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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Reading Independent Newspapers A Crime?

Today at the Homel Engine Factory, police filed charges against Anatol Paplauny, a civic activist. He was accused of violating Art. 172 of the Administrative Code, "dissemination of printed materials aimed at undermining state and public order."

In the morning Menchukou, staff, ideology and security deputy director, and Tsyatserych, senior district police officer of Savetski District in Homel, demanded explanations from the foreman, his supervisor and two workers of the factory's tool workshop. Viasna Human Rights Centre reported that two copies of the *Svoboda* [Freedom] at a workplace of one of the workers were the reason for questions.

After a conversation, a district police officer opened a case against Anatol Paplauski, a technician of the factory, for dissemination of printed materials. The Art. 172 of the Administrative Code provides for a penalty of five minimal salaries and confiscation of printed materials. The facts regarding violation of the law is to be determined by an administrative commission.

"The authorities and the enterprise leadership are afraid of independent information," Anatol Paplauny says. "Any unofficial source of information for workers really worries them".

Trans. And Rev. by Ed.

Source: Charter 97; November 29, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/11/29/pressa>

Belarusian Opposition Leader Arrested

Belarusian opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich was arrested Wednesday at the Minsk airport after returning from a trip to the Latvian capital, on suspicion of forging his domestic passport, the leader's press secretary said.

Riga was the venue of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's first summit on former Soviet territory, on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Milinkevich, who has been arrested several times over his role in mass demonstrations that followed the March elections in Belarus, visited Riga at the invitation of the Latvian president and met with U.S. President George Bush and several White House officials who were attending the NATO summit.

"I would not want to make pessimistic assumptions, but forgery is considered a criminal offense, and the consequences may be serious," Pavel Mozheiko said, adding that Milinkevich, who previously faced only administrative charges, could be kept in custody for a considerable time.

Milinkevich contested Belarus' presidential elections in March as the main opposition candidate, but finished a distant second, with 6% of the vote, behind incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko, who officially won 83% of the vote. The opposition and international observers said the poll was rigged.

In April, a court sentenced him to 15 days' detention for his part in an unauthorized 3,000-strong rally organized by opposition groups.

The rally was called by the opposition to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the world's worst nuclear accident, which affected much of the country.

Source: RIA Novosti; November 29, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/world/20061129/56196759.html>

Belarus Threatens to Close Newspaper

Belarusian authorities have warned a leading independent newspaper that it could face closure - a move its editor on Monday described as part of government efforts to muzzle critical voices.

Deputy Information Minister Lilia Ananich said the weekly *Nasha Niva* had been handed an official warning over its failure to indicate its address in the most recent issues published this month as required by Belarusian law. "The editors have rudely violated the law," she said.

The newspaper, which marked its 100th anniversary this month, had to change its offices four times this year after authorities barred it from the capital, Minsk. The state postal agency has refused to distribute the weekly, and authorities also have barred it from subscription.

"The Belarusian authorities don't stop attempts to destroy the last remaining independent newspapers in the country," *Nasha Niva's* editor Andrey Dynko said.

Reporters Without Borders, a Paris-based media rights watchdog, criticized the Belarusian authorities' moves against *Nasha Niva*, saying the newspaper's rental contracts had been canceled under official pressure.

"As in the case of *Arche*, a cultural magazine suspended by the Information Ministry in September, the authorities often use these practices to neutralize the independent press," the group said in a statement issued Friday.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has ruled the ex-Soviet republic with an iron fist since 1994, destroying opposition parties, shuttering independent newspapers and earning the nickname "Europe's last dictator."

Lukashenko's government has formed a loose union with Russia and is deeply suspicious of Western inroads into the region.

Source: PhillyBurbs.Com; November 27, 2006; <http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/89-11272006-747858.html>

Milinkevich Supporters Fired in Minsk

Three activists of Milinkevich's team are under administrative pressure after Milinkevich, the united democratic forces leader, enrolled in their initiative groups.

Maksim Zalevsky and Maksim Bleschik, two activists, were fired without any explanation. Aleksandr Dulchik, another supporter of "For Freedom" movement, an employee of the Minsk auto factory, was given notice by the factory administration that his "nomination for a deputy candidate will not be left unpunished."

Milinkevich is a member of the electoral initiative groups of 206 deputy candidates and has helped them to collect signatures. Last week these signature collection actions took place in Minsk and Gomel. Obviously, the authorities noticed them.

Rev. and trans. By Ed.

Source: AFN; November 22, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/news/news.asp?pg=1&d=22&m=11&y=2006&newsid=80697#data>

Five Young Belarusian Oppositionists Fined For Demonstration

A district court in Brest, southwestern Belarus, slapped five opposition youths on November 15 with fines ranging from \$300 to \$730 for their participation in an unauthorized demonstration in

the city in October, Belapan reported. Some 25 young people demonstrated in Brest on October 16, demanding freedom for political prisoners in Belarus.

Source: RFE/RL; November 16, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/11/3-cee/cee-161106.asp>

DOMESTIC

Lukashenka Nit-Picks Again

Yesterday, while answering questions from Ukrainian journalists during a live broadcast, Aleksandr Lukashenka stated that the results of the last presidential elections in March 2006 were fabricated by his order.

"We fabricated the results of the last elections. I have already told it to the West. 93.5% of the people voted for Lukashenka. They say it was not at the European numeric level, so we lowered the number to 86%. It happens... Before the elections, we were said that if we receive results close to the European numbers, then our elections would be recognized. We did the results closer to the European numbers and it did not work out," Lukashenka said yesterday.

His statement was like a bomb – Lukashenka seeming to admit to falsifying the elections. A short comment -- "Sasha, You're Finished" -- appeared on many online Belarusian forums discussing that statement. It seemed as if something might happen, if not in the next two hours, at least by that evening. In any other country where the definitions of "civic consciousness" and "civil society" exist, the investigating agencies would start to find out the details of this crime, and a premier minister would play the role of the state head.

But there was a long pause. A few comments appeared online: Lukashenka is still to answer. Under the law, new elections should be announced. And then all of a sudden, it was over. The authorities even showed excessive caution and left Lukashenko's confession in the TV version. Still, this incident was excluded by censors from the "full version" of yesterday's press conference on president's official website. Yesterday there was a chance, but none of politicians used this chance even for personal PR.

Today, the pause is not just long but has also started to stink. Moscow keeps silent, in quiet indignation. Obviously, it is a bad moment for the Kremlin to raise the fabrication question. Moscow, along with only a handful of countries, recognized the fabricated results of the elections. Putin congratulated Lukashenka. It would be difficult for the Kremlin to say: "We told you so; we knew the results were fabricated." If you knew, why did you recognize those results?

But why has the West kept silent? Here, Lukashenka himself has said he fabricated the election results, not only for the West (by the way he also admitted that he is looking for contacts with the EU, but who isn't?) The West does not even need to invent its reaction on the fabrication. This theme has been developed there a long time ago. But for now, there is no word from the EU officials and representatives, including foreign diplomats. No doubt experts are thinking hard about the next step. But most likely they are not thinking *too* hard. Everybody is waiting for the reaction of Belarusians, or rather, the Belarusian "political elite." Everybody gathers together around an abscess and everybody is waiting when it starts to grow. A lot of people wish to open this abscess.

Every time Lukashenka uses the expression "so-called opposition" in his speeches, it makes me angry. It is unworthy of the state head to use this kind of expressions, or to call his opponents "retarded." The opposition itself explained Lukashenka's statements by the fact that he is afraid of the opposition. So they are not just the opposition, but dragons. Every time Lukashenka sees them, or mention them, he loses his mind out of fear.

Today, people haven't seen any news of the reaction of the politicians to Lukashenka's confession. Many people ask a simple question: "So Lukashenka was right? Tell us, so-called opposition." Readers did not dare to ask why there was not any special meeting of the united democratic force leaders and why yesterday, none of the politicians, public and youth organizations called on people to use their right and protest against the fabrication of the elections results. Readers already know the answer. It is all about us. It is about every Belarusian, who has to decide if we want to continue living in a swamp. There is nothing funny about Lukashenka's confession. He knows us, he is the same.

Not until this afternoon was there some daylight. Vintsuk Vyachorka, head of the Belarusian People Front, made an appeal to the Prosecutor's Office concerning the possibility of opening a criminal case on charges of falsifying the 2006 presidential election results.

"It took Lukashenko eight months to say what everybody already knew. Though he said it in a very original way," Vyachorka said.

"It took more than a day for Belarusian to get any reactions from the politicians." It is a shame... It is a shame to be Belarusian.

Lukashenka threw a stone in the water and is watching the ripples. He is also indignant. Right now, on the eve of the decision about gas supplies to the country, it is the best time for him to start this story about fabrication, about recognizing the election results as invalid and about announcing new elections. New legislation allows him to participate in new elections. In October, the relevant amendments were successfully added to the Law On the President of the Republic of Belarus. He could also postpone the introduction of new prices for a year or two. For the second time, he would be elected for the third term with "significant" success. But there is no one to trouble the waters in the Belarusian maelstrom. Lukashenka overestimates his rivals.

Source: AFN; November 24, 2006;
<http://www.afn.by/news/news.asp?d=24&m=11&y=2006&newsid=80816#data>

Opposition Parties Leaders Are Rejected At Registration

110 deputy candidate nomination initiative groups were not registered by electoral commissions. In particular, Sergei Kalyakin, head of the opposition Communist Party, and Anatoly Lebedko, head of the United Civil Party, were rejected when attempting to register initiative groups.

According to *Belorussky Partizan*, the main reason for rejection is enrolling people in initiative groups without their permission.

Trans by Ed.

Excerpt from:
Source: Telegraf; November 17, 2006;
<http://telegraf.by/belarus/2006/11/17/oppositionregistration/>

Released Belarusian Oppositionist Vows To Stay In Politics

Former lawmaker Syarhey Skrabets, who was recently released from prison under an amnesty told journalists on November 15 that he will continue to engage in politics, *Belapan* and *RFE/RL's* Belarus Service reported.

"I intend to resume political activities as soon as I'm quite recovered from the hunger strike," said Skrabets, who spent 18 months in prison. Skrabets also told journalists that former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who has been on a hunger strike since October 20 in the same correctional facility from which Skrabets was released, is in a very bad physical condition. "Kazulin has lost some 17 kilograms, or more than 20 percent of his weight. Despite

this, he feels good spiritually. He looks like skin and bones but keeps his head up," Skrabets said. Kazulin's wife, Iryna, visited the facility on November 15, but was not allowed to see her husband.

Source: RFE/RL; November 16, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/11/3-cee/cee-161106.asp>

Vandals Desecrate Holocaust Memorial In Belarus

Vandals desecrated a memorial to Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust in Belarus, painting a swastika in the center of it and posting leaflets that warned against "enemies and traitors of our Fatherland."

A Jewish leader said that in the incident on the night of November 12-13, attackers also threw white paint on sculptures that are part of the memorial in the center of the capital, Minsk.

The memorial honors the estimated 800,000 Jews who were killed in Belarus by the Nazis. A swastika and anti-Semitic graffiti were also painted the same night on a building housing a Jewish cultural center in Minsk.

Source: RFE/RL; November 14, 2006;

Belarusian Opposition Launch "Open Your Eyes" Campaign

The Belarusian opposition announced the start of a national political campaign under the framework of the elections to local councils. The "open your eyes" campaign will start with posters containing "brief information about the political and socio-economical situation in Belarus."

Victor Ivashkevich, deputy head of the Belarusian Popular Front, reported that the opposition does not have enough money to cover all the planned events of the campaign. Thus, in the beginning of the campaign the opposition will distribute periodicals, *BelaPan* informs.

The posters will contest the facts of Belarusian history, economy and politics. The group of experts already approved several texts. "Belarus is at the 67th place in socio-economical development rating by the United Nations. Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Russia are ahead of our country." "Belarus is at the 106th place out of 155 by business environment in the world. Kazakhstan is 86th, Russia is 79th, Lithuania is 15th, and Estonia is 16th." "Since 1999, the Ministry of Justice has not registered any political parties." "Belarus is the only European country with an existing system of requiring permission to go abroad."

Candidates for the local council's deputies can use these propaganda materials in their election campaigns.

Revised and Trans. by Ed.

Source: *Telegraf*; November 9, 2006;

<http://www.telegraf.by/belarus/2006/11/09/beoppopsicia/>

REGIONAL

Ella Pamfilova: We Have No Such Absurdity in Russia

"Why be surprised? That is the logic of Aleksandr Lukashenka. Were you expecting something else from him?" Ella Pamfilova, head of the Presidential Commission for Human Rights, commented on yesterday's scandal with the Russian journalists in Minsk.

This kind of attitude toward journalists would be impossible in Russia, says Pamfilova. "Our Council's job is to expand the freedom of the mass media. Despite the difficulties we also have,

the situation with mass media freedom will be improved. We count on that because that is our job. This kind of absurdity [as in Belarus – Ed.] is impossible in Russia," Pamfilova stated.

Ella Pamfilova said that you can explain the actions of Belarus only due to Lukashenka's personal offence at Russian journalists. "Most likely, he didn't like what they wrote about him," she said.

"I think it is also connected with the general situation in Russian-Belarusian relations, where problems appear. After all, clarity should appear in our relations. We should stop beating around the bush. We should honestly agree on the relationships comfortable for both the people of Belarus and the people of Russia. Not the relationships which are needed by the ambitious the Belarusian leader," Ella Pamfilova stated.

Trans. by Ed.

Source: Belorussky Partizan; November 29, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forfe/?page=100&backPage=13&news=7282&newsPage=0>

Kremlin Journalists Get Cold Shoulder in Minsk

The Belarusian administration kicked reporters from the Kremlin pool out of the CIS summit Yesterday's CIS summit was the first not to be covered by the Russian press. After *Kommersant* photographer Dmitry Azarov and two correspondents from *Moskovsky Komsomolets (MK)* were deprived of their accreditation by Belarusian authorities, all Russian journalists walked out of the summit in protest. *Kommersant* special correspondent Andrey Kolesnikov, whose name was crossed off the blacklist by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko personally, did not take advantage of his amnesty.

"You are a *Kommersant* correspondent?" The presidential security service agent at the entrance to the National Library looked sincerely happy to see me. "We're keeping a dog here especially for you! We don't let the likes of you in! We have orders."

But they did let me in. And they really did have a dog there, in the cloakroom near the entrance. It was a dirty white Labrador-boxer mix chewing on a shoe. So I can say without stretching the truth too far that they set the dogs on us in Minsk.

The dog was the most good-natured thing in that library lobby.

Kommersant photographer Dmitry Azarov and the correspondents from *Moskovsky Komsomolets* didn't make it past the bouncers either. They were given to understand that their publications had in some way offended the Lukashenko regime. There had been an article in *MK* that devoted more attention to Lukashenko's private life than was given to the scandalous television star whose ex-husband recently took their children on "vacation" with him to a distant country.

It could have been suggested that Lukashenko didn't like a picture of himself published in *Kommersant*, since Azarov was singled out in the library. But not so. There was a meeting of heads of government in Belarus last week at which *Kommersant* economic reviewer Petr Ntreba was discussed.

The low-ranking presidential security service guards took the tribulations of the Russian journalists close to heart.

"We've been waiting for you!" one of the confessed. "We're ready. You can relax, no one is getting past! What, is that camera shooting me?"

The young man standing next to the metal detector fell instantly silent, and when the camera passed by, he asked, "What channel will they show me on?"

"On all of them," I replied.

"Really?" he exclaimed. "What time? I'll call my mother."

Attempts by the three disfavored journalists to make peace with the security service came to nothing. When asked about the nametags handed to everyone who passed through security, they were told that now all those people were under control and, if anyone went somewhere he shouldn't, the tag would blow up.

"Don't worry, you won't feel a thing," the hospitable Belarusians said.

The situation reached the point that no one was sure that it was a joke. The press service of the Belarusian president forbade the English-language Russian Today television correspondents to speak English on camera. Every second felt more apocalyptic. It was found out that the three journalists had been banned without explanation last week. Minsk had been entrusted to hold the summit by a general decision of all the heads of the CIS, and the presidential security had no right to refuse accreditation to anyone at the event.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attempted to intervene at that point. After receiving a note signed by the minister, the Belarusians said, "Well, all right, let them come."

But then they came to and announced that they had no chance of being admitted to the event. Head of the Russian presidential executive staff Sergey Sobyanin tried to resolve the problem by calling a colleague in Belarus. They seemed to have reached an agreement again. Then the same thing happened. The Belarusian administration disavowed its previous decision at the last moment (the evening before the summit) - undoubtedly on the order of its head.

When Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Minsk and the journalists were blocked from entering the National Library, the Russian president's press secretary tried to reach an agreement with his colleague. I understood that no one wanted a needless scandal. When I got into the event, I was sure of it. I was surprised and offended, of course, that I was not on the blacklist of honor. So I also made enquiries, with sensational results. A high-placed Belarusian official told me that "Alexander Grigoryevich [Lukashenko] remembers that he promised to crawl into a gas pipeline with you two years ago in Sochi, so you have nothing to worry about."

I was worried any way. The only right thing to do was to walk out of the summit, if only because it would be impossible to understand what was going on at it any way, since all meetings were closed.

The entire Kremlin pool agreed, which was the only pleasant surprise of the day. It would seem that the employees of information agencies were supposed to inform their clients of the results of the summit, at least of Lukashenko's opening phrase at the expanded meeting: "Respected friends, I welcome you once again to Belarusian land. Thank you for coming. Every Belarusian knows about this event today, has waited for it eagerly and is waiting for information from this hall. We are at the epicenter not only of our own country. Our neighbors are watching us closely as well, as, I think, are ones at a greater distance. Therefore, I want to wish success for this work and we will do everything we can to make your work successful: So far, we have no complaints from participants. So far, we have done everything to make it comfortable for everyone to work here."

But the information agencies only reported that the Kremlin pool walked out of the library at that time, slamming the door behind them.

Good work.

*Source: Andrey Kolesnikov, Kommersant; November 29, 2006;
http://www.kommersant.com/p725702/CIS_summit_Minsk/*

Lukashenka Seeks New Allies To End The Russian Gas Impasse

Over the past few days Belarusian officials have held several high-level meetings involving Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan, and Minsk played host to a summit of Commonwealth of Independent States leaders. President Alexander Lukashenka has used the period constructively, in an apparent quest to stave off what has long been considered a significant -- and inevitable -- rise in the price of gas imported from Russia next year.

His tactics have been resourceful. First, three-sided negotiations were held, involving the Belarusian state-run company Beltransgaz, Russia's Gazprom, and the Dutch bank ABN AMRO, which has been entrusted with appraising the value of Beltransgaz to pave the way to the formation of a Russian-Belarusian joint venture that will provide significant control to Gazprom. Second, Lukashenka has made no secret of his plan to render his country more self-sufficient in energy supplies by reducing the commitment to Russian resources, using imports from other countries, as well as by constructing a domestic energy program that will likely be based on nuclear power. Third, and most intriguingly, Lukashenka has raised the prospect of forming a union with Ukraine that will allow for a common position on energy supplies from Russia and essentially move Belarus out of the Russian orbit.

None of these moves presents real solutions; rather they are diplomatic gambles to enhance the president's bargaining power and prompt some concessions from Moscow.

The three-way discussions took place in Kyiv on November 24, with the Belarusian side represented by Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Semashka, and the Russians by Valery Golubev, deputy chairman of Gazprom. The cost price for Beltransgaz touted by Lukashenka -- \$10-17 billion -- was far in excess of earlier estimates of around \$5 billion. Spokespersons for Gazprom had previously suggested that the appraisal of Beltransgaz would be completed after the CIS summit in Minsk on Tuesday, November 28. According to Semashka, a joint company could be established by the end of the year. In an interview with the Interfax news agency on November 20, Gazprom press secretary Sergei Kupriyanov likewise stated that it was necessary to complete talks on the creation of the new company by January 1, 2007.

In Minsk on November 28, Russian President Vladimir Putin commented that the two sides were on their way to resolving their differences, and that Gazprom and Beltransgaz would establish a joint venture based on "50/50 terms." On the same day, reports emerged that Gazprom would seek a "European price formula" for Belarus (a price increase of approximately 400%), but that the Belarusians would receive compensation if they agreed to sell their main gas pipelines transporting Russian gas to Europe.

Such a solution to the impasse would hardly satisfy Lukashenka, who is under the most serious pressure of his ten years as president. Although the government has indicated its desire to provide at least 25% of its own fuel needs and to turn to nuclear power to extricate itself from heavy reliance on Russia for imports of gas and oil, that solution is long term rather than short term. Indeed, there is a ten-year embargo in place on constructing nuclear reactors that does not expire until 2008. Moreover, Belarus would likely depend on Russia for its reactor technology, and constructing nuclear reactors in the republic most affected by the 1986 Chernobyl disaster would not be a popular decision at home.

Lukashenka used the CIS summit to hold separate talks with Ukraine and Azerbaijan, focusing on the question of energy security. Specifically the discussions ranged from the question of pipeline transport to the supply of gas and electricity and the reprocessing of raw materials. Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko commented that he and Lukashenka had discussed plans to supply Ukrainian electricity to Belarus and to route supplies through Belarus into the Baltic States. The three presidents (Lukashenka, Yushchenko, and Ilham Aliiev) also discussed cooperation over the use of the Odessa-Brody oil pipeline to supply Azerbaijani oil to Belarusian oil-processing factories.

Though these options appear to supply some possibilities for Belarus to circumvent its present dependence on Russia, and the prospect of a closer partnership with Ukraine is intriguing (Minsk regarded Ukraine with hostility during the first year after the Orange Revolution), they should be perceived as maneuvers deployed by Lukashenka to offset Russian pressure and to force some concessions from President Putin. That this policy has been partially successful can be seen in Putin's friendlier tone toward his Minsk counterpart on November 28. A prospective new agreement with Russia should provide some compensation for the formation of a joint company to replace Beltransgaz.

In the near future, however, Belarus seems set to lose control over its pipelines, and the Belarusian economy, which is anticipating a slight drop in the overall rise of GDP in 2007 (from 9.6% to 9.0%), will no longer receive subsidized gas from Russia. Lukashenka may have bought some time with his overtures to Ukraine and Azerbaijan, but the Russians are unlikely to take them very seriously. Moscow, his main ally and partner for most of the past decade, has become -- at least for the time being -- the main adversary.

(*Belorusskoe Telegrafnoe Agenstvo*, November 27 and 28; *Belarusy i Rynok*, November 27-December 4; *Itar-Tass*, November 28; *RIA-Novosti*, November 28; *Belorusskie Novosti*, November 29)

Source: David Marples, *The Jamestown Foundation*; November 29, 2006;
http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371685

Russian Journalists Leave CIS Summit

Journalist of the "Kremlin pool" accompanying Vladimir Putin in his trip to the CIS summit in Minsk, decided to leave the summit venue. The organizers of the event have not allowed in Moscow journalists who had previously been accredited, including Dmitry Azarov, *Kommersant* press photographer, Natalya Galimova, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* reporter and Alexander Astafyev, *Moskovsky Komsomolets (MK)* press photographer.

Russian journalists found such actions inappropriate, especially at the international event, and left together with their colleagues.

The *MK* newspaper earlier published an article "Demon Rum in Lukashenka Land." "In the fairytale native village of Lukashenka, his relatives are losing themselves to drinking." The article was published right before the meeting of Lukashenka with Putin in Moscow.

Journalist Natalya Bobrova visited the native village of Lukashenka and met his close relatives without Foreign Ministry accreditation. Many of them, as the article states, are chronic alcoholics or live in poverty. The journalist also spoke about Lukashenko's father, a top sensitive for the Belarusian leader. It seems that Lukashenka is not to forgive such things...

A few days, before a journalist of *Moskovsky Komsomolets* Denis Ermakov was not allowed to attend the CIS summit in Minsk.

"All the approaches to the National Library where the official event was held were cleared from Minsk dwellers in advance. And every journalist was asked to present ID several times at the distance of several hundred meters far from the building. Men with walkie-talkies were following the movement of journalists. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* is approaching, please meet him," I heard a KGB man talking behind my back. And I was met..." "You are not on the list, we can not let you in," a guard, who was checking the papers of people entering the building, told me. It turned out that our newspaper was cancelled without any explanations. All efforts of Fradkov's press-service to influence the Belarusian authorities were futile. The government of the county and the Foreign Ministry denied commenting, saying unofficially that "the Belarusian party is categorically against

this newspaper correspondent's participation in the event". And that the decision had been passed at the level of Lukashenka's administration," Ermakov said.

However, it is known that representative of the Russian TV companies are left at the summit. They have decided that the Russian society should know about the events there.

Rev. by Ed.

Source: Charter 97; November 28, 2006;

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/11/28/journalist>

Lukashenka Eyes Union With Ukraine

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on November 23 that Belarus would welcome the idea of a union state with Ukraine and suggested that the two countries could coordinate rates for Russian gas that transits their territory.

Belarus's president made some surprising announcements on November 23 as Minsk prepares to host a summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Meeting in the Belarusian capital with a group of Ukrainian journalists, President Lukashenka informed them that Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko had "announced" that he will not be coming to the CIS summit on November 28, proposed the formation of a Ukrainian-Belarusian state, and even admitted to rigging Belarus's last presidential election.

Excerpt from:

Source: Jan Maksymiuk, RFE/RL; November 24, 2006;

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/B95B3BFA-932E-4317-8C22-99589908EA27.html>

INTERNATIONAL

Lithuania Exposes Belarusian Spy

Just weeks after the government deported a Russian diplomat for "illegal intelligence activities," the State Security Department announced it had detained a new spy, this time from neighboring Belarus. On Nov. 25, officials announced that they had detained a Belarusian spy, although refusing to reveal the person's identity, age and profession.

Immediately, the media jumped on espionage speculations. According to initial reports by the Baltic News Service, the alleged spy may have had something to do with the NATO summit in Riga or the traffic situation at the Lithuanian-Latvian border, where trucks have been waiting to cross for days (see story Page 4). Yet officials denied such hasty reports.

"I cannot comment on either of these reports. The Foreign Ministry is not involved," Foreign Minister Petras Vaitiekunas told The Baltic Times a few hours after the BNS report appeared.

But on Nov. 26, the Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office issued a statement confirming that the Belarusian citizen was detained on suspicion of illegal activities, and denied that he was somehow related to the Riga NATO summit and current truck lines. The prosecutor said it was not Lithuania, but Poland that had expressed major interest in the clandestine operation. "Successful cooperation between Lithuania and Poland's special service agencies has enabled us to obtain information on illegal activities by the Belarusian citizen S.M. against the Republic of Poland," the statement read.

The alleged spy was detained upon Poland's request, the statement specified, adding that agents had been searching for the Belarusian for some time.

"Polish officials suspect that S.M. was collecting and transferring national data for a foreign country," the statement said. Polish national prosecutor Janusz Kaczmarek said the alleged spy had been collecting information on Poland's special services. "It was confidential information, and these activities continued for a few years," Kaczmarek said, adding that the spy would bribe people for the information.

Arvydas Pocius, head of Lithuania's State Security Department, said the department has not ruled out the possibility that the Belarusian was also interested in Lithuanian information. He added that the Belarusian had already provided evidence to Lithuanian officials. The alleged spy has been detained for one month. Pocius said that Poland should ask for the man's extradition, although the final decision will be made by Lithuania's court. At the beginning of October, Lithuania expelled the first secretary of the Russian Embassy in Vilnius, reportedly because he was involved in "illegal intelligence activities."

A few weeks later, Russia's FSB security service said it had arrested an official in the Kaliningrad exclave - wedged between Lithuania and Poland-accused of spying for Lithuania.

Source: Arturas Racas, The Baltic Times; November 29, 2006;
<http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/16919/>

Bush Pledges Help to Belarus in Struggle for Freedom

US President George W. Bush slammed the tyrannical regime of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus and pledged to help the people there in their struggle to join the family of free Europe. "As the new democracies of Europe join the institutions of Europe, we must not forget those who still languish in tyranny," Bush said in a speech delivered on his arrival in the Latvian capital for the NATO summit.

"Just across the border here lies Belarus, a place where peaceful protesters are beaten and opposition leaders are disappeared by agents of a cruel regime," he said.

"The existence of such oppression in our midst offends the conscience of Europe and the conscience of America."

Opposition leader Alexander Kozulin, who ran unsuccessfully against Lukashenko for the presidency of Belarus earlier this year, was sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison for leading a post-election protest that was eventually put down in bloodshed.

"We have a message for the people of Belarus: the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace includes you and we will stand with you in your struggle for freedom," Bush said.

Lukashenko has ruled Belarus, a former Soviet republic lodged between Poland, Russia and Ukraine, with an iron fist since 1994. His re-election in March was recognized by neighbouring Russia, but criticized by international observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

During a visit to Latvia in May last year, Bush called Lukashenko's regime "the last dictatorship in Europe."

Source: Yahoo News; November 28, 2006;
http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/afp/061128/usa/nato_summit_us_belarus_1

EU Urges Belarus To Join Neighborhood Policy

The European Union today repeated its long-standing call for Belarus to join the EU Neighborhood Policy.

The EU's External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said in Brussels a summary of the benefits offered was handed over to the Belarusian government in Minsk on the morning of November 21.

The offer, she said, is conditional on democratic reforms in the country.

"We are sending a message today to the people of Belarus. That's the important thing -- we're sending a message to the people of Belarus explaining what we could offer to Belarus if the conditions in the country changed," Ferrero-Waldner said.

Apart from the government, the EU offer will be distributed to nongovernmental organizations and media outlets in the country.

Neighbor Benefits

The offer lists in a concise format the benefits of the ENP, currently enjoyed by Ukraine and Moldova among others -- development aid, easier travel to EU countries, and institution-building assistance.

The conditions listed in the offer say that to join the ENP, Belarus must hold free and fair elections, respect freedom of expression and civil society rights, and release political prisoners. It must also allow for an independent judiciary, respect the rights and freedoms of national minorities, respect the rights of entrepreneurs, and abolish the death penalty.

Exempt from:

Source: RFE/RL; November 21, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/FBB26BE0-EC72-4477-99D2-18A85B8A7A4F.html>

U.S. Inspectors To Visit Belarusian Military Unit

U.S. military inspectors are to visit a Belarusian military unit in November, a source at the Belarusian Defense Ministry press service told *Interfax*.

"A U.S. inspection team led by James McCoy will visit Belarus on November 13-16 in conformity with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)," the source said.

"They will choose a military unit liable for inspections under the CFE Treaty," he said.

"The inspection will verify the amount of armaments and military hardware declared by Belarus in its annual reports and its compliance with the CFE limitations," the source said.

Source: Interfax; November 13, 2006; http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/0.html?id_issue=11620438

EU Condemns Jailing Of Belarusian Youth Activist

The European Union has condemned the sentencing of a Belarusian youth opposition activist to 18 months in prison.

In a statement issued on November 8, the EU said the accusations against Zmitser Dashkevich were politically motivated and showed Belarusian authorities' unwillingness to respect international human rights standards.

Source: RFE/RL; November 9, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/E3593731-9632-465E-9245-C619BA4EB4F6.html>

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.
