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- **Oborona Activist Deported from Belarus**
- **Election Activists Sentenced In Closed-Door Trial**
- **Latvia Recalls Ambassador To Belarus**

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## **HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

### **1. Opposition Activist Sentenced to 10 Days of Arrest for National Flag**

On August 8, Byaroza District Court of the Brest region sentenced the chairman of Brest regional branch of the Belarusian Popular Front Party, Yury Hubarevich, to 10 days of administrative arrest for using unregistered symbols, *BelaPAN* reported, citing Raman Kislyak, a human rights activist who attended the trial. Kislyak reported that the incident leading to the administrative offense, took place during a walking tour of democratic youth called "Good Will Crusade 2006" (August 3-6). A white-red-white flag was raised between tents. Young people were sailing a boat with the same flag.

"It was noticed by nearby vacationers: a worker of Byaroza District Executive committee, a policeman and an employee of local TV who had a video camera," R. Kislyak said. "Like the marchers, they were witnesses in court. There wasn't any evidence that Hubarevich raised or carried the flag. I think Yury claimed responsibility in order to prevent problems for other participants of the tour".

According to the report, video footage and witness testimony the court found Yury Hubarevich guilty of violation of the Article 167 Part 2 of the Administrative Code. He is to serve the sentence in the remand prison by Byaroza police department.

Three administrative reports were drawn up against participants of the journey "Good Will Crusade-2006" (for parking a car closer than 50 meters to water and making a camp in a state nature reserve).

*Source: Charter 97; August 9, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng>*

### **2. Anti-Protestant Education Policy Persists**

Belarus' state education system continues to teach anti-religious – and particularly anti-Protestant – ideas, Forum 18 News Service has found. Despite protests from religious communities, state textbooks continue to make false allegations such as associating charismatic churches and Hare Krishna devotees with the group behind the fatal gas attack on Tokyo's metro system, claiming that Adventists operate "on the same principle as any fraudster," and depicting the history of Protestantism in Belarus negatively. The impact of such textbooks varies, as does knowledge of them, Forum 18 has found. Forum 18 has spoken to schoolchildren who say that children aged 13 or younger regard one Minsk charismatic church "as a sect," with older pupils adopting a neutral attitude. Some teachers do not share the state's hostile attitude, but others do. In one Minsk school, the headteacher told teachers that 90 per cent of every class must join the Pioneers, a Soviet-style state youth organization, "but that Baptists and satanists were permitted not to join." In another incident, one teacher told a class that "they shouldn't be friends" with a Protestant pupil.

The Belarusian state education system continues to inculcate its citizens with anti-religious – and particularly anti-Protestant – ideas, Forum 18 News Service has found.

A 2005 Russian-language textbook intended for students in higher education, for example, includes "Christians of the Full Gospel (CFG, neo-Pentecostals), also known as 'charismatics' " along with satanists and Aum Shinrikyo (responsible for the 1995 fatal gas attack in the Japanese capital Tokyo) in a section called "Other Neo-cults". Entitled "Religious Studies" and published in Minsk, Forum 18 recently purchased a copy of the textbook from a large, state-owned bookstore on the Belarusian capital's main street.

A Belarusian-language textbook for secondary school pupils published in 2004, "The Basics of Living Safely" includes six pages on the dangers of "sects" – including Baptists and Adventists. While specific groups are for the most part not named, Baptists are said to have "ignored state

obligations such as the registration of marriages and births" and "been characterised by fanaticism and hostility to dissenters." Adventists are alleged to operate "on the same principle as any fraudster."

On 10 November 2004 the leaders of the major Baptist, Adventist, Pentecostal and Charismatic unions in Belarus wrote to leading state representatives in protest at this textbook's "false information about Protestant communities" and demanded its withdrawal from schools. They pointed out that a similar complaint about the 2003 Russian-language "Man in the World of Culture" textbook had led to Education Ministry representatives promising to introduce "corresponding changes" on re-publication and when producing future religion-related materials. Hare Krishna devotees were also targeted by this textbook and also complained to the authorities in.

The Education Ministry's 29 December 2004 response, however, rejected the Protestants' complaint. "There is no information in the textbook about the Conference of Churches of Seventh-Day Adventists or the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Republic of Belarus [two of the signatories of the 10 November complaint], only Baptists and Seventh-Day Adventists," states the letter, "and there are known to be many unions and trends among Baptists." The response also claims that the textbook's references to Baptists are purely historical, and that a subsequent passage on "totalitarian sects" bears no relation to their activity. It fails to address the statements claiming that Adventists are associated with fraud.

What is the impact of such textbooks? On 20 July this year Forum 18 interviewed Alina and Yulia, two 17-year-old members of a Minsk charismatic church. They noted that classmates usually have a neutral attitude towards their church, while pupils aged 13 or younger "say it's a sect." Presuming this view to be the influence of teachers and parents – "or the lack of it" – the two girls were not familiar with the textbooks described above. However, Alina told Forum 18 that she had recently studied from a history textbook, whose narrative was accompanied by fictional eyewitness accounts of major events. "The one on how Protestantism came to Belarus in the sixteenth century made out that everything was terrible, when everyone regards it as a golden age. I told the teacher that I was against this view and she said I wasn't the first to say so, and that she agreed."

Some older church members are familiar with the textbooks. Now aged 21, Slava recalled that religion formed a part of the "Man in the World of Culture" course, which he described as "Darwinist". Lena told Forum 18 that she had taken a religious studies course at university: "We even brought [Protestant] Christian music into class, but we had an open-minded teacher and it was 1999." Her friend Tanya described to Forum 18 how she resigned from her teaching post rather than accept the additional role of organizer for the state-supported Belarusian Republican Youth Union: "It would have meant saying that Protestant churches are bad." Created in 2002, the Youth Union is modeled on the Soviet-era Komsomol Communist Party youth league and is reputed to have some 120,000 members in Belarus.

Also interviewed on 20 July, a Pentecostal mother told Forum 18 of a recent staff meeting in one Minsk school at which the headteacher explained to teachers that 90 per cent of every class must join the Pioneers (who are based on the Soviet-era organization for 10 to 15-year-olds), "but that Baptists and satanists were permitted not to join." She also described an incident in which one 11-year-old Protestant girl refused to participate in a school game in which a team was called "Jolly Demons": "The teacher made her stand in front of the class and told the other pupils that they shouldn't be friends with her."

As of this September, the same mother told Forum 18, there will no longer be an opportunity for parents to educate children in a religious spirit outside the state system. Signed into law by President Aleksandr Lukashenko on 5 July 2006, "On General Secondary Education" permits home schooling only if a pupil has a sufficiently serious medical condition. Even in such cases, state education representatives are responsible for providing tuition, and the law states in general

that parents and guardians "may not interfere in the choice of instruction method (..) made by a teacher in accordance with Belarusian law."

Speaking to Forum 18 in the Belarusian capital on 18 July, the main Baptist Union's elder for Minsk region confirmed continued state intrusion into such religious education as may be legally provided by churches. Gennadi Brutsky described how different state departments conducted up to four checks a day on this summer's Baptist-run youth camp in Kobrin (Brest region), western Belarus, even though all participants held written parental approval: "It made it impossible for us to work."

Brutsky also told Forum 18 that some local authorities continue to try to obtain the names of children involved in Baptist Sunday schools (see F18News 13 October 2003 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=161](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=161)). At their congresses, Baptist leaders urge churches not to comply with such illegal requests, he said, but one young pastor recently made the mistake of doing so: "Those children were called into the head teacher's office one by one, threatened and told to leave the Sunday school." Brutsky also described how one state teacher initially spoke to a class positively about church before asking children to raise their hands if they attended Sunday school: "But then the same thing happened." He was unable to provide Forum 18 with further details of these incidents, however: "There is always something like that happening somewhere. We're used to it."

The influence of Soviet-style militant atheism remains strong among state officials.

*Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18: August 8, 2006; <http://www.forum18.org>*

### **3. Oborona Activist Deported from Belarus**

On August 5, 2006 Ekaterina Vinokurova, a coordinator of the Republican Party of Russia and an activist of the Oborona Youth Public Movement, was deported from Belarus. She is prohibited from entering Belarus for five years. After 10 days of imprisonment the woman was freed from the special detention centre on the Okrestina street in Minsk.

According to the United Civil Party (UCP) press service, Ekaterina Vinokurova was taken to the rail station, accompanied by an officer of the migration service.

Let us remind you that two Russian citizens and a Belarusian citizen Viktor Simanovich were detained for the unauthorized rally in front of Russian embassy. They hold the banner "Life imprisonment for Luka [Lukashenko – Ed.]" and cried out "Russia without Putin, Belarus without Lukashenko!", "We need different Russia, we need different Belarus", and "No support to the Belarusian dictator!"

On August 5 Victor Simanovich was also released from the special detention centre on the Okrestina street. Nikolai Zboroshenko, a coordinator of the Oborona Youth Organization branch in Moscow, is still serving his 15-days sentence. According to Kristina Shatikova, the Russian citizen is holding a hunger strike in prison.

*[Trans. Ed.]*

*Source: AFN; August 8, 2006; <http://www.afn.by/>*

### **4. Election Activists Sentenced In Closed-Door Trial**

A verdict was handed down today in the closed-door trial of four Belarusian activists accused of running an unregistered organization.

The four, who have been in pretrial detention since February, each received prison sentences ranging from six months to two years. The four worked for a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that was planning to monitor the March 19 presidential election.

## Relatively Light Sentences

The sentences handed down today by Judge Leanid Yasinovich were more lenient than those recommended by the prosecution -- but harsh from the perspective of the defendants and their supporters.

The four -- Tsimafey Dranchuk, Mikalay Astreyka, Enira Branitskaya, and Alyaksandr Shalayka -- were charged with belonging to an unregistered organization "infringing upon the interests and rights of citizens."

That's a far cry from the accusations made by authorities when the four were originally arrested. Then, state officials suggested that the activists were plotting to overthrow the state and launch terrorist attacks in Minsk.

On August 2, prosecutors recommended the accused be given sentences of two to three years.

In the end, Astreyka received a sentence of two years. Dranchuk was sentenced to one year, and Branitskaya and Shalayka each received six-month sentences. The time they have already served means that at least Branitskaya and Shalayka are due to be released soon.

## Relatives Angry At Closed-Door Trial

Information about the trial has been scant, with the public denied access and little press coverage.

Since their detention in February, relatives of the accused have complained that their visiting rights have been restricted.

Volha Antsyovich, the wife of defendant Tsimafey Dranchuk, gave birth to a baby son while her husband was in prison.

"I think our children will grow up to become very good people," she said. "Our son, while growing up, will know and remember that when he was born, his father was not able to give me flowers or write me a note and give it to the maternity hospital.

"Even if this regime will not change by the time Platon [their son] becomes an adult, this regime has already made a staunch opponent [out of him] at the time of his birth," she added.

The wives of both Astreyka and Shalayka are currently pregnant as well.

## 'Struggle Against The Truth'

The defendants have argued that their NGO, Partnership, was only interested in election monitoring.

Opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who lost by a wide margin to Lukashenka in the March presidential election, has spoken out in support of the defendants.

"They [the authorities] have already begun to fight people who did nothing but had an intention to do something. What did these people want to do? They wanted to monitor the [presidential] election and they wanted to do an exit poll. This is done in all countries, even in those that are not very civilized," Milinkevich said on July 28.

"The authorities are afraid because they know that they lie and they know that the elections were falsified. They are afraid of the truth. Therefore, it is a struggle against the truth," he added.

## International Concern

Ambassadors of several European Union countries have also criticized the trial -- in particular, the fact that it is being held behind closed doors.

Tsimafey Dranchuk on August 1 (Bymedia.net) German Ambassador Martin Hecker, speaking outside the courtroom on July 31, compared the proceedings to the show trials that took place during the Nazi and Stalin eras. He also decried the fact that the work of independent election-monitoring groups is considered illegal in Belarus.

And the British ambassador to Belarus, Brian Bennett, said the trial is a worrying development. "We're here to show that we are keeping an eye on the process and to show our support for the democratic process in general," he added. "But also to show the authorities that we are concerned about developments here."

The activists were arrested in accordance with amendments to the country's Criminal Code. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka signed off on the amendments in December 2005.

The changes make it a crime punishable by up to two years in jail to "discredit" Belarus in the eyes of foreign organizations and governments. People convicted of circulating "false information" about the country also face similar prison terms under the new law.

The United States and European Union have both spoken out against the amendments. // RFE/RL's Belarus Service, with agency reports

*Source: RFE/RL; August 4, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

## DOMESTIC

### 5. Internet Users Oppose Further Regulation

Most Belarusian Internet users oppose additional legal regulation. Results of the survey, conducted by the National Law Internet Portal from 4 July till 7 August, testify to it. 56% of respondents answered negatively to the question: "Is additional legal regulation of activity on the Internet necessary in Belarus? ", 44% of respondents voted in favor of this proposal.

Readers will recall that on May 16, 2006, Minister of Information Vladimir Rusakevich declared that amendments, planned to be passed in the law "About press and other mass media", were going to concern the Internet in the first place.

Moreover, according to some previous surveys, 65% of respondents claimed they were using the Internet to find information, 11% used it at work, 12% browsed the Internet for educational purposes, 3% used it because of entertainment and e-mail, for 2% of respondents it was a means of communication and 1% used it to shop on-line.

*Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; August 9; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

## REGIONAL

### 6. Customs Union Priority for EurAsEC - Lukashenko

The EurAsEC is becoming a real economic union taken into consideration in the West and in the East. And formation of an efficient Customs Union remains a priority, Alexander Lukashenko, president of Belarus, said at a meeting with Belarusian representatives in international bodies August 8, Kazakhstan Today reports citing the Belarusian presidential press service.

The huge economic, energy, and human potential of the EurAsEC member states can turn the EurAsEC in perspective into a serious player in international economic and political processes, Belarusian president believes.

Speaking about the participation of the republic in the integrating organizations in general, Mr. Lukashenko said that Belarus was the most coherent and active motor of the Eurasian integration. According to him, results of the recent EurAsEC and CSTO summits in Minsk convincingly confirmed it.

"The time shows that these organizations can be active integrating centers attractive for others," - he said.

Mr. Lukashenko believes that the CSTO must become an independent subject in the international relations and provide security of its member states.

The head of Belarus stated that although there were problematic issues in those organizations, at the same time the CSTO had become a full participant of the international security system. "Our interest and our participation is the group of Belarusian-Russian troops in the Western direction. It is our responsibility zone in the CSTO. First of all we will undertake actions to provide security of the CSTO member states," - he observed.

Moreover he declared: "We will never be mere observers in any other events in Asia and Russia that do not contradict our Constitution."

In his view, the CSTO efficiency greatly depends on the capacity of its member states to work out a unitary approach, their readiness to take concerted actions. "Therefore we expect from our CSTO representatives some active work on further improvement of the coordination," - Mr. Lukashenko said.

The current situation in the world confirms an important significance of the preventive instruments; this is why improvement of our informational and analytical work is one of chief elements of the CSTO development.

Among other CSTO priorities there is also creation and development of a system for reacting to emergencies, military and technical co-operation, he concluded.

*Source: Gazeta.kz; August 9, 2006; <http://eng.gazeta.kz>*

## **7. Moscow Mulls Regime Change in Belarus**

Sergei Karaganov, a well-know political scientist from Moscow, the head of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, stated in an interview to the Polish newspaper *Dziennik* that the Belarusian authorities have become more and more unpredictable.

"Russia views Lukashenko and his policy very critically. Until recently, Belarus was an oasis of calmness. Now Belarus becomes more and more unstable and unpredictable. It does not follow agreements, it changes agreements conditions. We could even shut our eyes to several issues which fall short of democratic norms and oppose the Russian understanding of economical and geopolitical interests, as long as calm prevailed in Belarus. This time is getting to its end," – Sergei Karaganov thinks.

In his opinion, Russia may and must influence Aleksandr Lukashenko, because "Belarus is not only our geopolitical partner, but it is also an important chain of the path our products use to get to the West. I mean, first of all, our energy carriers, i.e. gas and oil. Stability ensuring in this unstable country is necessary."

Recalling the recent presidential election in Belarus, the political scientist said that Kremlin did not try to impact its results by supporting Lukashenko. "The tone of the comments in the Russian press and TV was often critical. However, we did not want to weaken Lukashenko's positions. We wished to give him another chance."

Commenting that the Lukashenko's presidency for the next five year, Karaganov said that "the situation is open and it depends on many factors. A lot of events are happening in and around Belarus. Personally, I do not wish to both Belarusians and Belarus the same [political] regime as they have had till present time. Especially that we are going to demand normal payments for gas and oil form Lukashenko, and it means crisis for the Belarusian economy."

At the same time Karaganov stated that "Russia does not need any revolutions. We want Belarus to evolve. Therefore I think that our ideas about the authorities changing in Belarus are more constructive than the conceptions of some of the Belarusian opposition."

*[Trans. Ed.]*

*Source: Belorusskie Novosti; August 8, 2006; <http://www.naviny.by/>*

## **8. Lukashenko Appoints New Ambassador to Russia**

On August 4, Aleksandr Lukashenko appointed new ambassadors to Russia, Britain and Kazakhstan, as well as two new presidential aides.

Notably, the Belarusian leader appointed Vasily Dolgolyov, formerly deputy prime minister/authorized representative of the president to Russia, as ambassador to the Russian Federation; Vasily Gapeyev, another former deputy prime minister, as ambassador to Kazakhstan; and Aleksandr Mikhnevich, formerly a deputy minister of foreign affairs, as ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and to the Republic of Ireland.

In addition, the head of state appointed Vladimir Puzyrevsky as presidential aide/chief inspector for the Brest region, and Anatoly Sivak as presidential aide/chief inspector for the city of Minsk.

While speaking to the newly appointed ambassadors, Mr. Lukashenko suggested stepping up efforts to increase Belarus' exports to Kazakhstan, Russia and the UK.

He noted that Russia is a strategic partner of Belarus. He pointed to the advancement of national interests and an increase in trade as the main tasks of the embassy in Moscow and Belarus' representatives in the Belarusian-Russian integration agencies.

The head of state directed the new ambassadors to Kazakhstan and the UK to diversify Belarus' exports to those countries.

He tasked Mr. Gapeyev with looking for new forms and areas for the development of relations with Kazakhstan.

He noted that the UK is one of the most influential nations in the world in both the economic and political spheres. Belarus should strengthen and expand ties with that country and look for new forms of cooperation with it, he said, suggesting that Belarus should supply Britain with not only tractors but also machine tools, optical instruments, other goods and even agricultural produce.

Mr. Lukashenko said that both the UK and Ireland provide considerable humanitarian aid to Belarus. According to him, the two countries should switch from purely charitable activities to the "generation of serious mutually beneficial investment projects," including those aimed at the rehabilitation of Belarus' Chernobyl-affected areas. He added that banks could be involved in such projects.

Apart from performing the functions of an ambassador, Mr. Mikhnevich will have to deal with matters concerning Belarus' bid to join the World Trade Organization, Mr. Lukashenko said.  
*//BelaPAN*

*Source: Belorusskie Novosti; August 8, 2006; <http://naviny.by>*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **9. Swedish Prime Minister Writes to Belarus Opposition**

For the first time, a Swedish prime minister has written an official letter to a foreign opposition leader.

Prime Minister Goran Persson has written to the head of the Belarus opposition Aliaksandr Milinkevich who visited Sweden recently - maintaining that Stockholm continues to condemn the imprisonment of another opposition leader in Belarus and the harassment of the opposition there.

The prime minister adds that Sweden plans to provide education for those critical Belarus students thrown out of university.

He also says he is in close contact with neighboring Poland and with Finland as the rotating president of the European Union - following developments in Belarus.

The EU has frozen assets and set up visa restrictions for high-ranking members of the regime in Belarus - labeled the last dictatorship in Eastern Europe.

*Source: Sveriges Radio; August 9, 2006; <http://www.sr.se/>*

### **10. Belarus Hunts Terrorists on Its Borders with the Baltic Countries**

Friendship of the Nations

The "Northwest Strategic Command forces command staff exercises" began in Belarus near the borders with Lithuania and Latvia yesterday. About 4500 troops and 50 pieces of armored equipment are involved. The Belarusian military will work on the interaction of strategic command organs and military units "in the organization and implementation of the antiterrorist struggle."

Military units from the Northwestern Strategic Command, the 103rd Independent Mobile Guard Brigade, territorial defense department organs, including district defense staffs and subdivisions of territorial forces of the Verkhnedvincky District of Vitebsk Region (on the border with Latvia) and the Vileisky District of Minsk Region (near the border with Lithuania), subdivisions of the 5th Independent Special Forces Brigade, an Air Force helicopter detachment and air defense forces.

Those forces will work out actions against illegal armed formations and paratroopers. The 103rd Brigade and 38th Special Forces Brigade will be the illegal paratroopers. The exercises will last until October 2.

The choice of location for the exercises is not chance. Belarus wants to show heightened military activity on its borders with the Baltic countries. Last Monday, the 15-day draft season began in Vitebsk and Minsk Regions, which both border on Baltic countries. Defense of military and state objects and military management organs is being developed. Belarusian Minister of Defense Leonid Maltsev stated at a meeting of officers of the Grodno Military Garrison (near the Lithuanian and Polish borders) that "an information war is being waged against Belarus" and, therefore, Belarus and Russia should stand up to potential threats from NATO with military might.

"The armed forces of our state in alliance with the armed forces of Russia should guarantee a level of battle readiness and have the military might so that no one was tempted to threaten us," Maltsev said. His statement coincided with a statement by Baltic Fleet commander Adm. Vladimir Valuev that Russia and Belarus plan to form a united system of air defense in the Western areas. "A system of information exchange already exists and the system for the use of aerodromes and raising forces and means from the republic of Belarus will depend on future agreement on the level of the ministries of defense of both countries," Valuev said.

According to the Belarusian Defense Ministry, Rosoboroneksport, the Russian state arms exporter, and that ministry signed a contract on September 10 for the delivery of S-300SP antiballistic missile complexes to Minsk. That, the military says, will significantly raise the effectiveness of the Belarusian air defense and Air Force and the unified air defense system of all the CIS countries.

Source: Yury Viktorovich, Kommersant; August 8, 2006; <http://www.kommersant.com>

### **11. U.S. Condemns Sentencing of Election Observers in Belarus**

Washington has condemned Belarus for sentencing four election monitors to jail and said the United States would impose sanctions against the responsible officials.

The four Belarusian members of the Partnyorstvo (Partnership) election monitoring group were found guilty Friday of participating in an unregistered non-governmental organization, AFP reported.

They had been trying to set up independent monitoring of March presidential elections in which strongman Alexander Lukashenko won a third term in power over opposition candidates who accused authorities of intimidation and fraud.

"As we have done in the past, we will take steps to impose appropriate sanctions on those responsible for abusing the rights of these Belarusian citizens," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.

In May, U.S. President George W. Bush froze the U.S. assets of Lukashenko and nine other individuals deemed obstacles to democracy in the republic.

"We call on the Belarusian authorities to free the Partnership civic activists and all those being held on politically motivated charges," McCormack said Friday.

The four have been in jail since they were detained on February 21 in the run-up to the March 19 election.

Partnyorstvo activists across the country were rounded up ahead of the election by armed security men wearing masks. Office equipment belonging to the organization was confiscated. The four were originally accused of plotting a coup with Washington's support ahead of the presidential elections.

"The United States condemns today's conviction of four independent election observers of the monitoring group Partnership," the statement said.

"The politically motivated trial continues a disturbing pattern by the authorities to intimidate civil society activists and to further erode the democratic process in Belarus.

"Their sentences range from six months to two years for allegedly running an unregistered organization that 'encroaches' on people's rights," the statement said.

Source: MosNews, August 5, 2006; [www.mosnews.com](http://www.mosnews.com)

## **12. Sweden Vows Support for Democratic Forces in Belarus**

Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson has promised that his government will continue providing support for democracy-building efforts in Belarus, *Belapan* reported on August 3, citing the press office of Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich. In a letter to Milinkevich, Persson reportedly said that increased assistance will be available for nongovernmental organizations and the independent media under the European Union's European Neighborhood Partnership Instrument program that will replace the TACIS assistance program in 2007, as well as under the Swedish government's projects.

The Swedish government intends to support pro-democratic activists and offer training programs for students who have been expelled from Belarusian higher educational institutions for political reasons.

*Source: RFE/RL; August 4, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>*

## **13. Belarus Prison Terms Anger OSCE**

Europe's security watchdog has voiced deep concern over the jailing of four members of an independent election monitoring group in Belarus.

The chairman of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Karel De Gucht, described the sentences as "disproportionate".

The four monitors were given jail terms ranging from six months to two years.

A court in Minsk found them guilty of taking part in an unregistered group that infringed citizens' rights.

"The long sentences given to two of the young persons can only be said to be disproportionate to the charges. All four have done nothing to merit imprisonment," Karel De Gucht said.

He also urged the authorities in Minsk to release all political detainees in Belarus.

Rounded up

The four monitors are members of the Partnyorstvo (Partnership) monitoring group.

Partnyorstvo's head Nikolai Astreiko, 25, was sentenced to two years in jail.

Timofei Dranchuk, 24, received a one-year sentence, while Enira Bronitskaya, 24, and Alexander Shalaiko, 29, were each jailed for six months.

The group planned to deploy independent observers during the 19 March presidential election. But the four members were detained by the security services in February.

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko secured a third term in office, but the opposition and Western countries said the poll was fraudulent.

The EU and US imposed sanctions on Mr Lukashenko and his top officials soon after the election.

*Source: BBC News; August 4, 2006; <http://news.bbc.co.uk>*

## **14. Belarus: Government Rejects UN Criticism**

Belarus has officially rejected the United Nations Human Rights Committee's finding that it has violated its citizens' religious freedom, by refusing to register a nation-wide Hare Krishna association, Forum 18 News Service has found. The authorities argue, repeating arguments they made in 2004, that their refusal was "justified" because it was in accordance with Belarusian law. Notably, Belarus fails in its response to address the UN Committee's finding that a requirement for state-approved physical premises to gain legal registration is "a disproportionate limitation of the Krishna devotees' right to manifest their religion," under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Belarus had been requested by the UN to publish their response within the country, however Forum 18 has been unable to find any evidence that the authorities have published their January 2006 response. Hare Krishna devotees in Belarus were themselves unaware that Belarus had replied to the UN. Using health and safety criteria to refuse to register a legal address is a tactic that the authorities have also used against Baptists, Forum 18 has found.

Belarus has rejected the United Nations Human Rights Committee's conclusion that it has violated its citizens' religious freedom by refusing to register a nation-wide Hare Krishna association.

"Competent organs" of the Belarusian government repeatedly argue that the refusal was "justified" because it was in accordance with Belarusian law, they claim in a 13 January 2006 response to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Belarusian authorities had been requested by the UN to publish their response within Belarus, however Forum 18 has been unable to find any evidence that the authorities have done so. Hare Krishna devotees in Belarus were themselves unaware that Belarus had replied to the UN.

The one-page document, a copy of which has been seen by Forum 18, explains that a legal personality must indicate its physical location in its founding documents in accordance with the Civil Code. Also, the Living Code stipulates that living accommodation may be used for non-residential purposes only after approval by the relevant Fire Safety, Hygiene and Architectural departments. The legal address given by the Krishna devotees – a free-standing residential house in central Minsk – was found to be in violation of sanitation and fire safety norms, the submission states, so that the court which upheld the authorities' refusal to register the nation-wide association there "made the right decision."

In essence, the Belarusian government's formal response – sent some two months after the 90-day deadline set by the UN Human Rights Committee – merely reiterates submissions it made to the Committee in 2004. Notably, it fails to respond to the issue raised by the UN Committee – that Belarusian legislation's requirement for state-approved physical premises in order for a religious organisation's legal address to be registered has in this case amounted to "a disproportionate limitation of the Krishna devotees' right to manifest their religion under the ICCPR."

The UN Human Rights Committee's 23 August 2005 conclusion had found the decision to be in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which entered force for Belarus in 1976. While noting that the requirement for premises adhering to relevant public health and safety standards is a reasonable limitation of the right of a religious association to carry out its religious activities, the Committee pointed out that there is no reason for such premises to be required for the act of registering such an association at a legal address: "Appropriate premises for such use could be obtained subsequent to registration."

Under the restrictive 2002 Religion Law, only registered nation-wide religious associations have the right to establish monasteries, missions and educational institutions, as well as to invite foreign citizens to preach or conduct other religious activity in Belarus.

On 17 July, Forum 18 visited the Minsk premises where Krishna devotees are denied both nation-wide and compulsory local re-registration by the Belarusian authorities. A spacious, three-storey building, it was constructed during the early 1990s from modern, western-style materials and is of a much higher standard than the traditional log dwellings surrounding it.

One of two Minsk Krishna devotees who filed the original complaint to the UN, Sergei Malakhovsky told Forum 18 that he has still not seen or been able to obtain any state response to the Human Rights Committee's August 2005 conclusion.

Local Krishna devotees have not been disturbed by police for at least the past year, Malakhovsky added, despite being denied the right to worship at their own premises. "We are now trying to follow what officials want. We realised that we were having problems because we were visible – distributing books and doing street processions right here where government is based. After we stopped doing all that in the city centre, Alla Ryabitseva [Minsk's top religious affairs official] urged us to value the fact that they weren't touching us, 'you tolerate us, and we'll tolerate you'."

This approach by Minsk's state religious affairs officials parallels continuing state attempts to confine religious activity to already-state-approved places of worship.

Contacted on 24 July, fellow Minsk religious affairs official Yelena Radchenko said that Alla Ryabitseva was currently away on holiday and that without her authorisation she could not answer any questions.

Despite attempting to comply with the state's demands for compulsory re-registration, the local Minsk Society for Krishna Consciousness has now had several applications rejected and received six official warnings for unsanctioned religious activity. Malakhovsky told Forum 18 that there has still been no move to liquidate the community, however: "Liquidation means scandal."

In an experience identical to that of a number of other confessions in, Malakhovsky said that the community has found a suitable legal address on four occasions – most recently two months ago - only to find that the prospective landlord cancels the lease after the city authorities learn of it through the re-registration application. He showed Forum 18 a 1 December 2005 letter from one such landlord informing the Department for Ideological Work at the administration of Minsk's Soviet District that the Latvia-based company "withdraws its letter concerning the provision of a legal address at premises belonging to our organisation to a religious community of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness."

While in Minsk, Forum 18 discovered that the Belarusian authorities' insistence upon premises meeting health and safety criteria – even if they are the site of a legal address rather than the physical location of a religious organisation – is not confined to the Krishna devotees' case.

The main Baptist Union has been unable to register a new church in Dzerzhinsk (Minsk Region) for over a year, elder for Minsk Region Gennadi Brutsky reported on 18 July. In a series of letters spanning the past six months viewed by Forum 18, Dzerzhinsk district officials insist to the pastor of Ascension Church that he may not register even its legal address at his home because "it will harm the living conditions of your children," "there is no electric illumination of the territory surrounding the house" and "minimum surface area norms for each resident will not be observed."

*Source: Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18; August 3, 2005; <http://www.forum18.org>*

## **15. Latvia Recalls Ambassador To Belarus**

Diplomatic relations between Latvia and Belarus took another turn for the worse today when Riga recalled its ambassador in Minsk.

The decision comes just one day after Latvia expelled a Belarusian diplomat. Last week, Belarusian police raided the home of a Latvian diplomat in Minsk, confiscating his possessions and accusing him of distributing pornography. Latvia says the raid was a breach of the international conventions on the treatment of diplomatic staff.

Source: RFE/RL; August 3, 2006; <http://www.rferl.org>

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The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the International League for Human Rights ([www.ilhr.org](http://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](mailto:cis@ilhr.org).

The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their case for the protection of civil society before the international community regarding Lukashenko's wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.

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