However, it is making significant efforts to do so." By "significant efforts", the report's authors mean a new presidential decree to combat trafficking in persons, N3, signed in early March 2005.

Kofi Annan, the secretary general of the UN, would probably like the title of the decree (as U.S. officials did). But no one is likely to agree, if they actually read the decree, that shutting down all the modeling and marriage agencies in Belarus is going to solve the problem. Neither is restraining students from going to work or study abroad, and neither is making it impossible for foreigners to adopt Belarusian children.

According to the decree, any activity connected with job placement abroad is to be licensed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Just after the decree was signed, two leading Belarusian modeling agencies were closed down for "not complying with the new rules". The director of one of the

agencies was jailed. Twenty other modeling agencies were "given a chance" to get a new license by the 1st of July. None of them managed to do so. This is not the first regulation stifling the Belarusian modeling business, but it may be the last.

Making matters worse, none of the marriage agencies in Belarus managed to get a license to operate under the new rules. "There is a huge demand for this kind of service in Belarus," says the director of the former Lonely Hearts agency. "There are not enough men for all the women in the country; 13 percent of women in their 'marriage age' are lonely." Because of the government's actions, marriage agencies are now operating in the underground economy. This hardly helps solve the human trafficking problem in the country.

But perhaps the most serious impact of the new decree is on students. From now on, all university students and school children will need permission from the Ministry of Education to study abroad. In early August 2005, the Ministry refused to let 59 of the brightest school children in Belarus participate in an exchange program with the U.S. (this program has operated successfully in Belarus, with no kidnappings, for the last 13 years). "This decree has nothing to do with caring about the young generation. It just proves the growing tendency of authorities to self-isolate the country," says Alexander Ruhlja, the former head of the Belarus State University's International Affairs Department.

Decree N3 doesn't benefit orphans either. "Twelve thousand Belarusian orphans have been deprived of the chance to be adopted by foreigners," says Natalja Pospelova, the director of the Belarusian Adopting Center. Last year, foreign families adopted 596 children. Now, according to the decree, one can adopt a child only with the consent of the minister of education, who is personally responsible for the fate of all adoptions he approves. Will he personally meet with all 600 foster parents? Not likely. Nor is the minister likely to risk his chair for the sake of some foreigners or an orphan. "REFUSED" is much more likely to be stamped on every adoption request from here on out.

"It's a standard reaction of Belarusian authorities to a rising problem," says Valerij Karbalevich, a policy expert with The Strategy, a leading independent think tank. "This reaction can be described with the following analogy: the medicine prescribed is more hazardous for the body than the disease itself."

The "anti-trafficking strategy" of the Belarusian government doesn't diminish trafficking in persons. Less economic and political freedom and more regulations only increase the number of people eager to emigrate in search of "a better life" and the number of illegal intermediaries eager to help them.

The root of the problem is not in such intermediaries, but rather in the state. In Belarus, the state doesn't allow people enough opportunities for self-realization. Poverty, corruption, lack of education, and the eternal human yearning for improving one's life make people vulnerable to trafficking. Pro-market economic reforms and freedom in general are the real remedies to treat this disease. Unfortunately, regulations are much easier to prescribe.

*Source: Anna Volk, Tech Central Station: August 23, 2005;  
<http://www.techcentralstation.com/082305D.html>*

### **15. Belarus Closes Down Independent Newspaper Publisher**

The authorities in Belarus have announced the liquidation of an independent newspaper publisher.

City authorities in the Belarus capital of Minsk issued a statement on Monday quoted by AFP announcing the closure of the Denpress publishing company, the publisher of the *Den (Day)* newspaper. The reason given was that the publisher "interrupted its commercial activities for six months and failed to explain the fact to tax officials."

The publishing house's director, Nikolai Markevich, rejected the accusation as groundless, saying that the company could not function properly as the courts had stripped it of its legal address earlier in the year, forcing it to print the newspaper in neighboring Russia.

Denpress had operated out of the western city of Grodno, close to the Polish border, but also had an office in the capital.

The newspaper frequently published materials criticizing the authorities. In particular, it published verses deemed by the authorities to have insulted Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko. After that there were reports of pressure being exerted by the authorities.

Over the last two years the Belarusian authorities have closed over 20 independent newspapers, the Belarus Journalists Association reported.

*Source: MosNews.Com, August 23, 2005; www.mosnews.com*

### **16. German Broadcaster Makes Waves With Russian-Language Plans**

In June, Germany's international broadcaster Deutsche Welle announced its plans to launch a Russian-language information program for Belarus called the "Belarusian Chronicle." Official Minsk has so far remained silent about plans for the daily show, which is scheduled to begin in October. But many of Belarus's opposition and pro-democracy circles -- who in theory could only benefit from such an endeavor -- have reacted with alarm, indignation, and even hostility. They want Deutsche Welle to speak Belarusian to Belarusians.

Media have since reported that Deutsche Welle won a European Commission tender to organize radio broadcasts to Belarus. Bidders reportedly included international broadcasters Euronews and BBC World Service. Brussels will spend 138,000 euros (\$169,000) annually to support Deutsche Welle's Belarus project, which is to continue for three years. It was initially reported that Deutsche Welle would broadcast 15 minutes a day to Belarus, but Deutsche Welle's Russian Service Director Cornelia Rabitz later signaled that her team might in September come up with a 30-minute daily program in which 15 minutes would be devoted to European developments and another 15 minutes to Belarusian domestic news.

Aleh Trusau -- chairman of the Belarusian Language Society, a nongovernmental group working to support the mother tongue of most Belarusians -- was the first to urge Deutsche Welle to launch its Belarus broadcasts in Belarusian. "[Deutsche Welle broadcasts in Russian] would plunge Belarusian listeners deeper into the Russian information space and increase their isolation from Europe," Trusau argued in an open letter to Deutsche Welle in June. And in an interview with RFE/RL's Belarusian Service later in the month, he clarified his position further by saying, "There are a lot of Russian-language sections in international broadcasters -- Voice of America, BBC, Deutsche Welle -- that employ emigrants from Russia with an imperial point of view. For them, Ukraine and Belarus are not full-fledged nations."

Belarusian opposition leaders seeking the role of a joint democratic candidate to face President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the

2006 presidential ballot were cautious after news emerged of Deutsche Welle's plans. United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka said Deutsche Welle's broadcasts in Belarusian would be a more appropriate option but immediately added, "If we cannot influence the development of events, Russian-language broadcasts are better than nothing at all." However, most opposition leaders with any chance of securing the democratic parties' presidential nomination have chosen not to comment on the issue in any way.

As for anti-Lukashenka intellectual circles in Belarus, Deutsche Welle's project has sparked a heated debate over the fate of the Belarusian language in particular, and the country's political

and civilizational choices in general. Belarusian political scientist Vital Silitski, in an emotional letter published in the Minsk-based "Nasha Niva" weekly earlier this month, appealed to Belarusians to boycott Deutsche Welle's Russian-language broadcasts. Silitski argued that the choice of Russian for broadcasting to Belarus is the result of a "complete misunderstanding" of the Belarusian situation by "European bureaucrats" who, according to Silitski, are following Lukashenka in his attempts "to instill the notion in public opinion that the Belarusian language has no prospects or real demand among Belarus's citizens."

Silitski claimed that the EU decision to sponsor broadcasts to Belarus by Deutsche Welle's Russian Service is "absurd," since the service employs people "for whom Belarus is just an extra job and from whom one cannot expect a deep knowledge or understanding of processes under way in Belarus." Silitski stressed that "the revival of national consciousness is a necessary condition for democratization of any nation" and again scolded "European bureaucrats" for what he perceives as their support of "the tendencies that consolidate the dictatorship in Belarus." "Nasha Niva" called on its readers to become signatories to Silitski's appeal.

German diplomat Hans-Georg Wieck, former head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk and a staunch advocate of EU-sponsored broadcasting to Belarus, responded to this wave of protests in Belarus through RFE/RL's Belarusian Service earlier this month. Wieck said that neither Brussels nor Deutsche Welle is against Belarusian-language broadcasting. According to Wieck, there is currently no money to organize Belarusian-language broadcasts. "This is a problem of means. Now in Russian, later in Belarusian,"

Wieck said. "The [Deutsche Welle] new project is only the beginning."

Wieck stressed that reaction to the Deutsche Welle project in Belarus is quite understandable.

Wieck, who was instrumental in uniting the cantankerous Belarusian opposition behind a single challenger to President Lukashenka in the 2001 presidential ballot, is doubtless among the most knowledgeable Western experts on Belarus. He is also one of the very few who seem to understand the important role of the Belarusian native linguistic and cultural heritage in the possible democratization of the country. In 2001, some forces in the anti-Lukashenka electoral coalition all but sabotaged the opposition campaign because of what they regarded as a disastrous choice of the opposition's single candidate. Vladimir Hancharyk, the single candidate "imposed" by Wieck on the Belarusian opposition in 2001, was a Soviet-era trade-union functionary who remained utterly indifferent to the revival of the Belarusian language and culture.

This revival, which is being ardently advocated by a significant segment of the Belarusian opposition as a sine qua non for Belarus's "return to Europe" and no less stridently opposed by Lukashenka as a major obstacle to his "back-to-the-USSR" drive, has now been dealt a serious (even if indirect and/or unintended) blow by Brussels and Deutsche Welle.

Will Brussels, as Wieck expects, think twice and take a more favorable stance toward the Belarusian language (read: find money for Belarusian-language broadcasting) in the future? Judging by all appearances, not in the not-so-distant future. Because Brussels still faces the task of crafting a strategic policy toward Lukashenka's Belarus that would map out long-term priorities, not just "emergency measures" on the eve of major political campaigns in Belarus, to which Deutsche Welle's Belarus project appears to belong.

It is difficult to imagine any "colored revolution" taking place in Belarus next year. And it has already become obvious beyond any doubt that Europe's assistance to pro-democracy activism in Belarus -- if it is to be efficient -- should not limit itself to training in election techniques but rather embrace a much wider program of activities intended to bolster Belarusians' awareness that they are not a "Russian" nation (as recently suggested by Russian President Vladimir Putin) and that they actually belong to Europe, not to Eurasia. The promotion of the Belarusian language, whether as a tool for imparting free and unbiased information or a means for attaining

a stronger sense of national pride by Belarusians, arguably should be one of the key priorities in such a strategic program of European assistance to Belarus.

Deutsche Welle's Russian Service Director Rabitz told Belarusian journalists that her company should be praised rather than criticized for its Belarus broadcasting project. "It is stupid to say that Russian is bad and Belarusian is good," Belapan quoted her as saying on 8 August. Rabitz also noted that Deutsche Welle has been broadcasting in Russian to five post-Soviet countries in Central Asia, where she said these programs are valued, not criticized. Rabitz's irritation is perhaps to be expected. However, as far as opponents of Russian-language broadcasting from abroad to Belarus are concerned, both of those arguments miss the point.

First, nobody in Belarus appears to be imposing such a "bad-good" evaluation on the two languages. The protests are directed primarily against what is perceived as Deutsche Welle's emblematic support for the policies and ideology of Russification promoted by Lukashenka in Belarus. Some might ask, not without reason, why Deutsche Welle found funding five years ago to sponsor Ukrainian-language broadcasting to Ukraine -- the country Russified to a level comparable to that of Belarus -- and was unable to repeat the act with regard to Belarus.

Rabitz's implicit comparison of Belarus with post-Soviet Central Asia, her opponents in Belarus say, does not hold water either, since none of those five post-Soviet republics has launched the kind of nationally traumatic linguistic and cultural policy that Lukashenka did 10 years ago in Belarus. In no former Soviet Union republic is the situation of the titular language so pitiable as in Belarus. Although the 1999 census suggested that 73.7 percent of Belarus's population declared Belarusian as its native language and 36.7 percent said it speaks Belarusian at home, Belarusian has been almost completely replaced by Russian in public life and state-run media.

On the other hand, while many Belarusians (including many with university diplomas) find it difficult to speak or write freely in Belarusian, the overwhelming majority has no problems whatsoever in understanding the language. Therefore, a Belarusian-language broadcaster could reach the same audiences in Belarus as a Russian-language one. This was amply demonstrated by the highly successful, private, Belarusian-language Radio 101.2 in Minsk, which was closed down by the Lukashenka administration in mid-1990s because, as one commentator put it, it broadcast in the language of freedom, not that of suppression.

One of the participants in the "Nasha Niva" discussion about Deutsche Welle's planned broadcasts to Belarus said the use of Russian language strips the project of any practical efficiency. He argued that tuning in to the Deutsche Welle Russian-language program on shortwave (over which Deutsche Welle will broadcast to Belarus) would be incomparably harder than tuning in to a Belarusian-language broadcast because of a multitude of other Russian-language stations on the shortwave spectrum. Thus the use of Belarusian by Deutsche Welle would arguably be a more pragmatic option. Some in Belarus believe that argument is even more appealing than any case based on Belarusian trauma resulting from its government's linguistic and cultural policies.

*Source: RFE/RL, August 21, 2005; www.rferl.org*

### **17. Hrodna Journalist Andrei Paczobut Protests Against the Restriction of His Right To Travel Abroad**

*Magazyn Polski's* editor-in-chief Andrei Paczobut lodged a complaint against the restriction of his right to travel abroad to Hrodna Region Court. This decision was taken as a result of the fact that the journalist did not pay a huge fine for participation in a protest action. The journalist says he could not do it because he was serving his sentence at that time.

The decision to restrict A. Paczobut's right to travel abroad was taken by Dzmitry Matseuk on July 27. It was he who fined the journalist on July 6 for 5 million 125 thousand BRB for participation in

an illegal protest action. (The protest took place on July 6 and was connected with the illegal printing of the Union of Poles' weekly *Glos znad Niemna*).

According to Andrei Paczobut, he had already paid a great part of the fine - 3 million 700 thousand BRB - and was ready to pay the rest in parts, but on July 26 in Shchuchyn (Hrodna Region) he was detained and sentenced to a 15 days' arrest. A. Paczobut was informed about the restriction of his right to travel abroad after he was released.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, August 19, 2005; www.baj.ru*

## **BUSINESS**

### **18. Belarus's Cold and Forex Reserves to Grow by \$145 mln-\$195 mln in 2006**

The National Bank of Belarus has forecast that its gold and foreign currency reserves will grow by \$145 million-\$195 million in 2006, says a draft monetary and credit policy for 2006.

The bank estimates Belarus's international reserves will be \$1 billion-\$1.1 billion by the end of 2005. The reserves were already \$1.225 billion on August 1, up 59.1%, or by \$455 million, from the beginning of the year.

Belarus's international reserve assets, as calculated by International Monetary Fund methodology, will be at \$620 million-\$680 million by the end of 2005, says a monetary and credit policy for 2005. The National Bank plans to increase the reserves in national definition to \$3 billion by 2010.

*Source: Interfax; August 24, 2005; www.interfax.ru/e/*

### **19. Belarus Will Not Import More Than 150,000 t of Wheat This Year**

According to Director of Grain Products Department of Belarus' Ministry of Agriculture Vasily Sedin, this year Belarusian government does not plan to import more than 150,000 tones of wheat, while in the part years the annual purchases usually amounted to some 200,000 tones.

Within the last few years Belarus has been purchasing small amounts of high-glutenous wheat for improvement of baking properties of flour, milled at local grain processing enterprises. But according to Sedin, the country's collective farms are going to increase local production of wheat with high baking qualities, which will reduce the needs in imports.

The official also said that Belarus this year was able to export no less than 20,000 tones of milling rye. The interest towards purchases of this grain has been displayed by many regions of Russia. In particular, Belarusian authorities are planning supplies to Russia's westernmost exclave region of Kaliningrad, following discussion of the issue with local Governor earlier this month, BelTA agency informed.

*Source: APK-Inform Information Agency; August 22, 2005; <http://www.agrimarket.info/showart.php?id=27974>*

### **20. Belarus: Total Grain Harvest Exceeds 4.5 Million Tons**

According to Belarusian Ministry of Agriculture and Food total grain harvest exceeds 4.5 million tons. They report that for today overall harvested area comes to 1,453 million hectares, which is about 60 percent of total areas. Favorable weather conditions help faster harvesting. Harvest campaign in Belarus is to be finished on August 25. As for the yield, according to the Ministry's representative, average grain yield over the country is about 3.2 tones per hectare, which is 0.07 tones per hectare less than last year.

The most actively harvested crop in Belarus is barley, for today about 2/3 of barley crops have been trashed.

About 415,000 tones of harvested grains have already been given to State, which is about 41.5 percent of the planned volume.

*Source: APK-Inform Information Agency; August 18, 2005;  
<http://www.agrimarket.info/showart.php?id=27896>*

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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](http://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](mailto:cis@ilhr.org) or Olga Tarasov at [otarasov@ilhr.org](mailto: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.

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