

May 18 – May 24, 2006

Edited by Maria Kabalina
International League for Human Rights

Table of Contents

I. Human Rights & Independent Media

1. Officials Complained About a Journalist From *Hazeta Slonimskaja* (BAJ)
2. Alyaksandr Kazulin Left In Prison (*Charter97*)
3. Belarusian Police Chief Rejects Complaint About Brutality (RFE/RL)
4. The Ministry of information Pronounced a Warning to the *Khimik* Newspaper (BAJ)
5. Belarusian Opposition Leader Warned Over Criticism (RFE/RL)
6. We Remember (*Charter97*)
7. Opposition Youth Leaders Jailed in Belarus (RFE/RL)

II. Domestic

8. Did Belarusian President Help Oppositionists 'Save Face'? (RFE/RL)
9. Belarus President Hints He Would Support Formation of Statist Party (RIA Novosti)
10. Belarusian Academy of Sciences Discussed Nuclear Power (RFE/RL)

III. Regional

11. Belarus for Preserving CIS (*Itar-Tass*)
12. Union with Russia Historic Choice of Belarus (*Itar-Tass*)
13. Lukashenko Thanks Armenia for Support to Belarus at International Arena (*PanARMENIAN.Net*)
14. Belarus Joins Protocol on Lifting Restrictions On Trade With CIS (*Itar-Tass*)
15. Mikhail Fradkov Pushes for Belarus-Russia Union State (*Kommersant*)
16. Belarus Warns Against Price Discrimination (UPI)
17. Lukashenko Calls For Action on Agreements From Eurasec Members (RIA Novosti)
18. Belarus Will Trade Beltransgaz for Production Assets (*Kommersant*)
19. Russia, Belarus Sign Plan for Forming United Transport System (*Itar-Tass*)

IV. International

20. Lukashenko Threatens Ban on Overflight (*The Daily Telegraph*)
21. Lukashenko Speaks Chinese (*Kommersant*)
22. Belarus To Appeal Sanctions Against Senior Officials in International Courts (*The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*)
23. Belarusian President Lukashenko Forecasts Collapse of Global Economy (*MosNews.Com*)
24. U.S. Criticizes Interpol Talks (*The Moscow Times*)
25. European Union Freezes Assets of Belarus Chief for Rigged Vote (*The New York Times*)
26. West Should Not Isolate Belarus – Lavrov (*Interfax*)
27. US, Russia, Belarus: Politics of Democracy (*ISN Security Watch*)

V. Business

28. Investments in Oil Refinery Industry of Belarus To Exceed 1 billion USD by 2010 (*BeITa*)

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Officials Complained About a Journalist From *Hazeta Slonimskaja*

The deputy editor-in-chief of *Hazeta Slonimskaja* Syarhey Chyhryn has been called to the Regional Public Prosecutor's Office today. He was asked to give explanations regarding the article "Officials are changed but the city remains" ("HS" #19 (466)).

The journalist wrote about the changes in the administration of the region and its enterprises. For example, he wrote the head of one enterprise Vasil Salevich was going to leave his post. He also added that one of the officials from Slonim Regional Executive Committee was going to be assigned for the post instead.

Mr. Salevich and the head of the Regional Executive Committee Mechyslau Kastsuik sent appeals to the Public Prosecutor's Office, asking to subject the journalist to prosecution for having insulted them as well as for the distribution of false information. Syarhey Chyhryn refused to plead guilty.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; May 2; <http://www.baj.ru/>

2. Alyaksandr Kazulin Left In Prison

Investigation in the case of the former candidate in the presidential elections in Belarus, a former rector of the Belarusian State University Alyaksandr Kazulin refused to change the measure of restraint (imprisonment) for him. An application for release of Kazulin had been submitted by politician's lawyer Ihar Rynkevich in connection with expiry of the measure of restraint's term on May 25.

At the moment the politician and his lawyer are studying the materials of the case. The investigation in the case of the politician has been prolonged until July 1.

Alyaksandr Kazulin was detained during a forcible dispersal of a peaceful protest on March 25. On March 30 the leader of the Belarusian Socialist Democratic Party (Hramada) was charged in two articles of the Criminal Code.

On February 17 Alyaksandr Kazulin attempted to enter the National Press Center and hold a press conference as a candidate for presidency, which was viewed as hooliganism (Article 339 Part 2 of the Criminal Code). He was charged with the same offence after an episode on March 2, when Alyaksandr Kazulin broke a portrait of Lukashenka in the building of the police department of Kastychnitski district of Minsk. As for the events of March 25, investigation believes that Kazulin is guilty of organizing a riot. He is charged with violation of the Article 342 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing group actions violating public order, or active participation in them).

Source: Charter97; May 23; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

3. Belarusian Police Chief Rejects Complaint About Brutality

Yury Padabed, chief of Minsk's riot police, has rejected a complaint from Kanstantsin Usyonak that police officers beat and abused protesters in an opposition tent camp in downtown Minsk following the March 19 presidential election, *Belapan* reported on May 22. In his complaint to prosecutors in Minsk, Usyonak alleged that after his arrest in a police raid on the tent camp on March 24, officers forced him to chew his shirt and cut off locks of hair on his head.

Padabed said in his written answer to the complaint claims that no proof of the allegations was found during an internal enquiry. "The actions of Minsk riot police were found legal," he added. "It is unclear why the reply was given by the chief of the abusers, not the prosecutor's office. In addition, Padabed's letter implies that such actions have become legal in our country," Usyonak told *Belapan*.

Source: RFE/RL; May 23, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

4. The Ministry of information Pronounced a Warning to the *Khimik* Newspaper

The *Khimik* newspaper (an independent regional edition) got a warning from the Ministry of Information. The editor-in-chief does not agree with the accusations and is going to send an appeal to the Superior Court of Belarus.

The warning was signed by Uladzimir Rusakievich on May 12. The edition is accused of publishing advertisements without having proved the right of the advertisers to perform their activities (Art. 30 of the Law on Press and other Mass Media).

The editor-in-chief claimed that the accusation was groundless because they did prove that right. "We were informed that the Department of Ideology had sent a letter to the Ministry of Information asking to pronounce the warning: nobody even asked us to prove the information".

Mr. Balai recalled that the newspaper had already been accused of many law violations – for example, publishing TV-programmes without the permission of *BeITA* and etc. The newspaper managed to answer to the suits with the help of *BAJ*. The Office of Public Prosecutor admitted that the edition had done nothing wrong. "We are an obstacle on the way of some local officials", - thinks S. Balai.

Khimik experienced problems with distribution together with many other independent newspapers. In December 2005 Vitsiebskabsayuzdruk cancelled the contract with the edition referring to some financial difficulties. In February 2006 Belposhta refused to cooperate with the edition. The edition is distributed with the help of private entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the newspaper hopes to renew the cooperation with Belposhta and Sayuzdruk.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; May 23, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

5. Belarusian Opposition Leader Warned Over Criticism

Belarusian authorities have warned opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich that he could be jailed for publicly criticizing President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Milinkevich said he was summoned by prosecutors today and warned about "discrediting" Belarus, a charge punishable by up to two years in prison.

Milinkevich says the warning was issued because of interviews he gave recently to the Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* and to the *BBC*.

Prosecutors allege that in one of the interviews he implicated the Belarusian authorities in the death of a Polish diplomat in Belarus days after the March 19 presidential election, and in the other he spoke of vote-rigging in the poll.

Milinkevich was the main opposition challenger in the vote, in which Lukashenka was reelected to a third term. Both the opposition and Western nations condemned the election as fraudulent, and Milinkevich served 15 days in prison for participating in protests against the election result. // *Belapan, Charter97.org, Reuters*

Source: RFE/RL; May 22, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

6. We Remember

The last week of May is announced International Week of Abducted Persons by the UNESCO. Four well-known persons went missing in Belarus in 1999-2000. Former Interior Minister, police general Yury Zakharenka was abducted on May 7, 1999. First vice-speaker of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus of the 13th convocation, a chairman of the Central Elections Committee Viktor Hanchar and his friend, an businessman and public figure Anatol Krasouski were abducted on September 16, 1999. Journalist Dzimtry Zavadsky went missing on July 7, 2000.

The demand to reveal the truth about abductions of Yury Zakharanka, Viktor Hanchar, Anatol Krasouski, Dzmitry Zavadski is contained in resolutions of the European Union, UN commission on Human rights, the PA OSCE.

The Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau, a Secretary of the Security Council Viktor Shejman, former head of the Interior Ministry Yury Sivakou and SOBR commander Dzmitry Paulichenka are suspected in implication in abductions and assassinations of Yury Zakharanka, Viktor Hanchar, Anatol Krasouski and Dzmitry Zavadski by the world community.

"We shall never forget those who have disappeared. We remember about them every day, We believe in justice triumph. It is our legitimate right to know the truth about what had happened to Yury Zakharanka, Viktor Hanchar, Anatol Krasouski and Dzmitry Zavadski. We remember," the statement of the civil initiative "We Remember" reads. The initiative unites families of abducted and murdered people in Belarus.

Source: Charter97; May 22; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

7. Opposition Youth Leaders Jailed in Belarus

Two leaders of the opposition youth group Malady Front, Zmitser Dashkevich and Artur Finkevich, were sentenced to 15 days in jail by a district court in Minsk on May 18, Belapan news agency reported. The two men were arrested on May 17 when they arrived at the court building where opposition activist Yury Radzivil was being tried.

The police claim that the two yelled obscenities and arrested them on charges of "petty hooliganism." On May 18, Judge Nadzeva Ravutskaya fined Katsyaryna Shatsikova 70,000 rubles (\$33) for "hooliganism." Shatsikova was arrested along with Dashkevich and Finkevich in front of the court.

Source: RFE/RL; May 19, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

DOMESTIC

8. Did Belarusian President Help Oppositionists 'Save Face'?

President Lukashenka explained to the National Assembly on May 23 why he allowed the Belarusian opposition to organize a tent camp on October Square in Minsk following the March 19 presidential vote, Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka said opposition presidential candidates Alyksandr Milinkevich and Alyksandr Kazulin asked him not to disrupt their planned protest in Minsk in order to allow them to "save face."

"They sent their mediators to [presidential administration chief Viktor] Sheyman, he can tell you a great deal. I was telling him constantly: 'Viktar, do not touch anybody. Do what they ask -- let them save face.' But that [subsequently] made them impudent. I had promised that we would react adequately to all events and all of their actions. They are not opposition, they are thugs -- I repeat it publicly once again," Lukashenka said. He also suggested that he was "physically" present "in the thick" of the opposition protests that followed the presidential election. He did not reveal whether he was there alone or with his bodyguards.

Source: RFE/RL; May 19, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

9. Belarus President Hints He Would Support Formation of Statist Party

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said Tuesday he would welcome the appearance of a pro-government political party, but said he had no plans to form it himself.

"If a political party that includes our political elite happens to appear I will not oppose it," Lukashenko said in his annual state of the nation address. But he said he would not get personally involved in the formation of such a party.

"A party established 'from above' is unlikely to win people's support. But if initiated by the people, it will attract a lot of supporters," Lukashenko said.

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

Lukashenko said the country's Communist Party had not always produced the desired results. "However, the party has focused on strategic issues and its positive role cannot be underestimated," he said.

Lukashenko also called for the role of trade unions, local government bodies and youth and veterans' organizations to be enhanced.

Source: RIA Novosti; May 23, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

10. Belarusian Academy of Sciences Discussed Nuclear Power

Research aimed at achieving greater energy security was singled out as the top priority of the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences on May 19, *Belapan* reported. Uladzimir Tsimashpolski, deputy chairman of the academy's presidium, stressed Belarus's dependence on imports of natural gas from Russia, which account for 95 percent of Belarus's total fuel consumption, *Belapan* reported.

Tsimashpolski said that building a nuclear power plant should be a top priority for Belarus. "Nuclear fuel would replace a considerable amount of energy imports, he said. "Nuclear fuel is much cheaper than organic ones -- an amount equivalent to one ton of coal costs \$5 to \$25 at present." One ton of coal costs approximately \$60.

Source: RFE/RL; May 22, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

REGIONAL

11. Belarus for Preserving CIS

Belarus is for preserving the CIS and for continuing cooperation in the framework of that international organization. Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko stated this in his annual address to the parliament and people of the republic.

"We will continue cooperation in the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States," he said. "The reserves of multilateral mechanisms of the CIS are not used effectively enough but this is no reason to talk of its scrapping," he declared.

Lukashenko said, "We have common interests, so any form of integration is useful. We must develop more actively in the framework of the CIS the transit component, social and humanitarian cooperation."

"At the same time there's no denying that the Commonwealth is in need of a reform, mainly in order to enhance the effectiveness of the decisions taken and responsibility of each state for fulfilling the obligations assumed," the president said.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 23, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

12. Union with Russia Historic Choice of Belarus

Union with Russia is a historic choice of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, the Belarussian president, said in his annual address to the republic's parliament on Tuesday.

"The advantages of union with Russia are undoubted," he said. "This is our historic choice."

Lukashenko said joint efforts of the two countries "are concentrated on the quest of the optimum model of relations in the framework of the Union State." "It is characteristic that we have passed on from dealing exclusively with organizational and legal matters to specific work in the areas of social security, education, the health services, the tax policy and free travel," Lukashenko said.

"A package of documents signed recently aims to solve a number of acute problems of daily living with which people are concerned," the president said.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 23, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

13. Lukashenko Thanks Armenia for Support to Belarus at International Arena

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko appreciated the contribution of Armenian Ambassador to Belarus Suren Harutyunyan in development of bilateral Belarus-Armenian relations, reports the web-site of the Armenian Embassy in Belarus. During his meeting with Suren Harutyunyan on the occasion of the latter completing his diplomatic mission, the Belarus President noted, "You are not only an Ambassador of a friendly country, you are our friend. I never remember you being silent, to say nothing of speaking negatively about our country. You rooted for Belarus."

Lukashenko underscored that Suren Harutyunyan took the office seven years ago, starting from nothing literally – in the diplomatic, political and economic fields. In his words, «the way for development of close bilateral contacts is already paved.» The Belarus President hoped that Suren Harutyunyan's successor will continue his line of strengthening bilateral relations. Lukashenko thanked Armenia for supporting Belarus at international arena, "We feel your help and support in international organizations. Armenia always helped us as a friendly state."

In his turn the Armenian Ambassador remarked that the support of the Belarus President, Government was a major one for pursuing the line of strengthening mutually beneficial bilateral relations. "Having worked in Belarus for 7 years, I always spoke in support of its interests. There was no single case for me to hesitate regarding your country and the President," the diplomat said. Suren Harutyunyan presented his latest book named «People, Years, Life» to President Lukashenko.

Source: PanARMENIAN.Net; May 23, 2006; <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=18104>

14. Belarus Joins Protocol on Lifting Restrictions On Trade With CIS

Belarus has acceded to the protocol on stage-by-stage lifting restrictions on trade with member-countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The bill to this effect signed by the president of Belarus was put on the National Register of Legal Acts May 19, 2006, *Prime-Tass* reports.

The protocol fixes the schedule for lifting restrictions on reciprocal trade with CIS countries. Thus, tariff restrictions on the import of vodka, tobacco and tobacco products are to be lifted from July 1, on the import of malt beer and refined sugar from January 1, 2007 and on ethyl alcohol, vermouth and wines from January 1, 2012.

In addition, the non-tariff restrictions, namely, the quotas on the import of beer, liquor and vodka and tobacco products must be lifted as of January 1, 2008.

The Belarussian Foreign Ministry holds that acceding to the protocol does not entail risks, as domestic producers have become more competitive and may gain positions in the market.

The protocol on stage-by-stage lifting of restrictions on reciprocal trade of CIS countries was signed on June 3, 2005 in Tbilisi. It was then signed by Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia (with reservations), and Tajikistan, while Belarus, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine did not sign the document.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; May 22, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

15. Mikhail Fradkov Pushes for Belarus-Russia Union State

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov took part in Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) Interstate Council session in Minsk yesterday. It was the participants' bilateral problems, and not those of the EurAsEC, that took the limelight. Mikhail Fradkov whose main interest in Minsk was Belarus, pressed it to accomplish its promise to create the Union State with Russia. Otherwise, Belarus should not count upon harmonious relations with Russia, or, rather, cheap natural gas.

Leaders of the EurAsEC member-states (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) recollect of its existence only a few times a year. Yesterday's session was joined by Uzbek Prime Minister Shavkad Mirziyayev (Uzbekistan joined the EurAsEC in January 2006). Yesterday's session proved once and again that there are too many bilateral problems.

One of the issues on the EurAsEC's agenda was the formation of a customs union. Belarus Prime Minister Sergey Sidorsky claimed the customs rate would be completely unified by the end of 2006. Yet, the unification process had been too slow to end in 2006.

Mikhail Fradkov reminded Sergey Sidorsky of the necessity to create Russia-Belarus Union State soon. Fradkov said that any delay endangers the situation, especially for Belarus. Gazprom intends to raise the price on natural gas for Belarus, the latter protests. Belarus was promised lower gas price in exchange for creation of the Union State with Russia.

Yet, Belarus did not make any concessions to Russia yesterday. It did not revoke its claims to compensate its budget losses which it thinks will appear when joining into the Union State. Belarus demanded \$ billion compensation for its integration with Russia. Besides, Minsk refuses to discuss export taxes on light oils, the transition to ruble as common currency both for Russia and Belarus, and does not want to lower customs taxes.

Development of the EurAsEC is nearly more successful than that of the Union State. The EurAsEC budget was settled yesterday—145 million rubles. Russia paid in 40 percent (58.1 million rubles), Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan each paid 15 percent, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—7.5 percent each. All EurAsEC members believe the CIS should be reformed. However, Mikhail Fradkov does not take big interest in the CIS. This year he decided to send Vice Prime Minister Alexander Zhukov instead of himself.

Source: *Kommersant*; May 20, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

16. Belarus Warns Against Price Discrimination

Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister has warned against energy price discrimination, *Belapan Minsk news agency* reported Thursday.

Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Kabyakow, who is also chairman of the Integration Committee of the Eurasian Economic Community, or EAEC, whose members include Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, spoke out against what he called discrimination against "Belarusian economic entities" in energy price formation after an EAEC Integration Committee meeting.

During the meeting, Kabyakow said, members discussed the performance of the energy council under the Integration Committee.

"The Belarusian side is thoroughly monitoring the contents of the agreements signed within the framework of the EAEC, the SES (Single Economic Space of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan) and between Belarus and Russia within the union state's framework," the deputy prime minister said.

Belarus, he said, views the principle of equality -- of conditions and of competitive policies for economic entities -- as key.

Asked about energy resources and pricing, Kabyakow said: "As for basic principles of competitiveness concerning resources, property or real estate, all this will definitely be included in an agreement that provides for the construction of a fully fledged customs union."

Source: United Press International; May 19, 2006; <http://www.upi.com>

17. Lukashenko Calls For Action on Agreements From Eurasec Members

Members of the Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec) should start implementation of agreements on economic development as soon as possible, the president of Belarus said Friday.

Alexander Lukashenko said priority issues included free movement of goods and transit of electric energy and oil products.

"The solution of transit issues will boost Eurasec's development," Lukashenko said at a meeting of heads of Eurasec member states in the Belarusian capital, Minsk.

Founded in 2001, Eurasec comprises Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Lukashenko said volumes of mutual investments should be broader within the framework of the community.

"Belarus has prepared a proposal and is initiating intergovernmental targeted programs in the spheres of health, microbiology and electronics," he said.

Lukashenko added that joint programs in the sphere of high technologies were also very important.

Source: RIA Novosti; May 19, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

18. Belarus Will Trade Beltransgaz for Production Assets

First Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus Vladimir Semashko was quoted by the *Itar-Tass* agency as saying "We are prepared to exchange assets, to place 50 percent of Beltransgaz in a Belarusian-Russian independent gas transport enterprise and receive assets in Gazprom's gas producing structures that would allow us to produce 10-12 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year in Russia." That way, Belarus would preserve its cheap gas supply in the face of Gazprom's intentions of sharply raising the price of gas to that country.

This is not the first time the offer has come from Belarus. Belarusian presidential representative Vasily Dolgolev announced that that deal was ready after the negotiations between Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin last month. Semashko claims that negotiations on that topic are underway. Press secretary of the head of Gazprom Sergey Kupriyanov told *Kommersant* that "We have received no official proposals for the exchange of assets. We found out about their existence yesterday from an information agency."

Belarus now pays \$46.68 per cu. m. of Russian gas. That is half the price Ukraine pays and a third of the price the Baltic countries pay. Gazprom has announced that it will charge Belarus a market price beginning in 2007, mentioning \$145 per cu. m. Semashko repeated yesterday that Belarus is prepared to pay only an 11-percent increase in gas prices, calling the sharp price hike for "an ally" incorrect. The Belarusian proposal is structurally similar to the agreement Gazprom has reached with the German BASF to trade shares in its Severneftegazprom producer for a larger chunk of Wingas, BASF's gas trader. Gazprom is nonetheless not allowing its foreign

partner direct access to gas production but only participation in an independent enterprise in which Gazprom would retain the controlling package. Judging from the statements of Belarusian officials, that country is interested in receiving a Russian gas field, for which there have no precedents.

Source: Kommersant; May 18, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

19. Russia, Belarus Sign Plan for Forming United Transport System

Russian Transport Minister Dmitry Levitin and Belarussian Transport and Communications Minister Vladimir Sosnovsky have signed a plan for forming and operating a united transport system of the Russia-Belarus Union State, Levitin told Itar-Tass at the end of bilateral talks.

The two ministers met in Dublin on the sidelines of a two-day conference of European transport ministers.

The plan they signed covers transport unification measures to be taken in 2006 and 2007.

"Along with unification of customs laws, we must also align all the regulations for transport that still contain differences," Levitin said.

The plan maps out the prospects for developing the Europe-Asia transport corridors that will stretch across the territories of Russia and Belarus.

"We must give an opportunity to our foreign partners to feel that our international transport corridors won't pose any problems either in terms of cargo passage or security," Levitin said.

"The agreement also contains provisions for simpler border crossing procedures, since unfortunately the problems the crossing of our borders still remain in the Union State," he indicated.

The document also says Russia and Belarus will abide by unified transport policies on the markets of other countries.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 18, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

INTERNATIONAL

20. Lukashenko Threatens Ban on Overflight

President Alexander Lukashenko suggested today he might ban Western flights over Belarus in response to sanctions against his former Soviet state in connection with his disputed re-election.

Mr Lukashenko issued his threat in his annual state of the nation address to parliament in which he rejected any notion of a change in the policies denounced in the West and refused to consider any contact with his opponents.

"Let them fly over the Baltic states or Ukraine. We ought to close the main route through," Mr. Lukashenko told parliament.

"Perhaps we will lose something here. But we must show them that we are proud people."

The United States and European Union have barred entry to Mr. Lukashenko and other officials in response to what they say was rigging in Mr. Lukashenko's March re-election.

The president's latest comment was almost certainly in response to last month's refusal by Canada and the United States to refuel a plane carrying Belarussian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky to and from Cuba.

Mr. Lukashenko said Belarus would make a legal challenge to the sanctions following the election in which he was credited with 83 per cent of the vote to six per cent for his nearest rival.

"Who under international conventions is empowered to limit freedom of movement?" he said. "Did a court rule that Lukashenko or Sidorsky were criminals? There is no such ruling."

The president, in power since 1994, said he had no intention of speaking to the opposition which staged unprecedented rallies for four days after the election before they were dispersed.

More than 600 protesters were jailed for up to 15 days. Opposition leaders, including his main poll rival, Alexander Milinkevich, were jailed briefly after subsequent protests.

"I am prepared for dialogue with an opposition which has proper aims of protecting the state and its people. This is no opposition, they are morons," he said.

"What sort of dialogue can there be when they call for economic sanctions against the Belarussian people?"

Mr Lukashenko, supported by voters fearful of what they see as instability in other ex-Soviet states, said he favoured creation of a political party backing his administration, but would not initiate it. // *Reuters*

Source: The Daily Telegraph; May 24, 2006; <http://dailytelegraph.news.com.au/>

21. Lukashenko Speaks Chinese

No longer friends with Russia

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko made his annual address to the parliament yesterday. It was his first major speech since the imposition of sanctions by the United States and European Union and the announcement of Russia's new policy toward the country. He promised to dispute the legality of the sanctions in international court and said that he was in favor of "full-format cooperation" with the U.S. and EU. Lukashenko did not mention Russia among his friends, but mentioned that the Belarusian economy was threatened by the growth of energy prices. He said that China would become a priority in the new foreign policy of the country.

Offense Taken

Lukashenko is known for his frequent and lengthy speeches, but that habit has been changing in recent times. Since his reelection to a third term, the Belarusian leader has been increasingly less visible to the public and significantly milder in his public statements. He has barely reacted to the recent attacks on him, remaining silent as the U.S. and EU imposed sanctions and Russia announced its decision to raise energy prices to the country and stop underwriting the economy in general. The Belarusian president was expected to make known yesterday what he intended to do in isolation.

Lukashenko began his speech with an unusual announcement. He assured the parliament, which he controls, that Belarus would be integrated into the world economy, and not limited to the CIS. "The priority task for the development of the Belarusian economy is to integrate with the world economy with unfailing attention to national interests. Belarus is thus pursuing a multi-line policy to expand the sales market for its goods, but that has to be done more aggressively," he said.

The president's address was astonishingly non-aggressive, however. There was a time when Lukashenko would have responded to sanction from the West with angry renunciations. But not yesterday. "With an open economy," he said, "the market should be regulated not by fences around borders, as some leaders would like, but by introducing new technologies and producing products of high quality at accessible prices. Regardless of whether or not Belarus is legally a

member of the World Trade Organization, we have been living by its laws for a long time.” Thus Lukashenko tried to create the impression of an enlightened marketplace.

“Minsk is in favor of full-format relations with the U.S. and EU,” Lukashenko continued, noting that a just world could only be multipolar. He made more promises to liberalize the Belarusian economy as well. In particular, the budgeting process should become “fairer and more transparent” and contain real measures to simplify the tax system and create a stable taxation policy.

Lukashenko spoke with carefully chosen words, as though trying not to offend the West. Only at the end of his appearance did emotions show through, as he recalled how the U.S. and EU have forbidden him to travel there, he angrily called the sanctions unjust and promised to fight them. Several days ago, all presidential representatives stated that the sanctions were of no interest to him. “What are the grounds for such sanctions? That some international court decided that Belarusian officials are criminals?! No! They pulled it out of thin air!” he exclaimed indignantly of the West’s unwillingness to receive him. He charged Prime Minister with preparing an appeal to international human rights courts to examine the imposition of the sanctions.

Already in a temper, Lukashenko recounted how American and Canadian authorities interfered with the flight of the Belarusian Prime Minister to Cuba. In response to “the complete savagery of those people,” he ordered Belarusian airspace closed to Western airlines. “Let them fly over the Baltic countries and Ukraine, but the main routes should be closed. Maybe we will lose something from that, but we have to show them our pride,” he said.

Stubbornness

After hearing Lukashenko’s impassioned reaction to the U.S. and the EU finally emerge, his audience was expecting epithets to be flung in the direction of Russia as well. Gazprom’s decision to triple the price of natural gas from the country (from the current price of \$47 per 1000 cubic meters) was the most brutal strike against Minsk in along time. In the course of the country’s gas war with Russia, Lukashenko has not been shy about accusing Russia of victimizing the elderly and handicapped and even compared Russian president Vladimir Putin to Hitler and Stalin and attributing to him the desire to dismember Belarus. Yesterday, however, he preferred to avoid mentioning Russia at all, saying just once that “the advantages of uniting with Russia are indisputable.”

Without mentioning Russia by name, Lukashenko indicated that the options of unification presented by Moscow are far from optimal for Belarus. He began by saying that “The CIS is in need of reform, since the multifaceted mechanisms of the CIS are not being used to the necessary effect. But that is no reason to talk of its liquidation.” Then Lukashenko spoke of the importance of such organizations as the UN, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

While almost not mentioning the formation of the Union State, Lukashenko said that “new centers of power are forming in the world. Iran, China, India and Russia are rising; Latin America is following a policy ever more independent of the dictates of the U.S.” The culmination of Lukashenko’s address was the announcement that “the main priority of Belarusian foreign policy is China, which shares in and supports many of our political steps.”

“I am proud that we are developing a strategic partnership with that country,” Lukashenko said. “China has always openly and honestly supported Belarus. I cannot think of anyone China has supported like it has us.” Finally, he tried to deny the international isolation of his regime. “No one is isolating us,” he stated. “We have good relations with such countries as China, India, the CIS states and, in spite of certain nuances, with our neighbors.” Lukashenko did not mention Russia by name.

Collapse

Only when discussing domestic issues did Lukashenko resemble his former self. He harshly condemned the most serious problems in Belarus today, “drunkenness and disorderliness.” He angrily scolded the members of local councils for their passivity in reducing bureaucracy. “The problem is worst in executive committees, where formalism, red tape, callousness and arrogance reign,” he said, and mentioned the dangers lurking in the upcoming local elections. “Our opponents are preparing for a cruel takeover. They are dreaming of revenge for their recent resounding defeat and hoping to create a launch pad for the future,” he warned. He said it was impossible to hold a dialog with the current opposition, because it supports the economic sanctions against the Belarusian people.

In spite of assurances that “there is a colossal demand for Belarusian products in the world” and “Belarus is among the highly-developed European states,” Lukashenko was unable to paint a bright future. “The long-term growth of energy prices, raw materials and semi-finished goods may cause a collapse of the world economy,” he warned gravely, without specifying what would become of the Belarusian economy in that case. But he did name the causes of its collapse: “unprecedented pressure from the West and the growth of energy prices.” Russia, Gazprom and Beltransgaz were not mentioned in that context.

Source: Vadim Dovnar, Mikhail Zygar, Kommersant; May 20, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

22. Belarus To Appeal Sanctions Against Senior Officials in International Courts

Prime minister of Belarus Sergei Sidorskiy is due to prepare a statement on propriety of travel restrictions against some senior Belarusian officials to the international courts on human rights, president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko said when answering questions of parliamentarians.

“What are the grounds for such restrictions? Have the international court announced the Belarusian officials as criminals? No! It is too obvious,” Alexander Lukashenko declared and added that none of the ministers “was involved in the political campaign”.

The head of state emphasized that Belarus is not isolated. “In the east we have Russia, our long-standing partner. We have established good relations with all EurAsEC and CIS member-states,” the Belarusian leader said. He also pointed to the trade-economic cooperation with Latin America, some African and Asian countries.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; May 23, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

23. Belarusian President Lukashenko Forecasts Collapse of Global Economy

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko forecasted on Tuesday the downfall of the global economy. “If the prices of energy sources continue to grow on global markets, this may lead to the collapse of global economy,” Lukashenko said in his annual address to the Belarusian parliament.

He went on to say that the world is very unstable at the moment.

“Situation in the world is even more unstable that it used to be five-ten years ago,” Lukashenko said, quoted by *RIA Novosti*.

The new centers of power are arising in the world, said the Belarusian President.

“This is connected with rise in prices of energy source. China, India, Persian Gulf countries and Latin America are all standing on their feet. The main thing is that Russia is rising too,” he said.

In Lukashenko’s opinion these new centers of power demand more and more rights for themselves. “The struggle between these states is escalating and we wouldn’t want this to lead to a confrontation or a military conflict,” he said.

The President of Belarus demanded that the country's Defense Ministry increases its vigilance. "Our defense agency has to proceed from the fact that the world is restless," Lukashenko said. "We have to have a realistic view of things."

Lukashenko ended his address by saying that two factors negatively influence Belarus - unprecedented pressure from the West and rising energy prices.

Source: MosNews.Com, May 23, 2006; www.mosnews.com

24. U.S. Criticizes Interpol Talks

The United States denounced the "business-as-usual" attitude involving Belarus that led Interpol to stage its annual regional meeting in Minsk.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack noted widespread denunciation of Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko's government and praised members of the EU that, like the United States, boycotted the conference. Only 12 of the 46 countries in the region attended the conference Wednesday and Thursday. // AP

Source: The Moscow Times; May 22, 2006; http://www.themoscowtimes.com

25. European Union Freezes Assets of Belarus Chief for Rigged Vote

The European Union on Thursday imposed a freeze on bank accounts and other financial assets of President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko and 35 other senior officials in Belarus, with their families or proxies, in retaliation for the rigged presidential election in March and the crackdown on government opponents that has continued in its wake.

The freeze follows a ban on travel to the European Union's 25 member states, and a similar ban the United States imposed this week. The Bush administration has also warned that it would freeze Mr. Lukashenko's assets, but has not yet done so.

The immediate effect is unknown, because it is not clear whether Mr. Lukashenko has bank accounts in Europe or the United States, and if so, how much money they contain. Mr. Lukashenko has mocked the idea, as he has the visa ban. Even before the election, he denied having assets abroad, as officials did again this week when the European Union signaled its decision.

"Take this money, if you know that there is any there," Mr. Lukashenko said then in typically defiant remarks in a televised interview. "There is nothing to get Lukashenko for. Understand?"

Mr. Lukashenko, who has been in office since 1994, won a third term with what officials said was 83 percent of the vote. The leading opposition candidate, Aleksandr Milinkevich, won only 6 percent, a result broadly disputed by Mr. Lukashenko's critics in Belarus and by American and European officials.

Mr. Milinkevich welcomed the European action on Thursday as an important new lever against Mr. Lukashenko's government, one that would harm senior officials but not the broader population, as economic penalties would.

"Even if they do not manage to find such accounts, it is effective because it has a strong moral impact on officials," he said in a telephone interview from Belarus. "As for visas, officials have given interviews in the press. They keep saying they have been offended unjustly, but one can see they are quite concerned, though, frankly, Lukashenko does not allow them to go abroad very often."

The freeze applies to Mr. Lukashenko, senior members of his administration, the ministers of education, information and justice, ranking members of Parliament, the prosecutor general and the chief of the security service, still known by its Soviet-era abbreviation, the K.G.B.

The European Union's statement, issued in Brussels, called the officials on the list those "who are responsible for the violations of international electoral standards and the crackdown on civil society and the democratic opposition" around the March 19 election. The statement said the freeze also applied to "those natural or legal persons, entities or bodies associated with them."

A European diplomat in Minsk, the Belarussian capital, said that meant family members or others, as well as trust funds or companies, that hold accounts abroad under other names. It also applies to stocks or other assets. A White House report issued before the election accused Mr. Lukashenko of enriching himself and asserted that he was "likely among the most corrupt leaders in the world."

After the election, the police and security forces arrested dozens of protesters and shut down an encampment that had lasted five days on the main square in Minsk. A second challenger, Aleksandr V. Kazulin, was arrested March 25 and remains in prison, facing charges of organizing antigovernment protests. Mr. Milinkevich and other senior opposition party leaders were arrested in April and sentenced to two-week prison terms on lesser charges. They were released late last week.

The European diplomat said in a telephone interview that the decision would force the European Union's members to scrutinize financial transactions in search of Mr. Lukashenko's money abroad. "We suspect there is," the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the policy publicly. "But we've never gone after it before."

A senior State Department official in Washington said that the Bush administration would follow suit, though perhaps not for several weeks because of legal requirements involved in freezing foreign leaders' accounts.

Source: Steven Lee Myers, The New York Times; May 19, 2006; <http://www.nytimes.com>

26. West Should Not Isolate Belarus - Lavrov

The West should not pursue a policy of isolation of Belarus, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"I am sure that dialogue is in the interests of all those who are convinced of the need to promote democracy and other Council of Europe principles," Lavrov told journalists in Strasbourg on Friday.

Belarus "should not be isolated but engaged in interaction. This is much more productive in achieving a positive response," the minister said.

Source: Interfax; May 19, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

27. US, Russia, Belarus: Politics of Democracy

After US Vice President Dick Cheney's speech on 4 May in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, during the Community of Democratic Choice's third meeting, Russian media were writing about the beginning of a "new Cold War". Then last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin's state-of-the-nation speech laid out Russia's ambitious global role and highlighted plans to enhance its strategic military capabilities in what many observers say was a direct response to reprimands from Cheney.

Cheney sharply criticized what he referred to as Russia's attempt to blackmail foreign policy with natural gas supplies and reprimanded Moscow for "unfairly restricting" civil rights.

US-Russian tensions have not only brought much international attention to the Community of Democratic Choice, but have re-ignited the political battle over Belarus and the struggle for influence in Eastern Europe.

The Vilnius Summit, the result of a joint Ukrainian-Georgian initiative, brought together nine former Soviet republics. And Russian observers are interpreting Cheney's blunt speech at this particular forum as US interference in Moscow's vital political and economic areas. In fact, some Russian media have even interpreted Cheney's words as a tool to undermine the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which still unites 12 former Soviet republics, though Georgia is considering the consequences of withdrawing from the commonwealth.

The Community of Democratic Choice

The presidents of Ukraine, Georgia, Poland, and Lithuania launched the new regional organization at a meeting in the Crimea in August last year, where they decided to create "an alternative Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) without Russia". Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko proposed the creation of a Community of Democratic Choice in accordance with the principles of the Community of Democracies – an informal US-backed forum launched in 1999 to promote liberal goals such as support for civil society, free and fair elections, independent judiciary, transparency, and accountability of governance.

The US had already attempted to establish a similar pro-Western regional organization linking the Black Sea region with Central Asia, known as GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) in the 1990s. However, the project lacked both political stability and ideological orientations. Moreover, the Uzbek decision in 2005 to evict the US from its military bases there and to enhance strategic cooperation with China and Russia further weakened GUUAM.

On the contrary, should a Lithuanian-Polish axis strengthen its ties with a Ukrainian-Georgian combine, a new alignment would see the light - and one that would share common security concerns, consistent energy routes, and a pro-Western liberal ideology.

In addition, Polish Prime Minister Marek Belka announced in August last year the launch of a working group with Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia to coordinate their policy towards Belarus. He also discussed with Polish political leaders the idea of opening a radio station to broadcast into Belarus in support of pro-democracy groups.

That and the goals outlined by the new Commonwealth of Democratic Choice exacerbated growing political tensions between Poland and Belarus. Furthermore, the US-Russia geopolitical rivalry in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia served to increase regional competition between Warsaw and Minsk. And Belka's August proposal echoed the Bush administration's stance against Belarusian President Aleksandar Lukashenko and appeared as a continuation of the US-inspired tactics implemented by pro-Western groups during the "Orange Revolution" in Kiev.

Belarus: a Russian wedge in a pro-Western Eastern Europe

With Viktor Yushchenko's success in the dramatic December 2004 Ukrainian elections, Kiev took a clear pro-US stance. As a consequence, the creation of an integrated area encompassing the regions between the Baltic and the Black Sea finally became possible. Such a project was first evoked in the early 1990s, but during the last decade, Belarus remained a very pro-Russian regional actor under Lukashenko's rule, while Moscow maintained significant influence in Ukraine.

The new Ukrainian course changed the regional context, creating a geopolitical continuum from the Baltics to the Black Sea, for both Georgia and the Baltic States already shared some key security concerns with Poland and the Central European countries. In particular, such concerns

included the fear of a resurgent Russia in both economic and strategic affairs. Thus, the Eastern European nations' new elites actively pursued a transatlantic security guarantee (EU plus NATO), while fostering a progressively enhanced integration into the Euro-Atlantic political and financial structures.

New pro-Western elites in Eastern Europe consider Lukashenko's rule in Belarus their most serious regional political problem. Warsaw and its Baltic allies believe the integration of Belarus and Ukraine into Western European markets and institutions is a necessary step to create an integrated economic area - not least because such a re-orientation of the two former Soviet republics would help the them to end Moscow's grip on strategic energy routes in Eastern Europe.

Moreover, Poland is steadfastly trying to build regional alliances to counter the recent strengthening of Russo-German energy cooperation, which has culminated in a massive gas pipeline project that will transport Russian natural gas to Germany via the Baltic Sea - thus bypassing Poland. The news of this project reinforced Warsaw's perception of Moscow using energy supplies to blackmail its neighbors.

Therefore, after successfully backing the pro-Western movements in Ukraine, Warsaw is eager to fully cooperate with Washington in an effort to promote a regime change in Minsk. Such a goal is considered by many observers to be legitimate interference because of Lukashenko's authoritarian rule, labeled as "Europe's last dictatorship" by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other top US officials. Needless to say, it is perceived as an unacceptable attempt to foment a revolution by both Minsk and Moscow.

"Russia's reaction to Cheney's Vilnius speech, as well as Moscow and Minsk's hostility toward a US-backed promotion of democratic change in Belarus, were entirely predictable," Clara Castelli, professor of Eastern European History at Rome's University, told ISN Security Watch.

"The Russians believe that Washington is creating a sort of anti-Russian cordon sanitaire by using Eastern European countries and former Soviet republics," she explained, "and they furiously reacted against Ukraine's and Georgia's decision to quit the Commonwealth of Independent States."

Nowadays, the Italian professor said, "Moscow sees the EU and NATO's enlargement processes as being directed against Russia's security zone and historical core."

Kiev and Tbilisi's new pro-Western chance, Castelli believes, is the key to understanding what many call a "new Cold War". Especially after it became clear that Yushchenko would do everything possible to quickly integrate Ukraine into NATO, Russia's grip on Belarus tightened, despite the fact that Putin is "not keen on Lukashenko".

She said Russia was confident it could successfully counter Western attempts to undermine Lukashenko's rule in Belarus "because of structural reasons".

"First, Minsk is heavily dependant on the Russian economy, since Belarusian GDP growth is largely determined by Russian demand, which is not easy to replace. Second, Belarus cannot cope with any possible cut in Russian gas supplies. Third, under Lukashenko's rule, Belarus' national identity has not been strengthened: Even the Russian language was de facto favored by Minsk over Belarusian. Thus, the ruling class and a large majority of the Belarusian population have no interest in a pro-Western turn," she said.

US- and EU-backed attempts to foster a "color revolution" in Belarus "have little chance to succeed", the Italian scholar maintained, although she recalled that following the Polish initiative, "the EU is backing the project of a television chain that is supposed to introduce information pluralism in the country".

The project, Castelli said, would offer daily news services in Russian and Belarusian in an effort to promote mutual understanding between Belarusians and their neighbors.

Castelli said Russia's rigid stance on Belarus would be coupled by Moscow's attempts to prevent Ukraine from fully integrating into Western structures: "In fact, Ukraine's economy is also very dependent upon Russia, as Ukrainian goods have hardly any outlet other than the Russian market. Moreover, many Ukrainian citizens work in the Russian federation thanks to a friendly visa-regime. Should Moscow drastically change such rules, many Ukrainian workers would immediately experience unemployment."

With regards to the recently born Community of Democratic Choice, Castelli said such a "Baltic to the Black Sea project" was hardly new in history. In fact, it suggests a "modern re-making of the Polish-Lithuanian power", which dominated most of Central and Eastern Europe by the end of the 15th Century - although today's Polish ambitions are of course embedded into the EU and NATO.

"The attempt to control the Eastern European area has always been a central issue in the long geopolitical rivalry between Russia and Western powers," she concluded.

In the meantime, the US is showing a relentless determination to expand NATO to Ukraine and to promote regime change in Belarus.

However, Lukashenko and his ruling elite appear still capable of successfully countering Western moves, while Russia's attempts to recover its influence in Eastern Europe will probably encourage Moscow to maintain its support for Minsk's present government.

Federico Bordonaro, based in Italy, is an analyst of international relations and geopolitics with the Power and Interest News Report (PINR) and Strategic-Road.com. He is an expert on the new structure of the international system after the Cold War, the European integration process, security and defense issues, and political realism.

Source: Federico Bordonaro, ISN Security Watch; May 19, 2006; <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/>

BUSINESS

28. Investments in Oil Refinery Industry of Belarus To Exceed 1 billion USD by 2010

By 2010 the oil refinery industry of Belarus will receive USD 1,059 billion worth of investments, chief of the innovation department of the Belneftekhim concern Victor Plotnikov reported at a seminar held within the framework of the exhibition "Chemistry. Oil and Gas".

According to him, the two Belarusian oil refineries JSC Naftan and Mozyr Oil Refinery will undergo modernization of production capacities. This will help improving the quality of products and boosting output.

By 2010 the volume of oil raw material will go up by 55.4 per cent to 24 million tons a year.

Mozyr Oil Refinery was put in operation in 1975. Its main products are petrol, diesel fuel, household gas, technical butane, kerosene, bitumen. This year the company plans to refine 10 million tons of oil. The plan of the company's technical reequipment for 2006-2010 stipulates an increase in oil refinement up to 12 million tons a year.

Naftan oil refinery was set up in 1958 and jointstocked in 2002. The potential volume of oil refinement is 12 million tons a year. Naftan's main products are various fuels (petrol, diesel fuel, mazut, kerosene), lubricating oil and oil additives, aroma carbohydrates, dissolvent, sulphuric acid, bitumen. In 2005 the company's production soared by 12.6 per cent in comparative prices in

comparison with 2004. This year the plant plans to achieve a 9.5 per cent increase. Naftan exports 70 per cent of its produce, mainly diesel fuel.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; May 24, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the International League for Human Rights (www.ilhr.org). The League, now in its 65th 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.
