

January 12 – January 18, 2006

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Edited by Maria Kabalina and Olga Tarasov  
International League for Human Rights

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## **DOMESTIC**

### **1. CEC Sets Forth Rules For Foreign Election Observers at Presidential Election in Belarus**

Central election commission has set forth the regulations of activity of foreign observers at the forthcoming presidential election in Belarus.

CEC secretary Nikolay Lozovik has reported that the term of their accreditation will run since the accreditation day and expire on the day of publication of the results of the presidential election. Foreign observers will be financed by means of their parties or by their own means.

The CEC resolution enables observers to present at all-level meetings focusing on the issue of the presidential election, meet with candidates for the presidency and with their spokesmen as well as with members of all political and public associations of Belarus. They are also entitled to observe all stages of the election campaign including drawing of the results.

In accordance with today's CEC document, after the voting day a foreign observer may publicize his opinion of the election legislation of the Republic of Belarus, the presidential elections in the country, hold press conferences and speak in mass media.

Nikolai Lozovik has stressed that foreign observers cannot use their status to engage in the activity not related with the monitoring over the preparation and conduct of the presidential elections. In case a foreign observer violates the national legislation or generally recognized principles and norms of the international law the central election commission can cancel his accreditation.

*Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; January 18, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>*

### **2. Analyst Compares Presidential Hopeful Haydukevich To Zhirinovskiy**

RFE/RL's Belarus Service recently spoke with Valery Karbalevich, an analyst with the Strategy political analysis center in Minsk, about Syarhey Haydukevich's presidential chances.

RFE/RL: Is Haydukevich is serious political figure?

Valery Karbalevich: He is a tricky political figure. He tries to present himself as a politician, who is in between [President Alyaksandr] Lukashenka and the opposition. He has no stable position -- sometimes he supports Lukashenka, sometimes he presents himself as an opposition figure.... Of course he has no chances, he has no serious political structures, but he plays this role rather successfully. He plays the role of political clown. Though Haydukevich insists he is very popular, the numbers speak for themselves. He got some 3 percent during the presidential election in September 2001 but has taken this 3 percent from the country's opposition.

RFE/RL: Haydukevich seems to use the same political language as the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Is there anything more that the party name that unites the two politicians?

Karbalevich: Haydukevich deliberately uses elements, styles, of rude language characteristic to Zhirinovskiy. By the way, Haydukevich's party was formed as a branch of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. Later, the two politicians split but many common elements remain.

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

### **3. Presidential Hopeful Haydukevich Says He Will Become President**

Syarhey Haydukevich, leader of the Belarusian Liberal Democratic Party, is registered as a candidate in the country's presidential vote in May. On 10 January, Haydukevich answered

questions posed by the listeners of RFE/RL's Belarus Service. The following are selected excerpts.

RFE/RL: Why do you want to become a president of Belarus?

Syarhey Haydukevich: I will become president. Everything is heading towards this outcome. The future belongs to us.

RFE/RL: What are your chances of being elected? Which of the candidates you would support yourself?

Haydukevich: I am moving forward all the time, my rating is growing, the image of the party is also getting better. Millions of people know me. I have enormous support. There the so-called "candidate of the united opposition [Alyaksandr Milinkevich] has no chance. I want him to think about that.

RFE/RL: What is your election slogan?

Haydukevich: Long live new Belarus; long live unity.

RFE/RL: What is your opinion about the EU after the bloc's enlargement?

Haydukevich: I support the EU and its enlargement. I think it is important for us to seek better relations with the EU.

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

#### **4. Belarus Approves 2006-2010 State Program On Mitigating Chernobyl Consequences**

The government of Belarus has approved the state program on mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe for 2006-2010. The decision is contained in resolution #29 of January 11, 2006 of the Council of Ministers.

As the Council of Ministers told BelTA, the state program and financing resources should be accurately defined in the annual undertakings on mitigating the Chernobyl consequences.

A similar program was implemented in 2001-2005 featuring large-scale projects to minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. At the same time incommensurability of the effect of the catastrophe and the opportunities of the country to mitigate it communicated a necessity to continue advancing in this direction. The idea is to provide socio-economic and radiation-ecological rehabilitation of the contaminated territories. The new program is a logic continuation of the government policy to minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

The success of the previous program made it possible to map out the targets for the upcoming five-year period. There is a need to set up conditions to do business without any radiation restrictions and keep on scaling down health risks.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; January 13, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

#### **5. Lukashenko Vows To Prevent Destabilization**

The March 19 presidential elections will pass peacefully and Belarus will not undergo any Orange Revolution, President Alexander Lukashenko said during a Thursday working trip to the Vitebsk region.

"The authorities will not allow any destabilization to occur, be sure of that," he said.

"The elections will go well and no violations will take place. We do not have to falsify elections, so we will do our best to prevent any accusations being made. We have registered everyone, including those who had no right to be registered. We want everyone wishing to take part in the elections to take part," Lukashenko said.

"We will not have to retain power by force, as we enjoy the confidence of the people," he said.

*Source: Interfax; January 12, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>*

## **REGIONAL**

### **6. LUKoil Should Expand Its Operations in Belarus - Lukashenko**

Belarus is ready to support projects involving LUKoil, Russia's leading independent crude producer, aimed at reconstructing and modernizing Belarusian companies, the country's president said Wednesday.

"LUKoil's presence in Belarus should not be limited to its network of filling stations," Alexander Lukashenko said at a meeting with businessmen.

"I am grateful that you have quickly proposed areas of cooperation," he said. "It is important to avoid red tape and bureaucracy."

The Belarusian leader, who the U.S. State Department has called the "last dictator in Europe", said the country was also interested in increasing crude supplies from LUKoil for the country's oil refineries, he said.

"I think this would be in the interests of both the company, and the country."

The president said LUKoil was a respectable companies working transparently and honestly on the world market. "This is important," he said, "because there are many [companies] keen to work in Belarus. But we are trying to secure our economy, companies, and workforce against not entirely trustworthy partners. We are happy with LUKoil's work in this sense."

*Source: Olesya Luchaninova, RIA Novosti, January 18, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

### **7. Russia-Belarus Union State Ups 2006 Draft Budget**

The Russia-Belarus Union State increased its 2006 draft budget by 17% year-on-year to more than 3 billion Russian rubles (about \$106 million), a senior Belarusian parliament member said Wednesday.

Vladimir Konoplyov, the chairman of the lower house of Belarus' parliament, said Russia and Belarus were consolidating their union and, therefore, increasing the union's budget.

He said the draft budget provided for the financing of about 40 union programs. According to Konoplyov, the union budget will allocate 30% to industry and energy projects, about 12% to anti-terrorist efforts and the strengthening of the union's borders and more than 12% to social policy and cultural events.

Konoplyov said experts from the two countries were currently studying amendments to the draft constitution of the union state prepared by Russia in October 2005 and that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Russia-Belarus Union State would discuss the preparation of the draft Constitution Act at its 29th session Friday.

Russia and Belarus announced their plans to establish a union state several years ago, but have failed so far to edge closer to their integration largely due to disagreements over the division of powers.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said he was against turning Belarus into another province of Russia. The plans of introducing the Russian ruble in the republic as a single currency have also not been realized.

*Source: RIA Novosti, January 18, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

#### **8. Belarus Frees Russians Detained Over Minsk Graffiti**

Belarus has freed nine Russian nationals detained two days ago for allegedly painting graffiti on a movie theater in Minsk.

Police spokesman Oleg Slepchenko said today the nine Russians were released for lack of evidence.

The nine were taken into custody on 14 January outside a movie theater in downtown Minsk with freshly painted graffiti on its walls. Police said some of the graffiti contained swear words, and some reports said it denounced the authoritarian government of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. // Interfax, ITAR-TASS

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

#### **9. We Shall Never Betray Russia – Belarus's Lukashenko**

Belarus shall move steadily along the road of closer relations with Russia, President Alexander Lukashenko said on Thursday.

"We shall never betray Russia," he said at a ceremony in Dokshitsy, the Vitebsk Region, marking the beginning of Russian gas supplies to that city.

"The Russians are our friends and they have the highest respect for the Belarusians," Lukashenko said. "The issue of the day today is not about what association with Russia should be created – a confederation or federation."

"There must be a country easy for its people to live in," he said. "In the Constitution of the union state we shall outline an alliance we wish to bring into being. But before that we shall hold a referendum."

Lukashenko said many problems worrying the two countries' peoples have been lifted, including those regarding social insurance and pensions.

At the same time he pointed out nobody in Belarus was saying, "We wish to become a member of Russia."

"We have no intention of becoming part of any state," Lukashenko said.

The Belarusian people have created a sovereign state that functions normally.

"We can normally coexist with Russia on the principles of relations of alliance," he said.

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

#### **10. Belarus Must Be Prepared For Gradual Rise in Gas Prices - Lukashenko**

Russian natural gas should be used rationally, bearing in mind the projected rise of gas prices, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on Thursday.

"If we economize with gas, we will survive everything, including an increase in gas prices. There will be no cheap gas, so we should be economical with what we purchase. We will buy as much gas as our people need, but we will have to pay for it," he said.

Belarus "will try to agree a gradual rise in gas prices with Russia, in order to prevent the Ukrainian situation," Lukashenko said.

It is also necessary to "make a more intensive and efficient transfer to the use of local fuel. We are searching for ways of doing this and we seem to have found some in Finland and Sweden," he said.

Lukashenko confirmed the plan "to increase the share of local fuel in the total fuel consumption to 25% in five years. Energy independence means sovereignty," he said.

*Source: Interfax; January 12, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>*

### **11. Presidential Candidates Discuss Gas Supplies, Prices**

On 8 January, RFE/RL's Belarus Service held a roundtable discussion on Russian gas supplies with five presidential candidates. The participants in the discussion were: Syarhey Haydukevich, leader of the Belarusian Liberal Democratic Party; Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada); united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich; Zyanon Paznyak, the exiled leader of the Conservative Christian Party; and former General Valery Fralou. The following is selected excerpts of the transcript.

RFE/RL: For you as presidential candidates, what lessons do you take from the Russian gas row with Ukraine?

Zyanon Paznyak: We have possibilities [to affect Russia] that Ukrainians lack. Namely those which are provided by interdependency between Belarus and Russia. I have in mind [Russian] military bases, which exist in Belarus practically free of charge and their price should be included into the price [Belarus pays] for gas. However, Belarus is losing this game. Very cheap and practically free-of-charge transit should also be included into the price and there are some other possibilities, which Ukraine lacks. However, Ukraine has one very important resource -- it has a national government and, largely because of this powerful and critical resource, it was easy for Ukrainians to stand up to this insolent and silly [Russian] blackmail and to win. We do not have such a resource and our first aim is to acquire such a resource. The Belarusian problem is that we have a pro-Moscow government and this is the biggest curse for the Belarusian people.

Syarhey Haydukevich: I don't think that [the gas crisis] threatens Belarus in the upcoming decade. My opinion is based on facts. I often visit Russia and have serious meetings there. I can make one point: Belarus will not find itself in the Ukrainian situation because Belarusian interests are based on other grounds than Ukraine's. It is completely not objective to say, as Ukrainians do, that Russia wants to increase the gas price because Ukraine seeks to join NATO. I do not think that Ukraine did the right thing -- you should not forget that you cannot choose neighbors and should be friends with your neighbors. In this sense [Ukrainian President] Viktor Yushchenko has disappointed me.

Alyaksandr Kazulin: We can make several conclusions and I think that all of them are evident. Anything that comes for free has strings attached. We should understand that nothing is ever for free. Secondly, to deal with any crisis we need to have a steady legal base. Agreements, which can be interpreted in different ways, earlier or later, end in misunderstandings and provoke conflicts as a result. That's what we have seen. If Yushchenko fulfilled the obligations taken by the former government the price would have been different from the one we have now. I should say that I do not fully support this quick rise to \$230, but Russia offered \$160 to Ukraine and Ukraine refused -- and did it in a bad way. You should not behave this way with a great country.

Alyaksandr Milinkevich: I think that Russia has demonstrated once more that it seeks obedience from its neighbors, first of all from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Concerning gas prices, the main lesson for us is that we should be ready for the new prices, especially bearing in mind that in the near future Russia will join the World Trade Organization and will also have to increase gas prices for us. Unfortunately, the Belarusian economy is not ready for that.

Valery Fralou: I do not think that the Belarusian authorities are eager to learn lessons from the crisis or learn any economic lessons as their only purpose is to stick to power. Concerning economists, they have learned their lesson long ago -- our economy, which is totally dependent on cheap energy, is not able to adapt to free market conditions. It only makes the situation, which exists in Belarus, worse. The economy is being ignored by politicians who only have one aim -- staying in power.

RFE/RL: As potential candidates, what gas prices would you agree with Russia?

Kazulin: I can guarantee that the price for gas would be as low as possible and would not increase as rapidly as in Ukraine. Of course, we all understand that, as world gas prices go up, prices in Russia will also increase. Of course they will go up in Belarus, too. It is clear that we should plan our politics according to world tendencies. But it is clear that the gas price in Belarus will not be so high....

Milinkevich: I was not sitting at the negotiating table and it is very difficult for me to talk about the prices. But of course the prices should not be around \$200. The prices should go up gradually. Gas prices will reach world levels in a year or a year and a half, but moving to the world prices now will mean a collapse for the Belarusian economy. The new Belarusian authorities will be better partners for Russia. I think that the new Belarusian authorities will show Russia that it is easier to deal with them, that it is possible to talk openly about everything and sign new agreements. But in no way will we cancel old agreements. We will honor them until they expire. We will fulfill those obligations, which Belarus is currently taking, though sometimes they are unfavorable.

Fralou: I think it will be very difficult to build new economic relations with Russia keeping in mind that we depend from Russia very much. Now I am not ready to give the price, which we might be able to agree during the negotiations. Probably we should find some other means, which would allow the Belarusian economy to stay aloof with prices going up considerably.

Paznyak: The price of gas, which is agreed between Minsk and Moscow, is advantageous for Russia. Otherwise, this price wouldn't exist. It is useful for them not only politically but also economically. By the way, the world price is neither \$160 [per 1,000 cubic meters] nor \$230 dollars -- these figures reflect the price of blackmail. If the French and Germans are getting the gas for \$160, in our case, one should remember the 200 kilometers distance [to transport the gas to Belarus.] The price of the gas for Belarus, bearing in mind the proximity, shouldn't be higher than \$80. The price of the Russian military bases in Belarus should also affect the price Belarus pays for gas.

Haydukevich: Every candidate should explain to the people, to pensioners, what prices we will have to pay for the Russian natural resources. The Belarusian economy depends on that. I have no doubt that the gas prices will not go up if I am elected the president of Belarus. For me personally it is clear. Gas prices do not belong to the sphere of economics but to politics. If for instance Syarhey Haydukevich would declare that he wants to be a strong ally of the EU; if he and his entourage would start making declarations that irritate the neighbors, I have no doubt that the attitude towards me will be completely market based. In this sense I completely support [Russian President Vladimir] Putin. I completely support President Putin in the row with Ukraine.

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

## **12. Belarus Will Be Not Part of Russia - President Lukashenko**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko ruled out Thursday the possibility that his country might become part the Russian Federation.

"We cannot become a part of Russia," Lukashenko said in the run up to presidential elections in March. "We created our own country and despite all the fluctuations in the world we will exist as a sovereign state."

He said Belarus and Russia could live as a single whole on the principles of the Union State, an idea that initially emerged in 1997 to foster political and economic integration, in particular by standardizing taxes and tariffs, but has largely remained on paper. Belarus was to have adopted the Russian ruble as a single currency for the state in 2005, but the move has been postponed.

However, Lukashenko, who is running for a third presidential term but is often accused of by the West being an authoritarian, said that both countries should move within the union toward integration on economic and social issues.

*Source: RIA Novosti, January 12, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

## **13. Lukashenko Opposes Civilized Divorce**

Not invited to Astana for inauguration of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko had enough time yesterday to focus on the Minsk role in CIS integration. In interpretation of Lukashenko, Belarus is one of the leaders and spearheads of integration, which is opposed by "our adversaries" – West Europe and the United States.

"The practice shows the most rational approach is to maintain and develop the so-called broad CIS of 12 states, simultaneously strengthening regional integration unions," Lukashenko said as if forgetting his previous attacks on existing associations of states. On Wednesday, however, Lukashenko suddenly realized that EurAsEC and Collective Security Treaty Organization are manifesting the most dynamic advance on the post-Soviet territory. "Belarus that, along with Russia and Kazakhstan, is a member of both organizations is among integration leaders. And it is absolutely objective. Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus are the countries of best economic fundamentals," Belarus president explained.

"Recently, a lot of critical statements have been made about CIS," Lukashenko pointed out. "They said it was a procedure of "civilized divorce" [the phrase of Vladimir Putin], rather than consolidation of states, we will never reach the level of European Union." According to optimistic Lukashenko, the reality is that "we are not getting weaker and that we are strong" and that is why Western Europe and the United States have been slapping EurAsEC, Collective Security Treaty Organization and uniform economic area that is being created and now and CIS. "What is the conclusion to reach? The only correct one is by integrating we are moving in the right direction," Lukashenko was sure.

*Source: Kommersant; January 12. 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>*

## **14. Lavrov: Belarus Also to Receive Gas at Market Prices**

Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister forecasts the transition to market prices for Russian gas supply to all countries, including Belarus. "Everyone, including Belarus, will switch to market prices, because the transition to such prices and transparency are 'in everybody's interests'," Lavrov noted in his interview to the Echo Moskvy radio station. "Gas prices will be corrected and vary depending on the proximity of the country and the amount of gas to be transferred".

The Minister noted that during the gas conflict with Ukraine, Gazprom was aiming to obtain the precise goal of selling Russian gas to all countries at market prices.

*[Text translated by the Editors]*

*Source: Prime-Tass; January 12, 2006; <http://www.prime-tass.ru/>*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **15. Antos Tsialezhnikau Takes the Lead of “Union for Democracy Support in Belarus”**

In Warsaw convention of Polish organization “Union for Democracy Support in Belarus” was held. It is one of the most active organizations engaged in Belarusian affairs. Belarusian student from Warsaw Antos Tsialezhnikau was elected the head of the organization.

In the several years of its existence “Union for Democracy Support in Belarus” has become a well-known organization in Poland. Its members have organized dozens of concerts of Belarusian musicians, pickets, demonstrations and meetings in support of democratic forces in Belarus.

The new head of the organization, Antos Tsialezhnikau, plans to expand the activities of the organization in the run-up to the presidential elections.

“Our work is to become more active, though one cannot say that we were not active before. Leadership is not the most important thing for us, and the main thing is a team in which we work,” Antos Tsialezhnikau. // Radio "Liberty"

*Source: ZUBR; January 17, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>*

### **16. Concern Over Human Rights in Belarus**

Swedish Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds says she is deeply concerned by political oppression and deteriorating human rights in Belarus.

Freivalds says there will be monthly rallies in downtown Stockholm leading up to the March presidential elections in Belarus.

On Monday representatives from all parties in the Swedish parliament took part in the first of the demonstrations.

*Source: Sveriges Radio; January 17, 2006; <http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/International/nyhetssidor/artikel.asp?ProgramID=2054&Nyheter=&artikel=775298>*

### **17. Polish Protestors Call On EU To Monitor Belarus Election**

Around 100 protesters held a demonstration in the Polish capital, Warsaw, today calling for the EU to send observers to monitor the 19 March presidential election in Belarus.

An organizer said the aim was to convince all of the EU organizations to mobilize to observe the election. Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz said earlier this month Poland will send independent observers to Belarus.

The West has accused Belarus leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka of seeking to extend his time in office through a series of rigged elections and referendums and of trying to stamp out domestic opposition.

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

### **18. Belarus Human Rights Leader Wins Sakharov Prize**

16 January 2006 -- A leader of a human rights group in Belarus has been named the winner of a Norwegian human rights prize, the Sakharov Freedom Prize.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee praised Alyaksandr Byalyatski, chairman of the Human Rights Center Vyasna, for the legal, political, and practical support that he has offered to victims of the authoritarian government led by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

The prize is named after Andrei Sakharov, the former Soviet dissident and human rights campaigner who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975.

Meanwhile, a presidential challenger to Lukashenka, Sergei Skrebets, has gone on trial in Minsk, charged with financial crimes in a case that he insists was fabricated as a means of removing him from the presidential race.

Skrebets, a former parliament deputy, is running as an independent in the election, which is scheduled for 19 March.

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

### **19. Belarus' Leader Says U.S. Hindering WTO Bid**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko accused the United States and Europe of hindering his country's efforts to join the World Trade Organization, the authoritarian leader's latest criticism of the West.

After a meeting with Amina C. Mohamed, who chairs the WTO's governing general council, Lukashenko said talks with the trade-rules group were proceeding "not without difficulties."

"You know why and you know with which countries: I want to stress again that because of a policy of double standards, it is very hard to talk with western Europe and the United States," he said, adding that Belarus is "counting on support from the WTO leadership."

Mohamed stressed that it is difficult to join the WTO and that for some countries, negotiations on entrance to the organization have taken up to 15 years. Under WTO rules, each member has the right to seek its own trade deal with a candidate before approving that candidate's membership.

Lukashenko, who is running for a third term as president in March, has made himself an outcast in the West, ruling his nation of 10 million with an iron hand, relentlessly stifling dissent and critical media outlets. Top U.S. officials call him Europe's last dictator.

*Source: Business Week Online; January 13, 2006; <http://www.businessweek.com/>*

### **20. Two Czech Senators Fail To Get Belarusian Visas**

Czech senators Karel Schwarzenberg (Freedom Union, US-DEU) and Jaromir Stetina (Greens) have failed to receive visas to Belarus where they planned to meet representatives of the political opposition, they write in a statement sent to CTK.

Schwarzenberg and Stetina said they are not surprised that they were not granted the visas by the tough regime of president Alexander Lukashenko.

A representative of the Belarusian Embassy said she will not comment on the issue.

The visit, scheduled for March, was approved by the Senate's organisational committee.

The two senators planned to meet opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandar Milinkevich, who is to challenge Lukashenko in the elections held this year, as well as representatives of

Belarusian NGOs and press. They also wanted to discuss the membership of the Czech Republic in NATO and the European Union and were interested in the procedure of issuing Czech visas to Belarusians.

*Source: České Noviny; January 13, 2006;  
[http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index\\_view.php?id=167147](http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index_view.php?id=167147)*

### **21. WTO General Council Chairwoman Amina Mohamed Begins Visit to Belarus**

The WTO General Council Chairwoman Amina Mohamed is to begin her visit to Minsk on Thursday to discuss Belarus' bid to join the World Trade Organization (WTO).

She will meet Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky and Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov, visit the plants of the Belbiopharm concern and tour several cultural and sport facilities and historical places.

A Belarusian Foreign Ministry representative told Itar-Tass that Amina Mohamed would be informed about Belarus' position at the final stage of accession to the WTO and the socio-economic situation in the country.

Belarus is likely to raise the question of increasing political pressure at the WTO accession talks. "The WTO accession process is blurred and vague, more elements of political pressure have appeared in it," Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Mikhnevich told a news conference recently.

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

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **22. Political Prisoner Skrabets Tells About Tortures in Prison**

On January 18 a court session in the Supreme Court in the case of Syarhei Skrabets, former deputy and the head of oppositional group Respublika, continued. As the human rights center Viasna informs, in the beginning of the court session Syarhei Skrabets stated that he feels unwell, as he has renal pain. The political prisoner is on hunger strike for more than a week. Skrabets explained that while transporting him from remand prison to the court, first he was kept in a cold underground room, and then in a cold room he was stripped to the naked for a total body search. Then he was handcuffed and in a cold car taken to the court. The political prisoner also told that in the remand prison, where he is kept, people are subjected to torture. Unknown people in black masks beat the detained persons under investigation.

Syarhe Skrabets told that he does not trust doctors from the remand prison, who after his complaint checked his health for form's sake.

Judge v Rakitski took recess. During the break an ambulance was called in. An emergency team held a medical check of Syarhei Skrabets and told that his state of health is satisfactory.

There was a strange episode when the judge read the conclusion of doctors in the court. It was written there that Syarhei Skrabets does not have fever, and he said that temperature was not taken by the doctors.

Judge dismissed a motion of Syarhei Skrabets about a more thorough medical checkup.

Then Skrabets read a statement in which he informed that in 2006 a coup d'etat is being prepared with the aim to take the power. And this seizure of power is headed by Alyaksandr Lukashenka. While being in public service, he abused his position and changed the Constitution

of Belarus for that. Skrabets also accused Lukashenka of creation a “slate club”, tax evasion, and embezzlement of profits.

Prosecutor Osipchyk interrupted Skrabets and addressed the court with a protest against the essence of the statement of the accused. The court sustained the objection of the prosecutor and prohibited Syarhei Skrabets to read the statement, and also had not attached the request to the case.

After that Skrabets told that in the remand prison (SIZO) where he is kept, tortures are taking place. Unknown people in black masks beat the detained persons under investigation. In particular, in the corridor of the remand prison his cell-mate, colonel Vosipau, had been beaten.

Judge recommended Skrabets to address the prosecutor on supervision, and from this time forth to speak “within the bounds of the court trial”.

The former deputy is charged with violation of several articles of the criminal Code. Belarusian human rights watchdogs are sure that the real reason for isolation of S. Skrabets is his active citizenship.

*[Text revised by the Editors]*

Source: *Charter97*; January 18, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

### **23. Zubr Activists Face Up to 5 Years In Prison**

Activists of the resistance movement Zubr, Alyksandr Kazakou and Zmitser Zubro are presented an accusation on charges related Article 363 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (Resistance to police workers or other persons protecting public order). The investigator of the prosecutor’s office of the Tsentralny district of Minsk, Lugin, informed Zubro and Kazakou with a statement about recognition them as suspects. This article envisages a sentence as restriction of freedom for a term of up to five years, or imprisonment for up to five years. Zubro and Kazakou believe the charges against them are illegal and unfounded.

Alyksandr Kazakou and Zmitser Zubro were detained on December 28 in the night for making graffiti. The young guys have spent more than two days in a remand prison, and after that a criminal action was initiated.

Source: *ZUBR*; January 17, 2005; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

### **24. Belarus Repression**

Independent publications in Belarus have virtually disappeared as a result of government suppression. In 2005, at least fifteen independent newspapers were denied printing or distribution services by state-owned monopolies.

The latest victim is the independent newspaper *Solidarnost*. Belsayuzdruk, which has monopoly on newspaper distribution through kiosks, announced that its contract with *Solidarnost* would not be renewed. The Belarusian state postal service also said it would cease distributing the paper and the state monopoly subscription service refused to allow people to subscribe to this and other independent newspapers. As a result, the paper was forced to stop distribution.

*Solidarnost* was founded in 1991 as an independent voice for a group of trade unions. Published in Russian and Belarusian, it gradually became a moderate opposition newspaper critical of President Alexander Lukashenko. Lately, its sales had been on the rise, with more than ninety-five percent of its print run being sold.

This is not the first time the government's treatment of *Solidarnost* has raised troubling questions. In October 2004, a staff writer, Veronika Cherkasova, was stabbed to death in her home in Minsk,

the capital. The authorities' handling of the investigation has drawn considerable criticism. Before an investigation, the prosecutor ruled out any possibility that her murder was linked to her work as a journalist. She had been investigating arms sales that Belarus had made to Iraq while Saddam Hussein was in power. In December, authorities announced they had closed Cherkasova's case because they could not determine who had murdered her.

With virtually no independent press left, it will be difficult for the opposition in Belarus to get their message out to the voters before the March presidential election. Still, a large group of pro-democracy supporters led by Alexander Milinkevich, are optimistic in light of peaceful revolutions in the neighboring countries of Georgia and Ukraine.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says elections in Belarus should not be sham elections and the international community ought to be ready to help Belarus carry out a free and fair election in 2006. The United States joins others in the international community in calling on Belarusian authorities to allow free and fair elections, as well as a free press to report on them.

*Source: Voice of America; January 13, 2006; <http://www.voanews.com/>*

## **25. Supporters of Opposition Presidential Candidates Face Harassment, Abuse**

Presidential candidates in Belarus have two weeks left to collect 100,000 voter signatures needed to officially add their names to the ballot. Three of the seven candidates have already crossed the threshold, including united opposition figure Alyaksandr Milinkevich. But signature collectors for Milinkevich and other opposition candidates say they have been routinely stopped and harassed by the authorities, and have sometimes had their signatures seized.

Belarus goes to the polls to elect a president on 19 March, but this is an election with a difference.

As many as seven candidates will be vying for the popular vote -- but no one doubts the outcome, not even the opposition leaders still struggling to gather enough support to join the contest.

Alyaksandr Milinkevich is the leader of the united opposition and widely seen as the strongest of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's challengers.

Yet even he concedes that the task of ousting Lukashenka is beyond his powers -- at least this time around: "It's impossible to beat Lukashenka in the elections, because we haven't had real elections in Belarus in a long time. We will use the elections -- which are our constitutional right -- to conduct a broad political campaign. We hope to win this campaign."

### **Tough Odds**

Lukashenka, who is seeking an unprecedented third term, claims to have already collected nearly 1 million signatures. Milinkevich and a third candidate, Alyaksandr Kazulin, by contrast, have just passed the 100,000-signature threshold.

But Milinkevich is fairly sanguine about the odds.

What do you expect, he says, when the opposition is denied access to the media, cut off from foreign support and constantly harassed by the authorities. Among ordinary Belarusian voters, the profile of opposition leaders, his own included, is extremely low.

The answer, he believes, is to take the message direct to the people-- by knocking on their doors.

### **Police Harassment**

But opposition activists find themselves harassed by the police at almost every turn. Nina Kavalyova, a cultural instructor at a hostel for workers in Vitsebsk, is one of those. "Some [people in our district] collected signatures for Lukashenka, while I collected for Milinkevich. I got 124 signatures in Pershamayski District alone," Kavalyova says. "Then yesterday I was summoned by the manager [of my hostel] who told me: 'Go to the human resources department. You need to tender your resignation.'"

Valyantsina Kudlatskaya from Homel was collecting signatures for both Milinkevich and Kazulin, when she and her colleagues were subjected to intense police scrutiny.

"Our nomination group was turned upside down by police last week. Police officers even called at our homes and workplaces," Kudlatskaya says. "They had orders to check everything. There were phone calls from the KGB. Now some members of the nomination group are going to stop collecting signatures because they were told [to choose between] collecting signatures or [keeping their] jobs."

Kazulin's presidential nomination group sent formal protest letters to the Central Election Commission and the Prosecutor-General's Office alleging obstruction of the collection of ballot-access signatures.

The group says its members were not admitted to a student dormitory of Yanka Kupala State University in Hrodna, while officials in Slutsk, Minsk Oblast, refused to register the gathered voter signatures.

The group also alleged that some of its members were pressured to quit the signature collection for Kazulin, and that unauthorized individuals in Vitsebsk and Minsk collected signatures for Lukashenka at workplaces during work hours, which is forbidden by the Electoral Code. Sometimes the approach is less direct, as Alyaksey Lapitski, who is collecting signatures for Milinkevich, reported from Zhodzina: "What's happening is that they're misinforming people in the factories on a mass scale -- they are saying that if you sign for Lukashenka, you have no right to put your signature down for any other candidate. This is wrong. We have asked the electoral commission to take appropriate action."

The intimidation is not always so blatant and clumsy. In December, one of the few surviving opposition newspapers, *Salidarnasts*, was forced to close down after Belposhta, the state postal service, decided to remove it and two other opposition papers from its distribution service.

That followed the decision just three months earlier by Belsayuzdruk, the state monopoly that runs the nationwide network of kiosks and newsstands, to terminate its contract for the sale of *Narodnaya Volya*, another opposition paper still clinging on to existence.

A 27,000-copy print run of *Narodnaya Volya* was stopped on 9 January on its way from a printing plant in the Russian city of Smolensk and offloaded at the district police department in Vitsebsk Oblast.

And in an attempt to neutralize any attempt by the opposition to mobilize popular support through public rallies -- as in Ukraine's Orange Revolution last year -- parliament introduced legislation in December that makes it a crime both to discredit the name of Belarus abroad -- a catch-all offence open to wide interpretation -- and to train people to take part in street demonstrations.

President Lukashenka is taking no chances.

Source: Robert Parsons, RFE/RL; January 13, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

## **26. The Number of Registered Newspapers Decreased by 36 During Last Year**

According to BAJ, there are about 30 social and political independent editions in Belarus (out of more than 1000 registered editions). More than 20 of them are distributed in the regions. The approximate circulation of these editions is 250 thousand issues. (Cf.: the circulation of the *Sovetskaja Byelorussia* daily is more than 500 thousand issues).

The Ministry of Information refused to give BAJ any information about the number of warnings and cancellations of registration of mass media in 2006 without a letter of inquiry. This information will not be published or announced.

Nevertheless, the statistics published in the site of the Ministry of Information [www.mininform.gov.by](http://www.mininform.gov.by) helps to see some special tendencies. The most evident changes concern printed editions. For example, on January 1, 2006 there were 1187 periodicals in Belarus (including 748 newspapers). Still, on November 1, 2005 there were 1257 registered editions (including 770 newspapers). On January 1, 2005 there were 784 registered newspapers in Belarus (1221 printed editions). Thus, during the last 2 months of 2005 the number of printed editions in Belarus decreased by 70 (the number of newspapers decreased by 22). The number of registered newspapers decreased by 36 during last year.

But editions that managed to get their registration are now experiencing difficulties while trying to access their readers. At the end of 2005 post offices and Soyuzpechat refused to cooperate with some mass media. According to BAJ, Belposhta refused to include 16 editions in its subscription catalogue, 19 newspapers are not sold in Soyuzpechat news stalls.

As a result, some newspapers were left destitute and had to stop being printed: *Salidarnast* and *Oska-express* (Slutsk) are among them. Many editions may face financial difficulties soon. For example, *Vitebskij Kerjer* that was excluded from the republican subscription catalogue, but managed to sign a contract with Belposhta's Vitebsk affiliate, has been officially informed that the enterprise refused to deliver the newspaper to subscribers.

Many editions are trying to resist this pressure. For example, such editions as *Narodnaja Vola* and *Nasha Niva* informed their readers in detail about all the ways to achieve the newspaper. (Both editions were excluded from subscription catalogue 2006 by Belposhta).

According to *Nasha Niva*, the number of their subscribers increased by 320 people this year. 47 readers offered their help in distributing the edition. In its first (double) issue *Narodnaja Vola* informed that many readers decided to pay upfront money for subscription and that they received not a thousand or 2 thousand receipts, and not even 5 or 7 thousand receipts but more. Still it remains difficult to deliver the editions to subscribers, especially if editions are printed abroad. *Narodnaja Vola* whose print-run has been already detained twice this year, is a vivid example.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; January 13, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

## **27. Why Were Catholic Priests Expelled?**

Fr Robert Krzywicki, one of two Catholic priests expelled from Belarus at the end of 2005, has told Forum 18 News Service that he thinks his expulsion was decided by the central Religious Affairs Committee in the capital Minsk. When Forum 18 questioned Vladimir Lameko, vice-chairman of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs, he stated that he did not know of the expulsion. Fr Robert has not been given a reason for the decision. He was parish priest of the Descent of the Holy Spirit parish in Borisov. The local District Executive Committee referred Forum 18's enquiries to the Ideology Department of the town's Municipal Executive Committee, who were unavailable for comment. Asked by Forum 18 whether his expulsion was connected with political activity, Fr Robert said that he had criticised state ideology. "In my sermons I spoke about Christ and the authorities saw it as being political." Fr Jozef Petushko of Borisov's second

Catholic parish told Forum 18 that Fr Robert "wasn't guilty of anything." The Catholic Church faces tight restrictions on foreign priests invited to work in Belarus.

The vice-chairman of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs has told Forum 18 News Service that he is unaware of the recent expulsion of Polish Catholic priest Fr Robert Krzywicki. Speaking from Belarus' capital Minsk on 12 January, Vladimir Lameko sounded surprised, asked for details and expressed doubt that the action could be politically motivated. He pointed out that since the Committee's new chairman, former Culture Minister Leonid Gulyako, was appointed only on 29 December 2005 and his own brief focuses upon nationalities issues, Forum 18 would do better turning to the Committee's legal expert, Aleksandr Kalinov.

Contacted the same day, however, Aleksandr Kalinov requested that any enquiry be sent by fax, which Forum 18 duly sent.

Prior to leaving Belarus on 27 December, Fr Robert Krzywicki told Forum 18 that, although he learnt of the decision to expel him from the deputy head of the Religious Affairs Committee for Minsk region, he believes it to have been taken by the central Religious Affairs Committee in the capital. There was no answer at the office of the Minsk regional Religious Affairs Committee when Forum 18 rang on 12 January 2006.

Until his departure, Fr Robert Krzywicki headed the Descent of the Holy Spirit Roman Catholic parish in Borisov [Barysaw], a small town approximately 60 km (37 miles) north-east of Minsk. Asked why Fr Robert had had to leave Borisov, Forum 18 was advised by a spokesman at Borisov District Executive Committee to contact the main specialist on religious organisations within the Ideology Department of Borisov Municipal Executive Committee, Aleksandr Myadeltsov, but he was unavailable for comment on 13 January.

Another Catholic priest was expelled along with Fr Robert, who Forum 18 has learnt also worked in the Minsk-Mogilev [Minsk-Mahilyow] Diocese, in a village parish near Minsk, and had served in Belarus for the past decade. Neither he nor the diocese is contesting the decision. The Minsk-Mogilev Diocese declined to comment to Forum 18 on 22 December 2005 about the expulsions, while the Apostolic Nunciature in Minsk said it had no information.

Speaking to Forum 18 on a poor line from Poland on 11 January 2006, Fr Robert Krzywicki said that he did not know if there had been any state reaction to the local petition for his return to Borisov and surmised that his parishioners were still collecting signatures. Asked whether his expulsion was connected with political activity, Fr Robert said that he had criticised state ideology. "In my sermons I spoke about Christ and the authorities saw it as being political." He also noted that there were political activists among his parishioners.

For 15 years the priest at the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Borisov's second Catholic parish, Fr Jozef Petushko told Forum 18 on 11 January that Fr Robert "wasn't guilty of anything." Also a Polish citizen, Fr Jozef said that, as a guest in Belarus, he had not taken part in organising the petition in Fr Robert's defence, signed it or "ever said anything political." Nevertheless, he continued, local officials had since criticised him because his parishioners were among the signatories: "How could I allow it? As if I were responsible."

Fr Jozef also told Forum 18 that the replacement priest for Fr Robert, Fr Zbigniew Grigorciewicz, who is likewise from Poland, arrived in Borisov on 28 December and is now operating "with full rights – except that he has no involvement in either politics or elections."

Of the 250 or so Catholic priests in Belarus, more than half are foreign citizens. The Catholic Church faces tight restrictions on priests it invites, being subject to an annual quota and unable to transfer priests from one parish to another without their religious visa being cancelled and reissued.

According to Fr Jozef Petushko, Fr Robert was assigned to a group of village parishes at the start of his five-year spell in Belarus and was transferred with great difficulty to Borisov, where the Descent of the Holy Spirit parish is currently building a new church. "We are still building everything up," he told Forum 18, "the only Catholic church in Borisov – the church where I now serve – was closed between 1935 and 1990." Suggesting that some progress is being made, however, Fr Jozef estimated that there are now over 100 Belarusian Catholic priests. According to the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs, 428 Roman Catholic parishes have been re-registered under the 2002 religion law.

In November 2002 a Catholic layman and opposition activist from Borisov, Igor Zakrevsky, was detained for picketing in Minsk against the adoption of the 2002 religion law, which breaks Belarus' international human rights commitments. Zakrevsky has since left the country.

*Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18: January 13, 2005; <http://www.forum18.org>*

## **28. Fighting the Blues and More: Belarusians To Wear Jeans In Silent Protest** Grass Root Groups Vying for Change in Belarus' Authoritarian Regime

Grass root organizations in the former Soviet republic of Belarus want their countrymen to wear denim as a silent protest to fight for democracy on the 16th of the month. This is the fourth month that various human rights groups have staged an event on the same date to rally people to demand change in the autocratic state, where KGB-like surveillance rules and the media has no rights.

Although other Russian enclaves have been able to ride the wave of democracy with their own "colored revolution," experts say Belarus' 'denim revolution' is different in nature and has many more obstacles to overcome.

"These are voices of opposition in a place where such a thing has been extinguished," said Sarah Mendelson, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "In a very authoritarian regime, any kind of protest is a success."

She commends these grass root organizations for taking a stand and showing that they exist, explaining that protesting is considered a criminal activity and any writing that is critical of the regime can land a person in jail for three years.

"Come out in the streets of your cities and towns in jeans! Let's show that we are many," announces the statement released by the youth group Zubr (Bison, Belarus' state animal.)  
Why Jeans?

Zubr's denim choice came as a fluke. During one of their rallies, policement seized all of their flags. One of the student group leaders made a flag by tying his jean shirt to a stick, thus becoming their symbol of struggle.

It's also a loaded symbol.

"Jeans evoke the West," said Celeste Wallander, Director of the Russia and Eurasia program at CSIS. "Denim is an assertive statement that they [Belarusians] are not isolated." Along with wearing denim, Zubr and the human rights group, Chapter 97, are calling for Belarusians to light a candle for fifteen minutes at 8 pm on the 16th of every month. Wallander sees these silent protests as a first step to challenge the repressive regime.

But democracy in Belarus still remains far off in the distance, experts agree.

"People should not think change in Belarus will be like the one in Ukraine," said Wallander referring to the "Orange Revolution" which led to the overthrow of a Russian-backed dictatorship after fraudulent elections.

It won't be like the 'Velvet revolution' in Czechoslovakia or the 'Rose revolution' in Georgia either. "Certainly there's a kind of contagion but there's nothing pre-destined about it," said Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Other popular resistance movements appeared elsewhere like in Azerbaijan and never went anywhere, he said.

Analysts all point to the government's stronghold over the country. The president Alexander Lukashenko has been in power since 1995 and over the years has steadily consolidated his power, restricting freedom of speech, the press and political opposition. Just last year Lukashenko staged a referendum to eliminate presidential term limits, which passed by a 77 percent margin despite reports of massive fraud by international observers.

In addition, although the country, sandwiched between Russia and Poland, has been independent since 1991, it has retained closer political and economic ties to Russia than any other former Soviet republic. "Russia keeps Belarus within the family," said Kupchan. "This is a country that continues to look to Moscow for guidance and remains under the shadow of Russian power."

He also believes that in Ukraine certain sections of the government had sided with the opposition and journalists jumped on the bandwagon, which hasn't happened in Belarus.  
Fearing a Violent Crackdown

Not knowing how widespread or high-level the support for the popular movement worries Mendelson the most. In her view it makes it difficult to gauge Belarus' opposition to the regime.

"There are many more obstacles to overcome because the security services are quite opaque and we don't know what degree the government stands behind the president," she said.

And as the upcoming presidential elections loom two months away, Mendelson fears a brutal crackdown.

"The real problem is that this will get very violent," she said, adding that Europe and the U.S. haven't been as supportive as they were with other transitional regimes received.

She believes that collaborating on a clear message could have an effect and possibly lead to free and fair elections but warns that until March, many things can happen.

*Source: Charlotte Sector, ABC News; January 13, 2005; <http://abcnews.go.com/>*

## **29. Belarus Prevents Opposition Leader From Leaving**

12 January 2006 (RFE/RL) -- Belarusian opposition leader Anatol Lyabedzka today claimed that authorities have barred him from leaving the country.

Lyabedzka told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that migration officers had refused to stamp his new passport, thus effectively preventing him from leaving Belarus.

He said authorities gave no reason to explain their decision.

Soviet-era exit visas remain mandatory under Belarusian laws. Although Belarus' Constitutional Court has declared them illegal, their abolition has been put on hold at the request of the Interior Ministry.

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

### **30. Narodnaja Vola is Won Back**

On the night of January 12 the whole print-run of *Narodnaja Vola* was brought to Minsk. Harry Pahaniajla (a legal expert from Belarusian Helsinki Committee) who accompanied the edition's editor-in-chief Josef Siaredzich in his trip to Dubrouna on January 11, informed BAJ about it.

According to Harry Pahaniajla, they provided additional documents that proved the legality of printing and distribution of the newspaper.

Yesterday BelaPAN announced that employees of Vitsiebsk custom house explained the detention of the print-run by the fact that the number of the invoice was in handwriting. Moreover, the police demanded to prove the right of the transporter to render transport services.

Josef Siaredzich claimed that all the necessary documents were in order and that somebody was just throwing them sand in the wheels. On January 10 he called upon Aleksandr Lukashenka to stop persecution of the newspaper.

Let us remind you that on January 9 the whole print-run of a new double issue of *Narodnaja Vola* was detained near the Belarusian-Russian Border. 27 thousand copies of the issue printed in Smolensk Publishing House were detained by customs officers in Rudnya. The print-run of *Narodnaja Vola* was delivered to Dubrovenski District Police Office. No explanation of the accident was given.

The detention of a special New Year double issue, printed in 27 thousand copies, took place on January 3 on the basis of the fact that one of the necessary documents was drawn up in an incorrect way. The print-run was kept in Dubrovenski District Police Office till January 4. It was given back only after Smolensk Publishing House managed to provide the necessary documents.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; January 12, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

## **BUSINESS**

### **31. MDC Ups 2006 Investment by 30%**

Belarusian cellular operator Mobile Digital Communications (MDC) has upped its investment for 2006 by 30% to USD100 million, the majority of which will be spent on the installation of new technologies and buying new equipment. The cellco, which markets its GSM services under the Velcom banner, reported a 65.2% increase in its subscriber base in 2005 to 1.9 million users, thanks in part to a 15% increase in network coverage.

MDC reportedly installed 430 base stations in 2005, compared with 172 base stations installed in 2004, and is keen to maintain the momentum in the face of competition from the country's GSM operators, Belarusian-Russian joint venture Mobile TeleSystems (MTS Belarus) and state-owned Belarus Telecommunications Network (BeST), and the country's mobile pioneer Belarusian-British joint venture BelCel, which operates NMT450i and IMT-MC-450 networks.

*Source: Telegeography.Com; January 17, 2006;  
[http://www.telegeography.com/cu/article.php?article\\_id=10700&email=html](http://www.telegeography.com/cu/article.php?article_id=10700&email=html)*

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

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

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