

Edited by Maria Kabalina
International League for Human Rights

TOP STORIES:

- Editors Urge Lukashenko to Justify Subscription Ban
- Belarus Adopts Law Against Extremism
- Belarus Denied Friendship of Russia

Human Rights & Independent Media

1. Belarusian Propaganda Replies to Opposition Media Projects (*AFN*)
2. Editors Urge Lukashenko to Justify Subscription Ban (*Belorussky Partizan*)
3. Belarus: Foreign Religious Workers Out? (*Forum 18*)
4. Kozulin Still Set To Go on Hunger Strike (*Belorusskie Novosti*)
5. *Nasha Niva* Confiscated From Minsk Store (*BAJ*)
6. Belarusian Opposition Activist Accused Of Murder (*RFE/EL*)
7. 130 Hunger Strikers on Prayer House Seizure (*MosNews*)
8. Shushkevich Calls for Boycott of Local Elections (*Belorusskie Novosti*)

Domestic

9. Lukashenko Demands Order At Country's Tobacco Market (*Itar-Tass*)
10. Belarus Adopts Law Against Extremism (*RIA Novosti*)
11. Belarusian Opposition Leader: Changes in Minsk To Come From Streets (*Prague Daily Monitor*)
12. New Law To Ease Registration Process for Trade Unions (*Belorusskie Novosti*)
13. Lukashenko Promises To Strengthen Belarusian KGB (*International Herald Tribune*)

Regional

14. Russia To Limit State Purchases from Belarus in Response to Minsk Steps (*Itar-Tass*)
15. Belarus Wants Share of Caspian Deals (*RFE/RL*)
16. Belarusian Leader Warns Grouping of Ex-Soviet Republics Could Collapse (*Kyiv Post*)
17. Belarus Denied Friendship of Russia (*Kommersant*)
18. Russia Urges Belarus to End Visa-Free Travel for Georgians (*MosNews*)
19. Belarus Lets Out Gas Warning (*The St. Petersburg Times*)
20. Lukashenko: Belarusians Will Die for Russia (*Belorusskie Novosti*)

International

21. EU To Grants Scholarships To Expelled Belarusian Students (*Playfuls.Com*)
22. Belarus Sanctions Farce Sheds Light on EU Machine (*EUobserver.Com*)
23. Belarus Warns Lithuania on Nuclear Storage Site Near Border (*RIA Novosti*)

Business

24. Belarusian Budget Deficit in 2006 Increased to 2.3% of GDP (*Interfax*)

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Belarusian Propaganda Replies to Opposition Media Projects

Recently Belarusian opposition “media magnates” Aleksandr Milinkevich and Anatoly Lebedko, with the support of some independent mass media discussed improved coverage of events in Belarus, including opposition activity. Breaking through the government’s information blockade could be done through 1) national newspapers; 2) satellite TV or radio, and 3) foreign broadcasting accessed in Minsk.

All three media options have been planned have been slated for implementation since January, yet a number of issues continue to trouble the democratic opposition, including the problem of funding. It’s very hard for a sensible person to imagine an independent national newspaper with a circulation of one million to be published under conditions where there is a total ban on dissent in the press and lack of access to the monopolist state distribution companies.

Local periodicals can not distribute their print runs of 2-3 thousand issues, but politicians talk about circulation comparable to that of *Sovetskaya Belorussia* [the major state newspaper – Ed.] The philosophy of this independent periodical is also unclear, especially against a background of an existing project, *Tovarisch [Comrade]*, a communist newspaper. For example, the April issue of *Tovarisch* printed an opposition leader’s appeal next to an article about the positive role of Lenin in the history of our country.

When we speak about such a huge project as a satellite TV, many recall the well-advertised project of the *RTVi* channel, owned by Pavel. Gusinsky. Indeed Lukashenko was right when he was asked about this project, “Who is watching it? Only me.” First, the half-hour program of this channel, devoted to Belarusian opposition activity, was shown at an inconvenient time, 5 pm on Sundays. You will not find a lot of opposition supporter on Sundays in the middle of the day. The show was repeated at 5 am on Mondays, 12 pm on Tuesdays, 5 am on Thursdays and 2 am on Saturdays.

Second, this TV channel was available only to cable TV subscribers, because this channel is broadcast in a coded vision. There are only 250-300,000 cable TV viewers in Belarus, despite the fact that cable TV is not so expensive. It costs only about 5-8,000 rubles a month [\$2-4 US – Ed]. The question of how many Belarusians can afford to buy satellite equipment for \$200 US per unit is still open. And the question of the content of this channel remains. The program at the Gusinsky channel sometimes faced problems of relevant content.

The third suggested option, radio broadcasting from abroad to Minsk, is not interesting at all due to the fact that it is not possible to access on the FM radio dial. Belarusians have already forgotten how to use radios with AM bands. In addition, the government’s jamming of the broadcasting from abroad remains in place.

Meanwhile, the authorities started a counter-attack to overwhelm the loud opposition debates. They launched radio broadcasting online with the use of the most modern technology: 17 hours a day, 7 hours of broadcasting in Belarusian, Russian, English, German and Polish, and 10 hours of English in a real time regime.

The Belarusian ideological propaganda explained the necessity of this online radio broadcasting very simply: two-thirds of Poles say they feel a lack of information about Belarus, published in the Polish and other European mass media. The surveys were made in summer 2006 in 10 cities in Poland by a specialist of the *Voice of Russia* Russian radio.

It is too late to discuss the reliability of this research. Today, not only Polish people but also many people in other countries have an opportunity to know in their own language about the Belarusian achievements in the economy, social life, and international affairs. While the opposition activists try to convince each other of the necessity of an information war against the authorities, the

authorities easily launch online radio broadcasting. They speak about the important “non-joint” role of Belarus on the international arena, about how bad Western Europe could live without the gas transit through Belarus, and how illegal immigrants will flood all of Europe without “the Belarusian border”.

The organizers of the official online radio broadcasting state that *Belarus* radio “is the source of first-hand information about Belarus, it shows how the Belarusians see their country, which questions they find important.”

We just hope that the Belarusian opposition politicians will be able to reply and create an alternative for such a first-hand source.

Trans. Ed.

Source: AFN; October 18, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?newsid=79665#data>

2. Editors Ask Urge Lukashenko to Justify Print Ban in Belarus

The editors of five non-state periodicals, including *Narodnaya Volya*, *Tovarisch*, *BDG. Delovaya Gazeta*, *Borisovskie Novosti*, and *Vitebsky Kuryer*, wrote an open letter to Aleksandr Lukashenko.

They were prompted by the inability since 2005 for non-state periodicals to print in Belarus. They are also rejected now for distribution through state-monopolist distribution companies Belsouzpechat and Belpochta.

On May 23, at the Chamber of Representative, the head of state said he intended to “learn the situation” and to give the relevant orders to resolve the problem. “We hope that the fast implementation of these orders will allow resolving the problem, connected with ungrounded obstacles for our periodicals’ activities,” the letter says.

After Lukashenko’s pledge, the editors appealed to the Ministry of Information to ameliorate the situation. However, the reply said that distribution and printing of newspapers is a matter strictly between companies, and does not involve the Ministry. The editors note that according to unofficial resources, orders on how to treat the independent media have in fact been sent by the presidential administration to distributors.

Trans. Ed.

Source: Denis Rutkovsky, Belorussky Partizan; October 18, 2006;

<http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forte/?page=100&backPage=13&news=6006&newsPage=0>

3. Belarus: Foreign Religious Workers Out?

While tight restrictions on the religious freedom of foreigners who live in Belarus were enshrined in the restrictive 2002 Religion Law, foreign religious workers invited by local religious communities are increasingly being barred from the country, Forum 18 News Service has learned. The State Committee for Religious Affairs – which has to approve all such invitations and agree that such visits are “necessary” - denied the charismatic Full Gospel Union permission to invite Nigerian pastor Anselm Madubuko to preach in three of its churches in August. One church had “no basis” for inviting him as it was not registered, while the visit to another was “inexpedient”, officials declared. US citizen Stewart Vinograd – pastor of a Minsk-based Messianic Jewish congregation he founded ten years ago - did not have his annual religious work permit renewed in late spring, while twelve Polish Catholic priests and nuns have been told their visas will not be renewed at the end of this year. The Hare Krishna community is among those unable to invite foreign citizens as they do not have the required ten registered religious communities.

While a more recent phenomenon than in neighboring Russia, an increasing number of foreign religious workers are finding themselves barred from Belarus, Forum 18 News Service has found.

In addition to tight legal restrictions on what foreign religious workers may do if permitted to enter the country, their activity is reportedly closely monitored by the state authorities. Foreign citizens whose official reason for being in Belarus is other than religious work run the risk of being reprimanded or even expelled if they participate in the organizational life of a religious community.

The 2002 Religion Law contains particular restrictions on the religious freedom of foreign citizens. Only religious associations – made up of at least ten registered religious communities, including at least one active on the territory of Belarus for at least 20 years – have the right to invite them to conduct religious activity. The ineligibility of the five registered Belarusian Krishna communities to do so contributed to their complaint to the United Nations Human Rights. In January 2006 the state authorities rejected the UN Committee's conclusion that they had violated the Krishna devotees' religious freedom, however.

A 23 February 1999 Council of Ministers decree additionally stipulates that invitations are subject to approval by the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs. In requesting permission, a religious association is "to give grounds for the necessity of such an invitation and include a copy of documentation certifying the religious education of the invitee". If successful, the foreign religious worker may conduct religious activity only within places of worship belonging to or premises continuously rented by a particular host religious organization. The transfer of a foreign religious worker from one religious organization to another requires permission from a relevant religious affairs official, even for a single event. The absence of such permission recently led the authorities to seek prosecution of a Polish Catholic priest who celebrated Mass while passing through.

In what to Forum 18's knowledge is the most recent case of a foreign missionary being barred from Belarus, the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs on 25 July 2006 denied the charismatic Full Gospel Union permission to invite Nigerian pastor Anselm Madubuko to preach to three of its member churches from 17 to 20 August. In his written refusal, viewed by Forum 18, Vice-chairman Vladimir Lameko states that the Committee considered the request in conjunction with officials in the three localities where New Generation congregations wished to receive Madubuko. In Postavy (Vitebsk region), he writes, the New Generation congregation does not hold state registration, meaning that there is "no basis" for inviting Madubuko to conduct religious activity there. The church in Svetlogorsk (Gomel region) similarly does not have permission from the local district executive committee to hold "religious rites and ceremonies" at its building, Lameko continues, while religious affairs officials in both Brest and Baranovichi (Brest region) are said to consider Madubuko's visit "inexpedient" due to "the violation of Belarusian law" by the local New Generation leadership.

Speaking to Forum 18 on 27 September, Baranovichi's state official dealing with religious affairs confirmed that there have been "violations" by the town's New Generation church over the course of the previous year. Ruslan Krutko was initially at a loss to say exactly what these were, however. He finally claimed that the church had "founded a religious school without permission - they told us it was a study group, but in that case there should only be people in it from Baranovichi, whereas people from all over Belarus were there." He also maintained that one of the alleged school's participants was a minor who did not have parental consent.

When Forum 18 asked whether there had been a subsequent prosecution in order for Krutko to qualify this activity as a violation, he was again hesitant. He acknowledged that no prosecution had taken place, at first claiming that this was due to a deficiency in the law, then abruptly denied that the law was flawed and finally explaining that "we asked the administrative commission to prosecute but they didn't support our request". Krutko did assure Forum 18 that there were now no complaints about the church's activity, however, "so in future their requests will be granted".

In the wake of a police raid on Baranovichi New Generation Church at the beginning of 2006, officials accused Gennady Akhrimovich, who chairs the church's council, of organizing a study group of eleven church members without registering its statutes. Akhrimovich argued that the

study group was not a separate organisation but an integral part of the church's work as outlined in its statutes and as a registered religious community under the 2002 Religion Law.

Speaking to Forum 18 in Baranovichi shortly before the authorities announced their decision to deny Anselm Madubuko permission to enter Belarus, Pastor Leonid Voronenko said that it was to be the Nigerian pastor's first visit, following three to Russia since the spring of 2005. Were Madubuko's application successful, he continued, all his religious activity would take place within the confines of the three New Generation churches inviting him – as required by the 1999 Decree. Even before the rejection, however, Voronenko had some doubts that the visit would go ahead. He pointed out that, although an invitation to Pastor Aleksei Ledyayev of New Generation's parent church in Latvia was approved by the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs in 2003, "he wasn't given a visa". Ledyayev, a permanent resident of Latvia, last visited Belarus in 2002 and has been barred from Russia in the same year.

In Minsk, Pastor Boris Chernoglaz of the city's Church of Jesus Christ - another member of the Full Gospel Union - pointed out to Forum 18 that there are now very few foreign religious workers in Belarusian Protestant churches. In contrast to Russia - and other religious freedom restrictions in Belarus – he also suggested that the practice of refusing them religious work visas was comparatively recent.

Chernoglaz believes the case of his church's founder - Ukrainian citizen Veniamin Brukh, denied entry to Belarus in 2000 - to be one of the first. In a 28 March 2000 letter viewed by Forum 18, Vladimir Lameko of the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs rejected the Full Gospel Union's request to invite Pastor Brukh to Belarus, explaining that the Church of Jesus Christ "already has highly qualified religious personnel, so there is no need to invite a foreign citizen to engage in religious activity in that community".

In other cases, Belarusian sources have told Forum 18 that US citizen Stewart Vinograd did not have his annual religious work permit renewed in April/May 2006. Vinograd founded the Minsk-based New Testament Church and has officially worked as pastor to its 300-strong Messianic Jewish congregation for the past ten years. US citizen Mark Rose, who founded an independent Baptist church in the town of Ratomka (Minsk region), was reportedly denied entry to Belarus in 2005.

A spokesperson at the Uppsala-based Pentecostal Word of Life Church told Forum 18 on 17 October that one of its pastors, Carl-Gustaf Severin, was refused a visa to Belarus approximately two years ago, having last visited the country in 1998. Severin had his Russian visa revoked in 2001, but has been able to revisit Russia more recently.

A foreign Protestant wishing to remain anonymous who used to work in the Belarusian humanitarian aid sphere told Forum 18 on 16 October that he does not know the official reason why he was denied a visa. While he believes his religious motivation – and open partnership with Christian churches – to be linked to the state's action, however, he pointed out that "if we had held theology conferences they wouldn't have minded, but we were teaching responsibility, a change of attitude – that it is not Jesus' example to sit down and accept what happens in your community." In this regard, he agreed with Forum 18's suggestion that churches and faith-inspired humanitarian organizations were currently being targeted not primarily for their religiosity, but because – in the wake of the enforced closure of more politicized NGOs - they were now in the frontline. "Humanitarian aid and charitable projects are also teaching how to strategies, to create some kind of network outside the control of the regime," he explained. "Even if they are social or religious, they attract people – so the authorities are playing safe by applying pressure."

While not aware of expulsion cases of religious workers other than those already familiar to Forum 18, this foreign Protestant noted the Belarusian authorities' present tactic to be to allow a person's visa to expire and then not to renew it rather than the more "provocative" action of deportation.

In apparent confirmation of the foreign Protestant's suggestions, the director of a Belarusian youth charity has told Forum 18 of a recent official warning to public organizations not to keep

any religious literature or to allow religious activities to take place on their premises. The director was reportedly summoned for an interview with a district official at which a KGB official present referred to support for the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution by Pastor Sunday Adelaja's Kiev-based Embassy of God Church. Alleging that that church was attempting to influence Belarusian churches, he is said to have commented: "We are not going to allow Maidan here [a reference to Kiev's Independence Square, the site of mass protests during the Orange Revolution]."

From Nigeria, Sunday Adelaja was a university student in Minsk during the late 1980s and left Belarus in the mid-1990s after founding a church there. Now in Kiev, his Embassy of God Church is probably the largest Protestant congregation in the Ukrainian capital. A supporter of the church, Leonid Chernovetsky became mayor of Kiev in the wake of the Orange Revolution. Contacted in Kiev on 17 October, an Embassy of God spokesperson could not recall when Pastor Adelaja had last visited Belarus, but maintained that he was not officially banned from doing so. Pastor Adelaja was barred from Russia this summer.

In Baranovichi, Pastor Leonid Voronenko described to Forum 18 how his 150-strong church is closely monitored. Local officials question, for example, if it has foreign teachers, how it is organized, how many members are businessmen or students and how much it receives in donations, he said, "but we refuse to answer." One church member told Forum 18 of her suspicion that there were informers in the congregation, since only this could explain what happened when a youth leader gave an impromptu sermon inspired by the birth of his child in January 2006: "We were warned by the authorities that only the pastor has the right to preach and that anyone else must apply for permission two weeks in advance." Pastor Voronenko wryly pointed out to Forum 18 that the constant check-ups did have a positive side, however: "When visiting police or officials say that they can see we're not a sect, or that society needs more people like us."

Other of Forum 18's interviewees maintained that foreign religious workers are subject to similar scrutiny. According to Sergei Lukanin of the embattled New Life Church, a Minsk church affiliated to the main Pentecostal Union was recently warned by officials after it invited a Swedish Christian woman to speak even though she did not have state permission, "but it turned out alright in the end." Gennady Brutsky of the main Baptist Union described how Jeff Laughlin, a US citizen holding a humanitarian work visa, was questioned by police and officials after he addressed a Bible college graduation ceremony in May/June 2006.

Forum 18 has previously been alerted to intrusive monitoring of prominent foreign participation in religious activity. The recent action against Catholic priest Fr Antoni Kochko after he celebrated Mass in Minsk without state permission indicates that this is not confined to Protestant churches.

Ruslan Krutko, Baranovichi's religious affairs official, insisted to Forum 18 that the authorities "don't have any particular policy not to allow foreigners" and cited a recent visit by German citizens to a local New Apostolic church. Some invitations are indeed successful - in January 2006, for example, the Full Gospel Union received permission from the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs for Danish citizens Erling Laursen and Andreas Jorgensen to visit Living Faith Church in Gomel. Mufti Abu-Bekir Shabanovich told Forum 18 on 21 July that his Minsk community has had no difficulty inviting imams from Turkey: "If a person proves to be OK, then their visa is extended, but if they haven't understood something, or don't fit in with the laws of this country, then they go."

Also speaking to Forum 18 in Minsk this summer, Greek Catholics Larysa Androsik and Anatoli Syomukha said that Apostolic Visitor Sergei Gajek, who holds dual Polish and Vatican citizenship, has had not difficulty travelling to Belarus to visit their community.

Foreign Catholic priests and nuns may have requests to extend their religious work visas refused, however, as happened recently to 12 Polish priests and nuns in Grodno diocese and two Polish priests at the end of 2005.

While such cases still appear rare, the Catholic Church is particularly vulnerable in this regard as more than half of its approximately 350 clergy in Belarus are foreign citizens. A Polish Catholic priest working in Belarus who requested anonymity recently suggested to Forum 18 that legal restrictions on foreign religious workers could to some extent be seen as beneficial. Since the head of the parish council is legally also the head of the parish, he explained, "I'm not responsible if something happens - if the fire service conduct a check-up, for example." In general, however, the priest acknowledged that there were significant drawbacks for foreign citizens under the 2002 Religion Law, such as the impossibility of founding a monastery or convent. "As a foreigner you only have two rights," he remarked, "to shut up and sit still."

*Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; October 18, 2006;
http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=856*

4. Kozulin Still Set To Go on Hunger Strike

Aleksandr Kozulin, who is serving a prison term in a correctional facility in the village of Vitba, three kilometers off Vitebsk, has not dropped his plans to go on hunger strike on October 20, according to his wife, Irina Kozulina.

On Monday she told reporters in Minsk that her husband had said so in his first letter from Vitba.

The former presidential candidate intends to stage the strike in protest against what he calls the illegal reelection of Aleksandr Lukashenko for a third term this past March. According to the politician, Mr. Lukashenko cannot be regarded as Belarus' legitimate leader after September 20, when his second term of office expired.

Mrs. Kozulina said that she was planning to meet with her husband the following day. "I am set to find out what steps we should take here to ensure that the strike lasts as little as possible. I won't even hear of it being indefinite."

The Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada" (BSDP), which Dr. Kozulin leads, has called on the politician to drop his intention.

"As the history of hunger strikes in our country shows, they do not raise a big hue and cry as expected," Anatoly Levkovich, acting head of the BSDP, said at the news conference. "I know that idealism and self-sacrifice are strong things in politics, but winners are those who have survived."

The United Civic Party also has urged the imprisoned politician to refrain from the hunger strike protest, saying that its efficiency would be much lower than the price the politician would have to pay.

"My husband is cheerful and optimistic. He does not ask anything because imprisoned conditions are not yet clear. But he is sure that they will be normal," Mrs. Kozulina said.

Dr. Kozulin, 50, rector of Belarusian State University between 1996 and 2003, was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison on July 13.

He was found guilty of hooliganism and the organization of group actions disturbing the public peace. The latter charge was brought in connection with a peaceful post-election opposition march that was brutally dispersed by riot police.

The European Union and the United States denounced the trial as clearly politically motivated. // *BelaPAN*

Source: *Beloruskkie Novosti*; October 17, 2006;
http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/10/17/ic_articles_259_148369/

5. *Nasha Niva* Confiscated From Minsk Store

20 issues of *Nasha Niva* newspaper were confiscated from a shop in Minsk on October 5.

Three men said they were from KGB and took the issues with them. They explained it by the fact that it was forbidden to distribute *Nasha Niva* in Minsk. By the way, the confiscation was not mentioned in any protocol.

Nasha Niva is registered by the Ministry of Information and has the right to be distributed throughout Belarus. The newspaper has a contract for distribution with that store. The editorial staff of *Nasha Niva* has sent a complaint to Minsk Office of Public Prosecutor. They demand that the incident be investigated and to prosecute those responsible for the confiscation. They also asked the authorities to return the confiscated copies.

Source: *BAJ*; October 11, 2006; <http://baj.ru/indexe.htm>

6. Belarusian Opposition Activist Accused Of Murder

Human rights activists say a Belarusian opposition youth activist held in connection with two blasts in Vitebsk last year is now also being accused of murder.

The blasts injured some 40 people.

Activists say that the Belarusian authorities now suspect that Krasouski, who was arrested in October 2005, committed murder and acts of sexual violence in 1999. He was 16 at the time. // *Charter 97, Interfax*

Source: *RFE/RL*; October 11, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/810EAD50-3BD2-4493-8DD3-39598CBCCCB.html>

7. 130 Belarus Protestants on Hunger Strike Over Prayer House Seizure

A total of 132 believers of the New Life Protestant church are taking part in a hunger strike that began in Minsk on Friday in the course of a stand-off against the authorities, *BBC* quoted Belarusian human rights group *Charter-97* as reporting on its website.

People from many Belarus cities arrive in Minsk to defend the church, representatives of the church said. Several dozen people stayed in the church building overnight. Some 500 people attended a service Monday.

The Protestants announced an indefinite hunger strike in an attempt to oppose the actions by the Minsk City Executive Committee. It was decided to hold prayer services every day and to organize a protest rally in Minsk's Bangalore Square on October 21.

In July, the economic court of Minsk obliged the New Life church to sell its building to the Minsk City Executive Committee for 17,000 dollars and to vacate the premises before October 8.

Source: *MosNews*; October 10, 2006;
<http://www.mosnews.com/news/2006/10/10/protstrike.shtml>

8. Shushkevich Calls for Boycott of Local Elections

Stanislav Shushkevich, chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada, called on the country's opposition groups to boycott the forthcoming election for the local soviets of deputies.

He made the call at a meeting of the Political Council of united opposition forces on Friday.

The 71-year-old politician said that the country's opposition should stop "bringing grist to the regime's mill" and drop plans to run in the elections.

The bill of amendments to the Electoral Code that has passed the national legislature this week makes opposition activists' chances slim, he said. "Only fools can participate in these elections," stressed Dr. Shushkevich, Belarus' formal head of state between 1991 and 1994.

Other opposition politicians present at the meeting opposed the call, saying that opposition activists should use the campaign to reach voters.

The Political Council earlier agreed that the campaign also might be used for nominating delegates to the second Congress of Pro-democratic Forces. It said that those opposition activists who would collect 300 signatures among voters should take part in the forum. //BelaPAN

Source: Beloruskkie Novosti; October 9, 2006;
http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/10/08/ic_articles_259_148263/

DOMESTIC

9. Lukashenko Demands Order At Country's Tobacco Market

President Alexander Lukashenko ordered the Belarusian government to normalize the situation at the country's tobacco market by January next year.

"All the shortcomings at the tobacco market have to be removed. The aim is to produce high-quality and competitive products," Lukashenko said after a Thursday meeting on the problems of the Belarusian tobacco market.

Lukashenko also said it was inadmissible to lobby interests in this sector. Tobacco products are a highly profitable business, which should be a source of budget revenues.

Lukashenko warned that he would exercise strict control over how his orders would be implemented. He said privileges and preferences would be rare because funds should be committed only to efficient projects.

The Neman tobacco factory in Grodno and the Tabak invest enterprise operate at Belarus' internal tobacco market. The Belarusian government has set this year's import quota for cigarettes at 1.5 billion pieces.

Source: Itar-Tass; September 13, 2006;
<http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=10882708&PageNum=0>

10. Belarus Adopts Law Against Extremism

On Wednesday the Belarusian parliamentarians adopted a law on combating extremism. The law was adopted almost unanimously on a second reading.

The law defines extremism as activities aimed at the country's Constitution and its territorial integrity, coup attempts, the formation of illegal armed groups, terrorist acts, and attempts to incite racial, ethnic or religious discord. The law also envisages Belarus' involvement in international efforts against extremism.

Vladimir Borshchov, a deputy chairman of the Belarusian Permanent Commission for National Security, said: "The law has been fully coordinated with the republic's relevant bodies, and corresponds with the similar law of the Russian Federation."

He also said the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko had already approved the legislation.

Russia's lower chamber of parliament, the State Duma, passed the law on extremism on a third and final reading July 8.

Under the Russian law, the term "extremism" encompasses assassination attempts against statesmen and public figures, hampering the work of authorities, orchestrating riots, hooliganism and vandalism with ideological, political, religious, racial or ethnic motives, propaganda of racial, social, religious or ethnic superiority, and the production of corresponding printed, audio and visual materials.

Source: RIA Novosti; October 11, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20061011/54718127.html>

11. Belarusian Opposition Leader: Changes in Minsk To Come From Streets

People on the streets will decide on democracy in Belarus and the fall of the authoritarian regime of President Alexander Lukashenko, Belarussian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich told CTK today.

Milinkevich, who is in Prague attending the Forum 2000 international conference, said that the situation in Belarus improved after the spring presidential elections and the protests their outcome provoked.

People are no longer so afraid, but at the same time Lukashenko's regime is resorting to tougher repression, he said.

"It is becoming clear that it is impossible to oust the dictatorship through elections. The regime would not have changed even if we had won them. We have no tools to achieve re-counting the votes and prove our victory," Milinkevich said.

Lukashenko, who is considered the last European dictator, won re-election in March. According to official results, 83 percent of people voted for him, while Milinkevich reportedly only received 6.1 percent of the vote.

However, the Belarusian opposition and international observers have questioned the election results and described the elections as manipulated.

"We have no other choice but the streets. Without them we will not be able to get rid of the regime," Milinkevich said regarding the opposition strategy.

Several thousand people gathered in the centre of Minsk at post-election rallies and the opposition is preparing further protests.

"Like the victory, they cannot be planned precisely. We must feel the mood in society and understand that people are willing to take to the streets," Milinkevich said.

After the March presidential elections, young people used to regularly gather in the centre of Minsk to express their support for the opposition. However, after a few days, the police intervened, dispersed the demonstrations and arrested the activists.

"The regime is becoming more and more cynical and does not try much to hide its aggression," Milinkevich said.

The increased repression is reflected in the expulsion of students from schools and lay-offs of employees due to their participation in opposition meetings, Milinkevich said.

"This is the worst because the opposition force is becoming the force of the jobless. How can people fight for ideals and democracy when their children have nothing to eat?" Milinkevich said. In Prague, Milinkevich met former Czech president Vaclav Havel.

"What took place in the former Czechoslovakia can be an inspiration to us. But all things cannot be transferred," he said.

The opposition in Belarus now needs mainly to address people and the European Commission has thus earmarked money for the support of independent broadcasting to Belarus.

Milinkevich said that he had no problems coming to the Czech Republic. "The regime allowed me to leave but it will make the full use of it. They will say that I left for tasks from imperialists and that I received money for destruction," Milinkevich said.

Source: Prague Daily Monitor, October 9, 2006;
http://www.praguemonitor.com/ctk/?story_id=w43064i20061010;story=Belarussian-opposition-leader-Changes-in-Minsk-to-come-from-the-streets

12. New Law To Ease Registration Process for Trade Unions

Aleksandr Lukashenko has issued an edict directing that a new edition of the Trade Unions Law should ease the registration process for such organizations.

Drawn up by the government, the new law would govern all matters connected with the establishment, registration and activities of trade unions, the Belarusian leader's press office said.

According to the press office, the bill is based on international legal standards in the sphere, Belarus' commitments in the framework of the International Labor Organization and the current operation of labor unions in the country.

The new law would allow employees to form a trade union without its registration as a legal entity. Such organizations would have to be registered with local executive authorities.

The bill would specify criteria allowing a trade union to cooperate with the government in solving social and economic issues and negotiate and sign collective bargaining agreements. // BelaPAN

Source: Belorusskie Novosti; October 9, 2006;
http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/10/09/ic_news_259_260062/

13. Lukashenko Promises To Strengthen Belarusian KGB

Belarus' authoritarian president, Alexander Lukashenko, on Thursday accused the United States and other Western countries of trying to undermine the ex-Soviet nation and promised to strengthen the Belarusian spy agency.

"The United States is strengthening its spy agencies and we know whom they are directed against," Lukashenko said at a meeting with heads of spy agencies from several ex-Soviet nations. "So why don't we strengthen our special services?"

He promised to increase funding for the Belarusian agency, which still goes under its Soviet acronym, KGB.

Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" in the West, has ruled the ex-Soviet country of 10 million people with an iron fist since 1994 and was re-elected to a third term in a March vote that the opposition and Western nations denounced as fraudulent.

A pariah in the West, Lukashenko has relied on close economic and military ties with neighboring Russia and also sought closer relations with China. He has repeatedly claimed the United States and other Western nations were seeking his ouster.

Speaking Thursday, Lukashenko accused the West of waging an "information aggression" against ex-Soviet nations. "Such a war is aimed at achieving a strategic goal of forcefully changing political and economic systems of the state which follow an independent course of development," he said.

Source: International Herald Tribune; September, 28, 2006;
http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/09/28/europe/EU_GEN_Belarus_KGB.php

REGIONAL

14. Russia To Limit State Purchases from Belarus in Response to Minsk Steps

The Russian Economic Development and Trade Ministry decided to limit federal-budget-financed purchases of goods from Belarus in response to Minsk's analogous actions.

Russian commodities are discriminated with the state purchases from Belarus, Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade Andrei Sharonov said in the State Duma on Wednesday.

There is a direct ban to buy Russian goods at Belarusian budget expense, including buying of food products and farming machines. It is a fact, Sharonov said.

The ministry in response decided to limit purchases of Belarusian goods that can be replaced by others. The law on state purchases passed last year allows it.

The question is only one of buying commodities at budget expense. There are no other limits for purchases of goods from Belarus for the Russian market, the official noted.

Source: Itar-Tass; October 18, 2006;
<http://www.tass.ru/eng/level2.html?NewsID=10899631&PageNum=0>

15. Belarus Wants Share of Caspian Deals

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka says his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, promised to support Belarus's push for a share in Caspian energy exploration deals.

During talks in Minsk on October 7, the two leaders signed a range of agreements to enhance cooperation between the two countries. The agreements, which run to 2015, relate to areas that include education, sport, and transport. // AP, *Interfax-Zapad*

Source: RFE/RL; October 17, 2006; http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/8F5678F7-843A-4A4C-B241-6048EF41E373.html

16. Belarusian Leader Warns Grouping of Ex-Soviet Republics Could Collapse

Belarus' hardline president warned Monday that attempts to reform a loose organization of former Soviet states that is widely seen as ineffective could provoke the group's collapse.

Alexander Lukashenko told a meeting of foreign ministers from the Commonwealth of Independent States that the group is important for resolving regional issues, but that "there are people in our organization who are strongly interested in ruining the CIS."

"If we want to play into our enemies' hands, we must accept reform," he said during the meeting in the Belarusian capital, Minsk. "It will be the greatest gift to our rivals and opponents who see post-Soviet markets and wealth in their dreams."

No details of the proposed reforms have been made public. But Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, whose oil-rich Central Asian nation holds the group's rotating presidency, said in July that it should concentrate on economic ties.

This could help keep in the fold Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which are seeking to move out of Russia's shadow and have expressed skepticism about the future of the Moscow-dominated CIS. The three, along with Azerbaijan, have formed a group seen as an alternative to the commonwealth.

The four countries announced Monday after a meeting in Moldova that they had agreed to cooperate in resolving conflicts in their territories, and pledged to uphold democratic values, human rights and political freedoms.

Georgia and Russia are currently locked in a bitter diplomatic dispute provoked by the detention of four alleged Russian spies last month. Despite their release, Moscow slapped a transport and postal blockade on its small southern neighbor, vowing to keep up the pressure until Tbilisi ends what is called its "anti-Russian" behavior.

Lukashenko, an open admirer of the Soviet Union who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand since 1994, has formed a loose union with Russia and is deeply suspicious of Western inroads into the region. He is a pariah in Western capitals, where he has been dubbed "Europe's last dictator." "The collapse of the CIS would place a very heavy responsibility on us politicians, just like happened with the collapse of the Soviet Union," Lukashenko said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has also watched with concern at the rise of Western-backed governments on Russia's borders, however, has backed plans to revamp the CIS, which was born from the ashes of the 1991 Soviet collapse.

"Reform was thought up not for its own sake, but to improve our cooperation," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told the meeting.

Source: Kyiv Post; October 16, 2006; <http://www.kyivpost.com/bn/25229/>

17. Belarus Denied Friendship of Russia

The transport monopoly of Russia, Transneft, will curtail crude shipment to Belarus by 30 percent in the fourth quarter. Transneft attributes the reduction to pressure relief in Druzhba (Friendship) pipelines. But the analysts speak about an attempt to pressurize Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko in the gas dialogue.

Russia's Technological Oversight Service, Rostekhnadzor, ordered Transneft to lower pressure in Druzhba trunk pipelines running towards Belarus. The reason is continued inspection of defects revealed after the breakdown, Transneft Vice President Sergey Grigoriev said yesterday.

Transneft intends to meet representatives of the state-run Belneftekhim [controls Mozyrsk and Novopolotsk refineries] to go through the shipment of crude. "We will talk to them, show what is happening, and we will see then," Grigoriev explained.

Rostekhnadzor proved unable to shed light on the situation Wednesday. Belneftekhim refused to comment as well. Representatives of Novopolotsk refinery said they knew nothing about the drop in deliveries and count on receiving the crude in the previously agreed amount, i.e. 610,000 tons a month. Mozyrsk refinery doesn't expect the reduction either.

But there are problems, sources familiar with the situation in Belarus' refineries said off-the-record. In October, Novopolotsk refinery will get no more than 520,000 tons of crude instead of the scheduled 610,000 tons, while Mozyrsk will have to confine to 440,000 tons instead of 725,000 tons.

Source: Kommersant; October 12, 2006; http://www.kommersant.com/p712457/crude_reduction/

18. Russia Urges Belarus to End Visa-Free Travel for Georgians

On Wednesday Russia moved to expand a transport blockade on Georgia with plans for tighter control on visitors from Belarus, *DPA* reported.

The Kremlin since midnight Monday blocked direct air, sea, rail and road links between Russia and Georgia, paralysing traffic between the two former Soviet republics. Russian secret police officers in Minsk said they were planning to expand the blockade so as to prevent Georgian citizens from entering Russia visa-free via an indirect route through Belarus.

"Georgian citizens are able to travel to Belarus without a visa...and taking advantage of the uncontrolled border between Russia and Belarus, are able to enter Russia without visas," the Interfax news agency reported a Russian FSB agent as saying. "We (the Russian FSB secret police) have received instructions to deal with this issue," the agent said.

A crisis in relations between Moscow and Tbilisi was touched off last month after Georgia arrested a group of Russian officers stationed in the country, and accused them of spying.

Belarus though generally closely allied with Russia thus far has refrained from siding with the Kremlin in the dispute.

*Source: MosNews; October 4, 2006;
<http://www.mosnews.com/news/2006/10/04/belarusvisas.shtml>*

19. Belarus Lets Out Gas Warning

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko threatened on Friday to sever all relations with Russia if Moscow sharply hiked gas prices for Minsk. He also warned that a merger of Belarus with Russia could lead to violence and disorder worse than in Chechnya.

Lukashenko's blunt remarks highlighted rising tensions between the two countries amid strained talks over natural gas prices, which Gazprom has threatened to quadruple from next year.

"A price hike to such levels would mean full severance of all ties, particularly in the economy," Lukashenko told Russian journalists at a four-hour news conference broadcast live by state radio. "We will survive, but you will lose the last ally. You will simply lose face."

Moscow and Minsk signed a union treaty in 1996 that envisaged close political, economic and military ties, but stopped short of creating a single state. The Kremlin, increasingly impatient about subsidizing Belarus' economy with cheap gas, has since proposed that Belarus be absorbed into Russia.

Lukashenko, who has vehemently opposed such a union, reiterated his stance. "Even Stalin didn't go as far as that. ... I don't want to be the first and the last Belarusian president," he said.

He said its incorporation into Russia could trigger chaos and even fighting.

"As soon as Belarus becomes part of Russia, it'll be worse here than in Chechnya," he said. "We'll have people coming in from Georgia, from Russia, Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic countries. They are ready today to come with weapons."

Gazprom says it will increase prices if Minsk does not cede control of its gas pipelines. Minsk has rebuffed the offer.

Belarus pays some \$47 per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian natural gas, while Gazprom wants to boost prices to about \$200, saying concessions on pipeline ownership would cut this tariff.

Lukashenko said he was ready to swap a 50 percent stake in Beltransgas, the state company managing the pipeline network, for the right to extract at least 10 billion cubic meters of gas in Russia annually. // *Reuters, AP*

Source: The St. Petersburg Times; October 3, 2006;
http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=19019

20. Lukashenko: Belarusians Will Die for Russia

Aleksandr Lukashenko has called on Gazprom not to increase gas prices for Belarus next year, saying that the Belarusians would die for Russia if the West decided one day to attack it.

"If tanks start rolling from there to Russia, we will be dying here for Russia," he told a group of Russian reporters in Minsk on Friday. "And our people should be ready for this."

"Do you have a single military unit between Moscow and NATO's borders westward? You have only one, which is Belarusian," he stressed.

"We are ready to defend you. This is our policy," he noted.

The Belarusian leader complained that the Russian Armed Forces were reluctant to stage joint military exercises in Belarus, suggesting that Russia was scared that the West would accuse it of turning into a military state. "We should communicate with each other on training grounds in order to be ready for signal support in the event of some emergency."

"We give food and drink to Russians that are kicked out of Lithuania as dogs if they fall in discharge there for some reason," he said. "The Chechens that were traveling to Poland via Brest were thrown out of the train cars. Hundreds of people were there. We received and accommodated them, gave them food and drink. They bore children there and named them after me," he said. // *BelaPAN*

Source: *Belorusskie Novosti*; September 29, 2006;
http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/09/29/ic_news_259_259614/

INTERNATIONAL

21. EU To Grants Scholarships To Expelled Belarusian Students

The European Union is giving scholarships worth 5 million euros (6.25 million dollar) to Belarusian students expelled from university because of their anti-government protests during and after presidential elections in Belarus last March.

The European Commission said Monday that scholarships would be granted to give expelled students the chance to continue their studies in neighboring countries such as Lithuania and Ukraine.

Bans on students were part of broad-based sanctions imposed by the government of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko following pro-democracy protests during and after the March 19 presidential elections.

EU funds will cover scholarships to 170 master and 35 bachelor programmes for new students in Vilnius' European Humanities University as well as living expenses for Belarusian students already enrolled there.

The 3-year-programme also includes scholarships for 100 students for higher education in Ukraine and other neighboring countries.

The scholarships will cover tuition fees and living expenses, the commission said. Financial aid would be granted to students who have been accepted by a host university and who have demonstrated that they cannot study in Belarus.

The commission said it was giving 4.5 million euros with an additional 0.5 million euros coming from Nordic countries and territories in the Nordic Council of Ministers, a governmental co-operation forum.

"The situation with regards to human rights and democracy in Belarus remains very worrying and has recently further deteriorated," the commission warned, adding that more students could be denied access to education in the coming academic year.

Since the vote, the Belarusian authorities have tightened their grip on civil society and in particular on the media, youth, opposition forces and NGOs.

The EU earlier vowed tough sanctions against the hard-line state which it has called "the last dictatorship in Europe." The presidential elections were widely seen as having been rigged.

Source: Playfuls.Com; October 16, 2006; http://www.playfuls.com/news_10_1662-EU-To-Grants-Scholarships-To-Expelled-Belarusian-Students.html

22. Belarus Sanctions Farce Sheds Light on EU Machine

EU member states have kicked into the long grass plans to impose mini-trade sanctions on Belarus in a move that says more about the mysterious inner workings of the EU institutions than about EU-Belarus relations - leaving the European Commission with a red face.

EU diplomats had planned to vote on Thursday, October 12, to impose tariffs on €390 million a year of Belarus imports after Minsk over the past 18 months failed to put in place 12 demands on trade union rights made by the Geneva-based International Labor Organization (ILO).

But EU diplomats cancelled the vote, giving an official explanation that Belarus deputy Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov plans to meet with ILO chiefs in Switzerland on 19 October and could make fresh concessions on trade unions, potentially leading to the labor organization withdrawing its complaint.

The move means that EU member states will not get another crack at imposing the sanctions until March 2007 at the earliest, with the whole process - which involves the ILO making a fresh recommendation to the European Commission which in turn has to make a new recommendation to EU member states - taking at least six months.

The cancellation is embarrassing for the European Commission, which has pushed strongly for sanctions, saying in the past few weeks that "the political fallout would be just huge" if the move failed and that "the EU has to recognize that this regime [Belarus] is carrying out flagrant abuses."

"We remain fully committed to our proposal, but we are currently evaluating whether new elements could be added to supplement it," a commission spokesman added on Thursday.

ILO meeting 'not real reason'

But the u-turn by member states is less to do with Mr Kobyakov's ILO visit and more to do with Chinese shoes, Polish-Lithuanian worries over cross-border trade and the risk of political precedent, with EU political will for the sanctions ebbing away, diplomats say.

"Nobody really believes the ILO will withdraw the complaint no matter what Belarus puts on paper," an EU official told *EUobserver*. "But we got into such a mess on trade with antidumping tariffs on Chinese shoes that nobody wants to see fresh trade retaliations from Poland and Lithuania just now."

Back in September, Italy blocked an earlier 26 September vote on the Belarus sanctions because it wanted to retaliate against pro-Belarus sanction states such as Germany, the UK and Sweden, which had gone against an Italian-led campaign to impose penalties on imports of cheap Chinese shoes, the contact explained.

The shoe war is over. But in the sensitive, post-shoe war trade climate, nobody wanted to see Poland and Lithuania use the Italian tactic and start voting against other EU trade measures to get back at member states who ignored their protests that Belarus sanctions would hurt cross-border trade.

Meanwhile, the mini-sanctions move - which would involve expelling Belarus from the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) on trade - could have raised prickly questions on why countries such as Cuba and Uzbekistan - not known for their trade union credentials - are allowed to stay in the GSP herd.

"I really don't know how this [Thursday] decision came about. It wasn't any single person or cause. It was a sort of creeping institutional wisdom," the official added.

Legal quibble

On top of all this, the Thursday vote would have encountered a small legal problem, as EU rules stipulate that an official European Commission recommendation - issued on August 4 in this case - must see a member state decision no later than one month down the line to be valid.

The legal quibble - which means the old 26 September vote could have been overturned even if it had gone the commission's way - was an added factor in member states' negative Thursday move.

"The commission overslept on this one. Or maybe somebody did it on purpose, tabling the 4 August recommendation in a month when nothing happens in Brussels," a diplomat close to the talks stated. "Either way, it shows what a big mess the whole thing has become."

Source: Andrew Rettman, *EUobserver.Com*: October 12, 2006; <http://euobserver.com/9/22629>

23. Belarus Warns Lithuania on Nuclear Storage Site Near Border

Belarus is ready to get involved in building a nuclear storage facility in Lithuania, but is opposed to its location near the country's border, President Alexander Lukashenko said Saturday.

Lithuania's Ignalina nuclear power plant, scheduled to be shut down by 2009, is similar to the one in Chernobyl, Ukraine, where the world's worst nuclear accident happened in 1986. Lithuania's prime minister said in early September it will build a new nuclear power plant to resolve an energy crisis expected in 2009 and meet the European Union's nuclear safety requirements.

"Belarus is ready to get involved economically, diplomatically and financially to address the matter of building a nuclear waste storage facility in Lithuania," Lukashenko said, adding his country was against the site being built near the Belarusian border.

He said Lithuania was going to build a facility to store nuclear waste from the Ignalina NPP five kilometers from the Belarusian-Lithuanian border.

"We have enough leverage to ensure that the facilities are not built near the Belarusian border," he said. "The decision to build [it] should be made by taking into account the interests of other states."

He said he hoped the two countries will resolve the issue "in a civilized manner."

Lithuania and Estonia dismissed earlier media reports that the Baltic states would build a joint storage facility for nuclear waste in Estonia.

Local media cited Estonian MEP Andres Tarand as saying that his Lithuanian counterparts had repeatedly suggested that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would share responsibility for storing nuclear waste. The three Baltic states agreed to build a nuclear power plant in Lithuania by 2015.

Source: RIA Novosti; October 7, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20061007/54603174.html>

BUSINESS

24. Belarusian Budget Deficit in 2006 Increased to 2.3% of GDP

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has signed a decree updating several budget figures for 2006.

Based on the changes, the budget deficit has been increased 22.3% to 1.712 trillion Belarusian rubles, or 2.3% of GDP.

"In accordance with the decree, budget revenue has been increased by 99.97 billion Belarusian rubles, expenditures have grown by 412.23 billion Belarusian rubles and the budget deficit has risen by 312.26 billion Belarusian rubles," the presidential press service told Interfax. Following the corrections, expenditures will grow by 1.5% to 27.329 trillion Belarusian rubles, while revenue will increase 0.4% to 25.617 trillion Belarusian rubles.

The adjusted budget figures were mainly the result of "the need for additional financing in 2006 for state programs and investment projects in addition to socially important and economically expedient events," the press service said.

*Source: Interfax; October 6, 2006;
http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/26.html?menu=2&id_issue=11600659*

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.
