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- Student Dissidents Keep Faith Despite Hardships
- Vasily Dogolev is New Lukashenko Sales Rep
- Milinkevich Nominated For European Prize
- Suspicions Surround Lithuanian Diplomat's Death in Belarus

Human Rights & Independent Media

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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Student Dissidents Keep Faith Despite Hardships

Dressed in jeans and carrying digital cameras, Iryna Pyarvoykina and Syarhey Shelehau look like ordinary tourists in Prague. They smile, joke, and talk about computers, music, and the lack of opportunities in their home country.

But they are not on a pleasure trip -- they came as part of a group of Belarusian students who were offered the opportunity to study in Prague for a month after facing political pressure at home.

Student Opposition

Such offers came from throughout Western Europe after students like Pyarvoykina and Shelehau ran afoul of the authorities. Many experienced difficulties after participating in opposition demonstrations during and after Belarus's presidential election in March

Hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were beaten and arrested on the main Minsk square just after the election, and were subjected to 15-day detentions.

Twenty-one-year-old Pyarvoykina's disillusionment with life under the rule of President Alyksander Lukashenka led her to become involved in politics a few years ago.

Her activism eventually led her to the ranks of young supporters of opposition candidate Alyksander Milinkevich.

Iryna says she was detained by Interior Ministry troops for several days after participating in opposition demonstrations ahead of the election.

"We were arrested by OMON [special police forces] and it was done in a very rough manner," Pyarvoykina said. "In the beginning I was taken to the hospital and then to the place of my detention. It is not easy to tell you how they have treated us because I do not want to recall it, it was so unpleasant."

Peer Pressure

Pyarvoykina says that despite being beaten, her time spent in detention with other activists was bearable. The worst, she says, came after her release.

Upon resuming her studies of psychology at Minsk State University, Pyarvoykina says the sneers she received from fellow students and teachers hurt more than the physical pain she endured in detention.

After leaving Prague for her one-month course, Pyarvoykina plans to head to Vienna to study there.

She blames the authorities for her situation.

Syarhey Shelehau plans to return to activism in Belarus (*RFE/RL*) "[I have a feeling] of being hurt by the way this man [Alyksander Lukashenka] represents us abroad," Pyarvoykina said. "I have big plans for my life. Probably like all young people do. I want to achieve a lot of things. Currently, I feel ashamed for this man who represents my country

Shelehau, 23, recently completed his studies in Belarus. He, too, is active in politics. He serves as vice chairman of the youth organization Veras (Heather) in the eastern city of Vitsebsk. The

organization spreads information about European issues and organizes public events such as the "Days of Europe."

He says that although he has never been subjected to physical pressure, the Belarusian authorities keep a close eye on Veras because of its influence on society.

Official Pressure

The harassment takes different forms, he says. Local bureaucrats invite him for "discussions" almost every day. And every idea the organization puts forward is meticulously discussed, every initiative requires approval, and permission is required for even the slightest public action. Shelehau says local authorities on many occasions have advised him "to be more loyal."

However, Shelehau and Pyarvoykina both exhibit obvious affection for their motherland.

Shelehau names off numerous advantages that young people enjoy in Belarus -- discos, nightclubs, Internet cafes, and gyms. The older generation, he says, benefits from steady employment, fair salaries, and regularly paid pensions.

"In fact everything is allowed except politics," Shelehau said. "In fact, with politics all the problems begin. If you ignore this sphere, you find that many things in Belarus are developing in a rather stable way, and we in principle do not feel that we are living in a kind of some kind of stone age."

Devotion To The Motherland

For her part, Pyarvoykina plans to return to Belarus after the completion of her studies in Vienna.

"In any case, I plan to return to Belarus. I do not know when it will happen. Maybe I will study longer than I plan [in Austria] but I will work for my country," Pyarvoykina said. "I will bring better life to it, bring something new to it."

Their hearts, it is clear, lie firmly in Belarus. And despite the hurdles they might face in working toward developing democracy there -- that is where they see their future.

*Source: Valentinas Mite, RFE/RL; August 30, 2006;
<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/8/7EE19473-9CB9-4F9A-853A-C9A96C8D4961.html>*

2. Belarusian Opposition Leaders Barred From Ukraine

Belarusian border guards removed two opposition leaders who worked for presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin Wednesday from the Brest-Simferopol train. The two men are leaders of the regional branch of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP), the party formerly lead by Aleksandr Kozulin, past opposition presidential candidate, who was recently sentenced to five and a half years of imprisonment.

Aleksandr Maslovsky, head of the Brest BSDP's regional branch and Georgy Rutsky, his predecessor, were on their way to Kiev. The BSDP representatives did not give any details about the goals of their trip, noting only that it was in connection with "the party's activities". As the opposition members themselves reported, they were inspected on the train by Belarusian border guards and the search was videotaped. Afterwards, the address books of Maslovsky and Rutsky were confiscated. The opposition activists did not receive any explanation, but were soon released and waited for the next train to Ukraine.

The BSDP representatives stated that they view the incident as the continuation of the harassment of their party's members. The BSDP noted that on August 21, 26 youth activists from the party were also searched. At first they were accused of drug-smuggling, but later, though they

received apologies for the unfounded accusation, the border guards claimed their bus was "out of order". // *Kommersant*

[*Trans. Ed.*]

Source: *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*; August 30, 2006;
<http://www.bdg.by/news/news.htm?92804>,

3. Will Writers Bow To Government?

The Union of Belarusian Writers (SPB) was evicted from its headquarters in Minsk today because of a dispute over unpaid rent with the presidential administration. The eviction is widely seen as a premeditated measure by Belarusian authorities to limit and marginalize the public significance of an organization still perceived as a rare model of intellectual independence in a country controlled by an authoritarian regime.

The SPB was first ordered to vacate its headquarters at the House of Writers last week, but was given a brief respite when the presidential administration postponed the eviction until today.

Until nine years ago, the House of Writers -- a three-story building in downtown Minsk -- belonged entirely to the SPB, an organization founded in 1934.

But in 1997, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka issued a decree handing control of the property to his administration's property management department. From that point on, building space began to be rented out to various organizations and commercial firms.

Payment Due

The property managers made clear they also expected the SPB to begin paying rent. The union refused, saying its writers' royalties had contributed to constructing the building in the first place.

So when the union's lease agreement on the House of Writers expired in January 2003, the presidential administration declined to renew it. Union members, however, refused to leave.

Thus began a court dispute that ended earlier this year with a court ordering the SPB to vacate the premises and pay the president's office more than \$20,000 in compensation for lingering past the expiration of its lease.

Belarusian writer and SPB members Volha Ipatava initially proposed that the union make a public appeal to raise the required sum.

"When they who owe us many millions for our house demand \$23,000 from us, I think that we need to collect this sum," Ipatava said. "And we will collect it. We should remain in the House of Writers, because it's a really sacred place for us -- in contrast to them. They're going to make some kind of entertainment structure out of it."

Opposition leader and former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich also suggested that the SPB should try to raise money in order to keep its office.

"There are two options. First, to fight to the end for one's own honor and the truth -- because it is unjust to pay this money -- and to find oneself on the street," Milinkevich said. "To do so would mean to lose this remarkable house. The second option is to begin paying, even if the verdict is unjust. In this case, we would preserve the most spiritual thing that we have. I am in favor of the second option. The world is not without good people, both in Belarus and abroad, and we all are able to stand together and to show that it is not so easy to break us."

Final Gathering

In the end, however, a special council of SPB members gathered at the House of Writers for a final time today. They decided to forgo any further negotiations on their eviction, and to vacate their historic headquarters.

The decision was a disappointing milestone in the union's struggle with Lukashenka, which began shortly after his presidential inauguration in 1994.

Belarusian writers welcomed en masse official plans to revive the Belarusian language after the former Soviet republic gained independence in 1991. SPB members wrote mostly in Belarusian, and were delighted at the thought of a language revival.

Three years later, they were no doubt shocked to hear their first president declare that such efforts were of no value.

It's a statement that's become notorious among supporters of the Belarusian language: "The people who speak the Belarusian language cannot do anything else apart from speaking the Belarusian language, because it is impossible to express anything great in Belarusian," Lukashenka declared in December 1994.

"Belarusian is a poor language," he added, before delivering his final verdict. "There are only two great languages in the world -- Russian and English."

A referendum in 1995 gave Russian official status in Belarus, along with Belarusian. In practice, the decision meant that Belarusian was once again relegated to secondary status, deprived of any real opportunity to achieve widespread public use.

At the same time, the government began to gradually limit its subsidies to publishing houses and authors producing texts in Belarusian.

Takeover Timeline

In 2001, the government ceased to finance the SPB altogether. State-controlled media began to portray the writers union as a nationalistic organization hostile to the president's policies.

In 2002, the government attempted to take control of the SPB. A group of writers, at the apparent behest of the government, tried to replace the SPB leadership with a more compliant group that could provide a sort of intellectual support for the ruling regime.

But the SPB that year managed to elect one of its own to serve as its chairman -- 30-year-old novelist Ales Pashkevich. Pashkevich refused to bow to the will of the authorities -- an uncompromising stance that apparently recently cost him his job at Belarusian State University.

In 2005, the government tried a new tactic, creating an alternative group to the SPB -- the almost identically named Union of Writers of Belarus.

Its chairman, Mikalay Charhinets, is both a lawmaker and a Russian-language novelist. He has done little to conceal that his organization is ideologically driven and in full support of Lukashenka's program of re-Sovietization and re-Russification.

"I was brought up in a Russian-speaking environment," Charhinets has admitted in interviews. "I have never considered myself Belarusian."

Official Victory

The current eviction of the SPB from its headquarters appears to be just another official measure to quash political dissent among the intellectual elite in Belarus.

Many people in Minsk told RFE/RL's Belarus Service they were appalled by the forced eviction:

"I have no words for that. It's an absurdity. Most likely there is no other country in the world where such things happen," said one Belarusian woman. "Writers everywhere are highly esteemed and respected. Here, meanwhile, we watch as our pride is trampled down in the dirt."

Another interlocutor was no less categorical.

"Seizing the building by the presidential administration is an act of dictatorial violence," she said. "It is a step into nothingness."

Such opinions, however, are unlikely to carry much weight with the current Belarusian authorities. There is little that Belarusians can do to support their uncompromising writers, other than to continue buying and reading their books.

Reluctance to publish in Belarusian has led to a significant drop-off in the number of Belarusian-language publications. But the situation is not yet hopeless. Private publishing companies have filled the gap, printing four-fifths of the 500 Belarusian-language books printed in Belarus in the first half of 2006.

Source: *Jan Maksymiuk; RFE/RL; August 30, 2006;*
<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/8/B071F625-0897-4715-9E2F-82EFB11350C3.html>

4. Journalists from *Myastsovy Chas* Are Not Allowed at Reception of President Assistant

On August 23, journalists from *Myastsovy Chas* were not allowed to attend a reception for Uladzimir Puzyreuski, Assistant to the President and Inspector General of Brest Region. The head of Pinsk City Executive Committee was also present.

According to the *BAJ* Monitoring Service, the representative of the City Executive Committee who had organized the meeting did not allow journalists from *Myastsovy Chas* to attend the reception because he did not like the way the publication presented information. That is why journalists had to wait in line find out what problems were bothering Pinsk residents

The *BAJ* Monitoring Service commented that this was not the first time such a thing has happened.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists; August 29, 2006; <http://baj.ru/indexe.htm>*

5. Opposition Youths Apply to Stage Big Jeans Fest on September 16

Youth opposition activists filed an application to the Minsk city government for permission to stage a show called a Big Jeans Fest in Nations' Friendship Park (near Bangalore Square) on September 16.

Organizer Aleksandr Atroshchenko told *BelaPAN* that the show would be in support of freedom, as Belarus' pro-democratic forces have adopted blue denim as a symbol of freedom and liberation.

The organizers would like to invite people to arrive at the square in front of the National Academy of Sciences at 4:30 p.m. and march from there to the park to attend the concert, which is planned to begin at 6:00 p.m.

Atroshchenko said he would take part in the event to support all political prisoners in Belarus and display his solidarity with all those who have suffered from politically motivated persecution.'

"No political slogans so far have been planned; people will just wear jeans," he said.

Opposition activists in Belarus have been observing what they have dubbed "Solidarity Day" on the 16th date of each month since September 16, 2005, the 6th anniversary of the disappearance of opposition politician Viktor Gonchar and his friend, businessman Anatoly Krasovsky.

Source: Belorusskie Novosti; August 29, 2006; http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/08/29/ic_articles_259_147757/

DOMESTIC

6. Second-Rate People Were Found in Belarus

In the life of Belarus, a small country in the centre of Europe, a problem was found, and in resolving this problem, the end justified the means. The leaders stated that the citizens who were deprived of their parental rights, might be put in jail.

"The expenses for child support must be refund by these people in full, I emphasize, in full to the last penny. These people must pay 100% of child support and we must make them if they can not and, though it sounds awful, we must put them in jail and take them out only to work," *Interfax* quotes the Belarusian President.

"We must do everything we can to make these parents pay for the support of their kids, whom we would take away from them. We will not take money to support these kids from the state budget," the state head specified.

Since there is no similar solution of this problem in the world, Lukashenko does not deny that the realization of this decision will be criticized a lot.

"But the problem resolution is the main thing for us," the President emphasized.

A precedent was created. It began to smell brown in the country right before the local elections. Maybe we should have went out on March 19, 2006 Oktyabrskaya Square?

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: AFN; August 30, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?newsid=78139#data>

7. Lukashenko Orders Drafting New Belarusian Language Spelling Rules

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has ordered the Education Ministry to draft new spelling and punctuation rules for the Belarusian language, the presidential press service said on Friday.

"Currently, the Belarusian language is based on the rules adopted in 1957. Meanwhile, the language is developing, which requires a review of spelling and punctuation rules," the press service said.

Source: Itar-Tass; August 25, 2006; <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=10737589&PageNum=0>

REGIONAL

8. Russia-Belarus Gas Talks At Company Level

Russia and Belarus are holding talks regarding gas supplies in 2007 at the level of the countries' economic agents, Leonid Rudinsky, General Director of Belarusian fuel and gas group Beltopgaz, told reporters at a press conference in the country's capital Minsk. The official said he did not think that gas would pose any issues for Belarus, since in 2005 the contract for gas supply was signed at the end of the year.

At the same time, Rudinsky believes that there would be a lot more gas consumers in Belarus next year. Particularly, it is expected that during 2007 all of the republic's 118 territories will have gas service installed (as of today, only five of them remain without gas supply).

Source: RosBusinessConsulting; August 30, 2006; <http://www.rbcnews.com/free/20060830093131.shtml>

9. Belarus Considers Purchase of Two Oil Fields in Russia

Belarus is contemplating the purchase of two oil wells in Russia, a senior executive at the Belneftekhim state-controlled petrochemical concern said Tuesday.

On August 1, the prime minister of Belarus said that exports of crude oil to Russia could drop because the country was redistributing it to other countries. But he said the country could lose markets if it did not cooperate with Russia.

Mikhail Osipenko said the fields have an estimated reserve of 15 mln metric tons.

"Russian companies would like to sell them at a very high price. We, of course, would like to buy them for less," he said.

He did not disclose the location of the fields, citing confidentiality considerations.

The Belarusian State Petrochemical Concern (Belneftekhim) includes the country's largest enterprises in the chemical and petrochemical industry.

Source: RIA Novosti; August 29, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/business/20060829/53288804.html>

10. Vasily Dogolev is New Lukashenko Sales Rep

On August 24, Vasily Golgolev, the new ambassador of Belarus to Russia, took up his post. Dolgolev, a long-time close presidential aide replaced another Belarusian official, Grigoryev, who previously served in this position. Although Dolgolev has been in the country's political sphere almost from the moment when Belarus gained its sovereignty, and even occupied top-level positions in the state hierarchy, he has always evaded the public eye.

The position of Belarusian ambassador to Russia is a very honorable and, at the same time, dangerous job. Russia is the major partner and ally of Belarus, who would feed and protect, and yet also would commit follies in this small house in the neighborhood. The present and future of the Belarusian state depend on how the Belarusians build up their relationships with Moscow. The closeness of Moscow has been there for centuries, and it will stay for centuries as not the only factor but the determinant one for Belarus' development. It doesn't matter if someone likes it or not. Anyone who denies this is an idiot. Of course only one person in Minsk determines the position regarding the Kremlin but an ambassador is an important link in the bilateral relationships.

Under Lukashenko, there will not be a strong ambassador in Moscow: neither strong as a person nor strong as a politician. For a Belarusian ambassador with the appropriate behavior, Moscow might become a great starting position for the realization of serious political ambitions at home. A politician, whom the Russian political elite would like, would get the network and money in Russia, and would be able to count on any support during the presidential or other elections. The

management of foreign policy is simple: they promote the person they know. Lukashenko is scared to the point of panic of any conspiracy in his environment and any hint at a serious rival appearance. That is why Lukashenko appoints weird, weak and compromised people as ambassadors to Moscow.

Grigoryev, the previous ambassador, was remembered only by changing the color of his hair from time to time and every time he chose the radical color. I once met him with the fire red hair, though he usually preferred blue. Grigoryev, an experienced party's organization man was sitting in Moscow like a mouse under the bench. He was destroyed by his complete professional uselessness at resolving problems, which lately appeared in the Russian-Belarusian relationships. But what can Vasily Dolgolev, the new ambassador, resolve?

Vasily Dolgolev is a typical Belarusian politician of the *pochvennik* or nativist type. Or, more simply, he is the product of the Belarusian village like most of the Belarusian leaders. A very sly, shifty fellow, extremely firm, and greedy. Rude and sharp. People said he got on the train in Minsk wearing old shoes and a polyester suit, and got off the train in Moscow wearing expensive clothes.

In his former Soviet life, Dolgolev held a modest position as head deputy of a small local Belarusian factory. He became a deputy of the Supreme Council, which announced the sovereignty of Belarus. From that moment, a new life started for Dolgolev. He did not show his worth and was a part of the ballast group and the political swamp. He, as well as Lukashenko, was also looking for a group to join for a long time. He even went to the nationalists and tried to join the Belarusian Popular Front. Then he became friends with Gennady Karpenko, the mayor of the city of Molodechno and nearly led Karpenko's election headquarters during the first presidential elections in 1994. At that time, the authorities saw a major election threat in Karpenko, but not Lukashenko. The mayor of the city of Molodechno was rudely dismissed from the election race. Vasily Dogolev quickly went over to Lukashenko's headquarters. Karpenko hated Dogolev after that for a long time and accused him of spending the election campaign money. Lukashenko noticed the new assistant and helped him out with jobs.

Vasily Dolgolev found time to be the head inspector of Belarus, though state control was not such a scary, paranoiac and persecuted organization as it has been for the last years. He managed the industry, but was remembered only for lobbying weird or extravagant projects. Dolgolev tried to keep up the image of serious specialist with the sense of professional and personal dignity. He timidly criticized Lukashenko's forcible style. H even wrote s resignation letter with Leonid Synitsin [head of the presidential administration in 1994-1995 – Ed.]. Synitsin left but Dolgolev stayed. Later, Dolgolev was sent to Russia as a Lukashenko's representative. He came back from Russia as the result of a scandal, and occupied the chair of the Brest region governor.

At Brest, Dolgolev finally liberated himself. He excoriated at the meeting of the executive committee, communicated with everyone at the buddy level. However he was a bad version of Lukashenko, a boss of all Belarusians. After his resignation, ten criminal cases were opened in Brest against the administration employees on charge of abusing of office. But all these cases were quietly suppressed. Three loud scandals were also suppressed, in which Vasily Dolgolev, the Brest region governor, was engaged. The governor's car, with Dolgolev on board ran down people at different times. In two cases, people died at the scene of the accident: the first victim was a young women and the second one was a man. Rumors say that at one of the accidents, Dolgolev himself was driving, but his driver took the blame upon himself. It is impossible to find out now if it is true or not. The young women's parents sued Dolgolev and the Brest executive committee for a long time, but with no results. The victim's family did not receive any financial compensation. People say Dolgolev sent an assistant with a huge bouquet of flowers to the funeral. After these events, Dolgolev was dismissed from the governor's position and was again sent to Moscow as a Lukashenko's representative. And now they have made him an ambassador.

Dolgolev is convenient for Lukashenko, because Dolgolev is seriously compromised, hanged on a huge hook, and will never become a strong rival.

Dolgolev is famous for helping businessmen to promote their business projects. For instance, the Savushkin Product milk factory was advertised and promoted by Dolgolev's people. Some accounted for this by Dolgolev's greediness, others as protection of the state's interests. People close to the president say that Dolgolev is a reduced copy of Konoplev [head of the Belarusian parliament – Ed.]. Financial motivation is the same one for both of them. People say that now Dolgolev promoting the idea to sell sugar to Russia through one or two authorized companies and he even names these companies. The Belarusian ambassador has become involved in very risky business. However, he will not be allowed to do anything else but the economic-interest lobbying. Well, at least he will earn money for a decent retirement.

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: Pavel Sheremet, *Belorussky Partizen*; August 28, 2006;

<http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp->

[forte/index.fjspx?page=100&backPage=13&news=4873&newsPage=0](http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forte/index.fjspx?page=100&backPage=13&news=4873&newsPage=0)

11. President of Kyrgyzstan to Visit Byelorussia to Accept Experience of Dictator

Bakiev probably does not know that Lukashenko's policy is constantly condemned by the European Community and the USA.

The president of Kyrgyzstan will visit with official visit Byelorussia in October - November, 2006, *24.kg* sources in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of KR informed about it "

Negotiations about an opportunity of official visit of Kurmanbek Bakiev to Minsk as *24.kg* informed earlier, have begun more than a month ago. On July 17 Minister of Foreign Affairs of Byelorussia Sergey Martynov came to Kyrgyzstan for this purpose and he brought an invitation from Alexander Lukashenko. According to some sources, the president of Byelorussia himself would not mind to visit Bishkek.

Alexander Lukashenko's interest, most likely, is caused by the enough warm relations, developing between two countries. Kyrgyzstan supports aspiration of the official Minsk to enter the World Trading Organization and SCO, as it was explained to *24.kg* in the Embassy of Byelorussia in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan and Byelorussia are members of many international and regional organizations: the United Nations, OSCE, CSTO, the CIS, EurAsEc. In the near future, Alexander Lukashenko might fill up this list to two more with the help of the official Bishkek.

Source: *Daniyar Karimov*; *24.kg*; August 28, 2006; [http](http://www.24.kg/cis/2006/08/28/6198.html)

[/www.24.kg/cis/2006/08/28/6198.html](http://www.24.kg/cis/2006/08/28/6198.html) ginal Message

12. Russia-Belarus Agreement on Pricing May Not Last

Russia may withdraw from the agreement with Belarus on equal conditions for pricing that envisages the use of domestic Russian railway tariffs on export and import freight transportation and domestic prices for Russian gas supplies to Belarus, a source in the Russian diplomatic circles told *PRIME-Tass*.

The agreement was signed in April 2002 and is now used by Belarus as the main argument at the negotiations with Gazprom on prices of gas supplies in 2007. It was signed in a package with another agreement, on setting up jointly with the Gazprom joint-stock company a gas transportation enterprise on the basis of the Belarussian Beltransgaz.

According to the source, the Russian Foreign Ministry addressed a note to the Belarussian Foreign Ministry to set out the stand of the Russian side on its further participation in the

agreement, taking into account the fact that Belarus does not fulfill the second agreement in the package.

"This does not amount to the denunciation of the agreement on equal conditions for pricing, as Russia has not ratified the agreement, and it has no legal force. The point is that it must have been ratified in the package with the agreement on creating the joint venture not later than in 2003, but the process stalled," the source said.

"Nevertheless, the Russian government, showing goodwill, has been fulfilling its obligations under the agreement," he added. "Now there is the question whether Russia should continue to adhere to the agreement, specifically, as regards the supply of cheap gas to Belarus. There are no questions regarding railway tariffs. I do believe they must keep, reaching agreement on this at interdepartmental level." the diplomat said.

The formal pretext for raising the matter was the fact that the agreement was concluded for five years, till April 2007, and envisages automatic extension unless one of the sides notifies the other, in the written form by diplomatic channels, of its wish to terminate the agreement not later than six months before the expiry of a regular term.

The Belarussian Foreign Ministry has not yet officially commented on the matter.

*Source: Belorusskie Novosti; August 29, 2006;
http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/08/25/ic_articles_259_147725/*

INTERNATIONAL

13. Milinkevich Nominated For European Prize

A group of European lawmakers have nominated Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich for this year's Sakharov Prize.

The European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Belarus said that in this year's presidential election Milinkevich had shown "courage to challenge Alyaksandr Lukashenka, the last dictator of Europe."

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named after Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, was set up in 1988.

It is awarded each year by the European Parliament on or around December 10. The prize is worth 50,000 euros. // www.charter97.org, *Belapan*

Source: RFE/RL; August 30, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/8/F9F9A85D-007E-4697-8979-E773E1DAB653.html>

14. Suspicions Surround Lithuanian Diplomat's Death in Belarus

The mysterious death of a Lithuanian diplomat in Belarus has sparked enormous controversy and strain in bilateral relations. Official reports from Belarus claim that security officer Vytautas Pociunas died after falling out of a hotel window, while unofficial reports in Lithuania claim the diplomat may have been stabbed or poisoned. Lithuania's politicians and prosecutors have described the ongoing investigation as "a quest of honor" and given it highest priority.

Pociunas, an adviser to the Lithuanian consulate general in Grodno, died while on a business trip to Brest in the early hours of Aug. 23. The diplomat's body was discovered next to the Hotel Intourist. The 48-year-old was believed to have fallen out of a ninth-story window.

Yet Lithuanian politicians are not ruling out the possibility of murder, suggesting that the officer might have fallen victim to Belarusian special services.

An investigation by the Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office was launched immediately. The diplomat's body, however, was returned to Lithuania on August 25.

The State Security Department has also launched a probe into the circumstances in Brest, which is headed and organized by the Prosecutor General's Office.

"This is an important case, and I am keeping an eye on the performance of our prosecutors and other services. Completion of the case and having all answers is a matter of our country's good name," Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas told journalists after meeting with Prosecutor General Algimantas Valantinas on August 25.

But speculation surrounding the diplomat's death has spread like wildfire.

An editorial column in *Lietuvos Rytas* noted that "if we reject the version of an accident, which is very unlikely, Pociunas' death is a bloody challenge to our country. The state, just like every honest citizen, will not be able to feel safe until it is clear whom we have been challenged by."

The daily noted that diplomats from EU countries, which Minsk sees as adversarial, have increasingly become victims of attacks in Belarus. Latvia, Lithuania and Poland actively participate in the formulation and implementation of EU policy towards Minsk, where it is "decried as an imperialist plot aimed at removing Alexander Lukashenko's administration," the paper opined.

"Thus the mysterious fall of Pociunas, a highly professional employee of the State Security Department, from the ninth floor of Hotel Intourist seems to be another part of the same chain," the editorial went on.

The newspaper reminded that a Polish consular officer had been found beaten in his apartment in Grodno earlier this year. The diplomat later died. An investigation did not follow.

The incident follows a scandal involving a Latvian diplomat earlier this summer, when Belarus investigators entered and searched Janis Smits' Minsk apartment in violation of diplomatic laws. Belarus' interior minister subsequently accused Smits of distributing pornographic materials.

Latvia responded to the incident by expelling a Belarusian diplomat.

In Lithuania, Foreign Minister Petras Vaitiekunas said that Vilnius was not considering a recall of its diplomats from Belarus. "We have no presumptions for such a move, and are not considering the possibility," Vaitiekunas told the Baltic News Service on Aug. 25.

Asked whether security was at least stepped up at Lithuanian diplomatic missions following the incident, an anonymous Foreign Ministry official replied, "security is ensured."

On the Belarusian side, the governmental news agency *BELTA* reported that forensics experts detected 1.9 promils of alcohol in Pociunas' blood. *BELTA* said the results were determined based on a blood test.

However, Valantinas said he had not received an official report from Belarusian authorities about the test results.

"We have not received such information. I only heard this from the media," said Valantinas. After meeting with Kirkilas on Aug. 25, Valantinas refused to comment on blood test results by Lithuanian experts, saying the medical conclusions had not yet been received.

"A forensic examination has been conducted, and we will try searching for answers to the same questions as did the Belarusian authorities," he said.

Justas Laucius, the Lithuanian prosecutor in charge of organized crime and corruption, has not yet returned from his investigation in Belarus.

Lietuvos Rytas emphasized the importance of solving the death, explaining the circumstances to the public as thoroughly as possible without disclosing state secrets.

"Efforts to suppress society's desire to know the truth based on the argument of protecting state secrets will fail this time. The people of Lithuania must know what the officer, who had faithfully served the country, fell victim to," the daily reports on Aug. 25.

Source: The Baltic Times, August 30, 2006; <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/16214/>

15. Aleksandr Milinkevich: Referendum To Lead to Belarus Disappearance

A possible "unifying" Russian-Belarusian referendum was the main topic at a meeting in Minsk between Aleksandr Milinkevich, the unified democratic forces leader, and representatives of the diplomatic corps of some accredited countries accredited in Belarus.

Milinkevich appealed to the governments of European countries "not to wait until the referendum date is established, but to work out in the nearest future a unified European position not to recognize the referendum results."

Aleksandr Milinkevich explained his position by the fact that under the current circumstances in Belarus, you can not hope even for a minimal objectivity and transparency in the referendum results.

"Most Belarusians will not be able to get all the information about the actual threats of the referendum and about the danger for Belarus to lose its independence and sovereignty under the conditions of a total state monopoly on information. Today, there are no real tools for society to have oversight of the preparation and voting process, and also vote-counting. Under these conditions, the scheduled referendum will become a serious political event, which might lead to the disappearance of Belarus from the world political map," Aleksandr Milinkevich stated.

Aleksandr Milinkevich noticed that the European countries should call processes by the proper names. "It will not be the union of two countries; it is a real *anschluss*, the economic absorption of Belarus."

"Today Belarus is a peculiar pill, medicine for definite imperial forces in Russia. Lukashenko has played at unifying too long; he is driven into a corner and he has no choice. Today, he cannot be seen as the guarantor of the independence of Belarus, the Belarusian people are the guarantor. And I announce today that protests will take place in the event a referendum is scheduled," said Milinkevich.

Diplomatic representatives from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Czech Republic, Poland, Netherlands, and Slovakia were present at the meeting, Charter 97 reported.

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: Belorussky Partizan; August 29, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forfe/index.fjspx?page=100&backPage=13&news=4920&newsPage=0>

16. Belarus Moves to Improve Ties with South Africa

Belarus Foreign Minister Sergei Martinov on Monday said his country, shunned by the United States and the European Union, wanted to create "a dense fabric" of ties with South Africa.

"We want high-level visits from heads of states downwards and a dense fabric of contacts," Martinov told reporters after meeting with his South African counterpart, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

"Our people in industry, technology and academia are interested in working with South Africans," he said, speaking at the start of a visit in which he is due to sign four pacts to boost trade, military co-operation and cultural ties.

"We are like-minded on how the world should be run and how the United Nations system should be changed," he said.

Source: Independent Online; August 29, 2006;

http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=qw1156800065195B243

17. IMF Says Belarus Faces Much Less Favorable Outlook

Belarus, whose economy has grown over 8 percent a year in the past three years, is facing much less favorable circumstances ahead because of rising energy prices, the International Monetary Fund said on Friday.

"The possibility of significantly less subsidized energy imports could impart a considerable downside risk to the outlook," the IMF said in its annual review of the economy.

"Directors also pointed to Belarus's declining market share in the CIS, the large and growing non-oil current account deficit, the low level of international reserves and the diminishing output gap," it added.

Cheap Russian energy has been a key driver behind Belarus' growth between 2002 and 2005 and Gazprom has threatened to at least triple prices next year.

In order to prepare for this possible change, most IMF directors urged Minsk to fundamentally alter its fiscal and structural policies starting with spending cuts and liberalizing prices and wages and then make broader structural reforms.

The IMF spoke favorably of the country's plans to implement fiscal and structural measures by 2010 such as curbing budget transfers and subsidies, cutting taxes, strengthening the financial system, ease real wage increases, and attract foreign investors.

"A more rapid withdrawal of state intervention, including early liberalization of prices and wages, would help to underpin strong non-inflationary growth in the medium term," it said. "Structural reform measures should be implemented without delay, while the economy is still in a position of strength."

Minsk needs to improve its governance and institutional framework plus build consensus to achieve those reforms. Directed bank lending should be phased out rapidly and all remaining state support to business should be part of the budget, the IMF added.

On the inflation front, the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus (NBRB) should clarify that controlling inflation is its primary objective and that it should accept more flexibility in the exchange rate in the event of inconsistency between inflation and exchange rate targets, the IMF said.

Any further rate cuts should hinge on clear signs of lasting declines in inflationary pressures, it added.

The NBRB should also stop directing loans to the economy and scrap caps on interest rates, the IMF said.

Source: Reuters; August 25, 2006;
http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?type=bondsNews&storyID=2006-08-25T184449Z_01_N25348187_RTRIDST_0_ECONOMY-BELARUS-IMF.XML

18. 'Worrying' Information Over Lithuanian Diplomat's Death In Belarus

"Worrying" information has been brought to light concerning the mysterious death of a Lithuanian consular worker in Belarus, the Lithuanian prime minister said on Thursday.

"There is worrying information, but I believe that if Belarus' law-enforcement agencies, our experts and diplomats work together we will find the truth and give all the answers," Gediminas Kirkilas told the Ziniu Radijas news radio programme.

Belarusian officials were cooperating with Lithuanian investigators and "concealing nothing," he added. Kirkilas' office would not comment on the nature of the "worrying" information.

The comments came a day after the body of Lithuanian diplomat Vytautas Pociunas was found lying beside a hotel in the Belarusian city of Brest. Pociunas, 48, was a security advisor at the Lithuanian consulate in the city of Grodno.

Initial comments from the Belarusian authorities suggested that Pociunas, who was staying in a room on the ninth floor of the Brest Intourist hotel during a working visit, had fallen from his window.

"The preliminary results of an investigation carried out by the Brest regional prosecutor showed that there were no grounds for suspecting that the death was caused by violence," the Belarusian prosecutor's office said on Wednesday, according to Interfax.

However, speculation had already begun in Lithuania that veteran security officer Pociunas, whose job included data protection at the Grodno consulate, could have been the victim of a political murder, Baltic News Service BNS reported.

Lithuanian officials would not comment on the allegations.

"The announcement of any preconceptions or assessments at this stage would harm Lithuania's interests. I cannot comment on either facts or opinions," Foreign Minister Petras Vaitiekunas said.

Source: Palyfuls.Com; August 24, 2006;
http://www.playfuls.com/news_0000002512_Worrying_Information_Over_Lithuanian_Diplomats_Death_In_Belarus_.html

BUSINESS

19. Belarus Posts Increase in Direct Foreign Investment'

In the first six months of 2006, direct foreign investment to the Belarusian economy increased by 25.5 percent to \$3278.7m, the Belarusian government's press office said. Direct investment accounts for 32.8 percent of the total foreign investment worth \$1bn received in H1 2006. Credits and loans obtained immediately from investors proved the prevailing method of raising money (81.4 percent of the total), while other direct investments contributed 11.6 percent, and investment into authorized capital 6.8 percent. The largest investment came from companies

based in Switzerland (71.3 percent of the total), Russia (4.5 percent), Poland (4.2 percent), Austria (3.8 percent), the Netherlands (3.6 percent), UK (2.8 percent) and Latvia (2 percent).

Investment was raised mostly for such areas as commercial activities to provide for market operation (70.8 percent), industrial production (17.4 percent) and retail and public catering (7.3 percent).

*Source; RosBusinessConsulting; August 25, 2006;
<http://www.rbcnews.com/free/20060825095127.shtml>*

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.
