

Edited by Maria Kabalina  
International League for Human Rights

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## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **1. Court Sentences Belarusian Activist to Two Years in Prison for Insulting President**

A Minsk court sentenced a Belarusian rights activist to two years at a prison colony Monday for saying authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko needed a psychiatric examination.

In convicting Yekaterina Sadovskaya, the Leninsky District Court pointed to the unpublished statement by her organization Veche that also called for a boycott of the March presidential election and accused Russian special agents of supporting "the Belarusian dictator."

"In Belarus, they even try you for your thoughts," Sadovskaya said after the sentence was handed down. "Lukashenko has turned human rights in Belarus into an empty sound."

Police found and confiscated the Jan. 21-dated statement during a search of her apartment even though she had not distributed it anywhere. During the trial, she confirmed she was the author of the statement.

The court also fined her 4 million Belarusian rubles (US\$2,000; €1,600) for moral damages that she allegedly inflicted against judges in the provincial town of Kirov during a trial of local residents.

The 60-year-old activist has been arrested and fined several times in the past for trying to organize pickets demanding that Belarusian authorities respect human rights.

Lukashenko, who has ruled the former Soviet republic for more than a decade, is a pariah in the West for his iron-fisted ruled, quashing all dissent.

Western observers say the March vote was severely flawed.

*Source: The International Herald Tribune; October 23, 2006;*  
[http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2006/10/23/europe/EU\\_GEN\\_Belarus\\_Activist\\_Sentenced.php](http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2006/10/23/europe/EU_GEN_Belarus_Activist_Sentenced.php)

### **2. Evangelical Protestants in Belarus Rally Against Their Church Closure**

About 1,000 parishioners of an evangelical Protestant church rallied Saturday to protest its possible closure by authorities in the ex-Soviet nation.

The New Life church bought a disused building and a patch of surrounding land three years ago and made improvements, but the authorities last year ordered the church to vacate the building and sell it to the government at a nominal price.

"We are facing a tougher persecution than even during the Communist times," said one protester, Yelena Kuchinskaya. She held a banner saying "We are Praying for Belarus."

The rally was sanctioned by the authorities, and police didn't intervene.

"Freedom of conscience must return to Belarus," Pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko said at the rally. He said that about 40 parishioners had been on a hunger strike for several weeks to protest the church closure.

Authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko initiated and signed legislation in 2002 that strongly favors the dominant Russian Orthodox Christian church and restricts the activities of smaller religious groups.

Three lawsuits and an appeal to Lukashenko have failed to reverse the decision, and the parishioners, who number about 2,000, fear the government will take steps to force them out.

Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 10 million with an iron hand since 1994, silencing dissent, punishing opponents and extending his rule through votes the West has denounced as fraudulent. The United States and other Western nations refer to him as "Europe's last dictator."

Source: *The International Herald Tribune*; October 21, 2006;  
[http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/21/europe/EU\\_GEN\\_Belarus\\_Church\\_Protest.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/21/europe/EU_GEN_Belarus_Church_Protest.php)

### **3. Journalist Veronika Cherkasova Was Cruelly Killed Two Years Ago**

Today is a two-year anniversary since that day of the death of Veronika Cherkasova, a journalist with the *Solidarnost* non-government newspaper.

On October 20, 2004, Cherkasova was killed in her apartment in Minsk. A murder stabbed over 40 wounds in her.

Cherkasova covered social life, but she also investigated criminal-related topics. From the beginning the investigation focused on the murder's motive related to her private life. The authorities identified her 15-year-old son and her stepfather as their main suspects in the murder. On April 2005 the charges against them were dropped.

In the end of December 2005 Mr. Ivanov, head of the Minsk investigation department, informed that the preliminary investigation into Veronika Cherkasova's murder had been suspended "due to inability to identify the perpetrators."

Journalists' community believes that the Cherkasova's murder was connected to her work. 99% of private life related murders are open without delays, but police can not find a Cherkasova's murder for two years. Journalist of the Agency of the Journalistic Investigations creative workshop, the Belarusian Association of Journalists, stated that Veronika Cherkasova might be involved in the war for the control over the Gomel wine factory between two criminal groups. The authors of the "Price of life" article think that the murdered journalist might have had information, led to the huge financial losses for one of the parties in a case of its release.

Earlier, journalists of the creative workshop pushed the other version of the murder. In these versions they talked about Infobank and weapons' sales to Iraq.

*Trans. by Ed.*

Source: *AFN*; October 20, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?pg=6&newsid=79730#data>

### **4. Belarus: Are Hunger Strikes Losing Their Power To Persuade?**

Jailed Belarusian opposition politician Alyaksandr Kazulin is due on October 20 to begin a hunger strike he hopes will draw attention to the country's human rights abuses.

His family and political party have reportedly urged him to forgo the protest -- not only out of concern for his personal well-being, but also because they believe hunger strikes have lost their power as a political tool.

The West had critical words to say when Kazulin, the former rector of Belarus State University and head of the Hramada party, was sentenced in July to 5 and 1/2 years in jail for his role in a peaceful opposition march.

Now, says his wife Iryna, Kazulin is hoping the West will once again come to his defense.

"As far as I understood, he primarily wants international organizations to speak out [on Belarus]. I asked him straightforwardly: 'When will you decide to end your hunger strike?' He answered that

[he will do this] when the Belarus issue is put on the agenda of the United Nations," Kazulina said.

Hunger strikes are seen throughout the world as a protest of last resort and a powerful form of moral pressure.

They have been used by everyone from Indian spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi to prisoners at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

### Bobby Sands

Denis O'Hearn, a sociologist and biographer of perhaps the world's best-known hunger striker, Irish republican Bobby Sands, says it's the ultimate form of protest.

"It takes a very long time, it's a very painful way for someone to die. And if people are willing to go through that, either to the death or nearly to the death, it's quite an extreme and wrenching form of protest," O'Hearn says.

Sands was the first of 10 Irish republicans who systematically starved themselves to death in a British jail to protest prison conditions.

He died in May 1981, after 65 days in which he ingested nothing but water and occasional spoonfuls of salt to give his body the minimum it needed to stay alive.

Hernan Reyes, who oversees prisoner medical issues for the International Committee of the Red Cross, says determined strikers want to stay alive as long as they can.

The longer they fast, the rationale goes, the more extreme their suffering -- and the more powerful their message. It only takes a few weeks for the physical pain of a fast to become profound.

"You don't feel hunger after a few days because of the ketosis. You have ketones in your bloodstream, which actually stamp out sensations of hunger as we understand it," Reyes says. "But of course there are other sensations. After a couple of weeks you'll have what we call nystagmus, which means that you have these uncontrolled rapid eye movements which give you a feeling of dizziness or vertigo, and you feel like you just go off a carousel that's been spinning around very fast. And it's extremely unpleasant. People throw up; they can no longer drink their water. And this is definitely one phase of the hunger strike which all hunger strikers who reach it do remember."

### New Life

That phase is rapidly approaching for the more than 150 Protestant believers in Belarus.

They launched a hunger strike on October 5 to protest the ejection of their community called the New Life Church from property it legitimately purchased from the state in 2002.

The New Life community says authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and other officials have been relentless in their repression of religious minorities in Belarus.

Now 14 days into the fast, they have vowed to see the strike through to the end if their demands are not met.

New Life member Uladzimir Mackevich says the group remains determined.

"[Our] mood is good, elated. We are convinced that we will win. It is a serious, composed mood. The initial enthusiasm has ended, and now we are soberly confident," Mackevich said.

The mass protest may be getting results. New Life on October 18 filed an appeal with Belarus's Supreme Economic Court against the city decision to confiscate the church's land.

The group filed the appeal at the recommendation of Lukashenka's aide for ideology. The president, in a sudden show of sympathy, had ordered that the church be helped.

Reyes says the success of a hunger fast -- among both prisoners and regular protesters -- largely depends on how willing a government is to stand by as a person or a group slowly and painfully starves itself:

"To protest by fasting is for prisoners very often the last resort they have to make their protest known outside. Of course, this implies that they can make it known outside, which is not always the case in many countries. [It also implies] that the country actually cares about their image -- not the prisoner's image, but their own image as authorities, as being benevolent and listening to this last resort of this prisoner calling for some specific action," Reyes says.

Lukashenka is not usually credited with having a benevolent side. But a third hunger strike has also gained the attention of the authorities.

Independent trade unionist Alena Zakhzhaya has been fasting since October 3.

She is protesting what she says is discrimination against fellow union members by a regional tire factory that is part of Belnaftakhim, the state petrochemical concern.

Her campaign appeared to score a victory earlier this week, when Belnaftakhim representatives promised to deliver unpaid bonuses and restore other benefits promised under the terms of the union's collective bargaining agreement.

But until the money had arrived in the proper accounts, Zakhzhaya says she will continue her fast.

"A representative of the concern [told me]: 'Stop your hunger strike, give us 10 days and we will resolve this problem.' I said 'I can't, you'll trick me one more time.' Therefore, as long as I can hold my ground, I will hold it," Zakhzhaya says.

*Source: Daisy Sindelar, RFE/RL; October 19, 2006;  
<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/F124A669-7855-4172-8021-2A58B8067BBE.html>*

## **DOMESTIC**

### **5. Mediator Without Mandate**

A new toy is an old forgotten one. Lately discussions about a necessity for Europe to offering friendship to Aleksandr Lukashenko became very active. The statement made by Vladimir Nistuk, Deputy Head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hromada) (BSDC (H) is the cause of these discussions.

The Nistuk's October statement leads to the following:

- The opposition is tearing apart by the internal contradictions. Most of citizens do not support the opposition. The existing bureaucracy does not want to deal with the opposition.
- The European sanctions against Belarus are ineffective and have no future.

- Aleksandr Lukashenko's positions are very firm, he has total control over the situation in the country and he is supported by the most of the citizens.

At the same time Nistuk blamed the opposition in "unbridle abuse of Aleksandr Lukashenko without any participation in the discussion, decision making process and implementation at the state or municipal level." He also suggested to "thinking about the fact that such a politician, who can rule the country in the conditions of increasing outside pressure, is awaited in Europe for a long time."

Finally, BSDC (H) Deputy Head spoke about the suggestions on changing the current situation. The first point is the European institutes' support of more than 100 candidates, the BSDC (H) is ready to nominate, during the upcoming local elections in Belarus. Nistuk also believes that "it is necessary to initiate the national agreement "round table" in order to start negotiations between the constructional democratic forces and the Belarusian authorities." He also thinks "it is necessary to go back to the Europe towards Belarus step-by-step strategy." For instance, "the Belarusian authorities have to adopt even single changes in the legislation, have not to put obstacles in the way of the SPECIFIC [highlighted by the author] democratic forces representatives during the upcoming local elections under the conditions of them totally follow the Belarusian law. In exchange, Belarus will get back the special guest status at the Representatives Chamber of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. And so on.

The Nistuk's statements made a strong impression on some people. *Belgazeta* newspaper even wrote that "each thesis looks carefully considered," and in general "it make an impression of a global message, some forces inside the opposition or inside the country are trying to send to the authorities."

The problem is that Nistuk does not offer anything new. In theory the step-by-step strategy is good. But there already was such a strategy. Europe has taken a lot of efforts to fix the dialogue with Minsk, but there was always no effect. The Belarusian authorities were never ready to compromise. Nistuk just moves the responsibility form one part to another. "We remember well the European "step-by-step strategy". Unfortunately, the Belarusian authorities did not make any steps in return. It all ended up in the form of firm ultimatums, which Europe put forward Aleksandr Lukashenko."

To put it mildly, it is ridiculous. Europe never put any firm ultimatums to the Belarusian head. We can not consider the resolutions, condemning the human rights harassment in our country as firm ultimatums. Any concrete discussion about the situation in Belarus was ending the same: the Belarusian authorities declared that they will not allow anyone to teach them how to act. We do not have any reasons to think that their position has fundamentally changed.

Nistuk in his speech posed himself as a mediator who was entrust with announcing "the new peaceful initiatives of the soviet authorities." He does not say that straight but he had it in mind. Anyhow, some people understood the BSDC (H) Deputy Head speech that way. In particular, the comment in the *Belgazeta* newspaper is the evidence of that. There is a question to rise in the connection with that: "Who is Mr. Nistuk?"

He is not a new figure at the Belarusian political market. When Nistuk criticizes the opposition we have to remember that he is a part of the opposition for a long time. His role is not the top one, but he is also not the last person there. Thus, BSDC (H) Deputy Head should share the responsibility for the democratic forces failure, but not to blame them from the outsider side. It was very not good-looking than Nistuk talked about his former colleague, the political prisoner Nickolai Statkevich, with whom he was close just recently.

May we say that Nistuk was entrusted by the Belarusian authorities to signal to Europe about their readiness for dialogue? Unlikely. The official Minsk has a lot of channels to send a "global message" without Mr. Nistuk.

Moreover, the dialogue, initiated by this way, has a minimal chance for success. Even if we suggest that Nistuk's initiative matches the current aspiration of the Belarusian authorities, it is more reasonable to wait the appearance of mediators, representing not themselves but the country's authorities.

*Trans. by Ed.*

*Source: Yan Buyan, Solidarnost; October 24, 2006;*

*[http://www.gazetaby.com./cont/print.php?sn\\_nid=3291](http://www.gazetaby.com./cont/print.php?sn_nid=3291)*

## **6. No Opposition Representatives in Territorial Electoral Commissions**

None of the opposition representative became a part of the territorial electoral commissions. It was announced at the meeting of the heads of the political parties' election headquarters on October 23.

Anatoly Pavlov, head of the election headquarter of the United Civil Party's (OCP), informed *BelaPan* that the political parties, participating in the opposition "Local elections" campaign, nominated more than 100 representatives to the territorial commissions.

Pavlov stated that "we view it as the evidence of the well-known thesis. There will be no elections in Belarus."

He also informed that today during the meeting the heads of election headquarters also discussed the questions of training the future candidates for the local commission deputies, and questions of providing legal assistance to them. In particular the OCP and the Belarusian Popular Front party stated their readiness to provide legal assistance to the democratic forces candidates.

In total more than 1500 commissions were formed. Seven to 11 people entered the law level commissions, nine to 13 – the basic level commissions. // *BelaPan*

*Trans. by Ed.*

*Source: BDG Online; October 24, 2006; <http://www.bdg.by/news/news.htm?95526>,*

## **7. Belarusian KGB: Radical Opposition Candidates Are Sponsored by West**

Vasily Dementei, First Deputy Head of the Belarusian KGB, stated that the Belarusian special services have been fixing the fact of the Belarusian opposition financial support by the West. KGB traces the situation on an eve of the local elections because the Belarusian opposition candidates work actively to get seats in the local councils of deputies.

"We are fixing the assistance receiving from the West, including financial assistance. We stop such support and we will stop it in future," Vasily Dementei stated. In his opinion, the Belarusian opposition actively promotes its radical candidates. "We pay attention to that," The *Radio Svaboda Belarusian Service*, referring to the *Interfax* news agency, quotes the words of the First Deputy Head.

Dementei also informed that Belarus will support actions of the Russian authorities and will not receive in its territory citizens of Georgia, deported from Russia.

Earlier, right before the presidential elections, the head of the Belarusian KGB stated that the special services disclose a script of forced power capture by the radical opposition after the elections. In the KGB investigators' opinion, the opposition's script included a plan to hold a rally in the centre of Minsk, during which opposition plan to "blow up bombs in the crowd." "A Provocative statement of the heads of an unregistered nongovernmental organization Partnership, monitoring the elections, was supposed to be a starting point," Stepan Sukhanenko, head of the Belarusian KGB, stated at that time.

*Trans. by Ed.*

*Source: Telegraf; October 20, 2006; <http://telegraf.by/belarus/2006/10/20/kgb/>*

## **8. Belarus To Build Nuclear Power Plant**

A senior scientist in Belarus says the country is set to begin building a nuclear power plant, possibly as early as 2007.

Bel-1 television news today reported that Mikhail Miasnikovich, chairman of the Belarus Academy of Sciences, said that state funds have now been set aside for the power plant.

Belarus is the country worst affected by 1986 Chornobyl nuclear disaster.

*Source: RFE/RL; October 19, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/9372E097-D8D4-4250-A3C2-973E0FE1A86A.html>*

## **REGIONAL**

### **9. Single Currency is Key Condition for Russia-Belarus Union - Putin**

The transition to a single currency is the most important condition for establishing a Russia-Belarus Union State, the Russian President said in a televised question-and-answer session on Wednesday.

The two countries have been negotiating on a union state since they signed an agreement on April 2, 1997. The project sets out to establish common economic, customs and political regulations, but negotiations have stalled recently over a number of issues, including a Russian proposal to raise natural gas prices for Belarus.

"First, we need to speak about economical integration. In this area, I consider the transition to a single currency to be the key issue," Vladimir Putin said.

The President said Russia wants to accelerate this process, and that economic issues were the priority.

"We are at the stage of harmonizing political issues, in particular the Constitutional Act. But I will say honestly and openly that the economy is still the priority. An economic base is required to establish, for example, a common parliament," Putin said.

*Source: RIA Novosti; October 25, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20061025/55124088.html>*

### **10. Gas Pipelines of Ukraine, Belarus Leave Underground**

On the threshold of Fradkov's visit to Ukraine, the latter has announced potential creation of a new gas alliance. As it turned out, Ukraine intends to rebuild the gas pipeline to Belarus and ship up to 10 billion cu meters there. At least officially, Belarus turns down the partnership offer for the time being.

On Monday, Ukrtransgaz officially announced the agreements attained with its Belarus' counterpart, Beltransgaz. CEO of Ukrainian company, Yaroslav Marchuk, met Beltransgaz managers in Minsk October 17-19 and discussed the possible storage of gas designated for Belarus in the underground facilities of Ukraine and cooperation in gas deliveries.

By results of the talks, Ukrtransgaz said, the parties sealed the documents setting forth cooperation of controller services of their countries when operating Torzhok-Dolina and Ivatsevichi-Dolina pipelines that connect Ukraine and Belarus.

A source with Ukrainian cabinet shed light on the future alliance. In 2007, Belarus may get up to 10 billion cu meters of Turkmen gas allocated by RosUkrEnergog for Ukraine. Belarus will buy it via UkrGazEnergog (subsidiary of RosUkrEnergog and Naftogaz Ukrainy).

But Beltransgaz will soon set to negotiating the 2007 gas prices with Gazprom. So, it is not surprising that Belarus has denied creation of any alliance with Ukraine. "There have been no negotiations bypassing Gazprom. No one has arrived to us. We don't comment anything," said representatives of Beltransgaz.

Meanwhile, gas negotiations of Ukraine and Russia are nearing the end. In 2007, Ukraine stands ready to buy from Gazprom 55 billion cu meters to 57 billion cu meters at \$130/thu cu meters. The final decision could be reached when Russia's PM Mikahil Fradkov visits Ukraine, said sources close to RosUkrEnergog.

*Source: Kommersant; October 24, 2006; [http://www.kommersant.com/p715797/gas\\_deliveries/](http://www.kommersant.com/p715797/gas_deliveries/)*

### **11. Russia, Belarus To Sign Agreement On Joint Air Defense System**

Russia and Belarus will sign an agreement in the near future on forming a unified air defense system, the Russian Air Force commander said on Thursday.

"The documents on formation a unified air defense system have already been submitted to the prime minister for signing," Vladimir Mikhailov said. "If he signs them today than we will sign an agreement tomorrow at a joint session."

The commander said Russia had been actively cooperating with Belarus on issues of air defense, and that in the future Russia will be able to form such joint systems with other countries.

Mikhailov said the territorial headquarters of the new air defense system will be located in Russia, and the auxiliary command center will be in Belarus.

*Source: RIA Novosti; October 19, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20061019/54949606.html>*

### **12. Russia Limits Belarusian Import**

Russia plans to limit state imports from Belarus, Deputy Economic Development and Trade Minister Andrey Sharonov said. The ministry explains, however, that this is just a response to the discrimination of Russian goods in Belarus. Yet, the curtailing of imports, to be introduced by November, looks like a tool to influence Alexander Lukashenko's regime in negotiations over gas prices for 2007.

Russian Economic Development and Trade Minister Andrey Sharonov confirmed yesterday, while speaking to State Duma deputies, that he had sent a letter with a suggestion to limit state purchases of Belarusian goods to the Agriculture Ministry and heads of Russian regions. The letter of the economic ministry was signed back in mid-July. It asks to give remarks on the exclusion of some Belarusian goods from the list of Russian federal and regional orders. The Sharonov List has been discussed by Belarusian mass media for a few days already. On Wednesday, Russia officially confirmed plans to limit state imports from Belarus.

Nevertheless, Andrey Sharonov said this proposal does not mean an unofficial trade embargo. "There are no curbs," the minister said yesterday. "Any person is free to buy what they have been buying – and in any amounts. We are going to make a decision on limiting state orders of those Belarusian goods that are not unique for some of our recipients." Belarusian press mentions

curtailing imports of such goods as furniture, sanitary engineering, ceramic tiles, meat products, vegetables and synthetic cleansers.

The Economic Development Ministry posted an official statement on its web-site with explanations following Andrey Sharonov's speech at the Duma. A new law came into force this January determining rules of state purchases and describing the so-called national regime for some foreign companies which could get access to state orders on the same conditions as Russian producers. "However, this regime is based on mutual terms only," the statement says. The ministry does not mention if analysis of terms of access to state purchases has been conducted in other countries. But as far as Belarus goes, there have been "terms which limit the access of Russian producers to tenders and create unequal conditions" in the tenders' procedures.

The discrimination of Belarusian goods in Russian state orders can be considered a decided matter, but the Economic Development Ministry still underscores that it has not been officially signed into a law yet.

The volume of Belarusian goods bought on Russian budget money is unknown. But the ministry's decision will surely send the declining Belarusian import further down. It fell to \$10 billion from \$11 billion last year. Judging from the list of the goods that are proposed to be limited, the Belarusian imports can drop as much as \$200 million.

Belarusian authorities decline both "plans of the Russian budget to discriminate its goods" and their own discrimination of Russian manufacturers. Russia's state purchase regime with Belarus has not been altered since 2003. A new bill on state orders took effect this January and the first steps to create a system of "mutual discrimination in state purchases" for Russia and Belarus were taken in July, just as Gazprom announced a hike in gas prices for Belarus up to \$200 per 1,000 cu. meters in 2007. Information about the Sharonov List cropped up as Transneft revealed plans to cut oil supplies for Belarusian oil refineries. The decision was reportedly made after the examination of the Druzhba pipeline and the meeting of Alexander Lukashenko and Azerbaijan's President Ilkham Aliiev where the two leaders discussed oil deliveries from Azerbaijan to Belarus via the Ukrainian Odessa-Brody gas pipeline.

Curbs of the Economic Development Ministry will damage not only Belarusian firms but Russian companies as well. Belarusian goods from the list of Russian state purchases are normally imported by Russian traders. Only large Belarusian companies export goods on their own, but their products are not on the Russian ministry's list.

*Source: Alexey Shapovalov, Kommersant; October 19, 2006; [http://www.kommersant.com/p714553/r\\_528/Russia\\_Limits\\_Belarus\\_Imports/](http://www.kommersant.com/p714553/r_528/Russia_Limits_Belarus_Imports/)*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **13. Belarus Wants Better Relations With United States**

Belarus wants to improve relations with the United States, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka today told the new U.S. ambassador to Belarus, Karen Stewart.

Lukashenka said Minsk wants an "open and constructive" dialogue with Washington on the basis of "equality, mutual respect, and consideration" of each other's interests."

The United States has dubbed Lukashenka "Europe's last dictator". The Belarusian leader has repeatedly accused the Washington of seeking his ouster.

*Source: RFE/RL; October 24, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/246A8E71-5876-4AE9-A7A0-CABE22CA6A70.html>*

#### **14. EU Increases Sanctions on Belarus**

The European Union has expanded its sanctions on senior Belarusian officials, adding four names to the list of those whose assets are frozen and are barred from traveling to EU nations.

The four officials are judges and public prosecutors who imposed a five-year jail term on opposition leader and failed presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin.

Thirty one other senior Belarusians are already forbidden from traveling to the European Union, including President Alexander Lukashenko.

The EU joined the United States in imposing sanctions on Belarus after Mr. Lukashenko was reelected in March in a vote international observers say was a fraud.

President Bush has called Mr. Lukashenko Europe's last dictator because of his suppression of human rights and free speech.

Mr. Lukashenko has accused the West of interfering in Belarusian affairs.

*Source: Voice of America News; October 24, 2006; <http://www.voanews.com/english/2006-10-24-voa1.cfm>*

#### **15. Tehran, Minsk Call For Abolition of Unipolar World System**

President Mahmud Ahmadinejad told visiting Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov on Sunday that most countries, especially independent countries, have come under pressure in the current unipolar world system. The president said, "Cooperation among friendly countries to break this unjust system is a necessity."

The Islamic Republic of Iran is firmly committed to boosting relations with independent countries like Belarus, he added.

Iran and Belarus are in consensus on many economic and political issues, he said, adding that mutual cooperation, especially in the energy and defense industries, should be strengthened.

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko is to visit Iran in the near future.

Ahmadinejad expressed hope that Tehran and Minsk would take great steps to boost ties during Lukashenko's trip to Iran.

Martynov criticized the unipolar world system, saying Belarus and Iran share many common views on international issues. "Belarus is prepared to cooperate with Iran and other independent countries to transform the world's unipolar system into a multipolar one."

He expressed satisfaction over the current level of ties between the two countries but called for continued strengthening of Tehran-Minsk relations.

*Source: Tehrantimes.Com; October 24, 2006;  
<http://www.tehrantimes.com/Description.asp?Da=10/23/2006&Cat=2&Num=014>*

#### **16. Belarus: Iran's Nuclear Program Is Peaceful**

Belarus does not doubt the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program, Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov said on October 23. The Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko will pay an official visit to Iran within the next few weeks, where the two countries will sign various

agreements, including ones on legal assistance and cooperation between their emergency situations ministries, information services and television channels.

Source: *Stratfor.Com*; October 23, 2006;

[http://www.stratfor.com/products/premium/read\\_article.php?selected=Situation%20Reports&sitrep=1&id=278742](http://www.stratfor.com/products/premium/read_article.php?selected=Situation%20Reports&sitrep=1&id=278742)

### **17. Minsk Devises New Foreign Policy - Lukashenko**

Aleksandr Lukashenko said that the Belarusian government was devising a new foreign policy.

"In fact, we are building a new foreign policy," official information sources quoted the Belarusian leader as saying at his meeting with Baleka Mbete, speaker of South Africa's National Assembly, in Minsk on October 20.

According to Mr. Lukashenko, Belarus' foreign policy has included new elements and Minsk currently regards South Africa as a key partner.

The Belarusian leader said the parliamentary speaker's visit continued a dialog recently established between the two countries, adding that both Belarus and South Africa shared approaches to the world's most pressing problems, including terrorism and poverty.

Mr. Lukashenko expressed hope that the visit would speed up the implementation of bilateral agreements reached earlier at top-level talks, official information sources said. // *BelaPAN*

Source: *Belorusskie Novosti*; October 20, 2006;

[http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/10/20/ic\\_news\\_259\\_260759/](http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2006/10/20/ic_news_259_260759/)

## **BUSINESS**

### **18. Belarus Sets Up Stabilization Fund To Deal with Energy Problems**

Belarus set up a stabilization fund to deal with a possible hike in the price it pays for Russian natural gas, the head of the country's Central Bank said on Thursday.

The price of gas sold to Belarus has not changed since 2004, and currently stands at \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters. But Russia's natural gas monopoly Gazprom said it would pursue a European price formula for Belarus as of 2007, rising the price to around \$200 per 1,000 cubic meters. This move is expected to tear a hole of around \$2 billion in the Belarusian budget.

Petr Prokopovich, board chairman of the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus, said the increase would not affect the country's economy.

"This will by no means affect the economy as a whole, or the gold and currency reserves," he said. "We have to work hard to increase exports of Belarusian goods and services."

He said the Stabilization Fund will not draw on the country's gold and currency reserves, but will use only budget funds.

"The state budget is the sole source for the fund," he said. "As far as I know, the fund current totals more than 100 billion Belarusian rubles (about \$50 million)."

In late September Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov said that the problem of Russian natural gas deliveries to Belarus and its transit via Belarusian territory in 2007 would be resolved by the end of 2006.

Gazprom is also 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.

A source in the Russian government said earlier the two companies are in talks 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.

*Source: RIA Novosti; October 19, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20061019/54960555.html>*

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The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the International League for Human Rights ([www.ilhr.org](http://www.ilhr.org)). The League, now in its 65th year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations and the International Labor Organization. To send letters to the editor or to subscribe/unsubscribe please contact Maria Kabalina at [cis@ilhr.org](mailto:cis@ilhr.org).

The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their case for the protection of civil society before the international community regarding Lukashenko's wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.

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