

December 29 2005 – January 4, 2006

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

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DOMESTIC

1. Lukashenko Rearranges Administration

On Wednesday, Aleksandr Lukashenko made changes in the Belarusian Presidential Administration.

Viktor Sheiman was relieved from the post of the Head of Presidential Administration and was appointed as the Head of Aleksandr Lukashenko's Pre-election Headquarters, according to the president's press service.

Gennady Nevyglas, who earlier served as the State Secretary of the Belarusian Security Council, will now head the administration.

Anatoly Rubinov, who served as the Head of the Supreme Commission on Certification, was appointed the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration.

Aleksandr Popkov was appointed the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration.

According to the press service, Oleg Proleskovsky, the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration responsible for overseeing mass media and ideological issues, was relieved from his post due to being transferred to another job.

[Text translated by the Editors]

Source: RIA Novosti; January 4, 2005; <http://www.rian.ru/politics/cis/20060104/42851660.html>

2. Belarus, You're So Busted

Google believers, your homepage is still free from advertising, at least for now. After every Googlophile in the blogosphere cried foul over Google's Belarus homepage sporting text ads to the side, Google replied with a simple, "that is not ours."

The homepage at google.by is hosted by pchighway.com, according to commenter Brian Mingus on John Battelle's Searchblog, not Google. The detective work began after the Google PR department responded to inquiries with, "This site (<http://google.by>) is not owned, operated or controlled by Google. We are aware of this site and our legal counsel is investigating the matter."

eWeek.com reported that the site was "long ago hijacked by cybersquatters" who replicated Google's homepage, placed text ads to the side, and Google copyright at the bottom.

Faking some kind of Google connection is happening more and more often.

DM News reports that Google is also looking into a Trojan program that replaces Google AdSense ads with fake ones promoting gambling, adult entertainment, and Viagra.

Most e-criminals though, know how to tiptoe the nether regions where it's difficult to pinpoint wrong doing, or that anything abnormal is going on at all. WebProNews recently reported on click-fraudsters and the software they may be using to make an ill-earned buck.

*Source: Jason Lee Miller, Webpronews.com; January 4, 2006;
<http://www.webpronews.com/topnews/topnews/wpn-60-20060104BelarusYoureSoBusted.html>*

3. Opposition Leaders Agree That Milinkevich Has Chance of Winning 2006 Presidential Election

Pro-democratic opposition forces have a chance of overcoming the current situation in Belarus and carrying the forthcoming presidential election, Anatoly Lebedko, chairman of the United Civic Party (UCP), told BelaPAN.

"We are at a historical turning point and next year will give an answer as to which path the country will follow in the years to come," he said. "Unfortunately, we've failed to reach full unity and those small pro-democratic columns that have hit the road for power, acting in parallel with the pro-democratic forces' single presidential contender, only diminish our chances."

According to the UCP leader, even if Aleksandr Lukashenko wins the presidential election, this victory will be temporary. "If the authorities do not carry out systemic reforms in the near future, they will face serious problems in the economy, which have been engendered in recent years," he said.

Aleksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition's presidential contender, expressed confidence that the pro-democratic forces would win the election. He noted that the vote would become the benchmark for building a new democratic Belarus. "Our main task is not only to familiarize people with the pro-democratic candidate but also to provide them with information and prove to them that we are a majority, that the truth is behind us, and that we have the right to live in a new Belarus and we will live in it," Mr. Milinkevich told BelaPAN.

Sergei Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists who chairs Mr. Milinkevich's campaign headquarters, also expressed the opinion that the pro-democratic opposition would be able to win the election. "This event will drastically change the situation in the country," he said. "In order to win, advocates of change should more strongly rally around the common leader."

Source: Charter97; January 4, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

4. Social Unrest Possible in Belarus in 2006, Opposition Activist Says

An activist of Belarus' opposition youth movement predicted that the government's policies might prompt social unrest in the country this year.

"The recent repressive amendments to the Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes, the possible tightening of control over the Internet, the wipeout of the independent Belarusian media, the persecution of active people lead to tensions ahead of the presidential election," Boris Goretsky said in an interview with BelaPAN.

The pressure may result in stronger resistance from the public, as there are currently "quite many youth organizations, activists and people who just care and are ready to actively defend their choice and votes to be cast in the presidential poll for Aleksandr Milinkevich, pro-democracy forces' single contender, or any other candidate alternative [to Aleksandr Lukashenko]," the activist stressed.

"Stronger resistance is evidenced by the fact that young people are looking for activists of [opposition] groups themselves, offering their help and getting actively involved in the work. Over the last two months alone, youth groups have been established in several small towns where they never existed before. And groups in Shklov, Khotimsk and Soligorsk have already begun active work," Mr. Goretsky said.

The activist warned that the possible large-scale falsification of the coming presidential vote by the authorities may lead to unpredictable consequences.

Source: BelaPAN; January 3, 2006; <http://www.belapan.com/en>

5. Belarus' Battered Opposition Tries To Muster Forces for 2006 Presidential Race

When the main opposition coalition chose Alexander Milinkevich as its presidential candidate, it gave him a gift laced with dark humor: a pair of running shoes.

The implication was that with no access to media, he would have to run door-to-door across the country of 10 million people to get his message out.

"The opposition has been left no other way to reach the voters," said Stanislav Shushkevich, Belarus' first post-Soviet leader, now an opposition leader.

Few believe the March 19 election will be free and fair.

Ever since he defeated Shushkevich in 1994, Alexander Lukashenko, whom critics call "Europe's last dictator," has come down hard on political dissent. Five opposition leaders sit in prison; four opponents have vanished.

Lukashenko, re-elected four years ago and running for a third term, has the parliament in his pocket and his government controls state television, radio and newspapers. Independent media have been driven underground.

On the eve of the campaign, parliament passed a law making it a crime to discredit the state – putting a huge question mark over how opposition candidates could get their message out without risking imprisonment.

Still, Lukashenko's opponents are encouraged by the revolutions in other former Soviet republics, which were triggered by uprisings against elections that were judged fraudulent.

"Belarus will be next, after Georgia and Ukraine," Milinkevich told The Associated Press after a coalition of opposition parties chose him in October as their joint presidential candidate.

Six candidates in addition to Lukashenko and Milinkevich have been nominated to run. They include an exiled nationalist leader living in the United States, Zenon Poznyak; former opposition MP Valery Frolov, who initiated a 2004 hunger strike of 17 opposition activists to protest Lukashenko's policies; and another opposition politician, Sergei Skrebets, who is in a Belarusian jail pending an investigation into charges he gave bribes.

Milinkevich, 58, is a physicist who founded Belarus' largest network of regional non-governmental organizations – a deeply political undertaking in Belarus, where the government tries to extend its control over every sphere of society, as in Soviet times. He also worked as campaign manager for an opposition political candidate in 2001 and had a brief stint as deputy mayor of his home town, Grodno, in the 1990s.

He got a good sense of what authorities have in store for his campaign when state television ran a bizarre report on the opposition's convention.

It focused on a group of self-declared homosexuals who showed up to profess their love for Milinkevich and demand the legalization of same-sex marriage, an unpopular cause in this conservative society that still has one foot in the Soviet era. The opposition says the group were provocateurs masquerading as gays.

On the eve of the convention, authorities closed the printing house and distribution system of the country's single independent newspaper, People's Will. In response, Milinkevich vowed to create an underground information network.

"Belarusians are deprived of truthful information and cannot make a conscious choice," said Kristina Gubskaya, a 67-year-old newspaper vendor who spread her wares including banned opposition publications on the sidewalk outside a Minsk supermarket.

As she spoke, she looked around nervously, watching for police and saying she had been fined several times, taking a chunk out of her \$80 monthly earnings. The best place to sell independent newspapers is around big factories during a shift change, she said.

The opposition movements – liberals and communists, nationalists and Greens – don't have a common strategy. Some leaders advocate peaceful tactics such as lighting candles in windows in solidarity with political prisoners; one underground faction, known as the White Legion, believes force is the only way to overthrow the regime.

Money is another problem. There is virtually no independent business capable of financing an alternative candidate's campaign. The country's KGB, which never went in for a post-Soviet name change or democratic facelift, strictly controls the delivery of any foreign assistance funds. The opposition has almost no representation in official bodies and cannot monitor elections. International organizations have judged all recent elections fraudulent.

"The only thing that remains for us is massive street protests," said Andrey Klimau, a politician and businessman who is serving a 1½-year sentence of exile in the city of Krupki, 80 miles east of Minsk, as punishment for holding a protest in the center of the capital. As a lawmaker in 1996, Klimau tried to have Lukashenko impeached.

"Lukashenko is scared. And the closer change comes to Belarus, the tougher and more aggressive his actions will be," he said.

*Source: Yuras Karmanau, San Diego Union Tribune;
<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/20060101-0954-beleagueredopposition.html>*

6. Belarus Forms 165 Territorial Election Commissions

Belarus has formed some 165 territorial commissions on the presidential elections, of them - 6 oblast and Minsk city commissions, 118 regional, 16 urban and 24 district commissions. The commissions staff made 2,124 people, secretary of the central election commission of the Republic of Belarus Nikolai Lozovik told BelTA.

We remind that representatives to the territorial commissions can be nominated by political parties, public associations, labour collectives and also by groups made of some 30 people. Election commissions are regularly formed at a sitting of the executive committee and the council of deputies of the relevant administrative territorial area.

More than 22 per cent of workers of the territorial commissions make part to political parties and public associations. Commissions include representatives of the Liberal-Democratic Party, Social-Sports Party, Republican Party of Labor and Justice, Communist Party of Belarus, Agrarian Party and the Belarusian National Front. Public associations are represented mainly by youth structures, organizations of women, veterans and trade union members.

Among members of electoral commissions representatives of labour collectives account for 23.4 per cent, candidates nominated by groups of citizens, who collected signatures — 44.8 per cent. Women account for 51.3 per cent of the commission personnel, youth under 30 — 8.6 per cent. Nikolai Lozovik informed, 20 per cent of those elected to the electoral commission work in the industry, trade, transport, construction, 7.2 per cent — agriculture, 12.1 per cent — education, 7.3 per cent — health care and social welfare, 1.5 per cent — law enforcers and military, 22.7 per cent — state employees, 0.3 per cent — unemployed, 1.8 per cent — pensioners.

The CEC secretary also stated, according to the timetable, polling stations are to be set up, by January 17. Once they are created, nomination of representatives to polling station committees will begin to end on January 29. All the polling station commissions will be ready by February 1 at the latest.

Source: *The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; December 30, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

7. Collection of Voters' Signatures Started in Belarusian Presidential Race

Collection of voters' signatures started in Belarus on Thursday in support of presidential candidates who will participate in the elections on March 19. Signatures will be collected by eight sponsoring groups, registered by the Central Election Commission. According to the plan, the collection will last till January 27. Each of the hopefuls is to collect at least 100,000 signatures in his support by this deadline.

Candidates will be registered between February 12 and 21.

"A member of a sponsoring group, collecting signatures is to show voters his ID card, issued by the Central Election Commission (CEC) and confirming that he is a member of a group for nominating a specific candidate," CEC chairwoman Lidiya Yermoshina explained the procedure of signature collection.

On Wednesday, the republic formed 165 constituencies for the election of Belarusian president. The number of aspirants for the presidential office has been fixed. Apart from incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko, the presidential race was joined by leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Sergei Gaidukevich, leader of the Belarusian Conservative Christian Party "People's Front" Zenon Poznyak, ex-speaker of the Belarusian upper chamber Alexander Voitovich, "common candidate" from the opposition Alexander Milinkevich, parliament ex-deputies Valery Frolov and Sergei Skrebets as well as leader of Belarusian Social Democrats Alexander Kozulin.

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

REGIONAL

8. Belarusian President Defends Russia's Stance on Gas

Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 31 December that the different prices Russia charges his country and Ukraine for gas are reasonable given the circumstances, ITAR-TASS reported on 1 January. "Russian-Belarusian friendship is not the reason for inexpensive gas supplies at \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters," Lukashenka said, adding that Belarus charges Russia considerably less to transport gas across its territory.

"If Ukraine sets the world price for transit of Russia's gas via its territory, the supply price should [also] meet world standards," he said. The Belarusian president added that Ukraine's decision to seek NATO membership means that joint defense systems with Russia "will be ruined," a development that "will inflict multi-billion-dollar losses on Russia."

Source: *RFE/RL; January 4, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

9. Belarus Keeps Eye on Russia-Ukraine Gas Dispute

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on New Year's Eve that his country is keeping an eye on the smoldering gas price dispute between Russia and Belarus.

This topic makes headline news on all national TV channels.

"Differences between Ukraine and Belarus over gas prices are reasonable," he said.

"Russian-Belarusian friendship is not the reason for inexpensive gas supplies at 46.68 U.S. dollars per 1,000 cubic meters. Belarus' transit price is one-third to one-fifth of that in relations with Ukraine, Lukashenko said.

"If Ukraine sets the world price for transit of Russia's gas via its territory, the supply price should meet world standards then," he said.

"Ukraine announced that it is an applicant for NATO membership, which means, as its president had stated, that the whole defense system, including the one jointly created with Russia, will be ruined," Lukashenko said. "This will inflict multi-billion-dollar losses on Russia."

"Ukraine also stated that it is necessary to revise the terms of Russia's Black Sea Fleet presence and increase prices for this service," he said.

"In this respect we conduct a policy quite different from Ukraine's," Lukashenko said.

He pointed out that "Belarus understands that fuel prices may grow in the future, as Russia itself faces annual fuel hikes."

"But to make the two countries' economies competitive, it is necessary to ensure that gas prices in Belarus and Russia remain equitable," Lukashenko said.

Source: Itar-Tass; January 2, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

10. Ukraine and Belarus, Separated at Birth

Elections will take place this spring in two former Soviet republics, Ukraine and Belarus, that are headed in very different directions after 14 years of independence. The outcomes could reverberate across Europe's eastern frontier.

On March 19, Belarus is to hold a presidential election that will return its autocratic leader, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, to power. Very few doubt the outcome, because very few believe the election will be fair.

Mr. Lukashenko, a former collective farm boss elected in 1994, has steadily turned Belarus into a miniature version of the Soviet Union itself, with a state-run economy and a security apparatus that punishes dissent.

He has amended the Constitution to increase his power and allow him to seek re-election indefinitely. Criticism has only hardened his stance; in December he pushed through a law criminalizing protests and statements discrediting the state.

"We realize there are no real elections in Belarus," said Aleksandr Dobrovolsky, an adviser to the leading opposition candidate, Aleksandr Milinkevich. "No one is going to count the votes."

Mr. Lukashenko's opponents seem not to be running an election campaign as much as they are trying to organize an uprising.

"We must be prepared to take people out into the street," Mr. Dobrovolsky said.

What he has in mind is what happened next door in Ukraine in 2004, when thousands of people protested a rigged election for a successor to President Leonid D. Kuchma, another autocrat. The protests ultimately swept to power a liberal, Western-style reformer, Viktor A. Yushchenko.

Mr. Yushchenko will face another electoral test on March 26, when Ukraine holds elections for a newly empowered Parliament.

For Mr. Yushchenko, who has vowed to move toward the European Union and NATO, the signs are not promising. The coalition he led to power eventually collapsed amid accusations of corruption. The economy slowed; impatience grew. His bloc has now fallen behind in the polls to a party led by Viktor F. Yanukovich, whose "victory" in 2004 the protests ultimately undid.

Source: Steven Lee Myers, The New York Times; January 1, 2006; <http://www.nytimes.com/>

11. Belarus President Approves Earth Sensing System Draft Agreement

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko approved, as a basis for talks with Russia, a draft agreement to create, replenish, and jointly use a remote Earth sensing system, the presidential press service said Friday.

Lukashenko authorized Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky to hold talks and sign the document.

Source: Olesya Luchaninova, RIA Novosti, January 1, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru>

12. Belarus Lifts Most Legal Barriers To Russians

29 December 2005 -- Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka today lifted most legal restrictions on Russian citizens in Belarus.

The new rules make Russians exempt from rigid controls used to track foreigners in the republic.

Russians will now be able to enter Belarus without migration documents and to take up residence anywhere in the country without government approval. They also give Russians more time to register with police after traveling within Belarus.

Under the new rules Russians will also have access to free medical care and enjoy equal property rights with Belarusians.

Source: RFE/RL; December 29, 2005; <http://www.rferl.org>

13. Cheap Gas Is Russia's Reward For Loyalty, Says Lukashenka

29 December 2005 -- Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has suggested his country got a bargain deal on gas deliveries from Russia because Minsk is a loyal ally.

In an interview with the Russian-government daily *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Lukashenka said he was not surprised that Russia was seeking to quadruple the price of its gas deliveries to Ukraine.

He said this was a direct consequence of Ukraine's orientation toward the West and what he called Kyiv's "unfriendly" policies toward Russia.

While Russia is seeking to charge Ukraine some \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas from January 2006, Belarus will receive gas from Russia for just \$47 per 1,000 cubic meters.

Source: RFE/RL; December 29, 2005; <http://www.rferl.org>

INTERNATIONAL

14. Representative Office in Belarus Closed by MOFA

The representative office was closed largely due to Belarus' open opposition to Taiwan's participation in international bodies

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) yesterday announced that it has decided to close the nation's representative office in Belarus, citing the former communist country's opposition to

Taiwan's bids to participate in international bodies such as the UN and the World Health Organization (WHO).

MOFA Spokesman Michel Lu said yesterday that the Taipei Economic and Trade Mission in Minsk, Taiwan's de facto embassy in Belarus, will be closed with immediate effect, due to its political and economic ineffectiveness.

The function of the Belarus representative office will be taken over by the Russian representative office in Moscow.

One of the main reasons for the closure of the mission, Lu said, was Belarus' opposition to Taiwan's bids to join the UN and WHO.

"When Taiwan establishes a representative office in a non-allied country, we hope this country will not oppose Taiwan's international participation, even if it cannot openly voice support for the nation's entry to the UN and WHO," Lu said. "Belarus did not avoid the issue. It went along with China in openly opposing Taiwan's bids to join the UN and WHO. This is one of the most important reasons why we shut down the mission office there," he said.

Taiwan and Belarus reached a mutual agreement in 1996 to establish economic and trade offices in each other's territories. Taiwan went ahead and opened its economic and trade office in Minsk. However, Belarus has not opened an office in Taiwan.

Lu said yesterday that the annual bilateral trade volume between Taiwan and Belarus ranged between US\$20 million and US\$30 million, which was an insignificant amount to Taiwan's economy.

"Improvement on mutual relations was limited. That's why we decided to close down the representative office," the spokesman said.

Lu said that the ministry evaluates the performance of all of its representative offices in non-allied countries.

In addition to mutual economic, trade and personnel exchanges, these countries' stance on Taiwan's international participation is a major consideration in gauging whether it is necessary to maintain the operation of the mission.

Source: Chang Yun-ping, The Taipei Times; January 4, 2006; <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2006/01/04/2003287324/print>

15. Alexander Lukashenko Relieves Ambassador of Belarus to Lithuania of His Post

By his decree president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko relieved Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to Lithuania Vladimir Garkun of his post, BelTA was informed in the presidential press service.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; January 3, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

16. Alexander Lukashenko: Belarus Not To Change Its Foreign Policy

Belarus will not change its foreign policy, Alexander Lukashenko told reporters today while visiting the Bereza power plant.

"We have found the course we will follow next year and during next five-year period in relations with foreign states. But, certainly, there will be modifications of the course because life goes on", the president stressed.

"We have made a decision: Russia is our support; we are busy establishing a Union State with the brotherly Russia. There are neighbors we did not choose with whom we will build normal relations. We have powerful partners one cannot do without – the European Union and the United States of America. We have mighty friends – India, China, South-Eastern Asia. We have been operating in the regions where we have our interests", Alexander Lukashenko added.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency: December 30, 2005; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

17. USA: Import Limits Adjustment on Belarus Wool Textile Products

Office of Textiles and Apparel's Committee for the Implementation of Textile Agreements (CITA) announced the adjustment of import limits for certain wool textile products produced or manufactured in Belarus.

Action: Issuing a directive to the Commissioner, US Customs and Border Protection adjusting limits.

For Further Information Contact: Ross Arnold, International Trade Specialist, Office of Textiles and Apparel, US Department of Commerce, (202) 482-4212. For information on the quota status of these limits, refer to the Quota Status Reports posted on the bulletin boards of each Customs port, call (202) 344-2650, or refer to the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection website at <http://www.cbp.gov>.

Supplementary Information:

Authority: Section 204 of the Agricultural Act of 1956, as amended (7 U.S.C. 1854); Executive Order 11651 of March 3, 1972, as amended.

The current limits for certain categories are being adjusted for swing pursuant of the Memorandum of Understanding agreement between the governments of the Republic of Belarus and the United States.

A description of the textile and apparel categories in terms of HTS numbers is available in the CORRELATION: Textile and Apparel Categories with the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States. See 69 FR 57270 (September 24, 2004).

Excerpt from:

Source: Fibre2Fashion.Com; December 29, 2005; http://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/textile-news/newsdetails.aspx?news_id=10350

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

18. "Young Front" Activists Will Be Tried For Participation in Day of Solidarity

Policemen arrested Young Front activist Siarzhuk Marchik in his flat and taken to police station. There they compiled protocol against him for participation in street action on Day of solidarity on December 16. Police officers said that they learned of his participation in the action from publication in local newspaper. Now Marchik is waiting for subpoena to court.

Source: ZUBR; January 4, 2006; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

19. The Investigation of the Murder of Veranika Charkasava May Be Renewed

It is possible that after January 7 Minsk Office of Public Prosecutor will renew the investigation of the murder of Veranika Charkasava. Syarhey Ivanou, the head of the criminal investigative force of Minsk Office of Public Prosecutor, informed BAJ about it. This intention is connected with the arrest of the journalist's son Anton Filimonau.

16-year-old Anton was detained in December 27 as a suspect in the case of counterfeiting of Belarusian money. Several 5 and 10 thousand banknotes were taken away from him and four his acquaintances. A criminal case against them was started according to art. 221 of the Criminal Code of Belarus. Moreover, they had to spend 3 days in the confinement cell. According to Anton's grandmother Diana Charkasava, only her grandson was arrested regardless of the fact that adults were involved in the case. Now Anton is in the confinement cell and all the others were allowed to go home.

"The boy's ignorance led to a violation of the law. But there are too many coincidences in the case, and they led him in the hands of those who would like to make him confess another crime", - says Diana Charkasava.

It became known that the following day after Anton Filimonau's detention some people came to the confinement cell and suggested him writing a confession saying that he had killed his mother. Anton relatives ran into them once more on January 1 near the confinement cell.

According to Syarhey Ivanou, they intend to check whether anybody of those detained is connected with the murder of Veranika Charkasava. He also added that he did not have any information about any people coming to Anton and trying to persuade him into writing a confession and said the he "personally did not go there".

Let us remind you that Veranika Charkasava's case was suspended on December 20 because "the person to be punished for the murder was not found".

Veranika Charkasava was killed on October 20, 2004 in her flat. Anton and Uladzimir Mialeshka, who entered the flat and called the police, were suspects in this case.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; January 3, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

20. Authorities Shelve Probe Into Cherkasova's Murder Without Ever Finding Any Clues

Reporters Without Borders today condemned the decision by the Minsk prosecutor's office, announced on 27 December, to suspend the investigation into the 16 October 2004 murder of Veronika Cherkasova, an investigative journalist with the independent trade union weekly *Solidarnost*.

Investigators never found any clues as to the identity of the murderer and yet never explored the possibility that she was killed because of her work as a journalist, despite calls from Reporters Without Borders and her family that they should do this.

"The decision to drop the investigation and shelve the case leaves little hope that the culprit will ever be identified," Reporters Without Borders said. "One more case that will never be solved, like the cases of fellow journalists Dmitri Zavadski, Mikhailo Kolomiets and Vassili Grodnikov. Belarus is a country where the murders of journalists are not investigated."

The Belarusian authorities always limited themselves to suspecting Cherkasova's young son, Anton Filimonov, who was the last known person to leave her home, where she was killed. The boy fled to Moscow to escape the medical examination demanded by the Minsk prosecutor's office, which threatened to commit him to a psychiatric clinic. The victim's mother, Diana Cherkasova, accused the authorities of hounding her family.

The survival of Cherkasova's newspaper, *Solidarnost*, has meanwhile been threatened by a decision by the state company that has a monopoly on newspaper distribution, announced on 30 November, to stop delivering it to news stands.

At a news conference in April at the headquarters of the Belarus Association of Journalists (BAJ), *Solidarnost* editor Alexandre Starkevitch voiced amazement that investigators never linked

Cherkasova's murder to the research she was doing into the Belarusian government's arms sales to Iraq. He said he suspected the authorities were involved in her murder and were trying to cover it up by ruling out any possibility of a connection with her work.

Source: Reporters Without Borders; December 30, 2005; <http://www.rsf.org>

21. So Called Democrat...

Collecting signatures for candidates for presidency have started on December 29. Initiative group of Kazulin have also started collecting signatures. Kazulin used to be rector of Belarusian State university. After he was dismissed he started to identify himself as a democrat. But he faced some problems. Members of his initiative group have to visit flats where former students of BSU who had been expelled for their political activities live.

"Members of Kazulin's initiative group came to flat of my parents. My mother refused to sign for him and they refused her of been anti-democrat. After that she had to explain what was democracy. She also told them as I was expelled from Faculty of International relations of Belarusian state university for being member of Zubr when Kazulin was its rector", -- said press-secretary of Zubr movement Aliaksandr Atroshchankau. He also said that members of Kazulin's initiative group had nothing to say, and they just left.

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

22. Criminal Action Initiated Against Zubr Activists

The prosecutor's office of the Central district of Minsk has initiated a criminal action against activists of the "Zubr" movement Alyksandr Kazakou and Dzmitry Zubro. A criminal action has been initiated on charges relating Article 363 of the Criminal Code (disobedience to a policeman or a person protecting public order).

Alyksandr Kazakou and Dzmitry Zubro were detained on December 28 in the night for making a graffiti informing about the Day of Solidarity. First the young people were accused of petty hooliganism (Art. 156 of the Administrative Code). Alyksandr Kazakou and Dzmitry Zubro spent the whole day in the Central police department of Minsk. Then they were taken to the court, and later sent to a police department again. After that they were transported to a remand prison in Fabritsius street.

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

23. Investigation In the Case of the Union of Poles In Belarus to be Extended For a Month

The General Prosecutor's Office has extended for a month an investigation term in the criminal case relating intimidation of the director of Shchuchyn Polish house Viktor Bogdan. The investigation lasts for 4 months already. The suspects in the case are deputy heads of the Union of Poles in Belarus (organization not recognized by the authorities) Jozef Porzecki and Wieslaw Kiewlak, and journalists Andrzej Pisalnik and Andrzej Poczobutt. Recently the case was submitted from Shchuchyn district police department to Hrodna regional department.

As said by Andrzej Poczobutt, the authorities probably are not planning a trial over them before the presidential elections, and at the same time they do not want to stop the case, to keep the four suspects on tenterhooks, to limit their actions, the Radio Svaboda informs. In connection with the investigation the permits allowing going abroad in their passports have been cancelled.

As the PAHONYA informs, the criminal case has been initiated on charges relating Article 185 (coercion and intimidation). The activists face the punishment of up to two years of restraint of liberty. Viktor Bogdan states that the representatives of the Union of Poles from Hrodna have been forcing him to leave his position. In July they came to him to check why the Polish House

had millions' debts, but Mr. Bogdan refused to give them financial documents. From the beginning he was on the side of the state in the conflict around the Union of Poles, and considered the leadership headed by Andzelika Borys illegitimate one.

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

BUSINESS

24. From January 1, 2006 Belarus To Introduce New Budget Revenues Classification

From January 1, 2006 Belarus introduces a new classification of budget revenues, Resolution #154 of the finance ministry runs.

The Ministry has reported to BelTA that the alteration aim to bring the Belarusian classification scheme closer to the international accounting and statistics standards, to help fulfill obligations under membership in integration formations and contribute to transparency of transactions involving the budget money.

New classification will differentiate tax and non-tax budget revenues, outline resources that form specialized budgetary funds and the social security fund of the ministry of labor and social security, analyze budgetary revenues (in particular, the role of taxes) and ensure international comparability of the country's budget indices.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; December 30, 2005; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

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

The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their case for the protection of civil society before the international community regarding Lukashenko's wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.
