

May 25 – May 31, 2006

Edited by Maria Kabalina
International League for Human Rights

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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Activists of “Young Front” Began a Hunger Strike Protesting Against Criminal Persecution of Fellow Members

On May 29 in the city of Soligorsk a few members of opposition organization “Young Front” started a hunger strike. The young people are demanding a halt in a criminal investigation against the fellow members and release of political prisoners.

Activists of “Young Front” Sergey Patskevich, Maxim Semenchik, Evgeniy Medvedev, and participants of the tent camp protests Iliia and Ivan Shilo are holding the hunger strike in a private apartment. They hung a placard “Hunger Strike” from the outside of the apartment’s balcony. Another placard that read: “Freedom to political prisoners” was removed by the police.

«We are asking to join our hunger strike representatives of other organizations and regions», – announced the participants of the hunger strike.

Activists of “Young Front” began to feel pressure during the presidential election campaign and it is still there two months after the election campaign is over. Ministry of Justice had cancelled “Young Front” official registration and starting from February 2006 a criminal investigation has been opened against members of the organization. A few articles of the country’s Criminal Code are being used, including the recently adopted article # 293 – “Participation in organizations that is grossly interfering with citizens’ rights and interests”. A few leaders of the “Yong Front” – Zmiter Dashkevich, Boris Goretskiy, Pavel Krasovski, Sergey Lisechenok, Sergey Marchik and Oleg Kurbanov, are being considered as suspects under article # 293 and could be placed under arrest and then tried in court. Since February 2006 Belarussian KGB has detained 5 members of unregistered organization of election observers “The Partnership” under that article.

In Minsk and other Belarussian cities the law enforcement agents continue to conduct searches in the apartments of “Young Front” members. As was already practiced during searches in the apartments of the “The Partnership” members, the agents are seizing computers and accessories, documents and printed materials. Activists of “Young Front” receive summons from the police, prosecutor’s office and the KGB, their parents’ job security is being threatened. In recent days a few hunger strike participants, residents of Soligorsk, were also summoned to prosecutor’s office and local KGB bureau for interrogations.

In Minsk on Saturday, May 26, in a show of support, around 30 supporters of “Young Front” were standing on Octiabriaskaya square holding pictures of the organization members who were already convicted or are being investigated under various Criminal Code provisions.

No one was apprehended by the police, which may be attributed to the bad weather. On that day, so the police was not expecting any public shows of protest. On May 30 nine more activists of “Young Front” joined the hunger strike being held by their comrades from Soligorsk: Anastasia Palazhenko, Vladimir Dubovik, Aleksandra Yanochka, Pavel Davidovich, Elena Ignatieva, Tatiana Anikeenko, Dmitriy Fedoruk, Aleksey Yanushevskiy and Antonina Vezhnovets.

Source: Prima News Agency; May 31, 2006; <http://www.prima-news.ru/eng>

2. A. Bastunets: “The Public Prosecutor’s Office Pays No Attention to the Court Decision To Declare Zavadski Dead...”

On May 30 the Attorney General Piotr Miklashevich claimed the authorities were “still looking for Dzmitry Zavadski”. BAJ deputy chairperson Andrej Bastunets stressed that the Public Prosecutor’s Office paid no attention to the court’s decision to declare Zavadski dead and was not going to start a criminal case.

“It is still unclear where Zavadski is, but we continue the search,” - claimed P. Miklashevich on May 30.

A. Bastunets's comment: "The Attorney General seems to deliberately stress the fact that "they are looking for Zavadski" (as if he was alive). It seems that the Public Prosecutor's Office ignores the fact that he might have been murdered".

The journalist's wife Sviatlana Zavadskaja says many journalists phoned her after P. Miklashevich's statement because they thought that the investigation had been restarted. Nevertheless, Zavadski's relatives were not informed about anything of the kind.

Dzmitry Zavadzki, an "ORT" TV Channel cameraman disappeared on July 7, 2000. He went to the "Minsk-2" airport to meet his colleague Pavel Sharamiet. However, Sharamiet found D. Zavadzki's empty car only. On 16 July 2002, the Belarus Supreme Court confirmed a life sentence against Valery Ignatovich, former head of special units at the interior ministry and a subordinate, Maxim Malik, for abduction and disappearance of the young cameraman and for the murder of five other people.

According to the official version of events, Ignatovich decided to seek revenge against Zavadski because he felt himself the target of the journalist's remarks, when he said in an interview in 2000 with the daily Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta, that he had met Belarus nationals fighting alongside separatists in Chechnya. The trial did not allow the exact circumstances of the journalist's kidnapping to come out nor did it identify those who ordered it. Last time the case was closed on March 31, 2006.

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

3. Belarus Authorities Launch Court Case to Close Leading Human Rights Group

Belarus Justice Ministry said Thursday it had asked a court to close down the country's leading human rights groups, the Belarus Helsinki Committee, *The Associated Press* news agency reports.

The move against the persistent critic of the ex-Soviet nation's authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko follows unprecedented protests against his disputed re-election in March.

In a statement posted on its Web site, the Justice Ministry said it had filed a request at the Supreme Court, requesting that the court order the closure of the Helsinki Committee.

The ministry said the rights group "has been systematically violating Belarussian law and its own charter for a long period of time."

It accused the group of posting unauthorized observers during the 2004 parliamentary elections, occupying office premises reserved for residential housing and committing gross tax violations.

The Helsinki Committee head Tatyana Protko accused Lukashenko's regime of bringing back Stalinist times and said the move was a response to her group's relentless criticism of human rights violations in Belarus.

"The government is trying to destroy the last legal human rights organization in the country. Stalinist times are back in Belarus when they punish you not only for your actions but for your thoughts as well," she told *The Associated Press*.

Lukashenko, described by Washington as "Europe's last dictator," has been in power in his tightly-controlled nation of 10 million since 1994, cracking down on political dissent and the independent media and squeezing non-governmental groups.

His March re-election was condemned as fraudulent by the opposition and Western governments and his regime was slapped with U.S. and EU sanctions.

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

4. Belarusian Activist Jailed For Five Months

A Belarusian court jailed an opposition organizer for five months today on charges of conspiring to create disorder in the republic.

Syarhey Lyashkevich was arrested on March 14, five days before elections in which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was reelected to a third term.

Opposition politicians say Lyashkevich was accused of instructing activists how to behave in the case of street demonstrations. // *Reuters*

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

5. About Forty People Detained in Minsk for Wearing “For Freedom” Badges

It has become often that the policemen detain young people for wearing badges. The police leave the badges to themselves, all the claims about the illegality of the detentions remain unnoticed.

Eleven □Malady Front□ friends were detained twice during the last week. The policemen claim that wearing a badge □For Freedom□ is a violation of law of □State Symbols□, though they don□t draw up the protocols.

When Iryna Tropina, a student, claimed to complain to the actions of the policemen they said they would report to the university she was swearing and draw up a protocol of petty crime.

Barys Haretski said that people are not afraid of wearing the badges and more and more still buy them.

During Flash Mobs and other youth actions the policemen just tear off the badges even not catching the young. The activists report about numerous detentions connected with wearing badges or White and Red and White ribbons. During the latest week about forty people have been detained.

Source: The Human Rights Center “Viasna”; May 26, 2006; <http://www.spring96.org/en>

DOMESTIC

6. Belarus Drafts Concept of Nuclear Power Plant Construction

Belarus scientists have drafted a concept for building a nuclear power plant in the republic, a senior researcher said Wednesday.

But Oleg Martynenko, head of the Energy Strategy enterprise, said a decision on the NPP, which would take an estimated 10 years to build and would cost \$2.5 billion, had not yet been made.

Martynenko said a nuclear power plant with a capacity of 2,000 megawatts was the best option for Belarus and researchers suggested the cost price of a kilowatt of power would be \$0.017 after the NNP is commissioned.

Vladimir Bobrov, the head of the strategic development department at the Belarus Energy Ministry, said in turn that the share of nuclear energy in the republic's fuel and energy balance could rise to 20% and the share of natural gas could decline to 50% by 2020.

Experts said a nuclear power plant would enable the republic to bring the share of nuclear energy to 85% in the republic's fuel and energy balance by 2050.

Source: RIA Novosti; May 31, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

7. Belarus Unveils Monument To Secret Police

A monument to Soviet secret police founder Felix Dzerzhinsky was unveiled Friday in the Belarusian capital Minsk, provoking protests from human rights defenders and opposition politicians.

Dzerzhinsky, reviled by critics of the Soviet era, helped establish the first Soviet secret service, called the Cheka, in 1917 under Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin. The Cheka, a forerunner of the KGB, was responsible for mass arrests and executions.

The towering 10-foot bronze figure, a copy of the statue of Dzerzhinsky that pro-democracy crowds tore down in front of KGB headquarters in Moscow in 1991, occupies a spot inside the grounds of the Military Academy. Dzerzhinsky was known as "Iron Felix." He was born in modern-day Belarus.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, an open admirer of the Soviet Union and a pariah to the West because of his government's crackdown on dissent and the media, has kept the Soviet-era acronym KGB for Belarus' security service.

Stepan Sukhorenko, head of the Belarus' KGB, attended the ceremony unveiling the stature.

Oleg Gulak of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee rights group condemned the move as "an insult to the memory of the millions of victims of the repressive machine founded by Iron Felix."

The leader of the Social-Democratic Party, Nikolai Statkevich, insisted that Dzerzhinsky was not "a figure of Belarusian history we should be proud of."

The head of the Belarusian border guard service, Gen. Alexander Pavlovsky, defended the decision to erect a statue of Dzerzhinsky next to the faculty for frontier guard officers.

"We shouldn't be afraid of our history and people who gave birth to a new state, fought for it and were heroes," he said. "Dzerzhinsky was not an odious figure, he is someone who merits respect."

Source: Seattle Post-Intelligencer; May 26, 2006; <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com>

8. Most People in Kazakhstan, Belarus Satisfied With Life - Poll

The way citizens of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine describe the quality of their life differ significantly, as is evident from sociological polls that the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) conducted in these countries in April and May.

Most respondents in Kazakhstan (73%) and Belarus (70%) said they are basically satisfied with their life, and 24% and 28% said the opposite.

In Russia, the share of people dissatisfied to some extent with their life amounts to 58%, while 41% are satisfied.

In Ukraine, 66% are dissatisfied with their life, and 30% are satisfied with it.

The respondents were also asked in what countries or associations of countries they would like to live.

A plurality in Ukraine (36%) and Belarus (30%) would like to live in a union of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, while a plurality in Russia (33%) and Kazakhstan (36%) prefer to live in their own country.

VTsIOM polled 1,585 people in Russia, 2,103 in Ukraine, 1,101 in Belarus and 1,000 in Kazakhstan.

Source: *Interfax*; May 26, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

REGIONAL

9. Belarus, Lukoil Form Joint Oil Venture

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko met Monday with head of Russia's Lukoil to boost cooperation on several energy projects.

Lukashenko held meetings with Lukoil chief Vagit Alekperov to discuss increasing cooperation and implementing several projects this January. The two parties have agreed to plan a joint venture for the production of additives to engine oils, Belarusian television reported.

Lukoil has become one of the biggest buyers of Belarusian mechanical engineering products. Alekperov said that new frontiers were being shaped and that both Belarus and the Russian oil company have many common interests.

Source: *United Press International*; May 31, 2006; <http://www.upi.com/>

10. Belarus-Russia Common Currency Good for Belarus Economy-IMF

A common currency of Belarus and Russia will make the Belarussian economy more efficient, chief of the IMF mission in Belarus and deputy division chief of the IMF European department Balazs Horvath said in Minsk on Tuesday.

A currency union with Russia may help the Belarussian economy a lot, he said. However, the sides should first meet certain conditions, including harmonization of their macro-economic parameters, he said. It is also necessary to level taxes and create equal conditions for business. Belarussian and Russian businessmen should enjoy equal access to each other's economies, Horvath said.

It is also necessary to sign a bilateral agreement on the Belarussian currency exchange rate to the Russian ruble, he said.

Horvath thinks that Belarus still has to meet these targets.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; May 30, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

11. Gazprom Takes Belarus for Europe

Gas will cost it \$200

After raising gas prices for Ukraine, Lithuania and Moldova, Gazprom has suggested that Belarus pay \$200 per 1000 cubic meters in 2007, instead of its current \$46.68. Belarus was planning on paying \$51.80. Analysts say that the hefty price is a consequence of the Kremlin's failure in its attempt to take control of the gas transport network in the CIS. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko forgot his promise to sell Gazprom Beltransgaz assets.

A Gazprom source told *Kommersant* that Alexey Miller, Belarusian Energy Minister Alexander Ozerets and Beltransgaz head Dmitry Kazakov will meet on June 1 to negotiate the transition to the new price. That source also said that the Belarusians were given the new price in May. Gazprom had previously stated a price of \$147 for Belarus. The higher price came in response to a confidential letter from Belarusian Prime Minister Sergey Sidorenko to Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov that stated that the higher price would destroy the foundations of the Union State. Gazprom cut off gas to Belarus for a day in February 2004 during a disagreement.

Gazprom is still willing to buy Beltransgaz, as it has been for the last ten years. There has been a disagreement over the trunk line's worth, however, with Gazprom assessing it at \$1 billion and

Lukashenko insisting that it is worth \$5 billion. Control of the gas transport network is especially important for Russia as Europe prepares to liberalize its natural gas market. Its efforts to take control of gas transport in Ukraine and Moldova ended in failure, however. The sharp price rises may lead to reduced consumption in the CIS and the rechannelling of gas to the European Union and even to China, at higher prices. At the same time, Russia is building up trust in the Central Asian countries where it buys gas by paying more for its gas as well.

Gazprom is not officially commenting on the topic, but a source said that the negotiations on June 1 are unlikely to yield any results.

Source: Kommersant; May 30, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

12. Belarusian Leader Meets Speakers of EurAsEC Parliaments

Belarus, chairing the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), intends to make any effort to stir up integration within the organization, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko said on Friday at the meeting with chiefs of EurAsEC parliaments.

Heads of parliaments of EurAsEC gathered to Minks on Friday, 26 May, to attend EurAsEC Interparliamentary Assembly (IPA).

Belarusian head said the seventh plenary session of IPA in Minks will promote further development of legal base of the community.

Lukashenko said the EurAsEC is only multisided integration union in post-Soviet area, where leaders of member states "want to solve something". He said a lot should be done despite achieved success in integration processes.

President focused attention to difficult task connected with accession of EurAsEC member states to World Trade Organisation, ensuring free movement of goods, including free transit of electricity, oil and oil products within the community.

Drawing attention to processes within CIS, Lukashenko said two unions within CIS are really working – EurAsEC and Union of Belarus and Russia. But it is early to say that EurAsEC can go further than Union of Belarus and Russia, he said. Belarusian head said experience of Belarusian and Russian Union could be used in integration processes within the union.

"We did not expect ourselves that EurAsEC became the most effective and only body, on which can rely and keep integration kernel in post-Soviet area and any other country can join," Lukashenko said.

Lukashenko said the aim of the EurAsEC is effective use of potential of member states to improve life level of people. He said the member states created necessary prerequisites for this and talked about economic achievements of member-states.

Belarusian head said decisions of the EurAsEC leaders should be obligatory to all countries of the community and the sides should synchronize interstate procedures on international agreement.

President Lukashenko said the Interparliamentary Assembly of EurAsEC should control implementation of agreements within the community and initiate introduction of signed international agreements to ratification. He said effective mechanism on realization and control of agreements and decisions should be created within the community.

Lukashenko said the work on unification of legal basis on tariff-customs, fuel-energy, trade, agriculture and migration spheres should be started.

In January 2006 summit of heads of states in Saint Petersburg Lukashenko as chairman of Interstate Council of EurAsEC proposed to increase efficiency of cooperation within these structures. EurAsEC member states supported initiative of Belarusian leader.

Programme, prepared by Belarusian side, includes measures on completion of formation of legal base of Customs Union in 2006, realization of transport potential of the community, filling integration process with economic and social programmes and projects and others.

In particular, it was proposed to develop in 2006/07 and implement next three-four years an interstate programmes "Transit", "Micro electronics EurAsEC 21 century", "Biotechnology to economy", "Health of EurAsEC people", programmes on creation of joint centers on sale and service of machinery and other equipment of EurAsEC states.

The issue on adoption of concept on international activity of EurAsEC and agreement on cooperation in social welfare were also put on agenda.

The Belarusian side expects more fruitful work from EurAsEC Interparliamentary Assembly, taking into account, determined tasks.

Boris Gryzlov, chairman of the State Duma of federal Council of Russia and Chairman of EurAsEC Interparliamentary Assembly, noted importance of adoption of agreement on status of legislative in EurAsEC, which should be ratified not only by parliaments of Russia and Kyrgyz Republic.

Speaker of Duma said it is necessary to go further without waiting of ratification of this document by all member-states.

Gryzlov said the creation of Customs Union is importance issue. This issue could be solved fast without waiting accession of member states to WTO. He said early member states wanted to join WTO and after that create customs union within the community. He added that there is no need to wait and it is time to start formation of Customs Union within the existing agreements.

Belarusian leader supported this position. He said EurAsEC member states should unite economically within the community and afterwards accession to WTO will be much easier. He said the EurAsEC member states can develop effectively without accession to WTO in this stage.

Russian speaker said Uzbekistan's accession to EurAsEC is significant and importance. He said Uzbekistan's accession to the community to increase number of population of the community to 200 million.

Gryzlov noted importance of creation of single customs, transport and energy area. He criticized that many cargo transporters bypass territory of the community. He said the problem on non-existence of single tariffs.

Russian official informed Belarusian leader that the EurAsEC states are actively discussing opportunity on unification of education system. He thanked Belarus for creation of all necessary conditions for productive work of EurAsEC Interparliamentary Assembly in Minsk.

Gryzlov and parliamentarians of EurAsEC member states congratulated Lukashenko with recent victory in presidential elections.

Nurtay Abykaev, chairman of Senate of Kazakh parliament, said support of people give new impulse to achieve targets. He said the EurAsEC should be together so world respect member states. Abykaev said the Kazakh side will contribute to development of the community.

Representative of Tajikistan Ubaydullo Dovlatov said the EurAsEC member states can solve any problems together.

Marat Juraev, representative of Kyrgyz Republic, said the Belarus achieved progress in economy and its industrial complex. He praised internal policy of the country.

Ilgizar Sobirov, chairman of Uzbek Senate, said fast production trends in Belarus and good mood of people.

Lukashenko called parliamentarians to support development of the community and said it is necessary to create Customs Union. He said the Customs Union will ensure dynamics.

Source: UzReport.Com; May 29, 2006; <http://news.uzreport.com/mir.cgi?lan=e&id=11523>

13. Ukraine's NATO Accession Not To Weigh on Cooperation with Belarus

Ukraine's accession to NATO will not affect this country's military-technical cooperation with Belarus, Belarusian Defense Minister Colonel General Leonid Maltsev told a press conference in Brest following a meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Anatoly Gritsenko commenting on whether Ukrainian-Belarusian cooperation in this sphere might narrow after Ukraine joins the North Atlantic Alliance. "We see it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage: Ukraine can be of help in our work with NATO," he said.

Source: RosBusinessConsulting; May 26, 2006; <http://www.rbcnews.com/>

INTERNATIONAL

14. International Trade Unions Urge EU To Suspend Trade Benefits For Belarus

Leaders of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and the World Confederation of Labor (WCL) have sent a letter to European Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson, urging the European Commission to suspend Belarus's trade benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) because of "the serious nature of the Lukashenka regime's trade union rights violations," *Belapan* reported on May 30.

A special committee in Brussels is expected to make a recommendation on May 31 for the European Commission as to whether Belarus should be barred from GSP benefits. The GSP extends duty-free treatment to certain products that are imported from designated developing countries. Belarus's exports to the EU in 2005 amounted to some \$3.9 billion.

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

15. In Five Years Number of Foreign Students Studying in Belarus To Be Increased Ten Times

In five years the number of foreign students studying in Belarus is planned to be increased ten times, deputy prime minister of Belarus Alexander Kosinets stated at an enlarged meeting of the permanent commission for state construction, local government and regulations of the Chamber of Representatives of Belarus. The meeting was held to discuss a draft action plan of the government of the Republic of Belarus for 2006-2010.

According to the vice-premier, at present about 2,5 thousand foreign students study in Belarus. The state gets about USD five million of revenues from the export of educational services. "We should create competitive education on the world market and ensure export of educational services", Alexander Kosinets said. Training of one foreign student ensures material security for education of three Belarusian students and enhances the material support to educational establishments.

In this conjunction the main thing is to ensure training of highly qualified personnel in industry, agriculture and other production fields. The government intends to bring closer education and

production. "We should prepare a powerful reserve of personnel", the vice-premier underlined. "This action plan includes a range of events and we are working to develop marketing, management and commodity distraction network. And we will not be able to do it without highly qualified specialists".

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; May 30, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

16. Belarus Backs Iran in Nuclear Standoff

Belarussian Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov in Putrajaya, Malaysia on Tuesday reiterated his country's stance on Iran's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes within the framework of International Atomic Energy Agency rules and regulations and the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Martynov met with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on the sidelines of a meeting of the Coordination Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which is currently holding a foreign ministerial meeting in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

During the meeting, the Iranian and Belarussian ministers discussed avenues for bolstering bilateral cooperation particularly in trade and other economic fields.

The two sides called for activation of the Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Commission, noting an earlier call of their presidents in this regard.

Mottaki praised Belarus for backing up Iran's peaceful nuclear activities.

He also extended an invitation to the Belarussian foreign minister to pay a visit to Iran which Martynov accepted.

The two-day meeting of foreign ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) kicked off at the International Convention Center in Putrajaya with an inaugural speech by Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The meeting ends Tuesday evening with the issuance of a statement.

Source: Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Republic News Agency; May 30, 2006; <http://www.irna.ir/en/news/view/menu-236/0605304297122411.htm>

17. EU Problems With Belarus Should Be Settled by Dialogue - Lavrov

Problems of European organisations - the European Union and Council of Europe with Belarus "should be settled only through a dialogue and not by way of isolation," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a session of the Bureau and Standing Commission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in the Russian capital on Monday.

According to the minister, "The Council of Europe is expanding its borders, however, Belarus so far is not participating in this process." "We hope it is possible to solve this problem," said Lavrov.

The Russian foreign minister recalled that the Belarussian parliament speaker could not attend the PACE session in Strasbourg due to the EU's politics of isolation towards Belarus.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 29, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

18. Belarus To Ban Canadian, U.S. Flights From Its Airspace

Weeks after Ottawa refused to let a plane from Belarus stop for refuelling, the former Soviet state plans to ban Canadian and U.S. flights over its territory.

On April 20, a plane carrying Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky was on its way to Cuba for an official visit when both Canada and the United States refused to let it land and refuel. Ottawa cited human rights concerns.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry announced the ban on Thursday, after it was proposed this week by President Alexander Lukashenko.

"Belarus strictly observes symmetry in adopting any sort of retaliatory measures," a foreign ministry spokesman, Andrei Popov, told a news conference.

"These restrictions will apply only to two countries: the United States and Canada."

Popov said it hasn't been decided whether to ban all Canadian and American flights or only flights carrying official delegations.

It's not clear how many flights would be affected by the move. Canada and the United States pay roughly \$200,000 to Belarus each year for the use of its airspace, west of Russia and north of Ukraine.

Foreign Affairs has not commented on the decision.

Stopover refused because of crackdowns

Ottawa refused to let the plane land on April 20 because of concerns about "the current regime's commitment to democratization and human rights," a foreign affairs spokeswoman, Pamela Greenwell, said at the time.

Lukashenko has come under increased international criticism following his controversial election win in March and subsequent crackdown on protests against the vote, which critics claim was rigged.

Hundreds of demonstrators have been arrested since Lukashenko's victory. The European Union has called on governments around the world to refuse to recognize the vote.

In early April, a Canadian journalist spent 15 days in prison while covering an anti-Lukashenko demonstration.

"In light of these concerns, we were not prepared to facilitate the entry of senior-level representatives of the Belarusian regime onto Canadian soil," Greenwell told CBC News Online.

Greenwell said she didn't know what alternate arrangements the plane made in order to land safely. The Cuban newspaper Granma said the plane had been carrying Sidorsky and a number of other government officials.

Source: CBC News; May 25, 2006;

<http://www.cbc.ca/storyview/MSN/world/national/2006/05/25/belarus-canada.html>

BUSINESS

19. Belarus Government Says High Pace of Economic Growth Persists

The Belarussian government states that high rates of the country's economic growth continue.

"Fourteen out of the 16 parameters of the social and economic development have been met for January- April of this year, except for the import of goods and services and energy intensity of GDP," Andrei Kobyakov, the deputy prime minister, told parliament on Wednesday.

He said the inflation rate from the beginning of the year made up 2.5 percent, with the average monthly inflation being 0.6-0.7 percent. "Inflation is kept within the forecast limit," he said.

Meanwhile Kobayakov pointed to the need to enhance competitiveness of Belarussian commodities.

Source: Itar-Tass; May 31, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

20. Complex Administrative Procedures Hold Back the Small Business Sector in Belarus

The business climate in Belarus has not improved over the past year, according to nearly 80 percent of entrepreneurs polled for the International Finance Corporation's annual business environment survey in the country.

The IFC survey also reveals that tax administration and permit issuance were significant barriers for Belarus's business community in 2005. Issuance of a permit became significantly more difficult, with both time and cost doubling in comparison with figures from 2004. In Belarus, it now takes just under four months and costs \$345 to obtain a permit. The typical small or medium enterprise has to obtain a total of six permits to operate in Belarus.

The unwieldy tax system also exacts a high cost on entrepreneurs: private firms in Belarus spent about \$15 million paying accountants for overtime work in 2005. This figure is ten times higher than the amount the government allocates to promotion of private enterprise development.

There were, in contrast, some positive developments in inspections and licensing in 2005. The average amount of time needed to obtain a license dropped from 45 to 27 working days. Meanwhile, the frequency of inspections also decreased: the average smaller business hosted seven separate inspections in 2005, down from ten the previous year.

Registration of a business in Belarus continues to be a long and expensive administrative procedure, averaging about two calendar months and costing \$736. To address this situation, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a decree in April that will significantly simplify entry procedures in Belarus by introducing a one-stop shop for registration procedures and cutting the duration and cost of the registration process. IFC estimates that the decree will result in \$25 million of additional sales for the country's small business sector and in turn generate increased tax revenue for the government and bring additional investment into the economy.

Ivan Ivanov, project manager of IFC's Business Enabling Environment Project in Belarus, said, "If the objective of doubling the contribution of small and medium businesses to GDP is to be met, the government should take more decisive steps to reform small business regulation. The government is currently tackling this issue, with the area of business registration being an excellent example. However, the pace of reform leaves much to be desired."

IFC's SME survey, conducted in January-February 2006, polled 1,100 company directors and 200 individual entrepreneurs. Independent experts and state officials were also interviewed. The survey sought to define the administrative burden borne by smaller firms and develop recommendations for improving the business environment.

The International Finance Corporation is the private sector arm of the World Bank Group and is headquartered in Washington, D.C. IFC coordinates its activities with the other institutions of the World Bank Group but is legally and financially independent. Its 178 member countries provide its share capital and collectively determine its policies. The mission of IFC is to promote sustainable private sector investment in developing and transition countries, helping to reduce poverty and improve people's lives. IFC finances private sector investments in the developing world, mobilizes capital in the international financial markets, helps clients improve social and environmental sustainability, and provides technical assistance and advice to governments and businesses. From its founding in 1956 through FY05, IFC has committed more than \$49 billion of its own funds and arranged \$24 billion in syndications for 3,319 companies in 140 developing countries.

IFC's worldwide committed portfolio as of FY05 was \$19.3 billion for its own account and \$5.3 billion held for participants in loan syndications. For more information, visit www.ifc.org.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) is a government agency that reports to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden. Sida is responsible for most contributions of Sweden to international development work with the goal to improve the standard of living of poor people and eradicate poverty.

Source: The International Finance Corporation: May 30, 2006; <http://www.ifc.org/>

21. 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

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: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; May 24, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

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.
