

Edited by Maria Kabalina  
International League for Human Rights

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## HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

### 1. State Mass Media Ignored Elections

The state mass media has ignored the local elections as a real political event. This conclusion was made in the final monitoring report, "Local Elections 2007 In the Belarusian Mass Media," conducted by the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ). The presentation of the monitoring results took place today in the BAJ office.

There were three stages of monitoring: from December 4 to December 16, 2006, during registration of candidates; from December 18, 2006 to January 9, 2007, during the voter awareness campaign; and from January 10 to January 14, 2007, during the final stage of the elections campaign. BAJ also followed press reaction on the results of the local council elections, and the preliminary and official announcement of the results. Twenty-eight national and regional mass media publications were subjects to monitoring.

According to the media expert Ales Antipenko, the state mass media missed important democratic elements such as competition and the possibility of open choice between different political positions while covering the local elections.

Antipenko noted that the limited access to mass media did not allow the candidates to widely present their electoral and political platforms. The voters, in their turn, missed the wide opportunities to familiarize themselves with candidates' views and programs.

"The monitoring results show that the first channel of the Belarusian TV, the *Panorama* program, gave only 4% of air time to local elections coverage. During the propaganda campaign, the hottest election period, *Panorama* even cut the air time for elections news from 5% to 3.9%. The subjects of the election process such as election observers, received only 8 seconds of the state TV air time during the whole period of the monitoring," Antipenko said.

The first channel of the national radio, *Radiofact* program, gave 3% of its air time to election coverage.

According to the media expert, BAJ obtained the same results from monitoring regional TV channels and state national press coverage of elections. *Sovetskaya Belarus* devoted 84% of news coverage to the local elections to the president; 9 percent to the central electoral committee, and 7% to the local authorities. The other political subjects related to elections did not get any attention from the newspaper. Moreover, *Sovetskaya Belarus*, according to the BAJ monitoring, did not cover the propaganda campaign and its main political participants, Antipenko noted.

"The state newspapers ignored some important aspects of the election process, as well as its main participants. They did not contribute at all to the voter's ability to make a deliberate and qualify choice at the elections day," the BAJ monitoring say.

*Trans. by ed.*

*Source: Tut.by; January 31, 2007; <http://news.tut.by/politics/81877.html>*

### 2. Belarus Backtracks, Allows Helsinki Committee To Re-open Office

Authoritarian Belarus backtracked on Wednesday, reversing a decision to shut down the local branch office of the human rights NGO Helsinki Committee, the Belapan news agency reported.

The human rights group was evicted from its central Minsk office space on Monday. Aside from the Helsinki Committee, few independent watch groups operate in the former Soviet republic.

The regime reversed its decision to deny the activist NGO a legal address - which would have made illegal almost all human rights defence work by the group - after a meeting between Helsinki Committee representatives and Mikhail Belyaev, a close associate of Belarusian President Aleksander Lukashenko.

The group received a lease in the same space it had been kicked out of, to run for one year.

"This is a first step by the Belarusian government towards understanding of the European system of values," said Tatiana Prot'ko, a Helsinki Committee spokeswoman.

Pressure by Europe and the US on the Lukashenko regime, in the wake of the Monday eviction, was critical in obliging the Belarusian government to reverse its position, Prot'ko said.

*Source: Playfuls.Com; January 31, 2007; [http://www.playfuls.com/news\\_10\\_11518-Belarus-Backtracks-Allows-Helsinki-Committee-To-Re-open-Office.htm](http://www.playfuls.com/news_10_11518-Belarus-Backtracks-Allows-Helsinki-Committee-To-Re-open-Office.htm), citing DPA.*

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### **3. Lukashenko: Journalist Must Be Responsible**

Aleksandr Lukashenko does not mind freedom of speech in Belarus at all. In fact, just the opposite. He is for freedom of speech, but in his own vision: this freedom must be responsible. Such were his remarks in a meeting with a communist leader of a post-socialistic country [Hungary]. It was especially nice to hear Lukashenko's statement that today in Belarus, "There is a policy of...freedom of speech."

"I concede any freedom for a journalist and today in Belarus we follow this policy," Lukashenko said.

"[But] There is one main thing: journalist must be responsible for what they write – from coma to paragraph, and for an article overall. Then we will not have any "commissioned" articles, he said. However, he did not say anything about what kind of "responsibility" a journalist should have.

He said that, in addition to being "non-commissioned", journalism must be proper.

"When you speak about a person, about his/her personal characteristics, you can criticize his/her position, but do not take anything out from his/her personal life and make it dirty. I do not stand than journalists come down to the level of personal values and misinterpret everything," Lukashenko warned.

"The rest might be criticism. And you should not be scared of it," he allowed.

All the basic principles of mass media new law were announced in easy and clear way. Now the developers and deputies must do their job. And they will.

*Trans. by ed.*

*Source: AFN; January 30, 2007; <http://www.afn.by/news/default.asp?pg=2&newsid=82823#data>*

### **4. Aleksandr Milinkevich Faces Travel Ban**

Aleksandr Milinkevich, leader of the unified democratic forces, and former candidate for presidency, might be prohibited to go abroad, Belapan reported. Milinkevich has received a letter from the October District Court indicating he may face difficulties.

Pavel Mojeika, Milinkevich's press secretary, told *BelaPan* that Milinkevich received a court decision saying he was fined \$4,650,000 rubles [\$2,170 USA] for "premeditated illegal crossing of

the state border". "Along with the decision Milinkevich received a letter saying that if he does not pay the fine by February 10, 2007, he might be prohibited from traveling abroad," Mojeika said.

Mojaiko also saying that for now, Milinkevich has no intention to pay the fine. "Despite the fact that the court decision is final, we are preparing a court appeal to the Minsk Court. This step is allowed by the law," Mojeiko noted.

Milinkevich believes that Belarusian authorities are using the court's decision to limit his activity.

On November 26-29, 2006 Milinkevich traveled to Riga to attend the NATO summit. During his departure from Minsk, border guards mistakenly put the exit stamp in his son's passport. His son's name is also Aleksandr Milinkevich. The mistake was found out only upon Milinkevich's return. The border guards accused Milinkevich of premeditated crossing of the state border using fake papers. On January 25, 2007, the court made a decision to fine Milinkevich.

*Trans. by ed.*

*Source: Tut.by; January 29, 2007; <http://news.tut.by/politics/81752.html>*

## **5. Opposition Youth Fined**

On January 26 an administrative commission of the Minsk's Partizansky District imposed a fine of 310,000 rubles (\$145) on opposition activist Aleksei Shidlovsky for pasting up "Jeans for Freedom!" stickers.

Shidlovsky, leader of an unregistered opposition youth group called Zubr (Bison), was caught by police in the center of Minsk on January 8. Police took him to the Partizansky District Police Department and he was charged under Aleksandr Lukashenko's January 16, 2006 presidential decree, which toughened penalties for violations of regulations governing the maintenance and landscaping of residential areas, *BelaPAN* said.

The young man was fined the same amount for the same offense in November 2006.

In the late 1990s, he served 18 months in prison for spray-painting anti-Lukashenko slogans in the city of Stolbtsy, Minsk region. In 2001, he was sentenced to a two-year corrective labor term for spray-painting "Zubr" on residential buildings in central Minsk.

*Rev. by ed.*

*Source: Belorusskie Novosti; January 28, 2006;*

*[http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2007/01/28/ic\\_news\\_259\\_266111/](http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2007/01/28/ic_news_259_266111/)*

## **6. Better Not to Speak Belarusian**

On January 25, political prisoner Emitter Dashkevich had a meeting with his father. Vyacheslav Dashkevich told *Radio Svaboda* that the colony's employees warned Emitter not to speak in Belarusian during the meeting. They threatened him with ending the meeting earlier if they found him speaking Belarusian.

During the meeting, it became clear that Emitter's parents received only two of nine letters he sent them. The political prisoner also did not get all the letters had sent to him.

Emitter Dashkevich, leader of the Young Front movement, was sentenced to 1.5 year of imprisonment for "activity on behalf of an unregistered organization."

*Trans. by ed.*

*Source: Charter 97; January 26, 2007; <http://www.charter97.org/rus/news/2007/01/26/zd>*

## **7. Belarus Expels Human Rights Group From Offices**

A human rights group in Belarus says authorities have ordered it to leave its offices in a building it has rented from the state since 1998.

The head of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Tatsyana Protska, said on January 22 that the move to deprive the organization of a legal address comes after it had stepped up its contacts with Western Europe.

She said the group will appeal the decision.

*Source: RFE/RL; January 23, 2007; <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/01/4B308E7E-BE6B-4134-B1C4-77A04AF86478.html>*

## **8. Documentary About Belarus' Heroes**

"Ploscha", a new documentary of the famous director Yuri Khaschevatsky, can now be watched online at the [ploscha.wolnabialorus.org](http://ploscha.wolnabialorus.org). The documentary is about the events of March 2006 in Minsk when tens of thousands of Belarusians went out to the streets defending their choice and their country from the fraud and total lies during presidential elections.

"A new force appeared in the country. That is the youth who possess other values, their own world view and who are not afraid to defend them," declared Yuri Khaschevatsky while speaking about his new documentary "Ploscha."

*Rev. by ed.*

*Source: Charter 97; January 18, 2007; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2007/01/18/film>*

## **DOMESTIC**

### **9. Belarus Vandals Demolish Rare US Monument**

Minsk - Belarusian vandals destroyed a rare monument erected by the US in the former Soviet republic, the information company BelaPAN reported Wednesday.

A granite bench unveiled during a 1994 visit to the Belarusian village of Kuropaty by then-US President Bill Clinton was smashed into fragments, said Igor Kuznetsov, a historical researcher.

The US government funded the construction of the bench to memorialize brutal Stalinist repressions in Belarus during the 1930s and 1940s. Kuropaty was the Soviet government's preferred execution site for Belarusian political prisoners.

Relations between Minsk and Washington soured in subsequent years. US State Department spokesmen have routinely accused Belarusian President Aleksander Lukashenko of running the least democratic nation in Europe as a private fiefdom.

For practical purposes, no other US-financed memorials exist in Belarus.

Thieves and vandals had attacked the Clinton-era bench ten times prior to its destruction in January. Raiders in earlier assaults tore off metal decorations and even pried up paving stones.

A cast-iron wreath signifying the undying memory of innocent persons murdered by the Soviet regime was stolen on December 2, Kuznetsov said.

The Belarus police force has never charged a suspect. US diplomats have requested, but failed to receive, a permanent guard for the memorial.

Source: *MonstersandCritics.Com*; January 31, 2007;  
[http://news.monstersandcritics.com/europe/news/article\\_1253874.php/Belarus\\_vandals\\_demolish\\_rare\\_US\\_monument](http://news.monstersandcritics.com/europe/news/article_1253874.php/Belarus_vandals_demolish_rare_US_monument)

### **10. Belarus Has No Political Prisoners – Interior Ministry**

Belarus has no political prisoners, Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov told at a news conference on Wednesday.

“In our prisons we have no citizens, who are sentenced on political charges,” he said.

Those citizens whom the opposition or the western officials consider political prisoners “as a rule serve their prison terms for hooliganism and group violations of public order,” Naumov said.

On his recent visit to Belarus PACE President Rene van der Linden called on the Belarusian authorities to begin integration with the European structures to release political prisoners.

Van der Linden pointed out that the international experts should resolve existing disagreements with Belarus on the definition of who can be consider as a political prisoner.

*Rev. by ed.*

Source: *ITAR-TASS*; January 24, 2007;  
<http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=11185587&PageNum=0>

## **REGIONAL**

### **11. Lukashenko Did Not Cancel Oil-transit Agreements with Russia**

Statements published by some Russian media that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko canceled oil agreements signed with Russia do not represent the facts. “It a clear provocation aimed at destabilizing the bilateral relations,” Lukashenko’s Spokesman Pavel Legky is quoted as saying. “The Belarusian side is interested in soonest disclosing source of this misinformation,” he stressed.

Earlier, media reported that Lukashenko proposed to introduce extra duties again for transit of the Russian oil via the Belarusian territory. “The delegation that conducts talks again was instructed directly by me: those companies that offer such contracts to us with such (overpriced) tariffs, will be here imposed an extra duty while transiting oil to Europe to let us make up our losses from prices that exceed the world ones,” the Belarusian president was quoted as saying by his press office. As Lukashenko said then, Russian companies were transiting about 80 mln tons of oil through Belarus and “the country had something to make up” for its losses.

It is worth mentioning that in early January Minsk suspended transit of Russian oil to Europe via the Druzhba pipeline claiming from Russia to pay new oil transit duties imposed since January 1, 2007. In January it was \$45 per ton. However, later supply of the Russian oil was resumed.

Source: *Regnum*; January 29, 2007; <http://www.regnum.ru/english/773612.html>

### **12. Belarus Leader Threatens New Oil Duties**

President Alexander Lukashenko threatened on Friday to slap fresh duties on Russian oil sent through the nation to Europe unless Moscow sells it oil at a cheaper price \_ raising the specter of a repeat of this month's supply cutoff.

Lukashenko, who has been branded "Europe's last dictator" for his iron-fisted rule, has made a series of defiant statements in recent weeks, accusing Russia of trying to crush or absorb the former Soviet republic. He has also pledged to seek less strained ties with Europe.

The Belarusian leader said the country had not signed an oil delivery contract for February because Russian oil companies were demanding prices above world levels. Belarus will charge a transit fee on Russian oil exported to Europe via its territory by these companies, he promised.

"We have to compensate for these losses. We're not going to argue with them, it's their oil. But we will pump this oil without any losses for us," he said.

Earlier this month, Russia suspended oil supplies to Belarus, disrupting supplies through a Belarusian pipeline to eastern and central Europe. The dispute was sparked by Belarus' decision to impose transit fees on Russian oil in retaliation for hefty Russian duties levied on oil exports to Belarus.

Facing the threat of a full-scale trade war with its powerful neighbor, which its economy is closely tied to, Lukashenko ultimately backed down, agreeing to pay some duties on Russian oil and sharply reducing the profits it had made by refining duty-free Russian oil and exporting the products.

Together with a doubling of Russian natural gas prices, the state budget is losing US\$3.5 billion (euro2.71 billion) a year, according to Belarusian estimates.

The oil disruption left lasting doubts in European capitals about Russia's dependability as an energy supplier. Moscow's reputation had been previously damaged last year when a price dispute with Ukraine resulted in temporary shortages of Russian gas to European customers. Officials at the representative offices of Russian oil companies in Belarus declined to comment. "Lukashenko is on the verge of despair and the only way out he sees is to blackmail Russia with the threat of a new cutoff of supplies to Europe," independent economist Yaroslav Romanchuk said.

Russian state pipeline operator OAO Transneft, meanwhile, is proposing to build a pipeline capable of carrying 50 million metric tons of oil per year (about a million barrels a day) that would bypass Belarus, the Interfax news agency reported Friday.

The agency cited an unidentified official at the Industry and Energy Ministry as saying that the proposed 1,000-kilometer (625-mile) pipeline would end at the Baltic port of Primorsk and help eliminate risks attached to delivering oil to Poland and Germany.

*Source: Yuras Karmanau, Associated Press Writer, Houston Chronicle; January 26, 2007; <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/fn/4502195.html>*

### **13. Belarus Warns It May Cancel Its Subsidies to Russia**

Contrary to the widespread impression, Russian economic subsidies to Belarus have been only one side of a two-way process. Belarus has in effect also been subsidizing Russia for the last decade. The mutual-subsidies system has been the only real dimension to the otherwise virtual "Russia-Belarus union state" from 1996 to date. Although politically and institutionally nonexistent, the "union state" has served to justify these arrangements, whereby Moscow and Minsk supported each other through non-cash, not-so-hidden benefits.

Now that Moscow is reneging on its side of the bargain by phasing out the energy subsidies to Belarus, Minsk warns that it could phase out its substantial, if indirect, contributions to Russia's budget. Such contributions include rent-free use of Belarus land for Russian pipelines and Russian military installations, gratis transit of Russian goods through Belarus westward, and other expensive privileges that Russia uniquely enjoys in Belarus. The notion that Moscow has been

subsidizing Minsk unilaterally is a tribute to the Russian state media's ability to shape international perceptions of ongoing trends.

As bilateral relations nosedived during the recent negotiations on Russian gas and oil supplies, Minsk hinted at possible retaliation in the form of charging Moscow for some of those services and privileges. On January 14, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka estimated their value at some \$10 billion annually. While offered by Belarus "fraternally" to Russia until now, Lukashenka warned that Minsk could begin demanding compensation in order to offset the higher costs of Russian energy. Echoing him on the following day, Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Kabyakau warned, "If Moscow takes a 'market' approach [to bilateral relations], then Minsk can take a market approach as well."

Lukashenka and other officials have repeatedly hinted at charging rent for the land tracts used by Russian-owned gas and oil pipelines through Belarus. The lines potentially affected are: 1) the Yamal gas pipeline to Europe, the first trunk line of which has reached almost the projected capacity at 30 billion cubic meters annually in 2006; and 2) the pipeline for oil products operated by Russian Transneft's subsidiary West-Transnefteprodukt in Belarus.

The Belarus section of the Druzhba oil pipeline is nationally owned and operated, with Russia enjoying cost-free transit of its oil through Belarus westward. Lukashenka and other Minsk officials have clearly hinted during the recent oil-supply crisis that Belarus would be within its rights to introduce transit charges as any country would under international law.

The Belarus State Property Committee has now prepared draft legislation on rental payments for land tracts used by Russian gas and oil pipelines. Apparently reflecting the "phasing-in of market relations," which Moscow has introduced and Minsk ostensibly replicates, the draft legislation would only charge rent for the forested and other nonagricultural land along the pipeline routes.

Chairing a government session on January 23 in the oil-refining center Navapolatsk, Lukashenka announced that Belarus' annual bill for Russian energy will be higher by \$2.5 billion for gas and by \$1 billion for oil in 2007. Consequently, Belarus will demand compensation for its services rendered to Russia, proceeding in accordance with international law and starting with Russian pipelines, he confirmed.

The government session focused on energy security, terming it "the most essential issue of our independence and sovereignty." Energy saving and conservation measures were discussed along with diversification of energy suppliers. Failing this, Lukashenka warned, "we would become yet another region of the Russian Federation. But no one will force us onto our knees."

According to First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka, talks are under way with the Switzerland-based Vitol Oil trading company to supply Belarus refineries with crude oil through Latvia's Ventspils maritime terminal. Vitol is a large oil trader with longstanding interests in the Baltic area. The scheme under discussion would involve using the Navapolatsk-Ventspils pipeline in the reverse direction, via Latvian and Lithuanian territory. Technical work for reversal would cost an estimated \$15 to \$20 million according to Syamashka. Russia halted oil supplies through that pipeline to Latvia in 2002 and to Lithuania in 2006 as part of its efforts to devalue and take over the Ventspils terminal and the Mazeikiiai refinery, respectively.

Russia is also using two major strategic military installations in Belarus rent-free: the Baranavichi missile early-warning radar and the Vileika naval communications center. The use of these installations is based on agreements signed in 1995 that were meant to compensate for Russian low-cost energy and other forms of economic support to Belarus. In the context of recent negotiations over energy supplies, Lukashenka and other Minsk officials have repeatedly hinted that Belarus would be within its rights to charge rent for Russia's use of those installations.

Western reactions to the Moscow-triggered oil-supply crisis in early January seem to have made a deep impression in Minsk. According to Lukashenka, "Europe and the United States behaved

decently, offered support and assistance to us. We shall never forget this." While Russian media toed the official line, Lukashenka remarked, "Western media covered the events objectively" (*Belapan*, January 14).

In further sign of rapidly changing attitudes, the Belarus government has proposed an energy dialogue with the European Union. The European Commission has received Minsk's initiative favorably and is reviewing it at the expert level. It envisages an EU-Belarus energy dialogue, on a par with the EU-Russia and EU-Ukraine energy dialogues. With Belarus, the dialogue will initially focus on renewable sources, conservation, and energy-saving technologies. // *Interfax, Belapan*, January 14, 17, 21, 23

*Source: Vladimir Socor, The Jamestown Foundation; January 24, 2007;*  
[http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2371830](http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371830)

#### **14. Terrorists May Enter Russia from Belarus**

Members of terrorist organizations may profit from the porous border between Russia and Belarus, Russian Border Service head Vladimir Pronichev said.

"Russia's border with Belarus is virtually unguarded. This is a hole used by citizens of third countries to illegally enter Russian territory," the official said during a 'parliamentary hour' at the Federation Council on Wednesday.

Belarus has maintained visa-free regimes with CIS countries, with which Russia maintains a visa regime, he said.

*Source: Interfax; January 24, 2007;*  
[http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/politics/28.html?id\\_issue=11664983](http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/politics/28.html?id_issue=11664983)

### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **15. Iran's President to Visit Belarus**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will make a state visit to Belarus in the coming months, Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki announced on Saturday.

Mottaki made the announcement at a joint press conference with Sergey Martynov, Belarus' Foreign Minister.

Mottaki said that Ahmadinejad would travel to the European state by July.

Belarus, which is not a state member of the European Union, has often been described by U.S. officials as Europe's last remaining dictatorship.

*Source: Iran Focus; January 27, 2007;*  
<http://www.iranfocust.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=10000>

#### **16. Belarus Will Not Drastically Change Foreign Policy**

Belarus will not drastically change its foreign policy, President Alexander Lukashenko said on Friday.

"The republic has found its only possible way," he said. Belarus is located in the center of Europe, so it must have "normal relations with the East and the West, as one does not choose neighbors," he said.

"Deteriorated relations with the West are not our fault. The West has realized what Belarus is. It has also realized that it would not ensure energy security without Belarus," Lukashenko said. The transit nations (Belarus and Ukraine) are no less important than Russia, which supplies energy resources, he said.

Lukashenko said that Belarus and Russia "should cool off, think about the current situation and try to avoid an insuperable deadlock."

Source: *Itar-Tass*; January 26, 2007;  
<http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=11193921&PageNum=0>

### **17. Belarus Plans to Buy Oil from Venezuela**

Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko confirmed a rumor that Belarus plans to buy oil from Venezuela.

"We will mix Russian oil with Venezuelan crude," the cabinet's press office quoted the official as saying at Thursday's meeting that brought together top officials with the industry ministry.

Belarus and Venezuela plan to launch joint oil projects in three years, the vice premier announced, adding that all promising projects involving cooperation with the South American country would be carried out.

The official urged the Belarusian manufacturers to boost exports to Latin American countries, lauding steps taken by the Belarusian Steel Works, the Gomselmash farming machinery maker and the MAZ bus and truck factory.

Mr. Semashko emphasized the importance of diversifying exports for Belarus. "The formula of our survival is that we should know how to sell our labor. We have not learned to do this so far," he stressed, suggesting a rise in the price of Belarusian-made products in foreign markets. At present, he added, Belarusian companies are "selling their labor cheap."

Source: *Belorusskie Novosti*; January 26, 2007;  
[http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2007/01/26/ic\\_news\\_259\\_266069/](http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2007/01/26/ic_news_259_266069/)

### **18. Lukashenko Will Rather Introduce Euro in Belarus**

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko said he would never yield to Russia's takeover of Belarus and emphasized that his country was ready for the EU membership and Euro's introduction, the *BELTA* news agency reported with reference to Lukashenko's interview.

Asked about the Union State construction, Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko said he would never yield to Russia's takeover of Belarus. He is for the Union of equal states and opposes introducing Russian ruble as a common currency.

The economy of Belarus is attractive for foreign partners and it's time to lift sanctions and think of cooperation, Lukashenko said when asked about the relations with the European Union.

Belarus is ready for Euro's introduction more than any other state, Lukashenko emphasized.

"We have no foreign debt, low inflation, hard-working and patient nation. Our economy works at 100 percent; we produce fine goods and can always earn money. If the European Union opens its borders for our goods, we would be evenly competing there, both in quality and price," Lukashenko was sure.

The Germans and many other Europeans openly say that, thanks to economic stability and economic development, Belarus is more ready for entering into the European Union and using euro than any other country, the president pointed out.

The development of Belarus relations with the European Union depends on Europe, according to Lukashenko. "We are good pupils ready to be taught. Moreover, having become the president, I said I will be constructing a state so that it resembles Sweden or Germany... I want the Belarusians to live approximately the same as people in Sweden or Germany. What else is needed? I have been shaping my policy exactly so all these years," the president explained.

*Source: Kommersant; January 26, 2007; [http://www.kommersant.com/p-9953/euro\\_ready/](http://www.kommersant.com/p-9953/euro_ready/)*

## **19. Belarus New Partner In Defense For Iran**

Two rounds of talks resulted in Iranian and Belarusian defense ministers signing a bilateral agreement on defense. The agreement formalizes the development of relations between Iran and Belarus, emphasizing expanding and solidifying defense ties between the countries, Fars New Agency reported Monday. Among the topics covered are exchange of experts, technical and training support, and consulting.

Belarusian Defense Minister Leonid Maltsev arrived in Tehran Sunday. During his visit, Maltsev met with top Iranian politicians and defense officials including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Belarus obtained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

*Source: Playfuls.Com, citing UPI; January 23, 2007; [http://www.playfuls.com/news\\_10\\_10302-Belarus-New-Partner-In-Defense-For-Iran.html](http://www.playfuls.com/news_10_10302-Belarus-New-Partner-In-Defense-For-Iran.html)*

## **20. Council of Europe Leader Calls for Dialogue**

A senior member of the Council of Europe called Friday for dialogue with Belarus, and said the release of jailed opponents of the authoritarian leadership would help break the ex-Soviet republic's isolation from the West.

Dutch senator Rene van der Linden, who chairs the human rights watchdog's Parliamentary Assembly, said the release of those jailed would be a step forward in promoting a closer relationship between Europe and Belarus.

He was speaking after meetings with officials, lawmakers, opposition figures and non-governmental organizations during a three-day trip to Belarus.

Amid strained relations between Europe and the government of President Alexander Lukashenko, the Council of Europe is trying to engage Belarusian leaders in debate about democracy, arguing that isolating the country would further strengthen the leader dubbed "Europe's last dictator" in the West.

"Hopefully, the dialogue is to start," van der Linden said, adding — "the situation contributes to it" — an apparent reference to increasingly cool relations between Belarus and Russia, which this year has withdrawn some of the economic support that has helped shore up Lukashenko's government.

"It is not in the interests of Belarus to remain isolated. It has to be interested in becoming a part of Europe," he said.

Belarus is the only European country outside the Council of Europe, because it does not fulfill basic membership requirements such as the rule of law. The European Union slapped a visa ban on Lukashenko and other senior officials after he won a third term in March in elections that were tarnished by arrests of opponents and protesters and widely rejected in the West as illegitimate.

Belarusian parliament speaker Vladimir Konoplyov said the country was ready for dialogue, but that any improvement in relations with Europe would not come at the expense of ties with Russia.

"We cannot set relations with Europe and relations with Russia, which is a strategic partner of our country, against each other," he said.

Van der Linden has held talks with Belarus' foreign minister and the speakers of both parliament houses, which are loyal to the government, as well as opposition leaders. He met with the wife of Alexander Kozulin, a prominent opposition leader who is serving a 5 1/2-year prison term after being arrested during protests over the presidential election, in which he ran against Lukashenko.

*Source: The International Herald Tribune; January 19, 2007;*  
*<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/01/19/europe/EU-GEN-Belarus-Europe.php>*

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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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