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- **Belarusian Opposition Vows New Street Protests**
- **Belarusian Police Detained Opposition Activist, Reporters**

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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Police Search Young Front Leader's Home

On September 6, police and KGB searched the apartment of Zmitser Khvedaruk, a leader of the Minsk branch of the Young Front, Zmitser reported. Although they had no search warrant, KGB officers and policemen were undeterred and managed to get into the apartment unlawfully using various means.

Zmitser himself has avoided an arrest, the Radio Svoboda informs. At the moment he is in a safe place. He managed to escape through a window, as his apartment is situated at the ground floor.

Source: *Charter 97; September 7, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/09/07/mf>*

2. Belarusian Opposition Party Proposes 'Bloc for Independence'

The opposition Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) on September 4 resolved to hold a gathering of opposition politicians, activists of nongovernmental organizations, leaders of cultural associations, prominent public figures, and intellectuals in October in order to form an alliance that could be named the Bloc for Independence, *Belapan* reported.

"The coalition of pro-democratic forces currently experiences a crisis and discord, that is why the forum and the new bloc would allow us to determine a common view of the political situation and find ways out of the crisis," BPF Deputy Chairman Alyaksey Yanukevich said.

The opposition Belarusian Party of Communists and Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) have recently floated the idea of forming a center-left bloc. "Talks about coalitions and so-called blocs make my head go round," United Civic Party (AHP) leader Anatol Lyabedzka said of the initiatives. "The most important thing is that everybody should be acting within one common strategy. The AHP is not going to join any blocs. We would like to cooperate with both left-wing and right-wing groups."

Source: *RFE/RL; September 5, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/09/3-CEE/cee-050906.asp>*

3. Belarusian Foreign Affairs Ministry: Watslaw Radzivinovich Was Refused Accreditation... yet?

Watslaw Radzivinovich, a journalist from a Polish weekly *Gazeta Wyborcza*, has not been refused accreditation, says Victoria Lahouskaya, an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' press office. "This issue has not even been considered yet because a meeting of the relevant commission did not take place. Mr. Radzivinovich did not receive any official reply," she said.

Despite Lahouskaya's denial, news of Watslaw Radzivinovich's failure to gain accreditation in Belarus appeared on several Belarusian web news sites. Andrey Pachobut, a reporter from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, explained the problem to the *BAJ*: "In early August, Bartosh Vendliarchyk, the chief of the foreign affairs department of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, received a phone call from the Belarusian Embassy in Poland. He was informed told that Watslaw Radzivinovich would not obtain accreditation because he was 'a biased journalist'. Since the news has appeared on web sites, Foreign Ministry officials have been trying to refute it, Pachobut said.

"Watslaw Radzivinovich is a professional journalist who closely follows the political and civil life of Belarus and is impartial in his coverage of events. The Belarusian authorities seem to dislike this. It looks like they are simply stalling for time," says Pachobut.

On February 19, 2006, shortly before the Presidential election, Watslaw Radzivinovich was denied entry to Belarus despite possession of an entry visa. In July 2005, he and a colleague

were detained not far from Hrodna on their way to the trial of activists from the Union of Poles in Lida.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalist*; September 4, 2006; <http://baj.ru/indexe.htm>

4. Independent *Tovarishch* Cut From Subscription Catalog 2007

On August 30th, the editorial board of *Tovarishch*, an independent, non-state newspaper, received a reply from the state enterprises Belposhta (Belarusian Post) and Minabldruk (Minsk Regional Press) to its request concerning access for *Tovarishch* to the state system of newspaper subscriptions through state-run newsstands and mail service.

Belposhta pointed that it had the right to choose the subjects of economy for concluding contract agreements and nobody had the right to force it to conclude an agreement. So, the enterprise refused to conclude a distribution agreement with *Tovarishch* without any explanations.

Minabldruk in turn stated it would not consider any proposals about distribution of periodicals by its newsstands till the end of 2006.

For now, the editors intend to continue distributing the newspaper through their own channels. The press-service of the Belarusian Association of Journalists reports that in 2005, Belposhta refused to include into the subscription catalog a number of non-state newspapers including *Tovarishch* and *Belsaiuzdruk*, and broke the contracts under which these newspapers were to be sold at newsstands.

Source: *Viasna Human Rights Center*; September 2, 2006; <http://www.spring96.org/en/news/4201/>

5. Belarusian Police Detained Opposition Activist, Reporters

Police seized Ales Chyhir in Babruysk, Mahilyou Oblast, on August 31, shortly after he chained himself to a lamppost near the building that houses the Babruysk City Council, Belapan and *RFE/RL*'s Belarus Service reported. Chyhir, a local councilor and history teacher, was protesting his dismissal from a teaching job at a local school. He headed opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich's team in the region during the presidential election campaign earlier this year and believes that he was fired for political reasons. Simultaneously with Chyhir, police detained 10 reporters who were at the scene of the protest. The reporters were released after spending several hours at a police station.

Source: *RFE/RL*; September 1, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/09/3-CEE/cee-010906.asp>

DOMESTIC

6. Belarusian Opposition Promises New Street Protests

On Wednesday, the Belarusian opposition announced the beginning of a street-protest fall campaign. They intend to open their campaign on September 16, with a procession and rally to demand peaceful change of the government.

The opposition submitted around 30 requests to hold public actions in different towns in Belarus, Viktor Ivashkevich, the deputy head of the Belarusian Popular Front opposition party, said at the press conference.

"The natural change of the power through the elections is impossible in a country, where elections themselves do not exist. That is why we have no other options but to go out on the streets and gain the opportunity for open and fair power change by street actions. Certainly, by

absolutely peaceful street actions,” Aleksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition leader, said at the briefing.

Last spring, the Belarusian opposition staged a series of unprecedented street actions, protesting the re-election of President Lukashenko for the third term. Tens of thousands of people participated in the actions. The authorities suppressed the demonstrations by arresting most of the opposition leaders.

According to Milinkevich, the opposition is expecting increased political activity with elections to local councils slated for January 2007.

“We do not expect a victory at local elections, because we know what kind of elections they will be,” the opposition leader said.

“But we go to the elections to increase the level of political activity in the society, to get an opportunity to meet people legally and to campaign legally.”

The European Union and the U.S. did not recognize the results of the last presidential elections and introduced sanctions against some Belarusian officials, accusing them of falsification of the results.

Trans. Ed.

Source: BDG; September 7, 2006; <http://www.bdg.by/news/news.htm?93194>; Reuters.

7. Lukashenko Rival Notes Crisis in Opposition

Aleksandr Milinkevich, former Belarusian presidential candidates, believes the united democratic forces are in a crisis now, but their coalition is not likely to disintegrate.

“You can talk in different ways about what is going on with the coalition. There are different points of view, different approaches. You can say that there is a certain crisis there,” Milinkevich stated 6 September at a press conference in Minsk.

Still, the opposition leader does not think the crisis will lead to a break-up of the coalition. Milinkevich noted that he does not know anyone “who would like to leave the coalition.” Arguments are part of a struggle, but a struggle may be not only the struggle of opposing parties but a struggle within a family,” the former candidate said.

Speaking about the prospects of the second Congress of Unified Democratic Forces, Milinkevich said, “Congresses should take place periodically, they mobilize people.” But he stressed that “a congress itself is not a goal”. In his opinion, the major goal of the congress is taking appropriate actions.

Milinkevich thinks that for now, the representatives of the unified democratic forces “must go to people.”

He also said that he is not afraid of the competition of his coalition’s colleagues. “I do not think that if I was selected as the unified candidate for the presidential elections in Belarus, than I was selected for a life term,” he remarked.

Trans. Ed.

Source: Newsru.Com; September 6, 2006; <http://www.newsru.com/world/06sep2006/milink.html>

8. Decision to Build Nuclear Power Plant in Belarus To Be Based on Public Opinion

A decision on whether to build a nuclear power plant (NPP) in Belarus will be made with account for public opinion, the president of the former Soviet republic said on Friday.

Alexander Lukashenko said that the Belarusian economy needed a nuclear power plant, which would cut the country's dependence on supplies of energy resources by 24%. He said Belarus was studying NPP projects proposed by France and Russia.

"Belarus needs an NPP, but the issue will not be forced in the country. The decision will be made with due account for public opinion," said the authoritarian leader.

Alexander Lukashenko, dubbed Europe's last dictator in the West, but popular with many in his country for defending national interests, suggested the nation would support the idea of building a plant if it were a modern and safe facility.

"There are several NPPs using outdated technology in neighboring countries. Belarus is vulnerable in terms of security, and the Chernobyl accident testifies to that," the president said.

The president said the issue was being discussed, but that it could not be imposed on the people for economic, as well as psychological reasons.

Much of Belarus was badly affected by the world's worst nuclear accident - the April 1986 explosion in the fourth reactor of the Chernobyl NPP in Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union. The radioactive fallout also contaminated large areas in Ukraine, Russia, northern Europe and other regions further from the disaster.

About 135,000 people were evacuated from within an 18-mile zone, which has left the surrounding area largely deserted to this day.

In April, Greenpeace said in a report that up to 600,000 people may die of cancers developed as a result of Chernobyl radiation exposure, a huge increase on UN figures, which put the excess cancer death toll at 9,300.

In Europe, countries are divided on nuclear power, which could help the European Union to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and meet its Kyoto targets, while satisfying growing electricity demand.

While also using renewables in electricity generation, some countries, in particular Finland and France, are building new, fourth generation, reactors which are considered economically competitive and safer, to replace old ones.

However, safety concerns prevail in other countries, including Germany and Spain, which have moved to phase out nuclear plants. Britain has yet to choose which way to move forward.

Russia's president called in June on the nuclear industry to assume a greater role in meeting the nation's energy needs and for security to be tightened at nuclear facilities.

Vladimir Putin tasked the government to bring the share of nuclear power in overall electricity production from the current 16% up to 25%.

Source: RIA Novosti; September 1, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20060901/53419555.html>

REGIONAL

9. Belarus National Bank Includes Rubles in Forex Reserves

From September 1, 2006 assets in Russian rubles will be included in Belarusian forex reserves, according to the national definition, the Belarusian National Bank's information department said, quoting a resolution from the National Bank Board of Directors.

The press release notes that according to the international standards, reserve currency may be foreign currency from leading states, used by other states to accumulate liquid international reserve assets, make international settlements and cover foreign obligations and to carry out currency intervention, accepted as payment throughout the world.

The National Bank said that from July 1, 2006 Russia removed all currency restrictions, which moved the Russian ruble significantly closer being a freely convertible currency. In addition, in recent years the sovereign rating of the Russian Federation has increased significantly," the National Bank said.

The Russian ruble accounts for about 20%-30% of total volume on the Belarussian domestic currency market and in foreign trade settlements, second only to the dollar, the press release said.

Also, as world confidence in the Russian ruble grows and its use in international settlements increases, the National Bank plans to increase the weight of the Russian ruble in the structure of reserve currencies.

Source: Interfax; September 4, 2006;
http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/finances/26.html?id_issue=11582185

10. Lukashenko: Belarus Will Not Buy Russian Gas at European Price

On Friday Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that his country would not buy Russian gas at the price the Western European countries buy.

"Russia offers oil to us at a price higher than to Ukraine, and the gas price is higher than it is for Germany. We will never buy gas at such price," he told *Itar-Tass* during his working trip to Pinsk, southwestern Belarus.

"We are not against growing prices. But the gas price should be equal to the price in Russia to comply with the union state treaty," Lukashenko said.

Belarus has proposals for oil development in other countries, mainly in Venezuela. "If we translate this project into reality, we will sell oil there, earn money to make our people feel safe," he said.

Belarusian economy "will never be ruined in the conditions of fuel price hikes and our people will not go begging," he said.

"We'll do our utmost to compensate for extra spending, if it is caused by growing gas and oil prices," Lukashenko said.

Source: Itar-Tass; September 1, 2006;
<http://www.tass.ru/eng/level2.html?NewsID=10753781&PageNum=0>

INTERNATIONAL

11. Belarus Calls for Closer Relations with Iran

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on Thursday that Iran was a significant source of support for his country outside of the former Soviet republics.

Iran has been at the center of an international dispute over the past year regarding its nuclear ambitions. Some countries suspect the Islamic Republic of pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program, but Tehran has consistently denied the claims, saying it needs nuclear energy for civilian purposes.

Lukashenko's domestic policies have also come under severe criticism from the West, with Washington dubbing him "Europe's last dictator," and both the U.S. and the EU banning him from entering their territories.

"[Belarusian] foreign policy has developed good relations with your neighbors, but we need to form an outside arc of good cooperation with such important states as Venezuela, South Africa, Iran and Malaysia," Lukashenko said at a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who is in Belarus on a two-day official visit.

"We consider Iran as a serious point of support abroad, and we want to actively develop relations with it," Lukashenko said.

The president also asked the Iranian minister to work out with his Belarusian counterpart issues for the presidents on the intensification of bilateral relations.

Mottaki replied that the foreign ministers of two countries have a very simple task, since the positions of the Belarusian and Iranian presidents are the same and are aimed at developing bilateral relations.

"The efforts of such powerful countries as Belarus in Europe and Iran in the Middle East can bring peace to these regions," Mottaki said.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry said Iran is studying ways to implement a number of major investment projects in Belarus. In particular, one of Iran's largest construction companies is interested in building hotels and residential buildings, as well as to form a transportation terminal in Belarus.

Source: RIA Novosti; September 7, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20060907/53615513.html>

12. Committee Probes Deeper into Diplomat's Death in Belarus

Parliament's national security and defense committee announced it would conduct a broader investigation into the circumstances behind a diplomatic security officer's mysterious death in Belarus.

Law enforcement officers provided the National Security and Defense Committee with information on Vytautas Pociunas' appointment to Belarus on September 4. However, members of the committee admitted that many questions remain unanswered.

The committee therefore decided to launch a parliamentary investigation.

According to Alvydas Sadeckas, chairman of the committee, investigators will not only look into issues related to the officer's death but also inquire about the State Security Department's activities, working principles and structural reorganization that occurred before Pociunas was sent to Belarus.

Sadeckas mentioned the department's "organization of work, relationships with personnel, moral atmosphere and reform issues" as specific areas that the committee would inquire about.

The chairman did not say whether this information dispelled the committee's suspicions about Pociunas' appointment to Belarus, adding that "it was a closed-door meeting."

President Valdas Adamkus has tried to calm public unease surrounding the case, saying that the tragic incident would not affect Lithuania's foreign policy toward Belarus. Hasty conclusions should not be drawn until the case is fully investigated, he said.

The president added that he did not want the issue to be politicized until the probe comes to a close.

"Lithuania's position toward Belarus has been stated clearly. I would like to note that the tragic incidents involving our officers are being investigated. I don't want them to be politicized and turned into a tool for bilateral relations. Let's wait for the final results and then we can make a decision," Adamkus told the press on September 5.

Lithuania has criticized Belarus for human rights violations and has recently voiced outward support for democratic opposition in the country.

Pociunas, who worked at Lithuania's consulate in Grodno, died mysteriously on August 23. The diplomat's body was discovered outside his hotel in Brest, where he was staying on business. It is believed that Pociunas fell from his ninth story window, although many believe he was murdered. Belarusian officers insist the death was an accident.

Following the Lithuanian security officer's death in Brest, a number of politicians asked parliament to look into the circumstances behind his appointment to Belarus. They said it was suspicious that such a high-ranking and experienced State Security Department officer had been sent to work in Belarus' "backwoods."

Before being appointed to Belarus, Pociunas, who held the rank of senior state adviser, headed the State Security Department's national economic and energy security office.

Deputy Prosecutor General Gintaras Jasaitis said that, so far, there have been no obstacles to the pre-trial investigation into Pociunas' death.

"The pretrial investigation is proceeding quite effectively. Our cooperation with Belarusian law enforcement institutions is quite constructive. Belarus has responded to our first three requests for legal assistance and this is a good sign. I hope the last request will be satisfied within a week," Jasaitis told reporters.

He did not provide further details on the probe, but said that "all versions are being investigated."

Source: The Baltic Times; September 7, 2006; <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/16279/>

13. Iranian Foreign Minister Visits Belarus

Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki today met with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka during a visit to the Belarusian capital, Minsk.

Mottaki said the two nations shared "common hopes and concerns," while Lukashenka said Iran is an important source of support for his country and called for more active cooperation. Both Iran and Belarus are facing international isolation. // *Belta, AP*

Source: RFE/RL; September 7, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/9/F2BFA0A0-61CD-497D-852F-5075B9578DE0.html>

14. 70 Belarusian Victims To Work at Polish Construction Companies

Aleksandr Milinkevich, the leader of the unified democratic forces, told *Belarussky Partizan* this week, that 70 Belarusians who had suffered from government harassment in their homeland, will work at Polish construction companies. The Committee of Witness for People, lead by Irina Kulei, his wife, is making a list of people to work in Poland. All Belarusians will be placed in jobs through the Labor Ministry. They will work in Poland legally.

Milinkevich said the Poles were prepared to provide more vacancies for the Belarusian opposition activists, who suffered during and after the presidential election campaign, but there were no more requests to the committee.

Mostly people taking the opportunity to work in Poland are from the provinces of Belarus, where opposition activists have almost no chance of finding a job. Their salary might go up to \$1,000 per month, depending on experience.

Aleksandr Milinkevich emphasized that the list of people going to work in Poland is still open. But it is necessary to go through all the administrative procedures from the beginning in order to form a new group.

Trans. Ed

Source: Belarussky Partizan; September 6, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forte/index.fjspx?page=100&backPage=13&news=5067&newsPage=0>

15. World Bank Says Belarus Imposes Highest Taxes On Business

The World Bank on September 6 released its annual survey of 175 countries pertaining to ease of doing business. The report appraises 10 specific areas of business regulations, such as the ease of registering a business, paying taxes, and cross-border trade. According to the report, Belarus is the worst country in the world in the category "paying taxes," which addresses the taxes a medium-sized company would have to pay in a given year.

According to the report, businesses in Belarus have to pay 186.1 percent of their profits and make 125 tax payments a year in order to comply with tax regulations. Former Belarusian businessman Leu Marholin told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that he agrees with the World Bank's evaluation. "If entrepreneurs in Belarus worked honestly, they would simply cease to exist. They still exist today because they take the personal risk of cheating the state," Marholin noted. Meanwhile, Alyaksandr Zhyhulich from the Belarusian Tax and Duties Ministry cast doubt on the World Bank's assessment of Belarus's tax system.

"It cannot be seen from this report what they consider to be tax payments and from where they took this number -- 125 [tax payments a year].... I think there is a biased approach there. I don't know how they calculated this. We don't have any such statistical data [confirming that businesses must pay] 186 percent of their profits," Zhyhulich told RFE/RL.

Overall, Belarus received a ranking of 129 in terms of ease of doing business.

Source: RFE/RL; September 6, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/3-cee.asp>

16. Belarus Wants to Sell Venezuelan Oil to U.S.

The Belarusian government's delegation is visiting Venezuela to negotiate the set-up of a joint oil venture. The initial agreement was reached during July visit of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to Minsk.

On Monday, September 4 Yaroslav Gribik, the deputy director for oil and gas of the Belgeologi, Belarusian state company, told *Interfax* that Belarus is considering "cooperation with Venezuelan oil companies". Belarus is ready to develop oil fields in Venezuela on concessionary terms and to sell the oil to the United States.

“If Belarus manages to secure a position on the Venezuelan oil market, we could produce oil and sell it to the United States. The profits would help to develop Belarusian oil refineries,” the official said.

He added that Belarus views Venezuela as a gateway to the Latin American market. Gribik also said that the survey and assessment of oil blocs as well as the design and construction of oil rigs are all promising areas for his country.

*Source: MosNews: September 4, 2006;
<http://www.mosnews.com/money/2006/09/04/belarusoil.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.
