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## HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

### 1. Belarusian Oppositionist Faces Lengthy Prison Term

A district court in Minsk is scheduled on May 17 to begin the trial of Yury Radzivil, who is accused of endangering the life of elite police (Almaz) officers on March 2, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. If found guilty, he could receive a six-year prison term. Radzivil, who worked for the election staff of opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, on March 2 drove in his car to a police station where police were holding Kazulin and some 20 of his supporters who were arrested earlier that day.

When several police officers attempted to get into the vehicle, Radzivil reportedly locked the car and drove off. One officer fired several shots at the car. Radzivil managed to escape but was arrested later that day and charged with resisting arrest and using force against police. "[Radzivil] is a young man who got involved in big politics and narrowly escaped death.... Now he is being framed to cover those who actually violated the law," said Uladzimir Nistsyuk, who worked with Radzivil on Kazulin's election team.

Source: RFE/RL; May 17, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

### 2. The Investigation of Veranika Charkasava's Case Put Off Again

The investigation of Veranika Charkasava's case has been put off again. The head of the criminal investigative force at Minsk Public Prosecutor's Office Syarhey Ivanou informed BAJ about it.

V. Charkasava's relatives – Diana Charkasava (mother) and Uladzimir Mialeshka (stepfather) say that nobody informed them about it although it turned out that the investigation had been suspended in the middle of March 2006. The investigation was suspended on March 14 "in connection with the fact that there was nobody who could be accused of the crime." (The investigation was suspended for the same reason at the end of December 2005 and got restarted at the end of February 2006.)

D. Charkasava and U. Mialeshka pointed to the fact that the investigation was suspended right after their grandson (Veranika Charkasava's son accused of money forgery) had been released on bail.

He spent 2.5 months in the confinement cell in Valadarskaha Street.

The investigation of the case of Veranika Charkasava was restarted during his detention in spite of the fact that the investigator denied any connection between those two cases.

Syarhey Ivanou did not want to answer the questions of BAJ and said that he would give no comments. Let us remind you that on April 10 an article entitled "The price of life (a new version of the murder of Veranika Charkasava)" was published on the site *Belaruski Partyzan*.

The article was written by The Journalist Investigation Agency. "Unlike state investigators, journalists managed to collect a lot of information proving that Veranika had been murdered because of her professional activities". The authors think that Veranika appeared in the epicenter of struggle between two clans in Belarus. They suppose that Veranika found out something that could cause a lot of financial troubles to one of the clans.

The Journalist Investigation Agency has one more version of the murder of Veranika Charkasava – it is connected with Infobank and selling weapon to Iraq. The whole article "Fear as a Decent Reason, or Who Killed Veranika Charkasava?" can be found [HERE](http://www.baj.ru/2005/Jan/210105smi3.asp)  
<http://www.baj.ru/2005/Jan/210105smi3.asp>

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; May 16; <http://www.baj.ru/>

### **3. Belarusian Oppositionist Completes Two-Year Prison Sentence**

Opposition activist Valery Levaneuski was freed from a correctional facility in Ivatsevichy, Brest Oblast, on May 15 after finishing his two-year prison term, *Belapan* reported.

Levaneuski and his associate Alyaksandr Vasilyeu were sentenced to two years' incarceration in September 2004 on charges of defaming President Lukashenka in a May Day leaflet featuring the phrase: "Come and say no to someone's holidaying in Austria, skiing there, and living well at your expense." Vasilyeu was released under an amnesty granted in July 2005, while Levaneuski was denied early release.

Source: RFE/RL; May 16, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

### **4. KGB Officers Took Away All Office Equipment From a Hrodna Journalist**

On May 11 KGB officers searched the flat and office of Uladzimir Hilmanovich (former deputy chairperson of the *BAJ* Hrodna affiliate).

They confiscated 2 computers, a printer and a Xerox. Mr. Hilmanovich thinks it was connected with his articles that had been published in a Belastok weekly *Niva* which is also distributed in Belarus.

U. Hilmanovich informed the *BAJ* press service that the search had been performed by Hrodna Region KGB officers. They said that everything had been done in connection with a criminal case started against Partniorstva members. Mr. Hilmanovich says he has nothing to do with the organization. He thinks that the search was aimed at preventing him from doing his job: his political articles are published in every issue of the newspaper *Niva* which is the edition of the Belarusian minority in Poland. The journalist is also known for his articles in the newspaper "Pahonya" closed down by the authorities in 2001.

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

### **5. Repressions Against Members of Alexander Kozulin Election Staff Are Being Intensified: Yulia Kasper Has Been Chosen As the Next Victim**

Presidential elections in 2006 have already become a history. On the one hand it turned out to be predictable, as according to official sources people's affection to the regime kept growing, coming close to 100 percent level. On the other hand during these elections people's protest against lie, violence and iniquity in first tie became evident. Furthermore a real leader has appeared. The leader who was eager to perform real political actions, to struggle for his people and his country, but not imitating the struggle with the regime that is peculiar to political failures.

That is why Alexander Kozulin has been imprisoned since March 25th. He has been imprisoned because he had courage to assault the fortress of regime, while political failures preferred besieging this fortress during ten years and are exhorting to keep doing it in near future. Having neutralized Alexander Kozulin the authority moved to neutralizing his protagonists. Yulia Kasper who was one of the coordinators of the A. Kozulin staff during the campaign was chosen as the next victim.

Yulia's political activity could not be missed by the authority. She became one of the young social democrats leader in Hrodno, approving herself not only by the maximalism and determination that are peculiar to youth, but by discretion and responsibility as well. Due to her BSDP (Hramada) consolidated its positions in the Hrodno considerably and young social democrats became a leading power in the social democratic movement in oblast. Before the elections Yulia's honesty and sincerity in relations with people, as well as her talent to persuade youth in vitality of social democratic ideas resulted in growth of the popularity of their leader and energization of social democrats. Moreover due to communications with Yulia about hundred of young people in Hrodno who had not been involved in political activity before, expressed their wish to join Alexander Kozulin's election staff.

In these conditions the period of collection signatures was really successful. A. Kozulin and social democrats were really popular among students in Hrodno. As Yulia was the student of Hrodno State University, she and her comrades were especially active in students' hostels. But recognizing that it is possible to collect few thousands of signatures for Alexander Kozulin among students would not be logical for the authority, while officially students should have supported pro-presidential BRSM. It was minded by the authority. But at that time there was an order to punish "too active people" after the elections and Yulia was scored up.

She was talked by the ideological staff in the University. They suggested she should not be involved in any political activity and not be a member of political organizations. She was "advised" to change her political views and ideas and not to "break her own life". It also took place before the election campaign, but during the elections ideological staff, pro-rector on instructional work and the dean crossed over to evident threats in regards to dismiss Yulia from the University. Yulia was not afraid of their threats because she has always been good at the University and there were no academic reason for her expulsion. Afterwards there were nights without sleep during the agitation period, observance during the Election Day. On March 20th Yulia together with a group of her peers came to the October square in Minsk in order to support the democracy and freedom. Among the first people she was imprisoned for seven days, having found out the simplicity of being arrested in modern Belarus, as if for "shouting anti-state slogans" and "making the air blue". But she did not regret about these seven days spent at Okrestino (Minsk prison for administrative affairs) because it were seven days under arrest for her own beliefs and the right to think freely.

But it seemed to be not enough for authority that did not forget "too active person". In the beginning of April it became publicly known about the criminal affair connected with allegedly rigged signatures in support of Alexander Kozulin in Hrodno. Just those signatures that were collected in students' hostels in Hrodno. Yulia Kasper initially turned out to be the only figurant in this criminal affair. Directly from the classes in the University she was taken for the interrogation to the police station. They pressed her psychologically to convince her to witness that all the signatures had been rigged, making threats that otherwise she would have been imprisoned immediately.

During four hours of interrogation she was biased to give false witnesses against the board of the region election staff, to lie that signatures were collected not voluntarily, not because of own beliefs of the people in the elections staff. She was biased to cooperate with KGB, instead she was promised to avoid repressions for having been involved into the election campaign. But here she also kept herself bravely giving up from any witnesses against her comrades. Few weeks were spent in very nervous atmosphere, when Yulia was threatened that she may be arrested at any minute and may be dismissed from the University.

In the hostel where she is living people from KGB broke the door when she was absent and made a search in her room, abasing her as a criminal in front of her neighbors. But as they failed to threaten her and to make witnesses against her comrades the authority moved from words to actions. As the first step they began the procedure of expulsion from the University, making an accuse of absence for classes without reasonable grounds (seven days spent in prison in Minsk).

Thus apparent reason is directed to be flair, but it is evident that the real reason is a "political black mark". The next logical step is the arrest of our comrade Yulia Kasper under the "affair on signatures". We don not want to wait for rigging the facts and imprisoning Yulia for five years (the article foresees until five years in prison) just for her active position and her effective work in this sphere. That is why we ask all our comrades to assist in defense of Yulia Kasper, not to leave her alone under these repressions. We ask our partners to assist in continuation of her study in one of the European Universities in order she could have a possibility to contribute to the future of the European Belarus.

*Text Revised by the Editor*

Source: Press-service of Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Hramada; May 13, 2006; <http://bsdip.org/index.php?q=en>)

## **6. The Case on Beating Aleh Ulevich Is Being Investigated by the Department of Internal Affairs at Minsk City Executive Committee**

The criminal case concerning the battery and assault of Aleh Ulevich (a journalist from *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus*) has been sent to the Department of Internal Affairs at Minsk City Executive Committee.

The Department's press secretary Aleh Slepchanka informed *BAJ* about it.

The press secretary refused to give the name of the investigator. He added that all the information about the case would be given to Aleh Ulevich or his legal representative.

Aleh Ulevich says that the case has already been sent from one court to another many times. He also added that he did not notice any progress in the investigation.

Let us remind you that a journalist from *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus* Aleh Ulevich was beaten and detained after the incident at the Railway Workers' House of Culture in Minsk on March 2, 2006. The beating resulted in a concussion of the brain. Aleh's nose was broken as well. Police officers are suspected of having beaten him.

On March 7 the Belarusian Association of Journalists directed official 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.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; May 12; <http://www.baj.ru/>

## **7. Belarusian Opposition Leader Released**

The Belarusian opposition leader sentenced to 15 days in jail for taking part in an unsanctioned rally was released on Friday, and he defiantly rallied his supporters with a call to fight for "a new Belarus."

Police delivered Alexander Milinkevich to his home several hours before his scheduled release apparently in an effort to prevent him from meeting with supporters who gathered outside the jail around the time they expected him to be freed.

Milinkevich, 58, returned to the jail later and spoke to about 100 supporters outside, ignoring police warnings that their gathering was not sanctioned. "Even jail cannot deprive a truly free person of liberty," Milinkevich said.

Milinkevich, who ran unsuccessfully against authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko in March, has been a unifying figure for an opposition that incorporates widely diverse forces ranging from democrats to Communists.

"We are fighting not against Lukashenko but for a new Belarus," Milinkevich said outside the jail.

The election, which the opposition and Western governments condemned as fraudulent, sparked unprecedented mass protests in this tightly controlled nation of 10 million. The protests in turn resulted in a wave of opposition detentions.

About 30 opposition activists still remain in custody, according to the Vyasna human rights group. Lukashenko, often described by Western countries as "Europe's last dictator," has been in power since 1994.

Also Friday, the Russian business newspaper Kommersant reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered an end to all subsidies to Belarus, a move that would have a serious effect on the country's economy and likely weaken Lukashenko.

About 75 percent of Belarus' economy is under state control, and the low prices that Russia has charged for oil and gas have been key to keeping the economy going.

Source: Yuras Karmanau, *The Washington Post*; May 12, 2006; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

#### **8. Belarusian Human Rights Activist Barred From Going Abroad**

Border guards and customs officers at the Minsk airport on May 13 did not allow Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BKHK) Chairwoman Tatsyana Protska to board a plane to Berlin, where she was expected to address a forum on human rights in Belarus, Belapan reported. Customs officers reportedly confiscated an annual BKHK report on Belarus's human-rights situation and a videocassette containing material related to the country's March presidential election.

Source: RFE/RL; May 12, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

#### **9. An Official Refused To Provide Journalists With Information**

On May 11, Mikhalai Dzehtsiarou, an official from Slonim responsible for environmental protection, refused to provide with information Volha Shynkevich, a *Hazeta Slonimskaja* journalist. The reporter had intended to ask the official some questions about the plans of his department for this year.

Mikhalai Dzehtsiarou claimed that he already had a newspaper he wanted to cooperate with. It is a state edition *Slonimski Vesnik* (a newspaper, founded by the local Executive Committee). The official said that the journalist would be able to get all the necessary information from *Slonimski Vesnik*.

The edition had already sent Mikhalai Dzehtsiarou an official inquiry.

If he does not answer the journalists' questions *Hazeta Slonimskaja* will go to law.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; May 12; <http://www.baj.ru/>

#### **10. Minsk Court Dismisses Charges Against Opposition Leader**

A court in Minsk has quashed criminal proceedings against Stanislau Shushkevich, a former speaker of the Belarusian parliament and leader of the opposition Social Democratic Party Hramada.

Shushkevich had been charged with organizing an unsanctioned rally of solidarity with political prisoners on May 1 in Minsk, but a district court today said his conduct during the rally "did not constitute a criminal offense." // *Interfax, Belapan*

Source: RFE/RL; May 12, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

### **DOMESTIC**

#### **11. Belarus To Set Up Stabilization Fund to Guard Against Energy Price Jump**

Belarus plans to create a stabilization fund to minimize the impact of an increase in oil and gas prices, the country's first deputy prime minister said Wednesday.

Vladimir Semashko said the fund would be similar to Russia's Stabilization Fund, established to accumulate windfall profits from high oil prices and hold back inflation by sterilizing the influx of petrodollars, and it would draw on various sources, including profits from state enterprises.

"We have highly profitable companies owned by the state, which manages their profits. Their surplus profits are used for other goals."

The deputy premier said the creation of the fund would be dependent on the price of energy imports from neighboring Russia steadily increasing. "Under any price increase scenario, even if it will be 11%, the fund will be set up."

The former Soviet republic has enjoyed significantly subsidized prices for natural gas from Russia - at \$46.7 per 1,000 cubic meters it currently pays well below the price Gazprom charges other consumers - but the Russian energy giant has said it will seek a substantial increase in the future.

Gazprom is in talks with Belarus' Beltransgaz to take a stake in the pipeline company. The Russian giant has failed so far to gain control over the Belarusian pipeline network, which is widely seen as a condition for preserving the price subsidies.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko dismissed suggestions Monday that his country was seeking to maintain friendship with Russia to continue enjoying subsidized energy prices.

*Source: RIA Novosti; May 17, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

## **12. Belarus: Economic, Social Conditions Blamed For High Divorce Rate**

The world marked the United Nations' 10th International Day of Families on May 15, but in Belarus the event was not cause for celebration. With one of the worst divorce rates in the world at about 4.5 divorces per 1,000 inhabitants, the country faces an uphill climb as it attempts to persuade families to have more children. But average Belarusians say the state itself is partly to blame, as they cite dismal economic and social conditions as among the main reasons families break up.

Belarus is experiencing a family crisis.

According to official data, the country registered 73,000 marriages last year. But those numbers were offset by a troubling 30,000 divorces.

When interviewed by RFE/RL, people on the streets of the Belarusian capital cited the poor financial situation in the country among the reasons for the country's high divorce rate.

### **Money Issues**

One young man, who declined to give his name, said financial strains can lead many couples to avoid having children, which he believes can result in more divorces.

"I think it [divorce] is an economic problem," he said. "It also explains the low birth rate. Many families have no children, which does not help to keep them together."

"People live together with parents and it also affects their lives. Every family has its own reasons."

An older woman, who also declined to give her name, agreed. "Primarily, I think that it [the divorce rate] reflects material difficulties. Husbands are earning very little and wives are not happy. Women also have no opportunities to get a good job. There are also housing problems. People live together with parents and it also affects their lives. Every family has its own reasons."

Another young, unidentified woman placed part of the blame on the state, saying that the authorities do not care about the problem. "You see, currently, we have such a situation in the country that families are left on their own [to deal with their problems]," she said. "Family, as an institute, is supported in the West. We have no such support. I think very often because of this reason families are falling apart."

## Soviet Legacy

Valery Karbalevich, an analyst with the independent Minsk-based Strategy Center for Political Analysis, said the rate of divorce can be linked to several factors.

"There are serious political-economic problems [the country] faces after the collapse of the Soviet Union," Karbalevich said. "These socioeconomic problems are causing a big psychological discomfort in the society. Without any doubt it has a huge impact on a family."

Karbalevich pointed out that after World War II, Belarus became a highly industrialized country, leading many citizens to move from rural to urban areas. This, along with a move away from religion, helped fuel the breakdown of the patriarchal family ties that were characteristic of the beginning of the 20th century.

"Family, as an institute, is supported in the West. We have no such support. I think very often because of this reason families are falling apart."

Today, Karbalevich says, society has evolved to a point where divorce is accepted as a normal fact of life in Belarus:

"Belarus is an atheistic country. Traditions that strengthen families do not exist here," he said.

Karbalevich said the issue is well-known and is often addressed by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who lectures television audiences on the advantages of having bigger, stable families.

But while Karbalevich says the authorities attempt to deal with the problem by offering financial incentives as a means of inducing Belarusians to have children, the country's lack of financial resources inhibits their efforts.

*Source: Valentinas Mite, RFE/RL; May 16, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

### **13. State Program "Young Talents of Belarus" by 2006-2010 Approved**

By his decree #310 the president of Belarus approved the state program "Young Talents of Belarus" by 2006-2010, BelTA was informed in the presidential press service.

The program, adopted in the republic for the first time, was initiated by the head of state. It is of comprehensive nature and continues measures to form the effective state policy to support talented children and young people, which was pursued in 1996-2005. The program includes actions aimed to create additional conditions to develop the intellectual and creative potential of talented children and young people.

The state program provides for opening new pre-school centers for child development, gymnasiums, classes for profound studying certain subjects, artistic-aesthetic and sports classes and for taking a set of measures to support talented rural youth and to ensure systematic work with gifted young scientists, creative youth and sportsmen.

Republican subject Olympiads, republican tournaments, contests, conferences, festivals and children's creative exhibitions, excursions and eco-biological tours will be organized in line with the program to find talented children and young people and to develop their abilities.

The program includes a set of measures to intensify social support to young talents: 100 presidential scholarships to post-graduate students, 200 scholarships to students of state higher educational establishments a 15 per cent rise in tariff rates (wages) to young specialists and the priority right to talented graduates to choose the first place of employment and others.

The state program will help create an efficient system to implement the state policy aimed to find, develop and support talented young people.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; May 15, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

## **REGIONAL**

### **14. Higher Price for Russian Gas No Threat to Belarus - deputy PM**

A possible increase in the price of Russian natural gas will not provoke an economic crisis in Belarus, the country's deputy prime minister said Wednesday.

Belarus has enjoyed significantly subsidized prices for natural gas from Russia - at \$46.7 per 1,000 cubic meters it currently pays well below the price Gazprom charges other consumers - but the Russian energy giant has said it will seek a substantial increase in the future.

But Andrei Kobyakov said natural gas prices were rising in Russia itself and so the rates for Belarus would be hammered out in talks.

"The differences in prices for gas for Belarus and Russia are the subject of negotiations," he said.

Gazprom is in talks with Belarus' Beltransgaz to take a stake in the pipeline company. The Russian giant has reportedly failed so far to gain control over the Belarusian pipeline network, which is widely seen as a condition for preserving the price subsidies.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko dismissed suggestions Monday that his country was seeking to maintain friendship with Russia to continue enjoying subsidized energy prices.

"We do not seek that [cheap oil and gas], as we are capable of maintaining cooperation in the areas we have outlined," he said.

He also said Belarus provided jobs to over 5 million Russian citizens, and that bilateral trade had tripled in the past 10 years via a customs union, an economic project being pursued by Russia and Belarus along with two other former Soviet nations - Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

*Source: RIA Novosti; May 17, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

### **15. Belarus May Take Part in Large Investment Projects - Klebanov**

Belarus may successfully take part in large investment projects being implemented in the North-West Federal District in Russia based on state-private cooperation, Presidential Envoy in the region Ilya Klebanov said at a meeting with representatives from the Belarussian government.

He said that at the moment five large investment projects are being planned for the North-West Federal District in the areas of automobile manufacture, energy and transport.

*Source: Interfax; May 16, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>*

### **16. Transdnestrian NGOs Ask Belarus, Kazakhstan To Recognize Independence**

Public organizations in Transdnestria have asked the presidents of Belarus and Kazakhstan to recognize the self-proclaimed Transdnestrian Moldovan Republic.

A message to Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev adopted at a Tuesday meeting of the Anti- Blockade Committee of 20 local NGOs calls for launching a procedure of official recognition of Transdnestria.

"Only recognition can offer the guarantee of peace and security in the region. Presently the Moldovan authorities are pursuing a policy aimed not only against Russia but also against countries friendly to it. It is indicative that at the bidding of Brussels Moldovan politicians rejected the outcome of the presidential elections in Belarus," the message says.

It says that in 1998 Transdniestria held a referendum in which over 90% of voters took part, and 96% of them voted to join the Union of Russia and Belarus.

Source: *Interfax*; May 16, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

### **17. Is an Economic Crisis Looming in Belarus?**

Reports circulated on May 12 that, three days earlier, Russian President Vladimir Putin had signed a decree on fundamental changes in Russia's trade-economic and credit-financial policies toward Belarus. In turn, the Russian gas monopoly Gazprom reportedly plans a threefold rise in the price of gas it sells to the neighboring country in 2007, which currently stands at \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters (*Kommersant*, May 12). What lies behind this apparent change of policy and how will it affect Belarus as Alexander Lukashenka begins his third term as president?

It may be coincidental that such statements closely followed an important meeting between Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Tomsk on April 26. Though Belarus was not the main focus of that meeting, it was evidently discussed and the talks coincided with the arrest of several prominent leaders who took part in the Chernobyl Way demonstration in Minsk, including the united democratic candidate for president, Alexander Milinkevich, who was imprisoned for 15 days (*Belarusy i Rynok*, May 3). Germany remains the most important individual partner of Russia within the EU and arguably the country with the most influence on the Kremlin.

On April 28, Putin and Lukashenka held a meeting at Strelnya, near St. Petersburg, at which the Russian president, most unusually, drew attention to the disparate political forces in Belarus, and asked Lukashenka whether he would be able to unite them in order to resolve the most important problems of the state (*Belarusy i Rynok*, May 3). In Minsk in mid-April, there were circulating accounts (that could not be corroborated conclusively) that the Russian president had berated Lukashenka for inflating his vote count in the Belarusian presidential election of March 19. Subsequently, Lukashenka did not appear in public for several days. All these recent events indicate a certain dissatisfaction in Moscow with the privileged position of the Belarusian government vis-à-vis Russia, but also with the political tactics of Lukashenka.

There are different ways of interpreting Russia's moves and they may result from international pressure, particularly in view of Russia's forthcoming chairmanship of the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg: the Russian government's frustration at the way oil companies exploit the economic relationship with Belarus to re-export oil from Belarus without benefit to the Russian budget; Gazprom's insistence that Belarus cannot continue to be subsidized with gas prices well below the market level and demands for control of Beltransgaz; the declining role of Belarus as a trading partner of Russia (it has slipped from second to sixth); and Putin's frustration at the way Lukashenka has exploited the Russia-Belarus Union ostensibly for the benefit of Belarus but with little advantage accrued to Russia. The single currency has not yet materialized and the draft version of the Union agreement continues to be discussed.

Added to these factors, however, appears to be an uncertainty -- perhaps exaggerated in Moscow -- about the extent of political opposition to Lukashenka within Belarus and the degree to which it may affect Russia's relations with its European partners. The united democratic forces have continued to develop beyond the purview of an election campaign. Milinkevich, Vintsuk Vyachorka (Belarusian Popular Front), and Syarhey Kalyakin (Party of Communists) were all released from jail last weekend. However, even in their absence, small protests took place on May 1, and the Political Council adopted several measures, including the formation of a regional initiative group to create a new movement called "For Freedom." The focal point for this new movement is the regional headquarters of Milinkevich's presidential campaign in Hrodna (*Narodnaya Volya*, March 11 and 12).

The new policy was elaborated by Vyachorka, who noted that street protests would continue but be strengthened by preparatory work in the regions. The democratic movement would focus on entrepreneurs, young people, students, and those working in industries that rely on imported energy resources. Vyachorka maintained that the lack of structural reform in Belarus would hinder the government's efforts to deal with the forthcoming energy crisis. Therefore the united opposition would develop its own anti-crisis policy (*Belapan*, May 12). Evidently it can also solicit support from small entrepreneurs. One of the leaders of the latter movement, Alexander Makayeu, commented that "a significant portion of businessmen understand that the economic situation cannot improve without political changes" (*Narodnaya Volya*, March 12).

The opposition's new focus on the economy is logical, since a stable economy has long been Lukashenka's main trump card. The question remains, however, to what extent Russia is prepared to weaken the position of the Belarusian government and whether it would contemplate seriously an alternative to Lukashenka. Clearly Belarus's present privileged position is coming to an end as a result of a combination of factors, including pressure from the Russian government on Minsk, EU (German)-Russian discussions, and Gazprom's demand for an end to what in effect are gas subsidies to the Union partner.

There is little evidence that Russia has any support for the democratic opposition; rather it would prefer a reduced and more compliant Lukashenka regime that is less visible internationally than over the past few months; and at least pays lip service to democratic principles and human rights. But the changing nature of the partnership offers at least a glimmer of hope to the For Freedom movement led by Milinkevich.

*Source: David Marples, The Jamestown Foundation; May 15, 2006; <http://jamestown.org/>*

#### **18. Russia-Belarus Union State Budget Spending Revealed**

Russia's contribution to the budget of the Russia-Belarus Union State amounted to RUR551m (approx. USD20.5m) over four months of 2006, the treasury of the Standing Committee of the Union State reported. The contribution of Belarus totaled RUR189.6m (approx. USD7m).

The Union State's budget spending exceeded RUR432.623m (approx. USD16m), among those around RUR21.95m (approx. USD851, 893) were spent on military and technical cooperation, some RUR98.25m (approx. USD3.65m) on law enforcement and security, almost RUR99.63m (approx. USD3.7m) were allocated for the manufacturing sector, power industry and construction. Transport and communications received around RUR50.278m (approx. USD1.8m) while some RUR95.795m (approx. USD3.5m) were assigned to mass media.

Russia accounts for 65 percent of the Union State's budget, while the share of Belarus is 35 percent.

*Source: RosBusinessConsulting; May 15, 2006; <http://www.rbcnews.com/>*

#### **19. Renova Comes to Belarus**

According to the Russian newspaper *Vedomosti*, "Renova Media Enterprises" company has acquired 50% shares of Cosmos TV company, a Belarusian cable TV operator.

Other 50% belong to the state owned Belarusian TV and broadcasting center. 200 000 households are subscribers for Cosmos TV cable TV broadcasting services.

In addition to that, Cosmos TV provides broadband Internet access to 75 000 subscribers. Useful links:

*Source: Mikhail Doroshevich, E-Belarus.ORG; May 15, 2006; [www.e-belarus.org](http://www.e-belarus.org)*

## **20. Belarus-Russia Friendship Cannot Be Destroyed - Lukashenko**

Russia has always been more than just a good ally for Belarus, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko said on Monday, calling Russia a reliable fraternal state.

“Despite attempts to drive a wedge between Belarus and Russia, the Russian people must always realize that neither oil nor gas can destroy our friendship,” the president said at a meeting with representatives from the Russian North-Western Federal District.

President Lukashenko dismissed allegations that Belarus wants to buy friendship with Russia “for oil and gas”. “We don’t want it, and we are able to cooperate with Russia in those directions that we have targeted,” he added.

He said that although the Belarussian economy does have problems, “it functions normally” and provides over five million people in Russia with jobs.

“By developing our MAZ and BelAZ plants, we thus raise production in Russia,” he noted. Focusing on “talks on stalling allied relations” between the two former Soviet republics, he drew attention to the fact that trade between them has increased threefold over the past ten years.

“There are no examples of such cooperation in the world,” the Belarussian leader stated, noting that Belarus and Russia “still have major potential, and we shall work in that direction”.

At the same time he noted that Belarus is facing tough competitive conditions on the Russia market, as the price of the Russian gas in the republic is much higher than Russian gas price in Russia itself.

Lukashenko also came out in favor of active cooperation between Belarus and regions of Russia’s North-Western Federal District, as their “economies are similar”. Cooperation with St. Petersburg is active, he said.

Belarus is ready to develop cooperation in the breeding of pedigree cattle, and would like to buy seafood for Belarus. At the present moment, Belarus purchases in the region equipment for a major plant for the production of paper in the Mogilyov region.

Russian president’s envoy to the region, Ilya Klebanov, stressed, for his part, that the sphere of economic activity with Belarus is vast. He said the delegation arriving from Russia consisted of over 180 people, most of them businessmen seeking to develop cooperation.

“The breath of the Belarussian economy” is felt practically in all regions of the North-Western Federal District,” he stressed and expressed hope that the number of joint projects would sizably increase after the visit of the Russian delegation.

*Source: Itar-Tass; May 15, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>*

## **21. Belarusian Opposition Appeals to Ukraine To Offer University Places To Expelled Students**

Belarusian opposition activists appealed to Ukraine on Monday to offer some state university places to Belarusian students expelled from their own universities for protesting against their country's authoritarian leader.

The activists said they did not have exact numbers, but that up to 2,000 Belarusians had been arrested for participating in protests against President Alexander Lukashenko, many of them students. The students have faced jail time, and many have been thrown out of universities and fired from their jobs.

"I understand that there might be concern that our children might take the place of Ukrainians, but it would be an act of international solidarity between our countries," said Belarusian activist Tatyana Vanina, head of a Belarusian group called Rebirth of the Fatherland.

Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution mass protests, which helped usher in a new pro-Western, reformist leader, were seen as a model by the Belarusian opposition, which staged similar protests after Lukashenko won a new term in a March election dismissed by the opposition and Western nations as illegitimate.

The Belarusian opposition held an unprecedented series of protests, but they were smaller than the rallies in Ukraine and the tent camp young demonstrators set up on a central square in the capital Minsk was broken up by police.

About 100 Belarusians have come to Ukraine and applied for political asylum, said Vyacheslav Sivchik, head of the Belarusian activist group Razom.

"The repression has only increased," said Zmitser Dashkevich, leader of the Belarusian Youth Front, who was freed from jail Saturday but faces a new criminal case. Dashkevich planned to return to Belarus, but appealed for help for those Belarusians who see no alternative but to stay away for the time being.

Nikolai Ilyin is one of those. He was badly beaten when police broke up the Minsk tent camp, but managed to escape when police brought him to the hospital for treatment. He fled to Ukraine, he said, and now he is working for the Ukrainian branch of Amnesty International.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry has mildly criticized Lukashenko but refrained from harsh censure, raising complaints among Ukrainian activists who had hoped that President Viktor Yushchenko, a former opposition leader whose party faced official harassment from the government of former President Leonid Kuchma, would take a stronger approach.

Ukraine's Education Ministry refused to comment on the Belarusians' request, saying it had received no formal appeal.

Yushchenko administration officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

Oleh Yastenko, the head of a Ukrainian students' group, said his organization had won assurances from some university rectors to provide space for Belarusians in daytime and distance learning programs.

Belarusian opposition leaders have made similar appeals to other nations, including Lithuania and Poland.

*Source: Kyiv Post; May 15, 2006; <http://www.kyivpost.com/>*

## **22. Ali Naghiyev Appointed Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Belarus**

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev issued an executive order on appointment of Ali Naghiyev extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador to Belarus.

The President's press service informed APA that Naghiyev was given a diplomatic rank of an extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador.

APA has recently informed quoting diplomatic sources that Naghiyev would be appointed ambassador to Belarus.

Prior to this appointment Naghiyev was minister for labor and social protection of population.

*Source: Azeri-Press Information Agency; May 15, 2006; <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=9785>*

### **23. Belarus To Check Georgia's Borzhomi Quality**

Belarus will check the quality of Georgia's Borzhomi mineral water by demand of Chief Public Health Official Mikhail Rimzha.

"Sanitary and hygienic control of samples of the Georgian Borzhomi mineral water will be done because of the Borzhomi situation in Russia," Rimzha said at a Friday health care conference in Minsk.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; May 12, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

### **24. Alexander Lukashenko Prepares for a Hostile Takeover**

Moscow stops subsidies of the Belarusian economy

Gazprom rejected all Belarusian proposals to maintain its low natural gas prices yesterday. The Russian company is insisting on introducing the market price for gas in Belarus in 2007. Moreover, Moscow is preparing to exert broad economic pressure on Minsk. According to information obtained by *Kommersant*, Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently ordered a complete cessation of subsidies to the Belarusian economy. That move threatens the Lukashenko regime with serious upheaval, unless he agrees to the formation of a union state on Moscow's terms.

#### Gas Front

Yesterday, *Kommersant* has learned, Beltransgaz representatives personally handed Gazprom managers new proposals for the maintenance of low gas prices in Belarus in 2007. We continue to be in contact with our Belarusian colleagues and we are discussing individual technical and technological projects," said Gazprom press secretary Sergey Kupriyanov. The company is not commenting on the contents of the new packet of proposals or on their outcome. According to *Kommersant's* information, all the proposals were rejected because they did not provide the Russian monopoly control over the Belarusian pipeline system. Gazprom has confirmed that the company's position on raising gas prices for Belarus to market level has not changed.

Gazprom is carrying out the direct orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin in its negotiations with the Belarusians. *Kommersant* sources in the Kremlin say that Putin signed an instruction on May 9 on changes in Russia's trade, economic, credit and financial relations with Belarus. A source close to the Gazprom board of directors confirmed the existence of a presidential instruction on Belarus yesterday, although he noted that "it's not likely to be in the form of an order."

*Kommersant* has learned that the document instructs the use of "exhaustive measures" to stop any direct or indirect financial support by Russia of the Belarusian economy and the cessation of the re-export or smuggling of any Russian goods (especially energy) through the territory of that country. In order to accomplish this, it will be necessary to review the entire mass of contracts and legal documents that regulate Russian-Belarusian trade and economic relations and propose changes to them "on the principles of real benefit and genuinely equal rights" in ties with Minsk.

Trade turnover between Russia and Belarus in 2005 was over \$15.8 billion. Import to Russia accounted for \$5.7 billion, while export was over \$10 billion. Belarus provides Russia with cars, manufacturing equipment, transportation equipment, food and agricultural products. Energy resources account for more than 53 percent of Russian exports to Belarus. Russia supplied \$949.5-million worth of natural gas, more than \$4-billion worth of oil and about \$220-million of electricity to Belarus.

After Alexander Lukashenko's election as Belarusian president for a third term, Gazprom announced that natural gas supplies to that country would be priced under the same formula as European contracts and become significantly more expensive. At the beginning of this month,

Kupriyanov named a price of \$145 per 1000 cubic meters. Minsk now pays \$46.68 per 1000 cu. m. Kupriyanov told Kommersant earlier that the price could rise to \$230 per 1000 cu. m. if the situation developed similarly to that in Ukraine. In response, Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko noted that the most the country was prepared to pay was 11 percent more, that is, \$52 per 1000 cu. m. Gazprom stated yesterday that it plans to triple the price of gas to Belarus.

#### Oil Front

No one at Russian oil companies was aware of the presidential order yesterday. The president's instruction to stop re-export concerns oil and petroleum products most of all. Russian oil companies are to supply Belarusian refineries with 19.5 million metric tons of oil this year under an interstate agreement. Experts say that there is no re-export of Russian oil as such from Belarus. Transneft provides Belarus with exactly the volume of oil required by local refineries. Instead, a hidden form of re-export takes place as petroleum products are exported from Belarus. Under the agreement on a customs union between the countries, export duties are not paid on oil delivered to Belarus. After they pump oil to Belarusian refineries for processing, Russian companies (their Belarusian subsidiaries, more precisely) sell some of the products obtained as export.

Under the same customs agreement, export duties on oil and petroleum products are to be unified in Russia and Belarus, but that provision has not been met. The size of the duty changes continually as the market price of oil changes. Experts estimate that the Belarusian duty is about 75 percent of the Russian. On light petroleum products, it is about 50 percent of the Russian duty. In essence, no VAT (which is 18 percent in Belarus as it is in Russia) at all, since it is included in the duty. In April, Moscow tried once again to make Minsk pay half of its export duty receipts to the Russian federal budget, but that attempt was again unsuccessful.

Thus the Russian federal budget receives nothing from oil pumped to Belarus for refining or from petroleum products exported through Belarus. This scheme is profitable for Russian oil companies, however, because of the low export duty and because the price of oil is \$20-25 higher in Belarus than in Russia. Therefore, oil companies supply Belarusian plants with oil on processing terms and also simply sell it to them. Belarus exports a total of about 13 million tons of petroleum products (12.96 million tons in 2004). The volume of the portion from the subsidiaries of Russian companies in that volume is not officially made public, but expert estimates place it at about 60 percent. With the exception of a small portion that goes to the domestic market, the remainder is exported by Belarusian companies, most of which are state controlled. This scheme is advantageous to Belneftekhim as well, which produces about 1.8 million tons of oil per year on its own. While buying Russian gas at a below-market price and sending it for refining, Belneftekhim exports its own oil (1.01 ton in 2004) at market prices.

If Russia just enforced the observation of documents already signed, the profitability of oil and petroleum products exported through Belarus will be the same as those exported from Russia. Russian oil companies would suffer from that move, but not greatly – supplies to Belarus account for about 7.5 percent of all exports. In addition, although the price of oil in Belarus is higher than the Russian domestic prices, it is lower than the world price. Between January and October 2005, the price of Russian oil supplied beyond the CIS was \$6 per barrel; in Belarus it was \$29 and within Russia it was \$22. The Belarusian federal budget would suffer a significant loss, since petroleum product exports make up a substantial part of it.

The Russian president's decision will not have a serious direct effect on the electricity in Belarus. Inter RAO UES declined to comment yesterday, but a Kommersant source in the company said that it would not be possible to increase the volume or price of electricity for Belarus in 2007. Electricity in Belarus will be hit by rising energy costs in any case. In 2003, 60 percent of the country's generating power operated on (Russian) natural gas and 21.7 percent was produced from Russian oil and petroleum products derived from it. Belarusian resources cover only 12.7

percent of the country's electricity needs. If Russian energy is supplied to the country at market prices, the cost of electricity production may rise by about 140 percent.

Higher gas prices will decrease the investment attractiveness of Belarusian food-processing enterprises, production costs at which are considerably lower than in Russia thanks to the low cost of agricultural products (Belarus subsidizes its agriculture) and energy there. We will have to change our plans on purchases of enterprises in Belarus," Maxim Protasov, head of the Pomidorprom holding, noted. "With the announcement of higher energy prices, the acquisition of production space there loses its sense for us. Belarusian enterprises will no longer be able to supply products at prices on average of 30 percent cheaper."

Belarusian heavy industry, the Minsk Tractor Plant in particular, is the country's largest exporter to Russia. The Minsk Tractor Plant is supported by the Belarusian federal budget, Evgeny Korchevoi, general director of Soyuzagromash, says. He explained that the subsidies are intended "to lower the manufacturer's selling price on MTP products by 50 percent." Korchevoi thought that a rise in energy prices would not lead the Belarusian authorities to stop subsidizing local heavy industry.

#### Political Maneuvers

Moscow is dealing Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko a heavy political blow by raising natural gas prices and ceasing its oil export subsidies. Minsk will be forced to accept Russian conditions or else face major social and economic upheaval. "With the end of the monopoly on setting the final price of energy for enterprises, Lukashenko's entire system of authority and the image of the Belarusian economic miracle will be destroyed as well," commented Kirill Koktysh, member of the department of political theory at Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

According to a Kremlin source, "the only way for Belarus to receive gas at domestic Russian prices is to become part of Russia." Analysts in Moscow see a political aspect to the onslaught against Belarus. Vladimir Putin, as the head of a new state, will have broad possibilities for political maneuvering in 2008 when his constitutional term ends. Kommersant has learned that the present organizations of Russian-Belarusian integration are being used for that purpose as well.

It will not be easy for the Kremlin to turn economic pressure into a political victory in Belarus, however. Many surveys by the Belarusian opposition and independent experts show that public support for merging with Russia has fallen in Belarus from 50 percent six years ago to 5-6 percent today. "The mood has changed. Today, sovereignty is a given in Belarus," Koktysh said. There is no doubt that there will be a powerful campaign of resistance to unification with Russia. Sergey Kalyakin, chief of staff for former Belarusian presidential candidate Alexander Milinkevich, speculated that Lukashenko will opt for an economic crisis and total isolation rather than give way to the Kremlin.

*Source: Anna Skoryakina, Natalia Grib, Svetlana Mentyukova, Mikhail Fishman, Kommersant; May 12, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com/>*

## INTERNATIONAL

### **25. Belarus Slams EU's Refusal To Attend Europol Conference**

The Belarusian Interior Ministry said Wednesday the EU was pursuing a policy of double standards by refusing to attend a Europol conference in the country's capital, Minsk.

The European Union's boycott of the Europol conference is part of EU efforts to isolate Belarus after the disputed presidential elections in the country in March, which propelled Alexander Lukashenko to a new five-year term. The controversial leader, who has been much criticized for his human-rights record, has ruled since 1994.

"We cannot qualify the EU's step as anything other than a new attempt to demonstrate its policy of double standards towards Belarus," a ministry spokesman said before the conference opened Wednesday. "The demarche staged by Europol countries is not guided by the interests of their citizens."

The Minsk conference is expected to discuss measures against terrorism, organized crime and making interaction between the Interpol national offices and its central bureau more effective.

The spokesman added that the Europeans' refusal to come to the Belarusian capital could be interpreted as a political ban on Europol representatives attending a conference in Belarus.

Source: RIA Novosti; May 17, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

## **26. EU Freezes Lukashenko's Money**

The European Union is to announce freezing foreign accounts of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and thirty other high-ranking Belarusian officials, *The Financial Times* reported yesterday. The decision was to be upheld at the meeting of EU's foreign ministers in Brussels yesterday. However, there was not enough time to translate the official document into twenty official languages of the European Union, as the proceedings require. Minsk responded to the reports denying that Alexander Lukashenko has ever had any accounts abroad.

European officials have been considering the sanctions against Belarusian authorities for the last few weeks, according to *The Financial Times*. It is not the first sanctions imposed on Belarus' top officials. Alexander Lukashenko and thirty other high-placed functionaries were declared personae non gratae in the European Union back in early April, after the presidential election in the country. The move must have little effect on the officials, judging from their reactions. Leonid Kozik, the chairman of the authority-friendly Federation of Trade Unions, was the only one to become outraged. "I'm not going to put up with it. I will write letters and ask why you made the decision, Sirs," he said and promised to suit the European authorities.

The decision to freeze bank accounts of Belarusian top officials is a more difficult process than the visa ban. The news about the resolution became known a few days before its endorsement from an unofficial source, since EU authorities were afraid that the Belarusian officials might draw out the money and transfer them to banks in Switzerland or any other country. The draft resolution aims to freeze European accounts of Belarusian President Lukashenko, Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov, Prosecutor General Pyotr Miklashevich, KGB Chairman Stepan Sukhorenko, Chairman of the Parliament's Lower Chamber Vladimir Konoplev and functionaries at the president's administration.

Meanwhile, the administration of the Belarusian president said Alexander Lukashenko do not have any accounts abroad. They called the EU's sanctions "complete nonsense" and offered the Europeans to take all the money they will find on the Belarusian president's foreign accounts.

Alexander Lukashenko earned 59,172,668 rubles (or \$27,395) as the salary in 2005, says the official report, submitted to the Belarusian Central Election Commission for his registration as a presidential candidate. Mr. Lukashenko does not have any property such as houses, apartments, plots of land, garages or vehicles, according to his income statement.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry earlier called the information on the president's bank accounts "filthy PR moves." The statement was made after U.S President George W. Bush passed information on Mr. Lukashenko's private means and income to the Congress ahead of the Belarusian presidential election.

The Belarusian president was vocal then. "You can kill me with reproaches that I took or stole something from somebody. When they tell me this, they know that they can hurt me with it; they know that I fall ill because of it. I wield great power and turn billions of dollars with presidential

decrees in different directions, but I have never seen private interest in it. Many foreigners – Americans and others – are mad that there is nothing to reproach Lukashenko with. You can't hide anything our world, especially when somebody says that I stole billions of dollars. It is lies. I told the minister: 'Please, write a proof from my name about my income and add at the end: you can take all my money in Switzerland or anywhere else.' They know it all, those people at the CIA, don't they? Then, they are welcome to take the money," Alexander Lukashenko said in March at the All-Belarusian People's Assembly. Other officials from the list made no comments, however.

*Source: Kommersant; May 16, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>*

## **27. Belarus Dismisses U.S. Travel Ban On Government**

Belarus's Foreign Ministry dismissed on Tuesday a U.S. travel ban on top officials, saying punitive measures against what the West says was President Alexander Lukashenko's rigged re-election would benefit no one.

U.S. President George W. Bush slapped a travel ban on senior members of Lukashenko's government on Monday -- similar to a measure imposed last month by the European Union.

"These measures by our European partners and the United States will produce nothing constructive in their relations with Belarus," ministry spokesman Andrei Popov told Reuters.

"They will have no effect."

Popov did not say whether authorities would take reprisals against Washington. Belarus had threatened to bar entry to top European officials, but no such measure was implemented.

Bush said the U.S. ban was introduced in response to Lukashenko's landslide poll victory in March, which generated unprecedented opposition protests.

U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney, addressing east European leaders in Latvia this month, repeated the contention of other U.S. officials that Belarus was "Europe's last dictatorship".

Western countries accuse Lukashenko of hounding his opponents, closing down media and systematically rigging elections since the 1990s. They also demand explanations for the disappearance of a number of prominent Belarussians.

Lukashenko's victory, in which he was credited with 83 percent of the vote to six for liberal Alexander Milinkevich, spawned protests up to 10,000-strong. Police tolerated the rallies for four days before dispersing them.

More than 600 protesters were jailed for up to 15 days. Opposition leaders, including Milinkevich, were given similar jail terms after subsequent protests.

Lukashenko is genuinely popular in the country of 10 million, especially among older and rural voters who see him as a bulwark against instability in nearby ex-Soviet states.

Milinkevich, released from jail last week, vowed to remove the president within two years through civil disobedience.

*Source: Reuters; May 15, 2006; <http://in.today.reuters.com/>*

## **28. US Admin Bans Entry In Country for Belarus Officials**

The US administration has introduced a ban on the entry in the United States as immigrants or non-immigrants for members of the Belarusian government and a number of other persons, it is said in a presidential proclamation published by the White House press service on Monday.

“In light of the importance to the United States of fostering democratic institutions in Belarus in order to help the Belarusian people achieve their aspirations for democracy and to help complete the transformation to a Europe whole, free, and at peace and given the suppression of human rights and democracy in Belarus, the fraud perpetrated during the recent Belarusian presidential campaign and election, the detention of peaceful protesters in Belarus, the persistent acts of corruption by Belarusian government officials in the performance of public functions, and the continued failure of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Belarusian government officials, and others to support the rule of law, human rights commitments, and other principles of high priority to the United States, I have determined that it is in the interest of the United States to take all available measures to restrict the international travel and to suspend the entry into the United States, as immigrants or non-immigrants, of members of the government of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and others detailed below who formulate, implement, participate in, or benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, and corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus,” says the proclamation.

According to the proclamation, “The Secretary of State shall have responsibility for implementing this proclamation pursuant to such procedures as the Secretary may establish.”

*Source: Itar-Tass; May 16, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>*

### **29. Swedish Space Corporation in Row Over Belarus**

A partly state owned Swedish satellite TV company, SES Sirius, is presently negotiating with Belarus about broadcasting state owned television via satellite to the rest of Europe.

The Swedish company SES Sirius is owned to 25 percent by the Swedish state, through the Swedish Space Corporation. SES Sirius has two satellites used by mostly Nordic and Central and Eastern European countries to broadcast television. SES Sirius now hopes to enlarge their network by including two Belarus channels.

Belarusian state owned television has been criticized for being used by Belarus President Lukashenka to spread party propaganda.

The EU and Sweden officially regard Belarus as a non democratic country, and further the EU has decided to not grant a visa to President Lukashenka.

Neighbouring country Lithuania forbade Belarusian broadcasting earlier this year with the argument that it was spreading misinformation.

A representative of SES Sirius claims that they never take responsibility for what is broadcast on channels using the satellites, but that each channel should follow local regulations of the country they are based in.

The Swedish representative of the EU’s special delegation for relations with Belarus, Swedish moderate Christofer Fjellner, says he thinks “it is insane that a Swedish company will help spread propaganda from Belarus”.

*Source: Sveriges Radio; May 16, 2006; <http://www.sr.se/>*

## **BUSINESS**

### **30. 10 000 USD Can Be Imported to Belarus by One person Without Customs Declaration**

The National Bank of the Republic of Belarus and the State Customs Committee of the Republic, by the Decision No 44/22 of March 23, 2006, brought in changes and amendments to the Instruction on the order of import, export and transfer of foreign currency, Belarusian rubbles, payment documents in foreign currency, certified securities in Belarusian rubbles and in foreign currency by natural persons through customs border of the Republic of Belarus.

The new legal act raises the amount of imported foreign currency which must be declared to the customs bodies. On entering Belarus with more than 10000 USD (in equivalent) of foreign currency a natural person must declare this sum to the customs body of the Republic of Belarus in written form. If a visitor on entering Belarus has less than 10000 USD (in equivalent) of foreign currency the declaration of this sum is not necessary. Before the new act came into force a natural person had been obliged to declare 3000 USD (in equivalent) and more of imported foreign currency.

The Decision also eases the declaration terms for the foreign currency imported from the states which signed the Agreement of the Customs Union and Common Free Market Zone from February 26, 1999. It allowed to import to Belarus 10000 USD (in equivalent) of foreign currency per one person without customs declaration from the states which signed the Customs Union Agreement. Before that, the minimal sum for declaration had been 3000 USD (in equivalent) for each driving-in or driving-out person.

Belarusian President established new customs due on imported mineral wool

The President of the Republic of Belarus by the Edict of May 4, 2006, No 283 established a new customs due on imported mineral wool in Belarus in the amount of 60 per cent from the customs value of this wool.

This due is established for nine months and comes into force from the day of its official publishing.

The new Instruction of customs control of goods transferred by car

The State Customs Committee of the Republic of Belarus approved, by the Decision No 28 of April 14, 2006, the new edition of the Instruction on peculiarities of customs control of goods transferred by automotive vehicles.

Alongside with the additional actions of the customs bodies on establishing the integrity of documents necessary to import goods and transport vehicles the Decision introduces 3 hours' term for an importer to tender missing documents necessary for the customs bodies to issue the permission for importation. If an importer fails to tender such documents within the established term, he gets 8 hours' term to apply for the customs escort permission. In case he fails to get such a permission within the established time, too, all the goods and transported vehicles will be returned to the territory of the contiguous state.

The Decision also established that importation of the goods restricted by the Customs Code of Belarus when the carrier hasn't presented the documents proving the compliance of restrictions is not considered as violation of the customs law, yet the importer should tender the necessary document afterwards.

A new list of border entry-exit points approved in Belarus

The President of the Republic of Belarus established a new complete list of frontier's entry-exit points in Belarus.

Edict No 313 of May 10, 2006 also established the list of the entry-exit points with border control only and of entry-exit points with other kinds of control.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; May 16, 2006;  
<http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

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

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

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