

March 24 – March 30, 2006

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DOMESTIC

1. Belarus Plans to Charge Defeated Candidate Who Led Protest

Prosecutors in Belarus said Wednesday that they would bring criminal charges against a defeated presidential candidate who led an antigovernment march last week, and that they were considering lesser charges against a second candidate who organized a rally.

The announcement, during which prosecutors also said the police had arrested more than 500 demonstrators last week, continued the crackdown on the opposition to President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, who is often called Europe's last dictator.

It was also an unmistakable snub to the West. The United States and the European Union have demanded the release of the candidate, Aleksandr V. Kazulin, and of demonstrators arrested last week during peaceful protests against Mr. Lukashenko's re-election, which the opposition says was a fraud.

Mr. Kazulin, who was arrested Saturday as he led a march toward a detention center where opposition members were being held, faces charges of organizing group actions and hooliganism, Belarus's federal prosecutor said, according to the Belapan news agency. The first charge could carry a prison term of up to six years.

Mr. Kazulin received 2.2 percent of the officially tabulated vote on March 19.

In an interview Friday, he said an honest count would show he received roughly a third of the votes cast. The next day, he led a group of demonstrators who were attacked by an elite riot police unit, SOBR, which has been widely accused of human rights abuses.

His wife, Irina Kazulin, said the charges were retaliation for his daring to challenge Mr. Lukashenko's authoritarian rule. "It is personal revenge," she said by telephone. "It is purely a political case."

Ms. Kazulin also said her husband had been kicked and beaten, and had a back injury that had not been examined by a doctor. The prosecutor said Mr. Kazulin had not filed a complaint. Neither claim could be independently verified.

Prosecutors also said they were considering charges against Aleksandr Milinkevich, who received 6.1 percent in the official vote count and who has called for peaceful acts of public assembly. The potential charge, disturbing public order, could carry a sentence of 15 days.

Mr. Milinkevich, in a telephone interview as he prepared for meetings in Poland, said that he expected to be jailed, and that the announcement on Wednesday was part of a mounting campaign against him. "At first, it is usually a P.R. action," he said. "It is only beginning."

He added that the government's pressure was counterproductive.

"I think they would very much like me to emigrate, fearing imprisonment, but I am not going to do that," he said. "The more repression they bring against the protesters and the organizers of protests, the more protests they will have. They are losing their supporters."

The United States warned Belarus's prosecutors not to proceed with charges.

In a telephone interview, David J. Kramer, the deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, said officials involved in these cases risked personal sanctions in the West.

The European Union is expected to discuss sanctions against Belarusian officials when foreign ministers of its 25 nations meet on April 10. The United States, which has its own process for

applying sanctions, including bans on travel and asset freezes, has been adding names of Belarusian officials on an almost daily basis since last week, Mr. Kramer said.

Source: C. J. Chivers, The New York Times; March 30; 2006; <http://www.nytimes.com/>

2. Opposition Rallies In Support For Arrested Protesters in Minsk

Belarusian opposition has gathered for a rally in the capital Minsk in support of fellow protesters arrested earlier, a RIA Novosti correspondent said Wednesday.

Dozens of young people came to the central square carrying lit candles in support of those detained after participating in unsanctioned rallies against the results of the March 19 presidential elections, which saw incumbent Alexander Lukashenko officially re-elected for a third term in a landslide triumph.

A total of 228 protesters were detained for 10 days, and 112 for 15 days under the country's Administrative Code. Fifty-three minors were released.

Belarusian Prosecutor General Petr Miklashevich said more than 500 people had been arrested in the week following the elections.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 29, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

3. Measuring The Success Of Protests In Steps, Not Strides

Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich believes that the week of street protests that followed the country's March 19 presidential vote made "cracks in the fortress" of the ruling regime. However, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- who won a third term in office following his landslide victory -- appears unmoved. The opposition has the West's backing as it continues to press for a repeat election, but success largely depends on the real impact the vote and ensuing protests had toward effecting change in Belarus.

The opposition's hopes for a revolution in Belarus were not realized, and President Alyaksandr Lukashenka remains at the helm of the state.

Regardless, main opposition candidate Milinkevich on March 28 found room for optimism. He says Belarus is on the right path and that the opposition movement will continue to facilitate change.

"We were also discussing what to do next," Milinkevich said. "This is very important. And we discussed also how to avoid pessimism. I think we have made the first and very serious step toward victory."

Positive Imprint

Many agree that the election and ensuing protests, while failing to unseat President Lukashenka, did succeed in leaving a positive mark on the country.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on March 28 praised the Belarusian opposition. Although she describes it as "nascent" and "incipient," Rice notes that the opposition's strength has increased over the past year and believes that its presence is an achievement.

Stuart Hensel of the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit says the achievements should not be overestimated. The demonstrations in Minsk were not large enough to force the regime to change course -- and thus cannot be compared to the success of Ukraine's Orange Revolution. However, Hensel believes things may be looking up for the Belarusian opposition.

"It could be that the opposition has managed at this point to carve out a bit more room for itself within the Belarusian domestic political scene and this could be interesting to watch going

forward," Hensel said. "I think Mr. Lukashenka is now faced with an opposition leader in Mr. Milinkevich, who is quite different than anything he has faced in the past."

Hensel says that Milinkevich, who was little known just a year ago, found more success in reaching out to voters than observers expected before the vote. The opposition leader is already creating a new political movement and cannot be waved aside easily.

However, Hensel says it does not mean that the opposition will be able to push Lukashenka from power in the future.

"It doesn't look like the opposition has sufficient strength in order to seriously challenge Lukashenka -- certainly in the next couple of months and potentially throughout the course of this [third] term, but what we've seen potentially is what we've saw in Ukraine four or five years ago -- is the growing size of the opposition's ability to mobilize and make its voice heard despite extremely constrained political surroundings," Hensel said.

Fractured Opposition

It would be an oversimplification to blame only Lukashenka for the state of affairs in Belarus. Hensel says the biggest problem is overcoming the lack of unity among the politicians in the Belarusian opposition. During the March election the opposition again failed to find common ground and wound up offering two candidates -- Alyaksandr Kozulin and Milinkevich.

Aleksei Malashenko, an expert at the Carnegie Center think tank in Moscow, says achieving political unity is only a part of the problem the opposition faces. He says the provincialism of Belarusian society and its isolation from the changes taking place in neighboring countries is the core of the issue.

"Belarusian society is provincial in character and in its political culture," Malashenko said. "One gets the impression that it [the society] is lagging behind [the neighboring countries] by some 10 or 15 years. It is not a fault but it is a disaster. It might look funny but it still lives in this Soviet-era inertia."

Stability Reigns

Malashenko says the majority of Belarusian citizens seem to be satisfied with the stability Lukashenka offers and are afraid of the uncertainty that follows change.

"As you see, we observe complete self-satisfaction," Malashenko said. "One gets the impression that for many [Belarusians] the main value is stability. People point to Ukraine, Russia -- some kind of demonstration taking place there, some kind of meeting; prices are going up, defaults happen. But here [in Belarus] everything is quiet and good. It is completely a trait of Soviet psychology [to be happy with what one has.]"

Meanwhile, Milinkevich is calling for an end to what he calls Belarusians' "slavery" to this kind of thinking, and says the protests mark the beginning of "a revolution of the spirit."

Milinkevich says this shift away from a Soviet mindset marks the greatest achievement of the recent protests.

Source: Valentinas Mite, RFE/RL; March 29, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

4. Lukashenko Hides Inauguration from Sight of Opposition

Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko, who had not showed up after election of March 19, broke the silence Tuesday and called on the bureaucrats not to make a headman out of him. The long absence of Lukashenko coupled with shelving his inauguration (initially due on March 31) roots in the opposition standoff, the analysts say.

All of a sudden, Lukashenko, who hadn't showed up before the public at large for a week, attended the yesterday's meeting on improving activities of the state bodies. Having praised enforcement officers for the perfect teamwork during the latest rallies in Minsk, Lukashenko unexpectedly lashed out at bureaucrats and even ordered to remove all portraits of president. Just a small photo would suffice, Lukashenko recommended, if placed where necessary, the people would be looking at it.

Lukashenko's whereabouts of the past week are still a top secret. Another mystery is shelving inauguration from March 31 to early April for some reasons unknown.

More likely than not, Belarus authorities need time to order opposition and to defuse tension before inauguration. No charges have been lodged yet against presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin, who is in jail now, Kuzulin's spokesman Oleg Volchek said yesterday. Belarus' KGB brought in an action against four activists of the Malady Front youth organization – Zmiter Dashkevich (detained for 15 days after the encampment in central Minsk was broken up), Oleg Korban (arrested at home), Boris Goretsky and Sergey Lisichonok (jailed after interrogation). Malady Front is the second NGO attacked by KGB. The first target was Partnership, the arranger of independent observation in time of election that is currently accused of having staged the power seizure in Belarus.

The trials against opposition activist are never ending. At least 293 protestors, the better part of them are Minsk students, were condemned Monday.

Source: Kommersant; March 29, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

5. Alexander Lukashenko – Existing System of Power In The Republic Effective

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is convinced that the existing system of power in the republic has proved effective. "It was stated even before the election that there was no need to disrupt anything radically and form a new system," he said on Tuesday, addressing the meeting on questions of perfecting the government structures.

This is the first meeting Lukashenko held in since the March 19 presidential election. "There is nothing extraordinary about this. Time demands the quest for new systems of work in present-day conditions," Lukashenko noted. He said in the framework of perfecting the system it is necessary, specifically, to ensure the transition from command methods of government to economic ones.

Following the meeting Lukashenko made instructions for perfecting state government structures. They will serve as the basis for forming the new government, since the present one, in accordance with the Constitution, will tender resignation to the president elected anew.

Source: Itar-Tass; March 28, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

6. Belarus Leader Delays Inauguration

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, whose re-election sparked opposition protests, on Tuesday abruptly postponed his inauguration without explanation, but declared "all political battles" over.

Lukashenko, branded "Europe's last dictator" by U.S. officials, had been scheduled to be sworn in on Friday. Opposition activists had hoped to mark their disapproval with a campaign of stickers showing a skull on a black background.

Nikolai Lozovik, secretary of the Central Election Commission, said a new date would be set and the ceremony might take place in early April. He gave no reason for the delay.

"We are now working on the new date which we will inform you of later," Lukashenko's spokesman, Pavel Lyogky, told Reuters.

The veteran leader's win has been called fraudulent by the United States, the European Union and international observers.

The delay in his swearing-in was unexpected as the workings of Belarus's state machinery tend to be very predictable.

Lukashenko failed to appear in public for several days after saying, on the morning following his victory, that a Western-inspired attempt to stage a revolution had been averted. On Tuesday, despite switching his inauguration, he bounced back into the public eye, chairing a government meeting.

Looking forceful, he urged ministers to stick to production programmes and said he saw good prospects for the next "five-year plan", a Soviet-style policy formula still in use.

"All political battles are over," official news agency BelTA quoted Lukashenko as telling ministers. "Despite some disturbances, we have put the country back in order, just as it used to be before."

More Protests Planned

"Maybe the main reason (for the postponement) is Lukashenko's psychological mood," main opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich told reporters after chairing an opposition meeting.

"The authorities were shocked, seeing how many people went out on the street." The protests drew around 10,000 people at their peak.

That view was shared by some ordinary citizens.

"I believe the dust of those protests has not settled yet, plus these quick trials. He probably thinks that it'll get quieter in mid-April," Vladimir, 53, a taxi driver, said.

Opposition activists had invited backers via the Internet to protest on Friday by placing "black marks to Lukashenko" stickers in public places. The stickers bore a skull, with features resembling those of Lukashenko, on a black background.

Milinkevich said the opposition would focus on attracting supporters. New rallies were planned for April 26 -- the 20th anniversary of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear plant over the border in Ukraine and a traditional day of protest.

"We are by no means pessimistic. I believe we have made the first step to victory," he said. "(But) I don't see much sense in standing in a square if a rally does not grow and no new people join in."

The opposition also plans to contest the validity of the election result in the nation's Supreme Court. Election officials say Lukashenko won 83 percent of the votes.

The protests ended when police broke up a march and detained many protesters, including at least one opposition leader.

Local rights group Vyasna said that on Monday local courts had jailed around 200 opposition supporters for up to 15 days.

Second opposition leader Alexander Kozulin, arrested at the weekend, could face six years in jail for malicious hooliganism.

(Additional reporting by Dmitry Solovyov)

Source: *Andrei Makhovsky, Reuters; March 28, 2006; <http://today.reuters.co.uk/>*

7. Minsk March Ends In Violence, Arrests

In the Belarusian capital Minsk on March 25, police assaulted opposition supporters as they were marching toward the city's main detention center to demand the release of people held over the past few days. Opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin was detained. The incidents occurred soon after a larger opposition rally ended peacefully in a central city square.

The clashes took place near Minsk's musical comedy theater as dozens of opposition supporters were heading toward the Akrestsina detention center.

Riot police blocked the road leading to Akrestsina, and beat their shields with truncheons while they advanced on the crowd.

An RFE/RL Belarus Service correspondent reports he heard several explosions of undetermined origin as police was charging. He says he saw people lying on the ground.

Television footage broadcast on Georgia's Imedi TV shows men carrying a form lying on a stretcher.

A man told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that police were using indiscriminate violence. "They're kicking women," one witness said. "This is outrageous. They're real fascists!"

In remarks carried by the official *Belta* news agency, Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau said demonstrators attacked police forces first, "throwing bottles and other objects." He also denied responsibility for the explosions, saying they wounded one civilian and eight security officers.

Opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was leading the march, was detained.

Navumau accused Kazulin of calling upon demonstrators to seize state buildings and overthrow Belarus's government.

In comments made to RFE/RL's Belarus Service, the wife of another opposition leader, Iyaksandr Milinkevich, denied reports that her husband, too, was detained.

Milinkevich's spokesman Pavel Mazhejka was briefly detained.

Earlier, both Milinkevich and Kazulin were addressing a crowd of several thousand on Yanka Kupala Square to demand that the outcome of the March 19 presidential polls be annulled.

Election officials say incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka won a landslide win with nearly 83 percent of the votes.

Milinkevich came second with 6 percent and Kazulin came last with 2.2 percent. The opposition, however, says the vote was rigged.

Milinkevich told supporters on March 25 that a new vote should be held "without Lukashenka."

He vowed that the Belarusian president-elect -- who is due to be inaugurated for his new five-year term on March 31 -- would be gone by the end of the term. He also announced the creation of what he described as a "national movement for the liberation of Belarus."

"They have been hiding in their offices and they think they won the elections," Milinkevich said. "But this is a Pyrrhic victory."

This is the beginning of the end of those who lie, who cannot talk to people, who use force against people and beat them. Shame on them!"

Addressing foreign reporters earlier on March 25 near the Akrestsina detention center, Milinkevich had called upon authorities to refrain from violence, vowing in turn to hold a peaceful demonstration:

"I hope [authorities] won't [use force]," Milinkevich said. "I believe there are also reasonable people on their side. When [a government] constantly resorts to forcible methods, it first of all testifies to its weakness -- after all they need to prove they are worth something as men -- and, second, it shows that its end is nearing. A country cannot be ruled by these methods, there has to be dialogue, partnership. But they've forgotten what that is. For them [the upcoming rally] is like a final test, a final warning. But we'll be peaceful, this I promise, there won't be any taking of the Bastille."

The March 25 rally was initially due to take place on October (Kastychnitskaya) Square, where protest rallies had taken place for most of the week that followed election day.

But security forces had cleared the square on March 24, arresting scores of protesters. Earlier on March 25, they had blocked all access to October Square, forcing demonstrators to move onto Yanka Kupala Square, in a nearby park.

Belarus's *Belapan* independent news agency on March 25 quoted rights campaigners as saying no less than 328 people were arrested during the March 24 sweep. This figure could not be officially confirmed.

Also on March 25, *Belapan* reported the head of Milinkevich's election campaign staff in the city of Brest was also arrested on March 24. Dzmitry Shymanski was first arrested 10 days ago on charges of participating in an unsanctioned opposition rally and had just been released from police custody when he was arraigned again, this time for "hooliganism."

Source: Jean-Christophe Peuch, RFE/RL; March 29, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

8. Belarus Opposition Maps Plan to Get Support

The week of unprecedented protests that followed disputed elections was just a start, and the opponents of authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko need to step back and gather broader support, an opposition leader said Monday.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Alexander Milinkevich likened the protests to a storming that made "cracks in the fortress" of the hard-line government.

But he acknowledged they were not big enough to force change and said the opposition would now seek to get its message to more people in the former Soviet republic of 10 million.

"We have made holes and cracks in the fortress. But if we keep on knocking against it with our heads, especially with few forces, we may lose. That is why we are taking a step back and beginning a siege of this fortress. The siege will be an information attack," he said.

His remarks came two days after a week of protests over the March 19 election. The events culminated Saturday in a clash with riot police who beat demonstrators with truncheons. The opposition was determined to press ahead.

"There will be a second storming, but we won't wait five years for it," Milinkevich said.

He said the opposition will continue to seek a repeat vote in which Lukashenko would be barred from running and reiterated plans to hold the next large protest April 26.

Milinkevich appealed to the European Union to press harder for the release of hundreds of people arrested in the protests, including another opposition leader, Alexander Kozulin. Courts are trying some of the detainees, with many being sentenced to jail terms of up to 15 days.

A spokesman for the prosecutor's office, Yegor Levai, said a criminal case against Kozulin had been opened, but he declined to say what charges he might face.

"I ask the EU to be tougher in demanding (Kozulin's) release, as well as the release of other political prisoners," Milinkevich said. He thanked Europe and the United States for their solidarity and their criticism of the election, and stressed the need for Western help in making Belarus more open and educating Belarusian students expelled for opposing the government.

"There are 10 million Europeans here ... and they must be helped," he said.

He also criticized Russia, which has expressed approval of the vote, calling its position "absolutely unfair."

The election, in which officials say Lukashenko won a third term with 83 percent of the vote, set off days of demonstrations that drew thousands of people to a central square in Minsk. The protests there ended in a pre-dawn raid Friday after police broke up an opposition tent camp that gave demonstrators an around-the-clock presence.

Milinkevich, who officially received 6.1 percent of the vote, called the election a fraud. The United States and the EU say it was deeply undemocratic and have vowed sanctions against Lukashenko and other officials over the ballot and the arrests that followed. Milinkevich said 1,200 people have been detained.

When protesters returned to the streets Saturday, riot police kept them from the square and forcefully dispersed a group marching to a jail where detained activists were being held, beating people with truncheons and detaining dozens. The clash occurred after some 7,000 demonstrated in a park where Milinkevich announced the creation of a movement for "the liberation of Belarus."

The Foreign Ministry claimed Sunday that police had shown "restraint and patience," and officers resorted to force only after being attacked.

E-mails and cell phone text messages reportedly encouraged supporters to gather Sunday evening at the central October Square.

Lukashenko despises the West and criticism from there fuels his contentions that the West is out to overthrow him. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry said the statements "are on the border of an anti-Belarusian hysteria."

It is unclear how much support the opposition really has, how much dissent authorities will tolerate or what effect a stream of denunciations from the West will have.

In the interview, Milinkevich called the protests "a revolution of the spirit."

"A huge number of people have demonstrated that they do not want to be slaves, that they have overcome their fear _ they are ready to fight for their dignity and for the future of Belarus," he said. "This is a huge success."

"But of course we need 200,000-500,000 people to come out, not 20,000," he added. "Only when we become the majority will we become a force with which the authorities will start negotiating; they won't have any other options."

Milinkevich said the opposition must fight fear and apathy in the face of an "information blockade" by the government, which has virtually complete control over the media.

"Our main goal remains: information, information, information," he said. "If people have information, the dictatorship will collapse like a house of cards."

Source: Yuras Karmnanau, The Associated Press, The Washington Post; March 27, 2006; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

9. Missing Opposition Figure Is Found

Missing Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin has been located in a detention facility outside Minsk, as many protesters remain in jail a day after clashing with police in the capital. The demonstrators accuse President Alyaksandr Lukashenka of stealing the March 19 presidential elections. The European Union and the United States, which have criticized the vote as unfair, are now demanding Kazulin's release.

Scores of Belarusian opposition activists were still in jail a day after police dispersed a rally in Minsk.

However, the whereabouts of the country's second-leading opposition figure, Alyaksandr Kazulin, are now known, after his wife said earlier that she did not know his whereabouts.

A spokesman for Kazulin, Ilya Rassolov, told RFE/RL's Russian Service today that Kazulin was detained in the town of Zhodina, about 50 kilometers east of the capital, Minsk.

"A case was opened under Article 339 for hooliganism," Rassolov said. "[Kazulin] will meet a lawyer only tomorrow. The case is led by an investigator from Minsk, although Zhodina is outside of Minsk. We were told that Kazulin is not complaining about his health. However, we are going to demand a medical examination because there are some doubts. Our main task now is to establish contact with him."

Kazulin was arrested on March 25 as he was leading protesters to the Akrestsina detention center in Minsk to demand the release of demonstrators held over the past few days. Belarusian Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumou said Kazulin was arrested because he called on people to attack state installations.

Rally Ends Peacefully

The incident occurred just after a large opposition rally ended peacefully in central Yanka Kupala Square to demand the outcome of the March 19 presidential poll be annulled.

Last week saw daily protests, led by opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich, on Minsk's October (Kastychnitskaya) Square. Security forces cleared the square on March 24, arresting scores of protesters.

International Sanctions

The same day, U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli urged the international community to put pressure on Belarus's authorities.

"The United States and the European Union remain united in our response to the situation in Belarus," he said in Washington. "We urge all members of the international community to demand that Belarusian authorities respect the rights of their citizens to express themselves peacefully and to condemn any and all abuses."

The European Union and the United States have demanded Kazulin's release. Austria, which currently holds the EU presidency, said in a statement issued late on March 25 that it was "appalled" by the violence used against demonstrators by the Belarusian authorities.

Following the elections, the EU and the United States announced plans to sanction Lukashenka's regime due to violations of international electoral standards.

The Belarusian government insists the polls were fair.

Source: RFE/RL; March 26, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

10. Belarus Minister Accuses Oppositionist Of Calls To Topple Power

The Belarusian interior minister said Saturday that Alexander Kozulin, a leader of opposition forces detained today after a clash between the police and opposition, had called on people to overthrow power and kill the president.

"During the rally, Kozulin urged power overthrown, state facilities attacked and the head of state killed," Vladimir Naumov said at a briefing.

The minister said one civilian and eight servicemen and policemen had been injured during the unsanctioned rally. Naumov said the police had done its best to prevent military force from being used to disperse the rally.

In Sunday's polls, Kozulin and two other candidates challenged President Alexander Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington. According to official results, the incumbent won a landslide victory with 83% of the vote; main opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich garnered 6.1%; Liberal Democrats Chairman Sergei Gaidukevich, widely regarded as a Lukashenko loyalist, finished third with 3.5%, and was followed by Kozulin with 2.3%.

The opposition disputed the official election returns on Monday, taking to the streets to call for a re-run.

Milinkevich blamed the consequences of the rally, originally planned as peaceful, on Kozulin, adding that the latter had made "more than a mistake" when he urged people to go to a detention center where reportedly several hundred people who had taken part in unsanctioned rallies were kept.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 25, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

11. Opposition Chief Proclaims Movement To "Free" Belarus

Belarus's opposition leader, addressing a rally protesting against the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko, proclaimed on Saturday the creation of a movement to "liberate" the country.

"I declare the creation of a Popular Movement for the Liberation of Belarus," Alexander Milinkevich told a crowd of several thousands massed in a park in the capital Minsk.

Milinkevich, heavily defeated by Lukashenko in a March 19 election that his supporters say was blatantly rigged, told the crowd in Minsk's Yanka Kupala park: "We are the ones who have won because more and more people are ceasing to be afraid."

"This was only a first storming of the regime. But we have to be realistic. We do not number 200,000 or 500,000. If we had, the regime itself would have taken to the air in its Boeings and flown off to another dictatorship.

"We will keep on working, but we will not put off the next storming for another five years. We will fight above all else for fair and honest elections," he declared.

The opposition rally switched to the park after being stopped by riot police from gathering on Minsk's central October Square, site of a tent camp cleared away by police on Friday.

In line with the pattern earlier in the week, police showed tolerance unusual for the tightly-controlled ex-Soviet state and refrained from using force to break up Saturday's rally.

Source: Reuters; March 25, 2006; <http://today.reuters.co.uk/>

12. Defying Ban, Opposition Urges Rally Today In Belarus

Despite an official ban, the liberal opposition in Belarus has urged supporters to rally in Minsk today to continue protests against what it calls the rigged reelection of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

Alyaksandr Milinkevich-- who lost to Lukashenka in the March 19 poll -- urged supporters to mass "no matter what" in October Square.

Riot police cleared a protest camp from that square early Friday morning, ending a four-day protest. Some 200 protesters were taken away in trucks to a pre-detention center.

The United States and European Union denounced the police action and both announced plans to impose new restrictions on Belarus, including a travel ban.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, however, described the police action as "restrained." He also accused the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe -- which described the election as flawed -- of playing an inflammatory role in Belarus.

Source: RFE/RL; March 25, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

REGIONAL

13. Gazprom Chief: Belarus Must Pay Gas Rates

Russia's natural gas behemoth OAO Gazprom said Thursday that Belarus must pay European rates for its gas -- an apparent bargaining ploy to win control over its neighbor's gas pipeline system and one that could stir trouble between the allies.

Pro-Moscow Belarus currently pays a rock-bottom price of roughly US\$47 (Euro39) per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian natural gas and is the only former Soviet country not to have seen Russia hike its gas bill last year.

Source; MSN Money; March 30, 2006; <http://news.moneycentral.msn.com/>

14. Fradkov Dismisses Any Attempts At Isolating Belarus

Russia considers any attempts at isolating Belarus because of the results of its presidential elections as counter-productive, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov said at a press conference in Oslo.

"We consider any attempts to isolate Belarus as counter-productive," Fradkov told journalists. "We believe that Belarusian involvement in integration processes and the West's cooperation with Belarus would foster the development of democratic processes in the country," the prime minister said.

Russia will follow the developments in Belarus and ensure the protection of human rights, he said.

Moreover, Russian and Belarusian attempts to build a union are in line with European integration processes," Fradkov said.

Source: Interfax; March 30, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

15. Russian Ambassador To Discuss Detainees' Release with Belarus

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Wednesday its ambassador to Minsk would discuss the release of Russian nationals detained for taking part in a protest against the results of Belarus' recent presidential election.

Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin said Russian Ambassador to Belarus Alexander Surikov would hold talks with representatives of the Belarusian presidential administration.

When asked what steps Russia was taking to secure the release of Russian journalists detained in Minsk, Kamynin said it would be wrong to divide the detainees into journalists and non-journalists.

"Ensuring the legitimate rights and interests of all Russian citizens regardless of their professional status is a matter of principle to us," he said. "The Russian side is taking all measures to provide legal assistance to the detained Russians."

Belarusian Prosecutor General Petr Miklashevich said earlier that 21 foreign nationals had been detained in Minsk between March 19 and 25 for participating in unauthorized rallies, including seven Ukrainians, six Poles, four Russians, two Georgians, one Lithuanian, and one Canadian. On Monday, a court in the Belarusian capital sentenced two Russians to 15 days in custody for taking part in a protest in Minsk.

The Russians were detained under the country's Administrative Code on March 24. Five other Russians, including a prominent television journalist, could face similar action.

Russian Embassy officials in Belarus said they had visited the Russians detained by police during unauthorized rallies in the country's capital.

The embassy sent a note to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, and Russian diplomats have been in contact with the republic's law-enforcement agencies.

On March 25, crowds protesting the re-election of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington, clashed with riot police on Minsk's central square. Police detained 300 opposition supporters.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 29, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

16. Pavel Sharamet Returned to Moscow

Paval Sharamet, the Head of Special Projects Department at *The First TV Channel* (Russia) has returned from Moscow.

He departed from Minsk in his car on March 27, 2006. The next day, the BAJ Press Service phoned the journalist and asked him to summarize his impressions of the events, which he had witnessed in Minsk. "The hopes for relief and liberalization of the incumbent Belarusian regime have not been justified," – noticed P. Sharamet. "Just on the contrary, there were confirmed the most pessimistic forecasts as for the scope of repression. How disgraceful! The Belarusian authorities did their best to jeer at the Georgians... As for the Russian citizens, they attempted to punish them in a pointed manner in order to prevent other Russians from providing help and showing solidarity with the Belarusian opposition..." – emphasized P. Sharamet.

In the interview to the *BelaPAN News Agency*, the journalist said that the decisive role in his release was played by Kanstantsin Ernst, the Director General of *The First TV Channel* (Russia). The latter addressed repeatedly the Belarusian official authorities with a request to discharge his colleague.

It should be reminded that the journalist was urged to leave Belarus within 48 hours after he had been released from a police ward in Minsk on March 27, 2006.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 28, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

17. Ukraine Calls Belarus Authorities To Dialogue With Opposition

Minsk police detained three citizens of Ukraine, who took part in the protest action, organized by Belarusian opposition, as reported Vasyl Filipchuk, head of the press office of Foreign Ministry of Ukraine.

According to him, Ukrainians feel well and do not complain of conditions of keeping or improper treatment.

On the Ukraine's consul's request administration of the police station put all the detained citizens of Ukraine in one cell. Ukrainian consul delivered them book and personal hygiene goods.

Filipchuk noted that Foreign Ministry of Ukraine continues to call Belarus authorities to ensure Belarusian citizens their right on peaceful meetings in accordance with democratic norms, to keep to tolerance, to bar from repressions and to release all the detained during the peaceful protest action.

Besides, Ukraine's MFA calls Belarusian authorities to the dialogue with opposition forces and to take into consideration conclusions and comments of OSCE and international community.

Filipchuk noted that Ukraine concerns over groundless detaining of Ukrainians citizens in Belarus and over prohibition of the country for Ukrainian citizens. "These actions contradict friendly and good-neighbour relations between our countries," said he.

Source: ForUm; March 28, 2006; <http://en.for-ua.com>

18. Two Russians Detained For 15 days After Anti-presidential Rally

A court in the Belarusian capital sentenced Monday two Russians to 15 days in detention for taking part in a protest against the results of the country's recent presidential election, a court representative said.

The Russians were detained under the country's Administrative Code on March 24. Five other Russians, including a prominent television journalist, could face similar fates.

Russian Embassy officials in Belarus earlier said they had visited the seven Russians detained by police during unauthorized rallies in the country's capital.

"Consulate officials have visited all the seven detained citizens of Russia, including [reporter] Pavel Sheremet. The detainees did not make any requests or complaints," a mission representative said, adding that their relatives had been informed about their detention.

The embassy has sent a note to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, and Russian diplomats are maintaining contacts with the republic's law-enforcement bodies, the diplomat said.

Courts are expected to rule on the other five Russians either later on Monday or Tuesday.

On March 25, crowds protesting the re-election of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko clashed with riot police on Minsk's central square. The police detained 300 opposition supporters.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 27, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

19. Lukashenko's Regime Imprisons Georgian Reporters

Minsk court has ruled on the case of the Georgian report crew arrested in Belarus capital on 24 March. Journalist Nino Giorgobiani has been sent to jail for 5 days, and the cameraman, Giorgi Laghidze for 15 days (Rustavi 2).

Director General of the Public Broadcast, Tamar Kintsurashvili told journalists that Nino Giorgobiani had informed the chiefs herself by calling them stealthily from somebody's cell phone.

Reportedly, Georgia's consul in Ukraine, Zurab Kvatchadze is trying to organize the release of the reporters on bail. Yesterday, he managed to send warm clothes to them in the prison cell.

Georgian reporters were in Minsk covering the presidential elections in Belarus. Belarus police arrested them on 24 March while they were interviewing the family members of the arrested demonstrators and opposition leaders outside the local militia.

Source: CASCEN.Org; March 27, 2006; <http://www.cascfen.org/>

20. Azerbaijan Leader Congratulated Lukashenko With Election Victory

Azerbaijan's president congratulated Saturday Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko with the presidential election victory, a source in the Azerbaijan's presidential staff said.

"I am positive that friendly relations and mutual cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Belarus will keep strengthening and developing," President Ilkham Aliyev said.

Aliyev also wished Lukashenko "good health, happiness and success in state activities."

Alexander Lukashenko, who Washington has dubbed "Europe's last dictator", was reelected to his third presidential term last Sunday with 83% of the vote.

Source: Gerai Dadashev, RIA Novosti, March 25, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

21. President of Ukraine Opposes Belarus' International Isolation

In an interview with 1+1, Victor Yushchenko said Ukraine supported the OSCE evaluation of last week's presidential elections in Belarus and reiterated that Ukrainian citizens had been members of the OSCE observation mission, the press service informed.

He added, however, that Ukraine believed "Belarus must not be internationally isolated, for it will not benefit democracy in this country."

The President reminded all of century-long historical ties between our peoples and said our friendship "cannot be ruined."

"We want to have pragmatic relations. We want to develop trade and economic relations with our neighbor. This is our rational intention...", he said.

Source: ForUm; March 24, 2006; <http://en.for-ua.com>

INTERNATIONAL

22. Belarus Opposition Leader Meets With Polish President And Premier

Belarus opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich met Thursday with Polish leaders who backed his failed bid to unseat President Alexander Lukashenko, and insisted the lost election was still a step toward victory.

"These elections were a demonstration for the whole Belarusian nation and for other countries that the authorities can only take part in elections with the help of force, violence and lies," Milinkevich said after a meeting with Polish President Lech Kaczynski.

The vote was "an important first step toward victory," he said, according to Poland 's PAP news agency.

Milinkevich was working with Kaczynski and Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz to establish a scholarship program for Belarusian students expelled from home universities due to alleged opposition to Minsk 's autocratic regime.

Later Thursday, Milinkevich and Marcinkiewicz plan to sign an agreement to allow some 300 Belarusian students to study in Poland , government spokesman Konrad Ciesiolkiewicz told PAP.

Poland has long pushed for democratic change in its authoritarian neighbor, and the agreement is the latest move in the country's active support of the opposition.

Before the March 19 presidential election, the Polish-backed Radio Racja began broadcasting from northeastern Poland to give Belarusians the chance to receive information uncensored by the Minsk authorities.

Lukashenko won a third term with 83 percent of the vote, in balloting that Western countries say was rigged, reports the AP.

Source: Pravda.Ru; March 30, 2006; <http://english.pravda.ru/>

23. EU Leaders Slam Belarus Leader But Are Split on Sanctions

European leaders want to help the Belarus opposition

Most EU leaders agree that the Belarusian elections were a fraud but disagree on how to respond.

In the wake of Belarusian elections this week, European leaders are loudly condemning the Belarusian president, setting up visa bans, giving money to opposition leaders and inviting them for talks. But while some call for sanctions, others say such measures will punish the wrong people.

The EU must firmly condemn the Belarus regime for its bloody crackdown on opposition supporters after presidential polls, but should not impose sanctions that hurt the people, Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz said in Riga Thursday.

"Belarus is our neighbor and what happens there touches us directly," Marcinkiewicz told reporters during a one-day visit. "But economic sanctions or a blockade should not be applied as they would put pressure on the common people, not the ruling elite."

"A massive fraud"

EU leaders agreed at a summit last week to widen a list of senior Belarusian officials subject to a visa ban and said they were also considering financial sanctions. Poland has already imposed travel restrictions on Belarusian officials it accused of falsifying results in the former Soviet republic's presidential election on March 19 in which "Europe's last dictator" won a landslide victory in a poll judged fraudulent by the EU, the U.S. and international observers.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday denounced the Belarus presidential election as marred by "massive fraud" as the lower house of parliament passed a resolution calling for the immediate release of arrested Belarusian opposition activists and sanctions against the country by the European Union.

"This election was subject to massive fraud and somebody has to say so," Merkel told the Bundestag.

More than 500 arrested

The German members of parliament are proposing to invite the main Belarusian opposition candidate, Alexander Milinkevich, to the next meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg.

Milinkevich, who led protests against the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko, said he was going to Poland Thursday to tell the outside world what was going on in his country.

"In the Polish parliament I intend to say what is really happening in Belarus," Alexander Milinkevich told Reuters. He added that he had no plans to emigrate even though he faces jail if he returns to Belarus in connection with the protests.

So far, more than 500 people have been arrested in Belarus after a wave of opposition demonstrations resulted in a bloody crackdown by pro-Lukashenko security forces. Alexander Kozulin, another opposition figure who ran against the president and was detained after the protests, has been charged with hooliganism and faces up to six years in jail.

Meanwhile, Lukashenko postponed his inauguration Friday to April with some suggesting that the protests, which drew as many as 10,000 people, had scared him.

"Maybe the main reason is Lukashenko's psychological mood," Milinkevich told reporters. "The authorities were shocked, seeing how many people went out on the street."

Source: Deutsche Welle; March 30, 2006 <http://www.dw-world.de>

24. NATO to Review Partnership Pact With Belarus

NATO has put an 11-year-old partnership pact with Belarus under review, an alliance spokesman said.

The reason for the review was the presidential election in Belarus, which the West denounced as flawed.

NATO spokesman James Appathurai quoted by Reuters said it was unclear what measures NATO allies might take, but stressed there was broad dissatisfaction within the alliance at alleged vote-rigging and arrests of opponents.

According to official information provided by the Belarus government, the current president Alexander Lukashenko has received 83 percent of the vote. Opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich gathered protest rallies against Lukashenko.

Belarus accuses the West of inciting unrest on its streets.

Source: MosNews.Com, March 30, 2006; www.mosnews.com

25. Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thinks That the Court "Gave an Adequate Legal Treatment To the Actions of the Canadian Citizen"

"It's a pity that Canada is trying to free its citizen using political pressure and blackmail", - that was the official comment of the Ministry distributed on March 28. That is the reaction of Belarus to the demand of the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter McCay to release the journalist Frederic Lavoie. He was detained in Minsk and is serving his sentence in Akrestsina Street.

The head of the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Maria Vanshyna claimed that "Lavoie arrived in Belarus at the beginning of March 2006 and he wrote in the questionnaire that he arrived "for meeting friends and traveling"... He did not ask for accreditation, - said M.Vanshyna. She also noted that the journalist had to leave Belarus till March 23. "We do not understand why he did not leave the country and on March 24 participated in the meeting at

Kastrychnitskaja Square in Minsk... "The court "gave an adequate legal treatment to the actions of the Canadian citizen", - thinks M. Vanshyna.

She also informed that the Canadian Consul was allowed to meet F. Lavoie and the journalist was allowed to phone his relatives in Canada. "Canada should understand that Belarus does not react to pressure, and that only a superior court can release the journalist if he decides to send an appeal. No one is allowed to violate the law – neither in Belarus, nor in Canada".

The Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter McCay demanded to release the Canadian journalist Frederick Lavoie from "La Presse" who is detained in Belarus. On March 27 Mr. McCay met the Belarusian Ambassador in Canada and demanded to release Frederick Lavoie and let him leave the country. According to CBC News, Minister McCay discussed the presidential election with the Belarusian ambassador. The head of the Ministry of foreign Affairs "condemned the total neglect of democratic principles during the election on March 19". "The election was not free ", - is said in the statement. Mr. Mc.Cay also claimed that Canada would limit its diplomatic relations with Belarus to human rights and international security.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 30, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

26. PM To Meet With Belarus Opposition Leader

Premier Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz said that Poland is preparing to take action against Belarus if the situation in that country does not change.

The premier added that certain steps have been prepared to help those repressed by the Lukashenka regime. Marcinkiewicz said he is meeting with the leader of the Belarusian democratic opposition Aleksander Milinkiewicz on Thursday.

Poland has introduced visa restrictions against those responsible for falsifying the results of the elections in Belarus and repressions against the opposition. The Polish Foreign Ministry informed that it had appealed to the EU to introduce similar sanctions.

In a communiqué the foreign ministry stated that it had taken steps to protect the interests of Poles in Belarus.

Source: Poland.PL; March 30, 2006; <http://www.poland.pl/>

27. Czech Republic To Give CZK 20 Million in Support of Belarusian Dissidents

The government decided today to release CZK 20 million in support of Belarusian dissident groups, Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda (Christian Democrats, KDU-CSL) told reporters.

Svoboda also said that the recent presidential elections in Belarus were manipulated and undemocratic.

Current president Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled in Belarus since the 1990s, won in the elections as expected.

The Czech Republic will use the financial support for scholarships and study stays of oppressed Belarusian students, the spread of information from abroad as well as projects of Belarusian and Czech NGOs and health care for the prosecuted Belarusian citizens.

The March presidential elections in Belarus were accompanied by demonstrations against the current regime during which many opposition leaders were detained. The government has refused to carry out any dialogue with the opposition. Czech Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek (senior governing Social Democrats, CSSD) said after the demonstrations were suppressed that Belarusian students who could be expelled from universities due to their participation in the protests could complete their studies in the Czech Republic.

Paroubek came up with the idea after the pattern of Polish politicians after the rigged presidential election in Belarus.

Apart from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design (VSUP) in Prague, Charles University has also offered study opportunities to Belarusian students of similar schools who are persecuted by the authoritarian regime of Lukashenko.

Svoboda supported the idea and the release of scholarships for the students. He said after a cabinet meeting today that the Czech government identified itself with the decision by the European Council summit to adopt restrictive measures towards Belarusians who are responsible for the violation of international election standards, including Lukashenko.

The Czech Republic ranks among the sharpest critics of Lukashenko's authoritarian regime and has cooperated with Belarusian dissidents in the long run.

(USD1=23.773 crowns)

Source: The Prague Daily Monitor; March 30, 2006; <http://www.praguemonitor.com/>

28. Pressure Will Not Accelerate Canadian Citizen's Release - Belarus Official

Canada is putting political pressure on Belarus to achieve the release of one of its citizens who was arrested in relation to an authorized rally, Maria Vanshina, a spokesperson for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, said.

"Canada should know that, first, Belarus does not yield to pressure and, second, only a higher court, to which the Canadian citizen has every right to appeal, can make a decision on his release," Vanshina told the press in Minsk on Wednesday.

The Foreign Ministry official said that a Belarusian court had sentenced Canadian citizen Frederic Lavois [transliterated from Russian] to 15 days of detention for attending an unauthorized rally.

Lavois had no reporter's accreditation, she said.

Vanshina also announced that the Canadian citizen had registered his stay in Belarus from March 7 to 23, 2006, but on March 24 he "joined the most active participants in the unauthorized rally in Oktyabrskaya Square in Minsk."

Source: Interfax; March 29, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

29. Europe and U.S. Consider Sanctions Against Officials in Belarus

The European Union and the United States are considering personal sanctions against more than 40 officials and state journalists in Belarus for their roles in election rigging and crackdowns on civil society there, according to Western diplomats and government officials.

A list of officials under consideration for sanctions in Europe includes not only President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko and his top staff but extends to government ministers and security officials, as well as prosecutors and judges involved in trying anti-government demonstrators and sentencing them to jail.

The European Union and the United States announced an intention to pursue punitive sanctions immediately after Mr. Lukashenko's landslide re-election victory on March 19, which the West and the opposition have denounced as a sham.

The draft list of officials, a copy of which was obtained by The New York Times, reflects the work of diplomats in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, in the days since the election, and after crackdowns against peaceful protesters on March 24 and 25. It includes 43 officials or state journalists by name, and four regional election officials by position.

"We have drawn up a list, as the European Union heads of mission, and sent it to Brussels," a Western ambassador in Minsk said by telephone today, referring to the European Union's offices in Belgium.

The exact form European sanctions might take have not been determined and must be agreed upon by the entire union, but is likely to include bans on the officials' travel to the 25 European Union nations, the ambassador said. Other steps might be taken as well, including asset freezes.

The ambassador spoke anonymously because deliberations about which Belarussian officials should face sanctions are confidential. He declined to discuss any officials by name.

The list is expected to be reviewed, and perhaps adopted, when the foreign ministers from the union meet in Luxembourg on April 10.

American and European officials said that although some names will probably be removed and others added, the speed of the list's creation and the collaboration between Washington and European governments reflects a resolve to try to apply pressure to Mr. Lukashenko's circle.

The United States has already banned travel on several officials, and plans to add more. "We are thinking through the right people to target, and are doing this in very close contact with the European Union," David J. Kramer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, said by telephone.

He added that the list may grow: "There may be other names out there we want to put on."

Unlike the European Union, which publicizes the names of people under sanctions, the United States is forbidden to disclose such names. But the United States has already brought sanctions against several officials in Minsk, and is steadily adding more, Mr. Kramer said.

Before the election, he said, the number of officials was "fewer than a dozen, and it's going to go up significantly. It's going up pretty much on a daily basis."

Mr. Lukashenko, whose inauguration had been scheduled for Friday but was postponed without explanation today, is often referred to as Europe's only remaining dictator.

He runs Belarus, a nation of 10 million along Russia's northwest border, like a Soviet holdout, where Lenin is officially revered and the preponderance of the economy is under state control. He is widely accused of vote rigging, corruption and Soviet-style repression.

He has been largely out of the public eye since March 20, when, anticipating the fresh round of Western sanctions, he said he was undeterred by Western threats. His spokesman, Pavel N. Lyogky, echoed Mr. Lukashenko today.

Any new sanctions, Mr. Lyogky said in a telephone interview, "are simply funny. They first of all are groundless, and secondly they will not bring about any expected effect."

In spite of the general consensus in the West to apply pressure against Belarussian authorities, one potential point of contention is what action, if any, to take against prominent government journalists in Belarus.

Washington has been more willing to try punishing the journalists, which it regards as K.G.B. officers, Western officials said, while European countries are concerned that limits against Belarussian journalists could lead to fresh restrictions against Western news gathering in Belarus.

The names of 14 journalists are on the draft list, labeled as "key figures in the propaganda, distortion of facts and attacks on the democracies and their representatives in Belarus."

The list also includes Aleksandr M. Radkov, the education minister, for "expulsions of students and restrictions on their travel" and Nikolai I. Charhinyets, a member of Parliament, for "liquidation of the Writers' Union."

For Stepan N. Sukhorenko, the chairman of Belarus's K.G.B., the reason listed is "self-explanatory. The main repressive organ of the regime."

Source: C. J. Chivers, The New York Times; March 28; 2006; <http://www.nytimes.com/>

30. Havel Wants To Protest at Belarusian Embassy, Is Denied Entry

Prague- Czech ex-president Vaclav Havel condemned the rigging of the recent presidential elections in Belarus, but was denied entry by the Belarusian embassy when he wanted to personally hand over his protest, along with a call for Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko to step down.

Havel had to cast his letter in the embassy's mail box.

On his arrival in front of the embassy, he was accompanied by senators Zdenek Barta (for the Christian Democrats, KDU-CSL), Jiri Oberfalzer (Civic Democrats, ODS) and deputy Tatana Fischerova (for the Freedom Union, US-DEU), who, along with other personalities, had founded the Civic Belarus association which is to monitor the situation and help the Belarusian opposition.

Protests in Belarus broke out after Lukashenko was re-elected president earlier this month. According to OSCE observers, the elections were neither legitimate nor free.

"We protest against imprisoning of demonstrators. This is an act of solidarity. From our own experience we know how important acts of solidarity are for those who are struggling for a freer regime," Havel, a former leading anti-communist dissident, told journalists.

He said it is a task of the new EU countries to stress that evil must be resisted from the very beginning instead of waiting for "catastrophic consequences."

Asked by CTK to comment on the embassy's refusal to receive him, he smiled saying that this reminds him of the year 1979.

At the time, "my British colleagues Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter protested against my imprisonment [by the communist regime in Prague]. They, too, brought their protest to the [Czechoslovak] embassy. They, too, had to cast it in a mail-box," Havel said.

"However, they'll read it," he added, referring to the Belarusian embassy staff.

The Free Belarus group has been founded, apart from Havel and the above MPs, by senator Karel Schwarzenberg, ex-senator Jan Ruml and deputy ombudsman Anna Sabatova. Their activities have been appreciated by Vladislav Yandyuk, representatives of the Belarusian exile in the Czech Republic.

"This is a signal to Belarusians that the basic and democratic values have a weight if struggled for by personalities such as Vaclav Havel," Yandyuk said.

Source: Czech News Agency; March 28, 2006; <http://www.ctk.cz/english/>

31. Belarus Questions Wisdom of Further Cooperation With OSCE ODIHR

Belarus may continue to cooperate with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) only if the organization offers objective assessments of elections, Central Election Commission secretary Nikolai Lozovik said.

"Their observation can make sense if they perform the functions stated in the organization's charter. I mean they are supposed to ensure independent election monitoring and assess the observance of human rights instead of promoting the interests of some super-power in our country," he said.

"I have strong doubts that this organization will be able to transform itself in the near future and abide by the same monitoring principles both in the West and the East," Lozovik said.

Source: Interfax; March 28, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

32. Canada Calls For Reporter's Release From Belarus Quebec man arrested during Belarus protests

Freelancer 'unjustly imprisoned,' father says

The family of a Canadian freelance journalist who has been in prison in Belarus since last Friday say he is doing relatively well but that they want him freed as soon as possible.

Frederick Lavoie, 22, of Saguenay, Que., was sentenced to 15 days in jail after being arrested while covering an anti-government protest in the Belarussian capital of Minsk.

Yesterday, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay met with Nina Mazai, the Belarussian ambassador to Canada, and asked her to get her country to free Lavoie immediately on humanitarian grounds.

Lavoie, who does work for Montreal's La Presse and Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean Le Quotidien, was among hundreds of people who were rounded up by police last week during a protest against President Alexander Lukashenko's victory in a disputed election.

Source: Toronto Star Newspapers; March 28, 2006; <http://www.thestar.com/>

33. Belarus Sentences Polish Diplomat for Opposition Protest

A Belarussian court on Monday sentenced a Polish diplomat to a jail term as punishment for participating in violent demonstrations against the government of the former Soviet republic, the Interfax news agency reported.

Mariusz Maszkiewicz, a former ambassador to the country, will face spend 15 days in a Belarussian detention centre, the report said. Maszkiewicz told reporters he did not regret his part in the protests, saying in part "I am proud I was there."

Poland's Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz on Monday in Warsaw termed Maszkiewicz's detention "scandalous" and completely "illegal", according to local media reports. Poland also suspended consular activities in Grodno, Belarus, in connection with what it termed the illegal detention by Belarussian officials of two other Polish diplomats.

Polish Consul General to Grodno, Andrzej Kretowski and his deputy Janusz Dabrowski were stopped late Sunday at the Kuznica Bailostocka- Bruzhi border point between Poland and Belarus. No reason was provided for their detention.

Further sanctions against Belarus were being considered, Poland's Foreign Ministry said Monday. Belarussian police detained former ambassador Maszkeiewicz on Saturday after authoritarian President Aleksander Lukashenko ordered law enforcers to charge crowds protesting his re-election.

Lukashenko earlier this month in a lopsided vote was returned to office for a third term. The international community has criticised the poll as riddled with fraud. Maszkiewicz has been participating in an anti-Lukashenko protest at the time of his arrest. He served at the head of

Warsaw's legation to Belarus from 1998 to 2002, and at the present runs an NGO promoting closer links between ethnic Poles in Belarus and Poland.

Lukashenko has accused the group of acting as a CIA front working to undermine his government.

Another Minsk court handed down a ten-day jail sentence for Polish newspaper reporter Weronika Samolinska on Monday. Samolinska came into police custody on Friday after law enforcers demolished a tent encampment erected by anti-Lukashenko activists on a central Minsk square, and found her in the vicinity.

Russian television reporter Pavel Sheremet, arrested and beaten by police during the Saturday street battles, was in contrast released with all charges dropped - but in possession of a government order expelling him from Belarus by the end of Tuesday. Courts throughout the Belarusian capital were reportedly jammed with hundreds of cases against other demonstrators picked up in street melees between police and anti-government marchers.

More than 500 detainees, most students, will face charges, an opposition spokesman said. State retaliation against demonstration participants also was reported in Minsk area universities, where students known by authorities to have marched against the government were being expelled, the report said.

Source: Playfuls.Com; March 27, 2006; <http://www.playfuls.com/>

34. Poland Introduces Visas Restrictions for Belarus Officials

Poland will introduce visa restrictions for some of Belarusian officials, the Foreign Ministry said on Monday.

It did not name the officials to be denied entry to Poland but said the restrictions would apply to those who "bear responsibility for the falsification of elections in Belarus and for repressions against the opposition."

The ministry also asked the European Union to introduce similar measures.

Earlier in the day, the Polish Foreign Ministry has decided to temporarily suspend the work of its consulate general in Grodno, Belarus.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Pawel Dobrowolski said the consulate general would not resume operation until the reasons that led to its closure are investigated.

He held Belarus fully responsible for the consequences of this decision for its citizens.

The work of the Polish consulate general in Grodno was suspended after Belarusian authorities had denied entry to Consul General in Grodno Andrzej Krentowski and his deputy Janusz Dombrowski on the border on Sunday.

In violation of international norms Belarusian authorities demand that their diplomatic cars be searched, the ministry said.

In another incident, former Polish Ambassador to Belarus Mariusz Maszkewicz was arrested for 15 days in Minsk on Monday.

Maszkewicz was found guilty of having participated in an unauthorised mass rally organised by the Belarussian opposition. On the night from March 23 to March 24, he visited the camp city set up by the opposition in central Oktyabrskaya Square. He was detained when police cleared the square of the tents.

Leaving the court after the verdict, the former diplomat said, "I am proud that I was there in Oktyabrskaya Square".

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

35. More Cracks Evident Between Russia and West Over Belarus

Belarus warned the United States and European Union against interfering in its internal affairs, as unhappiness persists over last week's landslide election victory of President Alexander Lukashenko.

Russia welcomed the result, however, and declared the poll free and fair.

The Belarus Foreign Ministry in a statement accused the West of "wishful thinking" -- an apparent reference to earlier popular revolts that brought down pro-Moscow regimes in other former Soviet states, Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

"If the United States and the E.U. respect our people, they must respect their choice," it said.

Lukashenko has been officially declared the winner of the March 19 election, securing a third term in office.

On Saturday, several thousand anti-government protestors were beaten by police who prevented them from marching to a police station.

The protestors were supporting members of the opposition detained after police broke up an unsanctioned opposition rally in the capital, Minsk, last Thursday.

The opposition is refusing to accept the election results and is demanding a rerun.

Belarus Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov said Sunday that main organizers of the unsanctioned protest would face criminal charges.

All key organizers, including former presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin, had been detained and would face criminal charges.

Naumov accused Kozulin of calling for a change of government by force and the "physical liquidation of the head of state."

At a weekend rally in a Minsk park, another former presidential candidate Alexander Milinkevich announced the creation of a movement to free the country -- the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Belarus.

The U.S. condemned the violence against protestors and called for the immediate release of those detained "for expressing their political views."

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack called on the authorities to refrain from further use of force and arrests.

The White House said Washington would impose financial sanctions and travel restrictions against Belarus officials "responsible for the recent electoral fraud and human rights abuses," including the president.

President Bush expressed support for those detained or assaulted in the protests, and praised "those who labor in the shadows to return freedom to Belarus."

The U.S. has called for an election rerun, while observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) slammed the vote as "severely flawed."

The E.U., whose territory borders Belarus, voted to tighten sanctions on Lukashenko's regime as well.

But Moscow backed the Belarus leader. President Vladimir Putin sent a congratulatory telegram to Lukashenko, and observers from the Moscow-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) declared the vote free and fair.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov played down the police action in Minsk, saying that "protests like this have little chance of changing anything."

"These people spent several days on the square but we didn't understand what they were hoping for," he said, accusing the OSCE of inciting the protests.

"Unfortunately, we saw a situation where the OSCE observer mission began talking about illegitimacy well ahead of the elections with quite a bit of taking sides, thus playing a role of instigator," Lavrov told reporters in Moscow.

Georgia's "Rose Revolution" in 2003, Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" in late 2004 and early 2005 and Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip revolution" last year all forced out governments accused of electoral fraud.

Source: Sergei Blagov, CNSNews.com; March 27, 2006; <http://www.cnsnews.com/>

36. Belarus Youth, Veterans Picketing Polish Embassy in Minsk

The Belarusian Republican Union of Youth continued actions of protest against the West's interference in internal affairs of Belarus.

Representatives of this public organization, who actively support President Lukashenko, on Monday, like on March 26, again began picketing near the Polish embassy in Minsk. A group of veterans joined the young people.

The protesters came to the embassy with flags of Belarus and slogans: "Lukashenko - - Our President," "Communists for Lukashenko." They also use a loud-speaker to express their stance.

The police are attentively watching what is going on but don't interfere.

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

37. EU 'Appalled' by Belarus Crackdown

The EU has condemned the latest round of violence against demonstrators in Belarus and demanded the "immediate release" of arrested opposition figures.

Presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin was arrested on Saturday (25 March) as he led a march towards the police station where other protesters were held following elections on 19 March.

Another 50 to 100 people were snatched by police on Saturday with men and women beaten with batons in the streets and three people feared to be in a serious medical condition, Polish media report.

Mr Kazulin's wife told reporters he was deported to a detention centre in the town of Zhodino, just outside Minsk.

Here he faces charges of "hooliganism" and if convicted "could get anything from a fine to seven years in jail," reports UK daily the Guardian.

Both the EU and US have demanded his release, with the Austrian EU presidency saying that it was "appalled" by the recent events.

Vienna urged "the international partners of the EU, and in particular Belarus' other neighbours, to follow the same approach towards Belarus."

But the Belarusian foreign ministry asked the EU and US to stop interfering in the country's politics, saying they are "trying to engage in wishful thinking on issues related to the internal political situation in Belarus."

Week of protests

Saturday's demonstration was held in memory of the anniversary of the declaration of Belarusian independence in 1918.

The march was originally supposed to be held in October Square, the site of earlier protests, but police used megaphones to tell protesters it was closed, according to the BBC.

The demonstrations are directed against last week's presidential elections - deemed seriously flawed by the OSCE - in which president Alexander Lukashenko won 82.6 percent of the votes.

The first crackdown on protesters came early on Friday as police broke up a tent encampment in October Square and arrested 200 people.

Both the US and EU reacted with sanctions against Belarus, including a travel ban on president Lukashenko.

Source: Lucia Kubosova, EUobserver.Com; March 27, 2006; <http://euobserver.com>

38. Belarus Accuses West Over Unrest

Belarus accused the West today of trying to foment unrest on its streets, while opposition leaders in the ex-Soviet state traded accusations over the failure of a protest broken up by police at the weekend.

Belarus's foreign ministry said the European Union and the United States were "on the verge of anti-Belarusian hysteria" in criticising the police action and arrests.

Opposition leaders Alexander Kozulin and Alexander Milinkevich called supporters onto the streets after losing a presidential poll, which gave Alexander Lukashenko 83 per cent of the vote. The European Union and Washington said the election was neither free nor fair, while Moscow backs the president.

Mr Kozulin was detained during the protest. The EU demanded veteran leader Mr Lukashenko release him and condemned the dispersal of a march that followed a city centre rally.

"It is self-evident to objective observers that the situation in Belarus is absolutely calm," a Foreign Ministry statement said. "We urge the European Union and the United States to stop attempts to destabilise the country from abroad."

It said police had demonstrated "calm and patience" and moved in to disperse protesters only after many had headed for a pre-trial detention centre at Mr Kozulin's urging.

The opposition, which Mr Lukashenko said is trying to raise a pro-Western rebellion in the country, has rallied up to 10,000 supporters over the last week - protests unmatched in recent years in a country ruled with a Soviet-style authoritarian hand.

But yesterday's march on the detention centre, where opposition activists are held, exposed divisions in the anti-Lukashenko front that may hearten Mr Lukashenko.

Mr Milinkevich accused Mr Kozulin of foolhardiness in leading the march after dispersal of the rally.

Mr Kozulin's headquarters hit back angrily today, calling Mr Milinkevich "a so-called democrat... who was jealous of Kozulin during the peaceful protests since March 19, and did not have the strength to lead despite the money, publicity and support from Europe and the United States".

"Milinkevich simply acted as a coward," it said.

Mr Milinkevich, who polled six per cent in the polls, said: "Our views differ, but we are not enemies."

The EU, which sees Mr Lukashenko's Belarus as a last bastion of Soviet-style political and economic rule, denounced yesterday's police action.

"The EU Presidency is appalled by the violence used against demonstrators by the Belarussian authorities," Austria said in a statement issued late yesterday on behalf of the bloc.

"It expresses serious concern about the arrest of demonstrators and members of the democratic opposition, including presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin, and demands their immediate release."

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said he wanted to invite Mr Milinkevich to a meeting of EU foreign ministers next month.

Poland's foreign ministry said a former ambassador to Belarus and a Polish journalist had been detained in an earlier police swoop on Saturday and were beaten by police.

About 50 young people from a pro-Lukashenko youth body chanted anti-American slogans in front of the US embassy in central Minsk today in a clearly orchestrated action, while police did not interfere, an independent journalist said.

"Down with the hirelings paid from abroad. Lukashenko is the real power here," said one of the posters they held.

Source: News.Com.Au; March 26, 2006; <http://www.news.com.au/>

39. Belarus Dissident Invited To Norway

Norway has invited Alexander Milinkevich, leader of the opposition in Belarus, to Oslo for talks. The trip is being arranged by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, a member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Aftenposten reported. The Norwegian Foreign Ministry is also involved and plans arrange talks between Milinkevich and Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Store.

The Norwegian government has denounced the results of last Sunday's vote. Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko was declared the official winner with almost 83 percent of the vote, while Milinkevich's official tally was 6 percent.

Opponents of Lukashenko and many foreign governments, including the European Union and United States, have denounced the vote as rigged.

Bjorn Engesland of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee said there are unconfirmed reports that Milinkevich's son is among those arrested this week in roundups of dissidents and police raids on demonstrations.

Source: United Press International, March 26, 2006; <http://www.upi.com/>

40. U.S. Condemns Violence Used Against Belarus Protesters

The United States condemned violence used against protesters in Belarus, and called for the immediate release of those detained “for expressing their political views” in Minsk.

“The United States deplors today’s use of force by Belarussian authorities against peaceful demonstrators in Minsk,” State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a statement. “We express our deep concern for the individuals who were injured and detained.”

The statement calls “on Belarussian authorities to refrain from further use of force and arrests against those exercising their legitimate rights to assembly and expression. “We urge authorities to immediately release all those being held for expressing their political views.”

Some 7,000 people joined Saturday’s rally in Minsk to protest last week’s election of Alexander Lukashenko to a third term in office, which the opposition claims was rigged. The violence took place after the peaceful unauthorized rally, when some of the crowd attempted to march on a prison where hundreds of opposition supporters have been jailed in the past week.

An AFP reporter at the scene saw lines of black-helmeted riot police on the road to the prison beating back protestors with truncheons. At least one person could be seen nursing a bloody head wound.

Alexander Kozulin, one of the two opposition candidates defeated in the presidential election, was arrested near the site of the violence.

The European Union and United States have also criticized the election, which Western poll monitors said was neither free nor fair, and have vowed to impose sanctions after police cracked down Friday on an opposition demonstration.

Source: MosNews.Com, March 26, 2006; www.mosnews.com

41. Russian, Canadian Journalists Arrested During Protests in Belarus

Russian television journalist and his Belarusian colleague Svetlana Kalinikina were detained in Minsk on Saturday, the Itar-Tass news agency reported. Police said the journalists had been detained for disorderly conduct.

Meanwhile, the Russian embassy in Belarus has begun a search for Sheremet. It learnt about his apprehension from his mother. Ambassador Alexander Surikov met her and promised support.

An embassy official said the Russian diplomats had not received any official information from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry about Sheremet’s detention.

On Sunday, Russian NTV television network reported that Sheremet was receiving treatment at a hospital in Minsk. The journalist told NTV, talking by phone from the hospital, that he had been detained and beaten for several hours.

On Saturday, the brother of a Canadian jailed during a police crackdown in the Belarusian capital said he was disappointed with the way officials in Ottawa are handling the case. Jeremi Lavoie said his brother Frederick, a freelance journalist covering the unrest for the Montreal newspaper La Presse, was rounded up along with 300 others after police stormed October Square in Minsk on Friday, CBC News reported.

Frederick, a freelance journalist, was covering the unrest in Belarus for the Montreal newspaper La Presse.

Speaking from Montreal, Lavoie said that shortly after learning of the arrest through text messaging, he lost contact with his brother. So he started making phone calls “to everyone I could contact” including Canadian authorities, the Belarusian government and non-governmental agencies.

He said officials from the British Embassy were the most helpful. “The ambassador asked me for [Frederick’s] information and said he would take care of it,” he told CBC Newsworld on Saturday. After hours of persistent liaison work, Lavoie said British officials were able to speak to Frederick and give him food and toiletries.

“Most of the work in Minsk was done by the British officials who were extremely efficient,” Lavoie said. “But in Ottawa, the Canadians only said they have no more news, and we got unclear reports from the government regarding what they can do.

“Yesterday evening, we were told [Prime Minister Stephen] Harper was going to call there directly and ask for his release — then we were told later maybe it was not going to happen.”

Frederick Lavoie, 23, was sentenced to 15 days in jail. Jeremi Lavoie says he wants Canada to put pressure on the Belarusian government to free his brother immediately.

Spokesman Rodney Moore of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa said Canadian officials have been in contact with Lavoie’s family and that British officials were helping the journalist. Canada doesn’t have consular services in Belarus.

Source: MosNews.Com, March 26, 2006; www.mosnews.com

42. Deploing Rights Abuses in Belarus, UN Expert Calls For Detainees’ Release

In his third condemnation in a week over presidential elections in Belarus, decried by monitors as neither free nor fair, a United Nations expert today deplored the escalation of Government abuses against the independent press, opposition candidates and supporters, and called for the immediate release of all political detainees.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Adrian Severin, cited reports that riot police stormed an opposition tent camp in Minsk, the capital, early today, beating demonstrators detained inside buses in order to avoid press attention, and releasing an unknown white gas.

“The Special Rapporteur reiterates his call on the Government of Belarus to release immediately and unconditionally all political prisoners, bring all violations of human rights to an immediate end, and investigate them, in order to bring those responsible to justice,” Mr. Severin said in a statement released in Geneva.

“The Special Rapporteur urges the President and the Government of Belarus to engage immediately in a constructive dialogue with all sectors of the Belarusian society and with the political opposition before the human rights situation deteriorates even further,” he added.

Only yesterday Mr. Severin, who already last week strongly deplored the Government’s actions ahead of Sunday’s vote, noted “with regret” that international monitors had cited arbitrary use of state power, widespread detentions, persistent disregard for the basic rights of freedom of assembly as well as allegations of fraud.

“The EP (European Parliament) ad hoc delegation stated that Alexander Lukashenko cannot be recognized as the legitimate president of Belarus, as the elections were not free, fair or democratic and called for a re-run of the elections, as well as for an extension of European Union sanctions against Belarus,” he said in that statement.

Special Rapporteurs, who are unpaid and serve in a personal capacity, receive their mandates from the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Source: UN New Centre; March 24, 2006; <http://www.un.org/apps/news/>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

43. A Criminal Case Concerning Battery And Assault of Journalists Has Not Been Started Yet

A criminal case concerning battery and assault of reporters from *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii* and Reuters news agency near the office of Kastychnitski District Department of the Interior on March 2 has not been started yet. On March 29 The Prosecutor General Piotr Miklashevich said it at a press-conference.

Journalists noticed that only a few days were necessary to start a criminal case concerning the battery and assault of BT journalists while it's been a month since the beating of journalists from independent mass media and the case has not been started yet.

P. Miklashevich said that in the case of BT journalists, "the reasons for starting a criminal case were obvious". He also says that an investigation of all the facts is being carried out now. "We will take charge of it. I have received an appeal from the International Association of Journalists (apparently from the International Federation of Journalists, - n. BAJ). Of course we will find out whether the police violated the law", - said P. Miklashevich.

Answering the question why only a few days were necessary to start a criminal case concerning the battery and assault of BT journalists while it's been a month since the beating of journalists from independent mass media and the case has not been started yet, the Prosecutor General said that in the case of BT journalists, "the reasons for starting a criminal case were obvious". In the case of beating of journalists near the office of Kastychnitski District Department of the Interior "the circumstances are not so obvious". // According to BelaPAN

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 30, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

44. Riot Policemen Assaulted Zubr Activist For National Flag

An underage Zubr activist Andrei Kuzminsky was detained on March 24 in the night during the liquidation of the tent camp on October Square in Minsk by riot policemen. He was one of the first to be seized by riot policemen. He defended tents together with his friends, clasping the hands. "I was thrown in an armoured truck. I was holding a national flag. Riot policemen started to snatch it from my hands, they knocked me on the ground, but I refused to give the flag. In Akrestsin Street I was dumped from the truck. I fell, then I stood up and tried to run to the fence, but they started to kick me," the activist told to the Charter'97 press center. Now Andrei Kuzminski is hospitalized in a surgery department of 9th hospital and diagnosed a blood tumor and kidney rupture.

As we have informed, on March 24 in the morning the Internal Affairs Department of Minsk city executive committee and the Internal Affairs Ministry reported that all underage defenders of the tent camp had been released. The policemen had not told that after beating up by riot policemen they were hospitalized.

It's not the first time when Andrei Kuzminski is beaten up by riot policemen. On March 15 the Zubr activist took part in the picket in front of the Russian Embassy in Minsk. The Zubrs held a streamer: "Support of the dictator is disgrace for Russia!" Andrei was beaten up by riot policemen in masks then. He regained conscience in an ambulance car. His rib was injured, he had many closed wounds.

Source: ZUBR; March 30, 2006; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

45. List Of Journalists, Prosecuted For Carrying Out Professional Duties

March 14 – 25, 2006

List of Arrested Journalists:

1. Andrej Pachobut (*Magazyn Polski in Exile*, Hrodna). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 14, 2006.
2. Ihar Bantsar (*Glos Znad Niemna in Exile*, Hrodna). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21, 2006.
3. Andrzej Pisalnik (*Glos Znad Niemna in Exile*, Hrodna). Sentenced to 12 days of arrest on March 21, 2006. The journalist was detained again after 5 days of arrest. Firstly, A. Pisalnik was sentenced on March 15, 2006.
4. Aliaksei Rads (Internet-resource <http://www.forum.grodno.net>, Hrodna). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21, 2006.
5. Andrej Dynko (*Nasha Niva*, Minsk). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 22, 2006.
6. Vadzim Aleksandrovich (*Belorusy i Rynok*, Minsk). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 22, 2006.
7. Sviatlana Stankevich (a free-lance journalist, Smarhon). The journalist was detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006 and sentenced to 8 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.
8. Yury Chavusau (a journalist of the Assembly of NGOs Internet Portal, an author of *Palitychnaya sfera* and *ARCHE* magazines). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21, 2006.
9. Siarhej Salash (an *Offside* newspaper journalist (Barysau), A. Milinkevich's Election Team activist). The journalist was detained in Minsk on March 22, 2006 and sentenced to 13 days of arrest on March 23, 2006.
10. Ivan Roman (A *Salidarnasc* newspaper free-lance correspondent). The journalist was fined 2 base amounts on March 20, 2006. The journalist was threatened with a gun at the Piershamajski District Department of Internal Affairs in Minsk by some unknown civilian (!). On March 23, 2006 the journalist was detained again by the police in Hrodna for no apparent reason and sentenced to 13 more days of arrest.
11. Viktor Yarashuk (*Miastsovy Chas*, Pinsk). The journalist was sentenced to 5 days of arrest on March 15, 2006. The journalist was detained again by the police on March 23. He has been sentenced to 6 days of arrest.
12. Anton Taras (a free-lance correspondent). The journalist was detained in Minsk on March 23, 2006 and sentenced to 11 days of arrest.
13. Vadzim Kaznacheyeu (a free-lance correspondent). The journalist was detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006 and sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.
14. Tatsiana Vanina (a *BAJ* member). Detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006 and sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.
15. Artsiom Liava (a *Nasha Niva* staff photo correspondent). Detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006 and sentenced to 15 days of arrest on the same day.

16. Vital Vasilkou (*Deutsche Welle*, Mahileu). The journalist was sentenced to 7 days of arrest on March 23, 2006.

17. Aliaksei Salej (*Pahonia* Internet Site, Hrodna). The journalist was detained in Hrodna on March 24, 2006 and sentenced to 6 days of arrest on March 27, 2006

18. Valery Shchukin (*Narodnaya Vola*, Viciebsk). Sentenced to 7 days of arrest on March 17, 2006. The journalist was released from arrest on March 23. However, he was detained again on his way to the railway station on March 24, 2006.

19. Darja Kastenka (free-lance, cooperates with the *Asvieta i Adukacyja* magazine). The journalist was detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006. She was sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.

List of Released Journalists after Arrests:

20. Andrej Shantarovich (*Miestnaya Gazeta*, Vaukavysk). The journalist was sentenced to 3 days of arrest on March 18, 2006.

21. Siarhej Niarouny (*Volny Horad*, Krychau). The journalist was sentenced to 3 days of arrest on March 18, 2006.

22. Mikalaj Gierdziy (*Volny Horad*, Krychau). The journalist was sentenced to 2 days of arrest on March 18, 2006.

23. Aliaksei Shein (A. Milinkevich's Press Group, Minsk). Sentenced to 5 days of arrest on March 20, 2006.

24. Tatsiana Snitko (a *Nasha Niva* free-lance correspondent). The journalist was detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006 and fined 30 base amounts (around USD 430).

List of Fined Journalists:

25. Volha Dziemchanka (*Odnako* newspaper, Minsk). The journalist was fined 20 base amounts (approximately USD 290) on March 21, 2006.

26. Alena Lukashevich (a free-lance correspondent). The journalist was detained in Minsk on March 23, 2006 and fined two base amounts.

27. Iryna Laurouskaya (*Brestski Courier*). Fined two based amounts by the Kastychnitski City District Court of Minsk on March 23, 2006

List of Prosecuted Foreign Journalists:

28. Andriy Lubka (*Karpatski Holos*, Ukraine). The journalist was sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 22, 2006.

29. Dzmitry Hurnevich (a *Radio Polonia* (Poland) free-lance correspondent). The journalist was sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21, 2006.

30. Frederick Lavoie (a Canadian free-lance journalist, worked without an official accreditation). The journalist was detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006. He was sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.

31. Nino Giorgabiani (*Public TV of Georgia*). Arrested near the Police Prison in Akrescin Street in Minsk on March 24. The journalist was sentenced to 5 days of arrest on March 27, 2006 and released on March 30, 2006.

32. Georg Lagidze (*Public TV of Georgia*). Arrested near the Police Prison in Akrescin Street in Minsk on March 24. The journalist was sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.

33. Aleksandr Podrabinek (*Prima-News Human Rights Information Agency, Russia*). The journalist was arrested in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk. He was sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.

34. Loren Milo (*La Liberation* newspaper correspondent, France). The journalist was detained in the evening on March 24. However, she was released some time later.

35. Alan Kallison (*Wall Street Journal, USA*). The journalist was beaten in the city center of Minsk on March 25, 2006.

36. Wieronika Samolinska (*Gazeta Wyborcza, Poland*). The journalist was detained in Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk around 3 am on March 24, 2006 and sentenced to 10 days of arrest.

37. Pavel Sharamet (*The First Channel, Russia*). The journalist was detained and beaten hard by the riot police in the city center of Minsk on March 25, 2006. He was convoyed to the 2nd City Clinic of Minsk. Afterwards, the journalist was released and urged to leave Belarus within 48 hours.

38. Aleh Kazlouski (*Pravoye Delo* periodical, Russia). The journalist was sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.

39. Eduard Glezin (*Pravoye Delo* periodical, Russia). The journalist was sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.

40. Pavel Salyha (a free-lance correspondent, Ukraine). The journalist was sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 27, 2006.

Discharged Journalists

41. Siarzhuk Sierabro (*Vitsiebski Courier, Vitsiebsk*). It has been the only case so far, when a judge decided to release a journalist and acknowledged that the correspondent carried out his professional duties.

42. Iryna Charniauka (<http://www.euramost.org>, News Internet Site, Hrodna). The journalist was detained by the police on her way to the Hrodna railway station on March 24, 2006. However, she was released some time later.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 30, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

46. Detained Belarus Opposition Go on Hunger Strike - Lawyers

Some 20 detained opposition supporters have gone on hunger strike to protest conditions at a Belarus jail holding 400 opposition supporters. The Associated Press news agency reported quoting the protesters' defense lawyers.

Dozens of youth activists again flouted prohibitions on unauthorized demonstrations, rallying outside a Minsk jail where detained protesters were being held.

Meanwhile, authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, whose re-election to a third term was widely derided as fraudulent and sparked a week of unprecedented protests, commended police

for “efficiently” maintaining the stability of the tightly controlled former Soviet republic.”“Peace and order have returned and the country is just as it was,” he said in televised comments.”

Rights supporters said nearly 1,000 activists have already been sentenced or are behind bars awaiting sentencing for taking part in protests or supporting the opposition following the election. So many were picked up in Minsk that some were being sent to jails outside the capital.”A court also sentenced several journalists to jail on charges of hooliganism or participating in demonstrations, said press freedom groups. They said the convicted journalists included citizens of Belarus, Poland, Russia and Georgia.

Rights advocates alleged prisoners were being held in crowded conditions, and were denied water and the right to receive care packages. Up to 18 inmates were being squeezed into cells designed to accommodate five, they said.

The election, which officials say Lukashenko won with 83 percent of the vote, set off days of demonstrations that drew thousands of people to Minsk’s central square. The protests there ended when police staged a pre-dawn raid Friday, breaking up an opposition tent camp.

Opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich, who officially received 6.1 percent of the vote, called the election a fraud. The United States and the European Union said the vote was deeply undemocratic and have vowed sanctions against Lukashenko and other officials.

An 18-year-old student who was detained in the Minsk tent camp last week said detainees were subjected to psychological abuse. “We were told we would be taken into the forest and shot, and that girls would be raped beforehand,” Polina Denisova testified in court.

Pro-Lukashenko youth activists, meanwhile, again staged rallies outside the American and Polish embassies in what apparently were government-sanctioned demonstrations.

Source: MosNews.Com, March 29, 2006; www.mosnews.com

47. Narodnaja Vola Has Not Been Published After The Election

Not a single issue of *Narodnaja Vola* has been printed after the election. The edition's editor-in-chief Iosif Syaredzich informed BAJ that on March 29 they would decide whether they should print it in Smolensk. About 400 thousand issues of the newspaper were detained at the Russian-Belarusian border before the election and have not been returned yet. Nobody can be sure that this will not happen again.

On March 28 I.Syaredzich talked to the head of Chyrvonaja Zorka (a printing house in Minsk) Ihar Malaniak about the possibility of cooperation in the future. But the head of the printing house put the talk off several times and than asked to phone him one or two weeks later. I.Syaredzich said that on March 29 he will contact the head of "Drukarnia Mikhailava" (a printing house in Smolensk) to find out whether they will continue their cooperation.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 29, 2006; http://www.baj.ru/

48. Journalists From Novaja Gazeta Think That A.Padrabinek IS a Political Prisoner

On March 27 Charter-97 distributed the statement of *Novaja Gazeta*'s editorial staff. The statement concerned the detention of Aliaksandar Padrabinek, an observer of the edition, the editor-in-chief of the *PRIMA-news* agency.

"An observer from *Novaja Gazeta* Aliaksandar Padrabinek is detained in Belarus just like a hooligan. We assure you: Padrabinek is not a hooligan, he is a political prisoner detained for his professional activities", - is said in the statement. "Aliaksandar Padrabinek is one of the most influential Russian human rights defenders and has an excellent reputation. We consider the detention of A.Padrabinek a purposeful anti-Russian demarche".

The editorial staff demands that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia should interfere in the issue and help A.Padrabinek and other Russians "detained by A.Lukasheka's regime".

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 28, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

49. Religious Freedom Lawyer Jailed

Following Baptist pastor Georgi Vyazovsky's completion of a 10 day jail term, religious freedom lawyer Sergei Shavtsov has been jailed, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. Shavtsov organised a Christian business leaders seminar, after being denied official permission, and was detained after police raided the seminar. His wife Dina Shavtsova told Forum 18 "Why shouldn't they hold a seminar? All it was about was a Biblical view of history." Dina Shavtsova said that her husband's sentence – although on identical charges – is not directly connected with Pastor Vyazovsky's. "But the authorities are punishing the same kind of activity – unapproved religious events." Vitali Misevets, head of the Frunze district Ideology Department, claimed to Forum 18 that "It's not absurd to deny permission for such a meeting. How do we know what 35 people were going to be discussing?" Fears have been expressed that Pentecostal Bishop Sergei Tsvor will be jailed on similar charges.

Eleven days after Baptist pastor Georgi Vyazovsky completed a ten-day prison sentence for leading unregistered religious activity, a second Protestant was detained and sentenced on similar charges. Sergei Shavtsov, who went ahead and organised a seminar of Christian business leaders in a private cafe in the capital Minsk after official permission was denied, was detained after police raided the seminar on 24 March. "The court offered Sergei a choice of a massive fine or ten days in prison – he chose prison," his wife Dina Shavtsova told Forum 18 News Service from Minsk on 27 March. "Why shouldn't they hold a seminar? All it was about was a Biblical view of history."

Dina Shavtsova said her husband's sentence – although on identical charges – is not directly connected with Pastor Vyazovsky's. "But the authorities are punishing the same kind of activity – unapproved religious events."

Vyazovsky was jailed for 10 days earlier this month [March] and there are fears that Pentecostal Bishop Sergei Tsvor of Minsk will be jailed on the same charges.

Shavtsova said the Christian Business Initiative, a registered social organisation which supports Christians in business, had originally intended to hold the seminar in the Christ for the Nations Christian college in Minsk's Frunze district. Under the tight controls on religious meetings, the authorities claim such events need specific permission, so the organisers sought such permission.

Vitali Misevets, head of the Frunze district ideology department, who on 17 March refused official permission to hold the seminar at the college, said the organisers failed to meet all the requirements of the law, including providing written permission from the Internal Affairs Department and the Emergency Situations Department. "It's not absurd to deny permission for such a meeting," he told Forum 18 from Minsk on 27 March. "How do we know what 35 people were going to be discussing?"

Misevets insisted that in rejecting the application he was merely fulfilling the law on mass meetings and events. "We're a law-governed state – this is what the law demands so this is what I need to have before I can give permission." He claimed he had nothing against the holding of such religious meetings.

The seminar went ahead in a rented private cafe in Minsk's Lenin district from Wednesday 22 to Friday 24 March. "The first two days there was no problem," Shavtsova reported. But on the Friday three police officers and one KGB officer arrived, claiming the seminar was illegal as no official permission had been granted. The officers locked all 35 or so participants in the cafe for an hour, while two Protestant pastors present, who were suspected of being the organisers, were

taken to the local police station for interrogation. Police took identity details for all the other participants, who were later freed.

Shavtsov – who was not present when the seminar was raided – soon arrived and said he was the organiser. The two pastors were then freed, but he was brought to trial later that day at Lenin district court under Article 167 part 1 of the Code of Administrative Violations. This punishes "carrying out unauthorised mass activities". Within 20 minutes he was found guilty and offered the choice of paying a fine of 4,650,000 Belarusian roubles (14,311 Norwegian kroner, 1,798 Euros or 2,162 US dollars) or serving ten days in prison. On choosing prison, he was immediately sent to the prison on Okrestina street, where many opposition political demonstrators are now being held. He is due to be released on 3 April.

No-one was available at the Lenin district police on 27 March to explain why a peaceful religious meeting was raided. Nor was anyone available to comment at Lenin district court as to why Shavtsov had been punished for organising the seminar.

Dina Shavtsova told Forum 18 she did not feel the harsh punishment for a peaceful religious meeting was related to current government nervousness in the wake of the 19 March presidential elections, which opposition activists claim were rigged. "The authorities in any case look at Protestants as an organised group that presents a danger."

Sergei Shavtsov is a Christian lawyer who has long been involved in religious freedom work. He helped compile the August 2002 "White Book", a collection of documents and articles about the adoption of amendments to the religion law in 2002 which brought in drastic restrictions on all religious activity. He also acts as legal consultant to several national Protestant Churches.

Several religious leaders who took part in or observed opposition demonstrations in Minsk in the wake of the election are among the hundreds who have been detained by the Belarusian authorities.

Source: Felix Corley, Forum 18: March 27, 2005; <http://www.forum18.org>

50. Two Belarus State TV Journalists Badly Beaten by Opposition

Two journalists of Belarus state television channel allegedly beaten by opposition forces during an unsanctioned rally in Minsk are currently in hospital with severe injuries, RIA Novosti said Monday.

Reporter of First Belarussian State Channel Mikhail Kristin has suffered a concussion, and cameraman Dmitry Chumak has a spine injury. Both are in hospital, the Belarussian State Television company said.

The journalists were injured during the Saturday unrest in the Belarus capital when some 7,000 people joined the rally to protest last week's election of Alexander Lukashenko to a third term in office. The violence took place after the peaceful unauthorized rally, when some of the crowd attempted to march on a prison where hundreds of opposition supporters have been jailed in the past week.

Kristin and Chumak said they arrived in the Yanka Kupala park to film the rally, and the protesters attacked them.

"Several people approached us and when they saw we were from Belarus State Television they attacked us, and broke the camera into pieces," one of the journalists said.

Source: MosNews.Com, March 27, 2006; www.mosnews.com

51. Fire Arms Was Used Against Protesters

Special forces have been using fire arms while dispersing peaceful demonstration. You can see it in pictures below.

Most likely they used carabines for shooting with rubber bullets and gas grenades.

Dosens of people got injures during the dispersal. Several were hospitalized. At least 100 arrested.

see pictures: <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/index.php?id=1896&lang=2>

Authorities hide information about the arrested 25/03/2006, 23:40 Authorities hide information about the protesters who had been arrested today during crackdown on peaceful demonstration.

Several people hospitalized. Siarhey Atroshchanka was taken to the 4th hospital of Minsk with heavy head injury, Natalia Apanacevich – to ER with broken leg.

Witnesses saw 4 armored trucks full of the arrested protesters. It means that at least 100 people were arrested.

Source: ZUBR; March 26, 2006; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

52. New Detentions Of Journalists in Hrodna

Journalists were detained in Hrodna yesterday evening

At about 10 p.m. the administrator of the web site *Pahonia* Aliaksey Saley was detained by the police. He will probably be detained till Monday and than he will stand trial for "misdemeanor".

Yesterday evening the policed tried to detain the editor-in-chief of *Magazyn polski in Exile*, an activist of the Union of Poles in Belarus (unrecognized by the authorities) Andrej Pachobut.

He was heading for the Polish Consulate to meet the vice-speaker of the Polish Sejm. At that moment people in mufti approached him and tried to detain the journalist. (A.Pachobut noticed that among them was Syarhey Vechar who works in the Leninski District of Hrodna Police Office).

The journalist managed to escape and ran towards the Consulate. After he entered the territory of the Polish Consulate he fell on the ground. His pursuers started trying to take away his bag, but the security service asked them to leave the territory of the Consulate.

(Let us remind you that the journalist was released on March 24 after a 10-days' detention for "misdemeanor").

Yesterday at about 10 p.m. Iryna Charnyauka, a journalist of the web site www.euramost.org was temporarily detained by the police. She was heading for the railway station to take the last train to Minsk that was to leave at about 11 p.m. Policemen approached her and asked her to get into their car. Iryna wanted to see their documents but they said she would have to get in the car and then everything would be explained to her. After that she was taken to the Dzeviatouka Police Office (which is very far from the railway station) and then released.

That is why Iryna was late for her train. Iryna thinks that it was done on purpose. The police did not want her to go to Minsk.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; March 25, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

53. 22 Reporters Held in Belarus This Week--Watchdog

Police in Belarus have arrested 22 reporters since the beginning of this week, an international media watchdog said on Friday in what it called an unprecedented crackdown on journalistic freedom.

"These arrests are intended to gag dissent and to sow a climate of terror in the country. The independent journalists should be immediately released," the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in a statement.

RSF said 13 of the journalists were still in prison, mostly serving sentences of several days "for alleged 'hooliganism', 'taking part in an unauthorised gathering' or for 'offering obscenities'".

It said they were held in overcrowded and unheated cells and called for their immediate release.

Official results from elections held in Belarus on Sunday showed an overwhelming victory for President Alexander Lukashenko over opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich, but the opposition complained of fraud and international observers said the vote was neither free nor fair.

Riot police on Friday broke up street protests against the election after several days but the opposition says it will go ahead with a rally this weekend.

The watchdog said four members of the Belarus Association of Journalists and reporters for Canadian, Georgian and Russian news organisations were among those arrested.

Source: Reuters AlertNet; March 25, 2006; <http://www.alertnet.org>

54. BAJ Deputy Chairperson Got Called To Minsk City Executive Committee

On March 23 the deputy chairperson of BAJ Andrej Bastunets was called to Minsk City Executive Committee Security Department. The reason for it was the fact that BAJ had sent many appeals to law enforcement agencies. The appeals concerned the assault and battery of journalists that took place before the elections.

A. Bastunets was asked to give written explanations of the facts of journalists' rights violation described in the appeals. He was informed that the case was being investigated, namely the fact of battery of Aleh Ulevich, a journalist from *Komsomolskaja Pravda v Belorussii*. Maskouski District Office of Public Prosecutor is also investigating the case.

It should be reminded that on March 7 the Belarusian Association of Journalists directed official appeals to the Prosecutor General of Belarus Piotr Miklashevich and the Minister of Internal Affairs of Belarus Uladzimir Navumau with a request to sue the police officials, who were beating journalists and preventing them from carrying out their professional duties. The Ministry of Internal Affairs sent the case to Minsk City Executive Committee. On March 21 BAJ sent the head of Minsk City Executive Committee Anatol Kulyashou additional information about the incidents.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 24, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

55. Three Buses With Detained Protesters Sent To Minsk Courts

The first three buses carrying protesters arrested after an opposition rally was broken up Friday morning in Minsk are on their way to courts in the Belarusian capital.

Every bus is carrying about 15 people, a RIA Novosti correspondent reported.

Police early Friday morning dispersed an opposition demonstration that had been going on in Minsk's central square since Monday.

They were protesting the official landslide victory of incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko with 83%, and calling for fresh elections.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 24, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

56. The Protesters' Camp in Minsk Ruined Violently by the Riot Police. A Number of Journalists Detained

At least four journalists, who are members of the Belarusian Association of Journalists – Arciom Liava (*Nasha Niva*), Tacciana Snitko (*Nasha Niva*), Vadzim Kaznacheyeu and Tatsiana Vanina. They were detained at night from March 23 to 24 in the Kastychnitskaya Square during the riot police storm on the protesters' camp. The journalists' location is not known so far.

Reportedly, there was also arrested a Canadian free-lance journalist Frederique Levoi, who was reporting from the protesters' camp in the Kastychnitskaya Square. More detailed information will be available soon.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 24, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

BUSINESS

57. Belarusbank Calculates Compensations For Deposits Made Before 1991

Belarusbank calculated the sums of compensations for deposits made before 1991, chairman of the board Nadezhda Ermakova said at a stockholders' meeting.

According to her, the compensations will be paid off from the budget, but no funds have been allocated for this purpose in the 2006 budget.

"Belarusbank has already solved organizational issues, in particular, concerning calculation of sums necessary to pay the compensations, and thus has fulfilled the instruction of the government", Nadezhda Ermakova noted. The total sum is estimated at several trillions of rubles, the bank said. "All the rest is beyond the competence of Belarusbank", she said.

Nadezhda Ermakova did not specify at what stage of consideration the issue was, but said it remained relevant and would stay on agenda in Belarus.

In turn, first deputy chairman of the board of the National Bank of Belarus Pavel Kallaur said that Belarus "developed various ways to pay off the compensations". He thinks this is not a simple issue, it requires generous financing from the budget.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; March 30, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

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

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.
