

September 9 – September 14, 2005

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DOMESTIC

1. Program on Demographic Safety of Belarus for 2006-2010 To Prolong Life Expectancy

The program on demographic safety of Belarus for 2006-2010 is aimed at reducing untimely mortality, prolonging life expectancy, stimulating birth rate and intensifying migration processes. The draft program was considered at a sitting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers September 12 presided by prime minister of Belarus Sergei Sidorskiy.

As the minister of labor and social security Antonina Morova noted the program is based on the monitoring and analysis of the demographic situation in the country and regional programs on demographic security. Today positive demographic processes are taking shape in Belarus. Infant mortality rate is going down (the lowest in the CIS). The deaths of mothers at childbirth and children under five have reduced while life expectancy is getting higher. The number of divorces is shrinking.

At the same time there are still some negative tendencies, among them ageing of the population, Antonia Morova noted. Over 60-year-olds account for 14.5 per cent while in the world this index does not exceed 7 per cent.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; September 13, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

REGIONAL

2. CIS Representatives To Discuss CIS 15th Anniversary Plans in Minsk

Representatives of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will meet Tuesday in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, to discuss plans for the 15th anniversary of the organization's establishment, the CIS Executive Committee announced.

Founded after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991 as a loose confederation of former Soviet states, the CIS plans to celebrate its anniversary with conferences, forums, festivals, exhibitions, the publication of books dedicated to the anniversary, and a "CIS - 15 years" Web site.

CIS monitoring of the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan will also be discussed at the meeting.

Source: RIA Novosti, September 13, 2005; <http://en.riar.ru>

3. Russia to Sell S-300 Air Defense to Belarus

Russia will supply Belarus with S-300 air defense complexes after nearly two years of negotiation, the Belarusian television channel ONT reported."

This is a very important event, it will strengthen our group, and the regional corps of Russia and Belarus both," deputy chief of the state military production committee, Pyotr Rogozhevsky, said in televised comments late Saturday.

The complexes would be supplied shortly after the pre-sale preparations were complete, Rogozhevsky said.

The S-300 complex can open simultaneous fire on up to 24 targets, including airplanes and missiles, in the 150-kilometer range.

Russia and Belarus have been mulling a union for years, also discussing military cooperation, but the union never materialized amid Moscow concerns about the unpredictable Belarus president, Alexander Lukashenko.

Source: *Defense News*, September 12, 2005; <http://www.defensenews.com/>

4. Russia, Belarus Launch Project to Obtain Transgenous Milk

Belarusian and Russian researchers are preparing to incorporate a human gene into goats in order to obtain milk with improved qualities.

"In the middle of September, human genes taken from human breast milk will be transferred into 100 goats. Embryos will be removed from donor goats, human genes will be transferred into them and the embryos will be incorporated into recipient goats," BelRosTransgen project director, Belarusian researcher Alexander Budevich told Interfax.

"Genes taken from human breast milk will be brought to Belarus from Russia. The experiment is expected to produce milk with unique immunity- enhancing qualities," Budevich said.

Source: *Interfax*; September 11, 2005; www.interfax.ru/e/

5. Belarusian President Understands Ukrainian Government Dismissal

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said he understood Viktor Yushchenko's decision to dismiss the Ukrainian government on Thursday.

"I think his conscience is clean," Lukashenko told journalists. The president added that Yushchenko had calmed everyone who had come to power with him, but they had continued to cause problems. Lukashenko therefore said dismissing them was the correct thing to do.

According to the Belarusian leader, Yushchenko would have had to have done this sooner or later. "It is a good thing that he did not drag this process out," he said. "Otherwise, the authorities would have started to decay."

He said Yushchenko was not a newcomer in the higher echelons of power, and had many reliable people.

When commenting on the appointment of the new acting prime minister, Lukashenko said Yury Yekhanurov knew how to do something else other than start a revolution.

"This was clearly bound to happen in Ukraine," Lukashenko said.

Source: *RIA Novosti*, September 9, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

INTERNATIONAL

6. In New York President of Belarus To Sign Nuclear Terrorism Convention

Today president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko has started his working visit to the United States of America.

In New York the head of state will take part in a special high-level plenary meeting of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly, BelTA was told in the president's press service.

According to deputy foreign minister Viktor Gaisnok, the Belarusian president will sign the Nuclear Terrorism Convention and meet with the UN Deputy Secretary General.

Belarus will benefit from participation in the summit by promoting its political and trade-economic relations with the UN participating states.

Source: *BelTA*; September 14, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

7. OSCE Must Not Be Used as Punitive Body - Belarus

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe should remain a venue for discussion of security issues instead of being used as a punitive body against certain states, the deputy foreign minister of Belarus, Viktor Gaisenk, told a news conference in Minsk.

"Considering that the OSCE was established as a forum for a dialogue we do not welcome its transformation into a bludgeon," Gaisenk said. The official criticized attempts on the part of Western governments to "use the body for political pressure on member-states."

"The situation is the same as in the U.N.," the official added.

Over the past years, Belarus has been at loggerheads with the OSCE which is highly critical of the Alexander Lukashenko authoritarian rule and anti-democratic policies of the Belarusian government.

Source: MosNews.Com, September 14, 2005; www.mosnews.com

8. Aleksandr Lukashenko To Take Part in High-Level Plenary Meeting of 60th Session of UN General Assembly

September 14 president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko starts his working visit to the United States of America.

In New York the head of state will take part in a high-level plenary meeting of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly, BelTA was told in the presidential press service.

Source: BelTA; September 13, 2005; http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf

9. Lithuania, NATO Parliamentary Assembly to Discuss Belarus

The Lithuanian parliament has supported the idea of holding an international seminar in Vilnius on September 22-24 to assess the situation in Belarus.

An initiative to hold such a forum was introduced at the April session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Permanent Committee in Reykjavik, the parliamentary press service told Interfax on Tuesday.

Source: Interfax; September 13, 2005; www.interfax.ru/e/

10. Belarusian President Invites Castro to Visit

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has invited Cuban President Fidel Castro to visit Belarus.

"If Fidel Castro visits Europe some time and combines his arrival with a visit to Belarus, we will be happy to receive him as a very close and kind man," Lukashenko said at a meeting with Cuban Ambassador to Belarus Felix Leon Carballo, who has come to the end of his term in the country.

President Lukashenko said he was certain that Belarusian and Cuban relations would continue to develop well.

"I remember everything we talked about during my last visit to Cuba," Lukashenko said, referring to a trip in 2000.

Source: RIA Novosti, September 12, 2005; http://en.rian.ru

11. Foreign Ministry Views European Commission's Decision to Hold Tender on Organizing Radio-and TV Broadcast to Belarus as Interference in Internal Affairs

"The position of Belarus on this issue is well known. We believe that Belarusian journalists who are highly professional and have big work experience can inform on political situation and foreign political activity of the country in Russian, Belarusian and other languages more efficiently and qualitatively", acting spokesman for the foreign ministry of Belarus Ruslan Esin noted when answering a question of a BelTA correspondent.

The successful work of the radio station Belarus that broadcasts in Belarusian, Russian and German can serve as a good example, he considers.

"We believe that while Europe lacks resources to make its own programs, inviting any tenders to implement political projects especially on the eve of important political events is a direct interference in the domestic affairs of the sovereign state", Ruslan Esin underlined.

Source: BelTA; September 13, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

12. Another Charge Brought Against Syarhei Skrabets

Former deputy and the head of the group "Respublika" Syarhei Skrabets is charged with illegal participation in business activities. The Charter'97 press center was informed about that by the lawyer of the oppositional politician, Aleh Dubavets. It is the third article of the Criminal Code, for which violation Syarhei Skrabets is accused. The political prisoner has also been charged with helping defraud a state bank of credits, and inciting a person to give a bribe.

The charge for violation of the third article of the Criminal Code is also related to the trading house Belbabaevski, previously headed by Skrabets. The lawyer said that according to the investigation, while politician was a deputy, he lobbied interests of the Belbabaevsky. In April 2003 Skrabets was charged with helping defraud Belarusbank of more than \$500,000 million in loans, while serving as director general of the BelBabayevsky Trading House, and creation of a criminal group.

Syarhei Skrabets as before refuses to give evidence, and states that he is not guilty. Within a month the defense is to get acquainted with the materials of the case of the oppositional politician.

As said by most observers, the prosecution of Syarhei Skrabets is politically motivated. In summer 2004 he took part in the hunger strike of the "Respublika" deputies, who demanded democratization of the Electoral Code, and release of one of the Belarusian opposition leaders, Mikhail Marynich. They also protested against referendum for canceling limits for a number of presidential terms. In 2004 he was one of the organizers of the rally timed to the end of the 10-year presidency of Lukashenka. In October, 2004, he petitioned Russian President Vladimir Putin to grant him political asylum, however his petition was refused. After an arrest on May 15, 2005 Syarhei Skrabets held a 40-days strike of protest.

Source: Charter97; September 13, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

13. Political Prisoner Mikhail Marynich Denied Early Release

A commission on the questions of early release of Minsk colony is not in favour of early release of former Minister and Ambassador Mikhail Marynich, his wife Tatsyana Marynich informed Radio Svaboda. She had a meeting with her husband in the colony from September 7 to 9. Tatsyana Marynich says that her husband is making efforts to change the decision of the commission.

"He was acquainted with the decision of the commission concerning possibility of his early release. He wrote his objection to the decision. Firstly, he follows all rules and has not committed any violations of the order, and secondly, he needs urgent treatment," Tatyana Marynich said.

According to information of Tatyana Marynich, on September 22 a new session of the commission is to take place. It is to determine finally, whether Mikhail Marynich will be released. He believed that he completely meets conditions of the early release, as considering the amnesty he had served more than a half of the term in prison, and he is a pensioner.

Besides, a 65-year-old politician has serious problems with his health. In March 2005 he had a stroke in prison, and he had been placed to a republican prison hospital in Minsk twice. Tatyana Marynich says that the consequences of the stroke are still left. "His left part of the body, the arm and the leg cause anxiety. They do not have enough sensitivity. In the last two days he felt strong pain in his arm and leg," the woman said.

As said by Tatyana Marynich, prison doctors render therapeutic medical assistance to Mikhail Marynich, however it is not enough. Mikhail Marynich asked the administration of the colony to give him possibility to go in for remedial gymnastics, but the administration answered that there are no possibilities for that.

However, according to Tatyana Marynich, Mikhail Marynich does not lose courage and optimism.

"He expresses thanks to everybody and hopes that he would be helped as before, and thanks to this help he would still be released soon," the woman said.

Representatives of Minks colony denied commenting the decision of the commission concerning Mikhail Marynich.

A well-known politician, former Minister of Foreign Economic Relations, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Belarus Mikhail Marynich was detained on April 26, 2004. He was found guilty of stealing office equipment of a non-governmental organization. He believes that he has been punished for joining opposition and planning to run in presidential elections. The Amnesty International announced Mikhail Marynich a prisoner of conscience.

Source: Charter97; September 12, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

14. EU To Fund Independent Radio, TV Broadcasts To Belarus

The European Commission said it will fund an independent radio and TV station to broadcast into Belarus.

The European Union has allocated some \$2.5 million for the project over the next two years. European Commission spokeswoman Emma Udwin explained the objective is to give people access to independent information.

"We are talking about a country where human rights are deteriorating, where those who would like to see progress towards democracy have very little hope of that and where the exchange of free information is becoming more and more difficult," she said. "The objective of this project is to give people access to information which is independent."

The stations would broadcast in the Russian and Belarusian languages. Interested broadcasters have until 11 October to submit their bids but the tender is limited to broadcasters or consortiums in EU countries.

Source: RFE/RL, September 9, 2005; www.rferl.org

BUSINESS

15. Belarusian Economy Grows 8.5% in 8 mths

Belarusian GDP grew 8.5% year-on-year in January-August, the Statistics and Analysis Ministry told Interfax.

The ministry said that industrial output rose 9.7%, agricultural output grew 2.7% and capital investment rose 20.6%.

Foreign trade turnover in constant prices and adjusted for indirect taxation in trade with Russia grew 19.4% year-on-year in January-July. Exports rose 25.9% and imports grew 13.1% in the seven months.

Real incomes grew 15.7% year-on-year in January-July.

Source: Interfax; September 13, 2005; www.interfax.ru/e/

16. From 2006 Onwards Belarus Will Be Importing Not More Than 100,000 t of Durum Wheat

From 2006 onwards Belarus is not planning to import more than 100,000 t of durum wheat with gluten content not lower than 28 to 32 percent, Head of Foreign Trade Activities Department of Belarus' Agriculture Ministry Vasily Prudnikov said at a briefing in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to Prudnikov, all the purchases will be tender-based and responsibility over the issue will be held by republican tender commission.

Prudnikov also said that in 2005 Belarus might export up to 300,000 tones of winter rye. However, he said, price situation on the market was now not very friendly for this sort of exports, therefore the ministry was considering an option of processing the rye into flour and feeds domestically.

According to information provided by BelTA news agency, in 2004 Belarus imported a total of 628,000 tones of food and feed grains, including maize, for the total worth of \$114.6 million, while exporting 6,300 tonnes of grains for the worth of \$899,000.

Prudnikov estimates the 2005 grain crop in Belarus to reach 7.1 million tones, including grain turned out by residing in the countryside individuals, which, to his opinion, will be completely enough to provide the country's food security and will create considerable exportable surplus.

[Text revised by the Editors]

Source: AgriMarket.Info, September 9, 2005; http://www.agrimarket.info

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.
