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## **DOMESTIC**

### **1. Lukashenko's Early Career**

Lukashenko was born in the village of Kopys in the Vitebsk voblast of what was then the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. He graduated from the Mogilev Teaching Institute in 1975 (Communist League), leading a Komsomol chapter in Mogilev from 1977-1978. After leaving the army, he became the deputy chairman of a collective farm in 1982 and in 1985 was promoted to the post of director of the Gorodets state farm and construction materials plant in the Shklov district.

In 1990, Lukashenko was elected as a Deputy in the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus, his first step as a politician. He founded a faction called Communists for Democracy, which advocated a democratic Soviet Union run on communist principles. He claims to have been the only deputy of the Belarusian parliament who voted against ratification of the December 1991 agreement that dissolved the Soviet Union and set up the Commonwealth of Independent States in its place. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR, Lukashenko briefly returned to management of a state farm.

Having acquired a reputation as an eloquent opponent of corruption, Lukashenko was elected in 1993 to serve as the chairman of the anti-corruption committee of the Belarusian parliament. Although he maintained close links to leftist Communist factions, he fell out of favor with much of the Belarusian Communist Party for attacks on the corruption and privileges of the Communist nomenclature. In late 1993, he accused 70 senior government officials, including Stanislav Shushkevich, the speaker of the parliament and the acting president, of corruption and stealing state funds for personal purposes. Lukashenko's accusations forced a vote of confidence that Shushkevich lost. Later the accusations against Shushkevich proved to be without merit.

A new Belarusian constitution enacted in early 1994 paved the way for Belarus' first democratic presidential elections, held in July 1994. Six candidates stood, including Lukashenko, who campaigned as an independent on a populist platform of 'defeating the mafia'. Shushkevich and Vyacheslav Kebich also ran, with the latter regarded as the clear favorite. Lukashenko won 45% of the vote against 15% for Kebich and only 10% for Shushkevich. A second round was held on July 10 in which Lukashenko won over 80% of the vote.

*Source: Euro-reporters.com; March 15, 2006; <http://euro-reporters.com>*

### **2. Early Voting Begins In Belarus As Opposition Warns Of Stolen Votes**

Advance voting opened today in Belarus' presidential elections in which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is widely expected to win a third term in office.

The main opposition candidate in the March 19 vote, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, said advance votes would simply be stolen by the authorities.

Officials have dismissed the criticism as groundless.

Meanwhile Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin was quoted as accusing "certain partners" of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) of trying to "manipulate" the vote.

Opposition groups, human-rights advocates, the European Union, and the United States say they do not expect the election to be free or fair.

Minsk last week refused to grant observer status to a European Union delegation at the March 19 presidential elections. Georgian observers were today barred from entering the country.

*Source: RFE/RL; March 14, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

### **3. Belarus Opposition Candidate Warns of Election Fraud**

An opposition candidate running in the presidential elections in Belarus issued a warning Monday about ballot-rigging at the March 19 vote and called for his supporters to take to the streets on election day.

"We are urging our supporters today to come on the streets on March 19," said Alexander Kozulin, the leader of the Social Democratic Party. "Many people will come, and not only in Minsk, but all around the country."

He said the protest would be peaceful unless the government provoked incidents.

According to the candidate, the authorities have already begun falsifying the election results, giving the incumbent president, Alexander Lukashenko, a landslide victory. Kozulin said he would win about 2% of the votes and another opposition candidate, Alexander Milinkevich, would take about 4%.

Kozulin, who has already had a run-in with the authorities, was quick to dispute this figure.

"Our preliminary data indicate that I have about 25%-30% of the votes," he said.

He also appealed to the Russian leadership to influence the situation and prevent the possible use of force during the elections.

On March 2, police in the Belarusian capital detained Kozulin as he was about to register for the All-Belarusian Assembly, a national gathering to identify the country's economic priorities for the next five years. Prosecutors said the candidate had pushed a policeman during registration and then damaged a picture of the president at the police station.

Kozulin was later released but is facing a fine, or one to two months of community service.

Belarus and its leader, Lukashenko, who Washington has dubbed "Europe's last dictator," have been continuously criticized by European officials highlighting massive human rights violations in the country.

*Source: RIA Novosti, March 13, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

### **4. Belarus To Check Election Commissions' Readiness for Mar 19 Poll**

All election commissions in Belarus will be tested for readiness for the upcoming presidential election scheduled for March 19.

"On March 13, a day before early voting begins, a virtual ballot for fictional candidates will be simulated," Central Election Commission secretary Nikolai Lozovik told *Itar-Tass* on Saturday.

"We will check out how information passes from local election commissions to the Central Election Commission," he said.

In his words, the testing is not something new. It takes place at all elections.

Early voting will begin at 10 a.m. local time on March 14 and end on March 18.

According to Lozovik, about 15 percent of Belarussians will vote by absentee ballots. "These are students or young workers, who live in hostels and go home for the weekend," he said, adding, "Another category of citizens are those who have no possibility to cast their ballots on the voting day."

He also said that the number of international observers to the March 19 election keeps growing. The commission has already registered already over 700 observers. "We have constructive and

businesslike relations with observers, including with those from the mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, although we cannot agree with all facts listed in their intermediate report," the CEC secretary said.

During his canvassing trips, opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich spoke against early voting. He believes that "the early voting scheme was made specifically for stealing votes".

Milinkevich also promised that he would get two-thirds of votes in the election.

Responding to this, incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko said, "We will know their rating by 10:00 or 12:00 on March 19."

He said election promises made by opposition candidates are sheer populism.

"This is nothing but populism. They know that they will not gain support in the elections and will not be elected president," he said, referring to the candidates' promise to pay \$1,000 childbirth allowances.

"Let them fund people from their grants. If they make such promises, they should also name sources," he said.

In addition to Lukashenko and Milinkevich, two more candidates will be running for the presidency: Social Democratic Party leader Alexander Kozulin and Liberal Democratic Party leader Sergei Gaidukevich.

*Source: BelaPAN; March 13, 2006; [http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/2-ya\\_gruppa/inter/13-03-06-1/](http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/2-ya_gruppa/inter/13-03-06-1/)*

## **5. Belarus Is a Case of Arrested Development**

The 10 million citizens of Belarus don't go to the polls until next Sunday, but the outcome is already certain: Alexander Lukashenko will win a third term as president. Most other governments in Europe, which see him as the continent's last dictator, will express their dismay and claim that the election was unfair.

They will be right in the sense that the opposition has been mercilessly harassed and that the counting of the votes probably won't meet international standards. But they will be wrong if they really think that Lukashenko would have lost a fair election.

Belarus has more policemen per capita than any other country in the world, and a few of Lukashenko's harshest critics have simply "disappeared." Opposition politicians are regularly beaten up or imprisoned, and people can go to jail for up to two years simply for openly criticizing the president. It is an ugly, petty, oppressive regime that is reminiscent in many ways of the old Communist tyrannies - but Lukashenko has won two elections and a referendum in the past dozen years, all with more than 70 percent of the vote.

He didn't win them just by stuffing ballot boxes, and although many people in Belarus feel intimidated by his rule, if they really constituted an outraged majority then the tool for their liberation is readily available. In the past five years, disciplined crowds of nonviolent protesters have overthrown similar "post-Soviet autocrats" in several other post-Soviet states. If the problem is just unfree elections and intimidation, why don't Belarusians get rid of their faintly Chaplinesque dictator that way?

The answer is to be found in the results of an international opinion poll that was published last week by the Social Research Institute in Budapest. The survey was conducted last year in 11 central and eastern European countries that were ruled by Communist tyrannies for at least a generation until the revolutions of 1989-91. The only country where a majority of the people polled preferred the "democratic" systems (some real, some sham) that they have lived under

since then was the Czech Republic, where 52 percent actively supported democracy and only a small minority longed to have Communism back.

In most of the former Soviet-bloc countries the nostalgia for Communist rule was strong, peaking at 38 percent in Bulgaria and 36 percent in Russia (where only 13 percent favored democracy). But this is hardly surprising when you consider that most people's experience, in most of these countries, was that the end of Communist rule brought a steep fall in living standards and a sharp rise in insecurity and inequality. For Russia, it also brought the loss of a centuries-old empire, the "exile" of tens of millions of Russians as minorities in newly independent countries, and a huge decline in the country's power and influence in the world.

And here we have Belarus, where a former collective-farm manager who was legitimately elected to power in 1994 halted the privatization process before it had properly got under way. Lukashenko has preserved both the good and the bad elements of the Communist system almost unchanged (except that the actual Communist Party no longer rules). So there has not been the same crash in living standards in Belarus, and there is none of the soaring inequality and unemployment seen in almost all of its neighbors.

There are also no free media, secret police everywhere, the drab conformity typical of late-period Communist states and occasional state violence against "dissidents." But Lukashenko would probably have won a majority of the votes honestly in every election and referendum he has held.

Why has it happened this way in Belarus and not elsewhere? Partly pure chance, but Belarus was also an ideal candidate because it has a very weak national identity (most people there actually speak Russian). There is little of the nationalism that helped most other former Soviet countries to persevere with the changes, and many Belarusians would be happy to be reunited with Russia.

But even there they would have to undergo many of the painful changes that they have avoided by choosing to live in this time warp. Sooner or later they will have to go through them anyway, but not yet. Not in this election.

*Source: Gwynne Dyer, The Salt Lake Tribune; March 13, 2006; <http://www.sltrib.com>*

## **6. Belarus Poised for Clashes After Election**

With media under tight control, parliament in his pocket, the opposition persecuted and powerful Russia on his side, no one doubts Alexander Lukashenko will be proclaimed the winner of Sunday's presidential election.

The question is what comes afterward. The opposition has pledged protests if it judges the election a fraud, and the authorities have banned any such demonstrations - setting the stage for potentially bloody clashes.

Lukashenko, branded "Europe's last dictator" by Western governments, has learned his lessons from the color-coded revolutions that brought opposition leaders to power in three other former Soviet republics.

He has packed the parliament entirely with his loyalists and thrown opposition figures in jail, while rejecting international calls for an independent investigation into the disappearances of four government opponents several years ago.

Independent newspapers can't sell their editions on the streets - they have to mail them to subscribers. The Free Theater, whose productions highlight state oppression, has to perform in private apartments and advertise its shows by word of mouth. Writers are pressured to toe the government line and cartoonists portraying Lukashenko unfavorably fled the country after being charged with slander.

Pop singers who extol Lukashenko win state honors and rewards. But Lyavon Volski, who sings "The sun will never rise in this country," has been driven underground, banned from performing outdoors or in concert halls.

Lukashenko, a 51-year-old former collective farm director, has ruled for 12 years and likes to be called "Batka" or "Father" of the 10 million Belarusians in this Kansas-sized republic squeezed between the expanding European Union and a resurgent Russia.

After pushing through a widely contested referendum scrapping presidential term limits, Lukashenko is seeking a third term against three rivals - two opposition candidates whom he has called "scum" and "imbeciles," and a pro-Lukashenko politician widely believed to be running to legitimize the election.

With six days left until polling day, the main opposition candidate, Alexander Milinkevich, has seen scores of his supporters, including senior aides, detained. He complains of being denied virtually any access to media and most venues to meet with voters, and has called on his supporters to hold peaceful protests if votes are counted fraudulently.

But the country's chief police official, Vladimir Naumov, said all rallies will be banned on election day and vowed to "use all means within the law" to disperse protesters. Meanwhile, Belarus' top security official, Stepan Sukhorenko, accused the opposition of plotting to detonate explosives on election day in a crowd of supporters protesting against alleged fraud.

The opposition insists it is calling for strictly peaceful protests and if violence happens, it would be the government's work, intended as a provocation.

Western officials threaten to add to their blacklist more Belarusian officials alleged to be involved in fraud.

The government said Friday that the vote will be monitored by some 900 observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and from the Commonwealth of Independent States - a loose, Russian-dominated grouping of 12 former Soviet republics whose monitoring missions have repeatedly given a stamp of approval to elections that OSCE and Western observers have criticized.

Moscow's support of Lukashenko is rooted in economic interests, including its desire to control the Belarus pipeline network that carries Russian natural gas to European consumers, and to prevent Belarus from falling to Western influences as have the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine.

"The Kremlin is afraid that any alternative to Lukashenko ... can lead to the same result: Belarus will start moving West-ward," said Oleg Manayev, an independent analyst.

A nationwide opinion poll of 1,500 Belarusians by Manayev's research team gave Lukashenko about 59 percent, and Milinkevich 17 percent. The margin of error in the February poll was given as 3 percentage points.

State-controlled polling agencies put Lukashenko's support at 78 percent.

Analyst Manayev said much depends on whether Lukashenko's challengers can convince voters that the result is fraudulent and draw them onto the streets despite fears of government reprisals.

But many Belarusians see no alternative to their iron-fisted leader. The country's media ceaselessly praise Lukashenko's Belarus as an island of stability and prosperity compared to many former Soviet states experiencing economic problems and violent ethnic conflicts.

Many are unaware or unwilling to take note of rampant human rights abuses and are thankful to Lukashenko that their average monthly salaries of \$250 and pensions of \$110 are paid on time.

Tamara Shikhova, a 55-year-old Minsk worker, said she would vote only for Lukashenko. "My life hasn't gotten worse under his rule," she explained.

*Source: Maria Danilova; The Seattle Post-Intelligencer; March 12, 2006;  
<http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/>*

## **7. Daring To Criticise Belarus' President**

Next week, the people of Belarus go to the polls to vote for a president. But opposition candidates face a tough battle if they are to prevent the incumbent, Alexander Lukashenko, from winning a third term in office.

You can tell a lot about a country from the kind of jokes being made about its leader.

Take this one, doing the rounds in Minsk at the moment: "At the start of the presidential election campaign, Alexander Lukashenko promises to ban censorship in the press if he's re-elected.

"He wins the vote and immediately issues two decrees - one banning censorship, the other banning the press."

Judging from the selection of newspapers on sale in Minsk, the independent press has already been banned.

The only papers I could find were government ones.

That is because in the 12 years that President Lukashenko has been in power, he has turned Belarus into a police state which, among other things, has cracked down on criticism and public displays of dissent.

Most independent newspapers are denied the right to publish and circulate.

Some still exist online, others have gone underground.

Unusual broadcast

As for radio and television, well, government control of them is even greater.

Belarusian State TV pumps out praise for the president.

Belarus is portrayed as a land of economic achievements.

There is no mention of Mr Lukashenko's political opponents who have been imprisoned, or vanished without trace.

In one news bulletin I saw, a Russian tourist was waxing lyrical: "Thanks to Lukashenko, your country is so successful, so wonderful," she gasped, "I'm so envious".

So you can imagine the shock that viewers had one evening last month, when they switched on their Belarusian "telescreens" and saw - not Alexander Lukashenko - but a man sitting in a studio denouncing the president.

The unthinkable

For 30 unedited minutes, Alexander Kozulin tore President Lukashenko's image to shreds.

A former university dean, Mr Kozulin accused Mr Lukashenko of being a liar, a dictator, of robbing his people - and that was just for starters.

The president, he informed the nation, had a lover and an illegitimate child.

And he finished by ripping up a copy of the main government newspaper, with President Lukashenko's photo on the cover.

And all this on one of the most highly censored, tightly controlled television channels in the world.

Alexander Kozulin had done the unthinkable, he had said the unspeakable.

Rumour-mill

Next morning in a radio phone-in, one caller asked nervously: "That speech, what does it mean? Has there been a coup?"

There had not been a coup.

As one of four presidential candidates, Alexander Kozulin had the right to limited airtime.

Most of his campaign broadcasts on state TV and radio have been heavily censored but, for some reason, this one was not.

The rumours began swirling.

Who put it on air? Were the censors asleep? Was it sabotage?

Everyone seemed to be talking about that speech. "It's like a giant bomb has just exploded," one man explained to me, "and no one knows how much damage there's going to be."

Public support

I met Mr Kozulin in his tiny campaign headquarters in the centre of Minsk.

He looked different from the TV. His lips were puffy, his head bruised.

The day before he had been beaten up by plain clothes police officers, bundled into a van and detained for hours.

Several journalists had been injured in the same incident, which happened when Mr Kozulin was refused entry to a people's congress organised by the president.

"Our country might be steeped in fear," he told me, "but Lukashenko's regime is a house of cards and it's about to come crashing down."

But is it?

After all, even Alexander Lukashenko's fiercest critics concede that at least a quarter of the population still support the president, inspired by his iron rule and anti-Western rhetoric.

What is more, opinion polls suggest that most Belarusians are unlikely to take to the streets after the elections, even if they conclude that President Lukashenko has rigged the vote.

And yet there are signs of growing public opposition to the authorities.

Political combat

On the day that Mr Kozulin was taken into custody, thousands of people rallied in the centre of Minsk in support of another opposition candidate - Alexander Milinkevich.

It was one of the biggest opposition gatherings in Belarus for a long time.

The authorities declared it illegal and sent in hundreds of riot troops to disperse the crowd.

"It doesn't matter, who wins - me or Milinkevich," Alexander Kozulin said.

"The main thing is to make sure that Lukashenko doesn't get re-elected."

If he does, then Mr Kozulin could face reprisals.

President Lukashenko has already called for his opponent to be driven from the country.

But Alexander Kozulin says he is ready for a fight.

"I couldn't give a damn what Lukashenko is planning to do with me," Mr Kozulin told me.

"I'm not scared of prison or my own death."

*Source: Steve Rosenberg, BBC News, March 11, 2006; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>*

### **8. Belarus Leader Says Bird Flu Threat Exaggerated**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko raised doubts on Friday about the threat posed by bird flu, detected in much of eastern Europe but not in his own country, and suggested the danger to people was limited.

Lukashenko is frequently dismissive of campaigns launched by Western countries, many of whom accuse him of cracking down on dissent and undermining democracy.

He has turned down proposed aid from non-government organisations in the West aimed at combating AIDS and tuberculosis -- serious problems in many parts of the former Soviet Union.

"In reality, there is much more idle talk and commercial problems than there is bird flu," the official BelTA news agency quoted Lukashenko as saying on a trip to an industrial plant in southern Belarus.

"Doctors produce statistics saying hundreds of thousands have died from ordinary flu. Seventy-six people have died from bird flu," he said, before adding: "If there is truly a threat, we must be ready for it."

The World Health Organisation says 97 people have died from the virus, mostly in Asia. Millions of birds have been culled and poultry industries have been badly damaged.

Lukashenko, seeking re-election next week, is accused in the West of undermining basic human rights in his ex-Soviet state of 10 million.

Cases of bird flu -- particularly the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain -- have been found in several regions of eastern Europe, including in neighbouring Ukraine and Russia and in Romania.

Measures taken to stop the spread of the virus have included a mass cull of birds, local quarantines and moves to confine domestic birds to buildings.

Belarus had already announced a tender to purchase 8 million doses of vaccine to protect domestic birds in areas where the danger of the virus spreading was considered high. Experts fear further outbreaks in spring, when migratory birds return north.

*Source: Reuters AlertNet; March 10, 2006; <http://www.alertnet.org>*

## **9. Around 7,020,000 Voters To Partake in Belarus President Election**

According to preliminary information, today there are 7,020,000 voters in Belarus. Since the 2004 referendum their number has grown by 34,000 people, chairperson of the central electoral commission of Belarus Lidiya Yermoshina told the press on March 9.

The CEC head said, now clerks at polling stations are on duty to welcome citizens, who are willing to check whether their names are on the voters' register. The list can be changed right up to the moment the vote counting starts.

Lidiya Yermoshina informed, the central electoral commission approved a regulation explaining how voters will get their ballots. The ballots will be issued in line with the list of Belarusian citizens, who can partake in the presidential election. To get a ballot, one will have to produce their passport (old pattern ones are accepted).

An essential novelty is the right of the voter to produce IDs other than the passport: a pension insurance certificate (provided it has a photo), a student card, a state official ID, a military service record card (for active duty military), a certificate issued by police to confirm the owner has lost or has handed in his passport for exchange.

BelTA reported earlier, the preterm voting starts on March 14, five days before the election day.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; March 10, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

## **REGIONAL**

### **10. Antiglobalist Alexander Lukashenko**

Presidential elections in Belarus demonstrate the peculiarities of a political model that is becoming an alternative to classic democracy in different countries. This model advances leaders that appeal to their population - first of all, the poorest groups - and eventually confront the Western world. Alexander Lukashenko preaches the cult of strong leadership, sticks to pronounced populism and firmly rejects globalization ideology and institutions. Nevertheless, elections are held, a multi-party system exists and the parliament is active.

But Belarus is situated in Europe, where completely different political principles are accepted. Poland and Lithuania have long been the backbone of the Belarusian opposition; recently, Ukraine has joined them. Moreover, the European Union and the United States sympathize with Lukashenko's opponents. Belarus does not have oil whose windfalls may be used to "feed" the regime's supporters, so the fact that Lukashenko has been in office for 12 years proves the great political talent of this provincially looking person, who is sometimes called "batka", the Belarusian for "father".

Opposition is getting active of late. Part of the republic's former elite is staking on Alexander Kozulin, who has been rector of Belarusian University. Yet most of the incumbent president's opponents - from Communists to liberals - have united around Alexander Milinkevich, a physicist and public figure who has been relatively unknown among voters until recently.

Lukashenko's problem is that he must necessarily win in the first round. If he falls a few percent short of the absolute victory, his regime may erode between the rounds, while many of his supporters, including state officials, will be demoralized. But if his victory is announced in the first round, opposition will attempt a color revolution under the pretext of protecting democracy, accusing the authorities of rigging the election. In this case it will be an adjusted version of the events in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine.

Hence the receipt of fending off the revolution proposed by Lukashenko: a preemptive strike against the opposition in order to discredit it in the eyes of the population and to disorganize it, turning political opponents into plotters. In so doing, Lukashenko is demonstrating that he is no

Kuchma or Shevardnadze. His task is to reduce the potential number of people participating in post-election protests by any means. He could not care less about the Western opinions of his political practices, and he is ready to take the toughest action to remain in power. Obviously, the receipt can be applied only in case of the authorities' total control over leading mass media - the collective organizers and propagandists (as seasoned revolutionary Vladimir Lenin called them), and this is what we are witnessing currently in Belarus.

Lukashenko may succeed once again. All the more so as his isolation is not total: Russia supports him as a partner in the Union State. Its choice has nothing to do with its affinity to the Belarusian leader, who, despite his pro-Russian statements, is a very difficult ally - for example, the introduction of a single currency with the emission center in Moscow has been discussed for several years to no avail. Decision-making on the creation of the Union State's governing bodies is also far from easy.

However, Lukashenko is important for Russia not so much as a pro-Russian figure, but as an anti-Western one. His reputation makes him unacceptable for the European Union, even if he should become an advocate of European integration. This means that as long as he remains Belarusian president, his country will not withdraw from the union with Russia, and will not join NATO. The Baltic countries joined the Alliance in 2004, and at present Ukraine's Orange leadership is seriously thinking of Atlantic integration. With such a background, Belarus seems the only Russian outpost in the West, which is actively cooperating with Moscow in the defense sphere, including air defense.

Hence Russia's purely pragmatic attitude towards the situation in Belarus and its hopes for the stability of the Lukashenko regime. These forecasts may well come true at the forthcoming elections, but this does not mean that the regime will not face any risks later. On the one hand, opposition is becoming increasingly active: at the previous election its representative looked like a meek outsider, but this time we are witnessing a real political struggle. On the other hand, the Belarussian regime, as any pronounced personalized regime, depends on the fate of its leader, who does not have a successor and does not provide for power transfer, even if managed and controlled.

*Source: Alexei Makarkin, Deputy Director General of the Center for Political Technologies, for RIA Novosti, March 15, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

### **11. 5th Channel Journalists Denied Entry to Belarus**

Belarusian border guards removed 5th Channel journalist Andriy Zhyhulin and cameraman Vitaliy Doroschenko from a Kyiv-Minsk train and sent them back to Ukraine without explaining the reason, the 5th Channel reported on Wednesday

The reporters had all the necessary documents issued by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry for covering the presidential elections in Belarus, the channel said.

According to Zhyhulin, at about midnight, when the train stopped at the Teryokha border station, Belarusian frontier guards confiscated the two Ukrainians' documents. The journalist and the cameraman were then taken off the train and brought to the border service facilities, where they were given their documents back and put onto a Minsk-Kyiv train.

*Source: Interfax-Ukraine; March 15, 2006; <http://www.interfax.kiev.ua/eng/>*

### **12. Tbilisi Slams Belarus on the Eve of Elections**

In a statement issued on March 14 the Georgian Foreign Ministry expressed deep concern over the decision of the Belarus government to bar representatives of several states, including Georgia, to observe upcoming presidential elections in Belarus.

"The Georgian Foreign Ministry believes that such decision of the Belarus government does not accord with the universally declared democratic principles of UN, OSCE and other international

organizations and presents an open defiance of the principle of transparent, free and fair elections," the statement reads.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry calls upon the international community to give due assessment to such acts of the Belarus government, "which raise serious doubts about the democratic character of the forthcoming elections and the legitimacy of the election results."

The Georgian Parliamentary Committees for Foreign Relations, European Integration and Defense and Security issued a joint statement on March 10 regarding the pre-election situation in Belarus, in which they condemned barring of Georgian observers from participating in the forthcoming presidential elections by "Lukashenko's dictatorial regime."

*Source: UNA-Georgia; March 14, 2006; <http://www.civil.ge/eng/>*

### **13. Lukashenko Sees Significant Progress in Ukrainian-Belarusian Economic Relations**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko believes that no unsettled issues exist between Kyiv and Minsk.

He said this while receiving credentials from Ukrainian Ambassador to Belarus Valentyn Nalyvaichenko on Monday.

The president reminded that Ukraine and Belarus witnessed a significant decline in bilateral trade and economic relations in 2004. "Last year our relations rose like a phoenix from its ashes, and the commodities turnover was record high over the whole history of our relations," Lukashenko said.

*Source: Interfax-Ukraine; March 14, 2006; <http://www.interfax.kiev.ua/eng/>*

### **14. Election in Belarus Is Test of Appetite for Democracy**

Nation suppressed reform, but many still hope for change

Anatoly Lebedko keeps a bouquet of miniature flags next to his office desk, including one that commemorates the Orange Revolution in neighboring Ukraine. For him, an opposition politician in Belarus, a country seemingly trapped in Soviet-style politics, the flag is a reminder that the impossible sometimes is possible.

In Ukraine, thousands of orange-clad demonstrators peacefully brought to power in 2004 a president who promised democratic rule. Lebedko was in the crowds there, and he couldn't help but imagine revolution also shaking Belarus.

The main uncertainty here, however, as Belarus prepares for elections Sunday is not whether President Alexander Lukashenko will win a third term but by how large a margin. Officially, he won 76 percent of the vote in 2001 and then 88 percent in the referendum that changed the constitution to allow him to run again, votes that European observers said were neither free nor fair.

The election is a test of the appetite for democratic change in the European country that has done the most in the post-Soviet era to prevent it. The vote tests the government's powers of intimidation against would-be reformers' ability to make their message heard. They are working in a society where apathy has been the antidote to fear.

"In the center of Europe, this cannot carry on for very long, what we witness in Belarus today," says Lebedko, head of the United Civil Party, one of the largest opposition blocs.

Lukashenko, a former collective farm director, is known here as "batka," or father, a nickname many use less as a sign of respect than of derision. During nearly 12 years in office, he has consolidated power in the presidency. Through a series of flawed elections, he helped remove all

opposition voices from parliament. He has muffled the press - the government has closed dozens of independent newspapers for alleged irregularities - and made the courts a servant of the presidency.

In its most recent report on human rights in Belarus, released last week, the U.S. State Department pointed to "serious abuses" by Lukashenko's government, including politically motivated arrests, torture of people detained by police and the use of force against peaceful protesters. During a visit last year to neighboring Lithuania, President Bush called Belarus the "last dictatorship in Europe."

With help from "ideology" departments at every university and a near monopoly on television, Lukashenko has convinced a substantial part of the population that Belarus is a stable, prosperous country under threat from the West. In December, parliament made it a crime to organize protests or otherwise "discredit" Belarus, a measure intended to prevent the mass gatherings that sparked the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Rose Revolution in Georgia.

"All these color revolutions are not really revolutions," Lukashenko said last year, calling them "open banditry under the cover of democracy."

But there is evidence that a growing number of people do not share his view.

In a survey conducted last month, about a fourth of the Belarusians who were questioned described their quality of life as "bad" to "very bad." Nearly a third said their lives could not significantly improve as long as Lukashenko remained in power.

That such data even exist is something of a feat.

Oleg Manaev is the sociology professor at Belarusian State University who conducted the poll. Lest he be jailed, he implores anyone wanting to refer to his findings to make this clear: He gathered the data as a private citizen. Last year, the country's supreme court closed his research organization, the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, and prohibited it from working in Belarus. The institute is now registered in Lithuania.

The government doesn't hide its tactics. On March 2, security police roughed up one of Lukashenko's election challengers, Alexander Kozulin, as he tried to enter a pro-government conference. The same day, police and security forces prevented people from gathering at Minsk's Freedom Square to hear a speech by Alexander Milinkevich, the leading opposition candidate. When Milinkevich's supporters tried to meet elsewhere, many were cut off by a line of riot police wielding shields and carrying tear gas.

The president's critics hope the government's heavy-handed tactics will help their cause. If the government is seen preventing candidates from speaking or blatantly falsifying election results, that may be the opposition's best chance to inspire people to protest.

"This is what persuades people to overcome their apathy, overcome their fears and to fight for their rights," Lebedko says. "In conditions of total fear, the fact that people will rise from their knees and go out into the streets, that would definitely be success."

On a wall in his office, Lebedko has hung black-and-white photographs of five prominent dissidents and a journalist. Four of those six people have disappeared since 1999 and are presumed dead; a fifth died in what his family describes as mysterious circumstances; the sixth is imprisoned. On Tuesday, Lebedko was briefly detained in Mogilyov, a city in eastern Belarus, and fined \$700 for holding an unsanctioned rally.

For critics of the government, Ukraine and its Orange Revolution seem an inspiring example. Ukraine, however, was far better prepared for a debate about democracy. There were dissident voices in its parliament. Some newspapers and television stations were independent, and

Western governments and nongovernmental organizations had long helped finance pro-democracy groups.

In Ukraine, the youth coalition Pora openly distributed millions of pieces of campaign literature on behalf of the pro-democracy candidate for president, and it organized more than 750 rallies. When the government tried to falsify election results, activists erected a tent city on the main thoroughfare of Kiev, the Ukrainian capital. Thousands of protesters camped there for weeks. There will be no tent city here.

Simply holding an opposition newspaper on one of the capital's broad avenues is enough to attract attention from authorities wearing military fatigues.

"All the methods that were used there are illegal here," says Alexander Atroshchenkov, 24, an activist with the Belarusian youth group Zubr, who traveled to Ukraine in 2004.

Atroshchenkov says his political activism led to his expulsion from Belarusian State University and to numerous detentions. He describes what happened in Ukraine as the "most beautiful revolution in the world" for its peace and civility, but he is unsure what election day will bring. "The more people, the less violence," Atroshchenkov says, thinking about possible public protests.

Critics of Lukashenko talk not of victory at the polls, but of incremental progress.

"We can win in different ways," says Milinkevich, a physicist who was elected by a congress of opposition groups to challenge the president. "He can win in this electoral farce. He can announce false results. We do not think this is a real victory. Our victory will be a victory in the minds of people.

"Even if they imprison me and my supporters," Milinkevich says, "it will be the beginning of their end."

Lukashenko became president in 1994 after Belarus' first - and so far only - free presidential election. He campaigned promising to eliminate corruption, institute market reforms and bring greater integration with Russia.

He portrays himself as Russia's most loyal ally, and the president is the main advocate of the union of the two countries that was agreed to in principle a decade ago. Belarus enjoys significant benefits from its alliance with Moscow. Belarus imports Russian natural gas at below-market rates, marks up the price and then resells it abroad, earning nearly \$4 billion a year, according to Andrei Suzdaltsev, an independent political scientist here.

"Belarus needs economic support from Russia; Belarus understands that," Suzdaltsev says. "Europe is not going to take Belarus under its wing. Independence costs money, and democracy costs even more."

Russian President Vladimir V. Putin has kept some distance from Lukashenko. Putin has not campaigned on his behalf, apparently reflecting the lesson learned from his open support for the losing presidential candidate in Ukraine. And his comments have been circumspect.

Asked in January about prospects for free elections here, Putin said, "Free elections are always possible." He characterized his occasional meetings with Lukashenko not as support "for the regime" but "for our fraternal Belarusian people."

Here, conversations often come back to Ukraine, as both a blessing and a curse. Its Orange Revolution brought hope that change is possible; Ukraine's economic problems, the disappointedly slow pace of reform and splits among the reformers have made it easier for supporters of Lukashenko to call the revolution a failure.

"Every Belarusian looks into Ukraine: Are there any positive changes or not?" says Vladyslav Kaskiv, an activist with the Ukrainian youth group Pora's political wing. "Until we have evident positive changes, we can't expect anything to change in Belarus."

Lebedko, of the United Civil Party, still looks to Ukraine for inspiration. He recalls meeting with two leaders of the reform movement there a few months before the revolution.

"They both told me that nothing will happen - they had no hope," Lebedko recalls. "But it did happen."

*Source: Erika Niedowski, The Baltimore Sun; March 13, 2006; <http://www.baltimoresun.com/>*

### **15. Ten Day Sentence for Ukrainian Students: Belarus Court**

Ten days behind bars - that was the sentence a Belarus court handed down on Monday to three Ukrainian democracy activists who were arrested in Minsk over the weekend.

Another two members of the Studentske Bratstvo organization are awaiting their sentence. They were charged with the participating in a unsanctioned rally in support of Belarusian opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevych and waving the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag that is not legally registered in Belarus. During the rally, held on Sunday, 5 Kanal's news crew was also arrested, and then released after Ukrainian diplomats intervened.

*Source: Interfax-Ukraine; March 13, 2006; <http://www.interfax.kiev.ua/eng/>*

### **16. Destiny of 6 Citizens of Ukraine, Arrested in Belarus, Still Unclear**

The destiny of 6 citizens of Ukraine, who were arrested in Belarus on 12 March, is still unclear.

According to TV 5 Kanal, it is still unknown, where the arrested Ukrainians are kept in Minsk.

By the preliminary information, nearly 20 citizens of Ukraine were arrested in Minsk during a meeting with Aleksander Milinkevych, the only presidential candidate of the Belarus democratic forces. All of them are representatives of Ukrainian political organizations and NGOs. Some of them were later discharged.

As UNIAN reported earlier, a camera group of TV 5 Kanal, arrested during an opposition meeting in Minsk, was discharged with the assistance of the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine.

*Source: UNIAN, March 13, 2006; <http://www.unian.net/eng/news/print-110473.html>*

### **17. 'Orange Revolutions' Process Fading**

Two key post-Soviet states, Belarus and Ukraine, head into elections this month amid dramatic accusations of planned coups, vote-fixing and outside interference.

But in sharp contrast to the previous cycle of elections in Russia's neighbourhood, which triggered tumultuous pro-democracy revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan and sent the Kremlin into a panic, Moscow appears to be regarding the present scene with icy calm.

"Russia has learned to use its material strengths, like energy supplies, rather than direct political interference as a means of exerting influence over neighbouring states," says Sergei Strokan, an expert with the liberal daily Kommersant in Moscow.

"There's a feeling that things are going Russia's way again, especially in Ukraine, and we can afford to sit back and wait. One year can make a big difference," he says.

.....

In Belarus, which is already a strong ally of Russia, the Kremlin will try to put the best face on long-time President Alexander Lukashenko's almost certain victory in polls slated for March 19, experts say.

Lukashenko, a former collective farm chairman who has maintained a strict, state-controlled economy, can point to healthy growth rates, low unemployment and stable, if meagre, living standards.

But he has closed down most independent media, severely curtailed non-official social movements, and human rights groups say that scores of opposition activists have "disappeared" in recent years.

Two candidates running against Lukashenko, Alexander Kozulin and Alexander Milinkevich, have been virtually barred from the media and have seen their rallies broken up by force.

In a Soviet-style twist, the republic's KGB security service chief has alleged that the opposition is planning an election day coup, to be triggered by false exit polls, allegedly prepared by U.S.-funded non-governmental groups, showing a 53 per cent victory for Milinkevich.

"After that, they planned to start seizing official buildings, and start blocking railway lines with the aim of completely paralyzing the state," KGB chief Stepan Sukhorenko said last week.

Opposition leaders deny the allegations, but say they will bring their supporters into the streets on election day to peacefully protest any perceived vote-rigging.

"These elections are being held under conditions of total falsification and persecution of the opposition," Milinkevich told journalists.

Some Russian experts allege the turmoil in Belarus is overblown by Western press reports, and point to official polls that show up to 80 per cent support for Lukashenko.

"Lukashenko, for all his lack of democracy, has the support of his people and is pursuing sensible policies," insists Mikhail Delyagin, director of the independent Globalization Institute in Moscow.

"He may be the devil incarnate to the West, but Belarussians regard him as their legitimate leader," he says.

*Excerpt from*

*Source: Fred Weir, CANOE; March 12, 2006;  
<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/World/2006/03/12/1484380-cp.html>*

### **18. Fradkov Tips Voters In Belarus**

Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov met with top officials in Belarus on Tuesday and said he was sure voters in the country would make the "right choice" in the upcoming presidential election, which pits incumbent Alexander Lukashenko against opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich.

"The people of Belarus will make the right choice that will strengthen cooperation between our countries," Fradkov said during a meeting with Lukashenko.

Meanwhile, a top campaign official for Milinkevich and the leader of a party supporting his presidential bid were detained after a rally in an eastern city.

Amid fears of unrest, with opposition protests expected if the vote is considered unfair and the government vowing a firm response, Lukashenko told Fradkov: "We control the situation, it is absolutely normal."

Anatoly Lebedko, leader of the opposition United Civil Party, said he and Milinkevich's campaign chief in Mogilev, Vladimir Shantsev, were detained and forcibly taken to a police station after a rally in the eastern city that authorities said was illegal.

"Lukashenko has turned the election campaign into a meaningless exercise," Lebedko said by telephone. "The forceful actions against us demonstrate the lack of even minimal conditions for a presidential race."

Lebedko said authorities had at the last minute withdrawn approval for an indoors campaign meeting, forcing him to hold it on the street.

*Source: The St. Petersburg Times; march 10, 2006; <http://www.times.spb.ru>*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **19. Belarus: Friction with the U.S. and E.U. Will Remain High After Upcoming Elections**

On March 19, 2006, presidential elections will occur in Belarus. No surprises are expected, as Alexander Lukashenko is set to win a new mandate. In October 2004, Lukashenko succeeded in winning a controversial referendum that allows him to compete for a third time after his previous wins in 1994 and 2001. Although his margin against competitors may be slightly narrower than in the past, Lukashenko is likely to comfortably win as his grip on the fundamental levers of power seems firm and hardly assailable.

The outcome of the Belarusian polls will be carefully monitored in Moscow, Washington and Brussels. Minsk plays an important geopolitical role for Russia since Moscow is striving to retain influence in Eastern Europe. Western powers have so far failed to cause a pro-Western political turn (such as in Ukraine and Georgia) to occur in the former Soviet country. The real issue is what consequences the expected Lukashenko win will bring for Russian-Western relations and Eastern European politics.

#### **Actors and Stakes**

Lukashenko has been repeatedly accused of undermining Belarusian democracy by using violent means against members of the opposition (intellectuals and politicians alike). Especially after his second win in 2001, many U.S. and European media organizations and institutions have issued reports about repression and even murders of some of Lukashenko's rivals. Minsk, however, has systematically denied such charges and instead points out that Washington has orchestrated a subversive campaign aimed at inducing a "regime change" in the country.

On March 19, Lukashenko's most popular rival will be Alexander Milinkevich, whose supporters often gathered in the streets of Minsk; these demonstrations have been severely repressed by the police. Early this month, another candidate, Alexander Kazulin, and his closer collaborators were reportedly physically beaten by Belarusian special forces during a meeting in Minsk.

Both Milinkevich and Kazulin look to the West for support, and therefore appear to be the ones who could usher in a dramatic change in Minsk's traditional pro-Russian stance.

On the contrary, Lukashenko is the symbol of an old Soviet nomenklatura whose political strategy is inseparable from that of Russia. In fact, Belarus is extremely dependent upon Russia, and Putin has consistently shown his determination to keep Minsk in Moscow's sphere of influence. In Yalta in October 2004, Putin re-launched the idea of a political and economic community among Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Obviously, Kiev's pro-Western turn in December 2004 complicated Russia's plans, but it also encouraged Putin to confirm his strong support to Lukashenko.

Belarus is dependent on Russia both politically and economically. For instance, Russia is practically Belarus' sole ally, and Belarusian exports are primarily fed into the Russian market. The West considers Minsk's state-controlled and state-assisted industrial core to be an old-fashioned, quasi-socialist economic model; there is no doubt if liberal and pro-Western Belarusian politicians won the elections, they would be immediately pressed by the E.U. and U.S. to dismantle these state-controlled structures.

The Belarusian economy measured 8.3 percent growth in 2005, and in spite of a reduction it is set to score six percent in 2006. Inflation rates are very high at 12.5 percent, and wage increases are often way ahead of productivity ones. In order to keep its national model alive, Belarus badly needs Russian help and cheap energy supplies that only Moscow can assure via favorable political arrangements.

On a geopolitical level, Belarus may appear today as a Russian wedge in Eastern Europe, where Poland is trying to further expand its influence by forming an axis with the Baltic states, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. Energy stakes and geostrategic factors work together to weaken Russian-Polish relations, as well as Russian-American relations.

As PINR noted in August 2005, Poland is backing a project that envisages using the existing Odessa-Brody pipeline -- which ends in Ukraine -- to carry Kazakh oil to Gdansk (on the Baltic shores of Poland) and then to Western Europe. Similarly, Warsaw is working to create a pro-liberal, pro-Atlanticist political bloc in the same area, causing friction with Russia since Moscow is attempting to regain influence in Ukraine and has preserved its influence in Belarus and Moldova.

Moscow's reasons for insisting on such a strategy are not only economic and energy-related, but also strategic. N.A.T.O.'s enlargement, for instance, causes Russia to lose decisive positions on its once-dominated western borders (especially in Ukraine).

Therefore, Lukashenko's predictable win will keep weak Russian-Polish and Russian-American relations in Eastern Europe. Moreover, Russia has allegedly used Belarusian companies to sell weapons to U.S. rivals in the Middle East, and Minsk has been accused by the U.S. in past years of selling arms to both Iraq and Iran. Lukashenko's departure would likely make it easier for Washington to control Belarusian arms sales.

## Trends

Since the E.U. and the U.S. are suffering certain strategic difficulties -- in Iraq and Afghanistan, in the Iranian nuclear crisis and as a result of the E.U.'s political impasse -- it is not easy for them to effectively support Belarusian pro-Western candidates.

Additionally, Lukashenko (and presumably the Kremlin) has launched a preemptive strike against Western interference in Belarusian affairs. Last month, Minsk's authorities disclosed an exit poll, allegedly performed by Gallup in Vilnius, which was said to be dated March 19 (the date of the presidential election) and aimed at boosting Milinkevich's popularity by stating his election victory with over 53 percent of votes. Whether the false survey was true or was fabricated by the government, it is certain that Lukashenko and his powerbrokers are well aware of the information war that will be fought during and immediately after election day.

## Conclusion

Lukashenko's win will perpetuate the statist model of the Belarusian economy and the traditional state-assisted industrial and agricultural policies, whereby Russian firms will probably be the only foreign ones able to do business in the country.

However, it is not clear that civil and political groups that aim to open the Belarusian society to more liberalization will be successfully contained by Lukashenko in the next five years. As its current high G.D.P. real growth rates look increasingly difficult to maintain, and with inflation set

to remain high, economic discontent in the country may fuel the fires of broader political opposition to the ruling party.

On the other hand, the wave of "colored revolutions" that struck former Soviet countries in the first half of the present decade hasn't succeeded in expanding further, and with Russia regaining at least in part its geopolitical influence in Eurasia, the U.S. and Europe will not have an easy job integrating Belarus into their Euro-Atlantic security and economic structures.

*Source: Dr. Federico Bordonaro, Power and Interest News Report, March 15;  
<http://www.pinr.com>*

## **20. Will Democracy Prevail in Belarus?**

Since the fall of Communism sixteen years ago, the Czech Republic has felt a sense of responsibility to help promote democracy in countries where basic human rights are frequently violated. The Czech government openly criticises the Castro regime, calls for an independent Tibet, and actively supported the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. But what are Czechs doing to help promote democracy in Belarus, where the press is censored, any form of political dissent is a punishable offence, and the use of Russian is more common than the native Belarusian?

Citizens of the eastern European country are casting their ballots in presidential elections this week but the vote is widely considered just a formality as President Alexander Lukashenko is expected to win a third term in office. Dita Asiedu spoke to member of the Belarusian community in Prague and editor of the Belarusian Review George Stankevich to see how the Czech Republic is viewing the political situation in his home country:

"President Havel [former Czech President Vaclav Havel] really does support our efforts to bring democracy to Belarus. Several senators and Minister Svoboda too [foreign minister Cyril Svoboda], as well as mainly the female journalists who write excellent articles in Lidove Noviny [a Czech newspaper] and Respekt [a Czech weekly magazine] occasionally has good articles on the subject."

Overall, would you say that the ordinary Czech citizen knows what's going on in Belarus?

"No. I'm not certain that they are interested at all."

About three years ago, our foreign minister Cyril Svoboda was accused of causing unrest in Belarus...

"That's a farce."

What happened exactly?

"The Czech Embassy decided to distribute a UN report on human rights violations in Belarus. It was perfectly legal but the regime in Belarus used it as a pretext to start attacking the Czech Embassy."

But would that have made any difference at all? At around that same time, Prague hosted a conference on Belarus. It seems like ordinary citizens in Belarus know very little about the opposition, that there is one...

"It was a good thing because the election campaign, which was more or less initiated by Lukashenko ahead of time so that the opposition had no time to organise theirs, sort of backfired on him because the opposition candidates used it to his displeasure quite well. That information got around and more and more people came to meet the opposition candidates. They came in thousands and the word spread. So, what the embassy did was a step in the right direction and it was appreciated of course.

But as George Stankevich mentioned earlier, ordinary Czechs have little interest in Belarus. Czech journalist and human rights activist Petruska Sustrova told Radio Prague there are three main reasons why:

"If we compare the situation here to that in Poland or the Baltic states, we have to realise that they have historic ties to Belarus, ties that are more deeply rooted. Belarus is much further away from us. I must also point out that in Communist Czechoslovakia many of us viewed Belarus as part of the Soviet Union and not a different nation with different people. Back then there was hardly any information on the various nationalities that made up the Soviet Union, whose history was suppressed. In Poland, this was not the case because some people there had relatives in Belarus, who shared their experiences.

"And today, Czechs are also not interested in what's going on beyond their country's eastern borders - the media and Czech society are much more attracted to the western states and lifestyles simply because of their developed democracies and much richer economies."

*Source: Dita Asiedu, Radio Prague; March 15, 2006; <http://www.radio.cz/en>*

## **21. Belarus Expels Foreign Election Observers**

Belarusian authorities have arrested eight foreign observers of the nation's presidential election and ordered them to leave the country.

The two Swedes and six Danes, part of an unofficial monitoring team from Danish pro-democracy group Silba, were arrested Tuesday, the first day of early voting for the March 19 election, the BBC reported Wednesday.

The Swedes were arrested in the western city of Grodno after visiting a polling station and were accused of violating a national ban on conducting opinion polls. The other six were arrested in Minsk, the capital.

The Silba team is not part of the official election monitoring team to be sent by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Opposition groups in Belarus have condemned the opening of the polls five days early, saying it will allow President Alexander Lukashenko's supporters to steal votes, ensuring a landslide victory for the incumbent as he runs for a third term.

The non-governmental organization Support Initiative for Liberty and Democracy in the Baltic Area, or Silba, was founded in 1994 to promote democracy in the Baltic States, but later expanded its activities to include all Eastern European nations.

*Source: United Press International, March 15, 2006; <http://www.upi.com>*

## **22. Minister: West Should Accept Lukashenko**

West should review Belarus ties after poll, says Martynov

Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov expects the West to brand Sunday's presidential election in his country as unfair.

But he says that instead of accusing President Alexander Lukashenko of running roughshod over human rights, Washington and its allies should accept that Belarus's leader and his policies are popular.

In a defiant interview in which he accused the United States and European Union of interfering in the ex-Soviet state's affairs, Martynov said Belarus did not fear sanctions and would never bow to pressure from the West.

"We would like to believe that our colleagues in the West will truly open their eyes and accept reality," Martynov told Reuters late on Monday.

"Let's hope they will understand the main thing -- that the Belarusian people's choice poses no threat to the interests of any country. We hope they are ready to grasp that Belarus is a reliable and responsible partner on the European continent."

Lukashenko is heavily favored to win a new term on Sunday against three challengers, including two opposition hopefuls.

Western countries allege Lukashenko has rigged elections since the mid-1990s and vow new sanctions if nearly 1,000 observers refuse to recognize the outcome of this contest.

Belarus says better ties with a country strategically located in central Europe would help the European Union develop more effective policies in disarmament, trade, energy supplies, crime prevention and illegal migration.

Martynov shrugged off the likelihood observers will say the poll is not free and fair.

"Declarations before the election suggesting that the polls are supposed to be unfair or rigged simply show judgment has already been passed," Martynov said. "Those working against us are simply waiting for the election in order to say so."

West policies 'ineffective'

He said the West had clung to ineffective policies since 1996, when Lukashenko was first accused of vote-rigging.

"This policy is of no benefit to anyone and it is time to change it. We hope the election will, to some extent, make our partners understand that for five more years they have to work with the leadership of an important European country."

U.S. denunciations, he said, amounted to open interference.

"Brussels has gone even further in declaring support for one of the opposition candidates," Martynov said. "That is clear and unacceptable interference in the political processes of another state. Time will tell just how far-sighted that proves."

"Even now, the two opposition candidates are talking about one or the other pulling out. Brussels may be backing a horse liable not even to finish the race."

Alexander Milinkevich, the candidate supported by most opposition groups, has met EU officials in Brussels and addressed parliament in Poland, Belarus's western neighbor.

'Stability, prosperity'

Although he has drawn crowds to rallies, polls put him far behind the president, who tells voters he has provided stability and relative prosperity alongside neighbors beset by turmoil.

A second opposition candidate, Alexander Kozulin, has campaigned less vigorously, but is popular among fellow academics. A fourth runner is an ally of the president.

Martynov said new sanctions would prove counter-productive.

"Sanctions never solve any problems. We believe it is dubious to say the least to use economic sanctions for political ends. It leaves a bad taste in your mouth," he said.

Belarus, he said, would not yield to Western pressure, although ordinary people could be penalized as 40 percent of exports -- mainly fertilizer and oil products -- went to the EU.

"I don't believe such measures would make the EU popular with Belarusians. But we would survive," said Martynov.

"Goods we supply to the EU are such that they can be sold elsewhere. Let Brussels think hard before they start talking about sanctions."

*Source: CNN.Com; March 14, 2006; <http://edition.cnn.com>*

### **23. Western Leaders Deny plot to Influence Destiny of Belarus**

The US and the European Union would like little better than to contribute to ending what Condoleezza Rice, the American secretary of state, has called "the last dictatorship in Europe".

However, they insist they are limiting their efforts to promoting fair elections and democracy - and reject claims from Belarus and Russia that the west is plotting to remove Belarus president Aleksander Lukashenko in a Ukrainian-style Orange Revolution.

In any case, western governments recognise that Belarus is much less open and susceptible to outside influence than Ukraine was in 2004, or even Georgia, which saw a similar popular revolt at the end of 2003. Pavol Demes, director of the central and eastern Europe operations of the German Marshall Fund, an independent US institution promoting democracy, says: "Belarus is far more isolated."

Russian officials have said this isolation has not prevented western governments from interfering in Belarus's elections in favour of the anti-Lukashenko opposition. The foreign ministry recently questioned the impartiality of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Europe's main organiser of international election monitoring, in its preparations for the Belarus poll.

In a Financial Times interview on Friday, Dan Fried, the US assistant secretary of state, said Washington was promoting democracy in general in the former Soviet Union and not trying to manipulate local political forces. "What we want to do is shine a spotlight on Belarus and what is going on to make sure Lukashenko knows he can't do things in the dark," he said.

The US and the EU have issued strong statements urging Mr Lukashenko to hold fair elections, although they have little hope this will happen. They are also warning Mr Lukashenko and the opposition to avoid violence if the polls are followed by demonstrations.

Mr Lukashenko has imposed tough control on independent political parties, the media and non-governmental organisations. Foreign financial assistance is often channelled through secret routes, a tactic that inevitably provokes charges of conspiracy from the Lukashenko administration.

The US last year budgeted nearly \$9.8m (£5.7m) for the promotion of democracy out of \$11.8m total assistance for Belarus and it is planning similar spending for 2006. The EU last year earmarked €9m (£6.2m) for promoting democracy and civil society, including €2m in new money.

Mr Lukashenko is permitting the OSCE to deploy nearly 500 election observers, alongside 400 coming from Russia and its allies. However, independent exit polls are banned. Foreigners or no foreigners, Mr Lukashenko is leaving little to chance.

*Source: Stefan Wagstyl, The Financial Times; March 14, 2006; <http://news.ft.com/>*

### **24. Concert Drums Up Support For Democracy in Belarus**

Oscar-winning Polish film director Andrzej Wajda rallied the crowd Sunday at a Warsaw, Poland, rock concert, part of an event organized by Polish and Ukrainian artists in support of Belarus' opposition a week ahead of a presidential election there.

"You are doing the right thing," Wajda, 80, told some 5,000 youths at the concert where Polish and Ukrainian bands sang songs of Ukraine's Orange Revolution and from Poland's Solidarity freedom movement of the 1980s.

In the March 19 election, Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko is seeking a third consecutive term but is challenged by three other candidates, including Alexander Milinkevich's main pro-democratic opposition.

Poland, which shed communism in 1989 and is now a European Union member, supports Belarus' pro-democracy forces.

*Source: Deseret News; March 13, 2006; <http://deseretnews.com>*

## **25. Russian Diplomat Calls for OSCE Monitoring Objectivity**

European monitors might fail to make objective conclusions on the upcoming elections in Belarus and Ukraine, which means universal monitoring criteria should be adopted, a deputy Russian foreign minister told RIA Novosti Monday.

Speaking about the upcoming monitoring mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), a body within the world's largest regional security grouping, Grigory Karasin said: "There are fears that the election verdicts offered by the ODIHR will again be ideologically tinted."

The ODIHR, part of the 55-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which monitors elections, human rights, and democracy across the world, is currently forming a mission to cover the March 19 presidential poll in Belarus and the parliamentary vote in Ukraine on March 26.

Russia and other countries have accused the organization of focusing on promoting democratic institutions in eastern Europe and ignoring abuses elsewhere, or applying what Russia calls "double standards" in its activities. The Russian Foreign Ministry has consistently called for the security grouping to undergo a thorough reform.

"The most important criterion here remains objectivity and impartiality in assessing preparing for and the voting itself," the deputy minister said. "Otherwise, the institution of monitoring is discredited."

Karasin, who pointed to a "geographic imbalance" in the monitoring body's activities, said the mission would comprise observers from other organizations, including NATO's Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament, where Belarus was not represented. He added that observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a loose union of former Soviet republics including Ukraine and Belarus, had not been invited to join the international mission.

The CIS, however, plans to send its own monitors to Belarus, as does Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Russia-Belarus Union State. Russian members of parliament, CEC officials, and members of the CIS Inter-parliamentary Assembly will also monitor the poll in Ukraine.

Karasin said the OSCE's Needs Assessment Mission, which delivers preliminary findings and conclusions, had already criticized the political situation in the former Soviet republics and made "far-reaching" conclusions that influenced international public opinion.

The diplomat said the Council of Europe, which aims to defend humans rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, had to adopt a convention to set out universal election criteria. He added Russia had already put forward a proposal to the organization, but the reaction had been unenthusiastic.

However, according to the diplomat, the ODIHR is set to change its monitoring practices and report on them to the OSCE's next ministerial session in Brussels.

Karasin also said Russia planned to hand out questionnaires at the OSCE concerning ODIHR activities. The surveys will also set out Russia's concerns and contain recommendations to improve the office's performance.

Russian politicians have accused foreign organizations of supporting the incumbent Western-leaning Ukrainian government, which came to power following the "orange revolution" in early 2005, and officials have reported violations in the run-up to the elections in the country.

Belarus and its leader, Alexander Lukashenko, which Washington has dubbed "Europe's last dictator," have been continuously criticized by European officials highlighting massive human rights breaches in the country.

On Thursday, the PACE president issued a statement charging Lukashenko with creating a climate of intimidation against opposition candidates, citing the arrest and trial of youth activists, and an assault on presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin.

Belarusian officials dismissed the criticism, saying those were provocative acts staged on purpose. In an interview on Russian television Saturday, Lukashenko said he had ordered the authorities to take every measure to ensure opposition leaders' security and prevent further provocations.

*Source: RIA Novosti, March 13, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

## **26. Light the Candles Of Belarus**

### **Europe's Last Dictatorship Will Not Endure**

On Sunday the people of Belarus will cast their ballots for a new president in what should be the first, tentative step of this unhappy country toward democracy. But sadly, in the past few months we have received nothing but reports of campaign violations, tightening control of the media, imprisonment of civic activists and gross intimidation of the opposition, culminating in the beating of an opposition candidate. Under these cruel circumstances, one can doubt that the people of Belarus will have a free and fair choice.

I believe that what the people of Belarus are likely to be denied is the most fundamental of human rights: the right to political choice. I believe this choice applies not only to the election of the president but also to the character of the nation's politics and its path in the years ahead. I believe that this coming weekend the people of Belarus have a choice between political darkness and the light of freedom.

Eighteen years ago, when Soviet communism still occupied Europe's East, people in Bratislava, the capital of my homeland, decided to light candles in the central square. They came simply to pray in the candlelight for religious liberty, for freedom and for an end to the tyranny of totalitarianism. On that day the regime crushed the protest, but somehow the flickering lights that had briefly rolled back the darkness were not extinguished. Twenty months later the regime fell and freedom came to Central Europe.

It has been a long road since those early days. As President Bush told my countrymen at the same square just a year ago, the road to liberty and prosperity has not always been straight or easy. But what began as little more than a prayer in the darkness has become a reality for the people of Slovakia. I am proud of Slovakia's achievements and its willingness today to support the cause of freedom and the advance of democracy around the world.

In my view, the historical forces set in motion by the aspirations of peoples yearning to be free are irresistible. Tyrants may well have acquired a new sophistication -- and certainly in Belarus a renewed ruthlessness -- but at the end of the day the attraction of freedom is a stronger force than the tactics of repression. This Thursday, and on the 16th day of every month, people in Belarus will be lighting candles as they did in the square years ago. They will be lighting candles and placing them in the windows of their homes for those who disappeared at the hands of the regime, for freedom, for a future without fear. And people of all ages will be wearing blue denim, the symbol of hope for a modern, European Belarus.

Last year, near the square where we lit candles, I introduced a special group of people to President Bush. These were civic leaders who championed freedom in their homelands. These were men and women who came from countries from the Baltic to the Black seas, from Georgia to Serbia and Montenegro, and, yes, from Belarus.

Later today Bush and I will talk about this meeting. Undoubtedly we will recall the bravery of these men and women and the solidarity we felt then with these extraordinary people. As the people of Belarus approach their nation's first attempt to make a free choice, we want them to know of our solidarity and that we wish them well.

A free and democratic Belarus will be a better home for its people and for their children. It will be a good neighbor for Europe and Russia, rather than the exporter of political refugees it is today. And a free Belarus would send a message to the world that the last dictatorship in Europe has finally come to an end.

What inspires such confidence in the people of Belarus? The same candles that lit the square in Bratislava now flicker in the apartment windows of Minsk and in small houses in the countryside. Perhaps, it is true, just one day of each month. But just as orange scarves and jackets began to fill the streets of Kiev, Ukraine, last winter, blue denim has become the fashion in the streets of Belarus and officials worry about the startling demand for candles. It all comes down to the inexplicable persistence of these tiny lights in the square. And this is the way the darkness finally ends and fear is forgotten.

*Source: Mikulas Dzurinda, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic; The Washington Post; March 13, 2006; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>*

## **27. U.S. Decries Oppression in Belarus, Declares Support for Ukraine**

Official contrasts anti-democratic and free elections in the two nations

The authorities in Belarus are conducting a campaign of intimidation, fear and violence, charged a senior U.S. official, who predicted that the March 19 presidential election will not only be deeply flawed, but will be "an election which may not deserve the name."

In contrast, the United States sees upcoming elections in Ukraine as free and fair, as the nation experiences problems typical of a "post-community messy democratic transition," according to Daniel Fried, assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs. Fried spoke to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington on March 9.

The United States, with its European allies and the international community, will continue to remain engaged in Belarus, Fried said, by exposing the regime's record in Belarus, supporting democratic activists, and creating hope for a "different future for Belarus than perpetual rule by Lukashenko and an eventual dictatorial successor.

In Ukraine, according to Fried, the United States seeks to work with a reformist government committed to fighting corruption at home and pursuing a position of integration with the European and Atlantic community internationally.

"The question of Belarus and its democratic evolution and the question of democratic consolidation in Ukraine have a profound impact on us all," Fried said. In response to a question about disputes between Russia and Ukraine over natural gas supplies, Fried said that the United States considers openness and transparency essential for long-term energy security in Europe and the West generally.

He disputed any suggestions that, by promoting democracy in countries like Ukraine, the United States was taking one side over another.

"We had a great deal invested in the Orange Revolution," Fried said, "not because it represented particular parties but because it represented democracy. It was the Ukrainian identity crystallizing itself in a democratic form."

Fried will travel to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia and Turkey March 13-17, 2006, according to a March 10 announcement by the State Department.

Following is a transcript of Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried's remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies:

(begin transcript)

U.S. Department of State

Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs

Washington, D.C.

Who'll Vote for Freedom? Elections in Belarus and Ukraine

Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Center for Strategic and International Studies

March 9, 2006

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Thank you.

Colleagues and friends, I am at a disadvantage here because I'm in the presence of people who know the situation on the ground in Ukraine and Belarus better than I do. We have a former Ambassador to Ukraine sitting with us, Steve Pifer. We have a former Ambassador to Russia, former Ambassador to Turkey, former head of the Soviet desk back in the 1980s, so I'm in the presence of expertise on these issues.

Let me review with you where I think we are, where the Administration thinks we are with respect to the upcoming elections in two very different countries. We're here to discuss Belarus and Ukraine. In Belarus, we have to deal with what is called the last dictatorship in Europe, the "last outpost of tyranny" as Secretary Rice has said, where we are seeing the kinds of abuses which are familiar to us from study and life in other repressive regimes.

In Ukraine, by dramatic contrast, we are seeing an election which promises to be free, fair, and open. It is an open election because we have, none of us have, any idea who is going to win. In Ukraine, we are dealing with the problems of a post-communist messy democratic transition. In Belarus, we are dealing roughly with a pre-democratic set of tensions.

Now to step back, to put this in a larger context, the question we are all dealing with is how far in Europe will the democratic wave that began in 1989 extend? How far will the frontiers of freedom move? And the question of whether and if so how far democracy can establish itself within

Eurasia, the territory of what used to be the Soviet Union, is a question with profound implications for a continental sized area.

The Bush Administration, in fact, frankly the Clinton Administration that preceded it in which I also worked, did not believe, we do not believe that certain countries or certain peoples are pre-ordained to succeed or fail with democratic transformation. If we believe that we would have accepted the views of most experts that democracy would probably not succeed in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary because that was, you recall, the prevailing view in 1989.

If democracy could succeed in those post-communist countries under conditions whose difficulty now is scarcely remembered, then it can, in principle at least, succeed anywhere in the post-communist hemisphere. And if it can succeed anywhere then the question is not whether one country or another is doomed to failure, but what conditions make it possible for democracy to succeed?

So the question of Belarus and its democratic evolution and the question of democratic consolidation in Ukraine have a profound impact on us all.

The question of democracies consolidation in Georgia, democratic progress in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, the possibility of reform and democracy even in Uzbekistan will also be affected by the results in Belarus and in Ukraine, as different as those countries are.

Now, let me turn to Belarus and review it. The news is obviously not good, and you needed no one from the State Department to tell you that. We are witnessing increased detentions, harassment, seizures of persons as the election approaches. The Belarusian regime is attempting to create a climate of fear and intimidation.

Opposition candidate Alexander Kozulin was beaten and detained on March 2nd. He may face criminal charges. One of his assailants was the notorious Colonel Pavlichenko who is said to be connected with some of the disappearances in 1999 and 2000.

I note also that the regime security forces roughed up the press that was covering Kozulin, which also tells us what kind of a regime we are dealing with.

Today, in Minsk, a court sentenced several members of opposition candidate Milinkevich's campaign team, including Mr. Viachorka, whom I know personally, to 15 days for supposedly taking part in an illegal demonstration. Activists from the Civil Society Organization Partnership have been detained under the rather fanciful and frankly absurd claims that they are engaged in a violent revolutionary plot led by Americans. I note also that NDI has been accused of seeking to foment violent revolution and with all respect to my friends in NDI, I have trouble imagining Nelson Ledsky engaged in anything like that. He sends good e-mails about detention of activists. He doesn't do anything like the regime is charging him with. This is Soviet-style in its absurdity.

So we must assume that there will be a deeply flawed election, in fact, an election which may not deserve the name.

What can we do in this circumstance? Principally, what we, the United States government, and we, the larger community of those in the United States, North America, and Europe who support democracy, is to shine a bright light on Belarus and the regime's record. We can help those activists who are struggling for democracy, to promote democratic change in the longer run. We can break the regime's stranglehold on information, and most importantly we can, through our support of an election process and our support for the opposition's efforts to open up that process, create a sense that there is a different future for Belarus than perpetual rule by Lukashenko and an eventual dictatorial successor.

The Congress and the Administration have worked together to this end. I must mention and must applaud the passage near unanimously in the House yesterday of House Resolution 673, which urged the government of Belarus to conduct a free and fair election and expressed support for efforts of the Belarusian people to establish a full democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights.

For our part, the Administration has invested \$12 million in Freedom Support Act assistance to implement programs to support Belarusian efforts to build democracy in that country. We plan to sustain that level of funding this year and will try to do so, Congress willing, into the future.

The President of the United States has personally engaged in this effort. He met with widows of two disappeared opposition figures and he has spoken out, including yesterday, in remarks on International Women's Day, about the plight of those whose husbands have presumably been murdered by the regime.

Secretary Rice, Under Secretary Burns, my Deputy David Kramer and I have all met with leaders of Belarus' opposition and civil society. David Kramer was in Minsk two weeks ago to deliver a message to the authorities that we would watch them closely and we would take steps appropriate to the level of election fraud that we found taking place. He also met, obviously, with representatives of the opposition, the civil society, students, and independent media to reassure them directly that the United States, with Europe, has not forgotten Belarus and will not forget it.

I myself met with opposition candidate Milinkevich in Warsaw briefly and again in Brussels. The United States has not taken a position about which candidate we favor, but I must say that I am impressed by the courage of the opposition in Belarus. They know that they are in what can be accurately put a farcical campaign, but they are nevertheless doing what they can to use this campaign to spread their message among the Belarusian people.

We are working also with the European Union. I tried myself to go to Belarus on a joint mission with Robert Cooper, my European Union counterpart. We had intended to go together to deliver a message to the senior Belarus leadership about the need to act responsibly in the elections. The Belarusian authorities refused to receive us at the same time. They first said that my European colleague could go, but I could not. Then they said that I could go but my European colleague could not. In the end, we decided that we would go together or not at all. I regret that Belarus declined this opportunity for dialogue with the United States and Europe.

Well, that is the character of the Belarus regime. We know that it is engaging in a process that will lead to its increasing self-isolation. We know that the Presidential administration plays a large role in the economy, including maintenance of separate reserve, presidential reserve fund, which stands apart from the state budget. Lukashenko once himself admitted publicly

that that fund possessed a billion dollars and noted that that fund was supported by secret arms sales from Belarus to countries around the world. We have reports that link Belarus to the transfer of weapons and other military equipment to Syria, the former Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein, and others.

It is said in Belarus that Lukashenko is not only the richest man in Belarus, he is one of the richest men in the entire former Soviet Union, which is saying something.

What can we expect on March 19th and what will we do afterwards?

It is a fairly easy prediction to say that the elections will not be free and fair. It is also a fairly easy prediction to say that the opposition will emerge from those elections with a greater sense of itself with an identity, with a self consciousness. We must, we the supporters of freedom and democracy in Belarus, must be prepared for a long game. We must be prepared to work for the years it will take to build on the base that the United Opposition has presented, and to work with

civil society in Belarus, and to make our message clear. The United States will be engaged on behalf of the Belarusian people for the long haul.

Let me turn from this to a radically different situation, which is Ukraine. Two hours ago I had the pleasure of attending the meeting between Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Tarasyuk. I must say it is a pleasure to be working with a government which is conducting an election, which is by all accounts going to be the freest and fairest of any election in that country.

Ukraine is in the midst of a post-democratic political turmoil. The Orange Coalition has found that governing is the hard part and that the Orange Revolution turned out to be, in retrospect, easy though no one thought so at the time.

This is not unique to Ukraine. Almost every democratic coalition that has come to power since 1989 has faced a period usually of some years of post-democratic political turbulence. Most of those countries, in fact almost all of those countries, have managed to get past this initial period and move forward, and we hope the same will be true of Ukraine.

It was a pleasure that in this meeting between the Foreign Minister and the Secretary, the two Ministers were able to note the real progress in U.S.-Ukrainian bilateral relations recently. To note some of the achievements in the last two months:

The United States has restored the generalized system of preferences, GSP trade benefits to Ukraine. The United States has accorded Ukraine market economy status. We recently signed a bilateral WTO market access agreement. Just yesterday the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to graduate Ukraine from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which follows on similar Senate action earlier this year.

Each of these steps required prior actions by Ukraine. They were not unilateral American gifts to that country. They were the result of our response to Ukraine's reforms.

So when I speak of a post Orange Revolution period of political turbulence, it's also important to keep in mind that the Ukrainian government did, when given the opportunity, manage to push through reforms, which made possible our positive response.

It is true to say that Ukraine faces a very tough road ahead. We have watched the Orange Coalition develop fissures. We've seen turbulence at the top. The Ukrainians themselves have admitted that they've missed some opportunities.

We're looking forward to dealing, however, with the next Ukrainian government, and we will judge that government, assuming as I do assume, that the elections are free and fair we will judge that government on its actions.

Many of us were enthusiastic and welcomed the Orange Revolution, but it is up to the Ukrainian people to give us the government of their choice; and up to us to work with a democratically elected government on the basis of its actions.

Now as an analytic statement, many believe that a reconstituted Orange Coalition will be best for that country's reforms. But again, there is a difference between analytic judgments and the Administration's policy. What we want to work with is a reformist Ukrainian government that fights corruption at home. That pursues a policy of integration with the Euro-Atlantic community abroad and which stands in its region for democracy, for good relations with its neighbors, for which Ukraine bears only half the responsibility. And for cooperation with the EU and with NATO in our joint efforts around the world.

I'm happy to report that, by all accounts, we are not witnessing any kind of the systematic abuses of Administrative resources that we dealt with in the previous election. So we must now start to

look past those elections and think about our response afterwards when we get the next government.

We do look forward to partnership with Ukraine. We do support its aspirations to move ever closer to the institutions of Europe. We're going to think about our policy steps, what we do as we see the new government emerge.

Let me stop here and take questions, but one final thought. We don't know and should not seek to draw great conclusions from the current state of democracy or the current state of relations among the different states of the former Soviet Union and Eurasia. We don't know where history is going to end. We don't know that the current very mixed picture of democratic reform is the final picture.

We have to be very clear about what it is we seek, which is democracy spreading as far as it can and cooperation with NATO extending as far as it can. Then the work is the responsibility of the peoples and the countries of that region.

We must be very clear about what we want, very patient about what we can achieve in any given year, in any given election, and we must remember that change is sometimes for the better, even though we deal with the problems of the moment.

With that, thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[Applause].

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QUESTION: You mentioned [inaudible]. I have a very specific question about Belarus. You've mentioned that one of the future actions after the upcoming election, depending on the result, that the U.S. Administration envisions is the [inaudible] of information campaign, bringing more information to people in Belarus.

Intermediate [inaudible] work for the past several years there, we've been doing public opinion, shows a clear connection between the people that receive information from international broadcasters. This group of population [inaudible] less closely to [inaudible] and they're also less optimistic about the future of Belarus. They are more concerned about it. Yet the [inaudible] budget that the Administration proposed, 13.5 percent increase in budget to the Middle East. There really is not a budget increase to programming directly in Belarusian language [inaudible] and indeed, as you said, it's one of the last tyrannies in that part of the world.

Is this just an omission or do you think that the number preventing [inaudible] available or the venues by which [inaudible] is sufficient?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: We have increased our programs, our media programs with respect to Belarus, and we've worked with Europe as it has increased its media programs for Belarus. I know that Poland, which has a very deep knowledge base about Ukraine is doing much the same.

If you're asking me whether I would be happy with additional funding for Belarus or any other democracy programs in my domain, well, I wouldn't complain. But we think we've got – the budgets we have are sufficient to do a good job. Could we do a better job? Well, perfection is – Sure. You can always do more with more. But the question is, are we able to put together media programs, which have the potential to be effective and I think the answer is yes. There are a number of them. Some of them are rather innovative. They're Internet programs. It's not just radio that nobody can receive. So we've been pretty, we and the Europeans, have been pretty creative on this.

.....

QUESTION: Walter Stankievich, *Belarusian Review*. You stated that long term haul is the key element in State Department's policy. Long term haul sounds great, but unfortunately some of the implementing agencies that exist in other countries that help the civil society to grow have been thrown out, starting with the Open Society by Soros, NDI, IRI, IREX, USAID, all of them operate from outside the country. So it would be interesting to know if there are any specifics as to how the long term haul will operate.

One of the areas that is very much needed was mentioned before, is the ability to provide alternative information to the information that's available in the country. Since that is one area where you don't need implementing agencies within the country that should be the area that lots of money is spent right now. I know that the United States government has supported the European newly created venture, but what is needed, for example here, Voice of America has never had a Belarusian service. The time for it is now. However small, however modern, however influential it should be, it should be done now. This is something we can do here. Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I agree with you that media is critical. We discuss this. The people in the State Department responsible for the media programs and for democracy assistance have come up with some creative ways to proceed. I'll certainly discuss with them the possibility of VOA, but we look at the mix of what's available and what's effective.

Yes, you're right. Many of the implementing agents, Open Society institutes, a lot of other NGOs have been tossed out of Minsk. I wouldn't be surprised if the pressure increases. This is not unknown and human rights groups and groups that support civil society have actually some experience working in conditions like this. It isn't new. It isn't new. There are people who know what they're doing even under tough conditions.

MODERATOR: I know there is a kind of movement among people who are interested in this to study, Belarus may end up being a leading case in the study of alternative technologies and modern technologies for breaking information blockades. So there's a chance to be a leader in the world.

.....

QUESTION: Shannon Wendell, the Belarus Country Director for Office of the Secretary of Defense. I just have a quick question.

You spoke earlier about continuing engagement with the Belarusian civil society for the long haul. I'm curious what is your view on possibly increasing engagement with low level government and military officials to expose them to the West in the hope that we have contacts that we could possibly use in the future?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: How novel, an interagency meeting right here and on camera. [Laughter].

MODERATOR: CSIS likes to be a leader. [Laughter].

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Yes, and thank you so much.

This is a serious question and a worthy one. After the elections how much engagement with the Belarus regime, how much discrimination among the elements of the regime, that's a fair question. Analogies are always weak, so forgive me in advance, but I do remember that during the worst period of Meciar's rule in Slovakia we maintained ties with the Slovak government, and, in retrospect, we were glad we did. That is not to say the situation is the same. It's not the same. In Belarus, frankly, it's worse. But it was pretty bad in Slovakia for a time.

We will have to think through the best way to proceed. Some of our European friends have urged us not to isolate completely Belarusian authorities, and we will work through this question, no doubt consulting with and hearing the views of my colleagues in the Defense Department.

QUESTION: I'm Nancy Donaldson. I work at Dotko Worldwide. We have had the privilege of working with you and many colleagues on some of the elections this year, so we're observing the rather wild discussions about the Administration's pro-democracy effort and promotion.

I just want to say one of the things we've learned is that in a world where anti-Americanism is very popular, the response of so many people of the business sector and of opposition leaders to President Bush's commitment to promoting democracy around the world is to have a large hope grow, and to really believe and unfortunately to have huge expectations about what that might mean.

So I wonder if you, and including the private sector, that's been the most interesting thing for us, to see the engagement of the private sector in elections.

I wonder if you would comment on your earlier point that you're looking at conditions as much as countries when you're looking for democracy, about that aspect of conditions and what, if you will, what you and everyone are learning about this pro-democracy drive. It's a general question, but it's also very important in terms of the debate.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: It is an important question. President Bush in his second inaugural outlined a very forward leaning strategy of support for freedom, the so-called Freedom Agenda. In it, and these are my words, not his, he embraced America's support for democracy and democratic movements. He did not accept the argument of so-called realists, that democracy is something that we should give second order attention to. And he is someone, the President is someone who speaks clearly. He's been accused of many things, but lack of clarity is not one of them.

Now we have to be clear about what we seek. We, the Administration, we have to be clear about calling things the way they are. But we also have to be clear about what it is possible to accomplish in any given country in any given time.

For example, if a country in the former Soviet Union is moving by fits and starts in generally a good direction but isn't a democracy, what should be our response? I don't want to get into specifics, but I want to talk about a principle.

Well, if a country's moving in the right direction, I think we will want to be more patient and more supportive. If a country is moving radically in the wrong direction, I'm not going to be much interested in arguments that democracy must wait a generation or two generations because that's just what dictators say.

So the challenge the Administration faces, and I'll admit this frankly, is how to operationalize a very bold vision with what it is possible to accomplish every day. And that poses a set of choices. And it generates questions like yours or tougher questions. But frankly, I would rather have to deal with those questions than deal with the problems generated by a cynical policy of pure real politic, which didn't regard the internal arrangements of countries as any of our business.

This question often is posed with respect to the Middle East and usually in terms a lot rougher than you just posed it. It's usually posed in some form like this: "What do you think you're doing supporting democracy when you get Hamas?" Something like that.

The answer is, well, what did we think we were doing all those decades when we supported dictators? Did we not try that other route, and nothing else for all our years? What did it give us?

I would much rather deal with the problems of support for democracy, recognizing that there are problems, than the problems of the alternative.

QUESTION: Asta Banionis, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. Mr. Fried, could you tell us if the U.S. government has taken a position on Russia's government expanding its broadcasting into Europe? Specifically, Voice of Russia two years ago signed an agreement with the German government and has been using very powerful AM transmitters to broadcast in Russian, German and English to countries in the entire region. They just reconfirmed that contract and are now expanding. They do 18 hours a day. Does the U.S. government welcome this addition to the broadcasting family?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: I can hardly complain about broadcasts into Europe. I will say I assume that means we will always enjoy the understanding and support of the Russian government for American and European efforts to support broadcasting of information into places like Belarus or Uzbekistan.

Therefore, on that basis of presumed reciprocity and a mutual understanding with respect to freedom of information, I have nothing bad to say about it.

QUESTION: Vygaudas Ušackas, Embassy of Lithuania. If I may complement the candid interagency discussion with a transatlantic dialogue, I just want to assure that whenever you make that call to [inaudible] Ukraine you may be expecting calls of disagreement, but you will also be receiving calls of strong support for Ukraine's prospective. And I think unfortunately from the national perspective, Lithuania is that EU wasn't able to provide that perspective to date which have been empowering encouragement to the Ukrainian people. That's our national point of view.

But coming back to Belarus, and having read many reports and articles on developments in Belarus, many also suggest that the key of the regime change in Belarus lies in Moscow. How would you comment on that and whether there is anything United States and European Union could do in that respect? Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: First Ambassador, let me thank you, thank the government of Lithuania for all you've done to support democracy in Belarus. Your government, the Polish government, others who have deep knowledge of that country are critical.

I hear it said from time to time that the key to change in Belarus, and you used the phrase regime change, not me, just for the record. The key to democratic progress in Belarus is in Moscow. I'm not sure I agree with that. I don't think we can hold Moscow responsible for Lukashenko. I don't think that Moscow created Lukashenko. And I don't think it is in Russia's interest to make Lukashenko, and his regime, their problem. They don't have to. That is, they didn't put him into power.

That said, I would, it's up to Russia to define its own interests. I would think that Russia and would hope that Russia would find it in its interest to have a democratizing, prospering Belarus to its west, rather than a Belarus engaging in increasing repression. Stability, which is a legitimate and natural concern that Russia has about the countries of this region ultimately comes through reform. To choose at random an example, let's take Lithuania. You are a stable democracy, a prospering country, a member of the EU. I am not aware of any problems that you have, serious problems with any of your neighbors, including Russia, at the moment. A perfectly good neighbor. The alternative might have been a country which was not prospering, not democratic, problems with the neighbors. The business we saw between World Wars I and II.

Obviously it's better for Russia to have reformist neighbors to its west, therefore they ought to support reform in Belarus, but that's me speaking, and the Russians will decide what they want.

I would welcome the chance to work with Russia for the sake of reform in Belarus.

QUESTION: Julia Nanay, PFC Energy. I was wondering if you have thought at all about a Russian-Belarus union and how you think that might progress by 2008.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: We would not recognize a decision, an undemocratic decision, to join Belarus and Russia. That has been the policy for some time. I don't think this is likely. I think it's talked about, but I don't think it will happen. But in any event, these questions if they're decided need to be decided on the basis of a free, democratic choice. That choice is not currently available to the Belarusian people.

QUESTION: Sarah Mendelson, CSIS. I too would welcome the Russian government supporting democratic and human rights activists in Belarus but that would premise probably another administration in Russia that also supports its own democratic and human rights defenders.

Just thinking ahead, and we can pose this in all sorts of hypotheticals. There's a large country in Eurasia that has a close relationship with a smaller country. To what extent do you and your European colleagues, as the U.S. and the EU are looking forward to March 20th for example, should there be some kind of violence in Belarus. How much do you see of a replay of what happened in Ukraine in the fall of 2004, where there's a sort of wall? It happened also in 2000, of course, with Serbia where the U.S. and the Europeans are on one side; Russia is on another side. In a year, and in a few months, where we're going to be meeting in Petersburg around the G8. What's the kind of thinking, what kinds of signals are you sending?

And understanding that the EU is not always consistent. Their response, their press release for example on the Chechnyan parliamentary elections in November 2005 was odd. It was sort of saying elections that the OSCE refused to observe. No Europeans were there, no Americans were there. The EU was sort of saying we applaud this electoral process. There's not going to be any kind of message like that on the Belarusian election I assume, either from the U.S. or the Europeans.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED: Well, the European Union has been quite staunch, and European governments have been quite strong. Milinkevich was in Europe, he was received by the French Foreign Minister; he was received well in Berlin. I sense a very strong consensus in Europe in support of democracy.

Now the OSCE which has a mandate and expertise to make calls on elections is present in force in Belarus. They're going to make a call. We're going to pay attention to that call. I am fairly confident in predicting that the United States and the European Union will back the OSCE, that our statements will be similar, and that problem will not exist.

I very much hope that Russia does not take an opposite point of view. I think it would be extremely odd if the OSCE of which Russia is a member, and the OSCE election mission to which Russia has sent observers, were to take a radically different national position than the rest of the OSCE. That would be strange. I hope that doesn't happen.

(end transcript)

*Excerpt from*

*Source: The Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State; March 11, 2006; <http://usinfo.state.gov>)*

## **28. Uprooted University Finds New Home In Lithuania**

For more than a decade, young Belarusians looking for a Western-standard education had been able to turn to the European Humanities University (EHU). The privately funded university, which opened in Minsk in 1992, offered graduate and undergraduate studies in philosophy, law, politics, and languages. It was closed in 2004 after Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka voiced

displeasure with what he said was the institution's pro-Western bias. But EHU is once again in session, with a new home in Vilnius, the capital of neighboring Lithuania.

The Lithuanian government announced in February it was granting official status to the EHU, giving it the right to legally operate in Vilnius until conditions provide for its return to Belarus.

Uladzimir Dunayeu is vice chancellor of EHU, and well-acquainted with the university's struggle with the Belarusian authorities. He says the university, now situated in Vilnius's picturesque old town, is enjoying a healthy enrollment of mainly Belarusian students.

"Currently we have some 1,000 students. Of those, 170 are undergraduates who live [and study] in Vilnius, 100 more are graduate students, and the rest are studying by correspondence [from Belarus]," Dunayeu says.

In its Belarusian heyday, EHU had a mix of Belarusian professors and visiting instructors from the West. Now, most of the instructors are Belarusian and Lithuanian. But it is hoped that western professors will once again join the ranks in years to come.

Dunayeu says EHU, as before, is offering a wide spectrum of humanities majors: "Currently we teach philosophy, art, media studies, European law, and political sciences -- namely, European studies. It is very important that we have started to train historians."

Lithuanian authorities are happy with the new institution, which reopened with support not only from the government in Vilnius, but also the French Foreign Ministry and U.S. and German foundations.

Petras Austrevicius, a member of the Lithuanian parliament's foreign affairs committee, says his country, as an EU member, seeks to support democracy in Belarus in accordance with official Brussels policy.

"By giving permission for this university to function in Vilnius, we have acknowledged that it cannot function freely in Belarus. By this act we demonstrate the continuity of our position. It is also an investment in the future of independent and free minds of Belarusians," Austrevicius says

## Media Projects

The EHU is not the only project in Vilnius aimed at democracy-building in Belarus. At the end of February, "Baltic Waves," an EU-funded radio station, began daily broadcasts into Belarus from the Lithuanian capital.

The station broadcasts were specially launched ahead of Belarus's March 19 elections to help give voters a nonstate alternative to turn to for news and information.

In the end of February an EU-funded radio station has begun broadcasting into Belarus from Vilnius. "Baltic Waves" will broadcast a daily hour-long bulletin of news, music and information on Europe.

Austrevicius says Vilnius's offer to act as a temporary host to the institution was not just an act of political solidarity between the two neighbors. Lithuania's Education Ministry also requested that the university adapt its curriculum and teaching programs in line with EU standards.

It was a move that delayed the reopening of the EHU, he says, but which ultimately raised the quality of the university's studies.

Students also seem to be happy with their studies in Vilnius. Valerya is from Minsk. She studies cultural anthropology, history, and the Belarusian language, and was able to receive a grant that covers the cost of school and housing.

Valerya says she likes her studies, but wishes the Belarusian language -- which often takes a back seat to Russian in her native country -- would be used more at the university: "The language of instruction for our major is Belarusian. However, that is only because our major is the Belarusian language. The language of instruction for the rest of the majors, as far as I know, is Russian."

Valerya says after graduating she would like to continue her studies abroad. But ultimately she says she would like to return to Belarus, and says she has no plans to stay in Lithuania longer than necessary.

"It is not my country, and let's put it this way -- nobody needs me here. And [Belarus] is my motherland; my parents live there. It's natural that I want to be closer to my parents, and to my native land," Valerya says.

Valery Ruselnik studies mass media and communications at EHU. He says he came to Vilnius when he was expelled from Belarus State University because of his political activities. In Lithuania, he says, he has found a different atmosphere.

"Living conditions are normal here. When I compare the hostel here with the Belarusian ones, I should say that the conditions here are better. As concerns the university itself, there are also substantial differences. To begin with, here we have what we lack in Belarus -- respect for students," she says.

Vilnius is a drive of several hours from Belarus, a reasonable distance for the students who travel to EHU. But Ruselnik says the Belarusian authorities keep close watch on EHU students. He says the general attitude toward the pro-Western institution is hostile, and can even be felt while crossing the Belarusian border.

"Many of people I study with have been detained numerous times and checked more thoroughly at the border. It is definitely true that EHU students are given greater scrutiny at the border-crossing points," Ruselnik says.

Even so, Ruselnik, like Valerya, says he can only imagine his future in Belarus -- a country he hopes will someday soon see democratic reforms take hold.

*Source: Valentinas Mite, RFE/RL; March 10, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

## **29. Belarus Rejects EU Lawmakers As Monitors**

The Foreign Ministry said Friday a group of European Union lawmakers were not welcome to monitor next week's presidential election in Belarus, accusing the legislators of intending to provoke conflicts.

Seven members of the European Parliament are seeking to monitor the March 19 election, in which authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko is running for a third term amid opposition warnings of possible election fraud.

"The goal of these so-called 'observers' is to provoke conflict situations during the election campaign and destabilize the situation in the country," Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Popov said. About 900 observers from ex-Soviet republics and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe will be enough to monitor the election, he said.

Bogdan Klikh, one of the European parliament lawmakers, said he and his colleagues possessed diplomatic passports and would still go.

"If Belarusian authorities claim that elections are taking place democratically, why can't we see that?" Klikh told The Associated Press.

Last month, authorities detained and charged four activists of the Partnership group who planned to monitor the election. The former Soviet republic's security agency chief accused them of plotting to seize power.

Meanwhile, the Justice Ministry accused journalists and media outlets it did not identify of discrediting and slandering Belarus and its leader, warning them that "inciting anti-government hysteria, attempting to destabilize the situation in the country" is punishable by law.

Lukashenko has ruled this nation of 10 million with an iron fist since 1994, quashing dissent and opposition and maintaining his grip on power through votes dismissed as illegitimate by his critics. The United States has dubbed him "Europe's last dictator."

Also Friday, rights groups and opposition members said police have detained six activists and government opponents, including Sergei Antonchik, a former lawmaker who has criticized Lukashenko over alleged corruption, in the latest series of detentions of opposition supporters. Police declined to comment.

"The authorities are conducting a cleansing on the eve of possible rallies by the opposition on March 19," said Vladimir Labkovich of the human rights group Vesna. "It looks like there is a list of the most active members who need to be neutralized."

*Source: Yuras Karmanau, Chron.Com; March 10, 2006; <http://www.chron.com/d>*

### **30. EU Threatens Belarus With Sanctions**

The European Union today threatened to impose further sanctions on Belarus if the March 19 presidential elections is rigged.

EU External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said at a meeting of the bloc's 25 foreign ministers in Salzburg that the EU stands ready to take new steps if irregularities emerge in the voting.

There are widespread fears that hard-line president of Belarus, Alyksandr Lukashenka, plans to manipulate the ballot in order to stay in power.

Ferrero-Waldner stressed that measures such as stiffer travel bans and a freeze on assets would target only those involved in any rigging of the vote. She said the measures would not affect the people of Belarus, with whom the EU is standing "shoulder to shoulder."

The EU already has travel bans on leaders in Minsk.

*Source: RFE/RL; March 10, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

### **31. Europe, U.S. Preparing Common Post-election Policies for Belarus**

United States plans to remain engaged for the long term, State's Kramer says

The run-up to the March 19 presidential election in Belarus is already deeply flawed, and the United States is making plans with European allies for common post-election policies, a senior State Department official said at a congressional hearing March 9.

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko "has already tilted the playing field to assure his re-election by using state officials and police to intimidate opposition candidates, nonpartisan activists and voters," said the State Department's David Kramer.

"Stringent campaign rules have been applied only to the opposition," said Kramer, the deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs. "The regime has used its

domination of the state media to vilify government critics with impunity. Election commissions are stacked with government supporters.”

It is still possible that the government of Belarus “could conduct the voting and vote-counting in a manner better than they have in the pre-election period – and we strongly urge them to do that,” he said. “But past experience gives us very little hope even for this somewhat-improved but far-from-perfect outcome.”

Kramer told the committee hearing that, in a unified approach with the European Union, the United States intends to remain engaged in Belarus for the long term despite what will likely prove to be unfree and unfair presidential elections.

“After the elections, we intend to continue our outreach efforts and our work to help pro-democracy forces build capacity to push for change,” he said.

“We understand the obstacles standing in the way of quick change, and whatever happens in this particular election, we intend to remain engaged in Belarus for the long term,” Kramer said.

Lukashenko, who has been in office since 1994, engineered what Kramer referred to as a “fraudulent referendum” in 2004 that enabled him to change a constitutional provision that would have otherwise prevented him from running for a third term. Both President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have referred to Lukashenko’s government as the “last outpost of tyranny in Europe.” Bush on February 27 met with two widows from Belarus whose husbands disappeared in the 1990s, apparently for political reasons.

Lukashenko is a man driven by “paranoia, megalomania and corruption” who is “trying to stay in power at all costs,” Kramer said when asked by committee Chairman Senator Sam Brownback for his assessment of where the Belarusian dictator is headed.

Kramer said Lukashenko has blurred distinctions between his personal and state property, by his own admission putting a billion dollars from international arms sales into his own account rather than state coffers.

Kramer, who recently returned from a visit to Minsk, said one of the reasons for his trip was to make clear to Belarusian officials that the United States and the European Union “are completely united in our approach to Belarus.” He also conveyed directly to those officials “that there will be serious consequences if the election – including the process leading up to the actual voting – remains as seriously flawed and tainted as it has been thus far.”

Kramer said he also underscored “that there will be major consequences if the government resorts to force against protestors who have a right to assemble and protest peacefully.”

The United States and western Europe are “prepared to respond in a most serious way to fraud, abuse, and violence perpetrated by this regime,” he said, adding: “It would be a grave mistake by those in the Lukashenko regime to underestimate American and European resolve.”

The United States will maintain solidarity with pro-democracy forces in Belarus, Kramer said. “Our proper place is standing beside these brave Belarusians, doing what we can to encourage and help them to achieve a better future for their country.”

Such a future will inevitably come, “although we cannot predict when,” he said. “Belarus is in the heart of Europe, and its democratization will be a major step in completing the democratic transformation of the continent.”

Also testifying at the hearing were Patrick Merloe from the National Democratic Institute; Stephen B. Nix from the International Republican Institute; Rodger Potocki from the National Endowment for Democracy; Iryna Vidanova, a Belarusian activist who also is the Editor-in-Chief of *Students’*

*Thought*, the only independent youth publication in Belarus; and Celeste Wallander from the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

*Source: Jeffrey Thomas, The Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State; March 10, 2006; <http://usinfo.state.gov>*

### **32. Polish Sejm Alarmed At Belarus's Presidential Campaign**

Polish lawmakers today accused the authorities in Belarus of violence and of harassing opposition candidates ahead of the March 19 presidential election.

Poland's parliament, the Sejm, adopted a resolution in which it condemns the Belarusian authorities' "brutal breaking of the [country's] laws" and expresses "deep alarm" at cases of "violence, imprisonment, harassment, and intimidation" of opposition candidates and activists.

It says it will continue to support those who "undertake the fight for a free and democratic Belarus."

Poland has long pushed for democratic change in neighboring Belarus, which has been ruled by authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka since 1994. Lukashenka is running for a third term.

*Source: RFE/RL; March 10, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

### **33. Lithuania Speaks Out for Belarusian Democracy**

Lithuania's opposition is urging Parliament to take a firm stand against Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Rasa Jukneviene, vice chairman of the Conservative Party, asked Parliament to state its position on the Belarusian administration's actions against opponents to Lukashenko in the upcoming elections.

Jukneviene proposed a draft resolution, which would censure repressions aimed against the Belarusian opposition and express solidarity with politicians opting for the West.

"Having assessed the repressions committed by the Belarusian administration against opposition leaders and other candidates, Seimas (Lithuania's parliament) censures such actions and expresses solidarity with the people of the neighboring country, which strives for freedom and European democracy," reads the draft resolution.

Last week, Minsk police detained Alexander Kozulin, an opposition candidate running in the March 19 presidential elections. Kozulin represents the Social Democratic Party Hromada. Government security agents beat both Kozulin and members of his election team before arresting them. The candidate was released shortly after his detention.

The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry censored the incident, along with Belarusian statements about internal coups organized by European countries, Lithuania included.

Last week, the Foreign Ministry expressed dismay to its Belarusian counterpart over the alleged coups, which they claim are invented untruths.

The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry noted that the propaganda campaign, in which Lithuania had been mentioned several times, harmed bi-lateral relations between the neighbors.

Representatives of the Lukashenko administration have repeatedly accused EU and NATO countries, including Lithuania, of planning a coup against the Belarusian regime and inviting the opposition to join their rebellion.

Independent candidates Alexander Milinkevich and Kozulin should have the right to free press during the election campaign, Lithuania stated, adding that all citizens of Belarus deserve the right to freely express their position and will.

The local opposition and foreign democracies do not believe the elections, scheduled for March 19, will be free.

Source: *The Baltic Times*; March 9, 2006; <http://www.baltictimes.com>

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **34. Andrej Pachobut Detained For 10 Days**

On March 14 the judge of Leninski District of Hrodna Natallya Kozel returned Andrej Pachobut (the editor-in-chief of *Magazyn Polski Na Uchodzstwie* ) guilty of disorderly conduct and sentenced him to a 10-days' detention. The journalist went on a hunger strike to express his protest.

The journalist was accused of using bad language near the Hrodna Region police office, - informed pahonia.promedia.by. On March 13 A.Pachobut was detained in Minsk and was later delivered to Hrodna.

According to Pachobut's colleagues, he came to Minsk to collect material for publications in such influential Polish editions as *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. They think he was detained simply because of his profession.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; March 15, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

### **35. Hundreds Arrested in Belarus in View of Presidential Elections**

Authorities have arrested nearly two dozen opposition activists and confiscated the entire print run of the largest independent newspaper, as Belarusians cast early ballots for Sunday's presidential vote, which the opposition fears will be rigged in favor of the authoritarian incumbent, the Associated Press reported.

After pushing through a widely contested referendum scrapping presidential term limits, Alexander Lukashenko — branded by Western nations as “Europe's last dictator” - is seeking a third term as president of the ex-Soviet republic. He is widely expected to win.

Some 20 opposition activists were detained in nine towns and cities nationwide Tuesday, said Ales Belyatski, leader of the Vesna (Spring) rights center. Several were immediately sentenced to jail terms ranging from seven to 15 days on charges of organizing unsanctioned demonstrations and of hooliganism.

Earlier, three supporters and aides to the main opposition candidate, Alexander Milinkevich, were detained, including a district campaign organizer who was charged with “swearing.” More than 300 activists have been arrested to date, Belyatski said.

A deputy head of the opposition wing of an ethnic Polish group and the editor of a Polish-language newspaper were detained and jailed for seven and 10 days, respectively, Union of Poles of Belarus leader Angelica Boris said.

Opposition leaders have called for peaceful protests if votes are counted fraudulently, but authorities' ban on any rallies on Sunday has potentially set the stage for violent confrontation. The opposition contends that early voting allows for falsifications including ballot-stuffing at unguarded, unmonitored polling stations, and multiple voting.

A university student, who identified himself only as Andrei out of fear of retribution, said students had been warned by school authorities “that if we don’t vote early, there could be problems.” He said he voted for “a free and European future,” but declined to say which candidate he supported.

Galina Grushnitskaya, a 72-year-old retiree, said she was voting early— for Lukashenko— because she feared opposition-orchestrated violence on election day.

Milinkevich told the Associated Press that he had urged Belarusians not to take part in early voting “because there your votes will simply be stolen.”

Central Election Commission official Nikolai Lazovik denied that: “This procedure is set out by the law, and there’s nothing frightening about it.”

According to official statistics, as many as 30 percent of voters usually take part in early balloting. Opposition parties have been denied of virtually any representation on election commissions that monitor the vote.

Nearly 7 million Belarusians are eligible to vote.

“The vote of the people doesn’t need any external recognition,” Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov said, dismissing concerns voiced by Western countries about the vote.

The chief editor of the country’s largest independent newspaper, meanwhile, said the paper’s latest 54,000-issue print run was confiscated by authorities at the border with Russia. It was the second time in just over a week that Narodnaya Volya, which is published in a neighboring Russian city to avoid official shutdown, had its print run confiscated.

“The elections are being conducted under the condition of complete information isolation for the voters, and authorities aren’t even making any attempts to create the illusion of the free press,” editor Svetlana Kalinka told AP.

The Ministry of Information refused to comment.

Also at the Russian border, security officials confiscated 65,000 copies of a fake issue of the main state newspaper, *Sovietskaya Belorussiya*, that contained derisory material about Lukashenko, *Sovietskaya Belorussiya* editor Pavel Yakubovich told AP. He said an official with the opposition Belarusian Popular Front who was in a van with the papers was arrested.

At least 3,000 people, meanwhile, turned out for a Milinkevich campaign rally at stadium in the southern city of Gomel, some shouting “Freedom!”

Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 10 million with an iron fist since 1994, quashing dissent and opposition and maintaining his grip on power through votes dismissed as illegitimate by his critics.

A team of European Parliament members picked to observe the election gave up its efforts Tuesday to travel to Belarus after being denied entry visas.

*Source: MosNews.Com, March 15, 2006; www.mosnews.com*

### **36. Anton Filimonau's Preventive Punishment is Changed**

On March 13 Anton Filimonau's preventive punishment was changed. Now it is bailment instead of custodial placement. Anton returned home yesterday evening.

The investigating authorities took into account that fact that "during the preliminary investigation there were a lot of demands to change Anton Filimonau's preventive punishment because he suffered of chronic diseases".

"Bailment would never be possible without the countenance and moneyed assistance of many people who were not indifferent", - say Anton's grandparents, Diana Charkasava and Uladzimir Myaleshka.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; March 14, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

### **37. Media Attempts To Destabilize Belarus Will Be Punished - Ministry**

The Belarusian Justice Ministry has warned the media that it will face penalties for any attempt made to "destabilize the country, discredit the authorities or to disrupt their work."

"During the ongoing election campaign, certain media outlets are spreading slanderous information at the initiative of individuals. They are also insulting the head of state and misrepresenting his role in the strengthening of Belarus' statehood, the republic's socioeconomic achievements and the building of the Russia-Belarus Union," the ministry said in a statement.

Some media groups even "question the legitimacy of Lukashenko's participation in the election campaign as a presidential candidate," the statement reads.

Source: *Interfax*; March 13, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

### **38. Smolensk Printing House (Russia) Cancelled Its Contract With the Belarusian *Tovarisch* Newspaper**

The *Tovarisch* newspaper's editorial team received a telegram from Mr. Guchev, the Director General of "Smolensk Printing House" this morning. The enterprise head informed the *Tovarisch* publisher about canceling the printing contract with the periodical. He referred to "the absence of technical possibilities." However, the newspaper's editor-in-chief considers these actions on the part of the Russian printer to be connected with the coming Presidential election in Belarus.

"I have all grounds to believe that the Belarusian state authorities put pressure on the Printing House management as we had co-operated with the enterprise without any problems for a year or so. It seems that some influential Lukashenka's lobbyists in Russia have had their say," – stated S. Vazniak, the *Tovarisch* Editor-in-chief in his interview to the Belarusian Association of Journalists.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; March 13, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

### **39. Pastor Freed From Prison, But Another To Be Jailed?**

Pastor Georgi Vyazovsky of Christ's Covenant Reformed Baptist Church was freed from a Minsk prison for Administrative Violations Code offenders shortly after midday local time today (13 March) on completion of a ten-day sentence for conducting religious worship in his own home. Shortly after his release, Pastor Vyazovsky told Forum 18 News Service he felt "splendid" and even joked that he had lost weight due to the "good diet".

Held in cells with five and then 13 other inmates, he also said that both they and the warders were "amazed" that he was there for religious activity: "They'd never had such a case before - one of the staff remarked that the judge must have gone crazy."

To Forum 18's knowledge, Pastor Vyazovsky is the first person to have been imprisoned for religious worship on the territory of Belarus for some twenty years. However, at least one further prosecution appears imminent.

Fellow Reformed Baptist pastor Vladimir Bukanov told Forum 18 on 13 March that approximately 30 members of various Protestant churches gathered at 11.30am to meet Pastor Vyazovsky, but were roughly moved some 400 metres (yards) away from the prison by police, while some 20 special police officers stood by.

On 10 March a meeting of Baptist Union pastors in Brest region wrote to President Aleksandr Lukashenko and other top state representatives calling Pastor Vyazovsky's arrest and detention "a disgrace". Leaders of the charismatic Full Gospel Association also expressed their concern at Pastor Vyazovsky's sentence in an open statement published on 13 March.

A combination of restrictions contained in the Administrative Violations Code (Article 167) and the 2002 religion law bans all but occasional and small-scale religious meetings in private homes, and religious activity outside designated houses of worship unless it has advance approval from the state authorities. A first offence is punishable by either a warning, a fine of between 20 and 150 times the minimum monthly wage or three to 15 days' imprisonment. A repeat offence within one year is punishable by either a fine of between 150 and 300 times the minimum monthly wage or ten to 15 days' imprisonment.

On 25 November 2005 Partisan District Court issued a warning to Pastor Vyazovsky following police check-ups on his home services on 26 May 2005 and 30 October 2005. An appeal against the court's decision was rejected by Minsk City Court on 10 January 2006.

Following a raid on the Sunday service at his Minsk home on 5 February, Pastor Vyazovsky was sentenced on 3 March under Article 167 of the Administrative Violations Code.

Pastor Vyazovsky confirmed to Forum 18 on 13 March that there has been no further attempt to prosecute church members since his conviction.

Forum 18 has learnt, however, that the Pentecostal bishop of Minsk region is now also threatened with prosecution under Article 167. Sergei Tsvor, who is also first vice-chairman of the Pentecostal Union and pastor of the Minsk-based Good News Church, told Forum 18 on 13 March that police visited the free-standing residential house where his 100-strong congregation meets during a service some six weeks ago. When an officer drew up a protocol against the bishop on the grounds that he had no right to lead the gathering under the law on public demonstrations, "I told them that it wasn't a demonstration or a picket, but a worship service," Tsvor told Forum 18. "I can't understand it."

He confirmed that Good News Church is re-registered at the house under the 2002 religion law, for which a document confirming a religious community's right to be situated at its address is required. (Even though the same law prohibits systematic and large-scale religious meetings in private homes, some religious organisations have in practice managed to re-register at free-standing residential houses.)

Under the 2003 demonstrations law, all public events require the advance permission of the local state authorities, while the 2002 religion law states that religious events - if not in designated places of worship - may take place only after a corresponding decision by the local authorities. It would thus appear that permission to hold individual services is being interpreted as separate from that already received by Good News Church to be situated at a residential address. If so, this is the first such case of which Forum 18 is aware.

Summoned to a hearing at Minsk's Moscow District Court at 2pm on 9 March, Bishop Tsvor told Forum 18 that the judge had been busy with another case and told him he would be summoned again. He has heard nothing since, however.

There was no answer at Moscow District Court when Forum 18 rang on 13 March.

*Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; March 13, 2005; <http://www.forum18.org>*

#### **40. Arrests of ZUBR Activists**

Arrests of Zubr activists continue in Minsk. Friday evening Zubr activists Aliaksey Liaukovich, Pavel Yuhnevich and Maxim Vinyarski were arrested in different places of the city.

They were arrested by KGB agents. Liaukovich is in Central district police department, Vinyarski is in Frunzenski district police department, Yuhnevich is in Savetski district police department. Liaukovich and Vinyarski were accused of violating article 156 of Administrative code (hooliganism). Most likely Yuhnevich will be accused of the same violation. The fellows will be waiting for trials in Administrative prison in Okrestsin street.

*Source: ZUBR; March 11, 2006; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>*

#### **41. Belarusian Opposition Worker Gets 15-Day Jail Sentence**

Authorities in Belarus have sentenced a key campaign aide of the opposition's leading presidential candidate to 15 days in jail.

A court in Minsk Thursday sentenced Vintsuk Vyachorka, leader of the Belarus Popular Front, on charges of taking part in what it called an unsanctioned demonstration.

Police detained him and other key members of the campaign staff of opposition presidential candidate Alexander Milinkevich Wednesday. The detentions followed an opposition rally in the Belarusian capital.

Another opposition activist says he was detained Wednesday and his apartment was searched.

Meanwhile, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution Wednesday expressing support for democratic processes in Belarus. The resolution urged Belarus to conduct free and fair presidential elections and expressed support for the Belarusian people.

The European Union Thursday also called on Belarusian authorities to assure presidential elections are free and fair.

President Alexander Lukashenko has ruled the former Soviet republic since 1994, and is seeking a third term.

The West has criticized him for his poor human rights record and for quashing political opposition. The United States has called Mr. Lukashenko Europe's last dictator.

*Source: Voice of America; March 9, 2006; <http://www.voanews.com/english>*

#### **42. The Printing of Zhoda Is Suspended**

The Ministry of Information sent a suit to the Superior Court asking to close down the *Zhoda* newspaper. The edition's editor-in-chief Aliaksey Karol got to know about it from an official letter from the court. The printing of *Zhoda* has already been suspended.

The suit is dated March 6 and it says that the reason for closing down *Zhoda* is the fact that it has many times violated art. 5 of the Law on Mass Media (the newspaper was warned about it on November 9 and February 23). Furthermore, the Ministry asked to suspend the printing of the newspaper even before the final decision of the court because during this time "the defendant might violate the law again".

On March 7 the judge Aksana Mihnuik decided to grant the petition of the Ministry and suspend the printing of *Zhoda* "until the final decision was taken". The preliminary hearing is assigned for March 15.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 13, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

### **43. Search in Flat of Aliaksey Shidlouski**

Search was carried out yesterday night in flat of Zubr coordinator Aliaksey Shidlouski.

Aliaksey was arrested for distributing stickers at about 8 p.m. After 4 hours in police he was taken home by police officers. There they as well as KGB officers searched the flat and basement. According to them, they were looking for explosives. But in staid of "explosives" several dozens stickers were confiscated.

After the search Shidlouski was released.

*Source: ZUBR; March 9, 2006; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>*

## **BUSINESS**

### **44. Belarus Plans To Attract \$1.9-\$2 bln in Foreign Investment in 2006**

The Belarusian government is planning to attract \$1.9 billion-\$2 billion in foreign investment to the national economy in 2006, including bank loans, the country's Economy Ministry told Interfax. Total foreign investment, including foreign bank loans, was \$1.8 billion in 2005. Thus, foreign investment should grow by 5.5%-11.1% in 2006.

Fixed capital foreign investment is expected to grow 25.6% to \$219 million in 2006.

A total of \$295 million was expected in fixed capital foreign investment in 2005, however the actual amount was \$174.4 million, including foreign loans, which is 5% less than in 2004.

The Belarusian government plans to bring total fixed capital investment to at least \$7.9 billion in 2006 amid a planned growth in factory gate prices of 13%-14% from the previous year.

Total direct foreign investment per capita was about \$200 over the past several years, which was ten times lower than in Central and Eastern Europe, according to experts at the Economy Ministry's Scientific and Research Economic Institute. Net inflow of foreign investment compared to GDP was less than 1% over the past few years.

The experts also pointed out a tendency of a drop in the share of foreign sources in fixed capital investment to 2.5% in 2005 from 3.7% in 2004, 5.5% in 2003, 5.2% in 2002 and 2.6% in 2001. The main characteristic of the investment process in Belarus is a significant growth in capital investment in fixed capital, mainly through domestic sources.

*Source: Interfax; March 13, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>*

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The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin 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 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).

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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