

June 1 – June 7, 2006

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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Young Belarusians End Hunger Strike

The four young people in Salihorsk who went on a hunger strike last week to protest the politically motivated criminal prosecution of their associates decided on June 6 to end their protest, *BelaPAN* reported. The four activists of the opposition Youth Front reportedly made their decision following a meeting with opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who urged them to end the hunger strike. Some 30 young people are continuing hunger strikes in other Belarusian cities.

Source: RFE/RL; June 7, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

2. Alyaksandr Kazulin's Brother Arrested

On June 5 in Minsk a brother of political prisoner, former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, was detained. As it turned out, in the end of March Uladzimir Kazulin has been sentenced to 5 days of arrest in his absence. He was found guilty of insubordination to demands of policemen.

On March 2, 2006 a former candidate for presidency, former rector of the Belarusian State University Alyaksandr Kazulin was brutally beaten up during the attempt to enter the so-called "All-Belarusian Assembly". The politician was arrested and taken to the police department of Kastychnitski district of Minsk. By the building if the police department several dozens of people, mainly family and relatives of Kazulin, gathered to find out the fate of the candidate for presidency. However Almaz special unit policemen started to disband peacefully standing people. The policemen in plainclothes were not showing any documents. Two dozens of people, including Uladzimir Kazulin, were detained then. Many of the detainees, including journalists, were brutally beaten up. At least five persons were taken to hospital with traumas.

It is known that Uladzimir Kazulin tried to challenge the verdict in Minsk City Court, but the court dismissed the claim.

Source: Charter97; June 6; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

3. Belarusian Oppositionist Sentenced to 10 Days in Jail in Absentia

A district court in Minsk on May 19 tried in absentia Vyachaslau Siuchyuk and sentenced him to 10 days in jail, finding him guilty of participation in an unauthorized demonstration in the Belarusian capital in March after the presidential election, *BelaPAN* reported on June 5. Hanna Siuchyuk, the oppositionist's wife, told the agency that she received notification of the sentence just a few days ago. Police reportedly beat Siuchyuk up while arresting him near the opposition tent camp on October Square in Minsk on March 23. He was subsequently hospitalized with a head injury and left for Ukraine following his discharge from the hospital.

Source: RFE/RL; June 6, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

4. Aggressive Policemen Will Not Be Prosecuted

The Maskouski District Office of Public Prosecutor will not start a criminal case against the policemen who used force against journalists on March 2, 2006. The fact was explained by the idea that there was no corpus delicti in their actions", - it was written in the letter sent to *BAJ* by the prosecutor V. Zhynhel.

The letter is a reply to the appeal of *BAJ* sent to the Attorney General Piotr Miklashevich and the Minister of Internal Affairs Uladzimir Navumau on March 7, 2006.

The investigators said they had interrogated Yulia Darashkevich, Dzmitry Brushko, Syarhey Pulsha and Aleh Ulevich as well as six Almaz members and 7 policemen. A criminal case connected with the fact that Aleh Ulevich had been "slightly" beaten was started. It was said that the other journalists could not prove the fact they had been beaten or did not come to give evidence of it.

BAJ representatives think that the Office of Public Prosecutor simply did not want to give all the necessary answers regarding the case. "*BAJ* asked some questions about the case", - stressed the *BAJ* deputy chairperson Andrej Bastunets. - Several journalists got beaten during the detention of A. Kazulin (<http://www.baj.ru/2006/Mar/0203nav.asp>).

It should be reminded that on March 2 journalists came to the Railway Workers' House of Culture together with A.Kazulin's initiative group. The politician was going to register for the All-Belarusian meeting. Several journalists got detained and beaten by the police. Dzmitry Madorski (*Reuters*) and a *BelaPAN* reporter Syarhey Pulsha were among them. Three more journalists - Syarhey Hryts (*Associated Press*), Vasil Fyadosenka (*Reuters*) and Yulia Darashkevich (*Nasha Niva*) - were detained by the police and released some time later.

Dzmitry Bushko (*Belhazeta*) and Aleh Ulevich (*Komsomolskaja Pravda v Belorussii*) got detained by the police as well. (A.Ulevich was beaten black and blue during the detention).

It has been admitted that the police interfered in the journalists' work. However, the prosecutors believe that the policemen had the right to do so according to the "Shield" plan (art.16, part 19-1 of the Belarusian law "On the Police") in order to prevent disorder in the streets.

However, *BAJ* would like to draw attention to art. 39 of the Belarusian Press Law that allows journalists to collect information in a free way. The policemen simply did not let the journalists do their job.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; June 5; <http://www.baj.ru/>

5. Jailed Belarusian Businessman Continues Dry Fast

Mikalay Autukhovich, a jailed businessman who is on trial in Hrodna for alleged tax evasion, fainted on May 30 and was moved to the medical unit in the detention center in which he is staying to receive intravenous therapy, *BelaPAN* reported on June 1. Autukhovich, who has refused food for some 40 days, decided on May 23 to stop taking water as well, in protest against what he considers official harassment.

Tax authorities accused Autukhovich, an operator of private taxis in the city of Vawkavysk, of failing to pay 679 million rubles (\$32,000) in taxes and violating cash-handling regulations. Autukhovich was arrested in October and placed under house arrest in December. He disappeared from his home in February and was captured by police in April. Autukhovich reportedly attended a court hearing on June 1 despite a medical report that his health is in danger.

Source: RFE/RL; June 2, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

6. Belarusian KGB To Charge Four in Connection With Illegal Organization

State Security Committee (KGB) chief Stsyapan Sukharenka told journalists in Minsk on May 31 that the criminal case against four members of an unregistered group named Partnyorstva (Partnership) will soon be sent to court, *BelaPAN* and *RFE/RL's* Belarus Service reported.

Tsimaŭey Dranchuk, Alyksandr Shalayka, Mikalay Astreyka, and Enira Branitskaya were arrested by the KGB on February 21 on charges of setting up an illegal organization that "encroaches upon the individuality, rights, and duties of citizens". If found guilty, they may be imprisoned for up to three years. Partnyorstva gained prominence for its observation effort during Belarus's parliamentary elections and referendum in 2004. Only one of the four was allowed to see a relative during the 100 days of their detention. Relatives of the four fear that the Partnyorstva trial will be held behind closed doors.

Source: RFE/RL; June 2, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

DOMESTIC

7. Belarusian President Abolishes Confiscation of Vehicles for Petty Smuggling

Alyaksandr Lukashenka has signed a decree abolishing the mandatory confiscation of motor vehicles in which customs officers detected even a small amount of undeclared goods, Belapan reported, quoting the presidential press service. Now a decision on the confiscation of a vehicle carrying hidden goods valued at less than \$580 should be made by a court, not by customs officers as before. The decree is also intended to preclude cases where passengers attempted to smuggling goods without the knowledge of the carrier, but the carrier's vehicle was nevertheless confiscated jointly with the smuggled goods.

Source: RFE/RL; June 6, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

8. President Instructs To Address Problem of Lack of Qualified Coaches

The head of state, president of the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko stated the lack of qualified coaches in the professional sport in Belarus. Meanwhile, a coach is the main link in achieving a success at big international competitions, the Belarusian leader is convinced.

At an extended sitting of the NOC Executive Committee the head of state ordered minister of sport and tourism Alexander Grigorov and aid to the president for physical culture, sport and tourism Gennadiy Alekseenko to solve the problem of the lack of highly professional coaches. According to the president, an athlete who has been on the podium might become a good coach. "He is a fighter and can train up his likes", Alexander Lukashenko went on.

The head of state believes that Belarus has created all necessary training conditions for national teams in winter sports. Thus, a skiing track meeting international requirements has been built in the Olympic sports compound "Raubichi". "The conditions are in place, what is needed is the desire to train and win", the president is sure.

At the same time Belarusian athletes and their coaches most often lack the aspiration for victory. "If an athlete feels responsible before the country and the nation he will be working hard and win," considers Alexander Lukashenko.

He also ordered to examine an issue of granting presidential scholarship to athletes. "This is good money and should be granted only to those who have achieved results" the head of state said.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; June 6, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

REGIONAL

9. Lukashenko, Baburin Discuss Russia-Belarus Union State

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko and Russian State Duma Deputy Speaker Sergei Baburin have discussed the Russian-Belarussian union state formation.

High on the agenda were the union state's dynamics and problems around the union state in the international scene, Baburin said after talks with Lukashenko.

The two men focused on hindrances that slow down the union state's formation and ways of eliminating them, he said.

Lukashenko and Baburin also touched upon the gas problem.

“The State Duma has had no official answer from the government yet to the question about the expediency and lawfulness of higher gas export prices for Belarus,” he said.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; June 6, 2006; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

10. The Editor-in-Chief of *Kommersant* Baradulin Called an Article in *Sovetskaja Belorussia* “the Worst Example of Soviet Journalism”

The editor-in-chief of *Kommersant* Baradulin called an article printed in *Sovetskaja Belorussia* on May 30 “the worst example of Soviet journalism”. Anonymous authors of the publication insulted the journalist Natallia Hryb who had written an article for the *Kommersant* newspaper. “Personal remarks about journalists are inadmissible even if the administration of Lukashenka is trying to make the newspaper feel some pressure”, - claimed Baradulin in his interview to *Belhazeta*.

The article in *Sovetskaja Belorussia* was called “About the sources and the finder”. It was a response to the article published in *Kommersant*. The article concerned the possible gas conflict between Belarus and Russia in case the prices were leveled up. Natallia Hryb is the author of one of the publications. *Sovetskaja Belorussia* made her a scapegoat and insulted her: “The fabricated sensation belongs to an ordinary wench in need ready to take up any dirty job. The article of that Hryb was very well-paid according to the tariffs of Tverskaja Street (a red-light district in Moscow) and made a racket in Minsk!..”

The editor-in-chief of *Kommersant* gave an interview to *Belhazeta* and commented on the insult: “They broke the law and insulted the journalist personally ... The campaign they started against “Kommersant” is disgraceful. I could stick the same labels on *Sovetskaja Belorussia*. People acting like that cannot be called professionals...”

The whole article “Vladislav Borodulin: “The source is in the Kremlin. It is V.V.Putin” can be found under the heading: “Mass media about mass media”.

By the way, the article was discussed at the general meeting of *BAJ* on June 2 and it was one of the reasons for adopting the “Manifest of Conscience”.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; June 6; <http://www.baj.ru/>

11. Belarusian Parliament Ratifies Uzbekistan's Accession to EurAsEC

Representatives Chamber of National Assembly of Belarus ratified Uzbekistan's accession to Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC).

The Belarusian parliamentarians ratified protocol on joining of Uzbekistan to agreement on foundation of EurAsEC and protocol on introduction of changes to agreement on foundation of EurAsEC.

Leaders of EurAsEC member states signed the protocols during their meeting in Saint Petersburg on 25 January 2005.

Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) is economic union and unites Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Source: *UzReport.Com*; June 6, 2006; <http://news.uzreport.com/mir.cgi?lan=e&id=12279>

12. Belarus Ratifies Equal Traveling Rights Agreement with Russia

The Belarussian parliament has ratified an agreement on equal traveling rights and choice of residence for Belarussian and Russian citizens.

The agreement deepens the integration between Belarus and Russia, Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov said. “We need a common migration space for forming common economic, social and legal space,” he said.

Citizens of Russia and Belarus will freely visit and transit each other's territory and choose a place of residence without a migration card. The only exception is restricted areas, which one can enter with a special permit.

It is possible to visit territories of Russia and Belarus without registration at a police station for 30 days, and receive residence permit regardless the period of staying on territory of the other country.

Source: *Itar-Tass*; June 6, 2006; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

13. Russia and Belarus To Hold Joint Military Exercises in June

Russia and Belarus are to hold Union Shield - 2006, large-scale command and staff military exercises, in the Belarus training facilities on June 17-25. The exercises are intended to settle questions relating to the Union State defense, and test the efficiency of the established united air defense system, Lieutenant General Sergei Gurulev, Chief of General Staff of the Belarus Armed Forces, told a press conference today. The main purpose of the exercises is to evaluate the ability of regional detachments of the Russian and Belarusian Armed Forces to defend the Union State.

A total of 8,800 people will take part in the exercises, including 7,000 people from Belarus and 1,800 Russians. Various types of military equipment will be employed in the exercises - more than 40 tanks, around 180 armored infantry carriers, 140 anti-tank guided missiles, 40 artillery pieces and 30 multiple launch rocket systems. The Air Forces and Air Defense Forces of the two countries will participate in the exercises.

Source: *RosBusinessConsulting*; June 3, 2006; <http://www.rbcnews.com>

14. Energy Dispute Could Disrupt Russia-Belarus Ties

As talks take place in Moscow about Gazprom's demands on Belarus for market-driven pricing of gas imports, reports suggest that the dispute could weaken the hitherto close ties between the two countries.

The wrangling over access to gas pipelines and pricing of imports to Belarus threatens to spill over into a wider political argument along the lines of the earlier Russia-Ukraine conflagration.

However in Belarus's case, as *Radio Free Europe (RFE)* reports, there is a key difference, in that it has long been perceived as an ally to Russia, and is something of a pariah state under the autocratic rule of Aleksandar Lukashenko. Therefore, unlike increasingly westernized Ukraine, it will have few allies to turn to in the face of Russian gas price hikes.

Gazprom - which itself has been criticized for acting as though it is a formal foreign policy tool of the Kremlin - is demanding control over the vital transit pipelines that pass through Belarus on their way to the west. It seems that Moscow prizes this access more than it values the political allegiance of a potentially-embarrassing satellite state, as it is prepared to axe the subsidies it offers on gas if Belarus does not give ground over the gas network.

RFE reports that Gazprom is aiming for a monopoly over gas export routes to the west - something evidenced by its trenchant refusal to accept EU demands that it open up access to its pipelines to other companies.

All of which leaves Minsk in a tricky position. The Interfax news agency reported on June 2 that Belarus's prime minister Sergei Sidorsky told parliament that a joint venture partnership between the Belarusian gas transit company and Gazprom would in all likelihood be established during 2006.

"One can expect a joint venture or some other structure to be established this year," he was quoted as saying.

Source: Nick Kingsley, *Energy Business Review Online*; June 2, 2006; http://www.energy-business-review.com/article_news.asp?guid=23F97C56-232B-4761-A48E-900F8EBB97A

15. Lukashenko Faces Total Isolation

Russia has toughened its policy towards Belarus. According to popular business daily *Kommersant*, the management of energy giant Gazprom intends to sell gas to Belarus at \$200 per 1,000 cubic meters, which Belarus claims is a violation of the Union Treaty.

Vedomosti, a Moscow-based daily, writes about a customs war, which Belarus has allegedly initiated in response to Moscow's gas offer. It writes that Belarusian customs officials have allegedly applied a dormant order of President Alexander Lukashenko to arrest a Russian batch of spirits and cigarettes sent to its enclave, the Kaliningrad Region, via Belarus.

The Kremlin is unlikely to accept Lukashenko's terms. If Moscow and Minsk fail to agree, Belarus will be isolated both from the west and from the east.

It is clear why Russia has decided to raise gas prices for Belarus. By supporting Lukashenko in his confrontation with the West during the presidential elections in Belarus, Moscow was protecting its own interests because political destabilization in Belarus would have affected Russia's geopolitical standing.

After that, Moscow waited for an opportune moment, and used the chance when Lukashenko became isolated from the West after the elections and had to listen more politely to the Kremlin's opinion.

Russia has its own strategy and tactics regarding Belarus. Strategically, it wants to integrate Belarus into Russia, which entails the introduction of the common monetary unit (ruble) and the adoption of the Constitutional Act that stipulates the election of a sole head of the Union State. This is a full-scale difficult-to-implement integration project. The Kremlin is skeptical of its chances.

The tactics provides for Gazprom gaining full control of Beltransgaz, the Belarusian state-owned gas company whose pipelines carry Russian gas to Europe. In fact, Russia's strategic objective is to gain control of gas distribution networks in nearly all countries that transit and buy Russian gas.

The issue was an object of economic bargaining in relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia, but has a strong political aspect in the case of Belarus. Moscow regards its right to control Beltransgaz as logical and justified because Lukashenko's election victory was mostly based on an "economic miracle" paid for by Russia.

Russia wants to keep Belarus within reach by using economic (the acquisition of gas networks) or political (possible election of a pro-Russian president) methods. If Russia assumes control of the Belarusian gas network, the latter goal will lose its significance - Moscow will be independent of the Belarusian gas transit network even with a pro-Western president in Belarus.

Therefore, Gazprom's acquisition of Beltransgaz (by setting up a joint venture) is one of the main strategic objectives of the Kremlin. Moscow would regard this as partial payment for gas, and would not raise gas prices very high. But if Belarus refuses to heed Gazprom's request for a JV, it will be made to pay.

Belarus is not budging so far, and so the Kremlin is toughening its policy towards it. At first, it planned to demand \$147 for its gas. Then *Kommersant* reported that President Vladimir Putin had instructed the government to stop subsidizing the Belarusian economy and to put an end to

the Belarusian policy of re-exporting Russian energy resources. And lastly, it has transpired this week that gas price could be spiked to \$200.

However, the use of the "gas weapon" against Belarus will be less effective than against Ukraine - Russia simply cannot turn off the gas, as it did to Ukraine. There is a major difference between Belarus and Ukraine although both countries transit Russian gas to Europe.

Ukraine, which is eager to join the European Union and does not want to damage its relations with the West, had to let Russian gas pass to Europe. Although President Viktor Yushchenko approved the siphoning off of a certain amount of gas for domestic purposes, he did this very cautiously, while defending his stand against Russia.

If Russia turns off the gas to Belarus, Lukashenko, who is no longer afraid of affecting his country's relations with Europe, may ignore Russia's obligations to the European consumers and would siphon off as much gas as he needs, thus endangering Moscow's relations with the West. A gas war would be especially detrimental to Russia this year, when it presides in the G8.

On the one hand, Belarus is more dependent on Russia [than Ukraine] and Russia has more instruments for pressurizing it. On the other hand, their application might prove damaging to its own interests. Moscow may have to diversify its methods and choose other than the strategic gas weapon.

Anyway, Russia has a very effective argument against Lukashenko: an aggravation of the crisis might push the Belarusian president into total isolation. This would threaten economic and political stability in Belarus and would be fraught with very serious consequences for him.

Tatyana Stanovaya is head of the expert department at the Center for Political Technologies.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and may not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial board.

Source: Tatyana Stanovaya, RIA Novosti; June 2, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

16. Official: Belarus, Gazprom Talks Positive

Belarusian Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski Friday called talks with Russian gas giant Gazprom on pricing were constructive.

"I discussed the subject with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov at our latest meeting. We are satisfied with progress of the ongoing gas price negotiations," he told the nation's House of Representatives. The comments were reported by the *BelaPAN* news agency.

In talks between the two sides Thursday, Gazprom executives said they viewed discussions as talks between two distinct economic entities, he said.

"We are using the logic that Gazprom is using. We are looking for economic approaches, economic tools that can influence the gas price for the country," he said.

Gazprom wants to increase nearly threefold -- from \$50 to \$150 per 1,000 cubic meters -- the price of gas to Belarus to bring it more in line with what it charges other customers.

Source: United Press International; June 2, 2006; <http://www.upi.com>

17. Decision on Belarus-Russia Gas Venture May Be Taken in 2006 - Sidorsky

Plans to establish a joint venture between Beltransgaz and Gazprom act as a strong argument in Belarussian- Russian negotiations on gas prices, Belarussian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky said in parliament on Friday.

"Beltransgaz, our joint venture, and gas production matter in these talks," he said.

"One can expect a joint venture or some other structure to be established" this year, he said.

Source: Interfax; June 2, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

18. Minsk Hosts Belarus-Russia Ministerial Consultations

Minsk is hosting the Belarus-Russia ministerial consultations focusing on the two countries' stand in regard to the issues on the agenda of the 61st session of the UN General Assembly. The Belarusian delegation is headed by deputy foreign minister Viktor Gaisenok, the Russian – deputy foreign minister Alexander Yakovenko.

It is the issues of the UN reconstruction that are in the spotlight of the present meeting, the Belarusian foreign ministry told *BelTA*. The consultations are expected to discuss the effectiveness of the UN efforts in addressing urgent international problems, responding to new threats and challenges of the 21st century and settling the situation in the Middle East.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; June 2, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

19. Chiefs of Frontier Regions of Ukraine and Belarus Discuss Transborder Cooperation

The issue was discussed by the participants in a meeting of chiefs of frontier regions of Ukraine and Belarus, was held in the Volyn region (Lutsk).

They urged to use the huge industrial capability of the two neighboring nations for enlargement and deepening mutually profitable trade - economic cooperation. Though, over four months of 2006 trade turnover between the two states grew almost 1.5 times, the parties to the meeting agreed that the industrial capability of Ukraine in this sphere is used only to 15 - 18 percent.

Source: The National Radio Company of Ukraine; June 1, 2006; <http://www.nrcu.gov.ua/>

INTERNATIONAL

20. Plane Forced Down in Belarus Owned by Lithuanian Air Club

An airplane that intruded Belarus' airspace Tuesday night and was forced down by local air defense belonged to an air club in neighboring Lithuania, the Belarusian Defense Ministry said Wednesday.

The ministry said the light plane, which was piloted by a Lithuanian citizen and carrying a 22-23-year-old Lithuanian woman, belonged to a club in Kaunas, Lithuania's second largest city about 100 km (62 miles) west of the capital Vilnius.

"The plane that Belarusian air force detained carries the badge of the Kaunas air club and Lithuanian symbols," the ministry press service said.

The source also said that before detaining the plane, Belarusian air defense forces had sent emergency radio signals to the pilot but he failed to respond. Officers then asked Lithuanian air traffic controllers whether the plane had applied for an air route.

"The Lithuanian side said it had no idea about the plane," the press service said.

The low-flying intruder was registered at about 7 p.m. local time (4 p.m. GMT) Tuesday crossing Belarusian air space. A Su-25 Frogfoot interceptor scrambled and forced the airplane to land at a military air field in Lida in western Belarus near the Lithuanian border.

Source: RIA Novosti; June 7, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

21. WAN Board Calls for End of Harassment of Journalists in Belarus

The Board of the World Association of Newspapers has called on the government of Belarus to end the harassment of journalists and the repression of press freedom that exists in the country.

"The past year has been marked by severe repression of press freedom in Belarus, which culminated at the time of the presidential elections in March 2006 when over 30 journalists were arrested. Even though all of them have today been released, the effects of the onslaught continue to mark the media scene in Belarus," said the WAN Board in a resolution issued during the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors Forum in Moscow, Russia.

The resolution said:

"The Board of the World Association of Newspapers, meeting at the 59th World Newspaper Congress in Moscow, Russia, 4 to 7 June 2006, deplores the continued crackdown on the independent press in Belarus.

"The past year has been marked by severe repression of press freedom in Belarus, which culminated at the time of the presidential elections in March 2006 when over 30 journalists were arrested. Even though all of them have today been released, the effects of the onslaught continue to mark the media scene in Belarus.

"On 10 April, the *Nasha Niva* weekly was informed by the Ideological Department of the Minsk City Executive Committee that the newspaper could no longer be registered in the capital city of Minsk. The Ideological Department, which is not a legal instance, motivated its decision by the arrest of *Nasha Niva* editor-in-chief Andrei Dinko in the aftermath of the presidential elections. The independent weekly has been subject to ongoing harassment for several months already and there is reason to believe that the aim is to close down the publication, which is the oldest newspaper in Belarus.

"On 10 May, a number of journalists were prevented from assisting the trial of youth leader Artur Finkevich, one of the front figures of the mass protests in March.

"In April and May, Belarusian journalists have regularly been arrested and summoned by the authorities for a variety of different reasons.

"Also in April, three Polish journalists were stopped as they tried to enter Belarus to cover the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. At least two of them carried valid visas, but despite that they were turned away at the border.

"Before the presidential elections, foreign journalists were expelled from Belarus, local journalists were beaten up by police and several newspapers were prevented from printing.

"The Board of WAN calls on the government of Belarus to end of harassment of independent media, and fully restore press freedom and freedom of expression in the country."

The Paris-based WAN, the global organisation for the newspaper industry, defends and promotes press freedom world-wide. It represents 18,000 newspapers; its membership includes 73 national newspaper associations, newspapers and newspaper executives in 102 countries, 11 news agencies and nine regional and world-wide press groups.

Source: The World Association of Newspapers; June 6, 2006; <http://www.wan-press.org/article11227.html>

22. Belarus, China Step Up Regional Cooperation

The visit of the official delegation of the Chinese city of Changchun to Minsk is a significant event in the history of Belarusian-Chinese relations, as it highlights the fact that the two countries have

started regional cooperation. The statement was made by Belarus deputy foreign minister Viktor Gaisenok during the solemn opening of the Changchun Days in Minsk. The event was held at the city hall today.

Belarus considers the development of the Belarusian-Chinese relations at the state level and the regional one extremely important, noted the deputy foreign minister.

Cooperation of the two countries has a strong basis, which is traditional friendship of the nations and a strategic character of the relations. "We can use the basis to build long-term cooperation in all fields, political, economic, scientific and cultural," emphasised Viktor Gaisenok.

He said, the visit of the Changchun delegation (the twin city of Minsk) and the signing of the programme to step up cooperation of the two cities are a proof of deeper relations and a new quality level the sides have reached.

According to the official, today there are great prospects for increasing the Belarusian-Chinese cooperation. "The Belarusian side is interested in taking part in large projects of China, in particular, restoration of the country's north-western areas," he informed.

Viktor Gaisenok expressed hope that the event will become a tradition to be held on a regular basis.

The official delegation of Changchun stays in Minsk on June 4-7. Today the parties signed a programme of actions to step up cooperation and partnership relations between the twin cities of Minsk and Changchun (China). The agreement to establish twin city relations was signed in May 1992.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; June 5, 2006;
<http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

BUSINESS

23. Azerbaijan, Belarus Leaders of Industrial Production in CIS

Azerbaijan and Belarus were ranked as leaders of industrial production among CIS member-countries in January-April 2006.

According to CIS Interstate statistic committee, during the abovementioned period the maximum growth of commercial production among countries of the Commonwealth was registered in Azerbaijan making 45.5%. The same rate accounted for 12.3% in Belarus. Tajikistan occupied the 3rd place with 7.2%, reports Trend.

During period under review industrial production in Russia soared at 3.5%, in Kazakhstan – 2.7%, and in Ukraine – 0.4%.

Manufacturing in Kyrgyzstan, Moldavia and Armenia declined for 9.5%, 5.9% and 2.9% accordingly.

CIS statistic committee has no information about industrial production in Georgia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

*Source: Mammadov, Trend News Agency; June 7, 2006;
<http://www.trend.az/?mod=shownews&news=21041&lang=en>*

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the International League for Human Rights (www.ilhr.org). The League, now in its 65th year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations and the International Labor Organization. To send letters to the Editor or to subscribe/unsubscribe please contact Maria Kabalina at cis@ilhr.org.

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