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THIS WEEK'S TOP STORIES:

- Court Rejects Opposition Leader's Appeal of Jail Term
- Thousands Rally To Free Belarusian Political Prisoners
- Belarusian Opposition Activist Jailed
- Current Trends in Belarusian Politics

### Human Rights & Independent Media

1. Court Rejects Opposition Leader's Appeal of Jail Term (*RIA Novosti*)
2. Belarusian Opposition Activist Jailed (*RFE/RL*)
3. Thousands Rally To Free Belarusian Political Prisoners (*RFE/RL*)
4. *Narodnaya Volya* Launches Online Version (*Belorusskie Novosti*)
5. Court Declines Partnerships Activists' Complaint (*AFN*)

### Domestic

6. No Longer Possible to Prove Falsification of Presidential Election (*Belorussky Partizan*)
7. Current Trends in Belarusian Politics (*Pontis Foundation*)
8. Authorities Fear Communication between Aleksandr Milinkevich and Belarusians (*Belorussky Partizan*)
9. Belarus Creates Belarusneft Oil Production Enterprise (*Itar-Tass*)

### Regional

10. Russia Strips Belarus of Its Oil Export Duties (*Kommersant*)
11. Problems Remain in Russia-Belarus Union Formation – Borodin (*RIA Novosti*)

### International

12. UN Rapporteur To Call For Probe Into Belarus Disappearances (*RFE/RL*)
13. U.S. Will Be Reliable Friend of Belarus, New Envoy Says (*The Moscow Times*)
14. Belarus, Venezuela sign \$1 billion Military Contract (*MPT Online*)
15. Lukashenko Says Belarus Deserves To Be Treated as Sovereign State (*Belorusskie Novosti*)
16. Lukashenko Calls on Non-Aligned Movement to Become "Global Center" (*Belorusskie Novosti*)
17. Belarus Opposition Leader Urges EU, U.S. to Ignore Results of Russia Union Vote (*MosNews*)

## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **Court Rejects Belarus Opposition Leader's Appeal of Jail Term**

On September 19, a court in Minsk rejected an appeal from an opposition leader sentenced to five and a half years in prison for unauthorized protests following presidential elections earlier this year.

Alexander Kozulin, 50, a former presidential candidate and the leader of the Social Democratic Party, was arrested during protests on March 25 against the results of the March 19 presidential elections that saw President Alexander Lukashenko re-elected to a third term. Kozulin's trial opened July 6.

Kozulin was convicted on charges of hooliganism, violating public order and refusing to obey police officers. Under the law, the charges against him require from five to six years of imprisonment sentence.

The prosecutors requested a six-year term for the opposition leader.

His defense lawyers appealed the ruling, saying the verdict is too harsh for Kozulin, who is innocent.

On Tuesday Igor Rynkevich, Kozulin's lawyer, said that the defense team asked the court "to drop the criminal case against Kozulin, release him and stop persecuting him."

Lukashenko, whom Washington has dubbed "Europe's last dictator," was re-elected to a third term with a massive 83% of the vote. Although he has support in his homeland for maintaining relative stability in comparison with some other former Soviet republics, his human rights record has been fiercely criticized by the international organizations.

The March elections were denounced by the opposition and international monitors as fraudulent, and opposition activists staged a five-day sit-in in Minsk's central Oktyabrskaya Square.

A demonstration on March 25 was broken up by police, and according to the opposition representatives, at least one person died as a result.

*Source: RIA Novosti; September 19, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20060919/54049747.html>*

### **Belarusian Opposition Activist Jailed**

A Belarusian opposition activist, Viachaslau Siuchyuk, was sentenced today to 10 days in jail after being found guilty of participating in opposition protests following presidential elections in March.

Siuchyuk was immediately detained after he returned to Belarus from Ukraine on September 12.

*Source: RFE/RL; September 18, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/9/DD5456F1-C280-4324-BC76-3C739DF138CE.html>*

### **Thousands Rally To Free Belarusian Political Prisoners**

Several thousand opposition supporters rallied in Belarus today against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's government and to demand the release of political prisoners.

Police were deployed around the officially sanctioned site of the rally in central Minsk but did not intervene. However, about 10 activists who attempted to stage an improvised march across town were detained.

Lukashenka -- who has ruled Belarus since 1994 -- won another five-year term in a March vote that the opposition and Western officials denounced as fraudulent.

Demonstrators held signs reading: "Freedom to Political Prisoners!" and "Solidarity."

They urged authorities to free an opposition presidential candidate, Alyaksandr Kazulin, as well as jailed election observers and activists who campaigned against Lukashenka in the run-up to the presidential election. // AP, Reuters

*Source: RFE/RL; September 16, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/B09DA2B8-311A-4989-B4F3-867516A60632.html>*

### **Narodnaya Volya Launches Online Version**

*Narodnaya Volya*, the Belarus' largest independent newspaper, launched its online version at [www.nv-online.info](http://www.nv-online.info).

In an interview with BelaPAN, Andrei Vashkevich, the website administrator, noted that the launch of the online version would allow the newspaper to have archives on the Web and ensure the uninterrupted publication of news if there are problems with the printed version.

The electronic version will have all the sections that the printed version has, including world news, politics, economy, society, culture, sports, and opinion/readers' feedback, Mr. Vashkevich said. A visitor can leave his/her comment after each article available on the site, he added.

According to Mr. Vashkevich, the only difference between the electronic and printed versions is that some articles will be available electronically a week later than in the printed version.

*Source: Belorusskie Novosti; September 15, 2006; [http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/15/ic\\_news\\_259\\_258854/](http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/15/ic_news_259_258854/)*

### **Court Declined Partnerships Activists' Complaint**

The Minsk City Court did not find any reasons to commutating the sentence of Nikolai Astreiko and Timofei Dranchuk, the Partnerships unregistered initiative activists. The court session regarding the appeal took place on September 15. The Minsk City Court needed more than two hours to make a decision, *Belapan* informs. It was a close-door court session.

On August 4, the Minsk Central District Court sentenced four Partnership activists to various prison terms. Nikolai Astreiko was sentenced to four years in prison, and Timofei Dranchuk – to one year. Enira Bronitskaya and Aleksandr Shalaiko were each sentenced to six month of imprisonment. The court found the young people guilty in violation of the Article 193-1, illegal creation of a public association, religious organization, foundation or participation in their activities. On August 21, the time of imprisonment was over for Shalaiko and Bronitskaya and they were released.

Pavel Sapelko, the lawyer of Dranchuk, told journalists he believes the sentence illegal and unfounded. He intends to appeal to a higher court. Valentina Shikhantsova, the lawyer of Astreiko, also intends to appeal.

Starting September 16 the sentences of Dranchuk and Astreiko come into force and they must be sent to places of detention.

*Trans. Ed.*

*Source: AFN, September 15, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?pg=4&newsid=78624#data>*

## **DOMESTIC**

### **1. No Longer Possible to Prove Falsification of Presidential Election**

On September 19, the period expired for which ballots must be kept from the March 19 presidential election.

According to the Central Electoral Committee resolution of December 27, 2006, these documents “were sealed after the totaling of the voting results and were delivered by the division election committees to the relevant district, city, or regional commissions. The documents are kept at these commissions for six months after election day and afterwards they are destroyed.”

However, most likely, these ballots were destroyed right after the election. It is impossible to check the reliability of the divisional and territorial electoral committees’ records without these documents. Thus, it is impossible to find out the truth: how Belarusians voted on March 19.

*Trans. Ed.*

*Source: Belorussky Partizan; September 19, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forte/index.fjspx?page=100&backPage=13&news=5323&newsPage=0>*

### **2. Current Trends in Belarus Politics**

Survey on External and Internal Factors and their Impact on Belarus Politics

#### Summary

The survey discusses the most pressing internal and external factors that determine current political trends in Belarus. It is based on twenty-six interviews with political and social scientists in Belarus carried out during the summer (June 2006).

A survey with a similar methodology was conducted by the Pontis Foundation in September-October 2005. As the survey reveals, among most important internal factors the continued repressions against the third sector activists may further strengthen the already existing tendency to push civic activists towards the individual work approach. While the summer atmosphere can not be compared to the atmosphere from March 2006, it can also not be compared to the defeatist mood that had existed before the elections among civil society. However, this spirit does not correlate with the trust in the opposition. This is reinforced by the conflict within the United Democratic Forces before the local government elections, where formation of regional coalitions (without the national party leaders) will further decrease the importance of Aleksandr Milinkevich as a national leader, since he lacks organized (local) structures behind him.

The absence of any concrete steps by Milinkevich himself to clarify his post-election position is also slowly but surely pushing him out of the position of a universal oppositional leader. Therefore, Belarusian experts forecast two major trends for the near future: continuation of the current inclination to conformism by the majority of the population and a further decline in opposition membership; and the increased tendency of marginalized opposition groups to take radical and uncoordinated steps.

While the current conflict has destructive tendencies with regard to democratic forces, the local-level preparation for local government elections can at least ease the tensions. While there is no clear vision towards participation in local government elections (most of the candidates are expected not to be elected due to the non-free and unfair process), various regional and local coalitions have still been formed to utilize the “elections” for campaign purposes.

Pro-democratic NGOs may play the role of a mediator in the process of forming regional coalitions, as happened by the end of the summer in Mohylev, but most of them must be much more active, and not only wait for political leaders to solve the current crisis.

Majority of respondents do not predict any substantial changes at the side of the regime, which is considered to be consolidated and internally stable. Few respondents expect at least some changes throughout the local elections within the administration - especially members of the state controlled trade unions and official youth organization BRSM are expected to be "elected". Along with this "shake-up" a few respondents pointed out the (rather limited) efforts of the regime to implement some sort of market reforms aimed to increase the inflow of foreign assets coming to Belarus.

There are not too many changes in external factors: Russia is not expected by the respondents to resign itself to support the current regime, unless there is an acceptable alternative. It is generally assumed that highly reflected gas price hike for Belarus will be similar to those currently paid by Armenia (approximately 100 – 120 USD/1000 m<sup>3</sup>) with some sort of "compensation" from Russia. On the other hand, Russia perceives Belarus increasing unwillingness to integrate economically within the framework of Kremlin-designed economic projects (SES, EURASEC). This could eventually change the Russian political communication towards Belarus, and make larger room for pressure at least until the 2008 Russian presidential election. The survey argues that it is necessary to further increase the pressure not only on Belarus, but on Russia by the West, since this seems to be the most effective way to ensure the opening of the current Belarusian regime.

#### Main Tendencies in Society

Repression pushes towards individualization: The escalation of repressions against the third sector activists, e.g. the latest and largest one which was targeted on Partnership activists (an unregistered civic initiative for the presidential elections monitoring whose members were imprisoned before the elections), remains the most characteristic trend in Belarusian civil society. According to respondents, this will further push civic activists towards the individual work approach, which is already a visible trend. On the other hand, the persecution of independent think-tanks has strengthened their orientation towards foreign institutions. This only increases the brain drain of independent experts in the area of social sciences from Belarus, which is already under way.

Even though the access to the independent information is becoming more and more restricted, what is indicated not only by repressions against independent press, but also by the prohibition of the distribution of remaining independent newspapers in the streets and at the metro stations, the author's personal impression was that following the events of March 2006, it is possible to observe the weakening of the power of fear as an instrument of the control of society.

It is still possible to see a considerable number of young people wearing the badge „Za svabodu“ ("For Freedom", a symbol of the presidential campaign of democratic forces in March 2006 which later became the name of the opposition movement led by A. Milinkievich) in the streets of Minsk.

While the situation in the summer of 2006 can not be compared to the atmosphere from three months ago, it can also not be compared to the defeatist mood that had existed among opposition activists before Aleksandr Milinkievich was elected as the single candidate of the United Democratic Forces for the 2006 presidential elections. Good spirit, but disbelief: However, this spirit – which still exists – does not correlate with the trust in the opposition, which remains considerably low. Moreover, according to the survey results, this trust seems to be slightly declining. Several respondents pointed out that the so-called "Belarusian Mайдan," the post-election protest in March 2006, was not inspired by the opposition itself but it was more a result of the spontaneous citizens' activity, especially of the so-called "new youth." A prominent sociologist forecasts that one of the two trends in the further development of the opposition background might prevail: 1) continuation of the current inclination to conformism and a further decline in opposition membership; and/or 2) the increased tendency of marginalized opposition groups to

take radical and uncoordinated steps. Both tendencies are already in progress, as documented mainly by hunger strikes. There are also other efforts to build a foundation for a policy-based alternative for the opposition. Strengthening analytical centers in regions and the interest in institutionalizing the Minsk Analytical Group grouped around the journal Arché or the elaboration of projects focusing on regional development strategies prepared with the assistance of expert from various fields deserves attention.

Conflicts at national level, but local government elections could ease them: The situation in smaller regional centers, such as Mohylev or Brest, is substantially different from the situation in Minsk. Opposition activity was nearly paralyzed in several regions after the presidential elections, mainly due to the conflict of political parties at the national level. This conflict between the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) and the United Civil Party (OGP), which has triggered the leadership crisis of United Democratic Forces (e.g the status of Milinkievich), is not necessarily manifested in the same way at the regional level. In Mohylev and also in Vitebsk, the conflict at the national level has reached regional structures as well, but respondents in Brest did not observe anything similar.

Nevertheless, this conflict has destructive tendencies with regard to democratic forces. However, local-level preparation for local government elections, along with the proposal to “reform” the UDF leadership, can at least ease the tensions. While there is no clear vision towards participation in local government elections (most of the candidates are expected not to be elected due to the non-free and unfair process), various regional and local coalitions have still been formed to utilize the “elections” for campaign purposes. After the Congress of Democratic Forces in October 2005, where many party delegates observed NGO support for the election of Alexander Milinkievich as the single candidate, and also after the presidential campaign, pro-democratic NGOs could play the role of a mediator in the process of forming regional coalitions, as happened by the end of the summer in Mohylev. While at the regional level party differences are not so relevant and NGOs have a stronger base, in a few cases – such as in Brest – party representatives still refuse to accept NGO activists as part of the “democratic forces”.

One of the reasons is that the bulk of assistance remains allocated in structures based in Minsk. This gives national (party and civic) leaders a reason to be out of touch with reality, and discourages regional activists. However, the preparation for local government elections and formation of regional coalitions could further decrease the importance of Aleksandr Milinkievich as a national leader, since he lacks organized (local) structures behind him.

#### Trends within the Opposition

Despite of the critical attitudes towards functioning of the official opposition among members of Belarusian opposition, especially among intellectuals active in think-tanks, there has been less criticism towards Aleksandr Milinkievich as leader of the opposition. Even though his own followers criticize him for irresoluteness and ineffective use of his opportunities, his advantages in comparison to other potential leaders (such as the absence of negative rating, respect for his personal qualities, etc.) have been respected even by his critics so far. However, the absence of Milikievich’s further steps to clarify his post-election position within the UDF is slowly but surely pushing him out of the position of a universal oppositional leader.

Conflict as Usual: The existence of internal conflict was recognized by the overwhelming majority of respondents, which was no surprise for them. The conflict between BNF and OGP has been occurring long-term; on the other hand, respondents do not expect any open conflict within the opposition. However, several respondents criticized the absence of a clear signal from the West in favor of maintaining the unity of the democratic camp. The core of the opposition’s internal conflict lies in the effort to take control of the leadership while maintaining Milikievich's symbolic position of a formal leader. Even top leaders of OGP have stated their intention to keep Milinkievich in high politics. However, the leaders’ goal could be to strengthen the position of their own party through elimination of smaller political groups from the leadership of UDF and to keep control over resources.

Views on Milinkevich: According to some respondents, Milinkevich, who was criticized for offering fewer impulses for the opposition than expected, should not prevent the organization of the second congress. On one hand, this could enable the reunification of opposition groups (however, it might be too late in the autumn already). On the other hand, several others think that in this stage, the opposition could not have a leader. In general, respondents state non-entanglement, steady character, and image of a fair man as Milinkevich's positive qualities. Independence from any political party is still viewed as his strength. However, his (as respondents saw it) self-imposed position as the "apostle of democratic values" was rather believed to be his weakness, as it limits his ability to broaden the existing political and social background of the opposition. His own supporters talk about weaker leadership qualities (as expected), while other respondents think he should weaken his pro-European behavior to achieve greater impact. Other respondents considered him to be dependent on and work under the pressure of party leaders.

Need for a transparent support mechanism: Financial machinations within the opposition are discussed more openly than ever before. Especially BNF and some of its representatives are criticized; such accusations dominate the current BNF conflict between BNF chairman Vincuk Viachorka and his younger opponents. Many critics refer to the pre-election mobilization campaign "Xopits!" as too expensive given its (exclusively) internet implementation. Similar accusations have been directed also towards OGP. After the election campaign, one of OGP representatives was criticized for obstructing the opposition campaign for not providing the electoral program to the editorial office of the national daily *Sovetskaya Belarussiya* on time, or for preparing electoral materials in Belarusian with major grammatical errors.

Communists as a Case Study?: The effort to eliminate the Party of Belarusian Communists (PKB) by the state power is perceived as an issue to probe the UDF. On one hand, after the visit of the PKB chairman Sergey Kaliakin in Moscow, there were rumors about his ambitions to gain the leading position in democratic forces. On the other hand, the pro-Lukashenka Communist Party of Belarus (KPB) developed an initiative to unify the party with communists who are active in the opposition. Even though PKB refuses to take this step, respondents do not rule out the possibility of formation of a fictive initiative group that would announce the unification of both parties and later followed by official dissolution of the PKB, might be formed. Another possible scenario is the elimination of registration of local, county, and respective regional organizations of political parties. Taking into consideration Belarusian legislation, political parties have to be active in at least four areas. If they do not fulfill this condition, they cannot be registered. Thus, consecutive and silent elimination of oppositional elements is more than viable, and the PKB could serve as the case study for such liquidation for other opposition parties – only in a later stage.

Local Government Elections - in search for a strategy: Chances that the independent or opposition candidates will succeed in being elected in upcoming local elections are quite low. The only opportunity is given by the generation exchange which was "announced" by the Central Electoral Commission Head Lidia Yermoshina, who said that local government elections will bring new faces to Belarus politics. The two new cadre bases of the regime are supposed to be the official youth movement, BRSM (the so-called Luka-mol), and trade unions. The opposition does not expect any serious success and throughout the election campaign it rather focuses on its own promotion, and propagation of their program. Nevertheless, respondents (during the summer) in the regions showed only a limited knowledge of the opposition's preparation for local elections, which indicates that the local government campaign is either prepared on the central level, or simply that respondents have been gathering information from Minsk. This suggests that democratic candidates independent of party-led campaigns will be left out and will not be able to gather sufficient support. If so, this could decrease the chances of independent local councilors, as it happened in 2003 when a handful of young democratic candidates won seats after running successful get-out-the-vote campaigns in various regions (mainly small towns).

New opposition: The phenomenon of the so-called new opposition, formed on the wave of post-election protests in March 2006, is perceived in various ways: respondents appreciate its

establishment and especially the fact that it involves people who had previously not been active in politics. Its importance is appreciated especially in regard to its mobilization potential. However, the survey points to the weakness related to its program and organizational functioning and majority of respondents doubts that “the new opposition” could become an independent entity in Belarusian political life. Nevertheless, only few respondents criticized the effort of political parties to gain control over this new emerged movement.

**Kozulin factor:** The potential of Aleksander Kozulin’s camp is considered to be limited, especially since its leader was imprisoned. After his arrest, the leadership phenomenon of Kozulin, who showed the capability to consolidate his social-democratic movement, has been extensively missing in Belarusian politics. Especially OGP and its leader Anatol Lebedko are openly trying to integrate Kozulin’s camp into the UDF. Nonetheless, several respondents supposed that Kozulin’s imprisonment might further strengthen his electoral potential in the future. Survey respondents admitted the need for a unifying process within the opposition as well as the need to overcome ideological differences; however, the high level of mistrust among followers of individual leaders remains the biggest challenge. Such mistrust is largely related to Kozulin himself as many oppositional activists still perceive him as the former destructive follower of Lukashenka responsible for repressions at Belarusian State University (Kozulin was the rector of the BSU).

**Contacts with the Administration?:** Some respondents mentioned the existence of informal contacts with the administration. These contacts exist on the level of technocratic elites, e.g., through the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. According to the survey, there are informal contacts with the administration, (economic) consultants of the President or with top officers at the Ministry of Economy. In connection with this, some respondents doubt the opposition might play a (relevant) role in the fall of the regime. They perceive as a mistake the insufficient communication with the business sector. In this regard the opposition is by many respondents seen not only as passive in building contacts and returning to the mainstream of Belarusian politics, but unable to meet its own commitments, too. Post-election goals of the opposition, such as announced collection of signatures against the contract system in the employer- employee relations, legal actions concerning elections, and possible impeachment of MPs has been either unnoticed or did not take place at all.

#### Stability of Ruling Elites

Majority of respondents do not predict any substantial changes of the regime. Government elites are considered to be consolidated and internally stable, even though this position was shaken during the March elections. The recent withdrawal of Head of the Security Council Tozik, who was not long ago perceived as Lukashenka’s favorite and potential future successor, appears to be falling victim to a “clannish” type of conflict between power groups: the technocrats (Tozik, Prime Minister Sidorski) and the so-called “siloviki” (former Head of Presidential Administration and present Head of State Security Council Viktor Sheiman). However, Tozik’s new position as Belarusian Ambassador to China also seems to be related to a stronger need to oversee business activities by various regime representatives and to the reprioritization of economic and political strategies in Belarus. China is widely considered to be the country in which the current Belarusian elite is interested in, especially after contacts with various Arab and Islamic states had failed to be developed into effective business. The role of Ural Latypov, the former Head of the Presidential Administration and Minister of Foreign Affairs in this “Chinese” direction remains unclear, still, Viktor Lukashenka, the president’s older son, is believed to be an important actor in the export of assets to China. Nevertheless, in case of a more intense pressure from the Western countries, these new target countries would not protect bank assets of the Lukashenka’s regime.

**Elite shaking?:** Currently, the position of Sheiman as the chief of the Security Council is believed to be considerably weaker compared to the powers he used to have as the Head of the Presidential Administration. The withdrawal of Prime Minister Sidorski is generally perceived as being related to the gas price hike, while in the same time he was considered to be the best negotiator with Russia regarding hydro-carbons. However, such shake-ups and conflicts among

individuals of the “clans” do not have a strong impact on the stability of the regime. President Lukashenka incites and exploits the disputes between different parties while he remains the ultimate arbiter in these disagreements. This is not a real conflict of elites, but an imposed exhaustion by some representatives of the regime, such as the case of Pavel Jakubovich, the editor in chief of the daily *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*.

Party of power and market reform: Few respondents expect specific changes in political course in connection with a speech given by Lukashenka in Belarusian Parliament on May 23, 2006. President indicated the possibility of building “the party of power”; either a political party or a social movement based on trade unions and the structures of BRSM, the so-called Luka-mol. In doing so, he did not exclude the dialogue with the so-called “constructive opposition” (“which sets normal goals in the area of survival of the state and the nation”) as one of the possibilities, but at the same time he rejected a dialogue with the current opposition. This shows that in the near future, efforts in the area of building a “loyal opposition” that “would respect the leading position of Lukashenka as well as efforts to build an own pro-regime third sector” can be expected. A similar possibility has already been explored in Russia, especially in the area of Trans-Dnistrina (youth organizations “Nashi”, “Idushciye vmeste”). In this region, civic organizations (who, in their style of work and their methods of presentation, try to imitate the Serbian “Otpor”, or Belarusian “Zubr”), were established under the auspices of the local administration to “work with the “electorate”, focusing especially on youth but at the same time promoting the official policy. Another issue, which was perceived by a few respondents as significant, was the effort of the regime to implement limited market reforms aimed to increase the inflow of foreign assets coming to Belarus. The cancellation of the so-called “golden share of the state” in corporations with foreign stakes, the preparation of a new tax legislation, or the decision to sell of Slavneffbank to the Russian Vneshtorgbank shows that young technocrats have been given a chance to launch the market reform à la Belarus.

#### Russia and Belarus: No sudden change is expected

The opinion of the respondents about Russia’s role in Belarusian political struggle was unified: Russia would resign itself to support the current regime only if there is an acceptable alternative. However, a pro-Russian alternative to Lukashenka in Belarus is not very probable. Nevertheless, respondents mentioned the absence of a consistent Russian foreign policy towards Belarus, and highlighted the differences in political communication and economic cooperation. Only a minority of respondents admitted that there had not been any changes in the current Russian policy towards Belarus, or believed in the possibility of cooperation between the EU and Russia to change the current Belarusian regime.

The announced increase in gas prices is perceived as occurring in connection with the G8’s July 2006 summit in St. Petersburg: It was an argument for Western partners to counterbalance the Kremlin’s support for the Lukashenka regime, to support Russia’s entry into the WTO and also simply to increase revenues for Gazprom. It is important to note that respondents do not expect the increase to be a dramatic one, i.e. that prices would not reach a European level. It is generally assumed that prices will be similar to those currently paid by Armenia, which would be a double increase at most (approximately 100 – 120 USD/1000 m<sup>3</sup>). Many respondents expect some sort of “compensation” for the price hike, such as the increase of transit fees or provisions of loans from Russia. Almost nobody considers the increase to be the Kremlin’s attack on the Belarusian regime. On the other hand, Russia perceives Belarus as unwilling to integrate economically within the framework of Kremlin-designed economic projects (SES, EURASEC). This could eventually change the Russian political communication towards Belarus. Respondents agreed that it is necessary to further increase the pressure on Russia by the West, since this seems to be the most effective way to ensure the opening of the current Belarusian regime.

Nevertheless, many respondents pointed to the possibility of participation of Russian special units in interventions against Belarusian demonstrators. It may have happened for the first time in the 2004 Parliamentary Elections, as well as during the protest action on March 25, 2006. Some believe in the joint training of Russian and Belarusian special police forces. Opposition activists

arrested during demonstrations remembered that during the police action and also during interrogations there were some people present who did not understand the Belarusian language and asked for interpretation.

Belarus and EU: Not too much change either: Respondents largely criticized the EU's current position towards Lukashenka's regime. Although many of them perceived the increasing interest and assistance of Brussels regarding the situation in Belarus positively, the latest measures – especially those aimed to support independent media – are considered to be inefficient. According to respondents, the need for broadcasting an independent satellite TV channel is the most pressing, regardless of other projects that also might be able to provide information to citizens more effectively. Few even view the increase of anti-Western feelings as a consequence of failed implementation of the EU policy. The respondents do not expect that the visa ban would influence the behavior of the government elites. The list is too rigid (i.e., short) to be taken seriously, and EU policy is perceived to be too soft and lacking serious implementation to be taken seriously by the regime. However, it would be different if this list were open and flexible, i.e., if it were regularly updated with the names of those participating in political repressions after the 2006 presidential elections.

Some argued that there is a risk that the regime might react by limiting traveling of opposition and civic activists or restricting the entry of foreign journalists into the country. Moreover, extensive expansion of this "black list" might strengthen the consolidation the state bureaucracy and bring the administrative machinery closer to the state power. In majority of cases, the possibility of potential EU economic sanctions towards Belarus meets with criticism as well. Respondents fear that the regime might also use the criminalization of Belarusian opposition to compromise it, while gaining political capital. Reflections on sanctions were used by Lukashenka as an argument against the dialogue with the opposition during his speech in Parliament on May 23, 2006 ("What kind of dialogue can it be if they are calling for economic sanctions against their own nation?"). Mainly, sanctions could lead to Belarus further exporting its products through Russian companies, which would in fact increase its dependency on Moscow. Cancelling trade preferences due to the violation of trade unions without talks following these sanctions would put the democratic trade union in an awkward situation.

In addition to restrictions, the EU should offer Belarusian citizens more positive programming and incentives – for example in the form of the liberalization of visa policy for regular Belarus citizens. A smaller part of respondents were willing to accept only selective sanctions, for example the limitation of a general system of preferences for Belarus as a state that limits the rights of trade union organizations, specifically with implications on gas products.

Source: *Pontis Foundation; September 19, 2006;*  
[http://www.pontisfoundation.sk/tmp/asset\\_cache/link/0000015387/PONTIS%20Summer%20Survey%20on%20Belarus.pdf](http://www.pontisfoundation.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000015387/PONTIS%20Summer%20Survey%20on%20Belarus.pdf)

### **3. Authorities Fear Communication between Aleksandr Milinkevich and Belarusians**

In 14 of 17 cities in the Minsk region, the local authorities prohibited citizens' rallies with the participation of Aleksandr Milinkevich, the united democratic forces leader. The activists of the Belarusian Popular Front Party and Independent Republic Zhodino public initiative were organizing these meetings.

Pavel Krasovsky, one of the organizers, told *Belarussky Partizan* that the rallies were to take place from September 23 to October 27. Discussion of the social economical situation in the provinces was the main purpose of the meetings of the democratic forces leader and citizens.

According to Pavel Krasovsky, replies from the officials were short and expected you can not hold any mass events closer than 50 meters to any administrative buildings. However, in several cities the replies were unanticipated. For instance, in the city of Nesviy the authorities refused to permit the meeting because of the Dozhinki republican festival to be hold there. In the city of Stolbets,

local authorities told the organizers that Victory Square (Ploschad Pobedi), the place they are asking to hold a rally, does not exist. In the city of Volodzhin, the authorities suddenly began repairs in the main square, where organizers planned to hold a meeting. The organizers did not receive any answers yet from three cities: Borisov, Molodechno, and Smolevichi. Pavel Krazovsky noted that they have no doubt that the replies from these cities would be the same.

However, the organizers vowed that Aleksandr Milinkevich would meet with the local population, but in “a different format.” Most likely, it will be meetings arranged through regional democratic activists

*Trans. Ed.*

*Source: Belorussky Partizan, September 18, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forse/index.fjspx?page=100&backPage=13&news=5268&newsPage=0>*

#### **4. Belarus Creates Belarusneft Oil Production Enterprise**

Under the presidential decree Belarus created Belarusneft, a big state-run oil production enterprise.

The purpose is to complete the creation of an entire network of oil product supply to Belarus and to carry out the full-scale reconstruction and modernization of oil production capacities, the presidential press service told *Itar-Tass* on Saturday.

The Belarusneft state enterprise was created on the basis of a unitarian enterprise with the same name and incorporated a number of affiliated enterprises, such as Lidanefteproduct, Pukhivichinefteproduct and Seismotechnika.

The reorganization is expected to promote oil exports, to improve the oil products realization system at the internal and foreign markets and to improve the competitiveness of Belarusian oil products, the decree said.

Belarusian oil producers take part in joint projects with oil companies of Russia, Syria, Vietnam, Cuba, India, the United States and a number of countries of the Western Europe.

*Source: Itar-Tass; September 16, 2006;*  
*<http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=10797660&PageNum=0>*

### **REGIONAL**

#### **5. Russia Strips Belarus of Its Oil Export Duties**

Russia’s government seeks a larger share of profits from export duties on oil products made at Belarusian refineries from Russian oil. Belarus is reluctant to annually lose up to \$2 billion and suggests a bargain – raising rates of oil export duties up to those in Russia and freezing prices on the export of Russian oil via Belarus.

A governmental source reported that Russia would suggest that Belarus consider raising Russia’s share to 85 percent at talks of economic officials of the two countries late September.

The duties bring an estimated \$2 billion to the Belarusian budget annually, boosting the country’s GDP by up to 3 percent every year. The existing practice also helps Russian companies to earn. Local subsidiaries of Russian firms supply oil to Belarusian refineries duty free, only to export oil products with low Belarusian duties to Western Europe. Last year, Belarus imported 19.2 million metric tons of oil from Russian, exporting 13.5 million tons of oil products.

Meanwhile, Belarus has promised to increase its duties up to those in Russia.

Belarus's agreement to give Russia 85 percent of profits on the duties could bring \$350 million to the Russian budget every year, and the unification of the duties rates – another \$500 million.

*Source: Kommersant; September 19, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com/page.asp?id=705792>*

## **6. Problems Remain in Russia-Belarus Union Formation - Borodin**

On Saturday the state secretary of the Russia-Belarus Union said that problems remained in the formation of the Union.

During the meeting with the Russian President Vladimir Putin, Pavel Borodin said that the problems were mainly connected with the implementation of four agreements signed by presidents of Russia and Belarus in January this year in St. Petersburg.

On January 24, 2006 the Russian and Belarusian presidents signed the agreements on issues of the countries' union property and on equal rights of citizens to move freely on the territory of both countries.

Borodin said one of the topical problems was the implementation of the agreement, which regulated the union state's property.

He said that the requirements stipulated by the agreement "unfortunately, were not fulfilled by Belarus."

The agreement regulates the property issues in the format of the union state and ensures equal rights of Russian and Belarusian citizens on free movement and the choice of residence in both countries.

In particular, it envisions that citizens of one country may spend 30 days in the other country without registering with the local authorities.

Borodin also thanked the Russian president for the budget of the Union State, which increased in 2006 to over 4 billion rubles (about \$150 million).

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a treaty on the formation of the Russia-Belarus Union State in December 1999.

The treaty was designed to become an efficient instrument for restoring the common political, economic, legal, defense and humanitarian space of the two peoples.

*Source: RIA Novosti; September 16, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20060916/53950758.html>*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **7. UN Rapporteur To Call For Probe Into Belarus Disappearances**

A UN special rapporteur says he will call for the United Nations' Human Rights Council to back a recommendation to launch an international probe into the "disappearance and murders" of politicians and journalists critical of the Belarusian government.

Adrian Severin says the investigation's mandate should be "to investigate the responsibility of senior officials of the government of Belarus."

The victims, three Belarusians and a Russian journalist, disappeared in 1999 and 2000.

The report was due to be presented on September 19, but has now been rescheduled for September 27.

Severin hinted on September 20 that governments with close ties to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka were behind the delay.

Severin told journalists that the problem was "not a lack of time but a lack of will" on the part of some members.

He said it was "quite obvious that Cuba was filibustering," but declined to name other countries.

The report will also express concern at "the steady deterioration" of the human rights situation in Belarus in 2005 and 2006.

Belarus has rejected the report as "artificial and politically motivated." // AP, AFP

*Source: RFE/RL; September 20, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/9/5566bdf3-96cb-4a2b-866e-e31cd9f27592.html>*

### **8. U.S. Will Be Reliable Friend of Belarus, New Envoy Says**

The new U.S. ambassador to Belarus said Washington wanted to be a friend to Belarus, despite harsh criticism of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, while Lukashenko said he was bolstering relations with countries from Cuba to China in an effort to counter U.S. clout.

"Several days before my departure to Minsk, representatives of the Bush administration at the highest level underlined that the United States will be a reliable friend of Belarus, will stand with Belarus while Belarusians work out how to define the future of their beautiful country," Karen Stewart told reporters Monday upon arrival in Minsk.

Lukashenko, after returning from a Nonaligned Movement summit that brought him together with other U.S. antagonists, said that "Belarus today is creating a so-called 'external arc' in its foreign policy. It leads from Cuba through the countries of Latin America, Africa, the Persian Gulf, Iran, China, Vietnam, Malaysia."

"The United Nations should serve the interests of all states, not just the United States of America," he told reporters. "Together we are capable of not allowing the [UN] to be used as an instrument of settling scores with countries conducting independent policy."

Lukashenko reiterated his accusation that the United States was seeking his ouster and said it would not happen.

The head of Lukashenko's Security Council, who visited Venezuela this month, said Monday that Belarus and Venezuela had reached agreements on arms and military technology sales that would bring Belarus around \$1 billion. // The Associated Press

*Source: The Moscow Times; September 20, 2006; <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2006/09/20/019.html>*

### **9. Belarus, Venezuela sign \$1 billion Military Contract**

Belarus has signed a military cooperation agreement with Venezuela worth 1 billion dollars.

This information was announced Monday in Minsk, revealing no further details, except that agreement in the oil exploitation filed had been signed too. Belarusian Security Council State Secretary Viktor Sheiman said the agreement "would secure commissions to dozens of Belarusian companies involved in military equipment production for many years to come".

At the press conference dedicated to his visit to Venezuela on 7-8 September, Sheiman declined to comment as to what Belarus's exports to Venezuela would consist of.

Source: *MPT Online*; September 19, 2006;  
[http://www.mrt.com.mk/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1142&Itemid=26](http://www.mrt.com.mk/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1142&Itemid=26)

### **10. Lukashenko Says Belarus Deserves To Be Treated as Sovereign State**

Belarus deserves to be treated as a sovereign state, Aleksandr Lukashenko said in an interview with the BBC during the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Havana last week.

"If the United States believe that we are a sovereign state, which we are, they should act in the accordance with this belief instead of lording it over us or pressing us. We deserve to be talked to as a sovereign state... We do not want much. We just want normal cooperation that will be to our state's benefit. If the Americans agree, we are ready to cooperate with them as early as tomorrow," he said.

The Belarusian leader denied that convicted Aleksandr Kozulin, who ran against him in the March presidential election, is a political prisoner. "When 95 percent of people vote for the incumbent president in the presidential elections, what an idiot can take someone and put him in jail? It will mostly harm you."

He said that the foreign observers had informed their countries' authorities "confidentially and privately" that he had won a landslide victory in the election, suggesting that he did not have any reasons for imprisoning Dr. Kozulin.

He pointed out that a person would be jailed in any country for an attempt to take a detention center by assault. "Imagine that someone leads a group of people to attack a detention center in the United States, the United Kingdom or somewhere else. How would you react? You would react in the harshest way because this is the law violation."

When Lukashenko was asked about the independent media in the country, he said that today it would be impossible to ban it. He said that "at least" half of all Belarusians watch CNN, and noted that the *BBC*, *Euronews* and *Eurosport* channels are also available to the Belarusians, along with Russian TV channels.

"How is it possible today to isolate a country and ban the independent media? They are openly being financed by the Americans and the Europeans. There is a new Russian channel, *RTVi*, which I believe is owned by Russian media tycoon Vladimir Gusinsky. Money was provided for it. People watch it and I also watch it. There is also a Belarusian-language version of this channel's programs. And they say there things that are far from being pleasant for the Belarusian president. Have I closed these channels? I do not even pay any attention to them. Because it is all lie. The West suffered a defeat in Belarus, but the Americans and the West do not want to acknowledge this," he said. //BelaPAN

Source: *Belorusskie Novosti*; September 19, 2006;  
[http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/19/ic\\_articles\\_259\\_148014/](http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/19/ic_articles_259_148014/)

### **11. Lukashenko Calls on Non-Aligned Movement to Become "Global Center"**

Aleksandr Lukashenko called on the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to become an "independent global center of political force" as soon as possible.

"This moment has come now," and the NAM member states should not miss, as "it may be too late tomorrow," the Belarusian leader said in his speech on September 15 at the NAM summit in Havana, Cuba. "We should by no means allow to remove us one by one to the backyards of our

planet or torn to pieces like Yugoslavia and other states and drawn into the shade so that nobody will ever see us."

In order to become an independent global center of political force, the NAM should have political will, Mr. Lukashenko suggested. "We should pool our efforts for achieving this strategic goal," he said.

He called for reviving the principle of solidarity in the NAM. "The Movement should resolutely come out in political defense of its members subject to external pressure or aggression," he said.

Mr. Lukashenko called on the NAM member states to coordinate their stances in the framework of the United Nations. "It was very correct of the Iranian president to reproach the United Nations Organization and the Security Council of inaction in the hottest events of our life, which the UN secretary general was ashamed to mention while speaking here," he said. He noted that while demanding efficient activities from the United Nations, the NAM should also be actively involved in solving international problems. "Interventions have lately occurred in states that were or are members of the Non-Aligned Movement," he said. "What was our response? Are we like ostriches sticking their head down in the sand? Do we really want not to see what is happening around us?"

"We should resolutely uphold the right of our peoples to choose an independent path of development and jointly oppose the dictation of external forces," the Belarusian leader said. According to him, the NAM should not allow the diversity of cultures, historic development and progress to be replaced by standards imposed from outside. "They are imposing a very uniform model of development on us," he said. "The Western leaders are convinced that only their countries have right to write the modern history. They use their power to readjust the planet to their needs, pursuing the sole purpose of subordinating all nations to their interests and ensuring their well-being at our expense."

Mr. Lukashenko pointed out that the United Nations should serve the interests of all states, not only the USA. "Being together we are able to prevent this organization from being used as a tool in crackdowns on countries that implement an independent policy," he said, warning that some of the NAM member states might become the next target.

Mr. Lukashenko stressed that unity and active efforts would help the Movement establish a new, more just, world system. "This is our main goal," he said. "To achieve it, we should have a clear program of actions to create gradually but irreversibly a multi-polar world." //BelaPAN

*Source: Belorusskie Novosti; September 16, 2006;*  
*[http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/16/ic\\_articles\\_259\\_147990/](http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/16/ic_articles_259_147990/)*

## **12. Belarus Opposition Leader Urges EU, U.S. to Ignore Results of Russia Union Vote**

Alexander Milinkevich, a former rival to Belarus' president Alexander Lukashenko and the opposition leader, called on the European Union and the U.S. to ignore the results of a referendum on establishing the Union State of Belarus and Russia if the vote ever takes place, the *Interfax* news agency reports.

"I have the following stance which I voice at all the international meetings: the EU and the USA should unanimously state prior to the referendum that it is illegitimate and its results will not be acknowledged," Milinkevich said during an online conference.

The conference materials were released by Milinkevich's press service today. He stressed that "if the referendum is called, we are ready for street protests". He intends to conduct "an extensive media campaign" so that people become "aware of the dangers of unification".

Milinkevich said that European leaders are “also concerned by a possible incorporation of Belarus into Russia”. “There is an understanding that it represents a threat to stability and security in Europe,” he said.

Source: *MosNews*; September 14, 2006;  
<http://www.mosnews.com/news/2006/09/14/belarus.shtml>

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The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the International League for Human Rights ([www.ilhr.org](http://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](mailto: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.

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