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## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **1. Former Prisoner Recounts Life Behind Bars**

Valery Levaneuski spent two years in a Belarusian prison for "publicly causing offense to the president."

Levaneuski, a political activist, spent two years in prison on charges of defaming President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in a 2004 May Day leaflet. The leaflet charged that the president had misused public funds to pay for a skiing holiday in Austria.

He was sentenced and jailed in September 2004. In Hrodno prison, in western Belarus, Levaneuski staged a series of hunger strikes and spent long periods of time in solitary confinement.

#### **Life In Hrodno Prison**

"The Hrodno jail is the place where even the walls and ceilings are depressing," he said. "It was built a long time ago and, as they say, many prisoners have died there, in those cells."

He was released on May 15 and says conditions from the beginning of his sentence were tough.

"There is a special [train] carriage to transport prisoners," Levaneuski said. "It has bars on the windows. This compartment houses some 18 prisoners. They are like herrings in a box. It has three tiers of beds. Practically, it is impossible to breathe. People are not allowed to go to the toilet. It is very difficult when you are being transported, when you travel for several hours or for several days."

#### **Solitary Confinement**

Levaneuski says the most challenging time he faced was when he was put in solitary confinement for staging a hunger strike.

"I was put in a solitary-confinement cell where the sewage system was not functioning," he said. "Excrement and urine was flooding the floor. Nobody was cleaning it, as there was no water there."

The Akrestsina Prison on the outskirts of Minsk (RFE/RL) Difficult living conditions are a fact of life, Levaneuski says, and make the prisoners totally powerless.

"Everything starts with a daily routine," Levaneuski said. "It is impossible to wash yourself. It is impossible to wash clothes. It is impossible to go [out from the cell] and walk. You are allowed to have only a one-hour walk in a small yard. It is impossible to do any physical exercise. There is no library. There is no information [from outside]. Correspondence is practically forbidden as the censorship is such that it is a problem to communicate with relatives as many letters do not reach them."

#### **A National Problem**

Belarusian human rights activists paint a similar picture. They say there are some 41,000 prisoners in the country. Worldwide, that's high. According to the International Center for Prison Studies at King's College London, only the United States and Russia have a higher number of prisoners per 100,000 citizens.

Capital punishment has not been abolished in Belarus, and at least three prisoners were executed last year.

Relatives of prisoners waiting to hand over parcels of food and supplies at Akrestsina Prison near Minsk (RFE/RL file photo) Tatsyana Protska, the head of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, says living conditions in prisons are a potential health disaster for inmates.

"We are concerned about the state of health care," Protska said. "There are very many sick people there -- people sick with tuberculosis, HIV. People, who are in jail, are not always getting sufficient medical help."

However, Protska says the real problem lies in the courts, not jails.

She says Belarusian courts give prison sentences even for minor offenses. For example, joyriding is punished with five to seven years.

Protko also says that most imprisoned opponents of the regime are in jail for criminal offences, rather than on political charges.

Uladzimir Labkovich, a Minsk-based lawyer and human rights activist, says that the Belarusian penal system is only concerned with punishing prisoners, rather than rehabilitating them.

No one from the Belarusian Interior Ministry was available for comment about the situation in the country's prisons.

*Source: Valentinas Mite, RFE/RL; June 21, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

## **2. International Human Rights Committee Facing Closure in Belarus**

The head of the Moscow Helsinki Group human-rights organization warned Wednesday that the group's Belarusian counterpart could be shut down following a probe from the country's Justice Ministry.

Lyudmila Alekseyeva said the closure of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee would signify the destruction of the most prominent rights group in the former Soviet republic, which has come under heavy fire from the West over its record on human rights.

"We can say that the most proactive human rights organization in Belarus will be destroyed with the closing of the BHC," Alekseyeva said.

She said the Belarusian Justice Ministry had claimed the committee had not paid taxes under the Tacis cooperation program between Russia and the European Union, despite the fact that the committee was financed by EU taxpayers and was exempted from taxes and customs duties under an international agreement signed by Belarus.

Sergei Karaganov, a co-chairman of the Russian-Belarusian human rights commission, said Russian human rights activists were concerned over the closing of human rights organizations in Belarus.

"We believe that Russia as a partner of Belarus in the formation of the Union State [a project to eventually unite the two former Soviet republics] bears responsibility for the development of civil society and democratic freedoms in the Union State," he said. "In this case we consider the claims of the Justice Ministry against the BHC to be obviously fabricated ... and an attempt to eliminate organized human rights activities in Belarus."

Founded in 1995, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee is a not-for-profit NGO and a member of the International Helsinki Federation (IHF) since 1997.

*Source: RIA Novosti; June 21, 2006; <http://rian.ru>*

### **3. The Ministry of Justice Claimed that Mass Media Play a Negative Role in the Legal Education of People**

"It has appeared that mass media can play a negative role in the legal education of people as well as a positive one", - is said in the official letter of the Ministry of Justice sent to BAJ at the end of last week. The letter was a response to the appeal of BAJ concerning the new instruction limiting access to information about courts' activities.

The Ministry of Justice explained that the instruction was necessary because "mass media misinterpreted courts' activities rather often".

The Ministry stresses that the documents only regulates the order of giving information to the media. The Ministry drew the attention of BAJ to two examples of such misinterpretation concerning articles about sentences that did not even come into effect (Minsk City Executive Committee's newspaper *Minski Kurjer* and *Vechernij Minsk* in January 2006.)

It should be reminded that the Ministry of Justice approved a special instruction that regulates the procedure of providing mass media with information concerning court activities. This regulation ("On providing mass media with information about court activities") was introduced on April 7, 2006. The document imposed more limitations in comparison with the previous rules.

According to the new instruction, judges can refuse to be shown on TV or to publish their photos "in order to protect themselves and avoid interference in court activities"; judges can forbid using cameras in court if it "impedes their work" etc. If judges feel pressure from mass media they should immediately inform the Department of Justice about it.

At the end of May BAJ sent an appeal to the Minister of Information V. Halavanau asking to explain some issues of the document. BAJ noticed that it contradicted the Media Law, the Criminal and Administrative Codes.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; June 20; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

### **4. Channel NTV Finally Leaves Belarus**

So far the NTV channel was almost the only large Russian channel which program was not touch by the Russian side. However since July 4 the Belarusian TV and Radio Company (BT) will alter the program of the NTV.

To start with, Belarusian TV would substitute "too bloody" Russian serials. Only time will tell whether "too bloody" Russian news would be replaced as well. The BT does not comment on the situation. NTV is terse too.

"It is really so that our company has make a contract with the National State TV and Radio Company, and all rights for broadcasting at the territory of Belarus belong to it," the TV company told to the *KP v Belarusi*.

The Charter'97 press-center reminds that in June 2003 a correspondent of the NTV Pavel Selin was deported from Belarus. The reporter was banned entry to Belarus for 5 years. Besides, in the same year Foreign Ministry of Belarus suspended work of the news office of the NTV in Belarus. The Internal Ministry of Belarus told reporters that in his coverage of funeral ceremony of the famous Belarusian writer Vasil Bykau reporter of NTV Pavel Selin provided "false and provocative information". In the report he told that thousands of people had come to pay homage to the writer, while official authorities had ignored the ceremony. In 1997 NTV correspondent Alyaksandr Stupnikau was deprived accreditation.

Which Russian channels are controlled by the Belarusian TV?

First Channel

The Second National channel (ONT) is in charge of its broadcasting to the territory of Belarus. Four years ago a slogan "Not instead of, but together" was declared. Today this slogan does not agree with the reality. Only evening news are left untouched from all informational programs of the First channel. Serials are bought later than they are demonstrated at the First Channel...

Rossija

STV is in charge of broadcasting of this channel at the territory of Belarus. The channel preserves its name and news programs in Belarus, however almost all serials and films in prime-time are replaced.

Ren-TV

STV is in charge of broadcasting of this channel at the territory of Belarus. It's a channel with exclusively Belarusian news and majority of Belarusian programs.

Kultura

The Belarusian TV and Radio Company is in charge of broadcasting of this channel at the territory of Belarus. Some programs of "Kultura" are broadcast at the Lad channel.

*Source: Charter 97; June 20; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>*

#### **5. Belarusian Oppositionist Fined for Flying Banned Flag on Television Tower**

A court in Vitsebsk on June 19 fined Krystsina Shatsikava some \$2,200 for hanging up a white-red-white flag on a television-transmitter tower in Vitsebsk on June 18, *RFE/RL's* Belarus Service and *BelaPAN* reported. A white-red-white flag was the official symbol of independent Belarus before Lukashenka became president in 1994 and banned the flag the following year. "It was my rebellion against what is taking place in the country, against the information blockade," Shatsikava said in the court. The policeman who hauled Shatsikava down from the television tower said in the court that she "put up resistance, was excited, tried to bite," and kicked him. Meanwhile, a witness of the incident told *RFE/RL* on condition of anonymity that Shatsikava was harshly beaten by servicemen who were involved in getting her down.

*Source: RFE/RL; June 20, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

#### **6. Opposition Activist Ties Herself to Light Tower as Sign of Protest**

On June 18th, at approximately 2:40pm, informal opposition youth leader Cristina Shatikova, as a sign of protest against the detention of oppositionists, tied herself to a light tower in a concert arena in Vitebsk. It took four hours for the police and MCHS (Emergency and Disaster Relief Ministry) to force her down.

Cristina Shatikova raised the red and white flag on the light tower of the Vitebsk amphitheatre - the traditional arena for the international festival "Slav Market". She tied herself to the tower with the forbidden national flag and ropes and lost consciousness several times while tied there. It was very hot in Vitebsk on that day.

Eyewitness to the events, Svetlana Stankevich a colleague of Shatikova's from the Minsk tent town, told a correspondent of *PRIMA –News*, Cristina staged her protest soon after the Vitebsk police refused to release three delayed oppositionists.

At approximately 4:00pm, two policemen attempted to persuade Shatikova to come down. She flatly refused. One police officer cut the tape, which attached Shatikova to the mast, but did not cut the rope, since this could have led the woman to fall.

At 6:30 pm three MCHS vehicles and two Special Forces vehicles participated in an "operation". According to Svetlana Stankevich: "Five men removed Cristina. The first got her by the hands,

then they put some hooks around her waist. Cristina shouted that she did not want to descend, and MCHS officers dragged her down by force. Special Forces soldiers pushed down from above and when she struggled they beat her head with their feet ". Cristina Shatikova was taken first to the 3rd urban, and then to the Provincial Hospital of Vitebsk. According to doctors, the young woman's blood pressure was elevated.

A mother of two children from the city of Mogilev, Cristina Shatikova is the cousin of Belorussian ONT journalist Dmitry Zavadsky, who disappeared in July 2000. Since March 2006, she has been one of the spontaneous leaders of the young people in Minsk's October Square. On March 24th, hundreds were detained and spent four days in the Minsk GUVB. During the spring of 2006 she was repeatedly detained by Minsk OMON.

From the 16th-18th of June in Minsk and Vitebsk there were numerous detentions of opposition youth.

*Source: PRIMA-News; June 20, 2006; <http://www.prima-news.ru/eng/>*

### **7. Belarus Opposition Activist Jailed For 3 Years for Slandering Lukashenko**

A Belarus court sentenced opposition activist Nikolai Razumov to three years in jail for slandering President Alexander Lukashenko, rights defender Vladimir Labkovich told the *AFP News Agency*.

During the presidential campaign of opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich, Razumov said that Lukashenko was involved in the disappearance of opposition politicians Viktor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky and Yuri Zakharenko.

Razumov had been behind bars since March 14.

"Three years is not such a big thing, he could have been given five. But he is very sick, he has only one lung and one-third of a stomach, he has often been on the edge of life and death, and this may become his death sentence," activist Ales Shutov told AFP.

Hundreds of opposition activists have been arrested since Lukashenko, who has ruled this ex-Soviet republic since 1994, was re-elected to a third term in office in March after a much-disputed vote that sparked protests in the Belarusian capital Minsk.

*Source: MosNews.Com, June 19, 2006; [www.mosnews.com](http://www.mosnews.com)*

### **8. Harassed Belarusian Newspaper Editor Seeks Asylum in Ukraine**

Reporters Without Borders today voiced support for the political asylum request which Andrei Shentorovich, the founder and editor of the Belarusian independent weekly *Mestnaya Gazeta*, made yesterday in Ukraine, according to an RWB press-release, forwarded to UNIAN news agency.

Constantly harassed by Belarusian authorities for years, Shentorovich finally left Belarus on 27 March, eight days after President Alexandre Lukashenko's controversial reelection. Based in the western city of Volkovysk, *Mestnaya Gazeta* was one of Belarus' few independent publications. Shentorovich had been publishing it since 2001.

"We are tired of seeing how the harassment of independent journalists continues to increase in Belarus," Reporters Without Borders said. "Shentorovich is not the only editor to have left the country in recent years to escape the systematic political repression. His decision is yet further evidence that dissident journalists are pushed to the limit and then forced out."

Shentorovich was arbitrarily arrested on 18 March, a day before the presidential election. He told Reporters Without Borders that the Volkovysk police forced him to get out of his car and hauled him off to prison. Charged with hooliganism, he was sentenced to three days in detention in a summary trial on 19 March.

The Belarusian authorities not only told him to stop publishing his articles but also prevented him from voting. More than 20 independent journalists fell victim to the wave of arrests that followed the presidential election and, like Shentorovich, were arbitrarily sentenced to several days in prison for hooliganism.

Shentorovich had published articles denouncing corruption by local officials. The authorities recently struck his newspaper from the commercial register and withdrew it from sale at news stands. At the same time, all local printers bowed to official pressure and refused to print it. Shentorovich had to change printers four times. Last year he began having it printed in the Russian city of Smolensk, a solution adopted by other newspapers harassed by the authorities such as BDG Delovaya Gazeta, which is now closed.

Shentorovich went on a hunger strike in October 2004 to protest against his newspaper's arbitrary suspension by the information ministry, which claimed that it did not have a legal address. Shentorovich remained on the hunger strike for three weeks, saying he was the victim of "the programmed disappearance of freedom of the press."

At least three Belarusian journalists have requested political asylum since 2004. They are Nikolai Posedko of the Svetlogorsk-based newspaper Region Vesti, who sought asylum in Sweden; Aleksandr Silish, the editor of the independent daily Narodnaya Gazeta, who sought asylum in Belgium; and Oleg Minish, who sought asylum in Ukraine last year after being accused by the secret service of insulting President Lukashenko in a cartoon on the [www.mult.3dway.org](http://www.mult.3dway.org) website.

*Source: MosNews.Com, June 16, 2006; www.mosnews.com*

#### **9. Belarus Jewish Leader Protests After Teacher Is Pressured for Purim Party**

A Jewish leader in Belarus has sent a letter to Belarusian officials arguing that a local prosecutor illegally forced a Jewish kindergarten teacher to remove Jewish symbols from classrooms.

Yakov Basin, the deputy leader of the country's Jewish community, sent the letter last month, after the prosecutor said Lyudmila Izakson-Bolotovskaya violated the law by holding Jewish religious celebrations inside the school, which is located in a government-owned building in the city of Mogilev.

But a Jewish official in the Belarusian capital of Minsk said it is unlikely that the development in Mogilev had anti-Semitic overtones.

"There have never been any problems between Jewish organizations and authorities in Mogilev," said Viktoria Brumina, executive director of the Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Organizations and Communities, an umbrella group. "To the contrary, the city officials always treated the Jewish community extremely well."

The prosecutor's action came after Purim celebrations in the kindergarten, featuring a children's Jewish musical group, were shown on local television news.

Prosecutors argued that Izakson-Bolotovskaya, who also leads the music group, violated the children's rights, and that television coverage of the event illegally propagated Judaism. The teacher was warned that she might be prosecuted if the actions are repeated.

According to local Jewish leaders, menorahs and Stars of David were removed from the school in the wake of the prosecutor's warning and at the request of the local education department.

Human rights watchers in the West have described Belarus' law on religion as one of the most restrictive in the former Soviet Union.

According to the law, only religious organizations can practice religious rituals and celebrations, and limits are placed on children's religious activities.

Because of the legal restrictions, Jewish institutions in Belarus that are not registered as synagogues have to exercise extra caution when holding Jewish celebrations such as Shabbat.

A Jewish official in Minsk said the city's main Jewish facility is no exception. The Minsk Jewish Community House is holding its weekly Shabbat celebrations by calling them a "Shabbat model," rather than just Shabbat.

Earlier this year, city authorities in the capital of Minsk refused permission for the local Chabad congregation to hold its Passover celebration at a municipal-owned Palace for Children and Youth, arguing that a religious event could not be permitted at a venue frequented by children. A country of 10 million people, Belarus is home to anywhere from 20,000 to 70,000 Jews.

*Source: Lev Krichevsky; Jewish Telegraphic Agency; June 15, 2006; <http://www.jta.org>*

#### **10. Viciebski Courier on the Verge of Bankruptcy**

*The Viciebski Courier-M* non-governmental newspaper celebrated its 16th anniversary on June 9, 2006. However, being deprived of possibilities to get distributed by subscription and through the news stalls, the media outlet has found itself on the verge of bankruptcy.

The newspaper editorial doesn't have funds to pay salaries to its employees. As a result, some of them have started begging for dismissal. The newspaper has huge liabilities on the rent payments. But for that, an individual entrepreneur is going to bring an enormous claim against the newspaper editorial, reportedly, for "publishing false information about an office building construction in the center of Viciebsk."

Valery Iskibayeu, the director of *Viciebski Courier Publishing House* Close Corporation told *BAJ* that the city authorities had been putting pressure upon the office holder in order to evict the editorial from the premises. The newspaper editorial delayed the rental payments for two months through financial difficulties, and the tenant intended to cancel the rental agreement with *Viciebski Courier-M* ahead of time. Fortunately, the editorial management coped with paying off the dept at the last moment.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; June 15; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

### **DOMESTIC**

#### **11. Lukashenka Seeks To Rewrite History Books**

On June 16, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka opened the new National Library in Minsk. Formerly located across the street from the president's residence, the new building, which resembles a space capsule, is located east of the city on the main road to Moscow and the international airport (*SB Belarus Segodnya*, June 17). Lukashenka spoke at the ceremony, declaring that the fundamental value of the current and future state is the people, and that the library -- "the fount of people's knowledge" -- is a symbol of contemporary Belarus. He also used the occasion to demand a new textbook on Belarusian history that will provide new and "more accurate" interpretations of the roles of Lenin and Stalin in Belarusian history.

The ceremonial opening of the library thus provided an opportunity for the president to address the historical record and the relationship of the Soviet state to modern Belarus. It is a theme to which he has returned frequently, but hitherto the government has not interfered noticeably in the content of history textbooks. It seems that is about to change. By and large the extant histories of Belarus published in the post-Soviet era are quite critical of Stalin's rule, particularly the purges and the errors he made in the early years of the German-Soviet war. Tatyana Pratka, the chairperson of the much-harassed Belarusian Helsinki Committee, also published a major work

on the purges in Belarus in 2002, although much of her research was undertaken prior to the Lukashenka era.

According to Lukashenka, "We should not forget these leaders [Lenin and Stalin] and turn them into idiots." Instead, he demanded a "truthful" version of the Soviet past that "elevates our people" (Interfax-Ukraine, June 16). In other words, there should be an official version of history that equates contemporary Belarus with the Stalin regime. Hitherto, the president has been content with symbolic references to the past as well as ceremonial occasions to mark the anniversaries of the Soviet victory in World War II. However, analysts in the country have noted the increasing prevalence of positive documentaries on Belarusian television about Stalin, a leader with which Lukashenka has now explicitly begun to compare himself.

There have been recent indicators of this deepening of the link with the early Soviet period in Belarus. Over the past two years, two new memorials have been created for the founder of the Soviet secret police (the Cheka). Felix Dzerzhinsky, a native Pole, was born in a village that is now part of the Belarusian state and which has been renamed Dzerzhinava. The first commemoration, in October 2004, was a monument in this same village, at which time Lukashenka attended the ceremony and referred to Dzerzhinsky as a "great man" (*MosNews*, October 7, 2004).

The second occasion was the unveiling in May 2006 of a new monument in Minsk, more than 10 feet high and an exact replica of the one that was torn down in Moscow after the failure of the 1991 putsch. Lukashenka and the chairman of the Belarusian KGB, Stepan Sukharenka attended the ceremony (*Charter 97*, May 26; AP, May 26). Minsk already has a small monument to Dzerzhinsky opposite KGB headquarters. Some two miles east along Independence (Skaryna) Avenue stands a statue of Mikhail Kalinin, Stalin's former chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. The central square is still dominated by a towering statue of Lenin. Soviet symbols remain and ominously they are being supplemented by new ones courtesy of the country's own dictatorial ruler.

Conversely, attempts to commemorate the victims of Stalin are impeded at every turn. The most poignant example is the Kurapaty Forest just north of Minsk, where in the late 1980s the archeologist and future founder of the Belarusian Popular Front, Zyanon Paznyak, rediscovered the mass graves of thousands of victims of the NKVD. A government inquiry followed but was inconclusive, and the Lukashenka government's initial interpretation after 1994 was that the Nazis had carried out the massacres. More recently the official line is that the bodies are those of 7,000 Belarusian Jews massacred by the Nazis during the wartime occupation (*ILHR*, May 2002). The president abolished the compensation fund for victims and families of Stalinist repression. In late 2005, vandals desecrated memorials erected at Kurapaty, and despite mass protests, particularly of youth groups, the authorities have long had plans to remove the forest in order to construct an underpass beneath the city of Minsk (*Charter 97*, January 9, 2002).

Lukashenka's first career was as a history teacher in the Mahileu region. Today he perceives close parallels between the careers of Soviet leaders and his own rule and is making an overt attempt to identify his own regime exclusively with a Soviet legacy. For the first time he is proposing to rewrite history textbooks so that Belarusian educators are obliged to follow suit. Although such policies in the context of the 21st century -- and the newly opened library -- seem absurd, the president is seeking to justify his authoritarian regime by venerating figures responsible for the mass elimination of the Belarusian intellectual elite in the 1930s while supplanting a national culture with a new version more firmly rooted in the Soviet past.

*Source: David Marples, The Jamestown Foundation; June 20, 2006; <http://jamestown.org/>*

## **12. Belarus President Opens New National Library**

Such a unique object as the National Library has been built due to professionalism of Belarusian specialists. Latest technologies and Belarus-made materials were used for this purpose,

president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko stated when answering questions of reporters during an official opening ceremony of the National Library.

According to the head of state, the main requirement was to build the high-quality library without assistance of foreign experts. Alexander Lukashenko told that the initial plans were considerably changed as the design was approved and innovated. "We were building such an object for the first time and now we know what it costs. The main thing is that there is everything Belarusian in the library - from ideas and technologies to materials and furniture".

Alexander Lukashenko has underlined that the result of such joint cooperation is the National Library, which will serve people.

*Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; June 16, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>*

### **13. Leader of Belarussian Catholics dismissed**

Minsk, June 15, Interfax - Pope Benedict XVI has dismissed the head of the Holy See in Belarus Cardinal Kazimir Sviontek, the Minsk eparchial department of the Holy See in Belarus told Interfax.

"Pope Benedict XVI has dismissed Cardinal Kazimir Sviontek," the officials said.

The department refused to comment on the dismissal.

Sviontek was appointed head of the Holy See in Belarus 11 years ago. In 1994 the Holy Father John Paul II made him a cardinal, the first in the post-Soviet territories.

In 1944 he was arrested and condemned to ten years in a labor camp, first in Siberia, then north of the polar circle near Vorkuta. After his release he returned to Belarus and became a priest at a Franciscan church in Pinsk.

The number of Catholic parishes has increased fourfold in the past 12 years and currently there are 432 parishes in four eparchies.

*Source: Interfax; June 15, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>*

## **REGIONAL**

### **14. Putin To Arrive in Belarus with Only One-Day Visit**

Russian President Vladimir Putin is to arrive in Minsk this Friday, June 23, to take part in the summit of Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Eurasec (Eurasian Economic Community). Moreover, five Presidents of other countries are to join the summit in Minsk.

Nevertheless, according to the initial plan Vladimir Putin` was to join President Lukashenka in the Russian-Belarusian manoeuvres "Shield of Union 2006" and hence should leave Minsk later, as the "KP v Bielorusii" informs. The most vivid military performance, which is a joint artillery and aviation exercise of the Russian and Belarusian units, will be held this Saturday, June 24, at the Obuz-Liesnovskiy training ground. According to the information agency BelTA, the OAMS heads intended to watch the exercise, but, as the "KP v Bielorusii" reports, Vladimir Putin will leave Minsk in the evening of June 23.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian government waits for Vladimir Putin's visit to Minsk impatiently. This is the second time that the Russian President arrives in the Belarusian capital after his first visit years ago. But this is not the most essential point - the gas price set by "Gazprom" at \$200 per 1 000 cubic tons, will be announced on Friday, June 23.

Belarusian officials remark constantly that the discussion on the gas price will be held at the highest level. And Putin himself left many issues rather ambiguous before leaving for Minsk. At first he said: "Why should we sell the gas at low prices at the expense of our aged and children?" And then he added: "However, we will keep on seeking a proper solution for Belarus. Actually we sell the gas to the Baltic States at lower prices than to Europe, although they have joined the EU and NATO".

Thus, Minsk will host the summit of the Presidents of Belarus, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan and Armenia. President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov will be the first to arrive in Minsk. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and leader of Tadjikistan Emomali Rakhmonov will come one day before the summit, on June 22. Others will arrive on the summit day, June 23.

*Source: Charter 97; June 21; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>*

### **15. Union State To Help Belarus Resolve Energy Pricing Issues**

There will be no issues in terms of pricing for any energy resources in Belarusian-Russian relations if the Union State is established, Deputy State Duma Speaker Sergei Baburin told journalists in Polotsk, Belarus, today. The countries should be making steps towards establishing the Union State in order to do away with concerns about the positions of certain companies, such as Gazprom, on these issues. Moreover, the Union State will have its own domestic prices within its limits, Baburin stressed. He believes that for this to be accomplished, the countries should adopt a Constitutional Act of the Union State, elect its own parliament, and take a few other steps. If that happens, this "quite obscure situation" will be resolved, according to Baburin.

*Source: RosBusinessConsulting; June 21, 2006; <http://www.rbcnews.com/>*

### **16. Russia, Belarus Hold Military Exercises**

Russia and Belarus have launched their largest ever joint military exercise, Union Shield 2006, with nearly 8,800 troops participating.

According to Russia's Itar-Tass news agency, 1,800 Russian troops will take part in the week long exercises, alongside 7,000 Belarusian troops.

Forty tanks, 180 armored infantry carriers, 140 anti-tank guided missiles, and 30 multiple launch rocket systems will be used in the large-scale exercises, according to Russian news agencies.

According to Itar-Tass, six Belarusian helicopters and 23 combat planes along with six Russian helicopters and 13 warplanes will participate in the maneuvers. The helicopters and war planes will include Su-30 multi-purpose fighters, Su-27SM interceptors, Su-24M bombers, Su-25M attack aircraft, Mig-29 fighters, Mi-8MT and Mi-24 helicopters, and two super modern Mi-28 Night Hunters. Russian Tu-160, Tu-95 and Tu-22M3 long-range aircraft will also participate.

Military observers from over 40 countries have been invited to attend the Union Shield 2006.

According to Russian officials, the objective of the exercises is to demonstrate the interoperability of a joint regional contingent in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which unites Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tadjikistan.

"The exercise was designed to coordinate the issues of defense of the Russia-Belarus and test the quality of the united air defense system the two countries are creating", the two countries' officials said in joint statement.

The exercises will be aimed at protection of the borders of Belarus and Russia as well as other four countries.

In other news, Russian media reported that a joint Russian-Belarusian center for servicing air defense equipment will be established in eastern Belarus in the near future to provide services for the two countries' militaries as well as third parties using Soviet- and Russian-made air defense systems.

In the meantime, Russian President Vladimir Putin last week admitted there had been no real progress towards creating a Russia-Belarus Union State, Itar-Tass reported. // By *ISN Security Watch staff, Itar-Tass, RIA Novosti*

*Source: ISN Security Watch; June 20, 2006; <http://www.isn.ethz.ch>*

### **17. Belarus Sold 19 Tanks to Azerbaijan in 2005**

Belarus sold 19 T-72 tanks to Azerbaijan last year. This is stated in the report on sale of ordinary weapons in the world weapon market that Belarus presented to the UN (APA).

According to the report, Belarus sold weapons to Slovakia and Jibuti last year. The volume of the contract for weapons sale is not made public. According to the UN calculations, last year Belarus sold the least amount of weapons in the past ten years. It is specialized in sale of armored tank, planes, helicopters, artillery systems, missiles to foreign states.

*Source: Azeri-Press Agency; June 19, 2006; <http://en.apa.az>*

### **18. Putin Admits Progress in Building Russia-Belarus State Absent**

Russian President Vladimir Putin admits the absence of real progress in the efforts to build a Russia-Belarus Union State, but the union cannot be forced on Belarus. Meanwhile, the real integration is going on, particularly in the format of the Eurasian Economic Community and the CIS Common Economic Space.

"We have no tension with Belarus, but there is also no progress in the construction of the Union State, anyway within those terms and in the form that we agreed on," Putin regretted.

"But integration is going on," Putin said, meaning the creation of the Eurasian Economic Community and the Common Economic Space. As for the Common Economic Space, the documents are not signed yet, but the work is going on, he pointed out. "This may take place before autumn," Putin believes.

"Nothing can be stepped up and, moreover, imposed," Putin said in reply to a journalist's query about the relations with Belarus. "It should be realised what we want and be patient," he remarked.

*Source: Itar-Tass; June 16, 2006; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>*

### **19. Russia, Belarus Set To Create Air Defense Servicing Center**

A joint Russian-Belarusian center for servicing air defense equipment will be established in eastern Belarus in the near future, a senior executive with a Russian defense group said Thursday.

Viktor Vishchuk, the first deputy general director of the Defense Systems holding, said the center would provide services for Belarusian and Russian military, and for the third parties that operate Soviet- and Russian-made air defense systems, reports TREND.

"In particular, the Belarus-based center could repair and service the equipment of the Kaliningrad special defense district, which has a strong air defense contingent," the executive said.

The core enterprise of the new service center will be a military electronics repair plant in Borisov, about 50 miles from the Belarusian capital, Minsk.

Russia's main arms exporter, Rosoboronexport, and Defense Systems will also participate in the project, Vishchuk said.

*Source: A. Mammadov, Trend; June 16, 2006; <http://www.trend.az>*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **20. Russia Legislators Criticize US Sanctions Against Belarus**

Members of the Russian Federation Council upper house of parliament criticize a new set of sanctions against Belarus by the USA, saying these steps are an echo of the Cold War and affect Russia's interests.

The U.S. Treasury Department announced on Monday that the U.S. banking system is expected to block assets of the Belarussian leadership, including the president, the Security Council secretary, the justice and interior ministers, the chief of the Belarussian KGB, the head of the Central Electoral Commission and the head of the State Television and Radio Co.

In mid-May, the USA together with the European Union already took punitive measures against Minsk. Members of the Belarussian government and connected with them people were banned entry to the USA and the EU on any visas.

The chairman of the Federation Council's committee for CIS affairs, Vadim Gustov, believes such policy "is becoming ridiculous nowadays" as the Belarussian leadership is in no way connected with the United States and hardly has financial assets there.

The chairman of the committee for science, culture, education, health and ecology, Viktor Shudegov, echoed him. "Sanctions cannot be introduced only because someone does not like some other person," he said. He brought to mind the fact that the Belarussian people had elected Alexander Lukashenko as president legally, thus showing their attitude to him and the situation in the republic.

The first deputy chairman of the committee for federal affairs and regional policy, Valery Kadokhov, drew attention to the fact that the United States is not pressuring Georgia and Ukraine, "where political and economic dissensions are underway".

"All kinds of declarations, sanctions, instructions against Belarus not only from the USA but also from Europe, smell of the Cold War times," said the deputy chairman of the committee for international affairs, Vassily Likhachev.

Russian experts connected with preparations for the G8 summit in St. Petersburg, believe the issue of democracy in Belarus can be among the most sensitive issues to be discussed at the summit.

*Source: Itar-Tass; June 21, 2006; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>*

### **21. Russia Getting Ready for G8**

Almost no one remembers now that the last presidential election in Belarus, which was held on March 19, 2006, had been previously scheduled for July 2006, during the G8 summit in St. Petersburg.

When Moscow and Minsk suddenly discovered that Belarus presidential election and the G8 summit mystically coincide, and, apparently, were horrified by the coincidence, then they reasonably decided to move these two events as far away from each other as possible. We now see what came out of it. US sanctions imposed on Belarus leaders only three weeks before the G8, indicate that such "technical measures" will not remove Belarus problem from US-Russia relations. It is clear that visa sanctions cannot really damage Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

Yet, the sanctions are a certain symbolic gesture of Washington. Its meaning is obvious: democratic reorganization of Belarus is inevitably becoming G. W. Bush's new "European project". We have already learned that current US administration does not see itself without such projects, regarding them as the central meaning of its existence in the outer world, isn't it so? Thus, today's sanctions will be inevitably followed by tens of major and minor steps, disguised as a long-term purposeful strategy, which will be shaking Lukashenko's regime from within. Sooner or later, the regime will be shattered. This pattern is already working in G. W. Bush's Middle East (Iranian) and Far East (North Korean) projects.

It is high time to consider what it will mean to Russia. It is well known that Lukashenko's regime exists owing to Russia. It is in Russia, and not China or Cuba, for instance, where the main sources of Lukashenko support are, regardless of anyone's personal attitude to Lukashenko in Moscow. Thus, if Russia prefers to leave its Belarus policy as it is, it will become more and more costly for Russia. Moscow will have to make more efforts and spend more money to keep Lukashenko afloat. But the advantages of such policy will become less evident and more questionable.

In the course of preparation for the G8, Moscow at some point decided that its main task is to lead the summit decently and without conflicts. Russia thinks it will be easier after the summit. Moscow has taken some conciliatory steps in what concerns Russian NGOs, obviously for the upcoming summit. It was another attempt of taking "technical measures" to solve the problem, without changing its essence. However, it is clear that Russia's relations with the U.S. and western Europe will continue after the summit, and Moscow will not escape dotting the i's concerning both Belarus and Iran, and other issues. Russia should have no illusions—it will not be easier after the G8 summit.

*Source: Sergey Strokan, Kommersant; June 21, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>*

## **22. EU Should Block Belarus-Russia Union, Minsk Opposition Says**

The EU and US should say at the G8 summit in July that any Belarusian referendum on a proposed state union with Russia would be illegal, Belarus opposition leader Aleksander Milinkevich told EUobserver on an impromptu visit to Brussels on Tuesday (20 June).

"I really want democratic countries, especially the EU, to say they cannot and will never recognise any referendum in a dictatorship," he said. "I hope this subject will be raised in St Petersburg, not just by the European countries, but also Canada, Japan and the US."

The current threat by Russian energy giant Gazprom to triple Belarusian gas prices in 2007 is an attempt to force president Aleksander Lukashenko to honour 1999 commitments to join Russia, Mr Milinkevich explained, saying "We see in this a danger of Anschluss [annexation]."

Mr Lukashenko told Russian agency Interfax on 8 June "Our country would never merge into the Russian Federation," but denies any link between gas prices and a state union, while negotiating the sale of Belarus gas pipelines to Gazprom to help keep hikes at bay.

Mr Milinkevich explained that a Belarus gas crisis would be bad for the EU and Russia, saying "There are some cool heads in the Kremlin who understand that a budgetary crisis in Belarus is dangerous for Russia and its neighbours, affecting their economies, creating migration."

But with just 5 to 6 percent support among Belarusian people for joining Russia, the worst case scenario would be a Lukashenko u-turn followed by a fake referendum backing the move, he added:

"This would definitely provoke very serious disturbances. There is a huge number of people, especially among the young, who could never live with the fact that their fatherland has ceased to be. The partisan resistance for which Belarus was famous in the past would not be good for anybody today, but it could rise up again."

EU plays wait and see

Mr Milinkevich made the remarks after meeting European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso in Brussels, with Mr Barroso reportedly expressing support for Belarusian independence but "without going into details."

An EU diplomat said there is "no chance" of an EU declaration prejudging the results of a hypothetical referendum in the future, on the basis that "due to some miracle" the referendum later takes place in a free and fair manner.

The EU does not know the current status of Belarus-Russia state union talks, with discussions carried out "in secret" by unnamed officials on the basis of documents that do not reach the public domain.

But the EU diplomat believes "the Russian lion is keen to swallow this big chunk of meat in small bites" by first proposing a currency union or a military union while keeping the "emblems" of Belarusian sovereignty intact.

"We could reach a tipping point quite soon - a situation where Russia sees state union as its last chance to keep Belarus from drifting toward the EU, while Lukashenko turns to the EU for help against Russia, giving rise to some kind of democratic transformation."

His analysis comes after Mr Lukashenko made a conciliatory speech toward the EU while meeting the commission's Belarus envoy - Ian Boag - on 14 June, saying Minsk would make "two or three steps" to meet the EU if Brussels made one step, Russian agency *RIA Novosti* reported.

First step would be easy

Back in Brussels, Mr Milinkevich urged Minsk to take a first step toward Europe by releasing the 17 long-term political prisoners thrown in jail after the 19 March election protests. "They could do this in one hour."

He also supported MEPs' efforts to talk the commission into funding a European Democracy Foundation that could channel EU cash to unregistered Belarusian NGOs, bypassing the current commission "bureaucracy."

"Such a foundation is missing in Europe," the opposition leader stated.

Mr Milinkevich explained the EU visa ban and asset freeze on 37 Belarusian politicians has "damaged morale" in president Lukashenko's circles, adding that Turkey is considering taking the EU line - after the US, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and the other western Balkan states jumped on board.

"Do not expect any sudden change in Belarus," he warned, however. "Dictators don't fall in a day. This is not Georgia or Ukraine. This is more like Poland under Solidarnosc."

*Source: Andrew Rettman, EUobserver; June 20, 2006; <http://euobserver.com>*

### **23. Belarus Says Give "Assets" Away to US Needy**

Belarus's Foreign Ministry on Tuesday dismissed as meaningless Washington's imposition of a freeze on its assets in the United States and suggested the "mythical funds" be sent to families in need.

President George W. Bush ordered the sanctions in response to what the United States and the European Union denounce as Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko's fraudulent re-election in March.

The sanctions, adding to a visa ban imposed a month ago, target Lukashenko and top officials of his government, barred from gaining access to assets in the United States. U.S. companies and individuals cannot conduct transactions with them.

"This decision pursues an old aim -- spreading false information about our country and discrediting its leadership," ministry spokesman Andrei Popov told Reuters.

"We propose that the United States send the mythical funds to which they are referring to needy U.S. citizens."

Western states accuse Lukashenko of hounding the opposition, closing down media and rigging elections since the mid-1990s.

The March election, in which Lukashenko was credited with 83 percent of the vote to six for his nearest rival, sparked unprecedented protests up to 10,000-strong.

Tolerated by police for four days, the protests were eventually dispersed and more than 600 activists sent to prison for up to 15 days for public order offences. Opposition leaders were handed similar sentences after subsequent protests.

Bush's order on Monday applied to Lukashenko and nine other officials, including the justice minister, the head of Belarussian state television, the interior minister and the president's national security adviser.

Belarus has already imposed retaliatory measures in response to the Western visa ban against Lukashenko and more than 30 officials, without providing any list of those affected.

*Source: Reuters; June 20, 2006; <http://today.reuters.com/news/>*

#### **24. U.S. Sanctions Touch 10 Belarusian Officials, Including Aleksandr and Viktor Lukashenko**

As we informed earlier, U.S. introduced the financial sanctions on President Aleksandr Lukashenko and other Belarusian officials. Starting today all their assets found in the U.S. will be frozen.

The following persons have got into the list:

1. Aleksandr Lukashenko (President of the Republic of Belarus)
2. Natalia Petkevich (Deputy Head of the Administration of the President)
3. Viktor Golovanov (Minister of Justice)
4. Aleksandr Zimovsky (Deputy Chairman of State Broadcaster Belteleradio)
5. Stepan Sukhorenko (Chief of the Belarusian KGB)
6. Viktor Sheiman (State Secretary of the Belarusian State Security Council)
7. Dmitry Pavlichenko (Head of the Special Rapid Reaction Unit (SOBR))
8. Vladimir Naumov (Minister of Internal Affairs)
9. Lidiya Ermoshina (Head of the Central Election Commission)
10. Viktor Lukashenko (Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs).

Let us remind you that the decision of the American authorities immediately blocks all the property and shares in the property of these indicated persons. It forbids the American companies and individuals to conduct transactions with the listed persons. Besides, the access to any assets in the U.S. is forbidden to the indicated officials, and it is forbidden to American financial institutions to provide to these persons any financial services.

*[Text translated by the Editors]*

*Source: AFN; June 20, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/>*

## **25. U.S. Blocks Assets of Belarus President**

The Bush administration moved Monday to clamp down financially on Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko as well as other government officials.

The Treasury Department added Lukashenko to its list of specially designated nationals, meaning that any assets belonging to Lukashenko found in the U.S. must be blocked and Americans are forbidden from doing business with him.

Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, is often branded by Western countries as "Europe's last dictator." He won a third term in March 19 elections deemed fraudulent by Western governments.

After the election, the White House said it would enact targeted travel restrictions and financial sanctions against Lukashenko. U.S. officials said Lukashenko's victory resulted from election fraud and human rights abuses.

In February, the Bush administration linked Lukashenko's government to the murders of a pro-democracy businessman and an independent journalist.

Other Belarus government officials also added to the United States' blocking list include: the minister of justice; the national security adviser; the minister of internal affairs, chief of the Belarusian KGB; chief of the central commission for elections and national referendums and the head of the Belarusian State Television and Radio Co.

The department didn't elaborate on its action.

*Source: Jeannine Aversa, The Associated Press; June 19, 2006; <http://www.ap.org/>*

## **26. Macedonia Joins EU Sanctions against Belarus**

Skopje. Macedonia is among ten states that joined economic sanctions imposed by the European Union against 36 high Belarus officials, including the President Alexander Lukashenko, the Macedonian agency *Makfax* reported.

On 18 May, EU adopted decision on freezing the assets of Belarus officials, due to alleged fraud on 19 March elections and break-up of opposition demonstrations.

Besides Macedonia, EU decision was also joined by Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Romania, Norway, Serbia and Croatia, the European Union Council announced.

*Source: FOCUS News Agency; June 16, 2006; <http://www.focus-fen.net/>*

## **27. Sudan, Belarus Ink Military Cooperation Agreement**

Sudan and Belarus inked a military cooperation protocol covering training, exchange of experiences, and military science fields.

Minister of Defence Gen. Abdelrahim Mohamed Hussein signed for Sudan while Minister of National Defence of Belarus signed for Belarus side.

In his address to the joint meeting between the two sides, Hussein praised the cooperation the Armed Forces delegation found from the command of the Belarus armed forces, affirming that the cooperation between the two countries will witness tangible progress in military cooperation and other domains.

Minister of Defense of Belarus, on his part, expressed the desire of his country to boost bilateral relations in all spheres.

It is to be noted that Minister of National Defence concluded a three-day visit to Belarus Thursday during which he held talks with Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs of Belarus, aimed to strengthen political, economic and military relations with special focus on qualifying the Armed Forces making use of Belarus's experiences in this connection.

Belarus hopes to boost ties with Sudan with an eye to increasing industrial exports and playing a role in developing the African country's oilfields.

On 7 February 2006, Sudan and Belarus signed a memo of understanding on boosting cooperation between the two countries in technological, scientific, agricultural and commercial fields, during the visit of Belarus Foreign Minister to Khartoum.

Also, the Belarusian Minsk Tractor Plant works with Sudanese companies in 1990. It has provided that country with 1,886 Belarus tractors since.

Belarus has exported weapons and military hardware to Sudan since 1996.

In 1997 Belarus supplied Sudan with six Russian-made Mi-24B attack helicopters and nine Russian-made T-55 battle tanks in 1996.

In 2003, it supplied that country with nine BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, 39 BRDM-2 armoured reconnaissance vehicles, 16 D-30 howitzer guns, 10 Gvozdika self-propelled howitzers and six Grad multiple rocket launchers of two different versions.

In its 2004 report sent to the UN Register of Conventional Arms, the government notes that it supplied Sudan with 21 BRDM-2 armoured reconnaissance vehicles, seven BTR-80 and 10 BTR-70 armoured personnel carriers and a BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicle.

*Source: Sudan Tribune; June 15, 2006; <http://www.sudantribune.com/>*

## **28. "Europe's Last Dictator" Lukashenko Urges EU to Abandon Confrontation**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko Thursday urged the EU to abandon its confrontational stance toward the former Soviet republic, *RIA Novosti* news agency reported.

The EU in April approved a ban on entry to the EU against 31 Belarusian officials, after presidential elections in the country in March were declared fraudulent by international observers and opposition leaders. The EU also decided in May to freeze the accounts of Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington.

"I propose going forward. We should give up confrontation and realize that a proud and freedom-loving nation lives in Belarus, which will not put up with being dictated to by anyone," Lukashenko said.

The Belarusian leader said while receiving the credentials of Ian Boag, the head of the European Commission's Delegation to Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, that his country would make "two or three steps" to meet the EU halfway if the union made at least one step.

Lukashenko said that if Europe wanted to see a prosperous Belarus, then "we will make efforts in that direction."

"But we will never bear uncivilized lunges against our state," he said.

He stressed that the common values the EU preaches had always been the cornerstone of Belarusian policy, but added that Belarus would only follow this path if it was in line with the country's interests and did not contradict its constitution and laws.

Boag said he could not deny that there were certain difficulties between the EU and Belarus, but added that proposals to open a mission for the Commission of European Union — the EU's executive arm — in Minsk would help resolve them.

He said Belarus should accept and follow the European Union's values, and then it would be able to use all the opportunities afforded under the EU's policy of neighborly relations.

*Source: MosNews.Com, June 15, 2006; www.mosnews.com*

## **BUSINESS**

### **29. Belarus Will Have 6 mln Mobile Phones Users by the End of 2010**

According to the programme of Social and Economical development of Belarus for 2006-2010 adopted by President Lukashenko on June 9, 2006, the number of mobile phone users is to be increased by 1,5 and totaled 6 mln.

At present, there are 4 mobile operators in Belarus with 4,8 mln subscribers.

It is also planned to extend fixed telephone network and to achieve telephone density of 38 per 100 people (in 2005 the indicator was 35 for 100 inhabitants of the country).

The programme states the priorities of telecommunications sector development: liberalization of the telecommunications market within the framework of Belarus's joining WTO, telecommunications networks' modernization, development of Belarusian segment of Internet, more effective mail services, introduction of electronic workflow, e-commerce and other IT applications.

*Source: Portalino; June 21, 2006;*

*<http://www.portalino.it/nuke/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=16571>*

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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.

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