

February 16 - February 23, 2006

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DOMESTIC

1. State Security Committee of Belarus Launches Website

The State Security Committee (KGB) of the Republic of Belarus has launched a website, head of the KGB information and public relations center Valeriy Nadochaev told BelTA.

The principal idea of the website is to provide unbiased information about the activities of the state security bodies of Belarus. In particular, the Internet site shows the structure and functions of the KGB, legal documents connected with it, the latest news regarding the activity of the special agencies, mass media reports and contact information – telephone numbers of Minsk and oblast departments.

According to Valeriy Nadochaev, the creation of the website proves the KGB is ready for a constructive dialogue and openness which is naturally limited by the specific nature of the security agency. The KGB spokesman has stressed that the state security bodies are interested in cooperation with citizens to ensure national security, stability and order. He has added that the website will be improving taking into consideration visitors' wishes and recommendations. The first step has been made. The information support of the site is provided by the members of the information and public relations center, Valeriy Nadochev informed.

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

2. How the Belarus Election Will Be Won

The Central Election Commission in Belarus announced on February 17 that four candidates have been officially registered for the presidential election of March 19. These include: President Alexander Lukashenka; leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Syarhey Haidukevich; and two opposition candidates, Alexander Kazulin of the Social Democratic Party and the leader of the united opposition, Alexander Milinkevich. The CEC announced that Lukashenka had received 1,903,069 valid signatures (this is almost one-third of the entire electorate), whereas over 180,000 had signed the lists legally for Milinkevich (his original total was over 226,000), and slightly lower totals were recorded for the other two candidates (*Itar-Tass*, February 17).

The Lukashenka team is essentially the government of Belarus team, and it has adopted a clear strategy that might be summarized in four points: project an image of stability and contentment among the citizens of the republic; maintain tight control over all aspects of the campaign; deploy harsh repressions against opposition structures; and provide almost blanket coverage of the presidential campaign on television, radio, and the official media. It is anticipated that, despite a much more watchful attitude on the part of the EU than hitherto, and some ambivalence toward the Lukashenka regime on the part of Putin's Russia, these factors will be enough to ensure a third term in office for the incumbent president.

Thus on February 18, the main government newspaper cited an opinion poll conducted by the Institute of Sociology, Belarusian Academy of Sciences, using more than 9,000 respondents from all parts of the country, and under the direction of Institute director, Hryhory Evelkin. The poll's results purported to show a notable rise in positive feelings about the political situation in Belarus from 29.02% in 2002, to 55.45% at the end of 2005. Not less than 76% of citizens expressed their readiness to support Lukashenka in the presidential campaign, with figures of around 3-4% for opposition candidates. Evelkin declared that the results indicated strong support for state policies (*SB Belarus Segodnya*, February 18).

The popularity of the president and his regime aside, the election results are virtually preordained by the composition of the CEC and the territorial commissions. Uladzimir Labkovich, who heads the legal office of the Milinkevich campaign, remarked, "The gravest violations" of the legal code are to be found in these commissions. The United Civic Party, for example, nominated around 800 people for the election commissions, many of which had experience as state officials, in the parliament, and organs of local government. However, only one member made it through to

acceptance. In the Zavadsky district of Minsk, representatives of the UCP were informed that the commissions had been formed prior to the submission of names (Charter 97, February 15; *Narodnaya Volya*, February 13-14).

To ensure that the opposition candidates cannot mount a sustained campaign, the regime has clamped down on their activity since the first days of the campaign. Two parties have reached the stage of "second warning" from the Ministry of Justice, meaning that they are on the verge of official dissolution. The Party of Communists of Belarus received such a warning in early February after its leader, Syarhey Kalyakin, appealed to leaders of local governments to ensure that opposition candidates were included in the territorial commissions. The Party of the Belarusian Popular Front received a similar warning shortly afterward because of alleged invalid addresses of party headquarters in the Hrodna and Homel regions. Officially a party cannot be dissolved during an election campaign, but such warnings serve to curtail freedom of activity (*Narodnaya Volya*, February 3-4 and 6-7).

Kalyakin has a dual role as the leader of the headquarters of the Milinkevich campaign. In that capacity he criticized strongly the enforced gathering of signatures for the Lukashenka campaign in the organs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the office of the State Prosecutor. In return he was accused of libel and of "denigrating the president of Belarus" and ordered to report to the Prosecutor's office. On February 11, the chairman of the executive committee of Democratic Forces, Anatol Lyabedzka, was detained in Salihorsk while local militia checked his identity (*Belarusy i Rynok*, February 13).

The EU has taken particular interest in the election, and the Milinkevich campaign in particular. This year Milinkevich has already met the French foreign minister, the Polish president, the German chancellor, and the head of the European Commission, and he has been given a rostrum in the Polish Sejm, the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He has also, together with Kazulin, visited Russia, though not at an official level (*Narodnaya Volya*, February 10-11). Russian President Vladimir Putin, in turn, has declared that his meetings with the Belarusian president can be explained by his support for the fraternal Belarusian people (*Belarusian Television*, January 31).

However, the Lukashenka regime is aware of the limits to foreign intervention in the campaign. Its militia were not restrained from brutally repressing a demonstration by Milinkevich supporters in October Square on February 16 ("Jeans Day") when dozens were arrested and beaten, including one of the organizers, Irina Khalip (*Charter 97*, February 16). Thus to date, the "happy and stable environment" remains under the close and watchful control of the Lukashenka government.

Source: David Marples, The Jamestown Foundation; February 22, 2006; <http://jamestown.org/>

3. President of Belarus Approves State Program on Fight Against Crime for 2006-2010

On February 21 by his decree #103 the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko approved the state program on the fight against crime for 2006-2010, BelTA was informed in the Belarusian leader's press service.

The program was designed to coordinate the activities of state bodies, public associations and other organizations to combat dangerous crime wave tendencies, to ensure law and order and personal and property security of citizens.

The document describes a set of measures to counteract different forms of criminal activities, to improve the legal base of the fight against crime and to enhance the effectiveness of the work of the law enforcement bodies of the republic.

The state program is based on the criminal situation analysis and the crime problem forecast in Belarus, the results of scientific studies, modern practice and track record in implementing the actions envisaged by the state program on intensifying the fight against crime for 2004-2005.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; February 22, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

4. Belarus's Milinkevich Prefers Fair Election To Street Revolution

Belarus's main opposition hopeful, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, says he does not want to see a Ukrainian- or Georgian-style revolution after presidential elections next month.

Fielding questions from voters on Belarusian television, Milinkevich said the only thing his coalition of opposition groups is demanding is that the election be honest and carried out according to the law.

He said that "voters would only go onto the streets to defend their honor," as citizens did in Georgia in 2003 and in Ukraine in 2004.

Correspondents say Milinkevich faces long odds in unseating incumbent Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the 19 March vote.

Lukashenka is running for a third term in office. The United States and European Union say they doubt the election will be free or fair.

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

5. Ministry of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus Creates Broadband Internet Access Backbone

At the press conference organized within the framework of Internet Days on February 20, 2006, Nikolai Strukov, deputy minister of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus announced that the Ministry is planning to create, broadband Internet access backbone. According to the Ministry's data, the broadband Internet access market in Belarus totals 500 thousand clients.

The broadband backbone is the first stage of Belarusian Informatization programme. The next stage is content issue. Now, the government bodies' websites are to be transferred to Beltelecom servers.

The third stage, according to Mr. Strukov is networks security.

The three components - customers, content and security are the milestones for the Informatization infrastructure.

Source: Mikhail Doroshevich, E-Belarus.ORG; February 21, 2006; www.e-belarus.org

6. Belarus Names Election Hopefuls

The election commission in Belarus has released the list of candidates who will contest the presidency in March.

They include Alexander Milinkevich, the leading figure opposing pro-Moscow President Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power for nearly 12 years.

Opinion polls suggest Mr. Lukashenko, who has dominated election coverage on state TV, will win a third term.

The United States has described the former Soviet republic as the "last dictatorship in Europe".

Ceremony

The list of four candidates - including Social Democratic Party leader Alexander Kozulin and Liberal Democratic Party leader Sergei Gaidukevich - was announced in a solemn registration ceremony on Friday.

It was the first and last time the candidates would meet during the campaign, as there will be no joint debates.

Candidates will be restricted to two half-hour pre-recorded speeches each on national television.

Appearing on television for even 30 minutes is a huge success for the three opposition candidates, says the BBC's Kyril Sukhotski in Minsk, as monitoring data over the past two weeks shows that they received considerably less television coverage than Mr. Lukashenko.

Accusations

Since coming to power in 1994, Mr. Lukashenko has increasingly been accused by opponents of running an authoritarian state.

The US and the European Union have accused him of cracking down on rival and silencing the media.

The opposition has been campaigning on a platform promoting the ideas of freedom, justice and truth.

On Thursday, dozens of protesters were arrested during anti-government protests in the Belarus capital, Minsk.

The demonstrations, involving about 200 people, were held to remember opposition figures who have disappeared or been imprisoned during Mr. Lukashenko's rule.

Source: BBC News; February 17, 2006; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe>

7. Belarusian Opposition Has No Chance of Winning Election Scheduled for March 19

Belarusian opposition has no chance of winning the presidential election scheduled for March 19, officials and Minsk and political analysts in Russia say.

They warn there is no use in expecting sensations and Belarus is the least likely country to be swept by a Ukrainian-style "orange revolution."

It appears, though, that Belarusian oppositionists realize the truth of the situation too, in spite of the massive support they receive from the West.

President Alexander Lukashenko is confident the nation will elect him for a third term of office. He received the right to run for presidency in all the subsequent elections at a referendum in 2004.

Another three candidates will be on the ballots March 19. Sergei Gaidukevich, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus, supports the authorities, while the united representative of oppositionist forces, Alexander Milinkevich, and the leader of the Social-Democratic Party of Belarus, Alexander Kozulin, stand in opposition to Lukashenko.

The President himself said a few days ago: "I'll get my 76% to 78% votes without a problem."

"An announcement will come upon results of the March 19 voting that Lukashenko has received 75 or even more percent votes," Milinkevich agreed, adding however that two-thirds Belarusians are looking for a change.

In the meantime, polls taken by the Institute of Sociology of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences indicate that about 76% voters are ready to vote for Lukashenko, indeed.

"And if you take the number of those who'll really come to the polls, that percentage may even be greater," says Georgy Yevelkin, the Sociology Institute director.

He indicates the same polls suggest that opposition parties enjoy support of 3% to 4% of the population.

"Lukashenko has no contenders, in fact," Alexander Fadeyev, the deputy director of Russia's CIS Research Institute said in an interview with *Itar-Tass*. He believes that all of the opposition candidates can hope for a maximum of 10% of votes together.

Milinkich complained at a news conference in Moscow that Belarusian oppositionists have to exist in total isolation, as only three independent newspapers have survived in Belarus.

When a reporter asked him what the Belarusians feared most of all, he said: "The politicians are afraid of getting to jail or to vanish altogether, while the rank-and-file people are afraid of losing their jobs."

"The oppositionists have recognized from the very start that Lukashenko will be re-elected," the Moscow-based *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* writes. "And yet, in a hope for aid promised by the West, they try to explain events by saying he is misusing administrative resources."

Milinkich urged the supporters of democracy to go to Minsk after the voting. "We're not appealing for an orange revolution, but already now there're grounds for doubts as to how democratic that election will be," Milinkich said.

"The election will be uninteresting, because Lukashenko has to run for re-election and all of his contenders use this as an opportunity to take part in the political process so that people will remember them years after that," says Sergei Mikheyev, a man in charge of CIS department at the Center for Political Technologies.

"There isn't even slim hope for an orange revolution there as opposition leaders themselves say they won't resort to pressure by force, while Lukashenko can suppress any unrest," Mikheyev said.

"Most likely, the authorities will use all the administrative resources available to them and the actions of protest will hardly have a mass scale," *Vremya Novostei* daily quotes Belarusian opinion researcher Oleg Manayev as saying.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta underlines the opinion of some experts that many channels of external influence on Belarus have been blocked. "The Belarusian Foreign Ministry and KGB qualify any political interference as a breach of sovereignty ensuing tough retaliation," it writes.

For instance, Milinkich's meetings with leading Western politicians were considered by the Foreign Ministry as meddling with internal affairs of the republic.

Belarusian Internet agency *Glavred* the Europeans have started tackling the Belarusian problem with unparalleled vigor in the past few weeks.

"Milinkich was given the green light for an impressive tour of political centers of the Old Continent," *Glavred* said. After the New Year festivities, Milinkich met with French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, Polish President Lech Kaczynski, Germany's Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso and other European leaders. He also took the floor in Polish parliament, the European parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

“The main thing is that the Europeans have seen clear democratic prospects in Belarus and now they’re ready to help us as actively as never before,” Glavred quoted Milinkevich as saying.

“Europe sees no good in a confrontation with Moscow, and when we say the Belarusian democratic movement has nothing anti-Russian in it we pour balm on their hearts,” he said.

“Lukashenko blocks any Western attempts to interfere, while neither Europeans nor Americans have yet had enough audacity for a serious political blockade,” Sergei Mikheyev says. “All the more so that the first hangover of orange revolutions has vanished, especially after events in Kyrgyzstan.”

Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, who is also Russia’s Defense Minister, mentioned the Kremlin’s stance on Belarus in a recent interview with Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

When a correspondent asked him why Russia supported ‘Europe’s last dictator,’ Ivanov said Belarus is a sovereign state and Russia does not interfere in its affairs.

The power to decide on who will be President in Minsk belongs to the people Belarus, he said, adding the country does not have a dictatorship and it must be able to live the way chosen by its people, not by Germany, Russia or the U.S., Ivanov said.

Belarus is showing some achievements in fighting with crime and it has curbed drugs trafficking, too, he said.

The Belarusians do not have corruption and the standards of living there are much higher than in many neighboring countries, which call themselves free.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was asked January 31 he supported Lukashenko, he answered that his meetings with the Belarusian President were meant to support the Belarusian people, and not “the regime.”

“It’s totally wrong to claim we may support one or another politician regardless of the price,” he said. “We abide by a balanced foreign policy line, aimed at developing relations with a state.”

Source: Itar-Tass; February 20, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

8. Month Of Election Campaigning Set To Begin

On 17 February Belarus will officially announce the names of people registered to run for election in the 19 March presidential poll. Of the four likely candidates, two are opposition figures -- Alyaksandr Kazulin and Alyaksandr Milinkevich. Some opposition supporters might have hoped the two would join forces, putting forth a single candidate who could provide more of a threat to incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. But Kozulin and Milinkevich are keeping their campaigns separate.

Candidates for the March poll will be announced Friday, marking the start of a cramped campaign period that will last just one month.

Analysts expect four candidates will compete for the highest post in the country. They include incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Liberal Democratic Party leader Syarhey Haydukevich, and Social Democratic leader Alyaksandr Kazulin.

Empty Streets?

It may be a quiet campaign. Kiril Poznyak, the editor in chief of *Belaruskye Novosti*, says the candidates will have to ask permission to organize rallies.

"They will have the right to communicate legally with the population. They will be allowed to meet voters," Poznyak said. "However, restrictions are already being imposed. Authorities in Minsk have announced that in order to meet voters, they will need to get permission. However, the election law says no such permission is required."

The opposition considers this move unconstitutional.

A poll taken by the Gallup/Baltic Surveys in the first half of January found that nationwide, nearly 55 percent of Belarusians intend to vote for Lukashenka. For Milinkevich, that figure is just 17 percent.

Advantages Of Office

Poznyak says Lukashenka enjoys many advantages as an incumbent president.

"State-owned media supports President Lukashenka and is critical of opposition candidates (CTK file photo)"[State-owned] newspapers, radio [and television] clearly favor Lukashenka, giving him the most attention. Practically some 70-90 percent of the media's focus is given to Lukashenka," Poznyak said. "Reports about him in the newspapers and on television are largely positive. The attitude to opposition candidates is largely negative."

Officially, the candidates are prohibited from campaigning until their final registration is announced on 17 February. But authorities say Lukashenka's wave of media coverage is related not to the campaign but simply to information about his current presidential duties.

At the same time, Poznyak says, the state-owned media appears to be stepping up its critical coverage of the political opposition overall and the individual candidates in particular.

As the president, Lukashenka also has the protection of antidefamation legislation, which makes public criticism of him almost impossible.

Where's The Opposition?

Even without the support of the media, Lukashenka is likely to win the race. The odds are so overwhelmingly in his favor that many observers are wondering why the opposition was unable present a more serious challenge.

Valery Karbalevich, an analyst with Strategy, a Minsk-based political analysis center, says the political ambitions of Kazulin, a former rector of Belarusian State University, are to be blamed for the failure.

Both Milinkevich and Kozulin have repeatedly said that they will not entertain the idea of a partnership with the third candidate, Liberal Democratic Party leader Syarhey Haydukevich.

"From the very beginning, Alyksandr Kazulin and his team did not participate in the opposition's coalition games. Their theory was that the opposition did not enjoy the support of society," Karbalevich said. "[They suggested] that some new people and some kind of third force should appear to oppose both Lukashenka and opposition."

Ambitions Outweigh Cause

Karbalevich says that Kazulin has continued along this path despite the fact that his popularity has registered at just 3 percent.

Poznyak of *Belaruskye Novosti* says that both Kazulin and Milinkevich have put their ambitions ahead of the opposition's cause. He says both politicians suggested different scenarios for possible unification, but offered terms that were unacceptable to the other.

In the end, however, Poznyak says it is difficult to understand why Kozulin has chosen to go it alone.

"It is clear that both have ambitions. Of course, a stronger force is behind Milinkevich -- the united opposition," Poznyak said. "As far as Kazulin is concerned, he is supported only by one force -- the Belarusian Social Democratic party."

Both Milinkevich and Kozulin have repeatedly said that they will not entertain the idea of a partnership with the third candidate, Liberal Democratic Party leader Syarhey Haydukevich.

They say Haydukevich, a lawmaker in the House of the Representatives, is too close to Lukashenka.

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

REGIONAL

9. CIS Observers Hail Initial Stage of Election Campaign in Belarus

In its interim report on Tuesday, the mission of CIS observers hailed the initial stage of a presidential election campaign in Belarus, but also drew attention to meager participation of political parties in electoral commissions as well as political pressure from the outside.

At the initial stage of the campaign, bodies of executive power and election committees in the republic have ensured a high level of the election process, as well as have demonstrated accurate and coordinated work, the report said.

The presidential election in Belarus is due on March 19. The report emphasized wide participation of labor collectives and public organizations in territorial and district electoral commissions, noting, however, meager participation of political parties.

Representatives of political parties make up only 2.6 percent in territorial commissions and less than one percent in district commissions. They are not represented at all in capital Minsk.

Observers also draw attention to the fact that the election campaign proceeds "against the background of political pressure from the outside".

"Unreasonably tough statements, biased commentaries, negative judgments from certain officials and agencies from some European organizations and the USA against Belarus are seen by CIS observers as a wish to predetermine a negative attitude of the world public and international observers to the results of the presidential election before it is finished," said the report by the mission of observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Source: Itar-Tass; February 21, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

10. Belarus' Exports to Russia Down 11.9 pct in 2005

Belarus' exports to Russia fell by 11.9 pct in 2005 due to a decline in supplies of petroleum products, footwear, truck and tractor components and televisions, the BelaPAN news service said.

The export of petroleum products to Russia decreased 83-fold, according to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis.

Imports from Russia also were down compared with 2004. Belarus bought fewer Russian-made truck and tractor components, electric batteries, wires and cables, plastic products, paper and cardboard, and ferrous metal products.

Supplies to and from Russia accounted for 48.4 pct of Belarus' overall foreign trade in 2005.

Source: Forbes.Com; February 21, 2006; <http://www.forbes.com>

11. Belarus Plans to Increase Export to Ukraine Up to Billion Dollars in 2006

Belarus plans to increase the export to Ukraine in 2006 up to 1 billion dollars, compared with 907.8 million dollars in 2005.

According to the press-service of the Belarusian Council of Ministers, Prime Minister of Belarus Sergei Sidorskiy claimed this at a meeting with the top Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine Stanislav Stashevski in Minsk today.

"Last year our countries achieved a record commodity circulation in the mutual trade – 1.8 billion dollars. In 2006, we set a task to achieve 1 billion dollars of export", said S.Sidorskiy. He believes that the mutual trade volumes grew owing to the activities of the inter-government Belarusian-Ukrainian Commission for issues of the commercial-economic collaboration.

The Belarusian Prime Minister added that his country is interested in broadening the presence of the Belarusian production at the Ukrainian market.

S.Stashevski also believes that the year 2005 was successful and fruitful for the commercial relations between the two countries.

Source: UNIAN.Net; February 16, 2006; <http://www.unian.net/eng/news/>

12. Belarus Opposition Candidate Says Election Will Not Be Free, Appeals to Russia

Belarus' main opposition presidential candidate said Thursday that next month's presidential election will not be democratic and he urged Russia to drop what he called its shortsighted policy of support for the nation's authoritarian leader.

Alexander Milinkevich also warned that violence could break out following the March 19 vote, saying that President Alexander Lukashenko's determination to stay in power and widespread doubts about the legitimacy of the election could make for a volatile mix.

"The election will not be free, it already is not free," Milinkevich said. He cited repressive state actions, almost nonexistent opposition representation on electoral committees and restrictions on observers as indications the vote will fall short of democratic standards.

Most of the opposition has united around Milinkevich as its candidate to challenge Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet republic with an iron hand since 1994. He has quashed dissent and maintaining his grip on power through votes dismissed as illegitimate by his opponents and Western governments that have dubbed him Europe's last dictator.

"The strength of the regime is not that it is loved, but that it is a regime of repression," Milinkevich told a Moscow news conference.

He said the Belarusian government has created a crooked playing field for the vote, including by placing only one representative of the opposition coalition among 74,000 members of local election commissions that will count the votes cast in the nation of 10 million.

"This is where the falsifications occur," Milinkevich said.

The government has also adopted a policy that will prevent both domestic and foreign observers from monitoring the counting process, he said, making the observation process "more symbolic than real."

Other opposition leaders told the news conference that government tactics included arresting opponents and warning people they would lose their jobs if they campaigned for the opposition.

In Moscow, as during recent visits to Western nations that are eager for political change in Belarus, Milinkevich stressed that he opposes violent upheaval but also warned that bitter Belarusians may take to the streets if they believe the election is rigged.

With Lukashenko vowing not to permit the kind of protests that broke out in the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan after disputed ballots and helped bring opposition leaders to power, Milinkevich called the situation ahead the election "alarming."

"We do not want revolution, but people may come out into the streets," he said.

Milinkevich also said he wanted to dispel what he called a "lie" promoted by Lukashenko that the Belarusian opposition is anti-Russian and he pledged to build "better relations with Russia than exist today" if he is elected.

He said Lukashenko remains in power "largely thanks to the strong support of Russia" and that Moscow's backing would undermine relations in the long run.

With other neighbors like Ukraine and the Baltics states turning Westward, the Kremlin is wary of the election in Belarus. President Vladimir Putin recently said he believes the vote could be democratic, and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told Western counterparts Lukashenko is sure to win on the basis of popularity.

Source: Kyiv Post; February 16, 2006; <http://www.kyivpost.com/>

13. Russia Seeks Market Relations with Belarus in Gas Sector

A Russian diplomat reiterated Thursday that the country was seeking market-based relations with Belarus in the natural gas sector.

"Russia plans to base its relations on market prices," said Valery Mikhailov, the deputy director of a CIS department in the Foreign Ministry. "What holds for Ukraine, holds for Belarus as well."

Mikhailov's comments followed reports of possible price hikes for Russian natural gas supplies to Belarus. But, under the agreement for 2006, Russia is to supply gas to Belarus for the same price as in 2005, or \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters.

"We should above all look after the economy. Belarus is certainly a fraternal nation and part of the [Russia-Belarus] union state, but it is still a different country, and this [market prices] is a correct and justified measure economically," Mikhailov told the lower house of parliament Thursday.

Meanwhile, Viktor Spassky, the head of the CIS economic cooperation department of the Economic Development and Trade Ministry, said that while Russia was delivering gas to Belarus at privileged prices, Belarus was establishing barriers against Russian goods.

"Hence, we offer a privileged regime, and Belarus sets more barriers for Russian goods than for European," Spassky said, adding that plans were in place to work with Belarusian organizations to avoid such discrimination.

The Russian gas monopoly Gazprom cut off gas supplies to Ukraine at the turn of the year in a long-running dispute, which has subsequently been resolved, about how much Kiev paid for natural gas supplied by Gazprom.

The company has also recently raised the gas prices for other former Soviet republics, Armenia and Georgia, and is in talks with Moldova over an increase.

Source: RIA Novosti, February 16, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

INTERNATIONAL

14. Belarus Accuses Czech Republic of Subverting Regime

The Belarusian authoritarian regime of Alexander Lukashenko has accused through state television the Czech embassy in Minsk of subversive activities, Lidove noviny (LN) writes today. The television asserted on Sunday that embassy employees spread "propaganda material" among extremist groups, LN writes.

It says that the television's Panorama news programme shows a group of young people loading a car standing outside the embassy with a big quantity of some kind of pamphlets.

In another shot police detain the car crew, LN writes.

"This was accompanied by a commentary saying that it is propaganda material that we are spreading. It was claimed that we and our Foreign Ministry infringe on all international legal norms and that this is a gross interference in the internal affairs [of Belarus]," Vladimir Ruml, head of the Czech diplomatic mission in Minsk told LN.

He said that the material was made from an opposite building in which the military counter-intelligence service has its seat.

Ruml sent a protest press release to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry and to the embassies of other countries in Belarus.

The alleged propaganda material is in fact a U.N. resolution on human rights in Belarus that the Czech Foreign Ministry translated into Belarusian and that it offers to Belarusians with the consent of the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, LN writes.

"People can come to us and take the brochure. In this particular case the people were activists who are linked to democratic parties. They take the pamphlets by hundreds and distribute them further," Ruml told LN.

The Czech Foreign Ministry will not probably react to the Belarusian television reportage.

"It has only been a media output. This does not exceed the scenario under which the Czech Republic has been painted as a country of subversive elements for a year," ministry spokesman Vit Kolar told LN.

The Czech Republic rather focuses on support to democratic forces in Belarus.

"It is not possible to fight with notes against the Lukashenko regime," Kolar said.

Ruml told LN that propaganda has been stepped up in Belarus as the March presidential election is coming closer.

"The situation has been much harder since January. I would say that it is worse and worse every day," LN quotes Ruml as saying.

Source: *Prague Daily Monitor*; February 25, 2006; <http://www.praguemonitor.com>

15. Belarus KGB Thwarts Activity of Grouping Financed by US NGO

State Security Committee (KGB) of Belarus has thwarted the activity of an illegal public association called Partnership Civic Initiative that was set up by an American non-governmental organization, spokespeople for the KGB press service said.

The Partnership was set up, managed and financed by the US National Democracy Institute, an NGO. Belarusian law forbids the practice of financing national NGO's from abroad.

"Law enforcement agencies issued numerous official warnings that the Partnership's activity was illegal, and a number of its activists were brought to administrative responsibility from 2003 through 2005 but it continued operations this year, too," a spokesman said.

As a result, four leaders of the organization -- Nikolai Astreiko, Alexander Shalaiko, Timofei Dranchuk, and Enira Bronitskaya -- were detained February 21.

The KGB instituted a criminal case over their activity citing an article of the Criminal Code that envisions punishment for setting up a public association posing a threat to individuals or citizen's rights.

The detainees were placed in a KGB detention center.

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

16. Launch of TV and radio programmes for Belarus on 26th February 2006

New EU-financed TV and radio broadcasting programmes for Belarus will start on 26 February 2006. They are part of a wider €2 million project that will cover internet, support to the Belarusian written press and training of journalists, in addition to radio and TV broadcasts. The objective of this project is to increase access to independent news and information across the whole of the country.

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner said: "Tight controls on the media in Belarus make it hard for Belarusians to find independent sources of information. I look forward to the day when Belarus will have its own free media, because this is crucial to the functioning of a democracy. In the meantime, I believe the new radio and TV programmes will raise awareness of developments in the country and help Belarusians better understand their neighbours in the EU".

She added "Diversity of the media is important. I welcome the launch of Radio Racja, the new Polish project to bring independent broadcasting to Belarus. The more sources of independent information the better".

EU-funded programmes in the new project will include:

RADIO - A daily 60-minute radio information magazine "Window to Europe" each morning in peak time in Belarusian and Russian by European Radio for Belarus, and Radio Baltic Wave. This is designed to appeal to a broad cross section of Belarusian society with particular attention paid to the young people. The magazine will present news features and reports from Europe and Belarus, as well as music entertainment with artists from Europe and Belarus. The news part of the magazine will cover topical political, economic and cultural events including sport, news and weather. Interactive phone-ins will also soon allow listeners to communicate with the studio team. In addition, four live programmes will be specifically dedicated to the Belarusian Presidential Elections of 19 March 2006, featuring debates with election observers, journalists, candidates and NGO representatives.

'Window to Europe' will initially be available on:

AM: 612 kHz
Satellite: 11013 Mhz

Internet: <http://www.belradio.fm> (active from 26 February 2006)

TV - The independent Russian channel, RTVi will broadcast a weekly half hour magazine-style programme, "Window to Europe", starting on Sunday, 26 February at 1700 (Belarus time) in Belarusian and Russian languages: Four weekly re-runs will be broadcast from Monday to Thursday. The programme is designed to appeal to the Belarusian audience. It will cover cultural, social, political, historical and economic aspects of Belarus itself, help raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges of the EU, and increase familiarity with the 25 member states, presenting a broad picture of the EU family. The magazine will include video reports and studio discussion.

In addition to the weekly magazine, two live special election shows are being produced to give an independent view of the Belarusian Presidential elections on 19 March 2006. These shows will involve Belarusian, Russian and EU experts including election observers, journalists, candidates, and representatives of NGOs.

The programmes will be available on cable and satellite.

The new TV and radio broadcasts follow a smaller (€138,000) broadcasting project already underway, implemented by Deutsche Welle.

Source: EUROPA; February 23, 2006; <http://europa.eu.int/>

17. OSCE Observers Biased in Runup to Belarus Election - Ministry

Observers from the human rights office of the world's largest regional security organization display bias ahead of a March 19 presidential election in Belarus, a spokesman for the Russian foreign ministry said Wednesday.

Mikhail Kamynin said observers from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had no transparent and comprehensible regulations to follow during the election.

"As we already learned in the past, such a way of doing things gives grounds for biased conclusions," Kamynin said.

The diplomat said the OSCE observers had concluded that Belarus had no conditions for free and fair voting long before election day.

Russian officials have repeatedly criticized the OSCE's approach to monitoring elections in former Soviet states, particularly after mass protests against election fraud swept new pro-Western leaders into power in Ukraine and Georgia. The international observers themselves deny any involvement in the regime change.

Last month, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, to discuss cooperation. Lavrov called on the member nations to work together on contentious issues, specifically ones related to monitoring of national elections.

"We will have to find a compromise on difficult issues, including the activities of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, particularly election monitoring," the minister said. De Gucht said the issue of reforming the OSCE, whose 55 member countries span from Canada to Russia, should be resolved by the end of 2006.

Source: RIA Novosti, February 22, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

18. Poland Backs Belarus Broadcasts

Poland has given backing to a radio station set up to broadcast to eastern neighbour Belarus in a bid to promote democracy and freedom of speech there.

The Polish government is funding the project just weeks before forthcoming presidential elections in Belarus.

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko has been in power for more than a decade. Opposition activists say he has become increasingly authoritarian.

Belarus's ambassador in Warsaw says Poland is violating international law.

He predicts the radio station will have relatively few listeners.

Radio Racja, which translates roughly as Radio Right, will begin its first broadcasts on crackly medium wave on Wednesday evening.

Solidarity links

It is based in the north-eastern city of Bialystok, about one hour away from the Belarusian border.

Its small team of Belarusian and Polish organisers say it will transmit music and uncensored information into the central and eastern parts of Belarus.

They say it will give the country's opposition a chance to be heard, ahead of the presidential elections next month.

Radio Racja stopped broadcasting four years ago due to a lack of money. The Polish government is funding its relaunch.

The station has its roots in the Solidarity movement which overthrew communism in Poland, so it is no stranger to state censorship.

Source: Adam Easton, BBC News; February 22, 2006; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe>

19. Russia Denounces OSCE Election-Monitoring Work in Belarus

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday claimed the OSCE's election observer mission in Belarus was showing severe bias ahead of next month's presidential election, in which authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko is seeking a third term.

The election observer missions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights have frequently labeled elections in post-Soviet states as severely flawed and Russia often bristles at the reports as Western attempts to interfere in countries that the Kremlin regards as within Russia's sphere of influence.

Lukashenko, widely criticized for repressing the opposition and journalists, is an ally of Russia and has sought to bring the country into a loose union with Russia. He contends that Western governments aim to undermine his government by stirring up opposition around the elections and he has vowed a heavy police presence on election day to prevent protests similar to those in Georgia and Ukraine after disputed elections.

In Belarus, where an observer mission began its work this month, "our worst fears have been realized," ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin said in a statement. "According to unnamed 'interlocutors,' they are already making far-reaching conclusions about the absence of the necessary conditions in the republic for conducting of democratic elections.

"We more than once have seen such conduct by representatives of the office, when assessments of an election have been put forward before they occurred. This cannot be called anything other than prejudice," he said. The missions routinely issue reports on preparations for elections. Both Russia and Belarus are members of the OSCE.

A spokeswoman for the OSCE's election monitoring operations, Urdur Gunnarsdottir, told The Associated Press in Warsaw that she had not seen the ministry statement. But, she said, "this is not the first time that they have criticized us."

"We are monitoring the Belarusian election activities in an objective and transparent manner, as we have done in other places. We have observed over 150 elections and we think our methodology is well-tested by now," she said.

Source: Kyiv Post; February 22, 2006; <http://www.kyivpost.com/>

20. Belarus Attends BSEC Sitting As Observer

For the first time Belarus took part in the work of the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) as an observer. A sitting of the BSEC working group for institutional issues was held in Istanbul (Turkey).

As BelTA has been told in the Foreign Ministry, the sitting highlighted administrative reforms in the state institutions of power, introducing up-to-date methods of rendering government services to the population.

The prospects of the BSEC cooperation with other international organizations were also on the agenda. A near-term program of actions of the working group was adopted at the sitting.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; February 20, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

21. Polish Journalist Expelled From Belarus

A correspondent of a leading Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* was expelled from Belarus. Wacław Radziwinowicz was approached by two Belarusian officers at a railway station in the border town of Grodno and informed that he was barred entry to Belarus. He was then placed in a train back to Poland. Radziwinowicz, who had all the required documents with him, planned to interview the authoritarian president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko.

Source: Polskie Radio, February 19, 2006; <http://www.radio.com.pl/polonia>

22. Belarus: Changes Will Not Come Easy

Voicing concern about the Belarusian authorities' conduct in the run-up to the March presidential elections, an Austrian Presidency politician tells MEPs in Strasbourg that "our work on Belarus has to be framed in the long term.

Speaking for the Austrian Presidency, the country's State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Hans Winkler told the European Parliament's 16 February session in Strasbourg that he does not expect next month's presidential elections in Belarus to bring about a "sweeping change". "Our work on Belarus has to be framed in the long term," Winkler said.

Belarus will hold presidential elections on 19 March 2006. According to the EU, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the previous presidential and parliamentary elections in Belarus - in 2000, 2001 and 2004 - failed to meet international standards. The country's current authoritarian president, Aleksander Lukashenka, is standing for a third consecutive term.

A draft resolution by the European Parliament states that the authorities in Belarus continue to create obstacles to the campaigning of the independent candidates and a number of leading opposition figures have been detained. The MEPs underlined that Belarus is the only country in Europe not yet linked to the EU by a partnership and co-operation agreement.

Recently, the Commission launched a new project package aimed at supporting democratic organisations and the free flow of information in Belarus. Among other things, a radio station has been set up to provide independent information in Belarusian and Russian.

The MEPs expressed "solidarity with, and support for, all Belarusians who strive for an independent, open and democratic Belarus". The MEPs "deeply deplored" the fact that the country has not invited election observers from either the European Parliament or the Council of Europe.

Source: EurActiv.Com; February 16, 2006; <http://www.euractiv.com>

23. Belarus: Poland Leading Non-CIS Partner

Poland is Belarus' third-largest non-CIS trade partner, last year's turnover between both countries rising 18.5 percent to 1.4 billion USD, Andrei Papou from the Belarussian Foreign Ministry said Thursday in Minsk.

Summing up Polish-Belarusian economic ties, Papou pointed to a marked rise in trade over 2005, especially a 16.3-percent rise in Belarusian exports to Poland.

Papou also noted Belarus' positive trade balance with Poland to the tune of 268 million USD.

Poland's imports from Belarus mainly embrace petroleum products, LPG, potassium fertilizers, kazeine, wood, electricity and steel products.

Source: Europejski Serwis Polskiej Agencji Prasowej; February 16, 2006; <http://euro.pap.net.pl/cgi-bin/europap.pl?grupa=46&dzien=0&ID=76752>

24. Belarus Claims US Government Intervenes in Its Media, US Denies

The U.S. Embassy in Minsk on Thursday expressed deep concern over what it calls false statements and conclusions about the U.S. government in Belarusian state media outlets, Radio Free Europe reported quoting the embassy statement.

"The most egregious example of this disinformation campaign to date was the 7 February Belarusian Television broadcast of the 'Agent 590' series," which "preposterously asserts that the United States government is financing the efforts of sovereign countries to orchestrate scandals in Belarus, with a goal of discrediting the country in the international community," the statement read.

The embassy also cited a report aired by Belarusian Television on 13 February, in which Yauhen Novikau, the anchorman of a program entitled "Human Rights: Look at the World," charged that the U.S. Embassy is planning the "liberation of the Belarusian people from dictatorship."

The embassy said: "Novikau's statements are not only offensive and irresponsible; they are potentially incendiary to the viewers of his program, who will surely take away a decidedly inaccurate and skewed view of the true purpose of our diplomatic mission here in Belarus."

Source: MosNews.Com, February 16, 2006; www.mosnews.com

25. OSCE Starts Long-term Monitoring of Belarus Elections

Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) have started the long-term monitoring of the presidential election campaign in all parts of Belarus, the ODIHR informed Interfax on Thursday.

Earlier reports said that the republic's Central Elections Commission has accredited 50 ODIHR representatives to monitor the presidential election campaign. Forty of them will work in the periphery, and the rest, at the OSCE office in Minsk.

In all, 182 international observers have been accredited: 80 from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 50 from the OSCE, 48 from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Belarus-Russia Union and four from British non-governmental organizations.

The Belarusian presidential elections are due on March 19, 2006.

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

26. On the conveyor. or Who and Where Prepare Provocateurs and Saboteurs for Overthrow the Power in Belarus

In the end of last year, Stepan Sukhorenko, Head of the State Security Committee, was speaking in front of deputies of the Palace of the Representatives during the discussion on the bill "About introduction of addenda and amendments to certain legislative acts of the Republic of Belarus regarding responsibility increase for acts directed against people and public safety". In particular he said: "Emissaries of the various non-government organizations come to our country and they, following the orders and using the money of the special services of the western countries, organize seminars on how to make "revolutions" and how to counteract in an organized way to the law enforcement bodies restoring public order. And the main training bases removed to the contiguous countries' territory. As a matter of fact, we face the militant – revolutionist training conveyor."

If there will be dollars than there will be assemblies

It is not a secret for a long time already that the foreign "non-government" organizations (NGO) are the main realization tool of the so-called "velvet revolutions" sceneries, developed by the western special services. Nevertheless, the opposition politics and journalists called the KGB head's speech "unfounded and contrary to the reality." Today we have the opportunity to present the fact of these large-scale subversive "work" on training and financing Belarusian radicals, accomplishing in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine... The goal of this work is to overthrow the legitimate government in Belarus. In order to economize newspaper space we will present only part of the facts for last 2005.

On January 17-25 the seminar "The local communities' development" with participation of the non-government organizations members from Minsk, Grodno, Brest, Baranovichy and Lida took place in Lvov, the "capital" of the frenzied Ukrainian nationalists. The seminar was initiated by the Belarusian "Democratic Deputies Assembly" (has anyone heard about this "assembly" before – Ed.) and the local regional development agency with the financial support of the "Counterpart" foundation Ukrainian representative office. But instead of the discussion about the Ukrainian institution of local governing activity, the conversation came to the necessity of the "orange revolution" export to Belarus and the financial support for its realization.

And dollars did not keep waiting. On January 25-27, before the "assembly" in Lvov was over, the seminar "The "velvet" revolution strategy in Belarus in 2006. The Ukrainian experience" for 30 young Belarusian radicals took place in a Lithuanian city of Trakay. The seminar's sponsor was the International Republican Institute (IRI, USA). The seminar's coordinator was Mr. Olson. The strategy of the Belarusian opposition preparation for the 2006 presidential election and the youth groups activities directions in organizing mass protests and "informational influence" on the republic population were discussed at the "seminar".

Coaches and "seminarists"

At the same time (January 25 – February 25) the series of seminars-trainings for more than 50 opposition organizations representatives from Grodno, Gomel and Vitebsk was hold by the National Development Institute within the frameworks of the “Belarusian NGO management” project in the other Lithuanian city of Druskinkay at the base of the training centre Dainava. The opposition organizations questions like financing, advertising, mass media relations, and the environment influence psychological aspects and so on were discussed at the seminars. And certainly, the NPI employees, who coached at the seminar, encouraged the “seminarists” in every possible way to compete in their negative estimation of the socio-political and socio-economical situation in the country from there they came. And those tried hard. There were well-cultured, at first sight, people, who did not loose their self-esteem yet. But, as we can see, they can not repulse rascals when they got in the hostile frenzied environment and they start to be led by rascals.

On February 6-15 the seminar on the corresponding subject was hold by the Warsaw office of the Human Rights Helsinki Foundation in the City of Suprasl, Poland. More than 20 representatives from Belarus took part in the seminar. The gathered public was well-known, first of all, by its financial scandals, which become the common property of the Belarusian people from time to time. But also a few young people were invited to that “seminar”. The “seminarists”, though agreed that in general the legal norm in the human rights protection field in Belarus meet the international standards, but the “mechanisms are imperfect and do not work in practice”. The foreign ‘human rights defenders surely approved in every possible way the Belarusian visitors approach and even promised to invite them to the next trip abroad. And what else do these “political” tourists need?

Surely, the non-elected “deputies”, whose programs and visions were not approved by the Belarusian people, were not disregarded. On February 19-20 the seminar on the subject “The experience of the peaceful overthrow the power and the bloodless revolution holding” was organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI, USA) for 20 former participants from the opposition of the elections campaign to the National Assembly of Belarus. The event’s initiators in the collaboration with the “Our Ukraine” block representatives and Yushchenko pre-elections headquarters illuminated their activity tactics during the presidential election. And they did not forget to remind that if the authority would not “let them have it” they were ready to “act more resolutely”. We know from the local news what exactly the ordinary Ukrainians got from this overthrow the government: cold, hunger, inflation, continuing national riches sale and unprecedented corruption.

“Civil society” against citizens

On March 11-12 the seminar, at which the ways for West to support (and not only financially) the radical politicized formations for creation in Belarus... civil society, was organized in Warsaw by Kazanetsky, the head of the East-European Democratic Centre. The main themes of the conference were the presidential election in Belarus, the strategy of the opposition and West participation in the election.

On March 17 the seminar under the loud name “The policy of the “critical dialogue” between Lithuania and Belarus” with the participations of the radical politicized organizations representatives took place in Vilnius. And if the hysterical impostors, who made it as a rule to defame their country everywhere, took part in the seminar from the Belarus side, then from the other side not only the NGO representatives but also the “quite respectable” gentlemen took part, in particular, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU External Affairs Commissioner, the former head of the Austrian Foreign Affairs Ministry and Antanas Valenis, the Lithuanian Foreign Affairs Minister.

On March 25-28 in Warsaw the training on the themes “Young leaders’ legal preparation” and “Political systems and their differences” was organized in relations with the Stefan Ogjena European Education Foundation for 30 Belarusian activists from youth radical organizations. Spot-Novitsky, the Foundation President and Milosh Milenkovich, one of leaders of the Serbian radical formation Otpor [Repulse – Ed.] appeared as the instructors. It’s necessary to note that

these guys from Otpor, who dashingly destroyed their country, which actually also lost part of its original territories, are today, as a rule, the main instructors for the Belarusian silly school-boys. And consequently, almost at the same time (on March 26-27) the seminar for the other group of the Belarusian radicals was held by the same instructor from the Serbian organization Otrpor and the Ukrainian organization Pora [It's time!, the civil youth organization in Ukraine – Ed.] in the other Polish city of Belostok. The seminar was devoted to the tactics of the 2006 presidential election preparation and actions.

Provocations will be stopped rigidly and unconditionally

On March 30-31 the meeting of the Belarusian youth organizations, such as Young Front, Young Belarus, Belarusian Students Association, Youth Christian-Social Union "Young democrats", The Civil Forum, Leninist Young Communist League of Belarus (LYCLB) and Molodaya Gromada [Young group] was held by the same International Republican Institute (IRI, USA) in Vilnius. As a result the agreement about the joint realization of the "mobilization campaign" for 2006 presidential election in Belarus was signed in the presence of the foreign sponsors who promised "help of every sort and kind" to these mercenaries.

In addition to aforesaid, I could also list 42 more "training seminars", "conferences", secret meetings and other "events", which were held abroad only in 2005 (and it does not count 25 training camps), where citizens of our country were invited and where western special services employees and colored revolutions practitioners taught them the methods and ways of the eliminate overthrow the government in Belarus. There were seminars, for example, the seminar on August 15-25 in the city of Kolki, Ukraine, where the Belarusian oppositionists were taught how to block not just the streets and avenues of the city but also main highways, how to hold the general strike, disobedience actions, and how to organize the street disorders and etc. During the seminar in Krakow, held on October 6-27 by the Strategical research Institute in the frameworks of the RITA-2005 program, the Belarusian oppositionists were taken to East European Centre of Democracy, where the meeting with the Polish Seim deputies took place. These frenzied "elected representatives of the people" were particularly interested whether "Russia will support Belarus in case of possible intervention and in what extend?". Calm down, gentlemen, the Belarusians themselves will manage with its enemies, and not only with the ones who, lead by you, plan, in the Constitution violation, to overthrow the power in the country, but also with ones who dream to deprive the country's freedom and independence. And finally I want to advise to those who was trained subversive activity abroad: remember that your every step is traced and any attempt to break the law will be stopped at the root. Rigidly and unconditionally.

Foreign non-profit organization, located around the Republic of Belarus, who leads the proactive subversive activity against Belarus

USA

1. United State Agency for International Development (USAID) – acting from the USA Embassy position
2. United States Information Agency (USIA) - acting from the USA Embassy position
3. National Democratic Institute (NDI)
4. International Republican Institute (IRI)
5. Institute for Democracy in Easter Europe (IDEE)
6. National Endowment for Democracy (NED)
7. Freedom House
8. Open Society Institute
9. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State
10. Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
11. Eurasia foundation
12. American bar Association – have the representative office in Belarus
13. Counterpart Foundation
14. International Centre for Journalists
15. International League for Human Rights

16. Human Rights Watch
17. American Centre of Education and Research (ACER)

Great Britain

1. Westminster Foundation for Democracy
2. Charter19
3. Know How Foundation
4. International Amnesty

Poland

1. Stefan Batory Foundation
2. Press centre for Central and Eastern European Countries Foundation

The Federal Republic of Germany

1. Gustav-Stresemann-Institute
2. Friedrich-Ebert Foundation– have the representative office in Belarus
3. Konrad Adenauer Foundation
4. German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

Serbia

Otpor (Repulse)

Croatia

Gong

Sweden

1. 1. Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (SIDA)
2. 2. Swedish Association of Local Authorities (SALA)
3. 3. Forum Sud
4. 4. International Helsinki federation for Human Rights

{Text translated by the Editors}

Source: Yevgeny Rostikov, Respublika newspaper; February 15, 2006

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

27. Belarusian Journalists Fear Censorship May be Extended to the Internet

A good three weeks ahead of presidential elections in Belarus journalists in the authoritarian-run country fear that censorship may be extended to the Internet. The state-run telephone company was the country's only Internet access provider, the head of the Belarusian Journalists Association, Shanna Litwina, said on Wednesday in Berlin. Therefore blocking unwelcome Internet pages was a simple exercise for the state apparatus run by President Alexander Lukashenko, she observed. "Rumor has it that the Internet in Belarus will soon be state-controlled," she added.

According to Ms. Litwina online media are among the most important independent sources of information in Belarus. Private media organizations operating in the country that borders the European Union have repeatedly been harassed or shut down altogether. Five months ago the last major independent newspaper Narodnaya Volya (Will of the People) was financially ruined with the help of a fine imposed for allegedly libeling the President.

Mr. Lukashenko who has been in power for almost 12 years now is widely considered by his opponents as "Europe's last dictator." On March 19 the 51-year-old will be seeking a further term in office. In the light of opinion polls the chances of the president's challenger, the opposition candidate Alexander Milinkewitsch, of being elected in place of Mr. Lukashenko are rated as remote.

Source: Heise Online; February 23, 2006; <http://www.heise.de/english/newsticker/news/70002>

28. Pressure Mounts on Two More Minsk Protestant Churches

Following two warnings last year, Pastor Georgi Vyazovsky of Christ's Covenant Reformed Baptist Church now faces administrative charges for leading an unregistered congregation after a city official and a police officer arrived at his home during Sunday worship on 5 February, he told Forum 18 News Service from Belarus' capital Minsk. The hearing is due on 3 March. Meanwhile, court officials are demanding that Pastor Ernst Sabilo of the Minsk-based Belarusian Evangelical Church – a veteran of Soviet labour camps for his faith – pay court costs of almost 60 US dollars for the liquidation of his congregation's legal status last September. Sabilo told court officials that as a pensioner he cannot afford to pay the sum. The two churches are among many religious groups in Belarus unable to gain registration under highly restrictive registration regulations, thus rendering all their activity illegal.

Legal pressures are mounting on two more Protestant churches in the capital Minsk which have been unable to gain registration under Belarus' highly restrictive registration regulations, their pastors have complained to Forum 18 News Service. Pastor Georgi Vyazovsky of Christ's Covenant Reformed Baptist Church is once again facing legal charges for holding unsanctioned religious services, while in a separate case, Pastor Ernst Sabilo of the Belarusian Evangelical Church – a veteran of Soviet labour camps for his faith – is being required to pay court costs for the liquidation of his congregation's legal status last September.

On Sunday 5 February the Christ's Covenant congregation of approximately 30 was reading the Bible and praying at his home, Pastor Vyazovsky told Forum 18 from Minsk on 22 February, when a local district official entered and began to take photographs. When church members refused to let in a police officer who arrived shortly afterwards, continued Vyazovsky, the two state representatives drew up a protocol accusing the pastor under Article 167-1, Part 1 of the Administrative Violations Code, of violating the established legal procedure for holding religious events. Under the 2002 religion law, such events require state permission if held outside a designated house of worship and may not be conducted systematically or on a large-scale in a private home.

Officially summoned to Minsk's Partisan District Court at lunchtime on 22 February - the same day that the case against him was due to be heard - Vyazovsky told Forum 18 he was unable to attend and that the hearing has consequently been postponed to 3 March. The pastor also said that the authorities had easily been able to find out about his church's Sunday service as its timetable had not changed, "up to now".

Contacted on 22 February, a secretary at Partisan District Court directed Forum 18 to its office dealing with administrative violations, but there was no response at that number.

On 25 November 2005 Partisan District Court issued a warning to Pastor Vyazovsky under the same Administrative Violations Code article following similar police check-ups on 26 May 2005 and 30 October 2005. An appeal against the court's decision was rejected by Minsk City Court on 10 January 2006.

Christ's Covenant Reformed Baptist Church unsuccessfully sought independent re-registration under the 2002 law after previously being affiliated to the mainstream Baptist Union. On 22 February Pastor Vyazovsky told Forum 18 that to date, there has been no attempt to liquidate his church by court order.

Pastor Vyazovsky asks for petitions in support of Christ's Covenant Reformed Baptist Church to be sent to the authorities from churches, individual Christians and from "those who are not indifferent to basic human rights". "We beseech you for help. It is easy and very effective - this was proved during the Soviet time. We need firstly prayers and secondly letters to government

institutions and to President Alexander Lukashenko. The more letters we have, the more effective they are."

In the case of another Protestant church in the capital, after Minsk City Court liquidated his Belarusian Evangelical Church on 20 September 2005, Pastor Ernst Sabilo was told to pay court costs of 127,500 Belarusian roubles (376 Norwegian kroner, 48 Euros or 58 US dollars). Pastor Sabilo - who spent 13 years in a Soviet prison camp after being convicted in 1951 for "speaking about my religious convictions and the political injustice of Soviet power" – tried to re-register his church under the 2002 religion law but was unsuccessful due to the absence of state-approved, non-residential worship premises.

On 23 February Pastor Sabilo told Forum 18 that he had recently received a demand from the court in Minsk's Moscow District – where the Belarusian Evangelical Church had previously been registered at his home address – to pay the outstanding court costs by 20 February. Visiting the courthouse on that date, Pastor Sabilo said that he had cited his inability to pay the sum demanded and argued that, as only one of 12 founder members, he was not solely liable in any case: "They registered the church, not me – my name never even featured in the court case."

Sabilo said he was told that bailiffs would make an inventory of his property for confiscation, "but nothing has happened so far". He told Forum 18 that some time earlier a Moscow District Court official had rung his home and told his wife that the sum would be deducted from his state pension.

Forum 18 tried to reach officials at the Moscow District Court on 23 February but the telephones went unanswered.

On 15 February the Evangelical Belarus Information Centre reported that the City Executive Committee of Gomel [Homyel] in eastern Belarus hosted a meeting at which all local religious leaders were warned against using land not according to its designation. Officials cited the position of the Minsk-based charismatic New Life Church as a particularly negative example. On 23 February New Life administrator Vasily Yurevich told Forum 18 that no steps had been taken against his church during the last couple of months, however.

Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; February 23, 2006; <http://www.forum18.org>

29. Detention for Distribution of *Narodnaja Vola* and *Tovarishch*

On February 21 the police took away 3985 issues of *Tovarishch* and 600 issues of *Narodnaja Vola* from a distributor in Rahachou. On the same day distributors of these editions were detained in Vetka (a district centre).

At about 7 p.m. police officers Syarhey Buhajeu and Syarhey Hurevich detained the head of Zhlobin affiliate of the Communist Party of Belarus Valery Rybchanka. He brought issues of *Narodnaja Vola* and *Tovarishch* in his own car to Rahachou. He had all the necessary documents allowing the distribution of the issues. During the search of the car the police confiscated 3985 issues of *Tovarishch* and 600 issues of *Narodnaja Vola* with the alleged purpose of studying their contents and authenticity. Mr. Rybchanka had to spend more than 3 hours in the police station. The activist lodged a complaint to the Office of Public Prosecutor.

On the same day Marya Bahdanovich and Ludmila Sudzilouskaja were detained by the police in Vetka. They were giving out issues of *Narodnaja Vola* and *Tovarishch*. The police explained the reason for the detention by the fact that they did not know such editions. Later the distributors were set free.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; February 22, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

30. Opposition Targeted As Lukashenka Calls For 'Preemptive' Security Sweep

Belarus's Committee for State Security, better known as the KGB, on 21 February staged a series of raids targeting members of the political opposition. Activists in different parts of the country saw their homes ransacked, with files, leaflets, and computers seized. KGB officers also arrested two prominent opposition members in the capital Minsk. The measures came as Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka ordered law-enforcement agencies to step up security measures ahead of the 19 March presidential election.

Tsimafey Dranchuk had left his flat in central Minsk to buy flowers for his wife's birthday. But he returned home in handcuffs after being seized by KGB officers.

The officers spent the next several hours conducting a thorough search of Dranchuk's apartment.

Dranchuk's wife, Volha Antsyovich, a journalist with the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper, was at home at the time of the raid. "They didn't tell us what they were looking for. From time to time they made a joke, saying, 'Are you going to hand over the gun or not?' Then they began to confiscate all the documents in the apartment -- various leaflets, old newspapers, some notes by Tsimafey. The search lasted three hours," she said.

The officers eventually left, taking three boxes of documents. Dranchuk, an aide to imprisoned opposition politician Andrey Klimau, was taken to KGB headquarters for interrogation.

Speaking to RFE/RL's Belarus Service, Antsyovich said she had received no word of her husband's fate: "We do not have any information about Tsimafey. Every time we call the KGB, we get the same answer: 'There's no information available, you should have called earlier when, for example, there was someone in the reception room' -- or some other excuse. Or they say that the information will be available tomorrow. Tsimafey's mobile phone is now switched off, but just two hours ago it would ring when we dialed. When they were taking Tsimafey away, I saw that they put his phone in an envelope without turning it off. Maybe they did it on purpose, to keep track of who was calling him."

Hours later, KGB officers made another arrest -- Mikalay Astreyka, a coordinator for a group of independent election monitors observing next month's election.

The security officers again seized documents and computers and brought Astreyka in for questioning. Both Astreyka and Danchuk remain in KGB custody today.

Crackdown

Elsewhere, across the country, KGB officers staged numerous raids targeting opposition supporters. At least six activists and electoral observers were subjected to apartment searches, including Alyaksey Trubkin in the northwestern city of Polatsk.

"At 8:30 in the morning, four citizens introducing themselves as KGB officers came to my apartment, along with two witnesses [to observe the proceedings]. They showed a search warrant and began searching," Trubkin said. "When I asked them what they were accusing me of, they didn't answer. They confiscated brochures, books, the [Belarusian-language weekly] *Niva* from Bialystok [in Poland], the [Minsk-based daily] *Narodnaya Volya*, business cards, materials from the Belarusian Popular Front and the Belarusian Language Society, and other petty things."

The raids came the same day as Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka handed a stern edict to the country's security forces to step up their vigilance ahead of the presidential vote next month.

Speaking at a government conference on national security, Lukashenka said opposition forces both inside and outside the country would stop at nothing to disrupt the elections and bring "lies and violence" to the Belarusian people.

"You know what pressure has been exerted on Belarus -- from open blackmail to attempts by the West to interfere in internal affairs, and from small provocations to threats of extremism on the part of the opposition," Lukashenka said. "Realizing the lack of chances for a legal win, opponents of the authorities are sweating their guts out to fuel tensions in the country, loosen the foundations of the state and society, and blacken our spiritual values."

The Belarusian leader went on to urge the country's security forces to take "preemptive" measures to ensure national safety during the election season.

The mandate appears to be just the latest measure aimed at neutralizing the influence of Belarus's opposition movement ahead of the 19 March vote.

Lukashenka, who is seeking a third term, has cracked down on nonstate media, scheduled early elections, and amended an already harsh Criminal Code to make virtually any form of political dissent a punishable offense.

Lukashenka's closest rival in the race is united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who has suggested Belarusians will take to the streets in a so-called "revolution of hope" if they conclude the vote is not free or fair.

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

31. Belarus Newspaper Prosecuted Over Offensive Cartoons

The Belarusian State Security Committee has initiated a criminal case against the *Zgoda* newspaper for publishing caricatures satirizing the Prophet Muhammad, a source in the country's prosecutor's office told Interfax on Wednesday.

"The criminal case was opened following an investigation carried out by the republic's prosecutor's office and the State Security Committee. The inquiry was conducted at the request of the committee for religious and ethnic affairs and the Muslim community of Belarus," the source said.

"The criminal case was initiated based on charges of incitement of racial, ethnic and religious hatred - Part 1, Article 130 of the Criminal Code of Belarus," he said.

The case materials have already been forwarded to the State Security Committee.

Source: Interfax; February 22, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

32. Trial Against ZUBR Activists Will Start on February 23

Trial against Zubr activists Aliaksandr Kazakou and Dmitry Zubro will start on February 23.

Kazakou and 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 under 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.

Source: ZUBR; February 21, 2006; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

33. More Opposition Supporters Arrested In Minsk

A report says about 100 opposition supporters were arrested in Belarus as they tried to join a celebration to mark the registration of their candidate for next month's presidential election.

The French news agency AFP says those detained were supporters of opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich. The report could not be independently confirmed.

Earlier today, the electoral commission officially registered Milinkevich, along with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Liberal Democratic Party leader Syarhey Haydukevich, and Social Democratic Party leader Alyaksandr Kazulin for the 19 March poll.

AFP says the Milinkevich supporters were arrested on various pretexts, such as the state of their vehicles or problems with their identity papers.

Lukashenka is seeking a third term in office and is seen as the heavy favorite.

The European Union and United States have voiced concern over whether the vote will be free and fair.

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

34. Two More Verdicts – 10 Days of Arrest

Activists of the Young Front Pavel Fihuryin and Barys Haretski, detained yesterday in Minsk during the peaceful action of solidarity, have been sentenced to 10 days of arrest each by the court of Tsentralny district of Minsk. Judge Alyaksei Bychko turned a blind eye to untruthful evidence of riot policemen and found the Young Front activists guilty of hooliganism (Article 156 of the Administrative Code).

As we have informed, 24 persons were detained yesterday in Minsk. Four of the young activists have passed the night in police departments of Minsk. Aleh Myatselitsa, one of the Zubr leaders, was sentenced to 15 days of arrest, the Young Front activists Aleh Korban, Pavel Fihuryin and Barys Haretski to 10 days of arrest.

Source: ZUBR; February 17, 2006; <http://www.zubr-belarus.com/>

BUSINESS

35. Belarus Budget Deficit 0.23% of GDP in 2005

The Belarusian budget deficit stood at 145 billion Belarusian rubles, or 0.23% of GDP, in 2005, the Finance Ministry told Interfax.

Budget revenue stood at an adjusted 21.29 trillion Belarusian rubles and spending was 21.435 trillion Belarusian rubles.

The budget received 4.111 trillion Bel. rubles from value-added tax payments, 1.682 trillion Bel. rubles from foreign economic activities, 1.536 trillion Bel. rubles from income and profit taxes and 1.116 trillion Bel. rubles from excise taxes.

The target budget deficit is not more than 1.5% GDP in 2006.

The official exchange rate was 2,151 Bel. rubles/\$1.

Source: Interfax; February 17, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

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