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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. TV Channel Should Reflect Public Television Principles

A new satellite TV channel called *TV Belarus* will start working next year. The decision was made during a recent round-table discussion concerning the prospect of broadcasting into Belarus from abroad. The meeting took place in Vilnius on September 23. Journalists and heads of TV and radio companies from Germany, Poland and Lithuania took part in the discussion.

The most important issue discussed at the meeting was the type of broadcasting Belarusians need, -- noted Edward Melnikau, a *BAJ* Board member, in his interview to the *BAJ Press Service*.

“Some people think that our channel should counterbalance the amount of state TV channels propaganda and propose revolutionary programs that would make people rebel. This is the wrong idea. The majority of discussion participants agreed that the channel should be created according to the principles of public television like all over Europe. In our country, this idea has already been compromised by ORT which in fact belongs to a group of oligarchs. The [Belarusian] channel's main task would be to provide people with impartial information and serve as a forum where people could share their ideas. There should be entertaining programs along with news and political reviews.”

Such foreign-based broadcasting will only be possible via satellite. One more transmitter will probably be built in Lithuania. In this case, the *Baltic Waves* radio station will be available throughout the whole country.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalist*; September 26, 2006; <http://baj.ru/indexe.htm>

2. Belarus School Protests Ban On Polish Teachers

The students and staff of a Belarusian middle school walked out of classes today to protest a government ban on the use of exchange teachers from Poland.

Reports say police are monitoring the peaceful demonstration in Volokovysk, in the western province of Hrodna, but not interfering.

The protest comes after local officials enforced a ban against Polish teachers. Minsk says Warsaw is seeking to undermine its rule through contacts with Belarus' large Polish minority.

Source: *RFE/RL*; September 25, 2006;
<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/41F2AFE1-7FBE-4DC8-A981-1EBC53C47FAB.html>

3. Information Ministry Suspends Opposition Monthly

Reporters Without Borders voiced deep concern today about the information ministry's suspension of the monthly history magazine *Arche* yesterday on the grounds that the September issue violated the terms of its license by including political articles. *Arche* is supposed to limit itself to historical content.

“We voice our support for *Arche*'s editor and we urge the information minister to reconsider his decision,” the press freedom organization said. “The distinction between historical and political articles is specious and is just meant to mask an act of censorship.”

The September issue covers photo shows police dispersing an anti-government demonstration in March. One of its articles is a detailed account of a 1995 crackdown on opposition parliamentarians who objected to referendum imposed by President Alexander Lukashenko that would have made Russian one of the country's official languages.

Arche's editor, Valer Bulhakau, intends to appeal against its closure. Created in 1997, the magazine has often broached sensitive issues and criticised the Belarusian authorities. As it is an opposition magazine, it cannot be sold and is distributed by volunteers. The editor has repeatedly requested authorisation to cover politics but has had no success.

Source: Reporters Without Borders; September 22, 2006;
http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=18978

4. Belarusian Regime Mistakenly Arrests Dmitry Dashkevich

The arrest of Dmitry Dashkevich, leader of the unregistered organization Young Front, was a huge mistake for the Belarusian special services and the regime's ideologues. This was confirmed by a discussion with Young Front members during a September 22 press conference in Minsk. The authorities decided to follow their well-worn path and behave the same way as they had with Partnership, an unregistered initiative. And they miscalculated.

In the case of Young Front, the authorities cannot expect the same effect they achieved by arresting Partnership leaders just a month before the presidential elections. Furthermore, the arrest of the Young Front leader does not threaten the organization members, but only make them believe more in their righteousness. And it is not the first arrest of the Young Front leaders: Pavel Severinets has been arrested in the past.

The authorities were obviously in a hurry. For the last six or eight weeks, Dashkevich has managed to create Young Front branches in provinces. And his achievements ran counter to the authorities' plans before the local councils' election campaign. Officials had to do something. They had no other options but to arrest him. According to Young Front representatives, he was arrested on charges of participating in an unregistered organization, which has been unable to obtain permission from the authorities since 1999.

These actions of the authorities gave the full right to Dashkevich's colleagues to speak openly about the political motivation behind the regime's actions, and about the violation of constitutional rights and freedoms, including freedom of associations.

Young Front members believe the case of Dmitry Dashkevich will be submitted to the court in the near future and that he will not likely be released. They believe that Dmitry will not renounce his participation in the Young Front organization. Moreover, he will openly state that he is a leader of the Young Front movement. We do not have to speak about the power of beliefs. Thus Dashkevich's colleagues openly stated that they are not afraid of possible arrests. They also stated that there is no problem in finding a new leader for the movement. There are more and more "Severinets" and "Dashkevichs" in Young Front and in Belarus. And it is not the reaction the authorities hoped for when they arrested Dmitry.

In addition, the regime will now deal with the "Freedom for Dashkevich!" national campaign. Young people plan to hold actions of solidarity with political prisoners, to distribute information and printed materials during the campaign. The campaign is planned to remain ongoing until the release of Dashkevich. This is the only way for the Belarusians to influence the regime.

Trans. by Ed.

Source: AFN; September 27, 2006;
<http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?pg=5&newsid=78852#data>

5. Jailed Belarusian Opposition Leader Declares Hunger Strike

A Belarusian opposition leader on Thursday declared a hunger strike as he began a jail sentence in a prison near the Russian border. Aleksandr Kozulin faces a term of five and a half years' incarceration in a Vitebsk penitentiary for his part in anti-government demonstrations in March.

A former university dean, Kozulin is the number two man in Belarus' heavily-repressed anti-Lukashenko movement.

Aleksandr Milinkevich, the opposition leader, was held in a Minsk jail for two weeks, as a result of the March disturbances.

Kozulin was at the forefront of street demonstrations against authoritarian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, whose police used force to break up the marches. Kozulin was charged with violating public order law, and inciting riot.

The hunger strike was "a mark of protest against the violation of the law by the Lukashenko regime," according to a statement from Kozulin's staff.

A former university dean, Kozulin called for an international tribunal to review the vote result returning Lukashenko to technically unconstitutional third term of office.

Most international observers criticized the March elections as heavily stacked in Lukashenko's favour, and the judgement and sentencing against Kozulin as produced by a biased court. // *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*

Source: RawStory.Com; September 21, 2006;

http://rawstory.com/news/2006/Jailed_Belarusian_opposition_leader_09212006.html

6. Belarus Presidential Repressions 2006

Belarusian Viasna Human Rights Center presented the report "President of Belarus Elections Campaign Repressions, 2006" in which shows the number of people, who were arrested days before elections, during mass protest actions against falsifications of the results of the elections and after elections.

Before the election campaign on March 19th, 2006 in Minsk 236 youth activists and people representing opposition candidates were penalized and arrested for a period from four to 15 days.

From the date of elections on March, 19th till March, 25th – 686 condemned in Minsk, about 50 condemned – in regions, from them only 5 penalties, other administrative punishments – arrests from 4 till 15 day.

Also, according to the Committee of Protection of the Subjected to Repression, 370 pupils and students have been excluded from educational institutions during the election campaign of 2006. All those students were subjected to repression not only for the participation in the presidential campaign but also for taking part in the actions of protest demanding to release political prisoners in Belarus. Thanks to the opposition efforts all of them have an opportunity to continue education in high schools, colleges and universities of the other countries close to Belarus.

Here is the List of Sentenced Political Prisoners (condemned in Belarus on politically motivated criminal cases - leaders and the activists of opposition who are serving time in jails right now):

- Kozulin Aleksandr (5.5 years) – Professor, the former candidate for presidency, former Rector of the Belarusian State University has been sentenced to five and a half years in a minimum security prison on July 13, 2006 by the judge Aleksei Rybakov. The politician was arrested during a brutal disband of a peaceful rally on March 25 this year and is in jail now.

Mikalay Astreika and Timofei Dranchuk (one-two years), were members of an independent election monitoring group, Initiative Partnership. They were sentenced by the judge Leonid Yasenovich on 4 August, 2006 to two years and one year imprisonment accordingly for their intention to observe the presidential elections in March 2006. Both are in jail now.

Pavel Severinets and Mikola Statkevich (two years). Pavel Severinets is one of the leaders of the youth organization Malady Front (Young Front) and Mikola Statkevich, leader of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Narodnaya Gramada) took part in the events of October 18th and 19th, 2004 when thousands of people were protesting against falsified results of referendum to extend Lukashenko's governing and elections of a new parliament. They both were sentenced by the judge Leonid Yasenovich on May 31st, 2005 to two years of imprisonment.

Andrei Klimov (a year and a half) - a former member of the dissolved Belarusian parliament. Police arrested him on 11 February 1998 for alleged fraudulent business practice. He spent over two years in pre-trial detention before being sentenced to six years imprisonment at a hard labor colony with confiscation of property in March 2000. Amnesty International believes that Andrei Klimov, like other members of Belarus opposition, was deliberately targeted by the Belarusian authorities to punish him for his opposition activities. He was elected to the Belarusian parliament, the 13th Supreme Soviet, in 1995 for a five-year term, which was unconstitutionally cut short after President Lukashenka's forced dissolution of parliament in November 1996. During the dissolution process Andrei Klimov was a vocal opponent of President Aleksandr Lukashenko and took an active part in the attempted impeachment of the President.

After the dissolution of parliament he continued his criticism of the President, accusing him of violating the law and the constitution. He played an active role in a parliamentary committee established in January 1997 to examine the violations of the constitution by President Lukashenka and contributed to a document highlighting the various violations committed by President Lukashenka during the dissolution of parliament. The document was reportedly written in consultation with the then Deputy Speaker of the 13th Supreme Soviet and opposition leader, Viktor Gonchar, who "disappeared" in September 1999.

Andrei Klimov was released in spring 2002 but was back in prison on June 10th, 2005 for taking part in the actions of protest in Minsk on March 25, 2005. He was sentenced by the judge Svetlana Gonchar to a year and a half.

Sergei Skrebets (two and a half years) – a former member of the dissolved Belarusian parliament's group Respublika was arrested on May 15, 2005 for alleged fraudulent business practice and sentenced to two and a half years on February 14th, 2006.

Artur Finkevich (two years) – a youth activist was sentenced to two years in prison for a political graffiti on May 10th 2006 by the judge Victoria Zaitseva. Artur Finkevich was arrested on January 30, 2006 for graffiti "We Want a New President!" and "Enough is Enough!"

Nikolay Razumov (three years) – during the election 2006 campaign Nikolai Razumov was sentenced on June 16th, 2006 in Orsha by the judge Tatyana Rybakova to 3 years in jail for releasing the information that the president Aleksandr Lukashenko was involved in the involuntary disappearance and death of Yury Zakharenko, Viktor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky, Dmitry Zavadsky and Gennady Karpenko.

*Source: Michael Batiukov, American Chronicle; September 20, 2006;
<http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/viewArticle.asp?articleID=13822>*

7. Jailed Belarusian Leader Condemns Lukashenka's Rule

Imprisoned former Belarusian presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin has called on Belarusian citizens and the international community to reject the government led by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

In a declaration distributed today by his supporters, Kazulin also says Lukashenka should be tried by an international tribunal.

Kazulin was convicted on charges of organizing an unsanctioned rally against the disputed re-election of Lukashenka in March. He was sentenced to five and a half year in prison. His appeal against the sentence was rejected on September 19.

Kazulin was transferred early on September from a detention facility in Minsk to a jail in Vitebsk, near the frontier with Russia.

Kazulin says he will go on hunger strike indefinitely on October 20 in protest against the current regime.

Source: RFE/RL; September 21, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/9/BC891F49-F6B6-4F39-BB9D-B9FA715353B2.html>

DOMESTIC

8. Lebedko: Mental Health of Lukashenka Menaces Belarus

Chairman of the National Committee of the United Democratic Forces of Belarus, leader of the United Civil Party, Anatoly Lebedko, appealed to the Council of Ministers for “adjudication of the incompetence of citizen Aleksandr Lukashenko”. He noted that recently, many Belarusians have been concerned by his behavior, and “a number of public statements made by him at the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement raise doubts about his legal capacity and exercise”.

Thus, in several interviews Lukashenka said that at the latest presidential elections he had been supported by 95% of voters, which contradicts even the official results of the elections. He also said that 99% of young people supported him, which also contradicts the real situation.

The statement made by Lukashenko that “he had been performing a special mission and was acting not only on behalf of his country, but of the whole Europe,” also gives rise to doubt that he can be aware of reality and judge it adequately, Lebedko believes. According to Russian press reports, Lukashenka had stated that “a new TV channel in Russian *RTVi*, Gusinky’s channel, and a Belarusian-language version of that channel is broadcast in Belarus, and many things unpleasant for the Belarusian president are said there”. In reality, *RTVi* channel does not have a Belarusian version.

“Taking in consideration Lukashenka’s statement that he read Vasily Bykau’s poems, and that he said that Skaryna lived in St. Petersburg and worked there, we cannot be but concerned for his mental health. Lukashenko said: They say that health is the most important thing. An uneducated healthy man is a healthy fool. A real fool. And a healthy fool is dangerous for the society”. It is possible that we are dealing with lack of education, ignorance about culture and history of his own country, but also with an inability to estimate his actions and control them. This is disability,” told the leader of the UCP.

In this connection Anatoly Lebedko, asks to initiate and carry out a psychiatric examination of Aleksandr Lukashenka.

“It is important not only for his health, but for security of Belarus and well-being of its citizens,” the address underlines.

Source: Charter 97; September 27, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/09/27/lebedko>

9. Secret School Teaches Liberal Values in Belarus

For three years teachers at the Yakub Kolos lyceum have been leading their students from one secret address to another. Moving mostly between private homes, the 90 pupils are defying the

high school's official closure in 2003 to try to encourage free thinking and foster Belarusian, the language associated with the small opposition in the ex-Soviet state.

"The history course we teach has nothing to do with the version drafted by Belarus authorities," Vladimir Kolos, director of the school is quoted by *Reuters* news agency. "And we conduct classes in good Belarusian. That is rare these days."

Officials say the school building was closed as part of a move to consolidate facilities and save money. Staff believe it was shut down because they broke away from the official curriculum taught at state schools and nurtured Belarusian.

They decided to keep their classes going, and resorted to the cat-and-mouse game after attempts to rent public halls led to confrontations or bureaucratic tangles with authorities.

Teachers found that halls were mysteriously booked, unavailable or found to have failed fire or safety inspections.

No one now discloses where the classes are held.

Running the gauntlet of inspectors and Education Ministry officials has become commonplace for these teachers in Belarus, ruled by President Alexander Lukashenko since 1994.

The opposition and Western countries accuse him of rounding up rivals, closing down media, rigging elections and hounding independent cultural associations.

Children starting state school are given a book entitled "Belarus - my homeland" featuring four imposing photographs of the president.

Re-elected in March in a poll denounced in the West as rigged, Lukashenko has reintroduced the Soviet notion of obligatory ideology courses for both state and private schools.

However, the Yakub Kolos school helps its teenage pupils challenge this official ideology.

"When we went to ordinary schools, we weren't free to express our opinions," said pupil Oleg Volotovskiy. "That could get you into trouble."

For Elina Kazarskaya, whose two daughters attend the school, "there is no other school in Belarus like this lyceum. Its graduates get into the most prestigious universities."

Lukashenko routinely derides the Belarusian language.

Now associated mostly with academics and, more important, with the liberal and nationalist movements that denounce his administration, Belarusian is an eastern Slav language mid-way between Russian and Ukrainian.

It fell into general disuse under Soviet authorities determined to use Russian to limit nationalist sentiment here and elsewhere. Attempts to revive it after the fall of communism retreated when Lukashenko took office in 1994.

Though street signs are in Belarusian, it is rarely heard in towns and was viewed in Soviet times as unsophisticated.

It is the language of instruction for one in five pupils nationwide but for only two percent in the capital Minsk. In other schools, it is a required subject but some students and parents say it is not taught seriously.

The language and its role in the national consciousness seems to be at the heart of Yakub Kolos lyceum's appeal. Two candidates compete for every available place.

"My son learned to speak Belarusian better here in a month than in all the previous years put together in state schools," said Tatyana Volotovskaya.

The school, which is funded by parents, cannot issue state diplomas but its pupils can enter universities by sitting separate examinations.

"I started at the lyceum before they closed it down. Then we just kept moving from apartment to apartment. We were the first students to take the entrance exams separately," said Yevgeny Blok, now preparing for university in Lodz in next-door Poland.

Kolos - no relation to the Belarusian poet after whom the school is named - says about half the graduates go abroad to study.

"Our teaching methods try to ensure that pupils become Belarusian patriots and want to stay in our country," he said.

"But our graduates have a hard time in Belarusian universities as so much time in the academic program is devoted to ideological disciplines."

The pupils are keenly aware of their sensitive circumstances.

On September 1, the traditional start of the school year throughout the former Soviet Union, they gather informally outside the closed school building.

Standing by a gate outside the building, part of which has been converted into a courthouse, they place flowers on the ground and share old student songs.

"There are no restrictions on how we work," said history teacher Valentin Golubev. "We can discuss just about any problem with our children."

*Source: MosNews; September 27, 2006;
<http://www.mosnews.com/news/2006/09/27/belarusedu.shtml>*

10. Milinkevich Meets With Activists of "For Freedom" Campaign

Aleksandr Milinkevich held the first of ten planned meetings with the activists of the "For Freedom" campaign. On September 26, the working meeting with the people from Sovetsky district in Minsk took place, the politician's press service informs.

At the meeting, the plans for cooperation during the local election in the framework of the "For Freedom" campaign were determined and unified actions of the campaign activists in the Sovetsky District were discussed.

"Young people are tired of political leaders' declarations, who say here and there that "the youth is our power and we count on young people." Today we are moving forward and offering our support to youth, the support of initiative and real activity. It is important that it is happening in the framework of the "For Freedom" campaign, which were seen by protest participants as a positive campaign," the leader of the unified democratic forces stated.

More than 500 people became volunteers of the "For freedom" campaign in Minsk in the last several months. Meetings with the campaign activists-representatives of all districts will take place every day.

Trans. by Ed.

Source: AFN; September 27, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?newsid=78943#data>

11. Belarus Moves Against Opposition Communist Party

The Belarusian Justice Ministry has filed a suit with the Supreme Court to suspend the activities of the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC).

The ministry accused the party, which is led by Syarhey Kalyakin, of violating the law on political parties. It said officials suspected the party's membership was less than 1,000, the legal minimum, and accused the party of failing to provide data on its members.

The Justice Ministry's action was prompted by a request for such a probe lodged by the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus in July.

Kalyakin says the move is revenge for his party's support for Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the main opposition challenger to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the March election. The poll, in which Lukashenka won re-election, was condemned by the opposition and the West as fraudulent.

Kalyakin also said the Justice Ministry's move was illegal and was aimed at preventing his party from running in forthcoming local elections. // Belapan, Reuters

Source: RFE/RL; September 27, 2006;

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/4D4A70B1-EA5B-4EA0-8225-600F1C4CA16C.html>

REGIONAL

12. Lukashenko To Answer Russian Mass Media Questions September 29

On September 29, a press conference of the Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko for the Russian mass media representatives was scheduled. Currently, journalists are having an information tour throughout the country organized at the Belarusian tax-payers' expense.

The goal of the tour is to show the life of modern Belarus to Russian journalists and to "try to persuade" them to write "truth and nothing but truth."

"The trip is organized by the presidential administration, the Permanent Committee of the Union State, and by the Belarusian Embassy in Russia. The main goal of the trip is the press conference of the Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko. It will take place on September 29 in Minsk," Vyacheslav Krymov, a journalist of *People Radio*, shares his impressions.

During the tour, the Russian journalists will also meet with the Belarusian officials, and visit industrial, agricultural and cultural enterprises in Minsk and Grodno regions.

Trans. by Ed.

Source: AFN; September 27, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?newsid=78964#data>

13. Belarusian Government To Check All Russian Companies

Within a month the Belarusian government intends to check all the firms in the country acting as representatives of Russian companies, Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky told during the press conference after a session of the Council of Ministers of the Belarus-Russia Union State on Tuesday.

Sidorsky said some companies pose as representatives of Russian enterprises in order to derive profits by marking up prices of Russian goods. It often hurts the interest of Russian producers. "One should raise integration to direct relations between Russian and Belarusian companies to the maximum extent," he stated.

During the Tuesday meeting, the parties discussed the problem of non-tariff restrictions in mutual trade, Sidorsky said, according to *Prime-Tass*.

He said there are no special barriers to Russian goods on the Belarusian market, in particular to Russian agricultural machinery.

In his turn, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov said the parties had come to accord in issues of trade restrictions. "We assume that we should not create artificial barriers. It was very important to hear that the Belarusian colleagues have no intention to do so deliberately," Fradkov said.

Source: Itar-Tass; September 27, 2006;
<http://www.tass.ru/eng/level2.html?NewsID=10828539&PageNum=0>

14. Russia To Decide on 2007 Gas Supplies to Belarus by End of 2006

The problem of Russian natural gas deliveries to Belarus and its transit via Belarusian territory in 2007 will be resolved by the end of 2006, the Russian prime minister said on Tuesday.

After raising gas prices for several of its other ex-Soviet neighbors, the Russian state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom said it will also pursue a European price formula for Belarus as of 2007.

"Talks are underway, and today this issue was discussed at a bilateral meeting [of the countries' premiers]," Mikhail Fradkov said.

Gazprom is seeking a stake in the Belarusian state pipeline company Beltransgaz, which owns pipelines leading to Europe. It has offered to partially compensate the Belarusian firm for the price hikes if Beltransgaz agrees to sell the Russian energy giant its main gas routes.

Fradkov said: "We expect a valuation of the Belarus gas transit system this November," adding that there was still plenty of time to reach an agreement.

Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky said that several problems concerning starting conditions and rules remain to be negotiated.

A source in the Russian government said earlier the two companies are talking to create a joint gas transit venture. He said that a contract on gas deliveries to Belarus in 2007 should be signed by the end of the year.

Belarus currently pays \$46.68 per thousand cubic meters of Russian natural gas, while average gas prices for European Union countries are \$180-200 per 1,000 cubic meters.

Source: RIA Novosti; September 26, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20060926/54276541.html>

INTERNATIONAL

15. Commission Suffers Setback on Belarus Trade Move

Member states have rejected European Commission proposals to punish Belarus with mini-trade sanctions in a surprising move, but the battle over the decision is not over yet.

Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece and Cyprus on Tuesday, September 26 voted against the proposal to suspend Belarus from the EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) on trade, while Italy, the Czech Republic and Slovakia abstained.

The negative result from Tuesday's expert committee or "working group" meeting means that EU ambassadors or foreign ministers will have to vote on the matter afresh in the next few weeks.

A positive result would have cleared the way for EU foreign ministers to formally announce the GSP move in mid-October and for the commission to impose tariffs on imports of Belarusian wood, textiles and minerals in mid-2007.

Poland, Latvia and Lithuania - who are staunch critics of Belarus president Aleksandr Lukashenko - fear the tariffs would impact ordinary Belarusian people and damage the EU's profile in Belarus.

"It came as a little bit of a surprise to everybody," a Lithuanian diplomat said. "We are worried about the negative political consequences the decision could have."

The GSP move would also impact small, cross-border traders in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania - all of whom share frontiers with Belarus.

The European Commission and international trade unions have been lining up the decision for over a year, on the grounds that Belarus violates GSP rules such as freedom of assembly.

As late as last week, EU officials felt certain the move would go through with no problems, saying the EU stands to lose credibility if it does not act in the black-and-white case.

"The commission continues to believe the suspension of GSP privileges is extremely important and will continue to argue strongly for the decision," a commission spokesman said.

Source: Andrew Rettman, EUObserver; September 26, 2006; <http://euobserver.com/24/22505>

16. New Swedish Government to Support Belarusian Opposition More Actively

Sweden's new government is expected to support opposition groups in Belarus more actively, Christopher Fjellner, a member of the European Parliament and of the country's Moderate Party, said in an interview with *BelaPAN*.

The Alliance for Sweden, a center-right coalition headed by Moderate Party leader Fredrik Reinfeldt, narrowly won Sunday's elections in Sweden, ending 12 years of Social Democrat rule. Mr. Reinfeldt is poised to become Sweden's next Prime Minister.

Mr. Fjellner said that the new government definitely would not have any political contacts with Aleksandr Lukashenko's "regime."

He said that the policy would not affect ordinary people, noting that Sweden would try to make it possible for the Belarusians to learn as much as possible about the European Union, also by easing visa formalities.

He said that Sweden had actively helped democratization in the Baltic States and would do so in Belarus.

Mr. Fjellner expressed hope that Sweden's embassy would open in Minsk some day

Source: Belorusskie Novosti; September 22, 2006; http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/22/ic_news_259_259189/

17. OSCE Chairman Regrets Sentence against Belarus Opposition Leader Kozulin Upheld

Today the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, expressed regret that the Belarus authorities had dismissed an appeal from Alexander Kozulin, an opposition candidate in last March's presidential election, and left the severe sentence in force.

"I seriously regret the authorities handled the case against Dr. Kozulin in a way that the alleged offences were never removed and the appeal was dismissed," said Minister De Gucht. "The police crackdown on demonstrators who were peacefully expressing their opinion was impermissible and authorities should have applied restraint."

In July, the Minsk Moskovsky District Court had found Dr. Kozulin guilty of repeated acts of "hooliganism" and of "organizing and participating in group activities that gravely violated public order" and had sentenced him to five and a half years in prison. On 19 September, the Minsk City court, where an appeal hearing took place, supported the District Court's sentence.

"Although Dr. Kozulin has the right to appeal to a higher court, his sentence has entered into legal force," said Minister De Gucht. "This is a most disappointing development."

After the July verdict, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office had expressed hope that, even at such a late stage, the Belarus authorities could still respond to an appeal by defence lawyers by dismissing the charges against Kozulin.

"I regret that the authorities never took note of those calls, and did nothing to review the case and to drop all charges," said Minister De Gucht. "Even though representatives of the OSCE Office in Minsk were allowed to monitor the trial itself and the appeal hearing, it is more and more obvious that Belarus wants to use the case of Dr. Kozulin and his harsh sentence to set an example for other opposition members."

The OSCE Chairman said imposing jail sentences on political grounds was unacceptable and violated human rights. "I call again for the release of all political detainees in Belarus," he added.

Source: Noticias.info: September 22, 2006;
<http://www.noticias.info/asp/aspComunicados.asp?nid=222168&src=0>

18. EU To Extend Belarus Visa Ban List

The EU plans to add up to four names to its list of Belarus officials banned from entering the bloc in response to the jailing for five and a half years of opposition leader Aleksandr Kozulin.

"There is a discussion on adding some names of those officials most directly involved in the trial, but it is 90 percent sure that it will happen," an EU official told *EUobserver* on Thursday (21 September).

The final decision will be made at EU ambassador level "a few weeks from now" the contact added, after Mr. Kozulin lost his appeal on Wednesday and declared that he plans to go on hunger strike.

Minsk prosecutors sentenced the presidential candidate on charges of "hooliganism" in July after he led street protests following President Aleksandr Lukashenko's disputed re-election in March.

The topic of extending the visa ban list came up during a meeting between fellow Belarus opposition leader, Aleksandr Milinkevich, and Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen in Helsinki on Wednesday.

"We have found understanding on the issue of increasing sanctions against officials of Belarus who violated the electoral code and are involved in repressions against the Belarusian nation," Mr. Milinkevich said after the talks, NGOs report.

The extension would stretch the list of Minsk officials banned from the EU from 31 to 35, with president Lukashenko himself included on the register in a bid to discredit his regime in ordinary people's eyes.

Belarus has in the past made light of EU sanctions, saying visa bans "show the lack of genuine political will on the part of the EU to engage in political relations" while cultivating contacts with states such as Cuba and Venezuela instead.

Trade move in October

The EU is also gearing up to remove trade preferences on Belarusian exports of minerals, textile and wood into the EU on grounds of violation of international trade union conventions, in a bid set to impact some €390 million a year of Minsk's foreign income.

Member states are to green light the move at an experts' meeting on 25 September before a formal decision at the EU foreign ministers' gathering on 16 and 17 October, with the tariffs kicking in six months down the line.

The move has caused controversy, with some new member states and Mr. Milinkevich warning that trade sanctions could impact ordinary Belarusian people and could damage the EU's image in Belarus.

"We had no choice. It was up to the Belarusian horse to move and it did not move. They did not present any new initiatives, any material to counter it," the EU official stated.

Burma is the only other country in EU history to face suspension from the so-called Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) trade scheme, which also covers other widely-criticized states such as Cuba and Uzbekistan.

Opposition momentum slowing

The latest report from Bratislava-based NGO Pontis on the political situation in Belarus suggests that opposition momentum gained in the 19 March anti-Lukashenko protests is slowing however.

"Belarusian experts forecast two major trends for the near future," the study says.

"Continuation of the current inclination to conformism by the majority of the population and a further decline in opposition membership, plus the increased tendency of marginalized opposition groups to take radical and uncoordinated steps."

Source: Andrew Rettman, EUObserver; September 21, 2006; <http://euobserver.com/9/22471>

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.
