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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Belarusian Opposition Figure's Trial Opens

The trial of Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin began today in Minsk.

Kazulin, a former presidential candidate, stands accused of disturbing the peace and incitement to riot during protests in Minsk in the run-up to and following Belarus' presidential election in March.

He was arrested during a March 25 protest against the poll in which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was reelected.

The opposition and Western governments say the election was fraudulent.

If convicted, Kazulin could face up to six years in prison. The opposition has denounced the trial as political.

Kazulin's supporters and many journalists were unable to enter the courtroom. But 10 European Union ambassadors forced their way in after challenging police to use force against the diplomats.

A crowd of more than 100 opposition supporters, led by top Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich, had gathered outside the courthouse as the hearing began. // (Belapan, dpa

Source: RFE/RL; July 6, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

2. An Independent Polatsk Newspaper *Khimik* Stopped Being Printed Because of Financial Difficulties

The edition's editor-in-chief Syarhey Balai explained that the newspaper had been facing financial difficulties because in December 2005 Belposhta cancelled their contract and excluded the newspaper from the subscription catalogue. In February 2006 Vitsiebskabsayuzdruk also cancelled the contract with the edition because of "financial inexpediency".

The edition had to organize its own system of distribution but the problem was that it had already lost half of its readership because it was impossible to conduct a normal subscription campaign - in December 2005 the edition's print run was 4500 issues while not long ago it was only about 300 issues.

At the end of last year the newspaper was cooperating with a number of city shops but later the owners of those shops refused to continue the cooperation because of some "financial difficulties", - said Syarhey Balai.

The newspaper will try to find a way out of the current situation. Probably the editorial staff will be creating an Internet version of the edition.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; July 5; <http://www.baj.ru/>

3. UCPB Activist Detained in Miadzel

Andrei Abalevich, activist of the United Civic Party of Belarus, was distributing leaflets during the official Independence Day meeting on July 3.

The action called We Are Together, was meant to help people solve their daily problems. Abalevich had managed to distribute several hundred leaflets, when he was detained and taken to Miadzel District Police Department. As a result, the police were not able to find the article of the Criminal Code that Abalevich had violated. He was made to give written explanations and finally released.

Source: The Human Rights Center Viasna; July 4, 2006; <http://www.spring96.org/en>

4. Another Belarusian Oppositionist Goes To Serve 'Restricted-Freedom' Term

Opposition youth activist Artur Finkevich left Minsk on June 29 for Mahilyou, where penitentiary authorities are to determine where he will serve his "restricted-freedom" term, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. In May, Finkevich was sentenced to two years of enforced labor for spraying antipresidential graffiti on walls in the Belarusian capital.

"Restricted-freedom" punishment, known in post-Soviet prison slang as "khimiya," means that a convict has to live in a sort of prison barracks, work for a specified enterprise or organization in a designated area, and report to the barracks administration at an appointed time every day. Three other Belarusian oppositionists are currently serving "restricted-freedom" terms: Mikola Statkevich, Pavel Sevyarynets, and Andrey Klimau.

Source: RFE/RL; June 30, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

5. Distributors of Independent Newspapers Fined in Vitsiebsk

On June 26 the Chyhunachny District Court of Vitsiebsk fined Barys Hamajda and Ales Mudrychenka (distributors of independent newspapers), - informed *the Vitebskij Kurjer M* newspaper.

B. Hamajda distributes such newspapers as *Vitebskij Kurjer M*, *Nasha Niva* and the *ARCHE* magazine in the centre of the city every day. On June 26 at about 1 p.m. policemen approached him and asked to show them his documents. He refused to do it and they brought him to the Chyhunachny District Police Office. He was kept there for about an hour and a protocol was drawn up according to part 1 of art. 148 of the Administrative Code (conducting trade in an inappropriate place). On the same day he was fined for 1 base amount 931 thousand BRB).

Ales Mudrychenka was detained on the same day in the same place. He was selling the latest issues of *Vitebskij Kurjer M* near a self-made white-red-white poster with the letters *VK* on it. Mydrychenka says that at about 12 p.m. policemen came up to him and demanded his documents which he did not have on him at that moment. Then he was taken to the Chyhunachny District Department of the Interior where he was searched. He spent there about three hours and then was taken to the Chyhunachny District Court. He was also fined for one base amount, - informs *Vitebskij Kurjer M*.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; June 29; <http://www.baj.ru/>

6. Foreigners Spend Months Awaiting Deportation in Belarussian Prisons

Citizens of Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Ukraine, Moldavia, Armenia, Georgia, and Syria spend months awaiting deportation in temporary holding units in Minsk and Vitebsk. They are kept in unsanitary conditions. This was reported on June 20th in Minsk by opposition youth leader Cristina Shatikova.

Shatikova called on foreign embassies accredited in Minsk to focus attention on the plight of prisoners in Belarus.

Cristina Shatikova said that in the Okrestina Street Minsk GUV D station, and in the temporary holding station in Vitebsk, she saw citizens of foreign states, who, according to her, "have spent years waiting for deportation to their native land". In the Vitebsk station, where Cristina spent the nights of June 18 and June 19, citizens of Lithuania, Azerbaijan, Moldavia, Armenia, India, Syria, and Ukraine are awaiting deportation. "They were all are located on the same floor where I was being held. Citizens of foreign states were also awaiting deportation on other floors. They live in subhuman conditions. In the area where I was held, lice was discovered". Shatikova also reported that where she was held, there were two citizens of Ukraine who had been expecting

deportation for approximately one year, and a citizen of Russia, a gypsy by nationality, who is pregnant and has two infants at home—twins.

Cristina Shatikova believes that there is a similar situation in all prisons in Belarus. "The most terrible thing is that these people do not know about their rights", says the activist. "People who are more politically informed and competent demand counsel, and are deported within a short period. People who are awaiting deportation for years do not know about their rights", emphasized Shatikova.

Source: *Prima News*; June 23, 2006; <http://www.prima-news.ru/eng/>

7. *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi* Got Fined 60 Million BRB

On June 22 the Savetski District Court of Minsk partially answered to the claim of the head of the State Customs Committee Aliaksandar Shpileuski against the editor of *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi* - BelKP-PRESS. The newspaper was fined 60 million BRB (around EUR 22,500).

The reason for the suit was the fact that on May 4 the newspaper printed a photo of A. Shpileuski, the head of Belarusian State Custom House Committee, under the interview with Mikhail Shpileuski (the agent of Aliaksandar Gleb, a Belarusian football-player) by mistake. The editors contacted A. Shpileuski immediately and apologized to him. They also sent him a letter asking to meet them. The explanation of the mistake was published in the following issue of the edition. The conflict seemed to have been settled and that is why journalists did not expect A. Shpileuski to lodge a complaint and ask for 80 million BRB as a compensation for moral damage.

Ludmila Martsinchyk, the lawyer of *KP*, says that the statement of M. Shpileuski published in the edition was dedicated to sports and nobody understands why the official considered it to be great moral damage. The edition is going to lodge a complaint.

"It is difficult to comment on the problem, - says the edition's Editor-in-chief Yulia Slutskaja. – The only thing I can say is that the sums of fines demanded by our officials testify to the fact that they "aim too high".

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; June 23; <http://www.baj.ru/>

8. Belarusian Opposition Leader Refuses To Eat Jail Food

Former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who is currently held in custody in Zhodzina near Minsk, has refused to eat jail food, *Belapan* reported on June 22, quoting Kazulin's lawyer. Kazulin's decision reportedly follows the jail administration's rejection of his request for dietary meals. Earlier this week, prosecutors referred Kazulin's case to a district court in Minsk. Kazulin, 50, has been held in Zhodzina since March 25. Prosecutors accuse him of organizing group actions that disturbed public peace and of two counts of hooliganism.

The former charge relates to an opposition rally in Minsk on March 25, during which Kazulin called on demonstrators to march toward a detention center where the authorities were holding several hundred antigovernment protesters following the flawed presidential election on March 19. The hooliganism charge originates from an incident that occurred on February 17, when Kazulin elbowed his way into the National Press Center to hold a news conference there as a newly registered presidential candidate, and from his attempt on March 2 to register for the government-organized All-Belarusian People's Assembly. Kazulin was severely beaten by police on March 2.

Source: *RFE/RL*; June 23, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

9. Vadzim Dounar Got Fined

On June 21 the Leninski District Court of Minsk returned Vadzim Dounar (a Belarusian journalist from a Russian newspaper *Kommersant*) guilty of misdemeanor and fined him for 1 base amount

(31 thousand BRB). That is the end of the case that started in April when Vadzim Dounar was detained near the building of the President Administration.

V. Dounar informed BAJ that the hearing lasted about 7 minutes. The judge listened to Illya Plotnikau (a presidential security member) who stooped the journalist on April 21 and called the police. (Plotnikau did not tell the journalist who he was and only explained that it was "an official secret"). Mr. Plotnikau claimed the V. Dounar was using bad language in the street and was also insulting the President. The judge Yulia Shumskaja returned V. Dounar guilty of violating art. 156 of the Administrative Code and fined him for 1 base amount.

The journalist mentioned that he had not received any notice of appointment. Only his lawyer Larysa Atamanchuk was informed about the hearing. He decided to come to court in order "to put an end to the case". The statute of limitation of the case finished today.

V. Dounar thinks that I. Plotnikau might have been present at the meetings that took place after the presidential election and probably saw him there. "He most likely recognized me and decided "to take revenge" on me. Probably he simply does not like journalists". V. Dounar is not going to lodge a complaint because he "is bored" with the case.

Vadzim Dounar was detained in Minsk on April 21 at about 1 p.m. He and his acquaintance were heading for an Internet-cafe in Karl Marx Street (which is not far from the President's Residence). They were passing by a group of people in mufti when one of them asked them to stop. V. Dounar and his acquaintance were detained and delivered to the Leninski District of Minsk Department of the Interior. Vadzim Dounar spent several hours in the police office. At about 6 p.m. he was called to the investigator and a protocol was drawn up. It was written that he had insulted A. Lukashenka. After that V. Dounar was sent to a cell (his belt and shoe laces had been taken away). But later another protocol was drawn up. He was accused of misdemeanor. Then the journalist was released and told to return on April 24. The person detained together with V. Dounar was released at about 4 p.m. No accusation was brought against him. The hearing was postponed several times because the protocol and the report of the police did not match.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; June 22; <http://www.baj.ru/>

DOMESTIC

10. The Smoke of Independence

Belarus capital, Minsk, celebrated the Independence Day yesterday. The city-folk saw a traditional military parade accompanied by a speech of President Alexander Lukashenko. Faithful to his rigid rhetoric, the president declared the Army stands ready to counter "external aggression." Lukashenko was equally ardent in his previous address made two days earlier, when he warned Russia that his republic "won't sell for nothing the national enterprises, including Beltransgaz."

During the military parade, 2.5 thousand officers and soldiers of Minsk marched in formation along the central street of the city – the Winners' Prospect. The Belaya Rus (White Rus) squadron of six L-39s flew over Minsk to contribute to the significance of the event. The planes were leaving a tail of red and green smoke – the colors of the state flag of Belarus. The final chord was the concert, where 144 military participated.

The celebration dedicated to the Independence Day started in Belarus on July 1 actually. On that day, Lukashenko addressed the grand meeting in the Palace of the Republic in Minsk. "Belarus won't sell for nothing the national enterprises, including Beltransgaz," Lukashenko said. "We don't oppose sharing the enterprise with Gazprom, but no one may sell it for nothing, even the president. The market price must be paid."

Source: Kommersant; July 4, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

11. Belarusian Writers Forced To Liquidate Library, Quit Office

Belarusian authors on June 26 moved several thousand books from the library of the Union of Belarusian Writers (SBP) headquarters in Minsk to a special SBP repository, Belapan reported. More than 35,000 books remaining in the SPB library will be transferred to a provincial library at a later date. Earlier this year, a court ordered the SPB to vacate its headquarters, arguing that an appropriate lease agreement between the SPB and Presidential Property Management, which owns the building that houses the SPB offices, expired in January 2003.

In addition, the court confiscated SPB property and ordered that the union pay some 55 million rubles (\$25,000) to Presidential Property Management as compensation for occupying the premises after the expiration of the lease. In November 2005, a group of Belarusian writers founded the Union of Writers of Belarus, an organization widely seen as loyal to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Belarusian state media have branded the SPB, which marked its 70th anniversary last year, as politicized and nationalistic.

Source: RFE/RL; June 27, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

REGIONAL

12. Human Rights Standards Are Much Lower in Belarus than in Russia

The secretary general of the Council of Europe is interviewed by *Kommersant*

The summer session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly ended last week. Russia was the chairman of the assembly for the first time at that session. *Kommersant* correspondent Nargiz Asadova asked Council of Europe General Secretary Terry Davis to comment on the outcome of the session.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov did not come to the first session of the PACE under Russia's chairmanship. Some members took that as a slap in the face. How do you feel about it?

I know that Mr. Lavrov had business in Paris then that could not be put off. I was very satisfied when [Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander] Grushko came to Strasbourg.

The fourth resolution obliging Russia to ratify the sixth protocol on the abolition of the death penalty was passed by the PACE this year. Does the CE have any other mechanisms to convince Russia to change its legislation on the death penalty?

It's not a matter of passing resolutions. Russia joined the CE ten years ago and accepted a number of obligations before the CE. One of the most important was to abolish the death penalty legislatively. Of course, Russia imposed a moratorium on the death penalty, and we note with satisfaction that there has not been a single case of the use of the death penalty since the moratorium was imposed. The CE has to convince Russia that it should meet those obligations that it still hasn't met.

If it doesn't do it, could the Assembly deprive Russia of its membership in the CE?

The Assembly cannot discontinue Russia's membership in the CE, but the Cabinet of Ministers can. That is envisaged in the charter, but it has never been done. I can tell you for sure that the possibility of depriving Russia of its membership in the CE has not been discussed in the Cabinet of Ministers yet, even though Russia has not met its obligations. When I met with representatives of the Russian authorities, they always assured me that Russia is about to abolish the death penalty.

At the current session of the PACE, Latvia was taken off monitoring. Russian authorities hold that that was premature, since Latvia continues to violate the rights of its Russian-speaking minority. Maybe monitoring should be restored?

The monitoring procedure was begun and ended by the PACE. It is within its competence. You most likely know that the PACE is made up of representatives from the parliaments of the CE countries. They are independent. Neither I nor anyone else can dictate decisions to the PACE. As for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia, I have repeatedly expressed my concern for them. I even visited Latvia for that purpose and made a report on my visit. In my view, the conditions of the Russian-speaking minority in that country have improved since then. Of course, the best path for the Russian-speaking minority is to become Latvian citizens. Then they can fight for improvements using democratic methods. Those who convince Russian-speakers not to become Latvian citizens do a disservice to both the Russian and Latvian communities in Latvia.

At the beginning of 2000, Russia proposed unified standards for monitoring elections. Why doesn't the CE want to consider Russia's proposal?

The Russian representatives have just not been able to convince their European colleagues and representatives of other countries of the need to adopt unified elections standards. Such standards exist in the world, and there are plenty of them, in general.

The CE plans to continue its dialog with Belarusian authorities. But how can you invite Belarusian authorities to visit if the majority of them are on the blacklist and aren't allowed into Europe?

We will carry on that dialog in Minsk. The Belarusians claim that they are ready for negotiations. We have had similar dialogs before, a CE representative was in Minsk and representatives of the Belarusian opposition have been in Strasbourg. That went on for two or three years, but I have to say that the results were disappointing. And I have to note regretfully that standards and norms of human rights and basic freedoms are much lower in Belarus than in Russia.

The PACE recently passed a resolution obliging Russia to free two Moldovans from prison in Transdniestria. Russia considers the demand misaddressed. What do you think?

It is much more important that there was a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights on that subject before the resolution. CE members, all of our representatives, are required to enforce the rulings of the ECHR. That applies to Russia as well. The ECHR judges went to Transdniestria and were in that prison and wrote a report that said the prison was controlled by Russian authorities. Russia states that it has no relationship to those prisons but the ECHR judges wrote in black and white that Russia controls them. Therefore, Russia is obliged to free those prisoners. Hardly anyone would deny that Russia has huge influence on Tiraspol.

Source: Nargiz Asadova, Kommersant; July 3, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

13. Putin Sends Greetings to Belarus Leader on Independence Day

Russia's president sent a letter of greetings to his Belarusian counterpart on the former Soviet republic's Independence Day Monday.

"I am sure that comprehensive development of integration-oriented cooperation along the principles of equal, mutually beneficial partnership will effectively help Russia and Belarus in fulfilling their ambitious economic and social tasks, and consolidating democratic institutions," the Kremlin press office quoted Vladimir Putin as saying in his message to Alexander Lukashenko.

In April 1997, Russian and Belarusian leaders signed a union agreement on political, economic and military integration between the two post-Soviet nations.

Moscow still maintains close ties with Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by the United States and other Western nations for his crackdowns on political dissent.

The Russian leadership supported the authoritarian president in his latest reelection bid, despite international observers' claims that he had won a third presidential term in March by rigging votes and stifling opposition and independent media.

Military cooperation keeps developing, with the two countries holding their largest ever joint exercise last month, and Russia announcing its plans to set up a permanent air base in Belarus in the face of NATO's eastward expansion.

Economic integration, however, has recently stalled over a number of issues, primarily a proposal by Russian state-controlled energy giant Gazprom to increase gas prices for Belarus. Gazprom has said it will almost quadruple gas prices for Belarus in 2007 unless the country agrees to set up a joint gas venture. Belarusian authorities have protested by saying the price hikes contradict the union agreement, which stipulates that gas prices for Belarus should equal Russia's domestic price.

Source: RIA Novosti; July 3, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

14. Belarus Condemns Gas Prices

The Belarusian government called Thursday for equal gas prices in Russia's Smolensk Region.

"One cannot speak about equal conditions if we are offered the price of \$200 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas," said Belarusian First Deputy Energy Minister Eduard Tawpyanets, Belapan news agency reported.

"We do not say that the price should not go up but it should increase in proportion to its growth in the Russian Federation if we are creating the union state," he added.

The Belarusian energy official said an increase in prices for Russian energy resources should be economically justifiable.

"We will think it over if the price proposed by (Russia's) Gazprom has a clear economic foundation. But we do not understand the profit margin of 500 percent," Tawpyanets said.

Tawpyanets said Belarus has studied the possibility of gaining gas supplies from Turkmenistan, but has not held official talks.

Source: United Press International; July 30, 2006; <http://www.upi.com/>

15. Higher Gas Prices Won't Affect Common Currency – Minsk

An increase of Russian natural gas charges on Belarus will have no influence on the common currency project, Belarussian National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prokopovich said on Friday.

"Higher energy charges will not affect the common currency," he said. However, the growth of prices "may slow down the integration in the Union of Russia and Belarus," he remarked.

"To our mind, higher gas prices are unfounded, as they are bad for the integration and strengthening of the Union," he said.

Source: Itar-Tass; June 30, 2006; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

16. Referendum on Russia-Belarus Union State Possible This Fall

A referendum on a constitutional act of a Russia-Belarus Union State may be held as early as this fall, a Russian official overseeing the project said Thursday.

The constitutional act will be a transitional constitution for the Union State, which the two countries have been mulling since they signed an agreement on April 2, 1997. The project should

establish common economic, customs and political regulations, but negotiations have stalled recently over a number of issues, including a Russian proposal to raise gas prices for Belarus.

Pavel Borodin, the state secretary of the Russian-Belarus union, said that he hoped the Union's Supreme Council would meet in July or August to set the dates for the referendum and for parliamentary elections.

"In practice, we can hold the referendum this fall and elections to the future parliament either this fall or next spring," Borodin said.

The Union State has a common budget totaling about \$2.6 billion. Belarus, whose population of 10 million equals only 7% of Russia's, contributes one third and Russia the remainder to the joint budget.

The two countries have also adopted measures including a common visa space and a joint customs committee.

Borodin said earlier this month that the common currency - the Russian ruble - would be put into circulation before the end of 2006.

But negotiations on the ruble have been advancing slowly, and Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko said earlier this month that the common currency issue had to be spelled out in the referendum.

The Russia-Belarus Council of Ministers convened Wednesday in Moscow to discuss further progress in integration. Borodin said the customs union had been on the agenda.

"We have built a customs center and set up customs checkpoints but we still have about 1,500 differences in customs rates," he said, adding that ministers had agreed to prepare a financial program for customs points and continue working to harmonize customs legislations.

Borodin also said that the Council of Ministers had considered the gas issue and a proposal by Russian state-controlled energy giant Gazprom to increase gas prices for Belarus. He said the parties had managed to ease tensions on some of the relating issues.

Gazprom, which is reportedly seeking control over Belarus's pipeline system leading to Europe - its main customer, has said it would nearly quadruple gas prices for Belarus in 2007 unless it agreed to set up a joint gas venture. Belarusian authorities, however, have said the price hikes contradict the Union State agreement, which they said stipulated that gas prices for Belarus should equal Russia's domestic prices.

The two countries agreed Wednesday that a special working group would draft proposals on gas prices and submit them soon.

Borodin also said Thursday that the Union State had 30 production programs involving more than 5 million people. He said the programs covered such areas as diesel and agricultural machine-building, and high-tech and computer technologies, but added that the projects had encountered financing problems.

"Unfortunately, we have changed the form of crediting these programs," he said, adding that instead of direct government subsidies for agriculture and machine-building, these programs received indirect funding in subsidies for interest rates.

Source: RIA Novosti; June 29, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

17. Russian and Belarusian PMs To Meet for Economic Talks

Prime Ministers of Russia and Belarus Mikhail Fradkov and Sergei Sidorsky are likely to consider the gas supplies issue at their bilateral meeting on the verge of Council of Ministers' session of the Russia-Belarus Union State, a source in the Russian government has told RBC. The source stressed that Russia regarded the issue of gas supplies to Belarus as a subject for talks between economic entities, and the gas price as a market issue. However, if Belarus turned to Russia for a loan to finance gas supplies, Russia would consider such a proposal, the sources added.

In addition the Prime Ministers are likely to address sugar supplies from Belarus to Russia on account of the recent delivery of cane instead of beetroot sugar. The government insider said that the two countries have to outline a set of joint protective measures since they have abolished customs procedures between them.

Also, the parties may touch upon the access of Russian goods to the Belarusian market from the point of view administrative regulations. Russia is worried as Belarus has preserved over 40 restrictions applying to Russian goods, which is twice as much as the European Union has.

Source: RosBusinessConsulting; June 28, 2006; <http://www.rbcnews.com/>

18. Asymmetrical Unity

The principles of Russian-Belarusian economic relations are leading to crisis, not integration

In the days leading up to the March presidential election in Belarus, Russian officials repeatedly stated that union of the two states was not so much a political question as an economic one, and it is economically expedient for Russia for remain friends with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Looking at the statistics, however, that is obviously not the case.

Ignominious Results

The last ten years of Russian-Belarusian relations have not been a credit to Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin, the administration, the State Duma, local administrations have been unwilling or unable to defend the interests of the Russian Federation in relations with its neighbor. The goods of Russian companies were confiscated in Belarus – and no reaction. Russian goods are crudely and openly squeezed out of the Belarusian market, Russian investors are driven out of the country – and Russia raises no protest. The broadcast facilities of Channel 1, the Russia Channel and NTV in Belarus are closed, the distribution of Russian newspapers in Belarus is “regulated” – and again no reaction.

Every year that Lukashenko has been in power, the attitude of the Belarusian people toward Russia has worsen as well. The number of supporters of close integration between Russia and Belarus is falling. But Russian authorities continue their unconditional and unreserved support not for the Belarusian people, but for the Belarusian regime, which has monopolized politics there for the last 12 years.

Lukashenko's anti-Russian policies were carried out using the money of Russian taxpayers. His partners and lobbyists in Moscow help him with that. They are easy to buy here with contracts for oil refining, arms shipment and the sale of agricultural and petroleum products. In essence, Lukashenko's lobbyists sell their homeland for the sake of the political interests of the ruler of a foreign state.

Asymmetrical Trade

Under the price conditions in force at the beginning of this year, Belarus was saving \$3.9 billion on the import of Russian crude oil. Russian companies, which did not pay an export duty when shipping oil to Belarus, also made about \$370 million extra. Compared to oil sales on the Russian domestic market, supplies to Belarus represented an additional \$1.5 billion in proceeds. Meanwhile, the Russian federal budget was deprived of \$3.5 billion in export duty income. It

should be noted that there is no question of financial benefits for the Belarusian people. They pay more than Russians for petroleum products and close to European prices.

Natural gas is the second product with which the Belarusian regime takes advantage of Russia's passionate desire to get at least that much of the Soviet empire back. It is sold to Belarus today at just under \$47 per 1000 cubic meters. Considering the volume of supplies and market prices in 2005, Gazprom would have been giving the Lukashenko regime about \$2 billion if it had sold it gas for \$150. The GDP of Belarus was \$29.5 billion in 2005. That means that Russian authorities subsidized the regime on a scale that no other state in the world could even dream of.

That is still not all the forms of support that Russia gives Belarus. Belarus has a firm hold on the market for many goods in Russia. And Belarus goods are often bought on order from the Russian state. That means that Russian officials discriminate against domestic producers, and receive their own share of the Belarusian fuel subsidy in the form of goods.

The lion's share of Belarusian exports of consumer goods go to Russia. It is more than 98 percent for meat and meat products, 97.7 percent for dairy products, 100 percent of sugar, 61.8 percent of pharmaceuticals, 73.5 percent of wall coverings, 81 percent of refrigerators, 65 percent of televisions, 39 percent of tractors, 76 percent of car trailers, and 70 percent of furniture. Experts estimate that the profits lost by Russian producers and the funds not received by the Russian federal budget because of the favored sale of Belarusian goods on the Russian market makes up 3-4 percent of the Belarusian GDP, or about \$1 billion.

Those sales schemes were advantageous to oligarchic structures, but far from all of them are allowed on the Belarusian domestic market. As a result the trade between the two countries is rapidly losing quality. The share of mineral products imported from Russia to Belarus rose from 40.6 percent in 2004 to 54.9 percent in 2005. The share of other products dropped dramatically: cars and auto parts from 12.5 to 7.7 percent, non-precious metals and metal product from 16.4 to 13 percent, ready-to-eat food products from 3.8 to 3.3 percent. Belarus blocks Russia from almost all markets, while demanding to receive natural gas at Russian domestic prices and to refine oil under super-profitable conditions.

The share of the European Union in Belarusian export rose to 50.2 percent in the first quarter of this year, and that of Russia fell to 32 percent. Trade turnover between Russia and Belarus fell by 10.7 percent in cost terms in 2005. In physical terms, the volume of export fell by 10.9 percent and of import by 12.9 percent. Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov and his city officials are traditional supporters of Lukashenko. In 2005, the trade volume between Moscow and Belarus fell by 49.7 percent. The hypocrisy of politicians who swear in public by the friendship of Slavic peoples but think only of dividing up the budget resources of Russia and Belarus damage Russia's reputation.

An Old Friend Is a New Enemy

Now a real crisis is brewing in relations between the two countries. After Gazprom announced that it would raise gas prices for Belarus to \$200 and the Russian government demanded its share of oil profits, the Belarusian regime took responsive action and shut down NTV broadcasts in Belarus. Proposals were made to raise the fee for transporting petroleum products across the territory of Belarus by 50 percent. A demand for rent for Russian military bases in Belarus is a predictable next move. After Belarusian sugar was seized in Russia, a convoy of Russian trucks taking cigarettes to Kaliningrad was seized.

Russia will still pay dearly for its support of the totalitarian regime in Belarus. It is no longer a matter of money and energy resources. Now Lukashenko is preparing a PR campaign to create a new enemy – Russia. It is being held responsible for the social and economic ills that are unavoidably coming up for Belarus and its antediluvian socialist economy. Millions of naive Belarusians, who have no access to objective information, are likely to believe the nationalist Lukashenko. That is our mutual, and very serious, problem. To restore Belarusians' trust in Russia, a cardinal change in Russia's policy to Belarus is needed.

Nikita Belykh, chairman of the federal political council of the Union of Right Forces Party; Yaroslav Romanchuk, deputy chairman of the United Civic Party of Belarus

Source: Kommersant; June 26, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

19. Russia To Quadruple Natural-Gas Price for Belarus in 2007

Russia plans to export natural gas to Belarus in 2007 at about four times the current price, a deputy industry and energy minister said Monday.

Andrei Dementyev said in a letter to the lower chamber of parliament that the price would be around \$180-200 per 1,000 cubic meters in comparison with current \$46.68.

The deputy minister said the price would be calculated under the same formula as the price for natural gas deliveries to Ukraine, including a zero rate customs duties for Belarus.

Source: RIA Novosti; June 26, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

20. Belarus Says No Plans To Join Eurasian Economic Community Bank

Belarus has ruled out the possibility of joining the Eurasian Economic Community - EEC bank for the time being, published reports said Monday citing Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov. Kazakhstan and Russia signed an agreement for establishing the Eurasian bank in January 2006. However, Kobyakov said his country does not rule out the possibility of taking part in the EEC bank in future. The EEC bank is intended to ensure stable development of the economies in the EEC, maintain high rates of economic growth and expand trade. The EEC comprises of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Source: TradingMarkets.com; June 26, 2006; <http://www.tradingmarkets.com>

21. ABN Amro to Evaluate Belarus' Assets for Gazprom

After four years of abortive attempts, Belarus and Gazprom have picked out an appraiser for the assets of Belarus that could be of interest to Gazprom. It is ABN Amro, one of the biggest creditors of Gazprom. If the appraisal satisfies both parties, Belarus may hope to put off for a few years the increase in gas prices from \$47 to \$200. Otherwise, a gas war between Russia and Belarus is bound to escalate.

On Friday, Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller met Belarus' Deputy PM Vladimir Semashko and Beltransgaz GD Dmitry Kazakov. Gazprom forwarded the draft contract far back in late April with the base price of \$200 per ths cu meters (vs. \$46.68 in 2005) for 2007. But the meetings have been rather formal until recently. "The prices will be market all the same, but we are ready to offset part of the gas cost by acquiring assets at the market prices," said Alexander Ryazanov, deputy chairman at Gazprom management committee.

The talks gained momentum June 23, when Minsk shifted to commercial negotiations with Gazprom. Miller and Semashko agreed to make out "a list of enterprises of Belarus that are of interest to Gazprom in view of the increase in gas prices."

A working group will agree on the list of assets in August, Gazprom briefer Sergey Kupriyanov specified. Gazprom will attempt to get control over the assets worth \$10 billion, according to the experts.

"We are interested in the gas mains of Beltransgaz, Beltopgaz distribution networks, Mozyrsky refinery, where we have 42 percent via Slavneft. We are offered chemical projects and stakes in the underground storage facilities of gas," Ryazanov said a few days ago.

Another breakthrough at the talks of Gazprom and Belarus was the choice of an independent appraiser for the assets eyed by the gas monopoly of Russia. It is Gazprom's big creditor ABN

Amro. In 2005, for instance, ABN Amro lent \$1.1 billion to Gazprom to refund the loans of 2003 to 2004. In 2004, it was eager to evaluate Rosneft in time of its frustrated merger into Gazprom.

Source: Kommersant; June 26, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

22. Russia Says Belarus War Games Not Directed at Any Particular Nation

Ongoing military exercises between Russian and Belarusian forces - the largest exercises ever for the two ex-Soviet republics - are not directed toward any nation, alliance or enemy in particular, Russia's defense minister said Thursday.

Sergei Ivanov spoke as defense ministers from the six-nation Collective Security Treaty Organization gathered in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, on the sixth day of the military drills that feature about 7,000 Belarusian and 1,800 Russian troops, The Associated Press reported.

"This Russian-Belarusian exercise does not have an aggressive nature and is not directed toward anyone," Ivanov told a news conference. Ivanov also said Russia and Kazakhstan would stage another military exercise later this year.

The exercises envisage a joint response to an unnamed, outside military threat. Russian MiG-29 fighter jets practiced intercepting enemy planes over western Belarus over the weekend as part of the drills.

Belarus' authoritarian president, Alexander Lukashenko - dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by the United States and other Western nations for his relentless crackdown on dissent - has repeatedly accused the West of harboring aggressive intentions.

Russia, meanwhile, has watched warily as former Soviet bloc countries bordering Belarus - Poland, Latvia and Lithuania - have joined NATO. Russian military officials have announced plans to set up a permanent air base in Belarus and deploy air defense missiles there.

Russia and Belarus signed a union agreement in 1996 providing for close political, economic and military ties, and their armed forces have held frequent joint drills.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and leaders of the other four nations in the defense and security cooperation pact - Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - will visit Belarus to watch the exercise on Saturday.

Source: MosNews.Com, June 23, 2006; www.mosnews.com

23. No Need To Deploy Nuclear Weapons in Belarus - Lukashenko

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said there would be no need to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.

"There is no need to deploy nuclear weapons in the 'first strike area'," he told journalists after an active phase of Russian-Belarusian military exercises, which consisted of simulated fights on the ground and in the air after a hypothetical aggressor's attack.

"There are enough weapons in the Russian Federation, which could if necessary be used in Belarus. I do not think such a situation will arise to bring such weapons here," Lukashenko said.

"Nuclear weapons presently are weapons of deterrence and not attack and defense," the Belarusian leader said. However, he added that "if there was a threat to security, nothing could be ruled out."

"We have to ensure security of the union state [of Russia and Belarus] by all means and forces," he concluded.

Source: RIA Novosti; June 24, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

24. Lukashenko Gets Chairmanship of CSTO's Security Council

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has assumed the rotating chairmanship in the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

"In compliance with the statutes of our council, I propose transferring the duties of council chairman to the president of Belarus," President Vladimir Putin, the previous council chairman, told a council meeting in Minsk.

As all were in favor of the motion, Putin congratulated Lukashenko, wished him success and asked him to chair the council meeting.

Source: Interfax; June 23, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

25. Belarus-Russia Union State's Budget To Be Enlarged

The budget of the Russia-Belarus Union State has increased by one half since 2001 and become an effective tool for implementing union-wide programs, said Boris Gryzlov, the Chairman of the Union State's Parliamentary Assembly and the Russian State Duma Speaker. He delivered a speech at the opening of the Parliamentary Assembly's 30th session in Novopolotsk, Belarus.

There are plans to enlarge the budget further in the near future, according to Gryzlov, and control over the efficiency of spending will be stepped up, as well. In his opinion, budget spending must be geared to sustaining innovative activity and stimulating the two countries' business. A recently signed agreement setting up the Union State's property regulation will help institute union property and will have a significant effect on budgeting. Speaking about the Union's results over the previous 10 years, the parliamentary head said the agreement package on equal rights of Belarussian and Russian citizens which was signed in January was a fresh step forward.

As reported earlier, the Belarus-Russia Union State's budget was fixed at RUR3.1bn in 2006.

Source: RosBusinessConsulting; June 22, 2006; <http://www.rbcnews.com/>

INTERNATIONAL

26. Belarus Students, Supporting Opposition To Study in Poland

Lukashenko won a third term as president in a March 19 election, beating opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich in balloting the opposition and Western observers and governments called illegitimate. Lukashenko won 83 percent of the vote.

Two weeks after the election, Milinkevich and Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz signed an agreement in Warsaw laying the groundwork for the scholarship program.

Marcinkiewicz and Milinkevich are both expected to take part in Wednesday's ceremony at Warsaw University.

Poland has long pushed for democratic change in neighboring Belarus, a former Soviet republic, and the program is the latest move in Warsaw's support of the opposition.

Before the March 19 presidential election, the Polish-backed Radio Racja began broadcasting from northeastern Poland to give Belarusians the chance to receive information uncensored by authorities in Minsk, the AP reports.

Source: Pravda.Ru; July 5, 2006; <http://english.pravda.ru/>

27. European Information Centre in Belarus

The chairperson of PACE Rene van der Linden claimed that it would be good to establish an office of the European Information Centre in Belarus. He informed about it at the meeting with Belarusian journalists that took place last week in Strasbourg. He said it was necessary to provide Belarusians with information.

Anyway the opening of the European Information Centre may be possible only if the Belarusian authorities give the necessary permission. Such a decision would testify to the fact that Belarus was interested in cooperation with Europe.

Rene van der Linden also considered the possibility of his visit to Belarus (he stressed that it was a "possible visit, not a planned one". He informed that he could visit our country and now the Belarusian side should give an answer (send him an invitation). "Isolation is a short-term measure - it is a way to show disagreement with the conducted policy... We have to work in such a situation not because we agree with it but because it is our reality and we have to put up with it", - explained the chairperson of PACE. "I believe that Belarus would like to join our European family, - but it is impossible at the moment".

Secretary General of the Council of Europe Tarry Davis is not going to visit our country in the near future. "I would like to come to Belarus before it becomes an EU member but many changes are necessary for it". Tarry Davis has already visited Belarus three times and knows what Minsk is like. His first visit was not an official one - he spent two or three weeks of his summer vacation with his wife in Belarus. Answering the question what Belarus would gain if it became an EU member he said: "Belarus does not need to be an EU member in order to become more democratic. It does not need to be an EU member to improve the situation with human rights either. But if it did become an EU member Belarusian citizens would have a real possibility to send complaints to the European Court of Human Rights in case the state violated their rights".

Source: Andrej Bastunets, Belarusian Association of Journalists; July 5; <http://www.baj.ru/>

28. Belarus-US Relations To Depend on US Goodwill – Lukashenko

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said relations with the United States would depend on its goodwill.

Speaking at a solemn ceremony devoted to Independence Day on Saturday, Lukashenko said, "This depends on when the American ruling elite realises new historical realities, gives up destructive claims on its sole world supremacy and understands that the proud, wise and independent people live in Belarus."

"Despite the world boom, Belarus continues its efforts to form a 'belt of good-neighbourliness' – develop good relations with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. We hope for considerable progress in developing good-neighbourly ties with Ukraine."

The Belarusian president noted that he expects trade turnover to increase with the European Union.

"The EU remains Belarus' foreign trade second partner after Russia," Lukashenko stressed. At the same time, the president noted that he "is ready to develop not only economic contacts but also the whole spectrum of relations with the EU on equal conditions."

In his words, Belarus attaches exclusive significance to cooperation with China, "a superpower of the 21st century".

Earlier in the day, Lukashenko said Minsk will not sell its national enterprises, including Beltransgaz, for an old song. "You know about 'a shaggy dog story' around Beltransgaz. Gazprom want to get this enterprise. We are not against to run shares, but no one, even the president, has right to sell it for an old song."

In his words, "it is necessary to pay a market price how this enterprise costs."

Lukashenko said the country does not give up foreign investments. "But we clearly determine conditions – they should not infringe upon our people and should not destroy the state. Thus, we ensure our security, sovereignty and independence."

In his view, "the inflow of investments may lead to losing sovereignty and independence, and the land." "In a split second you'll live outland and you won't govern the state," Lukashenko stressed.

At the same time, the Belarussian president said Minsk considers the development of integration processes with Moscow its foreign policy priority. "Integration with Russia responds to the will of the Belarussian people," he said, adding, "A union with Russia meets the interests of the Belarussian people. But this should be the union of sovereign states."

Source: Itar-Tass; July 1, 2006; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

29. Minsk Slams EU Travel Ban on Belarussian Officials as Illegal

The Belarussian Justice Ministry has condemned the European Union's visa ban against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and 36 other Belarussian officials as illegal and demanded it be lifted, *Belapan* reported on June 29. In April, the EU foreign ministers imposed a travel ban on more than 30 Belarussian officials deemed responsible for rigging March's presidential election and cracking down on opposition activists.

The ministry said in a statement that the travel ban contravenes the United Nations Charter, the 1970 Declaration of the Principles of International Law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and the 1975 Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. "Unfortunately, the principle of double standards, reluctance in some cases to possess full and true information about the country and the Belarussian people do not contribute to the formation of an objective opinion about Belarus in EU countries," the ministry notes.

Source: RFE/RL; June 30, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

30. Milinkevich Visits Sweden

On visit to Sweden, Belarussian opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich told journalists that he was convinced the regime of authoritarian president Alexander Lukashenko would quickly crumble without support from Russia.

He also urged G-8 leaders to focus on his country's plight at their upcoming summit.

While in Stockholm, Milinkevich met with International Development Minister Carin Jämtin.

According to Jämtin the two discussed ways for Sweden to help various factions of the Belarussian opposition to cooperate more effectively.

Also visiting Stockholm was Vincuk Viachorka, Chairman of the Belarus Popular Front Party.

Source: Radio Sweden; June 30, 2006; <http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/International/>

31. Senior Russian MP Slams Europe's Isolation of Belarus

The speaker of the upper house of the Russian parliament Wednesday slammed the EU's ostracizing of the current Belarussian administration.

The EU in April approved a ban on entry to the EU against 31 Belarussian officials, including President Alexander Lukashenko 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.

"It is impermissible when a European country is treated like a rogue nation without a good reason. A country's isolation leads to isolation of its people. Isolation and sanctions, including against Belarus, is no way for Europe to behave," Sergei Mironov told the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.

Source: RIA Novosti; June 28, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

32. Venezuelan President Reportedly To Visit Belarus in July

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is planning to visit Minsk in late July, Belapan reported on June 27, quoting a Venezuelan lawmaker staying in the Belarusian capital on an official visit. Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba Adan Chavez Frias, the Venezuelan president's elder brother, who is also on the visit to Belarus, said that President Chavez might visit Minsk on July 23-24.

Chavez Frias urged Belarus to pool efforts with his country in resisting what he called the United States' unchallenged dominance. "We have a common enemy who prevents us from achieving our goals," Chavez Frias reportedly told Belarusian lawmaker Mikalay Charhinets in Minsk on June 27.

Source: RFE/RL; June 28, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

33. Belarus Orders Bush, Rice Assets To Be Frozen

Belarusian authorities said today they will freeze any assets that U.S. President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice may hold in the country.

The move is a response to Washington's decision last week to impose sanctions, including a freeze on assets, against Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and other officials deemed accountable for the fraud that Western governments believe marred presidential elections in March.

Source: RFE/RL; June 26, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

34. Sanctions Against Belarus Officials Unproductive - Ukraine

Ukraine's foreign minister said Thursday that sanctions on Belarusian officials imposed by the United States and European Union were unproductive and could not help the country's people.

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 President Alexander Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington.

"I think it's necessary to work with elements of civil society in Belarus, non-governmental organizations and at the same time continue develop relations with the country's government," Borys Tarasyuk told journalists.

The minister said contacts between the governments of Ukraine and Belarus were ongoing and trade was increasing. He added that the two presidents were to have had a meeting in April but it was canceled due to reasons that had not hinged on the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry.

Source: RIA Novosti; June 22, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

BUSINESS

35. Belarus Boosts Ferrous Output 11.4% in 5 mths

Belarus increased ferrous metals output 11.4% year-on-year in constant prices in January-May to 1.2 trillion Belarussian rubles (2,149 Bel. rubles/\$1 on June 27), the Statistics and Analysis Ministry told Interfax.

Production grew 7% to 972,700 tonnes of crude steel, 12.6% to 999,300 tonnes of roll, 31.6% to 51,300 tonnes of steel pipes, 22.3% to 67,400 tonnes of wire, including 13.3% to 32,000 tonnes of steel wire, and 6.6% to 38,300 tonnes of steel cord

Source: Interfax; June 28, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

36. Belarus Wants Customs Union and WTO Entrance Separate

Belarus suggested keeping the formation of the Customs Union and accession to the World Trade Organisation apart, Belarus vice premier Andrei Kobyakov told the press while summing up results of the EurAsEC Interstate Council sitting, which took place in Minsk on June 23.

For Belarus creating the Customs Union is a priority, he stressed. "It doesn't decrease the rate of progress towards EurAsEC member-states' accession to the World Trade Organisation. Every country should join the WTO using principles each country deems necessary and has agreed with partners in the future Customs Union".

According to the Belarusian side, after the WTO accession the creation of the Customs Union can be prolonged for an indefinite period of time due to EurAsEC's economic competitors not willing to face a strong integration bloc.

Presidents of the EurAsEC member-states confirmed the point of view at the Interstate Council sitting in Minsk on June 23. They also ordered to create the legislation base of the Customs Union by late 2006.

According to Andrei Kobyakov, "It does not mean the Customs Union will appear by the end of 2006, only the legislation base may". After that a certain period of time will be necessary to adopt the signed agreements with national laws. The agreements will make the core of the Customs Union legislation base. This period can be quite lengthy, stressed Andrei Kobyakov. However, it should be done "to set up the Customs Union in principle," he noted.

Source: The National Centre of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus; June 26, 2006; <http://law.by/work/Eng/>

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.
