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International League for Human Rights

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- Russian Activists Held For 10-15 Days In Minsk
- Police Interrogate Angelika Borys, Informal Leader of Union of Poles in Belarus
- Venezuela's Chavez Hails Belarus Leader

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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Late-Breaking News:

Belarus' main opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich was detained by police on Wednesday, his spokesman said, quoted by Reuters. Milinkevich, who was the main liberal rival to President Alexander Lukashenko in presidential elections this year, was driving outside the capital Minsk when his car was stopped and searched. He was then detained.

Source: MediaFax; July 26, 2006; <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/>

1. Lebedko To Be Released Today

According to a United Civil Party (UCPB) press service, Anatoly Lebedko, head of the UCPB and head of the Committee of the National Democratic Forces (the alternative government) is to be released today after 10 days of imprisonment in the detention centre on Okrestina St. in Minsk. The oppositional leader was detained on July 10, 2006 on his way to the Russian Embassy while carrying a portrait of political prisoner Aleksandr Kozulin.

Holding a portrait is not against the law, even under "Lukashenko's law," say opposition sources. Accordingly, Lebedko was accused of "obscenity in a public place." Of course, despite the presence of numerous secret police video cameras, none were able to tape any obscenity as there was none to be found. Nevertheless, the police officer's statements were enough evidence for the court.

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: Belorussky Partizan; July 26, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org>

2. Russian Activists Held 10-15 Days In Minsk

Today, two activists of the Oborona [Defense] Russian youth movement, Nikolay Zboroshenko and Ekaterina Vinokurova, who is also a leader of the youth branch of the Republican party of Russia, have been sentenced to 15 and 10 days of arrest by the Tsentralny District Court in Minsk. On July 23, the young activists took part in a rally near the Russian Embassy in Minsk with a demand to stop Russia's support of Lukashenka's regime. The Russian citizens were charged with participation in an unsanctioned rally. They are to serve a sentence in the special detention center in Okrestina Street.

Pickers tried to unfurl a banner with the words "Russia without Putin, Belarus without Lukashenka". They were also shouting slogans: "We need a different Russia; we need a different Belarus", "No to support of the Belarusian dictator."

As we have previously reported, on July 16, on the Day of Solidarity with Belarus, 47 Belarusian citizens were arrested near the Russian Embassy in Minsk. The Belarusian citizens planned to demand that Belarus be raised at the G8 summit in St. Petersburg and urged Russia to stop support of the Belarusian dictatorship. Participants of the rally were holding portraits of politicians and a journalist abducted in Belarus, candles of solidarity with political prisoners and repressed Belarusians. Riot policemen brutally battered people during detention.

Source: Charter 97; July 26, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng>

3. Police Interrogated Angelika Borys

Today Angelika Borys, an informal leader of the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB) was summoned for the interrogation to the Grodno department of the precautions and public order protection.

Iness Todrik, a UBP member, informed *Belapan* that Vladimir Bozyk, head of the security department at the Leninsky District Interior Ministry (ROVD, or police), was interested to know why Angelika Borys calls herself the head of the Union of Poles in Belarus. Ms. Borys declined to give any explanation.

On July 20, 2006 Andzej Pislanski, a journalist of the Polish newspaper *Reczpospolita* in Grodno was also summoned to the police. Pislanski is a member of the UBP, which was declared invalid by the Belarusian authorities. Pislanski was questioned, if he was a member of the UBP and if not why he called himself a member. Pislanski also declined to give any explanation.

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: *Belorussky Partizan*; July 25, 2006; <http://www.belaruspartizan.org>

4. Journalist Disputes Actions of Judge Rybakov at Kozulin Trial

Well-known Belarusian journalist and human rights activist Valerie Shukin directed a complaint to the Minister of Justice of Belarus concerning the illegal actions of Judge Aleksey Rybakov of the Moscow Court in Minsk, who removed journalists from the courtroom during the trial of former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin.

Under Rybakov's chairmanship, the court sentenced Kozulin to five and a half years of deprivation of freedom in a general regime prison colony. The human rights activist disputes the actions of Judge Rybakov during the trial, held from the 6th to the 14th of July. During the first session, Rybakov removed all journalists who were present, and before pronouncing sentence, he removed the defendant himself.

"Only a sense of impunity makes it possible to explain how on July 14th, 2006, Rybakov, presiding over the trial, insolently trampled the standard of Chapter 5, Paragraph 8 of the Criminal Code, and instead of removing from court people who, in his opinion, could prevent him from pronouncing sentence, instructed the police to remove everyone present from the court (guilty and innocent). This included me, a journalist, who had no means of creating interference or impeding the trial", said Shukin's complaint. He insists that "by clearly illegal order" Rybakov prevented him from performing his professional journalistic responsibility to cover the trial.

Valerie Shukin is well known in Belarus for his work on the independent publications "Comrade" and "People's Will". Since the spring of 1996, the police have detained him dozens of times for participation in opposition protest actions and he has a record quantity of administrative arrests in Okrestino Prison. In 2003, he was detained and severely beaten for attempting to attend a press conference given by MVD Chief Naumov without accreditation, and then spent several months under arrest in the Zhondinsk SIZO (remand prison). The formal reason for that judgment was broken glass in the MVD building, damaged during the detention of the human rights activist by OMON.

Source: *Prima News*; July 21, 2006; <http://www.prima-news.ru/eng>

DOMESTIC

5. Some 700,000 Belarusians Said To Be 'Economically Inactive'

Belarusian Deputy Labor Minister Valery Paulau said in Minsk on July 25 that some 600,000-700,000 people of working age in Belarus are "economically inactive," *Belapan* reported. Another ministry official explained that people are deemed economically inactive if they do not have jobs but are not considered to be unemployed. This category includes students, prisoners, those on parental leave, and people who are not registered with any institution.

As of July 1, the number of officially registered unemployed people in Belarus, which has a population of about 10 million, was 66,500.

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

6. Belarus: As Drinking Increases, Government Declares War

Drinking has become such a problem in Belarus that it is threatening the very existence of the nation.

That, at least, is the view of sociologist Mikhail Zaleski, who specializes in the problems of alcohol abuse. He says that official statistics show that it has become one of the main causes of early death.

Police Prepare Crackdown

As a result, Belarus is toughening its fight against alcoholism. The Interior Ministry has prepared a draft presidential decree aimed at reducing alcohol consumption.

The new measures target public drinking and introduce new penalties for selling beer to minors. There are also new restrictions on advertising alcoholic drinks, including beer.

Life expectancy for Belarusian males has fallen to 63 years, and for females to 75. In neighboring Poland, the equivalent figures are 70 years for males and 79 years for females. Belarus also has one of the highest suicide rates in Europe.

"If you make a statistical model and remove the factor of alcohol abuse, the average life expectancy of Belarusian men increases by seven years," Zaleski says.

Zaleski says that at the beginning of the 20th century five people in 100,000 committed suicide, but that the number has now reached 60 and is growing. He says sociologists and medics agree that the main reason is alcohol abuse.

Beer And Vodka

After the collapse of communism, many Eastern Europeans changed their drinking habits and moved from strong drinks to wine and beer, says Alyaksandr Sasnou, deputy director of Socioeconomic and Political Studies, a Belarusian think tank.

But this hasn't happened in Belarus, where beer drinking has also become more widespread, but the amount of spirits consumed has not fallen significantly.

People drink beer and it is sold almost everywhere," Sasnou says. "This was not the case in Soviet times. There are inebriated people everywhere. You cannot say they are drunk, insofar as they are not lying under a fence, but there are a lot of people under the influence."

Cheap And Getting Cheaper

It's no longer unusual to see young people sitting on benches drinking beer or strolling the streets with beer bottles in their hands. Beer is often mixed with vodka. There's even a popular saying: "Beer without vodka is a waste of money."

Sasnou says alcohol-induced "happiness" is cheaper than it was during Soviet times.

"We have calculated [the price of alcohol] in relation to the average salary," he says. "You can now buy more spirits for an average salary than during the Soviet period."

"People drink anything containing alcohol," Zaleski says. "They buy it and drink it on the spot. This is the modern culture of drinking. Shops selling alcohol work around the clock. It's the same with places selling empty bottles or waste paper. People steal to buy alcohol and then they drink it on the spot. I see this everyday."

The government's planned restrictions are already being compared with the anti-alcohol campaign launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union 1985. Sasnou says Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka may suffer the same consequences as Gorbachev, who lost the war against alcohol and a considerable portion of his popularity.

State Also Addicted To Alcohol

A big chunk of state revenues comes from alcohol, and the state cannot afford to lose them. There is also a risk that the measures will stimulate the production of illegal alcohol, as happened under Gorbachev.

A Russian beer company advertising in Minsk (Bymedia file photo) Dealing with advertising could be even more difficult as most of it appears on Russian commercial television channels, which are widely available in Belarus.

"The biggest share of beer advertising comes from [Russia]," Zaleski says. "It has flooded the market. Teenagers, in their enthusiasm and stupidity, are snared by this advertising and can't be separated from their giant 1 1/2 bottles of beer. The brands of beer on offer are cheap and strong."

No Alternatives, No Support

Sasnou says Lukashenka's government is "fundamentally unable to fight drinking," as the current authoritarian system provides no alternatives for people.

In addition, in authoritarian Belarus, civil society is under pressure, and people are not given much help to deal with the problems of alcoholism.

Alcoholics Anonymous is an international organization that helps people stop drinking. It was banned in the Soviet Union and is not very visible in present-day Belarus either.

"Probably they are very anonymous," Zaleski says. "The problem is that in our country people know nothing about this organization. You don't see them and cannot hear them."

Alcoholic Anonymous Belarus has only a post-office box on its website, with no telephone number and no address.

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

7. Addressee Is Unknown

The text of the last statement of Aleksandr Kozulin, former candidate for presidency, recently sentenced to five and half year of imprisonment, appeared on his web site. He did not get the chance to present this statement in the court. The sentenced politician called on "all honest and brave people in Belarus and Europe and world to stay against the military-police machine, which represses Belarusians."

The last statement is quit long. After stating his innocence, Kozulin decided it was necessary to explain why he became a politician. According to the former dean of the Belarusian State University, his participation in the elections "was rather a struggle for the progressive ideals of the Belarusian people, than a struggle for power."

In Kozulin's opinion, the Head of state saw in him a real competitor and a threat for his (Lukashenko's) unlimited power. As a result he decided to make Kozulin into a "hooligan" and send him to prison. The former candidate talked in detail about the charges on him. Kozulin gave his own version of all the activities he was accused in, including the events at the National Press Centre on February 17, 2006; at the All Belarusian People Assembly on March 2, 2006, and at the protest rally on March 25, 2005. Kozulin believes that he did not violate the law and that the police officers statements against him were false.

It was hard to expect anything completely new in this part of the statement. The most interesting part might be the politician's conclusions and proposals. Summarizing, Kozulin stated that "our main evil is moral decline" and "Lukashenko's regime is dangerous because primitive instincts are cultivated as the highest values, and the aspiration for killing the spirit and vivid fire in a person have been raised to the rank of state ideology."

Answering the traditional question "what to do?," Kozulin appealed "to all honest and brave people in Belarus and Europe to say a firm 'no' and struggle against the created military-police machine, which represses the Belarusians.' He also suggested that all opposition leaders unite on the basis of real actions, not persons. Finally, the former candidate expressed his confidence that "the time of changes in our country is close." "It is possible to finish with the words "I will be back!", but by the power of my love and fire of my heart I am with you always," Kozulin finished his last statement. "We will be together! Belarus, Be Free and Independent!"

It is necessary to give Kozulin's courage due. While being in prison, he made several tough statements against Lukashenko personally. Unfortunately, at the same time, we have to state that his statement text was not made up completely professional. First of all, it is too long for a mass reader. Besides, there are many stock phrases in the statement, but not enough concrete things. The audience, to whom Kozulin appealed, is not clear. He did not say anything new to his existing supporters, and it hardly possible to attract new supporters using this statement. However, it is significant to say that above-listed minuses are parts of statements of all Belarusian opposition politicians. For many years none of them has been showing any special tendency to get rid of these weaknesses.

What is expecting Aleksandr Kozulin after his release, success or failure, depends on if he learns how to talk in the language, understandable and interested to an average man. If no, everything the politician has sacrificed would be vain.

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: Igor Potapchuk, *Solidarnost*; July 25, 2006; <http://www.gazetaby.com>.

REGIONAL

8. Belarus To Launch Its First Satellite

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is expected today in Kazakhstan to attend the launching of his country's first-ever satellite.

The Russian-built Belka satellite will be launched from the Baikonur cosmodrome at 1:43 a.m. on July 27.

It will be carried by a Russian rocket, along with one Russian and one Italian satellite.

The Belka, which costs \$9 million, is designed to collect cartographic, geodesic, and meteorological data.

During his visit to Kazakhstan, Lukashenka will hold talks with the top management of the Russian Space Agency. // *Belta, Kazakhstan Today, Interfax-Kazakhstan*

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

9. Uzbek Head Approves Visa-Free Regime with Belarus

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov approved an agreement between the government of Uzbekistan and government of Belarus on reciprocal visits of citizens, which was signed in Tashkent on 19 January 2005.

The Uzbek leader signed a corresponding resolution on 12 July and entrusted Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan to inform the Belarusian government on completion of inter-state procedures.

The agreement envisages visa free travel, including transit, between Uzbekistan and Belarus based on documents which certify identity and citizenship.

The document said citizens of two states will need their passports or certificate of citizenship (for those people under age of 16), diplomatic passport or service passport, to travel between countries. // UzReport

Source: UZ Report; July 26, 2006; <http://www.uzreport.com/>

10. Belarusian Gas Operator Signs Protocol with Gazprom

Belarusian gas-pipeline operator Beltranshaz and the Russian gas giant Gazprom on July 20 signed a protocol of intent to cooperate on the appraisal of Beltranshaz's assets, *Belapan* reported the same day. The protocol was inked by Beltranshaz General Director Dzmitry Kazakou and Gazprom Deputy Chairman Aleksandr Ryazanov.

The protocol is expected to be approved by the Belarusian government "within one or two weeks," said Andrey Zhukau, an aide in the Belarusian Energy Ministry, and "the Dutch Bank ABN AMRO will then get down to the appraisal [of Beltranshaz]." Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka announced earlier this month that the Belarusian government is ready to sell a controlling stake in Beltranshaz to Gazprom before the end of this year. In return, Belarus will insist that Gazprom honor its promise to sell Belarus gas at a price equal to the domestic rate in Russia's Smolensk Oblast. Gazprom has threatened to raise the price Belarus pays for gas from \$46.68 to \$200 per 1,000 cubic meters in 2007.

Source: RFE/RL; July 21, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

INTERNATIONAL

11. Venezuela, Belarus in "Strategic Alliance"

Venezuela and Belarus have launched a "strategic alliance" focusing particularly on military cooperation, Tuesday said Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez during his visit to the Minsk military academy.

"We have created a real strategic alliance between Venezuela and Belarus. Cooperation between our countries will be through several ways, including technical military mechanisms," the Venezuelan ruler added.

"We have to defend our motherlands and reject any foreign threat," added Chávez, who is concluding his two-day visit to his Belarusian counterpart Alexandre Lukachenko, whom Washington brands "Europe's last dictator," AP reported.

Chávez urged the Belarusian Government to "face a false democracy that is a de facto democracy of elites and multinational oligarchs."

Meanwhile, official Belarusian media praised "the axis of good" comprising Minsk and Caracas and created during Chávez' visit to Belarus.

"Axis of good and construction," "A heartfelt friendship," read the headlines of newspapers Narodnaia Gazeta and Respublika, respectively.

The independent press made no comments on Chávez' visit. As they are published abroad, Belarusian opposition newspapers are published a week later.

Chávez Tuesday is starting a visit to Russia that is taking him to Volga. On Wednesday, the Venezuelan ruler will arrive on Ijevsk and in Moscow.

Chávez and Lukashenko Monday signed seven agreements, including military cooperation, the official news agency ABN reported.

The rulers initialed a joint statement at the headquarters of the Belarusian Presidency, following a meeting where Chávez expressed interest in bilateral integration.

Both countries signed a memorandum of understanding for political consultations, and inked pacts on military cooperation, scientific and technological cooperation, a pact on petrochemicals and energy, and an agreement on agriculture, DPA informed.

Lukashenko said he was in sympathy with Chávez' Government. The Venezuelan President became the first Latin American ruler to visit Belarus since 1991, when it declared independence from the former Soviet Union.

Source: ELuniversal.Com; July 26, 2006; <http://english.eluniversal.com>

12. Representatives of the European Committee's Belarusian Visit Cancelled

Four representatives of the European committee on economic and social issues have not been allowed to enter Belarus. They were planning to investigate the real situation in the trade union movement in Belarus, and independent organizations' situation. According to Radio Svaboda, they even received visas earlier, but later they were annulled under a pretext that the visit had not been prepared in close cooperation with state institutions.

The Foreign Ministry of Belarus states that it had not refused to issue visas to the representatives of the European Committee on social and economic issues, but only offered to change the dates of the visit and coordinate them later, a press secretary of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry Alyaksandr Papou said.

The European Committee on Economic and Social Issues is an independent organization consisting of more than 300 representatives of the EU countries, which occupy leading positions in the trade unions of their countries. The candidates of the committee's members are ratified by governments of their countries.

Source: Charter 97; July 26, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng>

13. Venezuela's Chavez Hails Belarus Leader

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez hailed the man dubbed "Europe's last dictator" Monday as he started an international tour by visiting the authoritarian leader of the isolated former Soviet nation of Belarus.

Chavez, a former army lieutenant colonel and a frequent, harsh critic of the Bush administration, was greeted with hugs and smiles by President Alexander Lukashenko at the presidential palace in Minsk.

Lukashenko, like Chavez, accuses the United States of trying to overthrow him. He has been in power since 1994.

The Belarusian leader has been criticized by the international community for quashing dissent, jailing opponents and extending his time in office through votes widely considered illegitimate. The United States and European Union slapped sanctions and a visa ban on Lukashenko and other top officials following presidential elections in March that the opposition denounced as fraudulent.

"Here, I've got a new friend and together we'll form a team, a go-ahead team," Chavez said before one-on-one talks. "I thank you, Alexander, for solidarity and we've come here to demonstrate our solidarity."

Lukashenko, an open admirer of the Soviet Union, returned the praise, calling the president of the world's fifth-largest oil exporter "a man of extensive knowledge."

"You are versed not only in the economy of Venezuela but in the Belarus economy, as well. You know military science, the military-industrial complex, and this impresses me very much," he said. "We have many directions for cooperation. There are no closed topics for discussions in our cooperation with Venezuela."

During the 24-hour visit, Chavez was slated to tour a military academy and the "Stalin Line" - a network of World War II-era defense installations restored by Lukashenko's government. A Belarusian foreign ministry spokesman said seven agreements on military-technical cooperation, trade and economic ties would be signed. Bilateral trade was nearly \$16 million in 2005.

Chavez, who also plans to visit Qatar, Vietnam, Iran and Mali, is fighting a U.S. push to deny Venezuela a U.N. Security Council seat.

En route to Belarus Sunday, his plane stopped for refueling in Portugal, where the prime minister met with him for what a Portuguese spokesman called a "courtesy call."

Chavez was later expected to fly to Moscow to sign a series of major Russian weapons contracts. Russia's defense minister said Friday the nation would sell Venezuela 30 Su-30 fighters jets and 30 helicopters in a deal worth more than \$1 billion.

The Bush administration in May announced a ban on U.S. arms sales to Venezuela because of what it called a lack of support for counterterrorism efforts.

Chavez nonetheless has been using surging oil revenues to modernize Venezuela's military, signing multibillion-dollar defense deals with Russia and Spain, among others. Venezuela is buying 100,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles and hopes to set up factories to produce more.

During a visit to Minsk last month, Chavez's older brother, Adan, Venezuela's ambassador to Cuba, proposed forming a common front against the "common enemy" United States.

U.S. officials accuse Chavez of threatening the stability of Latin America and say they have no plans to attack Venezuela, as he has alleged.

Source: Yuras Karmanau; Forbes.Com; July 24, 2006; <http://www.forbes.com>

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.
