

September 15 – September 29, 2005

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## **DOMESTIC**

### **1. Belarus Nationalists Claim Responsibility for Recent Blasts**

The Belarus Popular Liberation Army (BPLA) has claimed responsibility for two recent explosions in the northeastern city of Vitebsk, injuring 42, Belapan reported.

A statement e-mailed to the local news agency Sept. 29 said "that on 14 and 22 September 2005 the BPLA installed and set off explosive devices in Vitebsk".

"The operation was aimed at achieving the BPLA's political objectives. As of 29 September 2005, the BPLA has suffered no losses," the statement said.

"Any attempt to use force to resolve the 'problem of the BPLA' does not have any prospects. The problem can only be solved by meticulously fulfilling the demands outlined in the declaration announcing the establishment of the BPLA," the group stresses.

The BPLA earlier assumed responsibility for rumors about the worsening radioactive situation and hoax bomb alerts at office buildings in Minsk and railway tracks.

The Belarusian Security Council does not regard the BPLA statement about its involvement in the Vitebsk bombings as "credible". A source in the council told Belapan that normally perpetrators of such acts claim responsibility immediately rather than after a period of time.

The General Prosecutor's Office said that the criminal case opened in relation to the bombing on Sept. 22 under Article 14 (an attempt to perpetrate a crime) and Part 2 Article 139 (murder) of the Penal Code had not been re-qualified.

About 40 people were injured when a home-made bomb went off in Vitebsk on the evening of Sept. 22. Two people were injured in an explosion in Vitebsk on Sept. 14.

*Source: MosNews.Com, September 29, 2005; www.mosnews.com*

### **2. Second Flower-Bed Bomb Blast Injures 46 in Belarus**

Forty six people were wounded, four of them seriously, when a bomb hidden in a flower bed exploded beside an outdoor cafe in the Belarusian city of Vitebsk last night.

Duty officer Alexei Murzhankov, of the city's department of the ministry, said that 25 of those injured in the blast were hospitalized and four were in intensive care.

Mr. Murzhankov said the explosion occurred just outside a city cafe. A Vitebsk resident, Anton Stepanishchev, said the cafe was a temporary, partially open-air structure of the sort often set up to attract customers in the summer.

The Interfax news agency reported that the explosive device was buried among flowers outside the cafe. It was the second such explosion in the town in nine days after a homemade bomb - a beer can stuffed with nails and metal scraps - was planted in a flower bed near a bus stop, injuring two people.

*Source: Scotsman.com; September 23, 2005; http://news.scotsman.com/*

### **3. Aleksandr Lukashenko: Trade Unions Do Not Stand Against Belarus' Authority**

Trade unions have never been against the authority, government and the president of Belarus, head of state Aleksandr Lukashenko stated today at the 5th conference of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus /FTUB/.

The president considers the FTUB conference as an important event not only in the work of the body but also in the country's development. According to him, the conference is completing report-back election trade union campaign and reviewing the results of the federation's development and its prospects.

"The socio-economic stability of the country greatly depends on the constructive position of trade unions", the Belarusian leader underlined.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; September 20, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

#### **4. Two Injured in Belarus Blast**

An explosive device went off in the center of Vitebsk on Wednesday evening, a spokesperson for local police authority told Interfax news agency.

The bomb was stuffed with nails and pieces of metal, the official said.

Two people — a senior pupil at a local school and a woman — were hospitalized with injuries.

Police have launched an investigation into the blast.

Belarus, the former Soviet republic ruled by authoritarian leader Aleksandr Lukashenko, is not involved in any territorial conflicts which could give grounds to assume the incident was a terrorist attack.

*Source: MosNews.Com, September 15, 2005; [www.mosnews.com](http://www.mosnews.com)*

### **REGIONAL**

#### **5. Top Officials From Ukraine, Belarus and Poland to Hold Three-Way Talks in Kyiv**

Ukraine's new Security Council chief called Sept. 29 for an end to the international isolation of Belarus, praising the three-way talks between Ukraine, Poland and Belarus as a step in the right direction.

Anatoly Kinakh said that Ukraine would direct its efforts toward ensuring that Belarus, led by authoritarian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, is able to play a role international organizations, such as the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Kinakh's comments about bringing Belarus out of isolation are in sharp contrast to the overwhelming view in Europe and the United States, which have treated Lukashenko like a pariah for his crackdown on human rights.

"We consider our dialogue ... an effort to not allow any attempt, even to this or that degree, to isolate Belarus," Kinakh, who was named this week to lead the Security and Defense Council, said during the talks, Ukraine's Unian news agency reported.

Lukashenko, who has ruled since 1994, has quashed dissent, closed independent media and suppressed opposition parties. He has also come under criticism for his government's crackdown on Belarus' small Polish minority.

Last week, Ukraine offered to help mediate with the European Union on behalf of Belarus, but Belarus rejected the offer.

The three-way talks on Sept. 29, which were hosted by Ukraine's Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, were held with the aim of improving border control between the neighboring states.

Participating on behalf of Poland was National Security Bureau chief Jerzy Bar, and Security Council chief Gennady Neviglas came from Belarus. Later, Bar and Neviglas met with Kinakh.

The meetings were held amid worsening ties between Poland and Belarus.

Lukashenko has accused Poland of encouraging Belarus' Poles to help oust him in mass protests similar to those that ushered the pro-western opposition into power in Ukraine last fall.

About 500,000 ethnic Poles, or around 5 percent of the population, are concentrated in the west, near the Polish border.

Kinakh said the talks would help ensure that the people of all three neighboring states "better understand the processes underway in our countries," Unian reported. He said the countries should find ways to boost cooperation in the energy and transportation sphere.

The talks also focused on efforts to improve border safety and battle narcotics trafficking and illegal migration.

Since coming to power, Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko has focused his attention on winning future membership in the EU and on maintaining ties with neighboring Russia, largely ignoring Belarus. Earlier this month, however, Yushchenko pledged to dispatch new Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov to Belarus and is currently arranging a summit with Lukashenko in what critics warn could signal a reversal of this country's western aspirations.

*Source: Kyiv Post; September 29 2005; <http://www.kyivpost.com/>*

#### **6. 69% of Poll Respondents Support Russia, Belarus Unification**

Sixty-nine percent of respondents in a poll conducted by the National and International Security Foundation's Sociological Research Center support the unification of Russia and Belarus.

The center polled 1,528 respondents older than 18 in 16 cities and towns of Russia on September 16-25, says the Foundation press release posted in the State Duma on Tuesday.

Twenty-seven percent of the respondents called for a Russia-Belarus federation, and the same number of respondents said that the Russian president should become the chief of the Russia-Belarus union.

Thirty-one percent of the respondents said that President Vladimir Putin is the staunchest supporter of the post-Soviet integration. Forty-seven percent described Belarus as the country friendliest to Russia.

Over one-third of the respondents said that the Russian integration policy on the post-Soviet space is efficient, and 28% said that the Russia-Belarus union has the best chances on the post-Soviet space.

*Source: Itar-Tass; September 27, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>*

#### **7. Belarus Rejects Ukraine's Mediation Offer With EU**

Belarus today refused an offer of help from Ukraine for it to mediate between Belarus and the European Union amid a growing row.

Acting Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk made the offer today in Kyiv after having talks with his Belarusian counterpart Siarhiey Martynov.

However, Martynov said that Belarus "doesn't need outside help," saying: "[Belarus], as a sovereign state, will make its own decisions about processes taking place in its society and it does not need outside help, with all respect to brotherly Ukraine."

Ukraine's offer comes as European officials criticize a recent crackdown on Belarus's Polish minority. Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko accuses Poland of working with the European Union and the United States to encourage Belarusian Poles to help oust him from power.

*Source: Robert McMahon, RFE/RL, September 26, 2005; [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)*

#### **8. Sergei Martynov: Meeting Between Presidents of Belarus and Ukraine Can Be Held in Near Future**

Issues on the forthcoming meeting between the presidents of Belarus and Ukraine were discussed today in Kiev. As BelTA has been informed in the foreign ministry of this republic, in the course of the talks between foreign minister of Belarus Sergei Martynov and his Ukrainian counterpart Boris Tarasiuk the sides agreed that in the near future (at the end of September – in early October) prime minister of Ukraine Yuri Ekhannurov will pay a visit to Belarus to prepare a meeting between two leaders Aleksandr Lukashenko and Viktor Yushchenko.

According to the head of the foreign political department of this republic, the concrete terms of the visit will depend on the terms of forming a new government in Ukraine.

Moreover, agreement on taking additional measures for finalizing several bilateral documents, which are planned to be signed in the course of the visit of the prime minister of Ukraine to Minsk, was reached in Kiev today as well, Sergei Martynov noted. Several documents on bilateral cooperation in the economic, political, intellectual and other spheres should be prepared for signing. These will be important agreements, for example, on taking mutual protective measures in the free trade between the two states.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; September 26, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

#### **9. Days Of Culture Of Belarus To Be Held In Armenia From September 30 To October 3, 2005**

From September 30 to October 3, 2005 Days of Culture of the Republic of Belarus will be held in Armenia, according to the Press Service of the Belarus Embassy in the RA. According to the press release, Days of Culture of the Republic of Belarus in Armenia will give opportunity to Armenians to join to the national Belarus culture, and will be a stimulus for further development of Armenian-Belarus cooperation.

The official opening of Days of Culture of the Republic of Belarus in Armenia will take place on September 30 in the National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet after Spendiaryan. The same day an exhibition of Belarus icons and national suits will be launched in the National Pictures Gallery. In the framework of the program Days of Belarus Film in "Moscow" movie theatre are expected. Four films will be shown to the Armenian audience: "Anastasia Slutskaya", "Dunechka", "Little Runaways" and "Deep stream". Belarus creative collectives will give performances in the regional centers of the republic, Artashat and Gyumri, during the Days of Culture of Belarus.

*Source: Armeniadiaspora.com; September 20, 2005; <http://www.armeniadiaspora.com>*

#### **10. Russia, Belarus To Have No Common President in Near Future**

The final wording of the Constitutional Act of the Belarus-Russian Union State will be agreed in Moscow at a meeting of the bilateral commission on October 20, said chairman of the State Duma Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Construction Vladimir Pligin, speaking

at a news conference on Tuesday. He has just returned from Minsk where work is also in progress on the text of the document.

"The draft document which we have now, does not provide for forming an institute of a common president," Pligin emphasized. "A mechanism of running the Union State will be more complicated."

He did not preclude a chance that in future, the two union states will have possibly a single Constitution. However it is too early to speak about this. The treaty participants should forfeit, for instance, part of their sovereignty. There is a number of other "deep-rooted questions which cannot be resolved at one go", Pligin emphasized.

*Source: Itar-Tass; September 20 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng/>*

### **11. Russia, Belarus Join Forces To Fight Terrorism**

Special forces from the interior ministries of Russia and Belarus are holding joint antiterrorist exercises in the western Russian city of Smolensk, a Russian ministry spokesman said Thursday. "The exercises, observed by Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev and his CIS counterparts, are taking place in three stages," the spokesman said.

He said the scenario would have the officers release hostages from inside the building seized by terrorists. The terrorists would then be dealt with before the troops went after the remaining terrorists in the area.

The exercises involve the Russian units Rus, Vityaz, Peresvet, Rys, the Smolensk region special police forces and Belarusian Almaz and Interior Ministry troops.

Officers from the Cobra Austrian anti-terrorist unit are observing the exercises.

*Source: RIA Novosti, September 15, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **12. Symbolic Language for Belarus**

MEPs at the Strasbourg plenary session finally turned to Belarus. Answering their questions was not External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner - too busy elsewhere - but Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn. "Belarus is in clear breach of its international commitments under the OSCE and UN charters," said Rehn. "We have recently seen a worrying deterioration in the situation. The regime restricts human rights even more and is taking further steps against non-governmental organizations, undermining the rights of minorities, imprisoning citizens for political reasons and curtailing freedom of expression," the Commissioner argued.

"But what exactly has happened since the last resolution on Belarus that we adopted in July, just before the holidays?" asked Polish MEP Bogdan Klich. "After all, as the Commissioner rightly notes, events in Belarus are galloping ahead. The political situation is undergoing a radical change to the worse from month to month," said Klich.

"You may ask how the Commission has reacted. In response to the growing repression in Belarus we have increased our funding for democratization and human rights by transferring €2 million from the TACIS Programme to the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights Programme," said Rehn.

Other measures include opening, early next year, a Commission office in Minsk headed by a chargé d'affaires. The Commission has also quietly investigated alleged violations of trade union

rights under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and extended an EU list of senior Belarus officials covered by a visa ban.

All this did not stop Polish MEP Konrad Szymański from attacking a lack of effective EU financing: "We need an effective financing system for democratic forces and it is difficult to imagine such a system without a specific human rights instrument that should be as flexible as possible, rapid and effective in transferring support in unfavorable legal conditions," argued Szymański.

"This year we have already signed 27 small contracts with NGOs worth EUR 3 million. One of the most significant developments in our assistance is our support for independent broadcasting," countered Rehn. "In response to the suggestions from this Parliament and elsewhere, starting from 1 November we shall fund a daily radio news programme."

The program, to be broadcast by Deutsche Welle from 1 November, quickly came in for criticism for being only in Russian. "It was a mistake to support radio and television programs in Russian. We cannot take part in the russification of Belarus that has been decreed by Lukashenko. European money must be earmarked for radio and television in the Belarus language," Polish MEP Bogusław Sonik told Rehn.

"Why do we support broadcasting in both Russian and Belarusian? There is one simple fact which we have to take into account: 65% of the Belarusian population speaks Russian at home, while 5% speak Belarusian at home," said Rehn. "This is precisely the reason why we have opted for broadcasting in both languages, Russian and Belarusian: Russian for pragmatic reasons – that is what most people speak every day; Belarusian for symbolic reasons – this is the language that heralds a new free Belarus."

*Source: David Ferguson, Euro-reporters.com; September 29, 2005; <http://euro-reporters.com>*

### **13. Ukraine, Belarus, Poland Step Up Tripartite Cooperation**

Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland step up cooperation in a tripartite format. With this end in view, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Boris Tarasyuk, Jerzy Bar, Chairman of Poland's National Security Bureau, and Gennady Neviglas, State Secretary of the National Security Council of Belarus, meet here on Thursday.

Vassily Filipchuk, Head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry press service, has told Itar-Tass, "The upcoming meeting will mark the beginning of interaction aimed at developing problem-solving contacts in the region".

The sides are planning to discuss matters concerning the development of trans-border cooperation, efforts to ensure the safety of borders within the context of counteraction to such threats as transnational crime, the trafficking of narcotics, and illegal migration. Some aspects of humanitarian cooperation among the three countries are also on the agenda of the three-sided meeting.

*Source: Itar-Tass; September 29, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng/>*

### **14. Belarus Hunts Terrorists on Its Borders with the Baltic Countries**

Friendship of the Nations

The "Northwest Strategic Command forces command staff exercises" began in Belarus near the borders with Lithuania and Latvia yesterday. About 4500 troops and 50 pieces of armored equipment are involved. The Belarusian military will work on the interaction of strategic command organs and military units "in the organization and implementation of the antiterrorist struggle."

Military units from the Northwestern Strategic Command, the 103rd Independent Mobile Guard Brigade, territorial defense department organs, including district defense staffs and subdivisions of territorial forces of the Verkhnedvincky District of Vitebsk Region (on the border with Latvia) and the Vileisky District of Minsk Region (near the border with Lithuania), subdivisions of the 5th Independent Special Forces Brigade, an Air Force helicopter detachment and air defense forces.

Those forces will work out actions against illegal armed formations and paratroopers. The 103rd Brigade and 38th Special Forces Brigade will be the illegal paratroopers. The exercises will last until October 2.

The choice of location for the exercises is not chance. Belarus wants to show heightened military activity on its borders with the Baltic countries. Last Monday, the 15-day draft season began in Vitebsk and Minsk Regions, which both border on Baltic countries. Defense of military and state objects and military management organs is being developed. Belarusian Minister of Defense Leonid Maltsev stated at a meeting of officers of the Grodno Military Garrison (near the Lithuanian and Polish borders) that "an information war is being waged against Belarus" and, therefore, Belarus and Russia should stand up to potential threats from NATO with military might.

"The armed forces of our state in alliance with the armed forces of Russia should guarantee a level of battle readiness and have the military might so that no one was tempted to threaten us," Maltsev said. His statement coincided with a statement by Baltic Fleet commander Adm. Vladimir Valuev that Russia and Belarus plan to form a united system of air defense in the Western areas. "A system of information exchange already exists and the system for the use of aerodromes and raising forces and means from the republic of Belarus will depend on future agreement on the level of the ministries of defense of both countries," Valuev said.

According to the Belarusian defense Ministry, Rosoboronekспорт, the Russian state arms exporter, and that ministry signed a contract on September 10 for the delivery of S-300SP antiballistic missile complexes to Minsk. That, the military says, will significantly raise the effectiveness of the Belarusian air defense and Air Force and the unified air defense system of all the CIS countries.

*Source: Yury Viktorovich, Kommersant; September 27, 2005; <http://www.kommersant.com/>*

### **15. Belarus Sliding Into Totalitarian Rule says UN Envoy**

A United Nations human rights investigator on Friday warned that Belarus was sliding into totalitarian rule and said he saw little hope that presidential elections due in 2006 would be free and fair.

Adrian Severin, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, called on the international community to present a united front to press for change to enable the people of Belarus to gain access to impartial information from the outside world.

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, isolated by the West for a poor record on human rights and media freedom, is running for a third term in 2006.

"I see signs of attempts at creating a state official ideology," Severin told Reuters in an interview. "This means a transition from authoritarian to a totalitarian regime," he said in Vilnius, where he was attending a conference on Belarus in Lithuania. "It is not just about controlling goods, but about controlling minds and souls."

Severin, due to present a report to the UN on Belarus in April next year, said the international community was divided on what to do about the ex-Soviet state of 10 million people. It has been called by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "the last true dictatorship in the centre of Europe."

The U.N. envoy said he held out little hope that the 2006 presidential vote would be democratic. "There are no signs that elections will be freer and fairer," he said.

Lukashenko, a close ally of neighbor Russia, has been in office for 12 years. The veteran leader won overwhelming support in a referendum last year to enable him to prolong his stay in power. Western countries have denounced the poll as rigged.

Severin, whose requests to visit Belarus have been denied, said his new UN report would detail no improvements there.

Senior opposition politician Vincuk Viachorka, chairman of the Belarus Popular Front Party, told Reuters there was no chance that Lukashenko would be unseated in the 2006 poll.

"Lukashenko's power is a typical example of an individual directly supported from abroad, from Russia," said Viachorka, who was attending the same conference in Lithuania.

In Belarus, President Lukashenko on Friday vowed to enforce additional security measures after a bomb blast wounded 40 people outside a cafe in a town northeast of the capital Minsk.

*Source: Darius James Ross, Reuters AlertNet; September 23, 2005; <http://www.alertnet.org/>*

#### **16. Belarus and Slovakia Agree on Reduced Visa Cost for Certain Categories of People**

At the bilateral consular consultations held in Minsk Belarus and Slovakia agreed on the mutual reduction of the visa cost for certain categories of people. The Belarusian delegation was headed by head of the consular agency of the foreign ministry Vasiliy Zhlutko, the Slovak – by director of the foreign ministry's consular department Liubomir Bystritskiy.

As a BelTA correspondent was told by head of the department on planning and analysis of the foreign ministry's consular agency of Belarus Igor Sekreta, the decision on mutual reduction of the visa cost would enter into force after all necessary state procedures and would be confirmed by the exchanged diplomatic notes.

According to him, the sides agreed that Belarus will legalize its succession in respect of the treaty between the USSR and the Czechoslovak Socialistic Republic on legal assistance and legal relations in civil, family and criminal cases signed in Moscow on August 12, 1982.

As for the agreement on readmission proposed by Slovakia, the sides agreed to continue the work on the draft after Belarus signs similar agreement with the Russian Federation.

The sides discussed the consequences of the Slovak Republic's joining the EU and its future accession to the Schengen agreement and also their impact on the relations between Belarus and Slovakia in consular issues. The sides exchanged the opinions on other consular issues of mutual interest, Igor Sekreta concluded.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; September 22, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

#### **17. Belarus Wants More Active Role for Non-Aligned Movement**

Belarus would like to see a more active role for the Non-Aligned Movement in the U.N.'s decision making, Belarus' Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov said on Wednesday.

Speaking at a meeting of the Non-Aligned states in New York, the minister was quoted by the Rosbalt web agency as saying the movement should work out a special proposal aimed at the activation of its role in negotiations and decision making within the United Nations.

The foreign ministers of Malaysia, South African Republic, Morocco, Syria, Sudan and North Korea supported Martynov's proposal.

The minister also quoted a U.N. initiative of Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko to acknowledge the diversity of ways of progressive development and the Belarus initiative to oppose the trafficking of people.

*Source: MosNews.Com, September 22, 2005; www.mosnews.com*

### **18. Foreign Secret Services Taking Keen Interest in Belarus Ahead of Presidential Election: Official**

Foreign secret services are taking a keen interest in Belarus ahead of the presidential election next year, the Itar-Tass news agency quoted the head of the country's security agency as saying on Sunday.

"We see many secret services are carrying out very aggressive and hysterical work against our state," Stepan Sukhorenko, head of the State Security Committee, told reporters on Saturday. Representatives of various foreign foundations are active in the country, Sukhorenko said. "Many in the West cannot live in peace with the course pursued by the Belarusian president."

Belarusian secret services may unveil results of the work to expose spies and bust the attempts to recruit Belarusian citizens, he said.

The fight against organized crime, corruption and terrorism remain priorities for the country's secret services, the security chief said. Source: Xinhua

*Source: People's Daily Online; September 19, 2005;  
[http://english.people.com.cn/200509/19/eng20050919\\_209184.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200509/19/eng20050919_209184.html)*

### **19. Increasing Tensions Between Belarus and Poland**

On August 25, the press department of Polish Prime Minister Marek Belka announced that Belka had recently led a discussion with the prime ministers of Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine about the possibilities of overthrowing Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko. The previous week, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski had held similar talks with the presidents of Ukraine, Georgia and Lithuania on the Ukrainian peninsula of Krim.

These unconcealed Polish threats against Belarus have been preceded by a series of diplomatic conflicts between the two countries. In May, Lukashenko sacked the recently elected head of the "Union of Poles in Belarus" (ZPB), Andzelika Borys, replacing him with former chairman Tadeusz Krukowski. With 25,000 members, the ZPB is the largest non-governmental organization in Belarus. In contrast to Borys, Krukowski believes in keeping out of the country's political debates.

At the end of July, the conflict escalated and both countries recalled their ambassadors. Lukashenko had 20 leading members of the ZPD arrested. On August 28, the ZPD elected a government supporter, Jozef Lucznik, as its new chairman. The election, however, was conducted behind closed doors. Belarus police had cordoned off large areas surrounding the voting place and prevented some delegates from voting. After the results were announced, the Polish government refused to acknowledge Lucznik as the new chairman.

Even before this episode, and in particular after the so-called "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine last year, politicians and the media in Poland have campaigned heavily against the president of Belarus. Hardly a day has gone by without a report in the media about the "last dictator in Europe." In recent weeks, Kwasniewski, Belka and foreign minister Adam Rotfeld have been at pains to gain the support of the European Union (EU). Rotfeld told the Polish public broadcast network: "It's good that the EU takes an interest in many of the world's countries, like Burma, East

Timor, various African regions, Burkino Faso and the Sudan. However, it would also be a start if they considered Belarus too.”

The Polish government has long been an active supporter of the Belarus opposition. On August 15, Belka allocated 950,000 zloty (234,000 euros) in an attempt to finance a Polish radio broadcaster in Belarus. State technical employees are presently working on resolving outstanding technical issues to allow broadcasts to commence. Some opposition groups, such as various anti-Russian outfits and the extreme nationalist “White Russian People’s Front,” partly coordinate their work from within Poland. A large proportion of the opposition’s newspapers and leaflets are being printed in Polish print shops.

If Belka is now talking about a possible overthrow of Lukashenko, his words are to be taken seriously. Concrete plans have already been drawn up for a putsch in Belarus in the same style as the “rose revolution” in Georgia and the “orange revolution” in Ukraine. All of these “colored revolutions” have been organized according to a similar model: a lost election is disputed with various claims of irregularities which are then carefully promoted in the media and channeled into demonstrations, combined with international pressure, thus compelling the incumbent ruler to stand down.

A significant role has been played in these events by various youth organizations that led the protests in these countries. In Georgia it was “Kmara,” in Ukraine “Pora” and in Belarus the opposition movement is being led by the “Zubr” (bison) group. The members of all of these groups were educated by the Serbian organization Otpor, which organized the overthrow of Serbian President Milosevic in 2000 with direct support from the US. These opposition organizations are financed through a network of various foundations, such as the National Democratic Institute, which is chaired by the former US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, and the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF), which obtains funding directly from the US State Department and other Western nations.

A possible colored revolution in Belarus is being planned for the middle of next year, when the next presidential election is to be held, and supposedly will take on the symbol of the blue cornflower. Whether it pans out the way its organizers foresee, however, remains to be seen. Lukashenko is relatively secure in office and the opposition is divided into various antagonist groups. What is certain, though, is that the Polish government will play a significant role in an attempted regime change.

Polish politicians already played a decisive role during the orange revolution in Ukraine. Without the massive support from the Polish government for Victor Yushchenko, the power struggle in Ukraine would hardly have been as quick and smooth.

Belka had already issued warnings several weeks before the Ukrainian presidential elections about possible election rigging and had threatened the government. A few days after the election, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski traveled to Kiev as the government’s official observer. Before departing, he spoke to both US President George Bush and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and developed a “three-point plan,” the content of which largely coincided with demands of the Ukrainian opposition.

Kwasniewski used all his powers to prevent serious resistance against the toppling of incumbent President Viktor Yanukovich. On November 26, when 60,000 miners from the country’s east made their way to Kiev to confront supporters of the orange revolution, Kwasniewski mustered all his diplomatic weight to prevent their arrival. After the demonstration was stopped, two of the three demands of the marchers were met on that same evening.

Two roundtable discussions were held, where the opposition laid out its demands. Kwasniewski played a decisive role here as well. After the second roundtable, Yushchenko and Kwasniewski spoke together to demonstrators in front of the Mariinski Palace. Yushchenko declared: “Without

the Polish president, no solution would have been possible, or it would have been only a modest one.”

Yushchenko was not the only one pleased with Kwasniewski’s intervention. During a telephone conference with Kwasniewski, US President Bush said: “Aleksander, you did so well with the Ukraine, do you have a bit of time for the Sudan?” The United States had long been campaigning for regime change in Ukraine.

#### Geo-strategical interests

The weakening of Russia’s influence in Ukraine constituted an important step in reducing Russia’s geo-strategic role in Eurasia. “Without Ukraine,” wrote the American intelligence group Stratfor, which has close ties to the US intelligence services, “Russia is doomed to a painful slide into geopolitical obsolescence and ultimately, perhaps even non-existence.” The United States views Russia as a direct competitor over the strategically important oil reserves in the Caspian Sea region, and therefore is determined that Russian influence, dating back to the Soviet era, has to be weakened.

The calculated intervention of the Polish government opened the back door for the US in Ukraine. Poland aims to play a similar role with its current threats against Belarus. Here too, what is at stake are global geo-strategical interests and not the concerns of the Polish minority in Belarus or the democratic rights of that country’s population in general.

Belarus is the last ex-Soviet republic that retains close connections to Moscow. Russia accounts for over 68 percent of its imports and 50 percent of exports. Two of the most important gas pipelines from Russia to Germany, whose capacity of 42 billion cubic metres per year accounts for most of Germany’s gas imports, run through Belarus: the Jamal and the Northern Lights pipelines.

If Belarus were to distance itself from Moscow and seek closer ties to the West, this would have catastrophic consequences for Russia’s economy. Russia’s economic and political weight in Europe as a whole would be dramatically reduced. At the same time, trade possibilities for “new Europe,” that is, those Eastern European countries that stand closest to the US, would increase outside of Russia. Both are considered important aims of American foreign policy.

It is therefore no surprise that the United States has supported the pro-West opposition for years, both financially and logistically. In the 2001 presidential election in Belarus, private and government organizations and foundations from the US and other Western countries handed out, according to the German daily *Junge Welt*, \$40 million to the election campaign of opposition candidate Vladimir Gontscharik.

According to official figures from Belarus, \$24 million have already flowed from US coffers into the pockets of the opposition for the 2006 election. Although difficult to confirm, the Russian newspaper *Rian Novosti* reported that most of the opposition groups and media are financed from the US.

One can find numerous web sites of organizations that have connections to the Otpor group and its partners, including those who support the opposition in Belarus. Many of these groups, such as the “Students for Global Democracy” (SfGD), have close connections to government and semi-government organizations in the US. The SfGD is currently collecting donations for its “Bell Campaign” to fund the Belarus opposition.

The Belarus offshoot of Otpor, Zubr, whose motto is “Honour, Motherland, Freedom,” also has close ties to the US. In April of this year, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met personally with representatives of the group in the Lithuanian city of Vilnius. Rice explained that the meeting served to help the organization achieve more freedom. She said the president of Belarus should understand that his behavior was being monitored very closely. Representatives of the opposition

then declared that, according to their assessment, irregularities would occur in next year's election and that they are already planning demonstrations.

US President Bush has made it clear on many occasions that he would welcome a change in government in Belarus.

The role of Poland

As with the Iraq war and the power struggle in Ukraine, the Polish ruling elite is taking on the role of a US pawn in Europe, helping Washington pursue its aims.

Behind this policy are vital interests of the Polish state itself. Poland can only play a leading role in Eastern Europe and on the continent as a whole by achieving independence from Germany and "old Europe" on one side, and Russia on the other. Economically, Poland is closely tied to the EU: it accounts for 75 percent of Polish exports and 60 percent of its imports. At the same time, Poland is dependent on Russian gas and oil for its energy supplies.

The prospect of an alliance between Russia and Germany, for which German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has been campaigning for years, is viewed critically within Poland. The Polish weekly magazine *Wprost* referred to the recent agreement between Russia and Germany to build a gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea, in a none-too-subtle reference to the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939, as the "Schröder-Putin Pact." The ruling elite in Poland fears that it will once more be ground between these two great powers.

The Baltic Sea pipeline is to channel Russian gas directly to Germany. By 2010 it will export up to 55 billion cubic metres of gas to the EU every year. The construction of this pipeline will largely cut off Poland from Russian gas, which is currently pumped into and through the country using the Jamal pipeline. Sejm Jan Rokita, a leading member of the opposition, said: "The pipeline through the Baltic Sea will cause injury to the common interests of the EU and individual states."

Another problem confronting Poland's energy supplies is the oil pipeline from the Ukrainian Black Sea port in Odessa to the Polish-Ukrainian border city of Brody. The pipeline was built to transport oil from Kazakhstan through the Black Sea directly to Europe and therefore to bypass Russian territory. Initially, the pipeline was planned to reach the northern Polish harbour city of Danzig, and would have allowed Poland to overcome its dependence on Russian oil. After the completion of the Odessa-Brody section of the pipeline, Russia increased pressure and finally managed to use the pipeline to pump its own oil for export in the opposite direction. With the change of government in Ukraine, Poland has achieved an important victory in this dispute.

These developments make clear that both the perspective espoused by German Chancellor Schröder and others—that an alliance between Russia and a united Europe can stand up to the United States—and the project of uniting Europe itself on a capitalist basis are doomed to fail as a result of the continent's own internal contradictions.

*Source: Marius Heuser, World Socialist Web Site; September 17, 2005;  
<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/sep2005/bela-s17.shtml>*

## **20. EU Broadcasting Project Comes Under Fire**

European Parliament deputies representing mostly new member states on 14 September attacked plans announced by the European Commission to fund independent radio and television broadcasts to Belarus. Deputies complained at a meeting of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee that the funds were insufficient, the tendering rules discriminate against countries bordering Belarus, and too much emphasis is being put on the use of Russian language in the putative broadcasts.

Many members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were particularly scathing about the commission's perceived preference for Russian over Belarusian as the main language for the planned broadcasts.

Former Lithuanian President Vytatutas Landsbergis was one of a number of MEPs from former communist countries who warned the commission it risks complicity in Russia's longstanding ambitions to "Russify" its neighbors. Landsbergis demanded assurances Belarusian will feature alongside Russian in broadcasts to Belarus.

"I would like to be sure that [the] formula 'Russian and Belarusian' - at least - is not to be interpreted as 'Russian or Belarusian,'" Landsbergis said. "Or, in turn, that it is [not interpreted to be] an issue to be decided by Deutsche Welle."

Deutsche Welle last month became the first media company to be awarded a commission contract to broadcast to Belarus. The commission first said broadcasts would use Russian, with the possibility of Belarusian being added at a later, unspecified date.

Some Western European MEPs pointed out that more than 60 percent of the population of Belarus considers itself ethnically Russian. Their appeals to pragmatism were drowned by protestations from representatives of smaller, Eastern European member states.

Toomas Hendrik Ilves, an Estonian and a vice chairman of the parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, noted that indigenous languages, not Russian, had served as the main vehicles for democratic change in Eastern Europe. He also appealed to the national awareness of smaller Western European countries.

"Imagine if in this parliament we said 'Well, all the Slovaks understand Czech, all the Danes understand Swedish, all the Portuguese understand Spanish, and all the Dutch understand German'? What would be the reaction here?" Ilves asked. "We can say, of course, 'All the Belarusians understand Russian,' but what does that mean for the people you are talking to?"

Most speakers also dismissed the 2 million euros (\$2.4 million) earmarked by the commission for two years' TV and radio broadcasts as by far insufficient. The commission's tendering rules, requiring applying media organizations to demonstrate an annual turnover of 3 million euros, were described as designed to exclude companies from neighboring Poland and Lithuania.

The strategy also appears to sideline the 500,000 ethnic Belarusians living in Poland and the three Baltic States, who a number of MEPs said would be best-placed to reach out to their compatriots.

Polish MEPs were particularly scathing in their judgments of the commission's performance. They accused the EU's executive of dragging its feet, pointing out Polish parliamentarians had been spearheading demands for action for over a year.

Ilves, a former director of RFE/RL's Estonian Service, also warned that the 2 million-euro budget for television and radio broadcasts stretched over two years would allow for "minuscule" amounts of programming.

A number of MEPs also attacked current EU funding rules that require it to clear assistance with the government of the country targeted. Edward Mcmillan Scott, a leading British conservative MEP, was among those suggesting the EU must overhaul the system to allow it to finance organizations that may be illegitimate in the eyes of regime's such as President Aleksandr Lukashenko's.

"TACIS [the main EU aid program for the former Soviet Union] must be flanked by an external fund for Belarus that is managed and disbursed by the commission with assistance from a small

number of interested member states," McMillan Scott said. "Such a fund needs to operate outside the strict guidelines of the commission. The purpose and mission of the fund would be to offer fast and flexible support to Belarusian democratic forces and NGOs that fall outside the parameters of current EU regulations and often have to operate on an illegal basis inside the country."

A representative of the European Commission, Hugues Mingarelli, present at the debate, offered a defense of its record and assured the MEPs of its continuing commitment to promote reforms in Belarus. However, he did not address the criticism offered by MEPs in any detail beyond saying that it is "a fact that today more people in Belarus speak Russian than Belarusian."

*Source: Ahto Lobjakas, RFE/RL, September 16, 2005; www.rferl.org*

## **21. President of Belarus Returns Today From USA**

The president of Belarus has returned today morning from the United States of America to Minsk. In New York Aleksandr Lukashenko has made a speech at a special plenary sitting of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly. The president spoke about the Belarusian position on urgent global issues.

The president attracted summitters' attention to the negative consequences of the present unipolar world and stated that only diversity of ways to progress can ensure stability in the world. "Freedom to choose the way of development is the main condition for democratic establishment. I hope that the great and mighty will realize that. As finely a unipolar world will turn against them. If we agree with each other we will make principles of multipolarity, variety and freedom of choice a reality and will reflect them in the UN documents we should be guided by. We will protect the world from terrorists, women and children from slavery", Aleksandr Lukashenko is convinced.

In this case the UN will become an organization of truly United Nations, Aleksandr Lukashenko added. "This is the main point of the UN reform, but not just enlarging the Security Council", the president added.

In New York Aleksandr Lukashenko considered development of bilateral relations with the presidents of Iran and Iraq.

The president talked a lot to mass media during the visit. The main topics of his interviews were Belarusian vision of the UN reform, cooperation between Belarus and this international institution, country's position in respect to the UN Security Council extension, president's impressions and forecasts of the summit results.

Belarus, according to the president, is quite satisfied with its participation and membership in the United Nations Organization. This country has its representatives in 14 UN agencies. The republic is a member of over 50 specialized UN establishments. By 2010 the UN will implement several projects in this republic to the amount of USD 33 million including in the sphere of education and liquidation of consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Speaking about the UN activities on the whole, Aleksandr Lukashenko said that the Organization should be independent from the mighty of this world.

Belarus confirmed its readiness to make a contribution to tackling one of the main challenges facing today's world - terrorism - by signing the International Convention for Suppression of Nuclear Terrorism. This country has initially supported drafting of the document.

"Belarus is deeply concerned about the spread of terrorism. It is a barbaric attempt on life, peace and order on the planet. And decisive steps should be taken in this sphere", the head of state underlined in the course of a signing ceremony of the International Nuclear Terrorism Convention.

By signing the Nuclear Terrorism Convention Belarus becomes a participating state of all anti-terror international agreements signed within the UNO framework, Aleksandr Lukashenko added. Today only one-third of UN participating states assumed these cooperation commitments. The president is convinced that today the UN states should focus on suppressing nuclear terrorism, which is the main objective of the nation's commonwealth.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; September 16, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

## **22. Lukashenko Criticizes U.S. 'Unipolar' World Dominance**

UnitBelarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko has blamed the United States for causing global instability and manipulating the United Nations. Lukashenko told the UN summit that Washington is using a campaign on democracy and human rights to try to dominate other states.

The Belarusian president told world leaders the global balance has been disturbed since the collapse of the Soviet Union 15 years ago.

Lukashenko made it clear he holds the United States responsible for major disruptions to world order and seeking to maintain a unipolar world. He said U.S. foreign policy is aimed at undermining governments, a reflection of his concern at the recent democratization of former Soviet states.

"If there are no conflicts -- they are invented. If there are no pretexts for intervention -- imaginary ones are created. A very convenient justification has been found to do this -- democracy and human rights. Moreover these terms are not used sincerely -- as a power of the people and the dignity of the nation -- but they are used as the U.S. government sees it fitting," Lukashenko said.

Lukashenko said Belarus should be allowed to develop itself through "our own traditions."

The Belarusian president's speech was similar in many ways to the address yesterday of Zimbabwe's leader, Robert Mugabe. Both countries have been called "outposts of tyranny" by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and face increasing criticism from European states for crackdowns on human rights and political dissent.

They have responded by criticizing their accusers as meddling hypocrites.

Lukashenko said, for example, that U.S. actions in Iraq and its war on terror should be open to greater scrutiny. "Where are these weapons? They do not exist but Iraq is drowned in blood, torn apart, people are brought to the limits of desperation," he said. "Where is the open, independent, under the UN supervision court trial over the Guantanamo prisoners? How many are they and who are they?"

Lukashenko later signed a convention on suppressing acts of nuclear terrorism. He said in his General Assembly speech that Belarus voluntarily gave up its nuclear arms after the collapse of the Soviet Union and does not cause trouble for neighboring states.

Speaking at the treaty-signing session, he again warned against interference from major powers. "Combating terrorism universally must not serve as a cloak to cover selfish goals of certain countries. The banner of fight against terrorism must by no means be used as a pretext for interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states," Lukashenko said.

Lukashenko faces presidential polls next year. His government has been tightening controls on independent institutions following popular movements that removed governments in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan.

*Source: Robert McMahon, RFE/RL, September 15, 2005; [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)*

## HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

### 23. October 16 – Day of Our Solidarity

Representatives of civil society of Belarus have offered to announce October 16, 2005 a Day on of Solidarity with Belarusian political prisoners, disappeared oppositionists, their families, independent journalists, with everybody who fight for freedom and democracy in Belarus. At a press-conference in Minsk the leader of the civil initiative “We Remember”, member of the “Free Belarus” Iryna Krasouskaya, a coordinator of the Zubr movement Mikita Sasim and a well-known journalist Iryna Khalip called upon the Belarusians to switch off the light in their apartments for 15 minutes on October 16, at 8 p.m. and to put a burning candle to their window boards as a solidarity sign. “We all shall light candles, think, pray for the disappeared, political prisoners and their families. We are to imagine Belarus in which we could live. Maybe everything would start with that. Dark cities, dark windows, where only burning candles are seen. This could become a mirror for us to see that we are many,” Iryna Khalip said.

Iryna Khalip explained what a Solidarity Day is:

“They are trying to intimidate and isolate us. I have heard dozens of variants of answers to the question “Why haven’t you come to the square?” over the last year. The most common answers are: all protesters are dispersed, beaten up, and I have only one life and health, I can be fired from job, expelled from university, my business can be liquidated. It is often heard that we are in minority, so what’s the use of all that?.. In reality we are a majority long ago. We just do not have such a mirror into which we could see everything and realize that we are many,” the journalist said. “It is really so that little people dare to take to the streets. And it is senseless to appeal to the people that are afraid today, to change everything immediately and to take to the streets. It is not realistic. If a person has come to a gym for the first time, he won’t lift a 100-kilogram weight. He should start with a lighter weight, with a pair of dumbbells. Then the next time we would be able to do more, and eventually we would be afraid no more and realize that we are a majority. We shall take to the streets”.

“The next year is to be a very difficult one, and a crucial one. Next year we are to lift our 100 kilograms, so let’s consider a switched-off light and a burning candle our dumb-bells of 1 kilogram, which are to be the beginning of everything,” the journalist said.

As said by her, every person worried by the fate of Motherland cannot say that he or she was afraid of switching the light for the fear of secret services or dismissal from work. “It would be a simple cowardice or hypocrisy,” the journalist said.

The protest on October 16 is supported by the wife of the disappeared public figure Anatol Krasouski, the leader of the civil initiative “We Remember”, member of the “Free Belarus” Iryna Krasouskaya, and one of the “Zubr” coordinators Mikita Sasim.

“Today we are to be solidarity with one another, as never before. “Zubr” was the first to hold actions of solidarity with the families of disappeared. In March 2001 we went to the streets of Minsk with portraits of Viktor Hanchar, Yury Zakharanka, Anatol Krasouski and Dzmitry Zavadski. Since that time thousands of people have joined us, hundreds of solidarity actions have been organized. Today we should stop talking and come down to real work. It was a solidarity that has helped me to live through many hardships and stay in the Resistance movement. We shall continue our struggle, and we call all Belarusians and people who are not indifferent to the future of our country for solidarity,” the Zubr coordinator Mikita Sasim said.

Iryna Krasouskaya reminded about the ultimatum delivered to the regime by the families of the disappeared Belarusian citizen. Families of the disappeared Belarusians demanded the official authorities to carry out an objective investigation of the cases of their abducted family members. The refusal of the authorities to investigate the cases of the disappeared, brutal dispersals of the recent protest rallies “We Remember” and “We Want to Know the Truth!” prove that the

authorities are involved in the politically motivated abductions of people, and intentionally hinder establishment of truth.

The wife of the disappeared oppositionist has returned from Geneva. There, in the UN Commission on Human Rights, a session of the Working Group dedicated to elaboration of a draft Convention against Forcible Abductions has been held. "It is a very serious document, which is being worked upon for several years, and which creates new possibilities for investigation of the cases of disappearances, and bringing to justice those who are responsible for abductions. Now a serious discussion is held, and I hope that at the next session of the commission this convention is to be passed," Iryna Krasouskaya said.

Iryna Krasouskaya reminded that passing the Convention is of great importance for Belarus. According to this document, all persons implicated in politically motivated people's abductions, from architects to perpetrators, including every official who interfered with an objective investigation of the forcible abductions' cases, are to stand trial.

Source: Charter97; September 29, 2005; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

#### **24. Journalists Fined for Humorous Collages**

Aliaksei Karol, the *Zhoda* newspaper's editor-in-chief and Aliaksandar Zdvizhkov, the *Zhoda* editor got fined 100 base amounts (approximately, USD 1,200) each. This verdict was announced by the Piershamajski City District Court of Minsk on September 23, 2005. The journalists were accused of violating article 172-1, part 10 of the Code of Administrative Torts (distribution of deliberately false information in the media that offends the honor and dignity of President of the Republic of Belarus.)

The court resolution is based on the check results, obtained by the Public Prosecutor's office of Partyzanski City District of Minsk. Particularly, the state institution established that A. Karol and A. Zdvizhkov "prepared and published collages... with the President's face as well as information... that contained deliberately false data about the head of state." The court refers to the results of "a fine art expertise, held by the National Academy of Science of Belarus" that ascertained that "the information content is false" and that it "discredits the head of state and offends his honor and dignity."

It should be reminded that on March 24, 2005, the living apartment, rented by an individual entrepreneur and the *Zhoda* independent newspaper editor-in-chief Aliaksei Karol were visited by the police and some civilians.

After a three-hour examination, there were confiscated 17 graphical images from the walls, which had been published in the *Zhoda* newspaper. Also, there were seized 4 hard discs from the computers at the apartment. All seized property was sealed up. Then, the police group completed a protocol on the investigatory activities and the confiscation matters. The state officials refused to give a copy of this document to A. Zdvizhkov on his request. The materials were passed to the Public Prosecutor's office of Partyzanski City District of Minsk that started examining them in order to clear out if the public demonstration of the mentioned collages could be regarded as a criminal offence (article 368, part 1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus.) The examination continued till July 19, 2005. Consequently, the Public Prosecutor's Office stated there was no reason for filing a criminal case. However, the state institution established a fact of committed administrative tort.

According to A. Karol, even now, the authorities refuse to return two editorial computers to the newspaper. In his opinion, the case with collages in *Zhoda* was the beginning that drove to the recent animators' prosecution. The precedent with *Zhoda* shows that everyone can be sued for any critical or humorous statement or picture in Belarus these days.

In accordance with the court resolution, it is final and non-reversible.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, September 27, 2005; www.baj.ru*

## **25. Belarus: Second Massive Fine For Organizing Religious Worship**

Vasily Yurevich, administrator of the Minsk-based charismatic New Life Church, was fined 4,080,000 Belarusian rubles (12,324 Norwegian kroner, 1,575 Euros or 1,895 US dollars) by the city's Moscow District Court on 23 September for organizing a Sunday morning service two months earlier.

Yurevich told Forum 18 News Service from Minsk on 26 September that Judge Natalya Kuznetsova had ignored his and church members' insistence that he had not organized the service, even though New Life members formally decided on 21 November 2004 that they attend church services on their own initiative.

The fine - equivalent to 160 times the country's official minimum monthly wage - is the second handed down to Yurevich for violating Article 167, Part 1 of the republic's Administrative Violations Code. This punishes an initial violation of "the established procedure for holding religious events" with a warning, a fine of between 20 and 150 times the minimum monthly wage or between three and 15 days' detention, and a fine of between 150 and 300 times the minimum monthly wage or between 10 and 15 days' detention for offences committed within one year of the first.

Yurevich was first fined 3,600,000 Belarusian rubles (10,059 Norwegian kroner, 1,215 Euros or 1,654 US dollars) on 28 December 2004 for organizing a similarly "illegal" worship service.

A copy of the 23 September court decision received by Forum 18 notes that Yurevich "took part in a religious gathering of prayers and preaching at 11 am on 24 July 2005 in a building not specially designed for religious events without the permission of the district administration". Three police officers conducting a check-up at that time testified to the court that Yurevich was present at the gathering, at which they saw "a man preaching on a stage decorated with religious items, urging those present in the hall to turn to god [sic]". The three also noted that members of the congregation providing security suggested they approach Yurevich and carried out his instructions. Judge Kuznetsova, concludes the court decision, "believes offender Yurevich is trying to evade responsibility for what has been committed" and has no grounds not to trust the testimonies of the witnesses, "since they are consistent and do not contradict one another".

A New Life Church report of the previous day's hearing at Minsk's Moscow District Court notes that Judge Kuznetsova described the church as a "sect" and suggested its members "club together" to pay the fine.

New Life Church has been worshipping at a disused cowshed it purchased in 2002 ever since being barred from renting a local house of culture in September 2004. As Vasily Yurevich told procuracy officials in December 2004, the church was earlier refused requests to rent other public facilities by district administrations throughout Minsk. The 2002 religion law requires state permission for religious gatherings in premises not specially designed for worship, but the Minsk municipal authorities have consistently refused to grant both this - on the grounds that the building is a cowshed - as well as permission to reconstruct the building as a church, latterly maintaining that it is to be demolished as part of Minsk's general development plan.

Yurevich told Forum 18 that he intends to appeal the 24 September decision and has not paid either this or last year's fine, which he recently referred to the Supreme Court after an earlier appeal against it was rejected by Minsk City Court. He also suggested that further prosecution is likely, since police officers again checked up on New Life's Sunday morning service on 4 September. According to Yurevich, New Life's Pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko has paid a fine of 720,000 Belarusian rubles (2,090 Norwegian kroner, 255 Euros or 330 US dollars) for similarly organizing "illegal" worship, but is also in the process of appealing it.

The Baptist Council of Churches, whose congregations refuse on principle to register with the state authorities in post-Soviet countries, have reported fines for worship in private homes from time to time ever since the adoption of the 2002 religion law. On 19 August they reported that a local court cancelled a fine of 127,500 Belarusian rubles (385 Norwegian kroner, 49 Euros or 59 US dollars) handed down to Mogilev church member Nikolai Dolbun on 12 July for leading an unregistered religious organisation in violation of Article 193 of the Administrative Offences Code.

Since then, however, local Baptists reported that Valeri Ryzhuk of Drogichin (Brest region) received a court summons on 16 August after refusing to pay a fine of 51,000 Belarusian rubles (154 Norwegian kroner, 20 Euros or 24 US dollars) handed down to him on 9 June for similarly leading an unregistered religious organization. The Baptist Council of Churches also reported that police officers and state officials called at the home of Igor Shpakovsky of Staryye Dorogi (Minsk Region) three times during August, ordering him to remove his prayer house sign and fining him 25,000 Belarusian rubles (75 Norwegian kroner, 10 Euros or 12 US dollars) for incorrect land use.

*Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; September 28, 2005; www.forum18.org*

## **26. Last Independent Daily Shut Down in Belarus**

The last independent daily newspaper in the former Soviet republic Belarus shut down yesterday. *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will) had published since the early 1990s. Most of Belarus' media is state-run and makes no pretence of reporting news fairly or honestly.

"This is effectively the death of freedom of speech in Belarus," wrote Iosif Seredich, chief editor, in a final column. "A blow has been struck against democracy and human rights."

The newspaper was forced to cease operations after government authorities removed from the *Narodnaya Volya* bank account the sum of 100 million Belarusian rubles (\$5,000) on a judge's order.

*Source: Khaleej Times; September 28, 2005; http://www.khaleejtimes.com/*

## **27. In Belarus, Battle Lines Are Drawn but Revolution Is Still a Tough Sell**

A united opposition could rout Lukashenko, some say. But first it has to sway a complacent public in 'the last dictatorship in Europe.'

Student activist Iryna Toustsik recalls with pride how a little bit of playacting that lampooned President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko briefly landed her in jail.

Protesters dressed up as doctors and patients, with the patients wearing imitations of the Belarusian president's prominent mustache — and alluding to suspicions that authorities were responsible for the disappearances or deaths of several opposition figures.

"We had this skit where I was Dr. Zubr, and I had a queue of Lukashenko's coming to see me," said the 23-year-old, who is a member of the Zubr pro-democracy student group. "They were saying, 'Doctor, I don't know what's wrong with me. I constantly jail people. I kill them. I don't want to keep doing this, but there's nothing I can do to stop myself. What's wrong with me? What do I do?'"

"And I would reply to them, 'Well, it's clear that you can no longer govern the state. You should step down.' After I diagnosed two patients, I was just taken away."

Youth activists like Toustsik have headed a string of largely nonviolent people's revolutions against entrenched post-Communist leaders and election fraud in recent years: Yugoslavia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, Kyrgyzstan this spring. Belarus, with a record of holding

elections judged by outsiders as neither free nor fair, could be headed toward its own showdown in the streets.

Rarely have the battle lines for this sort of confrontation been drawn so publicly, so far ahead of time. Presidential balloting isn't until next summer.

President Bush threw down the gauntlet last October when he signed into law the Belarus Democracy Act, which authorized millions of dollars in assistance for independent media, human rights organizations, election monitoring and other democracy efforts.

In May, Bush denounced Lukashenko for running "the last dictatorship in Europe." He added, "One of the roles that the United States can play is to speak clearly about the need for Belarus to be free."

But Lukashenko, a former state farm director with a populist touch, is no pushover. He came to power 11 years ago as an anti-corruption crusader with 80% of the vote, and even his fiercest domestic opponents don't question the accuracy of independent polls that rate him the most popular politician in this country of 10 million people.

His critics also say, however, that Lukashenko's backers now make up less than half the population, and that his position depends on relentless pro-government propaganda on state-run television and highly effective repression of opposition. He could be vulnerable to defeat in an honest election, they argue, if the opposition were united and had fair access to media. None of Lukashenko's critics expect the election to be fair, but some still hope it could lead to his fall.

Lukashenko has bitterly denounced the Western effort against him.

Upheavals such as those in Georgia and Ukraine "are plain banditry disguised as democracy," Lukashenko said in an annual address to parliament in April.

"No amount of money will be able to topple the existing authorities in Belarus," he said. "I want those who carry this money in sacks and suitcases through embassies to Belarus to hear this message."

Belarus lacks television channels that might spread opposition viewpoints, and nearly everyone in the country gets the news from state-run media controlled by the president. Critics of Lukashenko are largely dependent on a single daily newspaper, *Narodnaya Volya*, or People's Will, with a circulation of 30,000.

"The big problem is that 99% of the population here are zombies," declared *Narodnaya Volya's* editor, Iosif Seredich, whose biting words and tendency for hyperbole help drive his points home.

"Round the clock, the broadcast media work toward the common goal of turning people into zombies. I wouldn't be surprised if Lukashenko comes out on central television tomorrow and announces he's gotten a scientific report that walking on all fours improves digestion. And I wouldn't be surprised if people got down on all fours and started to crawl."

Lukashenko holds what can seem like a hypnotic spell over many Belarusians.

Lybov Shapyko, 65, and Svetlana Shapyko, 57, are sisters-in-law and neighbors who live in the rural outskirts of Dzerzhinsk, 30 miles southwest of the capital, Minsk.

Their homes are neatly painted, with pleasant vegetable and flower gardens. But they have no indoor plumbing, instead getting water from a public pump on the other side of the dirt road in front of their homes. Three years ago, their houses were hooked up to a natural-gas line, but other than that, they say, nothing has changed for better or worse since Soviet times.

They are big fans of Lukashenko.

"We get our small pension, but it's enough," Lybov Shapyko said.

"Lukashenko raises the pensions from time to time. He's doing a good job. He takes care of us," her sister-in-law added.

"He flies around in a helicopter and makes sure the fields are all right," Svetlana Shapyko said. "We're going to keep on voting for him. We're happy with him and with what we have."

In the capital, Lukashenko's supporters appreciate that under him, Minsk has not been engulfed by the raucous capitalism of flashy advertising, fierce competition, high-priced boutiques, all-night discos and heavy traffic seen in cities such as Moscow.

Central Minsk is clean, with moderate traffic, broad sidewalks, tree-lined streets and a pleasant riverside promenade. Ordinary citizens still address each other as "comrade." A bust of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the dreaded founder of the Soviet secret police, stands in a small park across from the headquarters of the security service that still proudly bears the name KGB. There is little nightlife, and stores close by early evening. The streets are virtually deserted by 11 p.m.

But some say that downtown Minsk is intended to give visitors an unrealistically positive view of the country.

"The local authorities take a lot of measures to ensure that the city stays very clean," said Galina, 69, a retired economist who was critical of Lukashenko and was afraid to give her surname.

"But if you go around some of the areas farther from the center, you'll see it can be just as dirty as Moscow."

Galina cited a Soviet-era joke to express how life was not nearly as sweet as the state-run media suggested: "If you want things to be good, hook up your refrigerator to the television antenna," so your fridge will be overflowing with the same abundance shown on television.

She said she has joined anti-Lukashenko protests, "but right now there's been such a clampdown that much of the opposition has been cowed." The chance of the opposition coming to power next year is very low, she said.

"Never in a million years," interjected her friend Erna, 70, a retired doctor who also declined to give her surname. "Everyone is being destroyed.... Under our president, there's a real dumbing-down of the country. He's a man of low culture, and it's reflected in the people."

No date has been set for the election, which must be held by late July.

Polls indicate that if the pro-democracy opposition could unite behind a candidate, that person could hope to win about 35% of the vote, with Lukashenko taking about 55%, said Oleg Manaev, director of the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies. Those figures are based on a reasonably accurate vote count but unequal campaign conditions.

Although that might look like failure for the opposition, it actually would be an enormous triumph that would hold out hope for future democratic evolution, Manaev said. This is because until now, Lukashenko has been able to argue that there is no alternative to him.

If the opposition makes a strong and united showing, "the hope is that the political landscape of the country will change the next day," Manaev said. "People will understand that they have their representative."

Anatoly Lebedko, head of the United Civic Party, is among those who hope to lead a unified opposition, and he argues that in the right circumstances, a majority will vote for change.

Lebedko is working with other Lukashenko critics to hold a congress of opposition forces this autumn aimed at picking a candidate and endorsing a shared program. Requests to rent a meeting hall in Belarus have been rejected, and organizers have said the congress will probably take place in a neighboring country.

The opposition in Belarus can be divided not into left and right, but into pessimists and optimists, Lebedko said. "The ones who will bring change to Belarus are the optimists," he said, describing himself as part of that group.

But even he doesn't expect the opposition candidate to be declared the winner when the votes are counted next year.

"In my opinion, the strategy for the election campaign is to mobilize people so they are ready and willing to defend their choice," Lebedko said. "On the day after the voting, if there are 100,000 people on the street, then we have a chance of defending our victory."

Lukashenko, however, has made it clear that, faced with protests challenging his grip on power, he would crack down with all the force available.

"I will defend my people, my state and my power with arms in my hands — alone, if necessary," Lukashenko told Moscow's TV-Tsentr in July. "I will not flee the country even if they shoot at me."

*Source: David Holley, Los Angeles Times; September 25, 2005; <http://www.latimes.com/>*

## **28. With Simple Tools, Activists in Belarus Build a Movement**

On Saturday, July 9, Belarusian special security forces burst into the home of Uladzimir Kishkurna, an opposition political leader. Neither he nor his wife was home.

They arrested Kishkurna's 22-year-old son, Anton, and claimed later that he had drugs and ammunition in his possession. But the real target of their raid appears to have been a printing press, a potent weapon in the hands of those seeking to topple the country's autocratic president, Aleksandr Lukashenko. The press, confiscated by the authorities, was one of fewer than 10 of professional quality outside control of the state and was useful for printing tracts and posters against Lukashenko, opposition leaders said.

Around kitchen tables, in parks and fast-food joints, and sometimes in the forests of this thickly wooded country that lies between Poland and Russia, a revolution is being planned, and Lukashenko's government is determined to stop it. Inspired by the Orange Revolution last winter in Ukraine, Belarus's neighbor to the south, opposition leaders here hope to use next year's presidential election to oust Lukashenko.

The authoritarian president has shut down so much of civic life that the opposition has been forced to use tools that are primitive in comparison with those of democratic movements elsewhere. Cell phones, satellite television, the Internet and instant messaging -- all of which played a role in popular uprisings in Ukraine, Lebanon and Georgia -- are too closely monitored by the government to be reliable, opposition figures said. The Belarusian upheaval, if it comes, will be built on printing presses, shoe leather and face-to-face campaigning, they added.

As many countries in the former Soviet bloc have chosen democratic rule, Belarus has gone the other direction. Colin L. Powell, while secretary of state, called it Europe's "lone outlaw," and Freedom House, which monitors civil and political rights throughout the world, ranked only Turkmenistan lower on its 2005 democracy ratings for former Soviet bloc countries. Belarusian

authorities last month arrested two young democracy activists from Georgia, who were held for more than a week.

In July, as word of the Kishkurna raid spread, a reflexive caution rippled through the small group of people opposing Lukashenko. Nervous activists recalled that they changed their daily schedules, avoided usual meeting places and scrubbed computers of dangerous information. In the shabby office of a human rights organization, the group's leader, Alies Bialiatski, tried to calm the terrified wife of a political prisoner on a hunger strike. In another room, a young man sat on a sofa, mechanically shredding papers into long strips and throwing them into a plastic bucket. "To have a printing press, you need special permission of the Ministry of Information and Press," said Bialiatski, who rushed to the Kishkurna home after hearing about the raid. "That machine was illegal in the best tradition of Soviet times."

Immediately after the raid, the younger Kishkurna came under attack from government media. "Contours," a television news magazine, declared the discovery of "anti-state" materials in the house, showing leaflets bearing pictures of opposition political candidates, and an announcer opined that the "so-called opposition" was "often connected with criminality." The program then turned to coverage of a large public concert, attended by Lukashenko, who spoke to a massive crowd of smiling people.

### Seeking Unity

Although elected as a reformer in 1994, Lukashenko, a onetime collective farm director, soon became the leading exponent of Soviet-era politics in the post-Soviet world. The economy of Belarus is still state-controlled. The nation's food is grown on collective farms; its media and educational institutions are closely monitored. Lukashenko has used violence and harassment to eliminate serious opposition, and propaganda to convince his people that they are surrounded by spies, subversives and external enemies.

Opposing him is a fractious and disparate group of politicians, civic leaders and students. They have little in common, except for the conviction that Lukashenko is driving their country back to the dark age of Stalinism. Throughout the summer, they worked more closely together than in the past to plan a democratic convention, tentatively scheduled for October, likely to be held in Ukraine. But when they met one morning not quite two weeks after the Kishkurna raid, the strains in their loose coalition were clear.

Sergei Kalyakin, a robust man with sausage fingers, powerful arms and a stentorian voice who is the head of the independent communists, spoke vigorously for drafting a concrete agenda for whoever was chosen to lead the fight against Lukashenko. As Kalyakin spoke, Anatol Lyabedzka, a veteran political operative from the United Civic Party who had come dressed in a suit, typed on a laptop and tended to a cell phone that rang frequently throughout the meeting.

Across from Lyabedzka, around an oval table in a room filled with old photographs of democracy protests in other countries, was Aleksandr Milinkevich. Milinkevich, dressed in jeans, has drawn his support from a network of nongovernmental organizations, largely funded from the West, and has distanced himself from the organized political parties, which are not popular in Belarus. All three men are candidates to lead the unified opposition, but they were still debating whether to forge a single platform that would appeal to a coalition encompassing middle-age intellectuals, committed old socialists and young people who yearn for the lifestyles and freedoms of Western Europe.

They have, however, agreed on a broad strategy: to unify behind a single candidate, who is pledged to dismantle Lukashenko's presidential system, to dissolve the rubber-stamp parliament and call new elections.

But the obstacles are formidable. They must collect 150,000 signatures to register their candidate. The government, they said, can disqualify Lukashenko's opponent on almost any grounds. Then, without access to state media, they must introduce their candidate to the electorate through word of mouth and printed bulletins. They also need a credible election monitoring system to challenge the government's vote tally. And if they win at the ballot box, they must gather enough protesters, and world outrage, to force Lukashenko from office should he try to remain.

#### Various Vulnerabilities

"If we can't solve the problem of printing by this fall, we'll have a problem in the election," said Lyabedzka. The opposition lacks access to independent radio and television, and although cell phones and the Internet are commonplace in urban areas, both are monitored by the government. The printed word is their only hope.

The loss of the printing press in Kishkurna's garden shed underscored the vulnerability of even small-scale efforts at mass communication. Vaclau Areska, who sits on the committee organizing the convention, said the opposition had been forced to smuggle printing material from outside Belarus, especially Russia, and bribe legal printing houses in Belarus to work off the books. No matter how many copies are printed, almost all opposition leaflets and newsletters carry the subscription figure 299 (any higher figure requires registration with the state), and often a false address. Police check for these details first and confiscate publications without them. Mailing is often done in small batches, at different post office branches, to avoid suspicion.

Independent newspapers, of which only a handful remain, struggle to work around a labyrinth of restrictions. They are forbidden to use any information from unregistered organizations. So polls and statistics that contradict the official numbers are attributed to partner organizations in Lithuania or Poland.

The papers are also forbidden to announce opposition political demonstrations, which are routinely banned by the authorities. "We announce their actions through 'subways,'" said one editor. They will mention the application for the permit, with the time and place, then mention that the permit has been denied, again with the time and place. "We've announced it twice," he said. Outside a McDonald's restaurant on a main street in the capital, Minsk, Belarusian militiamen keep constant eye on the swarms of people attracted to this rare icon of Western capitalism. Members of the Young Front, the largest opposition youth political movement, recently met inside, surrounded by the bustle of children waving flags with the chain's slogan, "I'm Loving It." The noise, two young members said, made it more difficult for the state security service, the KGB, to listen in.

Facing stiff restrictions, some groups find they have to operate illegally, without official registration. One young party leader who has worked as the treasurer for an opposition youth group said survival required creativity and improvisation.

"An NGO gets a grant, but they can't fulfill the terms of it," he explained, referring to nongovernmental organizations. "So they grant money to our party members -- the 'muscle' -- to do the work."

He said groups also barter work for access to office space, computers, the Internet and meeting rooms, a critical need when militiamen can close down any unauthorized gathering. Financial information is closely held. Unregistered groups cannot have bank accounts in Belarus and must find ways to bring money across the border. Subscriber lists for newspapers and membership rolls for organizations are carefully guarded.

Last spring, a few anti-Lukashenko posters on the walls of the offices of Zhoda, an independent newspaper, provided the pretext for a police raid. The charge was violating the dignity of the

president. Four computers were confiscated but no subscriber lists or sources were lost. The paper began publishing again with computers donated by other groups.

But there is no eliminating the human cost of working with the opposition. Kishkurna, whose son was arrested in the July raid, said he was only storing the printing press, which is legal under Belarusian law. In an interview that began with the collection of all the visitors' cell phones -- fearful they could be used for monitoring, he turned them off and moved them to another part of the house -- he said it was unlikely that any names of opposition groups had been found in his house.

When he returned to his home a few days after the raid, to find locks forced, windows broken and papers and books scattered, he had more pressing worries.

"I am trying not to say anything that could damage him," he said of his son. "Why do they use Anton as a victim? He's very young. To break into his house while his parents are out, to scare him into giving information on his father? They can do anything with him now."

*Source: Philip Kennicott, Washington Post, September 23, 2005;  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>*

### **29. Belarus: False Dawn For Minsk Charismatic Church**

Despite a 15 September promise "as an officer" from Belarus' deputy interior minister General Viktor Filistovich that he would help resolve the predicament of the embattled New Life Church at a further meeting with top religious affairs officials, the deadlock for the Minsk-based charismatic congregation has not been broken. Filistovich failed to appear for a 19 September meeting and junior officials simply repeated earlier demands that the church cannot retain use of a cow-shed it bought in 2002 which it has converted into a church. "Now state officials have no moral right to tell us that we have not exhausted all peaceful methods of resolving our problems," Pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko commented. Church administrator Vasily Yurevich told Forum 18 News Service that the congregation is currently praying about what to do next. The congregation has been denied re-registration, rendering all its worship services illegal, and church leaders have been fined.

A 15 September surprise meeting between representatives of the embattled Minsk-based New Life Church and a top-level Interior Ministry official has failed to break the deadlock in the church's predicament, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. "Now state officials have no moral right to tell us that we have not exhausted all peaceful methods of resolving our problems," New Life's Pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko commented on the church's website in the wake of the meeting. Speaking to Forum 18 on 20 September, church administrator Vasily Yurevich said that the congregation is currently praying about what to do next.

New Life had invited Minsk city executive committee chairman Mikhail Pavlov to explain at its 4 September Sunday service why he and his colleagues took their 17 August decision to confiscate the land beneath the church's building, a disused cowshed it purchased in 2002. When Pavlov failed to appear, the entire congregation vowed to go to his office at 4pm on Thursday 15 September, in what Pastor Goncharenko described as "not a demonstration -- the church will simply be asking to be received by the mayor".

On 14 September, however, Pastor Goncharenko was invited to a midday meeting with the assistant head of Minsk city police, Colonel Anatoli Naidenko. Accompanied by New Life's administrator Vasily Yurevich and lawyer Sergei Lukanin, the church's website reported that the colonel roughly threatened the three with arrest should members of the church gather near the Minsk city executive building as planned on 15 September, adding that state television had already been ordered to report such events "with appropriate commentary". After Naidenko left the room, the website added, police officers filmed his assistant Yevgeni Poluden repeating the warning -- this time politely.

At 10am on 15 September, the three church representatives were unexpectedly called back to Minsk city police department and told that their problem would have to be resolved at a higher level. There followed a one-and-a-half-hour meeting with deputy interior minister General Viktor Filistovich, who reportedly "gave his word as an officer" that he would help resolve the church's predicament positively at a further meeting with top religious affairs officials on Monday 19 September. According to the church's subsequent report, General Filistovich stated that he was personally responsible for public order in Belarus and considered "such a conflict between the state and religious believers to be against the republic's interests".

As a result of this meeting, New Life decided not to go to Mayor Pavlov's office on 15 September. A church report notes that seven busloads of riot police guarded the square outside his building on that day.

Following the promised meeting on 19 September, Yurevich told Forum 18 that General Filistovich had not in fact participated, and that junior rather than senior religious affairs officials had simply reiterated the same demands – that the church should re-register at a new legal address and accept that its cowshed would be bought by the state – that had inspired the original deadlock. "They aren't empowered to take any decisions," he remarked. "It was just for show."

Asked by Forum 18 on 21 September how New Life's situation could now be resolved, Aleksandr Kalinov - who represented the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs at the 19 September meeting – indeed insisted that the only solution was for the church to re-register at a new address, since, as other state representatives have repeatedly explained to Forum, New Life may not use its building for worship under Belarusian law as it is technically a cowshed. When Forum 18 pointed out that the possession of an alternative legal address would not give the congregation the right to worship there under the 2002 religion law and that the essence of the problem appeared to be the Minsk authorities' refusal to grant the church the permission to meet at venues in the city which is now required under the same law, Kalinov maintained that he had yet to see any evidence that this was the case.

Since no new proposals were made at the 19 September meeting, New Life lawyer Sergei Lukanin concludes that General Filistovich's promise to resolve the church's situation was made "simply to avoid at all costs 'social unrest' while the president was in America". In his address to the United Nations in New York on 16 September, Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko indeed stressed that "there are no conflicts in my country. Different nations and ethnicities co-exist peacefully, each practicing their own religion and way of life."

New Life Church has still not been approached by any state department with an offer to purchase its disused cowshed, Yurevich told Forum 18 on 20 September, even though preparations for this were scheduled to take place by 1 September 2005.

*Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; September 22, 2005; www.forum18.org*

### **30. Belarusian Police Break Up Opposition Protest**

Police in Belarus, an ex-Soviet state accused in the West of violating human rights, broke up a protest on Friday by demonstrators marking the sixth anniversary of the disappearance of two opposition figures.

About 70 demonstrators defied a ban to gather in the main square of the capital Minsk carrying portraits of opposition politician Viktor Gonchar and businessman Anatoly Krasovsky.

Police repeatedly pushed the protesters out of the square and thwarted their attempts to regroup. No arrests were made.

Western countries have demanded independent investigations into several unexplained disappearances during the 11-year tenure of President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

Gonchar and Krasovsky disappeared in 1999 during an opposition campaign to stage alternative presidential elections and an investigation into the case was dropped two years ago.

Other instances include the disappearance of former Interior Minister Yuri Zakharenko and Russian television cameraman Dmitry Zavadsky. Authorities deny any involvement in the cases. Western countries accuse Lukashenko of cracking down on Belarus's small, divided opposition, crushing independent media and rigging the electoral process to prolong his stay in power.

Some Western analysts have suggested Belarus may be the next ex-Soviet state to be subject to upheaval akin to the protests which unseated governments in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Lukashenko has vowed to cut short any such movement. And with police routinely breaking up protests and courts sentencing demonstrators to brief prison terms, fewer and fewer of his opponents are willing to take to the streets.

Lukashenko is expected to run for office again in October 2006 after winning a referendum last year enabling him to change the constitution.

*Source: Reuters AlertNet; September 16, 2005; <http://www.alertnet.org/>*

### **31. Courage and Professionalism: The Recipe for Survival of Belarusian Journalists**

On September 16, there was held a Round Table discussion on "The Perspectives of Mass Media Development in Belarus" in Minsk. It was arranged by the Belarusian Association of Journalists in cooperation with the representation of F. Ebert Foundation in Belarus. The discussion was dedicated to the 10th anniversary of BAJ. There were invited the BAJ members from Minsk and the Belarusian regions, foreign diplomats and guests from the Lithuanian Union of Journalists and the Foundation for Publicity Defense and other organizations to take part in the Round Table discussion.

The Belarusian media representatives from different regions discussed the problems they face in their daily activity and shared their unique ways of survival. Among other, there took floor Andrzej Pisalnik (*Glos znad Niemna*, Hrodna), Anatol Bukas (*Borisovskije novosti*), Lidzija Calujka (*Gazeta dla vas*, Ivacevichy), Andrei Shantarovich (*Miestnaja gazeta*, Vaukavysk).

The discussion participants stated that there diminished the number of independent mass media in Belarus, deteriorated their economic situation and increased total control and systematic pressure on the part of executive authorities.

Then, there was discussed the near-time outlook of independent press activity in Belarus. (Particularly, there was considered the prospective coverage of Presidential election campaign 2006.) "We should find the boundary that on the one hand, will permit us to carry out our civil and professional duties and on the other hand, will allow us to save our face," - noted Aleksandr Starykievich, the *Salidarnas* newspaper's editor-in-chief.

The BAJ 10th anniversary celebrations continued later in the afternoon. During the event, there were presented Dmitry Zavadzki Memorial Annual Awards "For Courage and Professionalism", founded by "The First Channel" (Russia) to five Belarusian journalists. "The First Channel" Special Projects Department Head Pavel Sharamiet handed the awards to Lubou Luniova, a 'Radio Liberty' journalist; Alena Slau, a REN-TV correspondent; Uladzimir Koscin, a REN-TV cameraman; Andrzej Pisalnik, the *Glos znad Niemna* newspaper's editor-in-chief (the only Polish language newspaper in Belarus); and Siarhiey Satsuk, a *BDG* newspaper journalist.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists, September 16, 2005; [www.baj.ru](http://www.baj.ru)*

## BUSINESS

### **32. Belarus Harvested 7.025 Mln tones Grains, a Minister Told Lukashenko**

Belarusian governmental agency BelTA informed that on September 22 Belarus' President Aleksandr Lukashenko had received Minister of Statistics and Analysis Vladimir Zinovsky who reported to the nation's ruler about grain crop performances in the country.

Lukashenko has been said to have earlier given strict orders to farm officials so that crop reporting be kept strictly to the fact, which concerns both state-controlled agricultural enterprises and private individuals, turning out agricultural products.

According to the news agency, Zinovsky has reported to the president that Belarusian agricultural producers, who include both state-run farming units and individuals, keeping small farming plots, have up to now produced 7.025 million tones of grains not including maize.

Maize crop has been estimated in the vicinity of about 150,000 tones and Belarus' total grain crop, according to the news agency making reference to president's press-service, is expected to reach some 7.2 million tones in initial weight.

This is said to be completely enough to meet the country's domestic needs.

*[Text revised by the Editors]*

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

### **33. IMF Takes Note of Belarus' Economic Growth With Simultaneous Reduction in Inflation**

The International Monetary Fund /IMF/ has noted the high economic upturn in Belarus accompanied by a reduction in inflation, deputy head of the European Department IMF Balazs Horvath has told a briefing today.

'The economic growth in your country has been quite impressive in recent years,' he said. At the same time the inflation in Belarus is lower than in Russia and Ukraine.

The IMF supports the achievement of high growth, however, the fund and the government disagree in its stability, Balazs Horvath stated. The IMF recommends conducting a careful tax-budget and monetary policy in order to preserve macroeconomic stability. At the same time experts of the international organization believe that market-oriented structural reforms would ensure sustainable economic growth.

We remind that today the IMF mission headed by Balazs Horvath completed its work in Minsk. The major targets of the visit were estimation of the economic development of the country in 2005, the macro-economic policy and consideration of the spheres which need the further technical cooperation with IMF.

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

### **34. Belarus President Says GDP To Grow 50% In 5 Years**

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko said Tuesday that the country's GDP would grow 50% in the next five years.

"We plan to increase GDP by 50%, to bring average wages to \$500 [per month] and halve the poverty rate," Lukashenko told a session of the Belarusian trade union federation. GDP is expected to increase 11% in 2005 against last year and average public sector wages will reach \$250 per month.

Lukashenko said improving rural living conditions was the most difficult issue to resolve in the next five years, but plans to do so focus on higher agricultural production.

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

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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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