

Edited by Maria Kabalina
International League for Human Rights

THIS WEEK'S TOP STORIES:

- Belarus Claims Opposition Leaders Train in Poland
- Belarusian Party Calls for Boycott of Local Elections
- Independent Press Distributor Detained in Pinsk
- Gas Prices To Rise 50-100 Percent for Belarus Next Year

Human Rights & Independent Media

1. Fake Bomb Found at Opposition Office in Minsk (*Gazeta.Ru*)
2. Belarusian Election Monitors Appeal Convictions (*RFE/RL*)
3. *Vitsiebski Kurjer M* Threatened by RNU (*BAJ*)
4. Opposition Looks for the Alternative of Belarusian State TV (*Belorussky Partizan*)
5. Independent Press Distributor Detained in Pinsk (*BAJ*)
6. Milinkevich Campaign Leader Dismissed (*Charter 97*)

Domestic

7. Belarusian Party Calls To Boycott Local Elections (*RFE/RL*)
8. Lebedko Supports Solidarity Action for Political Prisoners (*AFN*)
9. Lukashenko Destroying Belarus' Historical Architecture (*Polskie Radio*)
10. Belarus: An Orthodox State? (*Forum 18*)
11. Minsk-Based Companies Invest More than \$100 Million in Losing Farms (*RFE/RL*)

Regional

12. Belarus Deliberately Delaying Gas Price Solution – Russia (*RIA Novosti*)
13. Gas Price To Rise 50-100 Percent for Belarus in 2007 (*Belorusskie Novosti*)
14. Belarus, Russia Migration Services To Develop Joint Documents (*The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*)

International

15. Estonia To Admit Expelled Belarusian Students (*RFE/RL*)
16. Belarus Calls on EU, U.S. To Reject Isolationist Policies (*Interfax*)
17. Belarus Claims Opposition Leaders Train in Poland (*Poland.Pl*)
18. Belarus Creates New Scandal with Latvia (*The Jamestown Foundation*)
19. Belarus Opens Iranian Car Plant (*The Moscow Times*)
20. EU Demands Immediate Release of Election Monitors Jailed in Belarus (*MosNews*)
21. Netherlands Invites Scholarship Applications from Belarusian Students (*RFE/RL*)
22. Several More Turns of the Screw (*The Economist*)

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Fake Bomb Is Found at the Opposition Office in Minsk

A fake bomb was found at the office of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), an opposition party. A device was taped to the door. Police and combat engineers were summoned and discovered the item was a fake factory-made bomb. The fake bomb was marked with the logo of Russian National Unity (RNU).

According to Vintsuk Vyachorka, the BPF leader, a dark green container with a swastika sign and a RNU logo was attached to the door. Earlier similar images were painted on the doors of the party's office.

Minsk police department informed that a criminal case was opened.// *Radio Svaboda*

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: *Gazeta.Ru*; August 16, 2006; <http://www.gazeta.ru/>

2. Belarusian Election Monitors Appeal Convictions

The defense teams of Mikalay Astreyka and Tsimafey Dranchuk have filed appeals with the Minsk City Court against prison sentences handed down to them earlier this month, *Belapan* reported on August 15. In a trial held behind closed doors, Judge Leanid Yasinovich sentenced Mikalay Astreyka to two years in jail, Tsimafey Dranchuk to one year, and Enira Branitskaya and Alyksandr Shalayka to six months each for running an unregistered election-monitoring organization that allegedly "infringed upon the interests and rights of citizens."

The Minsk City Court has two months to consider the appeals. Since the four were arrested in February, Branitskaya and Shalayka are to be released next week. Amnesty International declared the four prisoners of conscience.

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

3. Vitsiebski Kurjer M Is Threatened by the RNU

On August 10, independent newspaper *Vitsiebski Kurjer M* received a threatening letter. The letter was sent by the Russian National Unity organization.

"Your newspaper is financed by American and German enemies of Russia. It breaks the unity of Slavonic nations", -- the letter stated. Its authors demanded that the editorial staff change the newspaper's news policy and "stopped publishing articles that discredit the present Belarusian authorities and A. Lukashenka who is struggling to make Slavonic nations superior in comparison with Jews and all kinds of liberals who are trying to enslave the Russian people".

If the threat isn't heeded, the RNU said it was going "to use all its contacts" in order to close the publication down as soon as possible.

The letter also contained a picture of a military man with a falcon on his uniform holding a hanged man in one hand and a sword in the other. The hanged man had the Star of David painted on his breast and dollars in his pockets. The inscription below the picture said "Let us make Russia clean!"

The editor-in-chief Uladzimir Baran claimed that the newspaper was going to file suit against the authors of the letter.

On July 18, journalists working for the *Intex-Press* newspaper (Baranavichy) found leaflets containing threats and two signs were posted with the inscription "CIA's Nest" on the door of the

newspaper's office. Police were unable to find those were responsible for it. A month ago the head of the Vitsiebsk affiliate of the UDP received similar threats from the RNU.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; August 14; <http://www.baj.ru/>

4. Opposition Looks for Alternative to Belarusian State TV

In the nearest future, the Belarusian opposition plans to organize a round table to discuss creating non-state TV. The U.S.A. and the E.U. have already promised to support the project. How do Belarusians see this new TV channel?

A few months ago Adam Lipinsy, the State Secretary of the Polish Prime Minister's administration, announced the creation of a non-state TV for Belarus. The satellite broadcasting could start as early as 2007. Only technical questions are to be resolved, Lipinsy stated.

Earlier Aleksandr Milinkevich, a Belarusian opposition leaders, expressed concern that only an insignificant part of the population would be able to watch the new satellite channel. His opponents objected, stating that there are a minimum of 300,000 satellite receivers in Belarus and that 17% of the electorate watch satellite TV.

According to Svetlana Kalinkina, editor-in-chief of the *Narodnaya Volya* newspaper, "we have to understand that there are no longer any larger projects and anything else like that, most likely, will not show up."

Regarding the technical side of the question, Kalinkina thinks that the project can be launched, but the other questions, such as the broadcasting language and political program of the channel, are fundamental for the Belarusian opposition.

The project's lobbyists should decide if the channel's goal is to increase awareness or to increase national self-consciousness. In other words, if the project is for the short tem or long-term perspective, Svetlana Kalinkina explained.

Eduard Melnikov, a member of the Belarusian Association of Journalists' Board of Directors, and an employee of the Belarusian state TV for many years, thinks that "Belarusian society has a keen need in an independent TV channel." "The political and social stagnation in the country is the result of a conscious show-down, people brainwashed by state-controlled mass media."

In addition, the European Union's project to show programs about Belarus on the RTVI channel, on which they spent about 2 millions Euros, "completely failed. It is necessary for Belarusians to talk about Belarus. We were watching the reality, displayed in the EU's project, with, to put it mildly, surprise."

The other important question is if the Belarusian authorities let the TV journalists work inside the country. Aleksandr Zimovsky, the head of the Beltelradio Company, stated that the chances to create an alternative TV channel are poor. According to him "you can not create an abroad TV channel to talk about the internal events." //Sergei Panchenko, *Deuch Welle*

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: *Belorussky Partizan*; August 14, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org>

5. Independent Press Distributor Detained in Pinsk

Aliaksandar Ramanovich, a distributor of *Narodnaya Volya*, was detained in the centre of Pinsk on August 10. Police confiscated 261 issues of the newspaper, took the distributor to the police office and filed a report.

Police claimed that at the moment of detention Mr. Ramanovich did not have an official permission to prove that he had received the issues from the newspaper's office.

Later the distributor brought all the necessary documents to the police station. A police officer refused to look them through or include them in the report.

A. Ramanovich was released three hours after the detention. According to the police report the confiscated issues will be kept in Pinsk Department of the Interior.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; August 14; <http://www.baj.ru/>

6. Milinkevich Campaign Leader Dismissed

One more opposition activist is fired. On July 27, the labor contract of Alyaksandr Chyhir, a history teacher at School # 8 in Babrujsk, expired. The contract was not extended. During the presidential campaign Alyaksandr Chyhir, a deputy at the Babruysk town council, was in charge of Babruysk headquarters of the united democratic forces' leader Aleksandr Milinkevich.

In a phone conversation with Radio Svaboda, Alyaksandr Chyhir said: "I am convinced that the dismissal is connected with my political activities. Knowing that this ruling is unjust, representatives of the Education Department are looking for pretexts for my firing. For instance, they claim I was not at work on March 25, on Freedom Day. It was a day off, and I went to Minsk. I am also charged with starting a fight in the spring of 2005 in Hrodna during the elections to the chamber of representatives. There haven't been any aggressive actions on my part. Policemen forcibly removed me from the polling station".

Source: Charter 97; August 11; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

DOMESTIC

7. Belarusian Party Calls for Boycott of Local Elections

The opposition right-wing Conservative Christian Party (KKhP) called for boycotting next year's elections to the local soviets, warning that the Belarusian and Russian governments might use the vote to hold a referendum on a constitution of the Belarus-Russia Union State, Belapan reported on August 14. "On election day one should not go to the polls to vote for the regime but should rather take to the streets to join others for protests and actions," the KKhP said in a statement, adding that "no fair election could be held under the occupational regime and dictatorship." The KKhP boycotted the 2004 parliamentary elections and this year's presidential vote.

Source: RFE/RL; August 15, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

8. Lebedko Supports Action of Solidarity with Political Prisoners

Anatoly Lebedko, the head of the United Civil Party (UCP), supported the idea to hold in Minsk a big action of solidarity with political prisoners, families and friends of the kidnapped politicians, the UCP press service informed.

"I am supporter of the idea to hold in Minsk a big action of solidarity, organized by the joint efforts," – the UCP head stated and declared for promoting the action into the regions.

The politician believes that "It is necessary to promote actions of solidarity with political prisoners, families and friends of the kidnapped regime critics into the regions. We must make a task to hold "a chain of not-indifferent people" in each regional centre in Belarus"

He also highlighted the necessity of mass media support during these actions. "There is demand to increase number of mass media covering this subject," Anatoly Lebedko stated.

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: AFN, August 14, 2006; <http://www.afn.by>

9. Lukashenko Destroying Belarus' Historical Architecture

The authorities of the city of Hrodna in Western Belarus have given this year another order to destroy the historical centre of this city.

Hrodna is 820 years old and is considered to be one of the most European cities in this country. The architecture of this city closely resembles Vilnius, which was built along similar lines. During World War II Hrodna suffered the least damage of Belarusian cities. However, according to Belarusian historians and enthusiasts of European architecture, the real war for Hrodna is just beginning.

This year Hrodna has already gone through reconstruction of the historical city centre - the Soviet Square, former Market Square. In defiance of the protests of the intelligentsia of Hrodna, the city authorities refused not to destroy the old town. Another stage of the so-called reconstruction of the city is to destroy the quarter called New World where constructivist-style buildings of historical value from the beginning of the 20th century are located.

A sports centre is to be constructed in place of the destroyed quarter; there will also be a road built there which would run through the city centre. The situation is complicated by the fact that the new road is to run by two castles, a synagogue and historical fire tower while the Hradnichanka River, which flows alongside, is to be directed into underground pipes.

A Belarusian historian, Andrej Vaszkievicz, tells of the origin and historical significance of the old Hrodna quarter.

This part of Hrodna which is called New World came into existence in the 1920's and 30's. Aristocracy mainly inhabited this quarter. Those houses became the pride of our city. But it is the constructivist-style buildings that are of the greatest value. This style used to be very common in Western Europe and also in Western Belarus. Such buildings, especially those in the style of the classical European constructivism, can be found very rarely in our country. And these houses built of wood are unique to the whole of Europe; one may only see them in Hrodna.

Many inhabitants of the city are convinced that the best solution to the problem would be to build the road according to a plan proposed by Hrodna historians; however, this possibility has been rejected due to the fact that the road would run past the houses of two local officials.

Anna Pawłowska, an active defender of the historical centre, of Hrodna talks about the plans of the local authorities.

The authorities did not reply to the appeals of historians, writers and scientists from all over Belarus. A Belarusian historian, Aleś Smalanczuk, who comes from Hrodna, believes that people who accept such plans are strangers to the history of Hrodna. Belarus is an empty and meaningless word for them.

Hrodna is a unique city for which it was easier to survive the two World Wars than for other Belarusian cities. The Soviet authorities ruled here for 20 years less than in central Belarus, perhaps this is what saved Hrodna. It may not always be comfortable to live in these houses. But destruction and the building of a sports hall in this place is not the solution. These buildings could be let as offices, after all it is a city centre. What matters is the image of our city. Now they are destroying Hrodna in the same way as the Communists destroyed Minsk, Vitebsk and Brest during the Soviet period. Our city may simply disappear as a historical and cultural phenomenon.

I have the impression that those people in the municipal council are strangers to Hrodna and to our Belarus.

Destroying the historical and cultural legacy of Belarusians, the city authorities continue the policy of the former authorities of the country, when demolishing monumental churches, monasteries, castles and palaces was deemed to be a step forward towards communism. The current authorities want Belarusians to disavow their history, because a nation without memory shall never threaten the authoritarian regime.

Source: Polskie Radio, August 10, 2006; <http://www.polskieradio.pl/polonia/>

10. Belarus: An Orthodox State?

Belarus' President Aleksandr Lukashenko publicly stresses the role of Orthodoxy. However, Forum 18 News Service has found little evidence that state support for the Moscow Patriarchate is more than nominal. For example, every month a network of Ideological Departments sends state policy on topics such as youth, trade or housing to every state organ in the country. However, there appears to be no insistence upon familiarity with Orthodox doctrine. One Orthodox priest commented to Forum 18 that the 12 apostles would be illegal under Belarus' Religion Law. He also noted that registered religious organizations are banned from using state school premises, even outside school hours, and that there have been no substantial moves to introduce Orthodox instruction into state education. Discussing why the state gives nominal support for Orthodoxy, rather than a more active pro-atheist policy, the priest pointed out: "You can make a reservation for it, in which it is tolerated as a museum of culture and turns into something that fulfils 'religious needs' instead of preaching the Gospel."

While President Aleksandr Lukashenko stresses the role of Orthodoxy in Belarus and there is an accepted view among Protestants that the Belarusian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is becoming a pillar of state ideology, Forum 18 News Service has found little evidence for this to be the case.

The Baptist Union elder for Minsk region, for example, recently joked to Forum 18 that the Orthodox Church had replaced communist ideology: "They attend all state events," Gennadi Brutsky remarked. "I wouldn't be surprised if we soon see priests blessing intakes of children into the Pioneers!" (Based on the Soviet-era youth organization.) Musing on the possibility of optional lessons on Orthodoxy in state schools, a Minsk Pentecostal maintained that in Belarus "optional" meant "having to fight for the right not to take part in it. You can't even call your child what you like, the name has to be in the registry office directory. When I suggested Dominic, they said 'How about Dmitri?'"

Despite the prominence of different confessions at different stages in Belarusian history, President Aleksandr Lukashenko has repeatedly affirmed his support for Orthodoxy. In recent years he has variously described the Belarusian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) as "the basis of our faith," "the most important origin of correct decision-making at state level" and, prospectively, "one of the most important pillars of our state." In addition to similar sentiments expressed during his November 2005 meeting with the Church's synod, the Belarusian leader's official website notes, Lukashenko referred to state support for both Orthodox church construction and seminary education. In the absence of much commercial advertising in Belarus, Forum 18 noted collection boxes for the Belarusian Orthodox Church prominently sited in every Minsk metro station and most major shops.

According to the 2002 Religion Law, the Orthodox Church plays "the defining role in the state traditions of the Belarusian people," something which government officials are obliged to take into account in their dealings with other religious organizations. In its 2003 concordat-style co-operation agreement, the Belarusian state also guarantees the Orthodox Church "the right of ecclesiastical jurisdiction on its canonical territory" and endorses its collaboration with a broad range of government ministries.

While the Belarusian Orthodox Church is certainly spared the restrictions on worship premises encountered by many Protestant churches, for example, Forum 18 has found government support for it to be largely nominal, however.

Recently speaking to Forum 18 in Minsk, for example, a former Belarusian state television employee described how, revived approximately three years ago, a network of Ideological Departments now sends state policy on topics such as youth, trade or housing to every state organ in the country, "only private commercial structures are exempt." Every month, according to the former employee, these organs then hold "information days" at which their staff members are addressed about the current topic. Forum 18 presumed that, in the case of state television, journalists would subsequently have to prepare material based upon the information received from the Ideological Department. "No, the material is already prepared!" the employee replied, before describing how the Orthodox Church's state-supported, majority position in Belarus featured during a month focusing upon nationality issues.

While the method is Soviet, coverage in one month's topic does not amount to a new state ideology, and there appears in practice to be no insistence upon familiarity with Orthodox doctrine. Although a Minsk mother told Forum 18 that a recent questionnaire from her child's kindergarten included "Will your child learn Christian culture of the Orthodox tradition?" among more innocuous questions, young Protestants reported that tuition in schools is anti-Protestant rather than pro-Orthodox and that very few of their fellow pupils regularly attend Orthodox worship.

"You need 20 people for a community to become legal, so the apostles wouldn't have qualified," a Belarusian Orthodox critic of the 2002 Religion Law commented to Forum 18 on 22 July. He noted that this and some of the law's other provisions have not actually helped the Belarusian Orthodox Church, despite enjoying its backing. In particular, he pointed out, Article 9 prohibits registered religious organizations from using state school premises even outside school hours. Due to a shortage of suitable premises for religious instruction attached to their church buildings, he said, Orthodox parishes used to do this quite frequently prior to the Law, "but now we don't have any possibility to rent state schools for Sunday school classes."

Despite the 2003 Concordat and subsequent agreements with the Belarusian Education Ministry, the Orthodox priest reported that there has in practice been no substantial move to introduce Orthodox instruction into the state education system. Both the Religion and Education Laws emphasize the secular character of state education, and the latter permits state education institutions to work with registered religious organizations only outside school hours. In an echo of Gennadi Brutsky's fears, the priest described to Forum 18 how pupils at a school run by the Orthodox Church under the auspices of an ordinary Minsk state school were taken to pay their respects at the grave of Belarusian Communist Party leader Petr Masherov, after whom the state school is named. He added, however, that the Church has found it difficult to find enough pupils to make up the few classes of the Orthodox school.

Distributed in Minsk by Vladimir Chertovich's Orthodox Initiative, a leaflet picked up by Forum 18 vaunts the fourth publication in Belarus of "The Law of God" by Fr Seraphim Slobodsky of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. In publishing 90,000 copies of the catechism since 1994 with the blessing of Belarusian Orthodox leader Metropolitan Filaret (Vakhromeyev) of Minsk and Slutsk, it states, the organization hopes that "our great thousand-year-old Orthodox culture will be treasured by every Belarusian and every citizen of Belarus. And above all, that 'The Law of God' will become a book in constant use in every Belarusian home."

Forum 18 discovered that the work – a thick volume preserving pre-1917 Russian orthography and prefaced by a photograph of President Lukashenko flanked by Russian patriarch Aleksii II and Metropolitan Filaret – is on sale at state bookstores in Minsk in addition to Orthodox Initiative's shop, "Orthodox Book". Notably, however, it does not carry any state endorsement. The Orthodox priest with whom Forum 18 spoke doubted that the book would ever be employed

in state schools, especially as the Belarusian Orthodox Church severed its links with Orthodox Initiative in December 2005. According to a March 2006 statement signed by Metropolitan Filaret, this was partly because the organization – famously sued in 2000 for publication of antisemitic literature – circulated "ideas and views sometimes incompatible with an Orthodox worldview and causing division in Church and society."

No longer enjoying Metropolitan Filaret's blessing, Orthodox Initiative has been operating as Christian Initiative since January 2006. Over the past decade the government has largely succeeded in crushing all Orthodox communities that function outside the framework of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), which has even registered the term "Belarusian Orthodox Church" as a trademark. The government has refused registration to parishes of all rival jurisdictions, including the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

The Orthodox priest with whom Forum 18 spoke noted the continued emphasis upon atheist ideology in the higher education system, with Orthodox theology graduates reportedly unable to find employment there. Forum 18 asked why, given the prevalence over religion of what Belarusian textbooks describe as "free-thinking", the state would choose nominal support for Orthodoxy rather than a more pro-atheist policy. Joseph Stalin opened churches after finding that he couldn't destroy Orthodoxy, the priest pointed out: "You can make a reservation for it, in which it is tolerated as a museum of culture and turns into something that fulfils 'religious needs' instead of preaching the Gospel."

Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; August 10, 2006; <http://www.forum18.org>

11. Minsk-Based Companies Invest More than \$100 Million in Losing Farms

Minsk-based enterprises invested 250 billion rubles (\$116 million) in the agricultural sector in the past two years, *Belapan* reported on August 9, quoting Alyaksandr Lukashevich from the Minsk City Executive Committee. The investments followed the government's directive of 2004 allowing well-performing urban enterprises, including private ones, to take control of unprofitable collective farms. Lukashevich said a total of 140 loss-making farms in Minsk Oblast received aid from urban enterprises in the period. He added that the investments were meant to restore the farms to profitability but failed to disclose whether they actually achieved that goal.

Source: RFE/RL; August 10 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

REGIONAL

12. Belarus Deliberately Delaying Gas Price Solution - Russia

Belarus is artificially delaying a settlement on the price of natural gas supplies from Russia, a Kremlin official said Tuesday.

After raising gas prices for several of its other ex-Soviet neighbors, Russian state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom said it would also pursue a European price formula for Belarus as of 2007, and offered to partially compensate for the price hikes if Belarusian gas pipeline company Beltransgaz were to sell the Russian energy giant its main gas routes.

"Belarus is under the illusion that something can change in Gazprom's position on the price of supplies to the country," the source said.

He said Russia had voiced its proposals on the price issue long ago but had received no response.

The price of gas supplies to Belarus has not changed since 2004, and currently stands at \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters. Russia is seeking a price in the region of \$180-200.

In his response to the parliament's inquiry into reasons for raising the price for Belarus, Andrei Dementyev, deputy minister of industry and energy, said that the current price of \$46.68 only partially compensated for spending on the extraction, storage and transportation of gas to Belarus.

"Under these conditions, keeping the current gas price means not only directly subsidizing supplies to Belarus, but also the absence of a source of investment in the development of the gas industry, and a reduction in budget revenues," he said.

Source: RIA Novosti; August 15, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

13. Gas Price Will Rise by 50 to 100 Percent for Belarus Next Year

Russia is likely to raise the gas price for Belarus by between 50 and 100 percent next year, according to the country's 2007 social and economic development projections posted on the Russian economy ministry's webpage.

Russia's Gazprom warned earlier this year that it planned to increase the price of 1,000 cubic meters of gas supplied to Belarus to \$200 in 2007, a fourfold hike compared with the current rate of \$46.68.

The forecast identifies Belarus as a major consumer of Russian energy resources among CIS countries, saying that investment projects and closer cooperation will contribute to a rise in fuel supplies to the Belarusian market, the *AFN* news agency reported.

According to the document, Russia's Lukoil giant is to invest in the manufacture of high-quality oil additives and oil refining, and Gazprom will be involved in projects on the modernization of the Grodno Azot fertilizer manufacturer and the construction of a subsurface gas storage facility. The document forecasts a rise in Russian oil deliveries to Belarus' refineries in Mozyr and Novopolotsk. //BelaPAN

Source: Belorusskie Novosti; August 12, 2006; <http://www.naviny.by/>

14. Belarus, Russia Migration Services To Develop Joint Documents

Belarusian and Russian migration services will have to develop joint documents as the Russian Federation has adopted new migration laws. The information was released by deputy director of the Russian Federation Federal Migration Service Alexander Ledenev, who had taken part in today's conference on Belarusian-Russian law enforcement co-operation in Vitebsk.

In his words, the new Russian migration laws, which will enter into force, will largely facilitate registration procedures for foreigners and reinforce responsibility for illegal stay in the Russian Federation. "The Belarusian side pursues the same goal and it will be easy to adjust our laws within the framework of the adopted acts," Alexander Ledenev believes.

Belarus deputy interior minister Viktor Filistovich added, Belarus has migration processes under control. The law on legal status of foreigners and stateless persons, who stay in the Republic of Belarus, works effectively.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; August 11, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

INTERNATIONAL

15. Estonia To Admit Expelled Belarusian Students

The Estonian Education Ministry today said that six Belarusian students expelled from university on political grounds have been invited to study in Estonia, supported by government scholarships.

The ministry says the offer is an expression of Estonia's wish to help consolidate Belarus' democratic forces and notes that several other European countries have also welcomed Belarusian students. // Interfax

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

16. Belarus Calls on EU, U.S. To Reject Isolationist Policies

Belarus says it disagrees with the opinion voiced by the EU and the U.S. on the human rights situation in the country and calls on the West to stop its efforts to isolate Belarus.

"Belarus sees nothing new in the statements made by the EU and the U.S. There is a politicization of issues that should be solved exclusively using legal means," Maria Vanshina, head of the press service of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, said Wednesday. Vanshina was commenting on the last EU and U.S. statements, which express disappointment with the sentences handed down to four members of Partnership, an unregistered civil organization.

"Belarus calls on the EU and the U.S. to reject their isolationist policy, restrictions, and bans, which have repeatedly proved their inefficiency and even counter-productive nature," she said.

Vanshina confirmed Belarus' readiness to "solve all issues in our relations through dialogue on the basis of equality and mutual respect."

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

17. Belarus Claims Opposition Leaders Train in Poland

A Belarusian daily has accused Poland and other neighboring countries of training future Belarus opposition leaders.

The government daily Respublika claims that a summer camp serving that purpose was organized recently at a Baltic sea holiday resort of Jastrzebia Gora, where young Belarusians were allegedly instructed how to conduct an election campaign.

The daily says that at such events "professional revolutionaries" are shaped to take part in "illegal political actions". It claims also that similar trainings are organized for students expelled from Belarusian universities by the regime of the authoritarian president Alexander Lukashenko. They were invited by countries such as Poland to continue their education.

Source: Poland.Pl; August 16, 2006; <http://www.poland.pl>

18. Belarus Creates New Scandal with Latvia

On July 25 the Belarusian militia searched the apartment of the Second Secretary of the Latvian Embassy, Reimo Smits, ostensibly as part of a campaign to uncover the distribution of pornographic materials in the Savetski district of Minsk. The incident sparked a diplomatic scandal that has yet to be resolved. The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded an explanation and an apology for the search and sent an investigator to Minsk to ascertain what had occurred. He found nothing that suggested any wrongdoing on the part of the diplomat. How does one explain this event and if it was a provocation on the part of Belarus, what lies behind it?

The official explanation is as follows. The Savetski district has become notorious for the dissemination of "extremely explicit" pornographic materials, and the Belarusian authorities have

been concerned that such materials, including tapes and magazines, are finding their way into the hands of young people. The militia was instructed to find the centers of dissemination and detain the traders of the materials, as well as confiscate pornographic products. "Evidence and interrogations" led to an address of a Latvian businessman called "Gleb." In mid-June, the militia detained a young man in Kulman Street in possession of a pornographic video. The man claimed that he had bought it from another man ("Gleb") living in the same street.

The Prosecutor's Office then issued an order to proceed urgently. According to the local housing service agency, the apartment specified by the detained man had been unoccupied since 2005. On July 5, Belarusian citizen "K" visited the apartment. By this time the authorities had hidden cameras in the rooms and "K" and the occupant of the apartment were filmed watching a video and then engaging in copulation. The militia then broke into the apartment and discovered videocassettes and DVDs depicting "sexual orgies -- in general homosexual orgies." When the search was over "Gleb" was asked to show his passport or some other form of ID but complied only after an hour. He was revealed to be the Second Secretary of the Latvian Embassy Reimo Smits. The militia then stopped the search, apologized to the diplomat for the intrusion, and left the premises.

However, the Belarusian explanation lacks consistency. Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau claimed that the incident was about pornographic materials. But after the exposure of the diplomat, Belarusian Television ran the entire incident on national television on July 30-31, having warned viewers beforehand that the program was only for viewing by "very mature and tolerant people." The issue became less the materials confiscated than the exposure of a foreign official engaged in a homosexual act, in other words a typical Soviet-style exposure familiar in the days of the Cold War. The apology to the diplomat was eclipsed by the public filming and use of his name. The TV program also made reference to the detention of a Czech diplomat, Pavel Krivohlavy, in January 2005 while drinking alcohol with a 17-year old boy and concluded with the comment: "The law is violated by representatives of those countries that like to teach Belarusians democratic values most of all. It occurs in the best traditions of double standards. They teach us and spit on the law."

The Latvian Foreign Ministry stressed that the search was a violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention pertaining to diplomatic behavior. The cassettes confiscated contained six-year old recordings of Belarusian news reports, according to the Latvian investigator. Further, the apartment was registered legally. Smits was well known in Minsk for his cooperation with leaders of the opposition, among which the United Civic Party has condemned his exposure. Homosexuality is legal in Latvia (it is outlawed in Belarus), and what a diplomat does in the privacy of his apartment is his own affair.

However, some qualifications to these remarks have surfaced in the Latvian media. Given the nature of the Belarusian regime and its sensitivity to outside influences and clampdown on its own opposition, was it wise to send an openly gay diplomat to Minsk? Another source wonders why Latvia chose to resolve the issue in terms of its bilateral relations with Belarus rather than referring the issue directly to the EU. Latvia served as the EU presidency's representative in Belarus until July 1 (representing Austria). The EU response to the incident to date has been muted. Smits left Minsk hastily, causing more glee among Belarus's official media. Latvia has expelled the First Secretary of the Belarusian Embassy in Riga, Dzmitry Kayushkin, and recalled Ambassador Maira Mora from Minsk on August 2.

Latvia must now await an apology from Belarus that is unlikely to be forthcoming. Belarus in turn managed to divert attention from the trial of the election observers of Partnerstva group and used yet another opportunity to denigrate a foreign diplomat on national television. Its overtly illegal action perhaps exploited some naivety on the part of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, which recently annulled visa fees for Belarusian citizens and has been at the forefront of the movement to bring democracy to Belarus.

(*Radio Praha*, January 21, 2005; *Belarusian Television*, July 30 and 31; *Belapan*, August 1 and 8; *Narodnaya Volya*, August 2; *Kommersant*, August 4; *Belarusy i Rynok*, August 7; *Charter-97*, August 8; and *BBC Monitoring of Diena*, July 31; *Riga Neatkariga*, August 1 and 2; *Telegraf*, August 7; *Latvijas Avize*, August 9)

Source: David Marples, *The Jamestown Foundation*; August 15, 2006; <http://jamestown.org/>

19. Belarus Opens Iranian Car Plant

Iran's industry minister inaugurated a new assembly plant for Iranian-designed cars in Belarus on Friday, wrapping up a four-day visit to the isolated former Soviet republic and pledging to further bolster ties.

Ali Reza Tahmasebi said the plant's opening was "another step toward the strengthening of bilateral cooperation."

The plant will assemble up to 1,000 Iranian-designed Samands -- a model based on old French Peugeot designs -- by year's end, and up to 6,000 by next year.

Earlier this week, Tahmasebi invited Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko to travel to Tehran to meet with Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

A pariah in the West for quashing dissent and for allegedly rigging his latest re-election in March, Lukashenko has sought to develop ties with nations that have strained relations with the West.

Last month, he played host to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, a frequent and harsh critic of the United States.

During a meeting with Belarusian parliament speaker on Thursday, Tahmasebi said the Iranian government "intends to develop relations with friendly nations, with whom it shares common positions on all international issues."

Trade between Belarus and Iran stood at a modest \$40 million last year, and Belarusian officials said they hoped to triple the figure.

"Belarus intends to expand cooperation with Iran in the field of machine-building," Belarusian Industry Minister Anatoly Rusetsky said during the car plant's opening on Friday.

Source: *The Moscow Times*; August 13, 2006; <http://www.themoscowtimes.com>

20. EU Demands Immediate Release of Election Monitors Jailed in Belarus

The European Union on Friday demanded the immediate release of four Belarusian election monitors who were sentenced last week to prison terms of up to two years for being members of an unregistered organization, *The Associated Press* reports.

The arrest of the four members of the U.S.-financed Partnership monitoring group in February thwarted the group's plans to deploy independent observers at Belarus' March 19 presidential elections, which the EU and the United States denounced as rigged.

At a closed-door trial, the Minsk Central Court last Friday sentenced Nikolai Astreiko, the head of Partnership, to two years in prison. Activist Timofei Dranchuk was sentenced to one year while Enira Bronitskaya and Alexander Shalaiko received six months.

The EU said in a statement it "notes with regret that the Belarusian authorities continue to intimidate civil society activists and to demonstrate unwillingness to respect international standards in democracy and human rights." It said the sentencing of the four and the July

conviction of an opposition presidential candidate, Aleksandr Kozulin, "clearly indicate further erosion of the democratic process in Belarus." The EU also called for the immediate release of all political prisoners.

Kozulin was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison for organizing a protest march, six days after the election which was broken up by the riot police who beat demonstrators with truncheons.

President Alexander Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington, won another five-year term in the March vote. Lukashenko, who has ruled the nation since 1994, has quashed Belarus' independent media and jailed critics, as well as accusing Western countries of seeking to overthrow him.

The United States and EU imposed financial sanctions and a visa ban on Lukashenko and other officials following the election, citing widespread arrests and repression of opponents during and after the elections.

Source: MosNews; August 12, 2006; <http://www.mosnews.com/n>

21. Netherlands Invites Scholarship Applications from Belarusian Students

Nuffic, the Netherlands' national organization for international cooperation in higher education, is launching a program that aims to help students from Belarus to take bachelor's and master's degree courses in the Netherlands, *Belapan* reported on August 10. The Dutch Education Ministry has made 1 million euros (\$1.28 million) available for this purpose. Scholarships will cover a monthly allowance of 900 euros, tuition fees, visa fees, and travel expenses. There is no fixed number of available scholarships. In 2006 the scholarship program will be open exclusively to students from Belarus. But Nuffic's press office said that in the future the program may be opened to other students "who find it impossible or extremely difficult to study in their home country because of the political situation there."

Source: RFE/RL; August 11, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

22. Several More Turns of the Screw

A paranoid leader lashes out on all sides against his imagined foes

IT IS against the law in Belarus to do lots of things that are unobjectionable in most countries. It is also, apparently, against the law just to think about doing some of them. On August 4th four people were jailed, for between six months and two years, for belonging to an unregistered organization, that "infringes upon the interests and rights of citizens". Their offence? Planning to monitor the rigged presidential election in March; they were arrested in February to stop them doing so.

In most other countries, a leader in Alyaksandr Lukashenka's position would feel buoyant. President of Belarus since 1994, he claimed another landslide victory. But he has celebrated by incarcerating many of his political opponents and their supporters, mostly for short periods. These have included Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who according to official results was Mr. Lukashenka's closest (though not very close) rival in the election. If a pretext for locking people up proves elusive, they are said to have sworn at the police.

Perhaps Mr. Lukashenka frets that, in such a well-smothered country, he can't tell how popular he really is. Probably he wants to stamp on the opposition before its momentum gathers. The president, speculates one opposition activist, needs to "show he is not going to change his methods", and thus that the protests that followed the election had no impact.

Fear, mixed with vengeance, seems to explain the persecution of Alyaksandr Kozulin, another opposition candidate, who was last month jailed for five and a half years, after being convicted of

hooliganism and inciting disorder; he was arrested after leading a post-election protest. Mr. Kozulin's blunt verbal attacks on the president seemed to trouble Mr. Lukashenka more than the professorial Mr. Milinkevich.

Foreign foes are also being punished. The government has provoked a row with Latvia-one of the countries Mr. Lukashenka says is plotting against him-by broadcasting covertly filmed footage of gay sex, purportedly involving a Latvian diplomat. A police raid supposedly implicated the Latvian in the distribution of pornography: a favorite slur of the Belarusian KGB. "Even in Cuba," says another Minsk-based diplomat of the raid, "they don't do that." "An outrageous violation of diplomatic protocol," says David Kramer, of America's State Department. (The scandal may backfire: elderly Belarusians were shocked that the footage was broadcast.)

For their part, America and the European Union have banned assorted Belarusian officials from entering their countries, and are trying to freeze their foreign assets (though not much loot seems to have turned up). Mr. Lukashenka has been left to share his celebrations with Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, a fellow pariah who visited Minsk last month, and with his friends in Russia. Even they may be turning: Gazprom, Russia's gas-export monopoly, is threatening Belarus with a potentially disastrous price rise. Gazprom has long wanted to take over the Belarusian pipeline network; the Russians may calculate that, isolated and paranoid as he is, their ally Mr. Lukashenka might now comply.

Source: The Economist print edition; August 10, 2006

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.
