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THIS WEEK'S TOP STORIES:

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- **Every Third Belarusian Would Love To Leave the Country**
- **New Congressional Measure Aims To Promote Democracy in Belarus**
- **Latvian Diplomat Charged with Distributing Pornography in Belarus**

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HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Late-Breaking News:

As *Charter'97* press center has learned, the first secretary of the Belarusian Embassy in Riga was declared persona non grata, and told to leave Latvia within 24 hours. This decision was taken by the Foreign Ministry of Latvia in response to a search of the Latvian diplomat's residence in Minsk.

The note was issued by the Foreign Ministry to Valery Dovgan, temporary Plenipotentiary of State Affairs of Belarus, who was called to the Foreign Affairs Ministry today.

Source: *Charter'97*; August 2, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/>

1. Belarusian Activist Fined for Staging Unauthorized Demonstration

An opposition activist in Vitsyebsk was fined on July 29 for participating in an unauthorized demonstration to mark Belarus's former Independence Day on July 27, *Belapan* reported. Alena Zaleskaya, leader of local United Civic Party branch, was ordered to pay a fine of 620,000 rubles (\$290). Two others charged along with Zaleskaya were found guilty of violating Article 167 of the Administrative Offenses Code, but were given warnings. All three were detained by police after distributing flyers and newspapers promoting the former holiday during the rally.

Source: *RFE/RL*; July 31, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

2. Valeriya Krasovskaya: "I Do Not Want Anyone To Experience What Our Family Went Through..."

Last week several websites carried the news of the detention of Valeriya Krasovskaya, the daughter of kidnapped and disappeared businessman Anatoly Krasovsky, who was picked up during a street demonstration. When I called Valeriya Krasovskaya to find out the details, she said "It was a mistake". That's how we started our conversation.

Marina Koktysh: How did it happen that your name got in the list of people detained during the brutal rally dispersal of July 16?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: I came to the action in solidarity with the victims of political oppression at about 6.05 p.m.. By that time, people had already been detained and taken to an unknown destination. I was talking to my friend when people in uniform began to grab demonstrators, beat them and push them into the bus. I did not know what to do. Finally I started to run along with everybody else. But I quickly stopped, because I realized the uselessness of running... I stopped and OMON [riot police] officers passed by me. I did not know why they did not detain me. Afterward, I ran into a neighborhood building courtyard and I kept running until I felt safe. Many people saw me running with all the demonstrators. That's how the information about my detention appeared.

Marina Koktysh: You were not scared when the officers began to grab participants in the peaceful protest? There were just a few demonstrators and they did not break anything, did not blow up anything, did not scream out any antistate slogans. They were just staying there holding the portraits of political prisoners.

Valeriya Krasovskaya: When I was going to the protest I knew it would be dispersed. I knew some of the protester would be taken to the nearest police station. But I did not expect such a terror. I think it was just another action of intimidation. I cannot say I was scared. I was horrified. I was horrified by the fact that a young man in uniform may violently grab a young woman, punch

her, and drag her on the ground for several meters... You know I have noticed that there is nothing in the eyes of those officers who were dispersing the protest. NOTHING. For me, a person without a father, who was, most likely, killed along with Goncharov, they are not even human beings... They are monsters with absolutely empty eyes.

Marina Koktysh: How do you feel about the fact that participants of the protest of your father's and other people's disappearance, were holding not just the pictures of disappeared people but also the pictures of jailed people?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: In the beginning people gathered on the square to support the families of the disappeared people. But later the days of solidarity with all victims of political oppression started to take place. I think it is right. For jailed people it is important to understand that they are supported and they are remembered. I am grateful to those who came on the streets with my father's portrait, though I do not know any of these people. But it makes me feel better.

Marina Koktysh: Five years ago you wrote an open letter to Lukashenko. Did you get any reply?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: No, I did not receive anything.

Marina Koktysh: At that time did you have any of your acquaintances say you were crazy to write this letter?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: I did not have anyone like that in my social circle. You see, I wrote this letter not for the public resonance. I just had to do it. It was my personal attempt to get the truth, to knock at another door, to get information. It was a hope.

Marina Koktysh: Do you feel sorry today about writing to this person? Recently Kozulin's wife and daughter have appealed to him. But...is it worth the humiliation?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: A person writing to Lukashenko, probably knows that he/she would not get any reply. But we must do all the thinkable and unthinkable things to get attention to this problem. Lukashenko's personality has no meaning here. In addition, it was not a personal letter praying to help.

Marina Koktysh: Lukashenko repeated many times that the opposition uses the topic of disappeared people only right before high-profile political events. He says they would forget them as soon as the elections are over. Did the opposition forget?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: No they did not. And I think it should be reminded all the time.

Marina Koktysh: Do you have any new information about what happened to your father?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: Unfortunately, no.

Marina Koktysh: I know it is a stupid question, but...how do you evaluate the investigating agencies work?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: We have no idea how the investigation goes. Nobody informs us. A lot of evidence in this case was collected by our friends. We still investigate my father's disappearance. We have recently opened a website with all the information about forced kidnappings (<http://www.ciwr.org/>). On the advice of the public initiative "We remember!" the picture of people, suspected in connection with the forced kidnapping of my father and other disappeared people, appeared in many European cities.

Marina Koktysh: Your mother said more than once: "I know many people took part in the kidnapping of my husband and Victor Gonchar. The ones who gave the order will definitely keep silence. I am appealing to those who carried out that order: think about the fact that life is not

forever, and this authority is not forever. You might save your conscience and probably your life by confession.” Did these words influence anybody?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: Probably, this appeal affected anyone... I think those who are connected with the high-profile disappearances think about purification of their own conscience and soul from time to time. We are sure that when the current authority collapses, many people will tell important information about these cases. They do not do it now because they are afraid for their lives.

Marina Koktysh: Almost all Belarus knows about the elimination of Zakharenko, Gonchar, Krasovsky and Zavadsky. Unfortunately, many people remain indifferent to these crimes. Maybe the Belarusians are not only tolerant but also insensitive nation.

Valeriya Krasovskaya: I would not say so. Anyhow I still hear the words of support from different people. I agree that many people are trying to stay away, to not speak loud about what happened. They naively believe that nothing like that can happen to them or their families. However, the high-profile disappearances gained huge public resonance. Now the whole world knows that undesirable people are getting eliminated. I do not think the authorities would dare to do to someone else what they did to my father. But the other thing is inevitable: undesirable people will be jailed. Now we see it literally every day. It is becoming harder and harder for a normal person to survive in our country. And this will touch a lot of people to a greater or lesser extent. Probably it is a natural people reaction: do not put themselves at the places of people who suffered. To speak the truth, I do not know how I would feel and act if I were not in this situation of losing the father.

Marina Koktysh: During the last year there were a lot of actions, loud statements, disclosures in connection with the disappearances topic. What was the most important for you?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: For me the most important was the adoption of the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Forced Disappearance. I would not want anyone to experience the same thing our family went through...

Marina Koktysh: Lera, you were born on the same day as your father. Is it true that you have not celebrated your birthday since 1999?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: My father and I were born on the same day with a difference of 30 years and several hours. I accept congratulations on my birthday. But we do not celebrate my father's birthday. What kind of holiday can it be without the birthday person?

Marina Koktysh: You once said: “In the beginning we did not completely understand what exactly happened. It seemed like one more day and everything would become clear, and my dad would come home.” How do you feel now? Is your life still turning around this tragedy, or the pain went away a little bit?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: No, the pain did not go anywhere. There is not even a day when I do not think about what happened. The more years pass, the more you began to understand what happened. It is not getting easier or less painful with the years passing by. The pain has become chronic. I read in a book that the loss of a close person is the biggest psychological trauma and the first seven years after the loss are very difficult. There is always a mark in your soul. However, than person not dying but disappearing, it is much more awful. Do you understand?

Marina Koktysh: Lera, it looks like that you just locked yourself in a space with no room for joy and laughter...

Valeriya Krasovskaya: It is not like that completely. I am trying to live a normal life, trying not to be locked. Though, I have to admit I have long periods of depression. They come and go away. I occupy myself with different activities. Otherwise I start to go deep into these sad thoughts. I

work, study, work on our website... I am really happy for my sister, who got married and had a child, kept on our family. We all are very proud of her and we try to live a fulfilling life, as much as it possible.

Marina Koktysh: Are you in touch with Victor Gonchar's son?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: No, to say the truth I even do not know him. It just happened that our families are barely in touch...

Marina Koktysh: I also want to touch such a very delicate topic as the second marriage of your mother. It is not a secret that people reacted differently on this fact. Did you talk her out of it?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: This is a very delicate question. I believe that it was her personal business. And I did not talk her out of it, I knew that I could not bring my father back. Contrary, I supported her in all ways. I am glad everything worked out so well for her. It was a very difficult decision for her, she was thinking for a long time. After all, my mother had a right to do that. And her current husband does a lot to find out the truth about what happened to my father. Probably he does more than anybody. And it is very important for us.

Marina Koktysh: I know that you lived abroad for awhile. What made you to come back to Belarus?

Valeriya Krasovskaya: I do not live in Minsk right now, but I come here often. Every time I come I participate in street protests. I was 18 years old when I left Belarus. The older I am getting the more I long to be here. I do not want to go far away. Because I know that a good and comfortable life is also possible here. I will come back when the political situation is stabilized. A lot of people, who had to leave the country because of different reasons, will do the same...// *Marina Koktysh, Narodnaya Volya*

Source: *Kozylin.Com*; July 30, 2006; <http://kozylin.com>

3. Belarus Policeman Writes to UN with Torture Revelations

Belarusian authorities are increasingly using torture to get confessions from political prisoners - a Belarusian policeman has stated in an open letter, with some EU diplomats in Minsk looking into the allegations and his whereabouts.

"A standing practice of using torture to extract confessions and evidence exists and is developing," Grodno region police investigator Pavel Melko wrote on 25 July in a text addressed to the UN and Belarus opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich.

"[This includes] electric shock, smothering...poisoning by tear gas and neuro-paralytic agents, battery, straining of tendons, piercing of gums by an awl," the letter says. "Some cannot bear the tortures, faint, try to commit suicide. People, tired from tortures, leap out of the windows."

The statement also alleges fraud in the March presidential elections, saying "I witnessed as...the authorities pressed people at all enterprises, organizations and in collective farms to take part in the early vote and to vote only for [Belarus president] Lukashenko."

A senior diplomat at one of the 11 EU member state embassies in Minsk reacted to the news with concern but without surprise, adding that his office will make enquiries into the affair. Mr. Melko left Belarus illegally before sending his letter and possibly went to Canada, Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* reports.

There are plenty of stories from victims of violence in Belarus, but it is rare for members of the security services to speak out. In 2001, state prosecutors Dmitri Petrushkevich and Oleg Sluchek spoke of "death squads" before going into hiding in the US.

Belarusian diplomats quickly poured scorn on the torture allegations. "These claims are bizarre," one official said. "Our police always act within the letter of the law. They are under more supervision than ever due to the world attention on our country these days."

Belarus opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich lent credence to Mr. Melko's testimony however. "These kinds of things are quite possible here. I don't doubt that the allegations made in the letter could be true," he told EUobserver. "It would be natural for Mr. Melko to fear for his own safety."

Mr. Milinkevich was himself briefly arrested on 26 July but said the police treated him well due to reform sympathies within the security services. "In the police, the secret service, the nomenclature there is a very wide feeling that people want change but they are afraid," he explained.

Fellow opposition leader Alexander Kazulin - jailed in July for five and a half years for "hooliganism" - has been less lucky. "I have reports, personal testimonies from him and people that visited him, that he is having problems with mistreatment," Mr. Milinkevich said.

Neighborhood tension

The EU has since the 19 March elections imposed a visa ban and foreign asset freeze on 37 Belarus officials on democracy and human rights grounds. In September, it aims to move ahead with plans for tariffs on €390 million a year of Belarusian exports to the EU.

President Lukashenko has reacted with mockery, saying he will ban US president George Bush from entering Belarus and freeze any assets of EU leaders he finds in his country. This week, Minsk refused visas for EU trade union experts and police raided the home of a Latvian diplomat.

Shunned by the EU and US, Mr. Lukashenko has turned instead to Kazakhstan and Venezuela for profile-boosting top-level meetings in recent days. "We see here a model social state like the one we are beginning to create," Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez told press in Minsk on July 24.

Source: Andrew Rettman, EUobserver; July 28, 2006; <http://euobserver.com/>

4. Belarusian Opposition Activists On Trial

Four Belarusian opposition activists went on trial today in Minsk.

The trial is being held behind closed doors.

Ambassadors of several European Union countries, as well as opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich arrived at the courtroom but were not allowed in.

The four were arrested in late February, in the run-up to the disputed March presidential election, in which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was reelected.

Tsimafey Dranchuk, Mikalay Astreyka, Enira Branitskaya, and Alyaksandr Shalayka are accused of belonging to an unregistered organization "infringing upon the interests and rights of citizens."

The organization, to which they belong, Partnerstva (Partnership), is an election observer group.

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

DOMESTIC

5. Ever Third Belarusian Would Love To Leave the Country

Every third Belarusian (35.5%) is ready to leave Belarus for another country for permanent residence. This data was obtained from a national survey of public opinion, conducted by the independent sociologists in the second half of July 2006. In total, 1505 people from the age of 18 and older, were questioned. The percentile range for error was 0.03%.

Respondents were asked the following question: "Would you like to move from Belarus to another country for permanent residence?"

57.6 of respondents did not want to move anywhere, 8.9% did not answer the question. Most respondents said they would like to move to Germany (11.4%), 7.2% would move to the U.S.A., 5% - to Poland, 4.3% - to Russia, 2.9% - to Baltic countries.

Sociologists also determined the social-demographic characteristics of those who want to move and those who do not.

There are 36.8% males and 30.8% female among those who would like to move to another country. Most of those who wish to move are people younger than 30 years old (54%). 41.6% of people who want to move have a degree. Many of those who least wished to move had a high-school degree (17.7%) or certificate of incomplete secondary education (19.4).

Those who least wish to leave the country are retirees (11.7%). Among students there are 60% of those who would like to leave Belarus, among independent employees – 47.4%, among the private sector employees – 38.9%, among state organizations employees – 36.9%.

Most of those who wish to move live in big cities (40.4%) and regional centers (38.9%).

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: AFN; July 31, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/>

6. Homeland Remember

The Belarus state does not forget its sons, even if they left the country because of the bad life and went abroad to earn some money. Starting August 1, 2006, new changes in several legislative bills regulating provision of pensions will come into force.

Under the new reforms, the list of people covered by state social security will increase. Belarusian citizens, who work outside Belarus, are suggested to "earn the pension in Belarus by paying... 30% of their income."

It is promised, for now, that "foreign Belarusians" may determine their income level by themselves.

[Trans. Ed.]

Source: *Belorussky Partizan*; July 31, <http://www.belaruspartizan.org>

7. Belarusian President Signs Anticorruption Bill

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has signed into law an anticorruption bill passed by the legislature earlier this summer, *Belapan* reported on July 26. The bill extends the list of those who can be prosecuted for corruption by adding foreign citizens, presidential candidates, members of

the upper parliamentary house and local soviets who are employed by a company or organization, as well as health-care employees and university professors.

The bill bans government officials from opening and keeping accounts with foreign banks and fulfilling orders coming from political parties and nongovernmental organizations. The bill also requires officials and their family members to file annual income and property statements and to notify the tax authorities about the sale or purchase of property valued above \$29,000. The law will come into force six months after its official publication.

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

REGIONAL

8. Aleksandr Lukashenko Called for "Active Steps" To Strengthen Belarusian Companies' Presence in Russia

"We are solemnly marching to Venezuela across the ocean today, but we do not act just beside us where we have long been able to work and where people speak the same language as we," he said when meeting with the heads of Belarusian diplomatic missions on Tuesday.

He said that the Belarusian cabinet was slow in carrying out joint projects with Russia, accusing it of reluctance to work. "What could be easier than to work in the Russian market? There are our people there and they have a great desire to cooperate. But we simply do not want to work," he stressed.

The Belarusian leader emphasized the need to make use of what he called the good attitude of Russian governors to Belarusian companies to strengthen the country's presence in the Russian market. //BelaPAN

Source: Belorusskie Novosti; August 2, 2006; <http://www.naviny.by/>

9. Belarus Export to Russia To Fall by Almost 60% in 2006

The Prime Minister of Belarus said Tuesday the volume of the country's exports to its neighbor Russia would fall by almost 60% in 2006 to \$6.5 billion, against \$15.8 in 2005.

Sergei Sidorsky said the decline would be largely due to the considerable decline in the export of crude oil to Russia.

"Belarus is redistributing its exports of crude oil and petroleum products to other countries," Sidorsky said.

The prime minister said Belarus intended to promote its exports in Russian regions. He said the construction of a Belarusian pavilion at the all-Russian Exhibition Center in Moscow was almost completed, and negotiations on the construction of a logistics center for Belarusian goods in the southwest of Moscow were in progress.

"Belarus may lose markets without full cooperation and the forming of joint ventures with Russian industrial companies," Sidorsky said.

Source: RIA Novosti; August 1, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/>

10. Rocket with Belarusian Satellite "BelKA" On Board Crashes After Launch

A carrier rocket "Dnepr" delivering 18 satellites, including the first Belarusian satellite "BelKA," to the space orbit, crashed at a distance of 189.6 km from the launching site after the lift-off, the Ministry of Emergencies of RK told *Kazakhstan Today*.

"The launch of the RS-20 rocket with a group of satellites on board by the carrier rocket "Dnepr" took place July 27 at 1.43 AM from "Baikonur" cosmodrome. The rocket crashed in the 73 second of the flight 189,6 at a distance of 189.6 km from the launching site, 6 km North-East of Tagai winter pasture," - the Ministry of Emergencies said.

There has not been any information about casualties or demolitions.

The Ministry of Emergencies of RK has sent a group of 35 persons with 6 units of equipment to the rocket crash area.

According to "Roskosmos," the rocket carrier crashed because the engine of the rocket's first stage did not complete 10 second of due operation and consequently the engine of the second stage did not switch on. "Telemetric information is being studied. Reasons of the accident are being established," - Yurii Nosenko, deputy head of the Federal Space Agency, told journalists after the lift-off.

Alexander Lukashenko, President of Belarus, was present at Baiknour during the lift-off. "The Belarusian leader has departed for Minsk," - the Federal Space Centre said.

Source: Gazeta.KZ; July 27, 2006; <http://eng.gazeta.kz>

INTERNATIONAL

11. Canada Cuts Trade with Belarus

There's talk of making Canada's trade relations with Belarus as frigid as their bilateral relations, but exporters say the move is inappropriate and will only hurt Canadian companies.

The government has taken steps to impose trade restrictions on Belarus after months of criticism over the former Soviet state's human rights record and the recent sentencing of the country's opposition leader to five and a half years in prison.

If the government is successful, Belarus will join Myanmar—also known as Burma—as the only other country on Canada's Area Control List, which requires Canadian exporters to obtain a permit to export to the country. Permits for humanitarian goods, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade says, will generally be approved.

"Canada condemns the unreasonably harsh sentence imposed on former presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin for exercising his right to protest," Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay said in a statement on July 14. "This is yet another example of the utter disregard of the Lukashenko regime for the democratic rights of the Belarusian people."

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's re-election on March 19 has sparked numerous demonstrations and police have arrested dozens of protesters, including 30 earlier this month who gathered outside the Russian Embassy in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, to demand Russia stop supporting Mr. Lukashenko's government. Numerous prominent opposition figures have also disappeared over the years.

The government posted its intention to place Belarus on the control list in the July 8 edition of the *Canada Gazette*, the government's official newspaper, and interested parties have until August 7

to deliver their support or opposition to the plan to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The Belarusian Embassy in Ottawa says Ambassador Nina Mazai is the only official who can speak to the matter, but that she is unavailable for comment until the end of August.

Part of International Censure

Relations between Belarus and Canada have been all but frozen since Mr. MacKay summoned Ms. Mazai to his Ottawa office in late March to demand the release of Frederick Lavoie, a freelance Canadian journalist who was arrested while covering nationwide pro-democracy protests in March.

Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Pamela Greenwell says Canada generally places countries on the control list "when working in concert with like-minded countries in reaction to specific situations requiring international censure.

"Our action as regards to Belarus takes place in a similar context, in which gross abuses of democratic rights have triggered an international response. The addition of Belarus... was considered an appropriate instrument with which Canada could contribute to international efforts and complement measures taken by partners and allies," says Ms. Greenwell.

In the past, the government has placed Libya, apartheid-era South Africa, the former Yugoslavia, and Haiti on the list, though all four countries have since been taken off.

"Once the Government of Canada is satisfied that the issues that originally lead to the country's inclusion on the ACL have been addressed in a positive manner, the regulatory process to remove a country from the ACL can commence," says Ms. Greenwell.

It was unclear what actions Belarus would have to take to be taken off the list if it is added.

The amount of trade flowing between the two countries is extremely small; in 2005, Canadian exports to Belarus totaled \$8.8 million, while Canadian imports from Belarus were recorded at \$20 million.

Playing Politics

Peter Szyszlo, manager of the Emerging, Dynamic, Global Economies Network at the University of Ottawa who has worked and lived in Belarus for several years, believes the Canadian government is trying to play politics with the European country.

Not only is this a message to Russia to stop supporting what Mr. Szyszlo describes as the least-reformed former Soviet state, but also a bid by the Canadian government to get onside with the U.S. and other Western countries that are trying to entice Belarus to Western principles.

"I think the West is trying to find some way of leveraging Belarus," Mr. Szyszlo says, adding the attempt will likely prove unsuccessful given Russia's strong relations with Belarus and its almost non-existent relations to the West. "The West wants to see regime change, but Canada has very little influence there. It doesn't have sticks or carrots to offer."

Liberal foreign affairs critic Keith Martin says Belarus was an "odd" country for the Canadian government to focus on, and if they want to make a difference, will have to "take a broad approach and not do just one thing [level sanctions]."

The government's announcement that it intends to place Belarus on the list has elicited concern from some corners. Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, an association representing companies responsible for about 90 per cent of Canada's manufactured exports, has submitted a

letter to the deputy director of DFAIT's Export Controls Division describing the government's move as "inappropriate."

"While supportive of the government's position with respect to the observance of human rights in Belarus, we believe that those policy objectives are best achieved through political and diplomatic means, not through trade measures that would penalize Canadian exporters," writes CME's senior vice-president, Jayson Myers.

"Export restrictions should be considered only in the most exceptional of circumstances and when accompanied by other political and diplomatic sanctions," he continues.

Rick McDonald, executive director of the Canadian Livestock Genetics Association, which represents several companies that export Canadian dairy cattle semen and embryos to Belarus, agrees that while the human rights situation in Belarus needs to be addressed, sanctions aren't the way to go.

"This is not going to accomplish anything except hurt Canadian exporters," he says. "It seems Canada had taken a stand on Belarus publicly [during the March elections] and now we seem to have to take some action."

Mr. McDonald says the majority of companies exporting to Belarus are small to medium enterprises that have recently made strides in developing more business in the country. In May, several Canadian companies signed an agreement with the Minsk regional government worth \$12 million over the next five years.

"It may not be huge by some comparisons, but it's significant to those involved," he says, adding some companies have also invested in the country. "And it's going to get bigger."

Source: Lee Berthiaume; Embassy, August 2, 2006; <http://www.embassymag.ca/>

12. How Secure Is Lukashenka?

Having attained through dubious means another overwhelming election victory last March, and having amended the Belarusian constitution yet again so that there are no limits to his term in office, President Alexander Lukashenka appears to be more firmly in power than ever before. Yet there is evidence to suggest that the so-called last dictator of Europe feels far from secure. He is seeking new friends and persecuting enemies, and his overriding mission is supposedly a foreign policy to create a multi-polar world that ultimately will succeed in developing a power base that can oppose the United States.

This situation was illustrated by the recent visit of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to Minsk on July 23-25. The two leaders had already exchanged complimentary greetings earlier in the month on the official public anniversaries of the two states (July 3 and 5). Then Chavez arrived in Minsk, reportedly on the invitation of Lukashenka (although his subsequent visit to Russia casts some doubt on this statement) and the two presidents lavished praise on each other and their respective governments. Annual trade turnover between the two states is around \$15.56 million, so, despite official rhetoric, the two countries are hardly essential to each other. But they both denounced "Western pressure" against their countries, allegedly intended to force them into adopting "an alien ideology" and "pseudo-economic reforms."

Earlier in the month, at a workshop organized by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Russia and Belarus, Defense Minister Leonid Maltsau outlined the perspective from official Minsk. Both the United States and the European Union, he asserted, are elaborating various options for creating crises in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, with the goal of incorporating the countries into their own "system of global rule" and undermining prospects for integration within the CIS model. After the partial success of democratic "color revolutions" in some former Soviet countries, he claimed, the West wishes to build a "Baltic-Black Sea belt"

around Russia. Thus far it has been unsuccessful because of the intransigence of Belarus. Therefore the West would like to see a change of regime in Belarus and the permanent committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has demanded a repeat of the March 26 elections. Belarus has responded to this pressure by improving its military cooperation with Russia and seeking to improve further the potential of the "Belarusian-Russian" regional group of forces.

Why would the Minsk regime make constant references to such pressure if Lukashenka truly felt secure? Domestically, the petty and vindictive persecution of real and alleged opponents has continued without abatement. Following the savage jail sentence imposed on presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin, the authorities briefly detained democratic opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich, and, in a ludicrous miscarriage of justice, arrested United Civic Party chairman Anatol Lyabedzka on July 17 and imprisoned him for ten days on the grounds that he swore in a public place! Meanwhile the trial of the unregistered civic initiative "Partnerstva," which has tried to monitor elections in Belarus, began on July 28 behind closed doors, with Judge Leanid Yasinavich presiding. The leaders of the initiative have been in detention since last February. One of the few remaining independent newspapers, Khimik (Navapolatsk), suspended publication in early July citing financial problems, while another, Komsomolskaya pravda v Belorussii, faces a criminal case and potential libel charges of R1 billion (\$467,000) for its July 11 article about the personal finances of Hryhory Kisel, the head of the government's ONT television station.

In what ways does the Lukashenka regime feel threatened? The United States and the EU have imposed a travel ban on the president and his leading associates, and they have frozen their foreign bank accounts (if such exist). In late July, Congressman Christopher Smith (R-NJ) proposed the renewal of the Belarusian Democracy Act, originally signed into law by President George W. Bush in October 2004. The bill would authorize \$20 million in assistance for each of the years 2007 and 2008 for NGOs, youth groups, independent media, and democratic political parties, and a further \$7.5 million for the same two years for the creation of surrogate TV and radio broadcasts to the people of Belarus. Such measures might keep the opposition afloat, but they do not directly threaten the tenure of Lukashenka. Rather they are a sign that the United States fails to see any improvement in the harsh internal environment in Belarus.

As for the implicit foreign policy mission to create a new power bloc, it is surely a lost cause. The Russia-Belarus Union, if and when it materializes in full, would be of more benefit to the geostrategic interests of Russia than Belarus. Lukashenka has few friends elsewhere, which is why Chavez was made so welcome. Isolation both in the world and in office perhaps breeds fear and paranoia. On the other hand, exaggerated foreign threats are also calculated to maintain an atmosphere of trepidation within Belarus, and the perpetuation of the image of a small, successful country surrounded by states intent on overthrowing the Minsk regime. In reality, there are no discernible external threats to the Lukashenka regime and for the moment the internal ones have subsided.

(Belarusy i Rynok, July 24; Sovetskaya Belorussiya, July 25; Narodnaya Volya, July 26; Belapan, July 5, 23, and 25; Belorusskie Novosti, July 25; and Charter 97, July 31)

Source: David Marples; Jamestown Foundation; August 2, 2006; <http://jamestown.org/>

13. Pabriks Refuses To Meet Belarus Ambassador

In response to the diplomatic incident in Minsk, Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks has said he would not meet with Belarus' incoming ambassador, Aleksander Gerasimenko, on Aug. 9.

Pabriks' spokeswoman, Inga Saleniece, said the minister would agree to a meeting only after Belarus' Foreign Ministry provided an explanation as to why law enforcement officials there unlawfully entered a Latvian diplomat's apartment last week.

Minsk responded by Pabriks' statement by saying a refusal to meet the ambassador would not prevent the latter from carrying out his duties in Riga, since Gerasimenko has already handed his credentials to President Vaira Vike-Freiberga.

Source: The Baltic Times; August 2, 2006; <http://www.baltictimes.com>

14. New Congressional Measure Aims To Promote Democracy in Belarus

Would authorize sanctions, funds for democracy-building, broadcasting

A bipartisan measure has been introduced in the U.S. Congress to continue support for the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Belarus, as well as to encourage the consolidation and strengthening of Belarus' sovereignty and independence.

The Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006 would provide assistance for democracy-building efforts, fund radio and television broadcasting to the people of Belarus and introduce additional sanctions against the regime of Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko.

It would continue and extend the provisions of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004, which provides assistance for Belarusian political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and independent media while prohibiting U.S. government agencies from providing loans and investment to the Belarus government, except for humanitarian goods. That law authorized appropriations for fiscal years 2005 and 2006.

In introducing the reauthorization bill July 27, Representative Christopher Smith said one of its primary purposes is "to demonstrate sustained U.S. support for Belarus' independence and for those struggling to promote democracy and respect for human rights in Belarus despite the formidable pressures and personal risks they face from the anti-democratic regime."

Co-sponsors include Representatives Tom Lantos of California, a Democrat, and Thaddeus McCotter of Michigan, a Republican.

The bill would authorize \$20 million in assistance for each of the fiscal years 2007 and 2008 for democracy-building activities, such as support for NGOs and international exchanges. It also would authorize \$7.5 million each year for radio and television broadcasting to the people of Belarus.

Sanctions in the bill range from a ban on entry into the United States for Belarusian officials, even lower level ones, to a variety of economic and financial sanctions, including a request that U.S. executive directors of international financial institutions vote against nonhumanitarian financial assistance to the Belarusian government.

"I want to make it absolutely clear that these sanctions are aimed not at the people of Belarus, whose desire to be free we unequivocally support, but at a regime that displays contempt for the dignity and rights of its citizens even as the corrupt leadership moves to further enrich itself at the expense of the people," said Smith, who serves as co-chair of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, an independent agency of the U.S. government charged with monitoring human rights.

In March 2006, President Bush sent Congress a report required by the 2004 Belarus Democracy Act that cited "numerous reports of Belarusian sales or delivery of weapons or weapons-related technologies to states of concern, including state sponsors of terrorism." It also cited "credible information" that senior government leadership in Belarus abused public resources, "including for personal use," and said Lukashenko was "likely among the most corrupt leaders in the world."

Lukashenko, who has been in office since 1994, engineered what the United States criticized as a "fraudulent referendum" in 2004 that enabled him to change the Belarus Constitution and run for a third term. The presidential election was held on March 19, 2006, and an international

election observation mission found it "severely flawed." The United States refused to accept the results and supported opposition calls for a new vote.

During a speech to leaders from the Baltic and Black Sea states May 4 in Vilnius, Lithuania, Vice President Cheney called Belarus "the last dictatorship in Europe" and said "there is no place in a Europe whole and free for a regime of this kind."

Later in May, President Bush banned travel to the United States by Lukashenko and senior officials associated with his regime, citing pervasive election fraud, corruption and human rights abuses.

In June, Bush imposed targeted financial sanctions on Lukashenko and nine other top officials in his government, essentially freezing any assets they have in the United States and barring U.S. citizens from doing business with them.

In introducing the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act, Smith applauded the actions the Bush administration has taken and said the Belarusian people deserve American support in their struggle for democracy and freedom.

Smith said he hopes the new legislation and European efforts will help put an end to the violation of human rights and democratization commitments by the Lukashenka regime "and will serve as a catalyst to facilitate independent Belarus' integration into a democratic Europe."

Smith's statement is available on the Helsinki Commission Web site.

The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State.

Source: Jeffrey Thomas, The Washington File, the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State; August 1, 2006; <http://usinfo.state.gov>

15. CSTO Should Be Key Guarantor of International Security – Lukashenko

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) should become a key guarantor of international security, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said at the meeting with heads of Belarusian foreign missions on Tuesday.

"The CSTO should become a key guarantor of security inside and outside Europe, alongside NATO," he said. "We are not going to be in confrontation with NATO. On the contrary, we should cooperate for ensuring security in Europe and the world."

The CSTO sphere of responsibility "spreads onto two continents: from Brest to Vladivostok, from Yerevan in the Caucasus to Dushanbe in Asia. Meanwhile, NATO is pretending that the CSTO does not exist. Does this attitude meet the interests of common security?" he wondered.

As for the cooperation between CSTO member countries, Lukashenko said: "if our CSTO partners take their military and political union seriously, they should more actively proclaim the common view of international problems."

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

16. Belarus President Offers EU, U.S. Beneficial Partnership

The Belarusian president said Tuesday that his country offered the European Union and the United States a mutually beneficial partnership, but that it had no desire to join the EU.

Alexander Lukashenko's domestic policies have come under severe criticism from the West, with Washington dubbing him "Europe's last dictator" and both the U.S. and the EU banning him from entering their territories.

"Our strategic line in regard to cooperation with the European Union and the United States is clear - without any intention of joining the EU, we offer a mutually beneficial partnership with a strong neighbor. We offer the United States the same cooperation within our spheres of common interest," the Belarusian leader said.

"People say that Belarus has, allegedly, the wrong values. If we are talking about respect for states, their independence and sovereignty, their rights to choose their futures, about the right to life and free labor, these are our values." The U.S. and the EU do not have a monopoly on these rights, he added. "Our nation paid a far greater price for these values than the U.S. and the EU."

As well being blacklisted by the U.S. and the 25 EU member states along with 30 senior diplomats following presidential elections in March that international observers called flawed, the EU also decided in May to freeze the authoritarian leader's accounts.

Lukashenko called on Belarusian diplomats to work on the promotion and protection of the country's image abroad, and warned them against negative steps given the high level of international pressure on Belarus.

Lukashenko added that the formation of a favorable image for Belarus would benefit the country's economic development.

"Every German or Pole should know that [natural] gas came to their country via Belarus," he said. In June the Belarusian leader said his country would make "two or three steps" to meet the EU halfway if the union made at least one step.

Source: RIA Novosti; August 1, 2006; <http://en.rian.ru/>

17. Latvian Diplomat Charged with Distributing Pornography in Belarus

Diplomatic tensions between Latvia and Belarus remain high after a Latvian diplomat was charged with distributing pornography. Latvia remains unconvinced about the charges, and has demanded an official explanation from Belarus as to why the diplomat's apartment was raided by Belarusian authorities last week.

Belarus Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov said the diplomat, who has not been detained, was involved in pornography distribution.

"Pornographic materials have been seized from him. A criminal probe has been opened against the employee of the Latvian embassy for distribution of pornographic materials," the minister said.

"According to the information of Belarus law enforcement authorities, the Latvian diplomat had been doing this for a long time. But they could not identify him," Naumov said.

The Belarus Foreign Ministry announced on Friday that after it received a report from the law enforcement agencies, it would forward it to the Latvian Foreign Ministry.

Latvian Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks declined to comment the news until a later date.

The Latvian Foreign Ministry in a statement issued Friday afternoon said that Latvia still insisted on receiving official explanations from Belarus about entering the diplomat's residence.

"The Foreign Ministry has not found any facts in actions by the Latvian diplomat that would justify such conduct on part of the Belarus authorities," the Latvian Foreign Ministry said in the statement.

The ministry underlined that Latvia was interested in good neighbor relations with Belarus but "violation of generally accepted international legal standards in the given case does not indicate any intention of part of Belarus to act with responsibility within the international community."

The Latvian Foreign Ministry reiterated that it had handed a note to Belarus over the incident.

Source: The Baltic Times; July 31, 2006; <http://www.baltictimes.com>

18. A Refined Regime

Belarus now pumps large quantities of oil to the EU. What does this mean for the economy and the prospects for democratization?

Belarus as a trade-based economy oriented towards Europe sounds like a vision of Belarus' embattled opposition politicians - but in fact, this is the picture that emerges from European Union trade statistics. With over half of its exports going to Europe and billions of euros in revenue and profits flowing back, Belarus appears to be in far better shape today than just three years ago, when its outdated goods could not compete even in Russia. So what happened in the last few years?

A European Economy?

In 2003, the \$32 million of exports from Belarus to the United Kingdom could be disregarded as a rounding error. But just two years later Britain imported goods worth 12 times as much, and is on track to exceed \$700 million in 2006. As an exporter to the U.K., Belarus is now ahead of Ukraine.

In the greater EU, the picture is the same: between 2003 and 2005, exports from Belarus to the 25 current member states increased by 70 percent and amounted to 3.3 billion euros last year. Where less than 20 percent of Belarusian exports went to the EU just three years ago, this share has now grown to over 50 percent.

This is a remarkable transformation, and even more remarkable is how little it's been noticed. But there's a simple explanation: the increase is due entirely to changes in the global energy markets. The annual average price of oil doubled between 2003 and 2005, while exports of petroleum products from Belarus to Europe increased by a factor of 2.7, outpacing the mere price effect.

The increase in Belarus' petroleum exports was the result of a deliberate policy by the government of Belarus to use Soviet-era refineries in Mazyr and Novapolatsk to refine Russian oil and sell it to the West. The refineries, whose capacity far exceeds the domestic needs of Belarus, were designed as part of the Soviet energy strategy in the 1970s.

Back then, rising oil prices prolonged the life of the moribund Soviet economy by a decade. President Lukashenka clearly hopes for a similar effect on his regime.

The Brezhnev-era factories were put back to work and the volume of petroleum pumped to Europe rose by 37 percent in just two years. The share of fuels in the total trade flow to Europe rose from 36 to 56 percent. The money earned accounts for more than 15 percent of the total national product.

Just as in a Middle East oil state, Belarus' prosperity is now built on oil.

An Oil Boom Sponsored by the Neighbor

But unlike most other oil states, Belarus does not have its own mineral deposits; rather, it refines the crude it gets from Russia. Oil constitutes roughly 40 percent of Belarusian exports; it also constitutes about 40 percent of Belarusian imports.

The country's economy has become a pipeline with a refinery on top.

Refining other people's oil is not a bad business, especially at a time when global refining capacities cannot meet demand, as is currently the case. But it normally does not yield the sort of profit that Belarus is now realizing. From 2003 to 2005, the difference between the market price for Russian crude and the price paid for it by the Belarusian refineries was between 35 and 45 percent, according to Belarusian government statistics quoted by Jaroslav Romanchuk of the opposition United Civic Party. Other observers quote similar margins.

This difference allows Belarusian refineries to make around \$10 profit per barrel, after accounting for the unprofitable domestic oil consumption. (For comparison, the European refining industry, which does not have access to discounted Russian crude, was losing about \$4 per barrel in 2005.) This is a fantastic profit: Russia itself makes less money on extraction than it allows Belarus to make on refining.

This lucrative trade now generates profits of some \$1 billion for Belarus every year.

In a country personally run by the president, it is all too obvious where these profits go: the national library building, the celebrations for the national holiday on 3 July, armored vehicles for the police.

The transformation of Belarus into an oil state would not have been possible without changes in Russia. In fact, it is another aspect of a dramatic transformation that has occurred in Belarus' mighty neighbor to the east since 2003.

A few years ago, the direct integration of the Belarusian economy into that of Russia would not have been possible. Oligarchic, chaotic, and corrupt as it may have been, Russia was nevertheless a market not controlled by the state. Today, things are very different. Still operating on market principles, engaging foreign capital, and participating in global economic clubs, Russia has re-established the central role of the state in economic management. Its leadership is pursuing a deliberate strategy of creating a powerful but state-centric domestic economy built around energy assets.

Having rationalized and partly renationalized its energy industry, the Kremlin created a system of large core enterprises run by current or former government officials and personal allies of President Putin. In this new emerging Russia Inc., Belarus Inc. is a small subsidiary that is allowed to refine some of the Russian oil in order to sustain its otherwise stagnant Soviet industries.

Meanwhile, just as Russia has increased the role of the state in its economy, Lukashenka is allowing a greater role for the market in his. Unlike Putin, he does not have to appoint his people to key management posts - no serious business has ever been possible in Belarus without an affiliation with the president's apparatus. In the end, the two countries' systems are converging, and this, just as Belarus' reliance on oil, has clear political implications.

What It All Means

First, the Belarusian opposition has to accept that its traditional economic message that the regime has failed the economy is not going to work when billions of euros are flowing into the country. The non-oil economy is deteriorating fast, but it is being sustained by redistribution of oil profits. Paid as salaries or given as holidays, subsidies continue to make things look normal in regular workers' eyes. The opposition needs a different message. The electoral speeches by

opposition leader Alyaksandr Kozulin, now in jail, may provide a useful template: rather than try to convince his audiences that the economy was stagnating, he talked of how the benefits of the so-called economic miracle had not trickled down to ordinary workers even while the lifestyle of Belarus' pro-Lukashenka elite was taking on a sheikh-like flavor.

Second, Europe is now Belarus' main trading partner, which means that it has vastly more influence than commonly thought. Europe has far more influence on Belarus than on Russia, on whose energy Europe is critically dependent. Even though Europe buys fuel from Belarus, it does not depend on it, since anyone can refine oil but only a few countries actually have it. Even though large for Belarus, its fuel imports to Europe are only three percent of those from Russia and can easily be replaced by other refiners.

Direct hard sanctions against Belarus, or at least its fuel export industry, would be extremely effective. However, they would also be difficult to implement given the collateral damage, and the propaganda opportunities for Lukashenka, that they would cause. But the mere threat of sanctions, and pointed public references to Belarus' dependence on Europe, could have some influence, and there are certainly no limitations on public campaigns of opposition activists against the European energy companies that trade with the dictator. In the age of the global brand, grassroots pressure on companies can have dramatic effects.

Finally, there is always the possibility that Belarus could fully converge with Russia in a model combining political authoritarianism with economic modernization. Should this happen, the chances of changing the political regime in Belarus in the foreseeable future would virtually disappear. If the temporary oil windfall can be translated into a more sustainable, more modern, and more open economy built for the future, most Belarusians are likely to follow the example of Malaysians, Koreans, and Chinese who at various points of time happily traded large amounts of political freedom for a certain amount of economic well-being.

Source: Siarhej Karol, Transitions Online, July 27, 2006; <http://www.tol.cz>

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.
