

May 4 – May 11, 2006

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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Anatol Lyabedzka Released, With Scratch Marks and Torn Clothes

The leader of the United Civil Party Anatol Lyabedzka was released in three hours after detention. The politician was taken to a police department of Leninski district of Minsk, though policemen told to journalists and family he was not there.

"I was taken to a police department of Leninski district right after arrest," he said to the UCP press service. "I was told: Anatol, we are to establish your identity. Captain Sytko was in charge of this process. It is obvious they wanted to isolate me before the rally started. Now I have a torn jacket, a torn shoe and scratch marks on my hands. It was done by Padabed (riot police commander). And everything else is all right".

Anatol Lyabedzka's comment of the accident was brief: "I see the eyes of the regime wide open with fear. But nothing would pull it through".

Source: Charter97; May 10; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

2. Minsk: Detentions of Participants of Chain of Concerned People

After the end of the Chain of Concerned People that was devoted to the anniversary of disappearance of Iury Zakharenka the police detained its participants Barysevich, Hryshenia and Panfilau near Peramohi Square and took them to Minsk Tsentralny Borough Board of Internal Affairs. The policemen also detained Tatsiana Dziadok, Krystsina Shatsikava, Kanstantsin Usianok and Volha Zhurauliova near the McDonalds that is also situated not far from Katrychnitskaia Square.

Before the beginning of the action the police detained the youth activists Anna Harachka and Liubou Kuchynskaia. Ms Kuchynskaia was severely beaten, after which she was driven to a hospital by an ambulance.

Source: The Human Rights Center Viasna; May 10, 2006; <http://www.spring96.org/en>

3. Lukashenko Lashes Out at the West

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko accused the West on Tuesday of trying to subjugate Belarus, and police detained three opposition activists handing out pro-democracy pamphlets to World War II veterans on Victory Day.

"Those who love saber-rattling imagine themselves the controllers of the fate of planets, the builders of a new world order, and with their metal-toed boots they mercilessly trample countries that do not want to submit to their arbitrary rule," Lukashenko told veterans.

"But if armed invasion is impossible, they try to destroy an independent state from within."

Opposition activists distributed flowers and pamphlets to veterans in a central park in Minsk.

"We are standing up for freedom and independence for Belarus just as the veterans fought for the country's freedom in World War II," said Andrei Astakhovich, an 18-year-old student. His fellow student, Alyona Shchepochenka, said official repression of the opposition "brings the victory of democracy in Belarus closer."

An Associated Press reporter saw police lead away three of the activists.

Source: The Moscow Times; May 10, 2006; <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/>

4. New Arrests In Minsk. Young Activist Lubou Kuchynskaya Beaten Up

Right before the protest rally in memory of the disappeared former Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Zakharenka, which was planned for 6 p.m. today on October Square in Minsk, riot policemen

seized the leader of the United Civil party Anatol Lyabedzka. 10 more activists were seized near the square. One of them, Lubou Kuchynskaya, was brutally beaten up by riot policemen. The girl was taken to the emergency hospital; however she managed to tell human rights watchdogs that she was beaten up by several riot policemen. They were hitting her on the head, pushed her roughly. Her clothes and bag were torn. She was robbed: her mobile phone was seized.

About 60 activists have taken part in the protest rally. They came to October Square with portraits of disappeared Yury Zakharenka; political prisoners Mikita Sasim, Andrei Klimau, Mikola Statkevich, Syarhei Kalyakin, Alyksandr Milinkevich, Vintsuk Vyachorka and others. Several dozens riot policemen arrived to the square to disband the rally. Policemen followed the participants of the rally along the avenue up to the Circus. Several protesters were detained at that moment. According to preliminary information, more than 10 protesters are arrested.

Source: Charter97; May 10; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

5. Belarus Authorities Slated As File on Missing Cameraman Dmitry Zavadski Is Closed For a Third Time

Reporters Without Borders expressed its shock that the file into the 7 July 2000 disappearance of cameraman Dmitry Zavadski has been closed for a third time and accused the Belarus authorities of incompetence. The file was last reopened in April 2005.

The victim's mother Olga Zavadskaya received a letter dated 3 May 2006 from the office of the prosecutor-general explaining that the case had again been closed on 31 March because the body of her son had never been recovered. An article in the Belarus criminal code does allow an investigation to be closed because of a "failure to find a missing person".

Reporters Without Borders has for several years been urging the authorities to open an independent investigation, but instead they have chosen to bury it yet again.

Two people were jailed for life for kidnapping Zavadski in March 2002, during a trial condemned as a "farce" by the victim's family. The trial failed to determine the exact circumstances of the kidnapping of the journalist or to identify the instigators.

US President George W. Bush met the cameraman's wife, Svetlana Zavadskaya on 27 February 2006 and expressed his personal support for her quest for justice and her determination, along with others in Belarus, to fight for a return of freedom in the country.

Source: Reporters Without Borders; May 5, 2006; <http://www.rsf.org/>

6. Reporters From Associated Press and Reuters Detained in Minsk Yesterday Evening

On May 4 reporters from *Associated Press* and *Reuters* Syarhey Hryts and Vasil Fiadosenka were detained by the police in Minsk. They were not given any explanations and had to spend half an hour at the police office not far from the railway station.

The journalists came to the station in connection with a flash mob action that was to take place there. The flash mob failed because there were too many police officers. The reporters were detained at about 8 p.m. when they were taking pictures.

One of the witnesses told *BAJ* that the police were using a new way of preventing flash mob actions. For example at the exposition Media in Belarus people in plain clothes came to journalists from *AP* and *Reuters* and told them they were the organizers of the flash mob because they "had been talking to its participants". The journalists also noticed they were being followed by a person in mufti after they had been released yesterday.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; May 5; <http://www.baj.ru/>

7. Another Belarusian Opposition Leader Jailed For Chornobyl Rally

A district court in Minsk on May 4 sentenced Viktor Ivashkevich, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), to 15 days in jail in connection with an opposition demonstration that was held in Minsk on April 26 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, *Belapan* reported.

Ivashkevich had filed a request with the city authorities to hold the demonstration and therefore was deemed its official organizer. Although the demonstration was approved, authorities subsequently declared it illegal, explaining that it was staged later than allowed, and that the opposition should not have held a rally in front of the National Academy of Sciences, as that place had been designated only as the gathering point for a subsequent march. Ivashkevich thus became the sixth opposition leader jailed in connection with the April 26 rally.

Last week, courts in Minsk jailed Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition forces' candidate in country's March presidential election; BNF Chairman Vintsuk Vyachorka; trade-union leader Alyaksandr Bukhvostau; Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists; and youth leader Zmitser Dashkevich.

Source: RFE/RL; May 5, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

8. Lukashenko Pursues His Enemies - Youth Activist Goes On Trial For Graffiti Against President

His slogans - "We want someone new" and "We're fed up" - resulted in charges of malicious hooliganism and premeditated destruction of property. The last charge carries a possible prison sentence of seven to 12 years.

"To my great regret, no other possibilities for expressing one's opinions have remained in Belarus," defendant Artur Finkevich, an activist with the Youth Front, told the court.

He said he "wanted to even the chances of presidential candidates, since the opposition was deprived of access to the media."

Finkevich, 21, has been in custody since January 30.

The authorities estimated the damage caused by the graffiti at 35.2 million Belarusian rubles (US\$16,500, ₮13,000).

Ten of Finkevich's supporters were detained Thursday as they rallied outside the court with about 30 others, carrying the activist's portrait and calling for an end to political repression in Belarus. About 40 opposition activists are already behind bars, including leader Alexander Milinkevich, who was jailed last week for 15 days after leading a Minsk protest that attracted about 10,000 people.

Lukashenko - often described by Western countries as "Europe's last dictator" - won a third term in March 19 elections deemed fraudulent by the European Union and the United States. The elections inspired a series of unprecedented mass rallies, which resulted in mass detentions.

Source: Pravda.Ru; May 5, 2006; <http://newsfromrussia.com/>

9. From 10 To 20 People Detained at the Exhibition Media in Belarus

More than a dozen young people have been detained at the exhibition "Media in Belarus".

At about 3 p.m. a group of young people tried to enter the Belexpo building where they were going to start reading independent newspapers near stands representing state TV-channels and the *Sovetskaja Byelorussia* newspaper. The majority of them were detained at the entrance. Those who managed to enter the building and unfold their newspapers were immediately detained by people in plain clothes. The detained were taken away in a bus.

Witnesses say that there were so many “people in plain clothes” that the exposition resembled a training ground.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; May 4; <http://www.baj.ru/>

10. Journalists Detained in Minsk

Two journalists – Natallia Valakida (*UDP Press Service*) and Tattiana Snitko (*Nasha Niva, Prima-news*) have been detained near the Pershamaiski District Court of Minsk where the hearing of the case of Artur Finkevich (a youth leader) was taking place. The journalists had to spend about 2 hours in the Pershamaiski District Department of the Interior.

The journalists were detained by people in plain clothes. In spite of the fact that they had their journalist certificates on them, they got detained together with some other people and delivered to the Pershamaiski District Department of the Interior. They were led to the assembly hall for "a preventive talk".

Some time later the deputy head of the District Department of the Interior Uladzimir Navitkevich arrived and showed them a videotape recording of events that had happened near the Pershamaiski District Court of Minsk (a group of young people organized a picket in support of A. Finkevich). T. Snitko and N. Valakida were not there and that is why they were allowed to leave. The other detained stayed at the District Department of the Interior.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; May 4; <http://www.baj.ru/>

DOMESTIC

11. Representatives of 25 States Take Part in VE Day Action in Belarus

Representatives of 25 countries will take part in the international action entitled “We – Heirs of the Victory” that will begin in Belarus on Monday. “The action timed to the 61st anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War is held in commemoration of a great feat of the winners and is designed to recall to the world community that it is needed today to fight for peace by all forces and means,” a source in the Belarusian Defence Ministry told Itar-Tass.

The international conference entitled “The saved world remembers” will launch the action at the Palace of the Republic in Minsk on Monday morning. Then its partakers will visit the historical cultural complex “Stalin’s Line” on the 28th kilometer of the Minsk-Molodechno highway. There the fascist tank troops moving to Moscow for the first time faced a fierce resistance of Minsk defenders who fought up to the last ditch retaining the movement of the nazi troops inside the country. The battle sites have recently been restored on the area of about of 40 hectares. Artillery batteries, machinegun blockhouses, command-and-observation post and a front-line crossing were restored there. Partakers of the international action will lay down the garden “Heirs of the Victory” on Monday.

A solemn meeting will be held, and a concert will be given at the Palace of the Republic on Monday evening. A commemorating rally at the worldwide known memorial Khatyn will climax the first day of the action. The memorial that is located 54 kilometers east of Minsk was unveiled in commemoration of 628 Belarusian villages burnt down by the fascist invaders.

A solemn march of war veterans to the monument of the Victory that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko will head will be the highlight of the action on May 9. The memorial symbol “We – Heirs of the Victory” will be handed over to the president on the Square of the Victory.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 8, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

12. Belarus Has Unique Social Security System – Sergei Sidorskiy

Belarus has created an efficient and coherent social security system which is a good jump-starting point for fulfilling challengeable tasks in the future, Belarusian premier Sergei Sidorskiy said today while introducing new minister of labor and social security Vladimir Potupchik.

Regardless of the shortage of funds, the government and the ministry have managed to build up a social security system not only for pensioners but also for invalids, veterans of the Great Patriotic War and other categories of citizens, Sergei Sidorskiy said. Besides, a lot has been done in the field of job safety, in creating an appropriate legislative base, coordinating efforts of state management bodies and employers to forge wholesome working conditions. "We have provided protection for employees exposed to hazardous working conditions and we are constantly reducing the number of such jobs. At the same time such people get a full support from the state", he said.

The head of government pointed to new challengeable tasks of the new five-year term. In particular, these are the demographic issue and further improvement of the pension system. "Social issues should always be kept an eagle eye on and I expect the new government to take such an active approach in this sphere", he said.

Introducing Vladimir Potupchik, the premier called him an "economist" with a world of experience and wealth of expertise.

Addressing the meeting, Vladimir Potupchik said that he sees his role in the ministerial office in "preserving the continuity of management and cultivating an atmosphere which could encourage every specialist to fulfill his potential". "The central strategic target" of state management bodies and the ministry in the new five-year term is to "boost the people's welfare and make the motto "State Benefiting its People" a reality", he added. Vladimir Potupchik stressed that the ministry has been given a special role of providing due payment of salaries, reducing unemployment, improving the pension system and providing social security for the disadvantaged citizens who cannot equally compete in the labor market. "These issues are becoming pivotal today for all state management bodies and the objective of the ministry is to coordinate their efforts and fulfill the tasks put forward by the leadership of the country", he said.

Vladimir Potupchik is confident that highly-skilled professionals working in the ministry will successfully cope with the tasks set forth at the Third All Belarus People's Congress.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; May 6 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

13. Lukashenko Appoints New Cabinet, Keeps Old Premier

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree Friday appointing a new cabinet in a bid to reform the structure of the government.

Lukashenko told a meeting with representatives of the country's executive bodies that minor changes had been made to Prime Minister Sergey Sidorsky's cabinet, with most of his deputies retaining their posts and two additional deputy prime ministers appointed.

He said the number of ministries and government agencies would be reduced to 39 from the current 47 to make the government structure more flexible - from a three-level to a two-level administration - in a bid to meet targets set out in a five-year development plan.

"You will have to do much more in the next five years than was done in the past ten years," Lukashenko said. "The [new] government must become the headquarters of the country's economy."

Lukashenko highlighted the country's political stability, as the formation of a new Cabinet included no political infighting.

"In this regard Belarus compares favorably to other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States [a loose association of former Soviet states]," he said. "[The Belarusian government] is not involved in battles, and this is evidence of country's stability."

Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington, was re-elected for a third presidential term on March 19 taking a landslide victory with 83% of the vote, but opposition leaders and international observers denounced the elections as fraudulent.

Although he has support in his homeland for maintaining relative stability in comparison with some other former Soviet republics, his human rights record has been fiercely criticized by international organizations. He recently topped a blacklist drawn up by the European Union and was banned from entering the Union.

Source: RIA Novosti; May 5, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

REGIONAL

14. Russia Could Free Belarusian Political Prisoners

Initiators of holding Days of Solidarity have called upon Belarusian citizens to come to the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Minsk (Staravilenskaya Street, 48) and bring candles and portraits of Belarusian abducted and political prisoners and demand to stop support of the Belarusian regime. The Belarusians abroad and all those who are concerned over the fate of Belarus, are also called upon to come to Russian embassies and missions in different cities of the world. Initiators of the Days of Solidarity note that out of all neighbouring countries, only the leadership of Russia had recognized the rigged results of the presidential elections in Belarus, and as before provides support to dictator Lukashenka. However, the initiators of the protest believe, Russia can demand Lukashenka stop repressions against political opponents and the civil society.

"It is known that G-8 summit, a summit of the world's most developed democratic countries, is planned to take place in July in St. Petersburg. On the eve of this event Russian authorities hired one of leading international PR-agencies to improve image of Russia. We offer Russian authorities several simple steps to change image of Russia as a democratic country to the better. It is in your power to demand from Lukashenka to stop repressions against his political opponents and civil society, to create an independent international commission to investigate cases of disappeared leaders of opposition Viktor Hanchar, Yury Zakharanka, Anatoly Krasouski and a journalist of ORT channel Dzmitry Zavadsky; to stop criminal persecution of oppositionists and release all political prisoners," the address published at internet-source www.solidarity16.org reads.

Prisoners of conscience in prisons of Belarus are:

Autuhovich, Mikalay, a leader of entrepreneur movement
Astreyka, Mikalay, a member of civil initiative on election monitoring
Branitskaya, Enira, a member of civil initiative on election monitoring
Dranchuk, Tsimafey, a member of civil initiative on election monitoring
Zubro, Zmitser, a youth activist
Kazakou, Aliaksandr, a youth activist
Klimau, Andrey, an ex-MP of the Supreme Soviet of 13th convocation
Kazulin, Aliaksandr, an ex-candidate on presidency
Levaneuski, Valery, the leader of entrepreneur movement
Leshkevich, Siarhey, an activist of Milinkevich headquarters
Nibiyko, Dzianis, a member of civil initiative on election monitoring
Radzivil, Yury, an activist of Kazulin headquarters
Razumau, Mikalay, an activist of trade-union movement
Sasim, Nikita, a youth leader

Seviarynets, Pavel, a youth leader
Skrabets, Siarhey, an ex-MP
Statkevich, Mikalay, the leader of Belarusian social-democratic party "Narodnaya Hramada"
Finkevich, Arthur, a youth leader
Shalayka, Aliaksandr, a member of civil initiative on election monitoring
"Russia can't head and host the summit of the developed democratic countries and help Europe's last dictator at the same time," the initiators of the Day of Solidarity state.

The initiative to hold Days of Solidarity started after policemen disbanded a protest rally dedicated to the memory of the abducted on September 16, 2005. Policemen seized portraits of disappeared politicians and national flags from the participants. At that moment one of the Zubr leaders Mikita Sasim raised his jeans shirt as a symbol of resistance to dictatorship.

Since that time actions of solidarity are held in Belarus and worldwide on the 16th day of every month. Hundreds thousands of Belarusians and friends of our country all over the world light candles of freedom in their windows, hold street actions of solidarity, tie jeans and white-red-white ribbons on their clothes, take part in flash-mobs and Internet-actions. In churches all over the world prayer services for political prisoners, families of the disappeared, all those fighting for freedom and democracy in Belarus, are held. Not only common citizens, but heads of parliaments and governments, presidents of many countries express solidarity with Belarus.

Source: Charter97; May 11; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

15. Development of Belarusian Satellite BelKA Completed

The development of the first Belarusian artificial earth satellite BelKA has been completed, deputy director of the Russian Federal Space Agency Yuri Nosenko told a sitting of the state commission charged with carrying out flight tests of the satellite and assessing its readiness for dispatch to Baikonur Space Centre. President of the National Science Academy of Belarus Mikhail Myasnikovich attended the sitting.

Yuri Nosenko noted, the Belarusian and Russian sides have done huge work to create a modern space satellite, which can be compared to the world's best ones. In his words, BelKA has many pioneering solutions, in particular, technological ones.

With its own satellite in the space, Belarus will be one of the space powers of the world, stressed the deputy director of the Russian Federal Space Agency.

Participants of the sitting, which is taking place in Moscow, intend to assess the quality of the satellite's development, its technical status, and take a decision whether to ship it to Baikonur Space Centre.

Let us remind you, the satellite is designed by the Russian rocket and space corporation Energia using universal space platform Viktoria on the order of the National Science Academy of Belarus. BelKA will perform geodesy, cartography, and meteorology projects.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; May 10, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

INTERNATIONAL

16. Belarusian President Calls Of Rebuffing Falsifications of WW II History

President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus has urged the nation to defend the heritage of Soviet Union's victory in World War II and to rebuff resolutely the attempts to spread falsification of and insinuations about historic events.

"Attempts have been going on throughout the past decade to falsify the history of World War II and to understate the role the Soviet people played in the defeat of Nazi Germany," Lukashenko

said Tuesday as he addressed a solemn ceremony of laying flowers at the monument on Victory Square in Minsk.

"War veterans in Belarus should have the status of most respected people and we, on our part, won't let anyone jolt the heritage and memories of fiery war years," Lukashenko said.

He welcomed citizens of more than 20 countries of Europe, Asia and the Americas who arrived in Minsk in the format of an international action commemorating the Victory.

"Participants in that action have a noble goal of pooling together the efforts of young generations and all the people of good will from different continents for the sake of keeping up the memories of World War II," Lukashenko said.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 9, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

17. Doing Time in Belarus

Vice President Cheney assailed Belarus last week as "Europe's last dictatorship." In March, Weronika Samolinska, a Polish journalist, joined thousands protesting in Belarus against the reelection of President Alexander Lukashenko. She and scores of other demonstrators were rounded up by police and jailed. Here is her account of what followed:

In jail, the guards did body searches of everyone. They took everything from me, including my glasses and tampons. Finally they escorted us -- 14 young women -- into one cell, where for the first time we were able to smoke a cigarette.

We introduced ourselves and helped calm one another. One girl, who had sneaked in her cellphone, called her sister. "Masha, tell everybody that I am attending an academic conference in Polock," she whispered. "Don't tell anybody that I am in jail."

After a while we began to sing, and the men in the neighboring cell joined in. They shouted out "Long live Belarus," nearly screaming, and we replied just as ferociously. Before long at least half of those who'd been arrested joined in.

An enraged guard began to threaten us, but by then we felt comfortable in our solidarity.

Soon, they took away all the Belarusians for trial, while the journalists -- the Ukrainians, Russians, one Canadian and I -- were led from room to room. They evidently did not know what to do with us. In the end, they left me alone in a cell.

The Polish consul came to see me. He had been waiting in front of the jail since 4 a.m., but they would not let him in. He had been told that no Polish citizens were being held. There were actually three of us, including Mariusz Maszkiewicz, a former Polish ambassador to Minsk, who also had been arrested on the main square. I received my first glass of water when the consul came in. He promised that he would take care of us and bring anything we needed. Then they took me to have another body search, during which I was able to retrieve my tampons, cigarettes and glasses.

They locked me up in a cell with a relative of Maszkiewicz's. She is a Belarusian citizen who is a permanent resident of Poland, but the authorities identified her as Polish. She had been horribly beaten and seemed to have suffered a concussion.

Late at night, we were joined by a Georgian freelance journalist who had been arrested while taking pictures of the inmates' relatives around the jail. They arrested her for not having her official government registration card with her. She told the militia that her card was at her hotel, and they replied, "Then let us go to the hotel." The cab that picked them up then drove them straight to jail. Three days later, during her trial, she discovered that she was being sentenced for

hooliganism. She smiled, recounting her judge's post-sentencing comment: "They could not have thought up something more unlikely, could they?"

The three of us sat in our cell. The lights remained on throughout our stay and we were forbidden to open the windows, so I began to confuse day and night. There were always crowds of supporters outside, singing, waiting, and some even getting arrested, if only to offer hope for the imprisoned. Random bits of information reached us about what was happening in the city.

Our cell was a small room, outfitted with solid tables on which we slept, ate and sat. There was a toilet in the open. We had no soap, no toilet paper; just ice-cold water from a tap. There was a terrible stench. A dirty room, mold on the walls, holes in the windows.

The food consisted mainly of some form of gruel and the odd cutlet, which we were given only at the end of the day. We could scarcely touch this repulsive stuff, even though we were very hungry. The tea was awful as well. A broth with cabbage in it would follow. We could not eat that, either, because of its strong odor. Only the bread was edible -- good, fresh and dark.

The first night in jail was unbearable, since it was very cold. We huddled together. The next day the consul brought us sleeping bags. I also received warm sweaters, socks, basic hygienic goods and -- most important -- bread, meat, cheese.

After three days, Maszkiewicz's relative was released. Two days later, another cellmate got out. By this time, two Belarusians had been added to my cell, arrested for participating in a public meeting. They told me about their farce of a trial. No counsel was present.

Those inmates who knew their rights called out: "I would like legal representation" or "I ask for witnesses" or "I wish to submit a complaint." Every plea was ignored. They entered the courtroom. They listened to the charges read to them. Ten days' sentence. End of story.

My own trial was attended by the Polish consul, a lawyer, and even a witness -- the militiaman who arrested me. At least that is what he claimed (every militiaman at the demonstration was masked). He told the courtroom that he had heard me scream anti-statist slogans such as "Out with Lukashenko," "Out with the powers" and "We cannot live like this." He claimed to have stood within a few feet of me, an outrageous fabrication. I was sentenced to 10 days.

My new cellmates and I mainly spent our time reading aloud from Henryk Sienkiewicz's "Quo Vadis" in Belarusian. We sang as well. When the guard told us to stop, we merely sang louder. By then the two women had stopped feeling afraid; the 10-day sentence had become bearable. "If they throw us out of university, so be it," they said. "But we are no longer afraid."

One day the guards led me to the warden's office, where I saw a lieutenant. He introduced himself as a KGB man who was leading an investigation against an illegal group called the Young Front. I asked that the Polish consul be present for the discussion, but was reprimanded for my request. This was a secret criminal matter, I was told, and I could not refuse to answer any questions.

I became frightened and decided to play stupid: I did not know anybody in Minsk, and if I was near the protesters' tents it was because they were giving out cups of tea. I also made sure to emphasize that I knew nothing about politics, and that I knew of no political organizations whatsoever. At first the lieutenant was very sweet, but the facade eventually fell. He did not get any information out of me, and sent me back to the cell.

I was transferred to a cell for "nonpolitical" inmates. I was put in with two so-called bums, women without passports, documents or a designated residence. One was an illegal Uzbek, and the other a young woman arrested for alleged thefts. The cell was filthy, and the women smoked cheap unfiltered cigarettes.

I had difficulty understanding them. They spoke poorly, every other word a profanity. Before meeting them I thought I understood more or less every Belarusian curse; now I know better. But I began to grasp their language a little, and they went out of their way to care for me. They made sure that I stayed warm, that I ate my rations. In such circumstances we got to know one another. Finally, one night at 3:15 a.m., I was released with several others. As we walked outside, throngs of people greeted us with flowers, champagne and cheers.

I am happy to have glimpsed a free Belarus, for what I saw on the protesters' square was a brief yet definitive moment of Belarusian freedom. And despite the loathsome discomforts and deplorable realities of jail life, sitting in there with those people was an honor for me. They are heroes.

Weronika Samolinska is a reporter for the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, where this article first appeared. It was translated by Jakub Krolczyk, *the Ukraine List (UKL)*, http://www.ukrainianstudies.uottawa.ca/ukraine_list.html

Source: Weronika Samolinska, The Washington Post; May 7, 2006; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

18. Belarusian Opposition Calls on Europe To Adopt Action Plan

Four representatives of the Belarusian opposition addressed the attending leaders of countries from the Baltic, Black Sea, and Caucasus regions at the conference "Common Vision For A Common Neighborhood" in Vilnius on May 4.

They appealed to Europe to place the Belarus issue high on its agenda, map out a strategy regarding the ruling regime in Minsk, and adopt an action plan. The speakers were Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the opposition United Civic Party; Iryna Kazulin and Ina Kuley, the wives of jailed opposition leaders Alyaksandr Kazulin and Alyaksandr Milinkevich, respectively; and Iryna Krasouskaya, the widow of businessman Anatol Krasouski, who disappeared in 1999.

Later the same day, the four handed a letter to U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney in which they appealed for the situation in Belarus to be discussed during the G-8 summit scheduled to take place in St. Petersburg, Russia, in July. Speaking in Vilnius on May 4, Cheney stressed that "there is no place in Europe" for regimes similar to that of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Source: RFE/RL; May 5, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

19. Cheney Says 'No Place In Europe' For Lukashenka

U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney today said there was "no place in Europe" for an autocratic regime such as that of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

"The world knows what is happening in Belarus," Cheney said. "Peaceful demonstrators have been beaten, dissidents have vanished, and a climate of fear prevails under a government that subverts free elections and bans your own country's flag. There is no place in Europe, whole and free, for a regime of this kind."

Addressing a meeting of Baltic and Black Sea leaders in Vilnius, Cheney said the people of Belarus was suffering under the "last dictatorship in Europe."

He also called for the immediate release of opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich and other opposition members imprisoned in Belarus for protests against Lukashenka's regime.

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

BUSINESS

20. International Monetary Fund Expects Belarus' GDP To Rise By Four Percent in 2007

Minsk, 10 May. In its latest World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Belarus' GDP to rise by four percent and prices by 13.3 percent in 2007.

The Belarusian government has not yet adopted its official Social and Economic Development Prognosis for next year.

The Ministry of Economy is in charge of the draft Prognosis and is to submit it for consideration by the Council of Ministers in late June.

The IMF predicts that in 2006, the country's GDP will increase by 5.5 percent and consumer prices by 10.4 percent, whereas the government has projected rises of seven to 8.5 percent and seven to nine percent, respectively.

The Fund had expected that Belarus' GDP would rise by 7.1 to 8.5 percent in 2005, but the country's official statisticians reported a rise of 9.2 percent. An increase of up to 10 percent had been forecast by IMF experts in consumer prices, whereas the government reported an eight-percent rise.

Source: Belapan, May 10, 2006; <http://www.belapan.com>

21. Lukashenko Orders Smaller Taxes

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has instructed the new government to reduce the number and size of taxes and dues.

"Our task is to make the taxation system a stimulus for larger revenues through better efficiency of real sectors of the economy," Lukashenko told government members on Friday. He said though that smaller taxes must not reduce budgetary revenues.

Lukashenko expects the government to suggest economic instruments of greater competitiveness of Belarusian industries. The State Science and Technology Committee and the National Academy of Sciences should intensify innovative processes. "Every ministry, plant and research center must focus on better competitiveness of our products and economy at large through innovations," the president said.

Hasty and poorly considered decisions concerning small and medium businesses are impermissible, Lukashenko said. "Businessmen do not ask for much. They just want rules of the game not to worsen," he said.

Lukashenko said that activities of the new government would be strictly assessed. "Assessments will be strict – I am not going to beg anyone," he said.

The new government led by Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky was approved on Friday. The majority of government members retained their positions.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 5, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

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

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.
