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THIS WEEK'S CASE

- Aleksandr Kozulin, Former Presidential Candidate Sentenced to Five and a Half Years in Prison

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CASE OF THE WEEK

Aleksandr Kozulin

On July 13, former Belarusian presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin was convicted and sentenced by the Minsk Moskovsky Court to five years and six months in prison for unauthorized public protests following presidential elections. Kozulin was convicted on charges of hooliganism, violating public order and refusing to obey law-enforcement officers. The defense team will appeal the ruling in the city court of Minsk, defense lawyer Igor Rynkevich said, adding that the verdict was too harsh for Kozulin who, he said, was innocent.

The 50-old-politician was detained in Minsk on March 25, 2006 during the opposition rally against the results of the presidential elections of March 19. Kozulin was one of three opposition candidates against President Alexander Lukashenko in presidential elections. Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington, won a landslide victory with 83% of the official vote in a ballot the opposition and international observers said was fraudulent.

Opposition activists subsequently staged a five-day sit-in in Minsk's central Oktyabrskaya Square. The March 25 demonstration was broken up by police, and opposition representatives say at least one person died as a result.

The trial began on July 6, 2006 and continued for almost six days. Describing the proceedings, Kozulin said: "This is no court; this is a farce, a kangaroo court!"

The following narrative is a translation into English of a journal of the trial sessions prepared by Kozulin's supporters and published on his website at www.kozulin.com in Russian:

July 6, Day 1

The trial opens at 10 am on July 6. Journalists and diplomats cannot get into the court. All the seats are occupied by young male skinheads who say that they are relatives of the victims. The diplomats have to call to the Foreign Affairs Ministry to get permission to attend the trial. Most of the journalists are fainting from the heat. Everybody who did not manage to get into the court room (more than 80 people) petitions the court chairman to move the trial to a larger court room...The request is rejected. Only five journalists were allowed to attend the trial. Kozulin, who is greeted with applause, asks for Judge Rybakov to be replaced, since the judge had unreasonably declined the petition of the admission of Kozulin's daughter, Olga Kozulina, to serve as defense counsel. The judge declined the request.

The court also declined other petitions about changing the preventive punishment and permission for video and audio recording of the trial. Oleg Bortnik, the prosecutor, stated that video recording will disturb order in the courtroom. The prosecutor stated that Kozulin's daughter may not be a trial attorney because she has no trial lawyer license. The audience burst out laughing. According to Article 44 of the Criminal Code the close relatives or legal representatives can act as a defender in court. Article 44 does not require an attorney's license or a legal degree. The audience' laugh drove the judge mad and he removed all Kozulin's supporters, including his relatives and lawyers, from the court room.

July 7, Day 2

Today, the court heard the [testimony of the] victims. There were 15 police officers appearing as plaintiffs in this case. Kozulin again demanded to change the terms of preventive punishment and to admit his daughter as defense counsel. Kozulin also stated that he intends to ask for replacement of the judge and prosecutor replacement. According to Kozulin "he sees the bias of the court from the fact that only one officer from 15 came to the court."

Kozulin demanded replacement of the judge and prosecutor for a third time. He gave the following reasons for this solicitation: "Judge Rybakov and State Prosecutor Bortnik are in agreement. It is obvious that there is no objective investigation." "Just execute me now and stop this farce", he also added.

In his turn Bortnik stated that "this petition [of judge and the prosecutor replacement] is ungrounded and leads to the intentional delay of the process." The judge exchanged glances with the prosecutor and declined the petition. In the absence of the victims, the court started to examine the accused.

Later Aleksandr Kozulin talked about two incidents for which he was convicted. First he spoke about the incident on February 17, 2006, when he was going to hold a press conference as a presidential candidate in the National Press Center. He stated that, in his opinion, there was no reason to forbid him to hold the press conference. The meeting with journalists was permitted but at the last minute the press centre management informed Kozulin about the cancellation. Kozulin viewed this rejection as unfounded, because the management of all state organizations must assist a candidate for presidency in his activities, as it says in the Election Code. Kozulin explained that he was on his way to the press centre when the unknown people stopped him. As Kozulin stated "he did not have in his mind to organize any unlawful actions in the press centre." He said almost the same regarding the incident at the All Belarusian People Assembly on March 2, 2006. He was also stopped by unknown people while he was trying to register. He informed them that after his detention by brute force, he was taken to the Oktyaborsky District Police Station where he hit the Lukashenko's portrait and broke it, trying to get attention to the unlawful actions of police.

Regarding the March 25, 2006 events, Kozulin stated that he did not organize the protest rally against the results of the presidential elections of March 19 in Minsk and he did not know that the rally was unauthorized. Aleksandr Milinkevich, the other candidate for presidency, was the one who called upon people to come to the rally. Milinkevich told journalists this outside the court. He was puzzled why he was not called to the court as an eyewitness.

July 10, Day 3

The press writes about the harassment of the defendant during the trial. Kozulin does not get an opportunity to eat or to drink water. The temperature outside is above 30 degrees C. Judge Rybakov states that he has no connection to the prohibition on Kozulin from taking water with him from the jail.

Officers of a special unit have demanded 13 million rubles (US \$6,046) in damages from Aleksandr Kozulin. They said that they were seriously injured during the March 25 demonstration, which ended in clashes between protesters and police. Another officer, who detained Kozulin at February 17 in the National Press Center, claimed 2 million rubles (\$930) in damages. Kozulin reiterated his demand for the replacement of the public prosecutor, whom he accused of colluding with the officers.

July 11, Day 4

Kozulin finally got the opportunity to eat, but still he got no water. During the trial session, Kozulin demand to put him out of the court room. "I have nothing to do in this court. I ask to take me out of the court. I am not interested in this farce." The judge told that forbids Kozulin to make such statements, and asks the defense to explain to the defendant that he could be put out of court and be invited only for reading the verdict. Kozulin decides to stay.

The defense witnesses' cross-examination started. They confirmed Kozulin's statements that he made earlier. Later in the evening, the court decided to watch the case evidence, video tapes. Kozulin stated that he could not take part in it because he had not eaten or drunk anything and asked to postpone review to the next day. His request was rejected. The defense asked to call for

an ambulance for the defendant, but this petition was also rejected. Kozulin reiterated his demand for the replacement of the judge. The petition was rejected again. Then Kozulin lay down on the bench and said that he fell sick. The judge had to stop the proceedings. It was 8:30 pm.

July 12, Day 5

Kozulin was permitted to drink water. The politician wanted to express his appreciation to the person who gave him that permission. But Judge Rybakov interrupted Kozulin's speech and said that it was not relevant to the case.

Questioning of two witnesses from the police was begun. Six videotapes were viewed. On the first video tape, there was an interview with Kozulin, in which he peacefully called upon people to walk calmly to Okrestin Street and not to step down to the road. The events on March 25, 2006 were also videotaped. According to Kozulin, the final episode, where he was asking the camera operator to introduce himself, was cut out. Earlier the witness from police said that Kozulin did not ask him to introduce himself, but tried to seize the camera.

Journalist Lubov Luneva, the last witness, stated that on March 25, 2006 Kozulin acted calmly and did not lead the rally, and that it was police who struggled, not the demonstrators. Kozulin tried to ask her extra questions to specify her statements, but the court took the questions down, because, according to the court, Luneva had already answered these questions.

The public prosecutor petitioned to remove the defendant from the court room. His petition was satisfied. Thus was the defendant deprived of his final speech, Igor Rynkevich, Kozulin's defense attorney told reporters.

July 13, Day 6

The day passes without the defendant in the court. The public prosecutor demands a six-year sentence. Later that evening when Kozulin entered the court room to hear the court's final decision, almost all those present stood up and welcomed Kozulin with applause, which did not cease even when Judge Rybakov entered the room. The judge ordered Kozulin, all his relatives, and the media removed from court. Kozulin's defense attorney described the proceedings as "a farce."

Judge Aleksey Rybakov read the verdict in the presence of lawyers and a member of the diplomatic mission. Aleksandr Kozulin was convicted and sentenced by Minsk Moskovsky Court to five years and six months in a low-security prison camp [under Art. 339-2, "deliberate actions grossly disturbing the peace, expressed in clear disrespect of the public, accompanied by violent acts and damage of property" and Art. 342-1, "organization of group actions grossly violating public order"] [Kozulin was also fined for 190,000 Belarusian rubles or approximately US \$89.]

From RIA Novosti, Belorussky Partizan, BelaPan, Kozulin.Com, RFE/RL

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

1. Political Prisoner Missing

Political prisoner Ivan Kruk from Astravets (Hrodna Region) has been serving his sentence for the last 10 days. But his family still does not know where. On May 15 he was sentenced to 6 months of imprisonment for allegedly assaulting policemen. The family has not received letters from either the police or from the prisoner.

Before the presidential elections in Astravets (Hrodna region) a search was held in the apartment of Ivan Kruk. His son was charged with robbery. Policemen came to look for masks in which the crime had been carried out allegedly. But they started to confiscate printed materials and a

computer. Ivan Kruk was not against opening the system block at home. But he was against its confiscation. When policemen wanted to carry it away, Ivan Kruk broke the system block.

Policemen of Astravets police department Tararuk and Vishneuski charged Kruk with tearing off shoulder straps of lieutenant Tararuk during the arrest, and inflicted bodily harm –scratches on two fingers. A criminal action was brought up against Ivan Kruk for violation of the Article 364 of the Criminal Code – violence or threatening with violence against a policeman.

Source: *Charter 97*; July 19, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org>

2. Journalists From Independent Baranavichy Newspaper are Being Intimidated

On the morning of July 18, journalists working for the *Intex-Press* newspaper (Baranavichy) found leaflets containing threats and two door-plates with the inscription "CIA's Nest" nailed to door of the editorial office. Moreover, somebody wrote "No Sell-Out Press!" and drew a hammer and sickle in a circle on the door.

Journalists believe the leaflets to be a clear threat of violence because it was written: *Intex-Press!* Your covert CIA structure must be punished. You throw sand in people's eyes, you are the Fifth America's column and Europe's dirty hairy mongrels doing your black deed. Meetings, interviews with the so-called "members of the opposition" and articles blackening the Soviet past show who you are – [signed] Heirs of Battle Victories"

The head of the Intex-Press publishing-house Uladzimir Yanukevich sent a complaint to the head of Baranavichy Department of the Interior asking to investigate the problem and find those who are responsible for it.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; July 18; <http://www.baj.ru/>

3. Belarusian Court Sentences Two Who Participated in Solidarity Day

The Minsk District Court on July 17 sentenced Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, and opposition activist Anatol Askerka to 10 days in jail on charges for using obscene language in public, Belapan reported the same day. Lyabedzka, Askerka and about 40 others were arrested on July 16 as they attempted to stage a protest outside the Russian Embassy in Minsk.

The group intended to protest the Kremlin's support for President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and to display solidarity with political prisoners to mark a "Day of Solidarity," which the Belarusian opposition observes on the 16th day of every month. The protests were timed to coincide with Russia hosting of the G8 summit in St. Petersburg from July 15-17.

Source: *RFE/RL*; July 17, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

4. Police Detain 30 at Belarus Protest

Belarusian police on Sunday detained about 30 people who staged a demonstration outside the Russian embassy to demand the Kremlin stop backing hardline President Alexander Lukashenko.

The demonstration was mounted as Russian President Vladimir Putin, one of only a handful of world leaders to congratulate Lukashenko on his re-election in March, hosted a G8 summit in St. Petersburg.

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The outcome of the March poll, in which Lukashenko won 83 percent of the vote, sparked rallies up to 10,000-strong in Minsk for four days. Police then dispersed the demonstrators and more than 600 people were jailed for up to 15 days.

The United States and the EU have long accused Lukashenko of hounding opponents, closing down media and rigging elections.

Both were highly critical of Kozulin's conviction last week and the U.S. ambassador to Minsk said the issue of human rights in Belarus would be discussed at the St Petersburg meeting.

Source: Reuters; July 17, 2006; <http://today.reuters.co.uk/news>

DOMESTIC

5. Belarus Prepares Tougher Liquor Laws

Belarus will introduce tougher liquor laws as part of a government campaign to combat alcohol abuse. An Interior Ministry spokesman, Andrei Solodovnikov, told Interfax news agency today that the move is aimed at reducing crime. Consumption of alcohol will be illegal in public places, and advertising of spirits of any kind will be restricted.

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

6. Belarusian Authorities Defend Court Decision, Reject Criticism

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry has upheld Kazulin's sentence, Belapan reported on July 14. "The judiciary of the Republic of Belarus is governed exclusively by Belarus' national legislation in accordance with the principle of the rule of law," ministry spokesman Andrey Papou said, referring to statements by the U.S. Department of State and the heads of EU diplomatic missions. "With regret and surprise, the Belarusian side once again notes the intention of the U.S. and the European Union to intervene in court proceedings in Belarus and their attempt to exercise outside pressure on decision making by judges," Papou added.

Source: RFE/RL; July 17, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

7. Belarusian Pro-Government Communists Proclaim Merger with Opposition Communists

The leadership of the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus (CPB) proclaimed on July 15 a merger with the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC), Belapan reported on July 16. According to the organizers of the merger conference, the event gathered more than 150 CPB delegates and over 70 BPC members, although those figures were disputed. The resulting organization will reportedly adopt the CPB's ideology.

The BPC leadership slammed the merger conference, describing it as a government-orchestrated move to liquidate the influential opposition party. According to the BPC, the merger conference was attended only by two BPC members, who were earlier removed from the ranks of the BPC. The BPC was one of the four opposition forces that backed Alyaksandr Milinkevich in the March presidential elections.

Source: RFE/RL; July 17, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

8. A Hope for Democracy in Belarus

Young people want a change

Peace, democracy, liberty and equal rights are objectives we generally all aim for. The recent crisis in the world seems to imply that these values are being forgotten all too fast and have become almost unachievable; the war still continues in Iraq, nobody knows when the Middle East crisis will come to an end, the wars for natural resources go on in Africa. Furthermore, the spring presidential elections in Belarus (March 19th) show that human rights, liberty and democracy are being neglected not only in far away places but in the neighbourhood of the European Union.

On April 8th the "new president" Lukashenka was sworn in for his third mandate. According to him, "Belarus has prepared a substantial background for achieving its long term political and economical goals and just the mono-thinking world society tries to create anarchy and chaos in Belarus. The West is using the principle of "divide et impera" and in order to preserve ourselves the expansion of army and military service will be the priority in the coming years."

On paper, Belarus seems to have achieved stability and growth that many countries can only dream of. Its economy in 2005 achieved an 8% growth. The government succeeded in lowering inflation over the past several years and in keeping with this policy, Lukashenka re-imposed administrative controls over prices and currency exchange rates and expanded the state's right to intervene in the management of private enterprises. Furthermore, the rate of unemployed people (officially registered) is just 1.6%. Isn't that amazing? Huge economic growth, low unemployment rates. It seems that Lukashenka really knows how to deal with the economic issues.

The economic improvements were noticed by the voters in the recent presidential elections in 2006. More than 82% of Belorussians supported the "new president" (as Lukashenka calls himself) - and expect him to lead them into a better future of the country. In fact, Lukashenka should not really have any trouble - every tenth person is a KGB agent, all the media is under the government control, and any foreign opinion, except Russian, is impossible.

Life in Belarus looks pretty and Lukashenka, as believed, will be a perfect president. Moreover, the opposition leader Milinkevich won just 6% of votes. Still several questions arise: if there is such enormous society support, why do people go to the streets? If there is stable economic growth (as the government reports), why do people want change? Why does not the government want foreigners to come and observe the election? Why do the young generations want a new leader?

Young people want a CHANGE. They are tired of walking in silence in the streets, they want to see the opportunities in life, they want a NEW BELARUS, and a new political system. They want democracy!

The country has changed after March 2006. The extremely unfair elections and the various violations encouraged thousands of people, despite the threats of the authorities, to go on the streets of Minsk and to raise their voices in favor of change. Furthermore, the number of Belorussians who are ready to fight for freedom is growing with every day. Along with this, Aleksandr Milinkevich (the opposition leader) grows in the eyes of the public as well as gathering an enormous support from the Western countries.

The president Lukashenka is not happy about the activities of the opposition and his regime is trying to stop the progress of the possible change, to turn back time, to when Belarus was frozen by fear and dictatorship. For those who still dream of a free Belarus however, this is too late. The time for change is now.

Source: Vaida Jazepčikaitė, La Taurillon; July 16, 2006; <http://www.taurillon.org>

9. Analysis of the situation in Belarus: Presidential Elections and the Involvement of European Civil Society

The situation in Belarus in light of the upcoming elections keeps changing rapidly, but even today we can still analyze a number of factors which make this campaign different from the previous ones.

The economy is developing rather fast: in 2004 there was about 10% GDP growth, in 2005 about 8%. It is the result of the good situation in the world market for Belarusian export goods and also because of Russian support in the form of cheap credits and low prices for gas, energy and oil.

Thus the salary of the citizens is increasing, but prices are increasing even faster because a great percent of GDP growth remains only on paper. Nonetheless, the regime is becoming more and more cruel to everyone who does not support its policy and abuse of basic human rights has become a standard of governmental policy with a lot of opposition leaders such as Statkevich, Severinets, Klimov, Skrebets, Marinich and others being put in jail, while others still have disappeared.

The Presidential Candidates

Many democratic parties and NGOs elected Milinkevich in the congress of democratic forces. In the upcoming March presidential elections 7 politicians will be seeking the Presidency: Lukashenko, Milinkevich, Kozylin, Frolov, Skrebets, Pozniak and Gaidykevich but only four of them collected more than 100000 signatures which according to the present legislation would entitle a person to become a candidate for President - Lukashenko (current leader and considered by many to be the only remaining Dictator in Europe), Milinkevich (candidate from the united opposition), Kozylin (former rector of Belarus State University, leader of the Belarusian Social Democrats party) and Gaidykevich (leader of the Belarusian Liberal party, present MP and a true Lukashenko supporter whose duty is to claim opposition). Frolov and Skrebets are now supporting Kozylin while Pozniak decided not to register because he does not believe in election and suggested his idea of an alternative election. The result is two oppositional candidates Milinkevich, oriented towards the West and Kozylin who is more East oriented. Gaidykevich is Lukashenko's supporter who is entering the elections with the purpose of gaining personal benefits from the regime.

While official propaganda can be found everywhere, oppositional candidates do not have access to mass media, all TV channels are governmental and under absolute control, there is no independent press, one governmental internet operator and oppositional web sites are usually blocked before elections.

Moreover, each company which has one hundred employees should have an ideologist, and ideology as a subject appeared in all universities. A person can now get two years of prison for a wide range of oppositional activities and practically all independent NGO's lost their registration while non-registered NGOs that still carry on activities are liable to imprisonment of two years. Certainty about the outcome

There is no doubt that the upcoming elections will not be democratic and Lukashenko will call himself a victor with 90% of support. Although the ratings of Milinkevich and Kozylin are increasing, a lot depends on negotiations between Milinkevich and Kozylin and their will to work together in opposition. However, their negotiations failed because of great personal ambitions and it is now uncertain whether the opposition's support will be enough to change the regime. Recent Milinkevich meetings in Paris, Warsaw and Brussels with the high ranking European politicians showed that Europe is greatly interested in a free and democratic Belarus and the EU has recently given money for the creation of an independent television station; however the tender which won this money included a Russian television company. Hence it is very doubtful that a television station that has had a long and beneficial cooperation with Lukashenko would help create an independent television.

EU - the unknown quality

It is also quite difficult for a Belarusian to get an EU visa and the number of those who have visited European countries is quite low. This, together with official propaganda which claims that EU, together with the USA, is an enemy for Belarus justifies the fact that European ideas are not very popular. EU resolutions do not play any role for the regime, and citizens do not know about them and the number of programs in which Belarus youth can take part is very limited. The elections will be held in March, but the questions which were discussed long ago with EU representatives have not been solved. The result of the efforts of the EU will be clear in the upcoming elections - but if the understanding of the situation does not go together with serious work from all interested sides, Belarus will remain a black hole on a European map for many years to come.

Source: Andrew Martselev, La Taurillon; July 15, 2006; <http://www.taurillon.org>

REGIONAL

10. Ukraine Joins EU in Demand To Release Belarus Leader

Ukraine has joined the European Union's demand to free Belarus opposition leader Aleksandr Kozulin.

He was sentenced to five and a half years in a Belarus prison last week. The European Union and Ukraine condemned his imprisonment as purely political and as proof that the ruling regime in Belarus is quashing democracy in the country.

Source: Channel 5; July 20, 2006; <http://5tv.com.ua/eng/>

INTERNATIONAL

11. The President of Latvia Demanded the Belarusian Authorities to Stop Opposition Persecution

On July 20 Vaira Vike-Freiberga, the President of Latvia received credentials from Aleksandr Gerasimenko, the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary from Belarus to Latvia, the presidential office informed REGNUM information. After wishing all the best in the future to the Belarusians, Vike-Freiberga urged the Belarusian authorities to follow the OSCE standards and stop persecuting the political opposition. The President also expressed concern about the fate of Mikhail Marinich, the former ambassador from Belarus to Latvia.

According to the presidential office, the two countries also discussed Latvian-Belarusian cooperation by border guards and customs, particularly to address smuggling, narcotics selling and other crimes.

[Translated by the Editor]

Source: Charter 97; July 20, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/rus>

12. EU To Strike Belarus Trade Blow in September

The European Commission has confirmed it will recommend expelling Belarus from the EU's low-tariff trade regime - the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) - in September, but pushed back formalities for two months due to "technical reasons."

A commission official told EUobserver on Thursday, July 20 that the Brussels executive has already taken the decision after Belarus failed to improve trade union rights over the past year. "Nothing has changed with regard to Belarus' lack of compliance with GSP standards," he said.

The commission's trade department was unable to rubber stamp its proposal before the summer break, as planned, due to "problems with tabulating economic data." But the timetable - with member states set to endorse the move in late September and actual expulsion in March 2006 - will not be affected, the contact added.

"In theory, Belarus can still introduce reforms over the summer. But this would have been equally true at any point before the member states' decision," he explained. The expulsion is set to see prohibitive tariffs slapped on €390 million a year of Belarusian mineral, textile and wood exports to the EU.

Belarus neighbours Poland and Lithuania had initially objected to the expulsion, saying it represents the EU "making a political statement at the cost of our small traders" without hurting president Alexander Lukashenko, whose main income flows from energy and arms sales not covered by the GSP.

Some EU diplomats are also concerned the move will see Brussels criticised for double standards and political interference by Lukashenko's state-dominated media machine. "Cuba and Uzbekistan have full GSP privileges despite equally worrying reports about respect for workers' rights," one diplomat stated.

But Poland and Lithuania will not seek to block member states' September decision, with most EU countries and the EU's foreign affairs envoy Javier Solana taking the line that Brussels would lose credibility on its commitment to GSP standards if it let Belarus off the hook.

Burma is the only other country ever to be kicked out from GSP, in 1997. The Minsk expulsion would be the latest in a line of EU psychological blows against the Lukashenko government, with a visa ban and foreign asset freeze on 37 Belarus officials imposed earlier this year.

Source; EUobserver; July 20, 2006; <http://euobserver.com/>

13. EU, OSCE Criticize Belarus For Jailing Opposition Leader

The European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) today criticized the decision by a Belarusian court to jail an opposition leader, Alyaksandr Kazulin, to five and a half year for "hooliganism" and organizing and participating in antigovernment demonstrations earlier this year.

OSCE chairman-in-office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, condemned the sentence, calling it "harsh" and said the he found "the entire handling of the alleged offenses... gravely disturbing."

De Gucht said he called for restraint by Belarus authorities but said "Belarus has basically ignored these calls."

The EU released a statement accusing Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka of using the country's law-enforcement apparatus to oppress his political opponents.

The statement said the court's decision "contradicts basic freedoms."

Source: RFE/RL; July 14, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

14. U.S. Diplomat Comments on Proposed Belarus-Russia Union

U.S. Ambassador to Belarus George Krol said on Friday that the United States would not recognize a possible future referendum in Belarus on the country's proposed unification with Russia because, he argued, elections and referendums in Belarus were undemocratic.

Krol, who was talking to reporters in Minsk, said his country also felt concern over a possible Russian referendum on unification with Belarus.

Source: Interfax; July 14, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

15. U.S. Condemns Conviction, Sentencing of Belarus Opposition Leader

State Department spokesman says trial was "politically motivated"

The United States has condemned the conviction and sentencing July 13 of former Belarusian presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin.

Convicted of "hooliganism" and disturbing the peace, Kozulin was sentenced to five and one-half years in a medium security colony by the court of Maskouski district in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

"The entire trial was a politically motivated process designed to punish Kozulin for expressing his political views," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack in a statement released July 14.

"As we have done in the past, we will take steps to impose appropriate sanctions on those responsible for this abuse of a Belarusian citizen's rights," McCormack said.

In June, President Bush imposed targeted financial sanctions on Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko and nine other top officials in his government who share responsibility for undermining democratic processes or institutions in the former Soviet republic. In announcing the sanctions, the White House cited as justification the government's human rights abuses, corruption and assaults on democracy, as well as the "fraudulent" presidential election in March and post-election repression of the opposition.

On May 15, Bush banned travel to the United States by Lukashenko and those associated with his regime.

The March 19 Belarusian presidential election failed to meet international commitments for democratic elections, according to an international election observation team sent by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). As a result, the United States refused to accept the results and supported the opposition's call for new elections.

The European Union has also imposed sanctions on the Lukashenko regime, freezing all funds and assets of 36 Belarusian officials "responsible for the violations of international electoral standards and the crackdown on civil society and the democratic opposition" related to the March 19 presidential elections and imposing travel restrictions against Lukashenko and other Belarusian officials.

Kozulin, a former rector of the Belarusian State University, was arrested March 25 while leading a peaceful protest against the rigged election.

The European Union joined the United States in condemning Kozulin's conviction and sentencing.

“The verdict of the court contradicts basic freedoms, the rule of law and international commitments of Belarus,” the Embassy of Germany, which represents the EU in Belarus, said in a statement July 13. The statement further called for the immediate release of Kazulin and other political prisoners.

In the July 14 State Department statement, McCormack called on Belarusian authorities “to free Kozulin and all those being held on politically motivated charges, including the four civic activists associated with the non-partisan monitoring group Partnership.”

Partnership is a Belarusian nongovernmental organization devoted to training Belarusians to be election observers and educating Belarusians on their voter rights under Belarusian law. The full text of the statement is available on the State Department Web site.

Source: Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State: July 14, 2006; <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

16. Belarusian Judge, Prosecutor Banned from Entering U.S.

Judge Alexei Rybakov and Prosecutor Sergei Bortnik, who took part in the trial of former Belarusian presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin, have been included on the list of Belarusian officials who are banned from entering the United States.

U.S. Ambassador to Belarus George Krol told reporters the list might be expanded further.

The aim of the list is to attract public attention to the situation in Belarus, he said. The people who are carrying out repressions have to know that their actions will not remain without punishment, he said.

The list comprises 36 Belarusian senior officials.

Source: Interfax; July 14, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

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.
