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EDITORIAL

Moving Away From Russia

By Jan Maksymiuk

Two important developments took place in Belarusian politics within the space of several recent weeks.

First, on May 7 Belarus signed a document on joining the Eastern Partnership initiative — a peculiar "waiting room" for six post-Soviet countries that might aspire to full-fledged EU membership in some indefinite future.

Second, on June 14 Belarus refused to sign a document on creating the so-called Collective Rapid-Response Forces — a Eurasian answer to the seven-nation Collective Security Treaty Organization of NATO.

Both developments may seem to be more of a symbolic than a practical significance. The Eastern Partnership does not offer any substantial financial or economic incentives to the post-Soviet signatories. The Collective Rapid-Response Forces do not offer any substantial counterbalance or pose any substantial threat to NATO forces in Europe. But in making his decisions on both issues, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has proven in practice that integration with Russia is not the only possible or the only desirable option for his country. These decisions may, in the long run, mark a turning point in Belarus's foreign policy.

In making his recent advances to Europe, Lukashenka had to swallow his autocratic ego. And he did that. Brussels invited Belarus to the Eastern Partnership but, at the same time, unambiguously suggested that it would be deeply embarrassed if Lukashenka appeared at the May 7 summit in Prague in person. Mercifully, and prudently, Lukashenka took the hint. He sent a deputy prime minister to Prague to sign the Eastern Partnership declaration.

Lukashenka also had to withstand the Kremlin's subdued dissatisfaction with the Eastern Partnership before the Prague summit and the Kremlin's untamed ire after the summit. He did not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia before the summit. And he made an even more unprecedented step to spurn the Collective Security Treaty Organization after the Kremlin put economic pressure on Belarus by embargoing Belarusian dairy products and withholding a \$500 million loan installment.

Such a behavior surely warranted a reward from the West, and it was not long in coming. The International Monetary Fund said in June that it will lend an additional \$1 billion to Belarus, bringing its total loan to \$3.4 billion.

Where do these developments leave the Belarusian opposition, whose hopes for change in Belarus were during many years anchored in the conviction that the only efficient way for the West to deal with Lukashenka was to isolate him?

There is no simple or brief answer to this question.

It is evident that in his domestic policies, whether economic or social, Lukashenka is not going to importantly diminish his grip over the country or give a significant role in the public life for his opponents.

But it is also evident that, at least for Brussels, the isolation of Lukashenka is already a thing of the past. Therefore, it would be advisable for the opposition to make some conclusions from this less-than-expected turnaround of Lukashenka's political fortune.

The first prominent oppositionist in Belarus to make such conclusions was Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who has started to campaign for Belarus' greater engagement with the European Union, even at the expense of some legitimization of the autocratic regime in the international arena.

Will the others follow? Most likely, veterans of the opposition -- for example, Barshcheuski's and Paznyak's wings of the Belarusian Popular Front -- won't be eager to make such a step. Because such a step would mean losing their credibility and support they still have in society.

But younger opposition activists are more likely to side with Milinkevich's and his pragmatic political vision.

This vision implicitly acknowledges that the opposition is currently too weak to change the political regime in the country. But this vision also presumes that the opposition is sufficiently potent to contribute to the change that is currently taking shape in Belarus. Belarus has manifestly begun to move further away from Russia. It would be advisable for the opposition to help accelerate this movement, not to hamper it.

**DID YOU RENEW
YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?**

From the Publisher

Our publication was complimented recently by a long time reader who is an authority in US international relations. He views *Belarusian Review* as the top resource for anyone wanting to learn about the current situation in Belarus, since it provides both the important news and varied analysis.

It is in large part due to the generosity of our subscribers and particularly to those who provide larger contributions that we continue to publish. Many of the names you'll recognize from the previous years. The following have been especially generous so far this year:

Anatol Lukjanczuk, Alice Kipel, George and Lorraine Kipel, Alla Orsa Romano, Peter Kasaty, Nicolas Sniezko, Karnella Najdziuk, Thomas Bird, Maria Kiehn, Anatol Sankovitch, John Shybut, Olga Wilson, Halina Hayda.

In order to inform and educate about Belarus a wide circle of government officials and political leaders we appreciate the annual contribution received from BNR Rada.

Quotes of Quarter

President Lukashenka had on June 5 an interview with correspondents of Russian papers and magazines. It has been published in Belarus' official press, but has not been printed in Russia. Selected excerpts from the interview follow:

On marketing:

"Today's Russia has in fact closed the market for Belarusian goods"

"... Why have you closed your market for our tractors... why have you done that? Who needs such a "union state"?"

On Russian protectionism:

"I addressed our government and said: "If you won't sell sugar, you will lose your job. We found other markets and sold this sugar"

On talks with Moscow:

The President disclosed some details of recent talks in Moscow. He referred to Belarus' Prime Minister Sidorski who quoted an unnamed Russian governor: "Putin said that if we (the Russian region) would buy anything Belarusian, I'll bite your head off".

On Caucasian conflicts:

"... Do you want one more Chechnya here? I do not want it".

On shielding Moscow:

"Do you believe that 10 million people (Belarusians) who are now forming a shield in front of Moscow should do it for free? You have pumped out 10 billion dollars from Belarus by having raised gas prices three times. And you have loaned 2 billion dollars at exorbitant interest, while the IMF extended credit at terms that are three times better!"

FEATURES

Declaration of the European Council on the Eastern Partnership

1. Promoting stability, good governance and economic development in its Eastern neighbourhood is of strategic importance for the European Union. The EU therefore has a strong interest in developing an increasingly close relationship with its Eastern partners, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The European Union's proposal for an ambitious Eastern Partnership to be established with these countries serves this objective.

The Eastern Partnership will bring about a significant strengthening of EU policy with regard to its Eastern partners by seeking to create the necessary conditions for political association and further economic integration between the European Union and its Eastern partners through the development of a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. To achieve this, the Eastern Partnership seeks to support political and socio-economic reforms, facilitating approximation and convergence towards the European Union. In the same vein, the Eastern Partnership will help to build trust and develop closer ties among the six Eastern partners themselves.

2. Work under the Eastern Partnership will go ahead without prejudice to individual participating countries' aspirations for their future relationship with the European Union. The Eastern Partnership will be governed by the principles of joint ownership, differentiation and conditionality. Shared values including democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights will be at its core, as well as the principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance. Increased European Union engagement will be in line with the main goals of the Eastern Partnership, depending on the progress made by individual partners. Increased financial support in line with the Commission's proposal of €600m for the period to 2013 will respect the resources available under the multiannual Financial Framework, including adequate margins.

3. There will be effective complementarity between the Eastern Partnership and existing regional initiatives in the EU's neighbourhood, in particular the Black Sea Synergy. The European Council underlines the EU's commitment to strengthen the Black Sea Synergy and to support its implementation, noting that its focus is on regional cooperation in the Black Sea region, whereas the Eastern Partnership focuses on approximation and will strengthen the links of partner countries with the EU. The Eastern Partnership will also be developed in parallel with the bilateral cooperation between the EU and third countries.

4. Bilateral cooperation under the Eastern Partnership should **provide the foundation for new Association Agreements between the EU and those partners** who have made sufficient progress towards the principles and values set out in paragraph 2 above and who are willing and able to comply with the resulting commitments including the establishment, or the objective of establishing, deep and comprehensive free trade areas. The European Union's Comprehensive Institution-Building Programmes will help the participating countries to improve their administrative capacity. The Eastern Partnership will promote mobility of citizens of partner countries through visa facilitation and readmission agreements. The EU, in line with the Global Approach to Migration, should also take gradual steps towards full visa liberalisation as a long term goal for individual partner countries and on a case by case basis provided that conditions for well-managed and secure mobility are in place. The Eastern Partnership aims to strengthen the energy security cooperation of all participants with regard to long-term energy supply and transit, including through better regulation and energy efficiency. It will put at the disposal of partners the EU's expertise in social and economic development policies.

5. **The multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership will provide for cooperation activities** and dialogue serving the objectives of the Partnership. It should operate on a basis of joint decisions of EU member states and Eastern partners, without prejudice to the decision making autonomy of the EU.

The European Council proposes to hold regular meetings in principle once every two years at the level of Heads of State or Government of the Eastern Partnership, and once a year at the level of Foreign Ministers. Four thematic platforms should be established according to the main areas of cooperation (Democracy, good governance and stability; Economic integration and convergence with EU policies; Energy security; and Contacts between people). The European Council also supports the launching of Flagship Initiatives in order to give momentum and concrete substance to the Partnership. The EU looks forward to an early discussion with the partners in this regard.

Third countries will be eligible for participation on a case-by-case basis in concrete projects, activities and meetings of thematic platforms, where it contributes to the objectives of particular activities and the general objectives of the Eastern Partnership.

6. The Eastern Partnership will **engage a wide range of actors, including government ministries and agencies, parliaments, civil society, international organisations, financial institutions and the private sector.**

7. On the basis of this Declaration, the EU will conduct the necessary consultations with Eastern partners with a view to preparing a Joint Declaration on the Eastern Partnership to be adopted at the Eastern Partnership launching summit on 7 May 2009. **The European Council looks forward to launching the Eastern Partnership as a common endeavour with partners, being confident that this initiative will advance the cause of good governance, increase prosperity and strengthen stability, bringing**

lasting and palpable benefits to the citizens of all participating countries.

Source: www.consilium.europa.eu, March 20, 2009

Europe's Last Dictatorship

By Jeffrey Gedmin

Minsk, Belarus -- One of the questions I was repeatedly asked during a recent trip to the capital of Belarus was whether the Obama administration would opt for greater pragmatism at the expense of idealism in foreign policy. Both the government and opposition in this country have a vested interest in the answer. As early as next week, the U.S. will decide whether or not to continue sanctions against the country known as "Europe's last dictatorship." The European Union faces fresh choices as well.

NATO sees Belarus as a potential threat to neighboring Lithuania. Russian tanks stationed in Belarus can be in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, in about 90 minutes. This small nation of 10 million can threaten in other ways: 20% of EU gas imports from Russia pass through the former Soviet state.

Belarus also remains a notorious human-rights abuser. In its press-freedom index, Freedom House ranks Belarus 188th out of 195 countries. Transparency International rates Minsk as more corrupt than Moscow. Minsk can feel like a time warp: Main avenues in the capital are still named after Lenin, Marx and Engels.

On my trip, I attended a dinner with leading oppositionists in a private room at a local restaurant. It was private except for the two minders who were stationed about five feet away from us. At a meeting of former political prisoners at the U.S. embassy to celebrate the 55th anniversary of Radio Liberty broadcasts to Belarus, I met a former trade minister who had served two years for breaking with the regime. Another young, charismatic businessman had spent six years behind bars for his pro-opposition views.

The man who rules Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, is severe. In 1995 he had his air force shoot down a hot air balloon that had strayed into his air space, killing two Americans.

The U.S. and the EU need to consider two issues in their relations with Belarus. It's only through a coordinated approach that we'll make progress towards reform.

The first issue has to do with democratic development. The heady days of the 1990s, when it appeared that freedom was on the march around the world, have given way to a decade of democracy recession. The most troubling developments have taken place in Russia and its periphery.

Democratization in countries such as Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine will almost certainly help to curb Russia's imperial appetite. Faced with neighboring democracies, Russia would be forced to take greater stock of its affairs at home. Garry Kasparov, the chess champion turned Putin opponent, thinks of an inside and an outside game if you

want to support Russian democracy today. **Mr. Kasparov argues that the outside game — what happens in Russia's neighborhood — may be as important as what's happening inside Russia.**

Every dictator has his Achilles' heel. For the authorities in Belarus, theirs may be the economy. The Russians, with whom Mr. Lukashenko has a "close but dysfunctional relationship," as one EU diplomat puts it, have reduced their economic support for Belarus in the last couple of years. Moreover, Belarus has not managed to remain immune from the global financial crisis. According to that same diplomat, some 25% of state-enterprise employees are now working on reduced hours. Mr. Lukashenko is in trouble if his social pact begins to seriously fray.

What to do? The civil-society leaders I met were in agreement that the recent release of political prisoners was the result of U.S. and EU pressure. That pressure must be sustained. The U.S. should consider lifting sanctions only on the basis of strict conditionality. Washington should not give in to the temptation to accept the return of the American ambassador, who was expelled last March over U.S. sanctions, as sufficient. Belarus must be pressured to have more independent media, to investigate the cases of missing dissidents, and to end the practice of jailing oppositionists. For its part, the EU should insist that any economic assistance be closely tied to political reforms and respect for human rights.

This will be slow, tough going to be sure. But now is exactly the wrong time for a short-sighted realpolitik approach.

Mr. Gedmin is president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Source: The Wall Street Journal, <http://online.wsj.com/home-page>, 29 May 2009

Belarusian President Boycotts Moscow's CSTO Summit

By Vladimir Socor

Belarus refused to attend the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit in Moscow on June 14. The summit made decisions to enlarge the size of collective rapid deployment forces, the scope of their missions, and the legal basis of their operations.

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka cancelled the participation of Belarus at the last moment before the summit; and his government is now contesting the validity of the summit's decisions made in the absence of Belarus. The Uzbek president, Islam Karimov, signed the summit's documents with reservations attached, limiting Uzbekistan's participation in future CSTO activities. Armenia's position is not immediately clear: Moscow's official reports do not mention an Armenian signature on the framework agreement regarding CSTO's rapid deployment forces (*Interfax*, *ITAR-TASS*, *RIA Novosti*, June 14).

At the concluding press conference, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev asked "the states" that have not inked

the summit documents to reconsider and sign them later. Belarus was scheduled to take over the chairmanship of CSTO's Council of Heads of State from Armenia at this summit, in accordance with the annual rotation in Russian alphabetical order. With Belarus boycotting the summit, however, Russia took over the CSTO's chairmanship "for the period of Belarus' absence."

Adding insult to injury, Lukashenka did not personally notify the Kremlin about his refusal to attend. Lukashenka's office informed Medvedev's office and the Belarusian ministry of foreign affairs informed the CSTO secretariat on the shortest possible notice.

Moscow takes the position that Belarus' non-participation in the summit does not invalidate the summit's decisions. Under the CSTO's rules of procedure, a collective decision can be blocked by an "official objection" from a member country. Belarus had participated in negotiations on the documents prior to the summit without registering official objections, according to unverified claims by Russian officials. Nevertheless, the Belarus foreign ministry note did clearly warn that Belarus' non-participation "means a lack of approval from Belarus of the decisions that are to be considered" at the summit, as well as disavowal of decisions made at the pre-summit, ministerial-level meetings, which "consequently means a lack of consensus [by Belarus] on these decisions" (*RIA Novosti*, June 14).

Officially, Minsk explains its step as a response to Moscow's restrictive commercial measures against Belarus and abusive practices in the energy sector. Tacitly, the Belarusian authorities from Lukashenka on down are loath to become involved in Russia's conflict undertakings, whether ongoing or looming ones in the South Caucasus or Central Asia.

The foreign ministry note complained of "overt economic discrimination by a CSTO member country against Belarus. Such actions undermine economic security, which is a foundation for stability and a pillar of comprehensive security... [Belarus' participation in the summit] would mock common sense against the backdrop of trade wars waged by some CSTO members against others. In this situation, Belarus has no choice but to cancel its participation in the CSTO summit in Moscow. Belarus will sign the package of documents on the rapid reaction force only when comprehensive security will have been restored within the CSTO" (*RIA Novosti*, *ITAR-TASS*, June 14).

Last month, Russia suspended the allocation of a promised \$500 million stabilization loan to Belarus. Lukashenka publicly complained that Moscow was retaliating for his refusal to recognize the "independence" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Kremlin had pressured Lukashenka on this issue for several months, but he has all along insisted that the loan and the recognition issue must not be linked.

In recent weeks, Lukashenka and other officials criticized Russia publicly for closing its markets for Belarus-made tractors, sugar, and dairy and meat products. On the day of the Moscow summit, Belarus state television read out an indictment of Russian economic policies toward Belarus, retroactive and current: "They [Moscow] turned off gas

supplies in winter; they suddenly introduced crude oil export duties; they practically introduced customs control on the border," depicting the recent restrictions on tractors, sugar, and dairy and meat products as parts of a consistent pattern (Belarus TV Channel One, June 14).

On June 13 Lukashenka asked the government to consider the possibility of reintroducing border controls on the Belarus-Russia border. On the following day the State Border Protection Committee chief, Ivan Bandarenka, announced that his committee and the State Customs Committee are discussing the possible reestablishment of border and customs checkpoints, in response to Russia's unilateral reintroduction of 15 such checkpoints (Interfax, June 13, 14).

Lukashenka has clashed with Moscow over economic issues during most of his tenure as president. This time, however, he reinforces his arguments in that debate by refusing to cooperate with a Kremlin-cherished project on international security. Moreover, the familiar clashes over economic issues are now unfolding in an entirely new context: that of Lukashenka's efforts to institute a balanced foreign policy for Belarus between Russia and the West.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 6, Issue 14, June 15, 2009

PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS.

Foreign Relations Authorization Act.

H.R. 2140

To authorize appropriations for the Department of State and the Peace Corps for fiscal years 2010 and 2011, to modernize the Foreign Service, and for other purposes

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 14, 2009

Mr. BERMAN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Section on Belarus:

(a) Findings-

Congress finds the following:

- (1) Despite some modest improvements, notably the release of political prisoners, the Belarusian Government's human rights and democracy record remains poor as governmental authorities continue to commit frequent serious abuses.
- (2) Since 1996, President Alexander Lukashenka has consolidated his power over all institutions and undermined the rule of law through authoritarian means.
- (3) Belarus restricts civil liberties, including freedoms of press, speech, assembly, association, and religion. Nongovernmental organizations and political parties are subject to harassment, fines, prosecution, and closure. The Belarusian Government maintains a virtual monopoly over the country's information space.

b) Policy-

It is the policy of the United States to--

- (1) support the aspirations of the people of Belarus for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;
- (2) support the aspirations of the people of Belarus to preserve the independence and sovereignty of their country;
- (3) seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in Belarus as well the development of a democratic political culture and civil society;
- (4) seek and support the growth of an open market economy in Belarus through the development of entrepreneurship and protection of property rights; and
- (5) remain open to re-evaluating United States policy toward Belarus, including existing sanctions, as warranted by demonstrable democratic and human rights progress made by the Belarusian Government.

(c) Sense of Congress-

It is the sense of Congress that--

- (1) the United States should furnish assistance to Belarus to the support democratic processes in that country, including--
 - (A) expanding and facilitating the development of independent print, radio, television, and internet broadcasting to and within Belarus;
 - (B) aiding the development of civil society through assistance to nongovernmental organizations promoting democracy and supporting human rights, including youth groups, entrepreneurs, and independent trade unions;
 - (C) supporting the work of human rights defenders;
 - (D) enhancing the development of democratic political parties;
 - (E) assisting the promotion of free, fair, and transparent electoral processes;
 - (F) enhancing international exchanges, including youth and student exchanges, as well as advanced professional training programs for leaders and members of the democratic forces in skill areas central to the development of civil society; and
 - (G) supporting educational initiatives such as the European Humanities University, a Belarusian university in exile based in Vilnius, Lithuania; and
- (2) the United States should support radio, television, and internet broadcasting to the people of Belarus in languages spoken in Belarus, including broadcasting by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, European Radio for Belarus, and Belsat.

Note: Rep. Howard Berman, who introduced this resolution, is Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The Bill has been passed by the full House of Representatives on June 10, 2009.

Amnesty International Public Statement

15 May 2009

Eleven Prisoners of Conscience

On 5 May, in an unprecedented move, AI wrote to the **Prosecutor General of Belarus stating that the organization considers 11 young people, who are currently serving sentences of restricted freedom, to be prisoners of conscience.** All of them participated in a peaceful protest in Minsk in January 2008 and Amnesty International believes that they

had been sentenced to a punishment which amounts to imprisonment for peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of assembly and expression.

Following an unauthorized demonstration against the introduction of a Presidential decree concerning tax and employment regulations for small businesses, which took place on 10 January 2008, 14 people were initially prosecuted for criminal offenses for their participation... (Three of them were fined or amnestied)...and the 11 remaining young people were sentenced ... for "taking part in or organizing actions that gravely disturb public order" and **sentenced to between one and a half and two years of restricted freedom.** (The list of the 11 names follows in AI's Public Statement — Editor).

The conditions of restricted freedom that are laid out in Article 48 of the Criminal Procedural Code are so restrictive that Amnesty International considers it to be a form of imprisonment.

"... In its letter, Amnesty International urged the Prosecutor General **to immediately and unconditionally lift the restrictions**" "... **to ensure that an impartial investigation is carried out into allegations of beating**" "... **to investigate the actions of the police officers.**"

HISTORICAL DATES

June 19, 1924

Birthdate of **Vasil Bykau**, an outstanding Belarusian writer and public figure. Most of his works covered the topic of World War Two, experienced by him as a soldier.

Towards the end of his life he was forced to seek refuge abroad. He lived in Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic. He was forced out of his homeland due to attacks in the state-run press and censorship of his writings. The regime continues to take revenge against Bykau even after his death. Vasil Bykau's books are not being republished in Belarus and films about his life and creative work are banned.

Bykau was considered for the Nobel prize in literature in late 1990. He died on June 22, 2003.

July 7, 1882

Janka Kupala (Ivan Lucevic), a great Belarusian poet, was born in Viazynka, near the town of Maladechna.

Kupala may be considered one of the founders of the modern Belarusian literature, whose patriotic poetry significantly contributed to Belarus' national awakening in the 20th century.

In addition to his literary activities, he was a valuable civic leader, and the editor of the *Nasha Niva* newspaper in the 1910s.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release, June 12, 2009

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the Federal Register and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the Federal Register for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency and related measures blocking the property of certain persons undermining democratic processes or institutions in Belarus are to continue in effect beyond June 16, 2009.

Despite some positive developments during the past year, including the release of internationally recognized political prisoners, the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus and other persons that have undermined democratic processes or institutions, committed human rights abuses related to political repression, and engaged in public corruption pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. For these reasons, I have determined that it is necessary to continue the national emergency and related measures blocking the property of certain persons undermining democratic processes or institutions in Belarus.

BARACK OBAMA
THE WHITE HOUSE,
June 12, 2009.

For Immediate Release, June 12, 2009

NOTICE

CONTINUATION OF THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY WITH RESPECT TO THE ACTIONS AND POLICIES OF CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BELARUS AND OTHER PERSONS THAT UNDERMINE DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES OR INSTITUTIONS IN BELARUS

On June 16, 2006, by Executive Order 13405, the President declared a national emergency and ordered related measures blocking the property of certain persons undermining democratic processes or institutions in Belarus, pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701-1706). The President took this action to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States constituted by the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus and other persons that have undermined democratic processes or institutions; committed human rights abuses related to political repression, including detentions and disappearances; and engaged in public corruption, including by diverting or

misusing Belarusian public assets or by misusing public authority.

Despite some positive developments in the past year, including the release of internationally recognized political prisoners, the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus and other persons continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. Accordingly, the national emergency declared on June 16, 2006, and the measures adopted on that date to deal with that emergency, must continue in effect beyond June 16, 2009. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13405.

This notice shall be published in the Federal Register and transmitted to the Congress.

BARACK OBAMA
THE WHITE HOUSE,
June 12, 2009.

ECONOMY

Zombie Economy

By Siarhiej Karol

The recession has pulled the curtain back on Belarus' unusual economic model as it limps along with cash injections from international organizations and Russia.

On the face of it, the economic crisis could be going worse for Belarus. Although the country went through the same decline in production and currency pressures common to its neighbors, it is fairing better against the regional background. The banking system is not collapsing, as in Ukraine, nor is there double-digit economic decline, as in Lithuania and Latvia, nor even waves of layoffs as in Russia – all aspects that the Belarusian government's propaganda machine will not fail to exploit. Yet, it has become obvious to official Belarus and ordinary citizens that the crisis marks a turning point not only for the economy but for politics as well. Already, economic pressures stemming from changed global financial conditions have led to previously unthinkable events such as a loan from the International Monetary Fund, talk of liberalization and market reform, devaluation of the ruble, and even the possibility of a political thaw between the nation's estranged leadership and the European Union. Today, Belarus seems to be a strange mix of a relatively benign economic climate and a noticeably changed political one.

NEW MODEL ECONOMY

To understand the country's path through the crisis and imagine its probable futures it is important to remember just how unusual the Belarusian economic model is, once proudly described by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka as the Belarusian Economic Miracle. The model was inherited from the Soviet planned system and little has changed since

then. Unlike those of its neighbors, Belarus's economy is almost entirely state-owned, with only a thin layer of private enterprise, mostly in the service sector. The bulk of the country's GDP comes from a handful of extremely large state-owned conglomerates organized in a vertical hierarchy ultimately managed by the president himself. The Minsk tractor and truck factories, Hrodna and Homel chemical producers, Mahileu agricultural equipment maker, and most importantly the Mazyr and Navapolatsk oil refineries represent an industrial complex built from the 1940s to the 1970s as a Soviet version of "offshore" manufacturing – where raw materials and parts arrive from afar to be sent back in the form of finished goods or refined chemicals. All that industrial might was designed for the vast economic space of the USSR and the Warsaw pact countries. It cannot, under any circumstances, survive by relying solely on the domestic market. The heavy reliance on foreign markets – exports amount to over 60 percent of GDP – puts Belarus among the top 10 most trade-dependent economies in the world, alongside such export kings as Singapore.

Like Singapore, Belarus also relies heavily on imports, with a similarly high ratio of imports to GDP. Unlike the Asian trade hub, however, the Belarusian industrial complex lacks both savvy management and a technological edge, not to mention being hopelessly outdated. But it employs 4 million Belarusians and must be kept running at the risk of a political backlash like the one that brought Lukashenka to power in 1994. Lukashenka was elected with a mandate of keeping the system running, and in this respect he fulfilled his mandate. This was possible due to his ability to preserve a deep discount on Russian oil and gas, which are used domestically to power enterprises and heat Belarusian homes or are turned into diesel and gasoline for supplies to Europe.

Before the global slump, Belarus was able to export over 5 billion euros in fuel per year, sold at world prices, while buying the raw crude at 30 percent to 50 percent below the market price, amounting to a giant subsidy from its eastern neighbor. Any economy would become a miracle if it were to receive a "bailout" that amounted to 20 percent of its GDP.

But even with that subsidy the model was already showing signs of distress well before the financial crisis, especially after New Year's Eve 2006, when Russia began implementing a program to gradually eliminate the fuel discount. The economy moved on, however, at an impressive rate of growth, thanks to peak prices for its petroleum exports and peak demand for manufactured goods from the Russian market, which itself was experiencing an oil fueled boom. Belarusian factories were working at full capacity in response to mounting orders from the East and also increased production of diesel fuel for purchasers in the U.K. and continental Europe.

A LONG-RUNNING CREDIT CRUNCH

The main problem at that time was the increasingly pressing need to find financing to keep the pipeline economy running. The Belarusian import-export model is so inefficient that it was losing money even with the

subsidy, so that the gap between exports and imports grew to over 10 percent of GDP. In 2007, at the peak of the boom, the trade deficit exceeded \$2 billion, which the state had to finance from abroad. Initially, financing was obtained from British and Swiss banks, who, in the days of global low returns on investment, were willing to provide over \$3 billion in short-term financing for banks and enterprises despite Belarus' very low B credit rating. Belarusian importers received even greater loan amounts from foreign companies in the form of extending payment terms or straight cash. But even that was not enough to cover the growing gap, and the government started to look for funds by selling state-owned assets, beginning with the pipeline operator Beltransgas.

The mounting problems were known to officials but hidden from the population. Factories ran at full capacity, cash from oil exports was flowing in, and proceeds from export tariffs plumped the state budget. The funding problem was being addressed one day at a time – by measures such as asking Russia for a \$1.5 billion credit in 2007.

The global downturn brought matters to a head. First, the sources of foreign revenue shrank as prices for oil products and demand in Russia both fell dramatically during the second half of 2008.

Belarusian exports peaked at about \$3 billion a month in June 2008, and then started to plummet, dropping to \$1.6 billion this February. Imports fell too, but they proved less flexible because a lot of the imported energy is used domestically to produce heat and basic necessities. This accelerated the pace of the rising trade deficit, which reached \$4 billion in 2008 and showed no sign of slowing in the first two months of 2009. Meanwhile, production has fallen as both prices and demand have decreased. GDP fell in the first quarter of 2009 while the trade deficit – and thus the need for financing – continued to increase. This brought the government to again seek Russian support, but it was only partially available. The \$2.5 billion IMF credit line was no less timely than it was unexpected by both domestic and external observers, coming at a time when foreign currency reserves were dropping by a quarter and the currency was devalued.

Even more important, the mountain of short-term debt under the Belarusian import-export enterprise exploded together with the global liquidity crisis. Lending to Belarusian borrowers was looking like another form of subprime credit and it dried up fast. Also, buyers of Belarusian exports began to delay payment while sellers of imported components were demanding prepayment – a phenomenon known as the liquidity squeeze, when a shortage of cash forces a decrease in production.

TIME TO FIX THE SYSTEM

The global crisis has forced out into the open things that were percolating under the surface even during the boom times. Industrial output is down, the trade deficit up, foreign financing squeezed. The government had to

accept the IMF loan, look for more Russian credit, and seek friendlier political terms with Europe. The problems are exposed even to the economically oblivious population. The Belarusian model is in obvious need of repair.

Hopes that such repair is immediately forthcoming, however, would be naïve. For a decade and a half Lukashenka's smart political management, fending off all predictions of imminent collapse, has kept the Belarusian model functioning in the same space that was allotted to it by Soviet central planners: as an assembly line attachment to the Russian economy. And the Russian economy, while weaker with oil at \$50 per barrel, is still far from going into free fall. With his knack of manipulating the Russian sense of geopolitical insecurity to obtain tangible economic benefits, the Belarusian leader can still harbor reasonable hope of weathering the region-wide recession. Also, his subjects have traditionally expressed much greater sensitivity to the relative rather than absolute level of living, and the plight of Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, and even Russia offers rich material for comparative propaganda. Similarly, the

IMF may learn at first hand the Belarusian president's outstanding ability to avoid delivery on promises and conditions. Secretly, he must be hoping for a global recovery and a return to more favorable trading and

Any economy would become a miracle if it were to receive a “bailout” that amounted to 20 percent of its GDP.

financing conditions for the company whose CEO he has been with impressive success since 1994: Belarus, Inc. The fact that that firm is loss-making and outdated does not in itself imply its imminent bankruptcy – the financial crisis is producing similar “zombie companies” getting by on subsidies and cheap credit in the West, with the American auto industry being a prime example. Similar precedents can also be seen during the long Japanese recession of the 1990s.

In the longer run, one hopes the crisis has made a sufficient dent to warrant a gradual integration of the Belarusian economy into the global one on more open, market-friendly terms. This observer's personal forecast is that the country will now move closer toward welcoming foreign investment, creating private or mixed-capital companies, and begin an uneasy, convoluted but ultimately unavoidable path toward liberalization and integration – as did its fellow export-import based economy, Singapore, five decades ago. This would fall far short of the standards set by the Central European countries in the 1990s, and very far from their political achievements, but it offers hope that this is at least Churchill's “end of the beginning” for Europe's last dictatorship.

Siarhiej Karol is a U.S.-based financial executive

Source: TransitionsOnLine, 24 April 2009

Lukashenka Says He's Ready To Consider Belarus Reforms

MINSK (Reuters) -- Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, long criticized as authoritarian in the West, said he could give suitably qualified opposition figures government jobs and make other political reforms demanded by Europe if this does not hurt the economy.

The European Union suspended sanctions against Lukashenka, Belarus's leader since 1994, and re-established political contacts after detainees deemed political prisoners in the West were freed and opposition newspapers were allowed to publish.

Speaking to Reuters in a wide-ranging interview at the presidential offices in Minsk, Lukashenka welcomed the EU's moves and said he was ready for further steps to ensure good relations for ex-Soviet Belarus with both the West and the East.

"I believe it is important for both Russia and Europe that Belarus is a sovereign, independent state where Europeans can feel at home," he said. "...We have to destroy stereotypes in people's minds that Belarus can be isolated or taught a lesson."

Brussels wants to see changes to electoral rules and the end of a law allowing imprisonment for membership of an unregistered organization if the sanctions are to disappear for good.

"If someone starts nudging me towards this, I will take a good look," Lukashenka said when asked about further reforms. "If a given step causes no harm to the political and economic situation, I will do it."

But the Belarusian president said he would not take steps which could lead to political or economic chaos, such as that seen in neighboring Ukraine after its 2004 Orange Revolution.

"I have already made quite a few concessions to Europe," Lukashenka said. "But we should not be doing this today... if it will lead to the collapse of the economy, of public activity, to negative consequences, to destabilization, as in Ukraine."

Weak Opposition

Lukashenka noted the weakness of the domestic opposition, correcting a reporter's assertion that 400 people attended a recent protest rally.

"We count them to a man. I am therefore telling you there were 200 people there," he said.

But he said he would accept opposition figures in government jobs "with great pleasure" if they had the right qualifications and were willing to work for the benefit of the people.

He praised Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who ran against him in the last presidential election in 2006, as "pragmatic and well-considered" in his policies.

The Belarusian leader, a former state farm boss and military officer, defended his political system, saying his people "like our Belarusian model."

Official results gave Lukashenka 83 percent of the vote in 2006 elections criticized as undemocratic by the West, against 6 percent for Milinkevich.

Police used to routinely disperse protests in Minsk with truncheons, but Lukashenka said the West was in no position to give lessons.

"We are criticized for taking tough measures against demonstrators, but Lukashenka has never, not once, used tear gas or water cannon against demonstrators," he added. "And that is what we have seen periodically in democratic Europe or in the United States, the very hotbed of democracy."

Lukashenka has overseen an improvement in relations with the West, such as his trip last month to Italy and the Vatican and an invitation for Belarus to take part in this week's EU Eastern Partnership with six former Soviet republics.

Alliance With Moscow

But he made it plain change would not be at the expense of a long-standing alliance with gas and oil supplier Moscow.

"We have signed a treaty with Russia on building a union state," Lukashenka said, referring to a largely dormant 1997 treaty establishing a customs and passport union. "We will not move away from this treaty even if Russia has a tendency to back away from what has been agreed."

Lukashenka ruled out any question of EU membership for Belarus in the future, saying "we haven't even thought of this."

But he also set a condition that union with Russia could only develop on the principle of complete equality between both sides -- something Moscow has deemed unrealistic because Russia's population is fourteen times the size of Belarus's.

The Belarusian leader said he enjoyed good personal relations with Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev and its Prime Minister and former President Vladimir Putin.

But he criticized Moscow for doubling gas prices to Belarus and imposing customs duties on Belarusian products, saying Russia should have adopted a "more careful position."

"Economics form the basis of our relations," Lukashenka said. "If our economic relations are poor, you cannot expect relations to be any better in terms of politics."

The United States imposed sanctions on Belarus under the Bush administration, dubbing the former Soviet republic "the last dictatorship in Europe," a term which angered Minsk.

Lukashenka bemoaned what he termed the West's "double standards" toward Belarus, saying nobody demanded that Russia undertake the kind of political reforms which were asked of him.

"If I had [natural] resources like Russia or Kazakhstan, our relations would be completely different," he said.

He foresaw improved relations with Washington under President Barack Obama, whom he described as a "reasonable man" but added Minsk had not yet received any clear signals from the new administration in Washington.

Source: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, May 05, 2009

Belarus' Forum

March 25 in Minsk Dictatorship's scare

Thousands of interior troops' soldiers were brought to Minsk on March 25. On the day when the country was celebrating the anniversary of proclamation of the Belarusian National Republic, the authorities in fact imposed a state of emergency in the capital.

On March 25 Belarus marked the 91st anniversary of the Belarusian National Republic, the event that led to the establishment of independent Belarus. Organizers of the action, the BPF party, applied for holding a rally between the Academy of Sciences and the October Square. The Minsk authorities permitted the participants to gather in front of the Academy of Sciences and traditionally permitted a march not to the city centre, but to Banhalor square, a bedroom district. The action organizers stated that the authorities' decision to prohibit a peaceful demonstration marking the national holiday was unlawful and the people would choose where they want to go.

Oppositionists were preventively arrested ahead of the action. The regional militia and traffic police officers detained youth activists, traveling to Minsk for the March 25 demonstration. Apartments of activists of civil campaign "European Belarus" and "Young Front" were searched before and during the demonstration. Youth activists were detained an hour before the rally; militiamen were seizing them in streets, beating them, taking away their banners and leaflets.

Nevertheless, several thousand people gathered near the Academy of Sciences at 6.00 p.m. A large number of national and EU flags created an atmosphere of a holiday. In addition to flags, residents of Minsk brought red and white balloons and flowers. Many people came with their families and children.

Leader of the civil campaign "European Belarus" Andrei Sannikau, former chairman of the Supreme Council of Belarus Stanislau Shushkevich, BPF party leaders Lyavon Barshchevski, Viktor Ivashkevich, and Vintsuk Vyachorka, coordinator of Charter'97 Zmitser Bandarenka, leader of the United Civil Party Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Hramada) Mikola Statkevich, activists of the civil campaign "European Belarus" Zmitser Barodka, Yauhen Afnagel, Pavai Yukhnovich, co-head of the organizing committee of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Pavai Sevyarynets, leader of the "For Freedom" movement Alyaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the "Young Front" Zmitser Dashkevich, leader of the "Young Belarus" Artur Finkevich, People's Artist of Belarus Zinaida Bandarenka, deputy head of the United Civil Party Lyudmila Hraznova, Belarus' National Poet Henadz Buraukin, popular playwright Uladzimir Khalip, and other well-known people took part in the demonstration.

Demonstrators were holding huge white-red-white cloth sheets, streamers with words "European Belarus!", "Freedom to political prisoners", "Belarus to Europe!" Slogans "Long live Belarus!" and "Independence!" were heard throughout.

A brief meeting was held in front of the Academy of Sciences. Speakers (opposition leaders, intellectuals, youth leaders) congratulated Belarusians on Freedom Day, expressing confidence that sooner or later the day would be celebrated as a state holiday.

Finally the BPF deputy chairman Viktor Ivashkevich called on the participants of the action to form a human chain along Independence Avenue holding flags and banners and stand there for an hour, reminding people of the Freedom Day and the political prisoners.

A portion of the crowd formed a human chain on advice of Viktor Ivashkevich. But a column of 500 young people moved to October square shouting "Independence!", "No to Union with Imperial Russia!", "Freedom to Political Prisoners!" The column consisted of activists of the civil campaign "European Belarus", "Young Front", and "Young Belarus".



The young oppositionists managed to walk only 100 meters when their way was blocked by hundreds of riot militiamen armed with batons at intersection of Independence Avenue and Brouka Street. A hundred of riot militiamen formed columns on both sides of the avenue.

Then youth leaders Yauhen Afnagel and Artur Finkevich urged the demonstrators to refuse to be drawn in authorities' provocations. In their words the actions of law enforcers against peaceful demonstrators showed the real face of "liberalization" declared by the Belarusian regime.

The rally lasted about an hour longer. People were standing on the avenue's border with flags and streamers, chanting "Long live Belarus!"; the cars passing by honked in support, some people joined the chain.

When the rally ended in about an hour, buses and trucks filled with interior troops' soldiers started coming from the streets near Independence Avenue. 44 buses and trucks of troops came from the Hikala street alone, near Yakub Kolas square!

Thus — several thousand soldiers were dispatched against Belarusians celebrating their national holiday...

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, March 25, 2009

Declaration of the Assembly Of Belarusian Democratic NGOs On Participation of the Belarusian Civic Society in the Eastern Partnership

We welcome the new initiative by the European Union and see it as a historic chance for Belarus to start participating actively in the European life. However we believe that Belarus' accession to this project should depend on the situation in the country otherwise Eastern Partnership will just help to preserve today's situation in Belarus without providing any fundamental changes.

Current situation in Belarus, in our opinion, limits the possibility of participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership initiative on political level. The cooperation of Belarusian authorities with the governing structures of the Eastern Partnership is going to have just a technical character and will be aimed on solving particular problems in the frames of the Eastern Partnership initiative. But the lack of political cooperation between Belarus and European Union should not prevent the sides from working together in the other fields of the project.

The civic society in Belarus is able and is ready to become a subject which will allow the country to use the potential of the Eastern Partnership for introducing positive changes in the State. It is also able not to let Belarusian authorities to preserve current internal situation. With European structures' mediation, a productive dialogue can be led between Belarusian civic society and authorities, which might result in effective and stable changes in Belarus.

The development of the criteria of the participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership initiative, as well as the monitoring of situation in Belarus should be the main tasks of Belarusian civic society at the moment. These tasks could be realized, for instance, in the following ways:

- a) by developing proposals on changes and reforms in Belarus;
- b) by monitoring changes in the internal situation, regarding mentioned above propositions;
- c) by estimating the level of the correspondence of the situation in Belarus to European standards;
- d) by participating in making agenda for European governmental and non-governmental institutions with the purpose of implementing European standards of internal politics in Belarus (in the fields of human rights, social security, judiciary, elections, etc.). The implementation should be organized not only in the framework of the Eastern Partnership project, but also in the frames of other forms of Belarusian-European cooperation.

All cases of human rights violations, as well as other aberrations from European standards, should be considered in the light of the participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership project. Human rights organizations, networking structures and other participants of the country's civic society should be considered as legitimate actors in this sphere.

The Civic Society Forum should have real influence on the country's issues, it should not cover the absence of real changes in Belarus.

The suggestion to hold the Civic Society Forum in the form of regular conferences seems to be rather beneficial. In our opinion, the representation of Belarusian NGOs at this event should be as diverse, as it is possible, all important democratic organizations should take part in it. It is also essential that at the time between the conferences civic society could have an influence on Belarusian-European dialogue. Thus, there is sense in organizing regular meetings of the leaders of Belarusian civic and political society with the representatives of authorities. These meetings should be held under the auspices of the Eastern Partnership and with the participation of European experts and of the EU representatives (first of all, those of the European Commission and its structures, and also the representatives of different institutions created in the framework of the Eastern Partnership).

This kind of mechanism is already being implemented in some other spheres of Belarusian-European dialogue (for instance, in the field of electoral legislation, the freedom of expression, etc.). As the practice shows, it has worked more effectively than the mechanism of creating advisory councils on the national level. The Eastern Partnership might help in institutionalizing this mechanism of advisory councils and increase its effectiveness.

We suggest to pay attention to the Resolution of the VI Congress of the Assembly of NGOs, which was made on March 6th, 2009 by more than 300 participants of the Congress. The Resolution contains a brief analysis of the current situation in Belarusian third sector and a list of actions which can be undertaken for the normalization of the situation. We call upon the international community to continue monitoring the situation with human rights in Belarus. Human rights cannot be subject to bargaining or concessions.

**Human rights
(in Belarus) cannot be subject
to bargaining or concessions**

The Assembly of Belarusian Democratic Non-Governmental Organizations is ready to take part in the preparation and organization of the civic society Forum in the frames of the Eastern Partnership project.

The Assembly of Belarusian Democratic Non-Governmental Organizations is an association of 220 civic organizations and initiatives. It was founded in 1997. Its main objectives are: promotion of Belarusian NGOs' interests and protection of their rights; improvement of communication between NGOs; monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the situation in the public sector. From the moment when the European Parliament declared the testing period for Belarusian authorities, the Assembly is monitoring closely the situation with the realization of the freedom of association in Belarus.

Source: Press service of the Assembly of Belarusian Prodemocratic NGOs, April 22, 2009

Role of a Government in Exile

By I.J. Survilla

This article, originally a part of a presentation by the author, explores conditions that have affected Belarusian self-government since the early 20th century. The stresses of the Soviet period forced a new Government into exile and its operations beyond the borders of Belarus. In order to understand the present plight of this European nation, there is a need to consider the recent experiential history of Belarus and Belarusians.

At the time that the people of Belarus proclaimed the independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (Bielaruskaja Narodnaja Respublika or BNR) on March 25, 1918, 148 years had passed since the first of the partitions of the Commonwealth of the Two Peoples that was created centuries earlier, which western historians have myopically called -- Partitions of Poland. The occupation was completed in 1795, when all of Belarus became a province of Russia. Tsarist rule made the 19th century one of the darkest periods of the history of Belarus. Its people barely survived as a nation. Its culture, its language, its religion, its sense of identity, its dignity had been subjected to a continuous persecution. A most significant response and impetus for change came in 1918, when the people of Belarus proclaimed their independence.



I.J. Survilla

President of the BNR Rada

The proclamation of the independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic has been the most important event in the history of modern Belarus. Without it, Moscow would not have been obliged to create the BSSR - the Belarusian Socialist Soviet Republic -- in 1919, and without the existence of the BSSR, its Head of State Stanislau Shushkevich would not have been one of the signatories of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the last decade of the 20th century. Thus, it is thanks to BNR that the independent Republic of Belarus -- however imperfect it may be -- exists today.

When the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic was forced into exile by the invading Bolshevik troops, it was welcomed in the Czech Republic, where its two first presidents in Exile, Piotr Krecheuski and his successor Vasil Zakharka, resided until the death of Zakharka in 1943. Under the conditions of Nazi occupation, Zakharka in his last will requested that Mikola Abramchyk, who was later

associated with the French Resistance, take over the struggle until a new Session of the Rada could be convened. At that Session, held in post-war West Germany in 1947, Abramchyk was elected the new President of the Rada. He remained in that position, resident in Paris, until his death in 1970. His successor was Vincent Zhuk-Hryshkevich, a Canadian Belarusian academic. The fifth President of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile was a resident of the United States, a medical doctor, Joseph Sazhych. I am the sixth President of the Rada in Exile. I was elected at the Session of the Rada held in New York in August 1997 and then re-elected for another six year term in 2003. Currently the Rada represents the major Belarusian communities worldwide.

The first goal of the Rada, the renewed independence of Belarus, was achieved in 1991. The question most asked since then has been -- why did the Rada keep its mandate when all the other Governments in Exile of the Republics of the USSR and of the Soviet satellite states relinquished theirs upon the demise of the Soviet Union? I will try here to answer that question and express my understanding of the key reasons why the role of the Rada remains essential today.

Why are we Europe's only Government in Exile?

The immense wave of hope experienced at the break-up of the Soviet Union made the oppressed nations believe that the end of that successive Russian empire would be followed by a general renaissance of the old states harboring the values which had been preserved for many decades by their exiled governments. It did. Belarus was one of the exceptions. Firstly, because the governmental structures in place had not yet been established through free elections, and the country, although now independent, could not be considered a **democracy** (even though this term can imply many kinds of concreteness).

The country's geographical location and human factor have not played a lesser role. Because of its geopolitical interest to Russia, and its proximity to Moscow, the Belarusian territory had been more than any other Soviet Republic made the homeland of the often evoked humanoid -- which we know under the name of HOMO SOVIETICUS. Intended to be the ideal citizen of a new Soviet order, his main characteristics were a total ignorance of his pre-Soviet historical past, the acceptance of the "big brother" status of Russia, the replacement of his mother tongue by the Russian language, and of his ancestral culture and values by copies of Russian cultural and historical values. A sense of non-Russian national identity was condemned as "bourgeois nationalism" in all non-Russian republics. Granted, that the Belarusian people were not militantly resisting Moscow's russification policies. Having experienced two world wars on their territory and years of Soviet terror, deprived of freedom since the partitions, and bereft of historical memory, Belarusians had developed incredible survival skills and had adapted to the Soviet ways of life. They were ready to accept anything "as long as there was no war".

Their work habits and skills made them one of the wealthier republics of the Soviet Union. So much so, that it was literally invaded by two million non-Belarusian

Soviet citizens. This is not a xenophobic statement, but it rather emphasizes that this influx significantly changed the nature of the electorate in a country of ten million.

A non-democratically elected Parliament, a "denationalized nation" (as described by University of Alberta professor David Marples), a strong foreign element in the population were not factors we could ignore, when considering the future of the Rada. Although there are some Russian settlers in Belarus who now consider themselves Belarusian, there is still a considerable number of those who retain their Soviet Russian identity and the vestiges of Russia-oriented views. Their influence, as well that of the russified former Soviet nomenklatura that remained in power, helped to make today's Republic of Belarus the authoritarian state it is.

However, some key events did energize the nascent democratic opposition. The discovery of the killing grounds of Kurapaty, and the Chernobyl disaster whose consequences in Belarus were hidden for three years by the Soviet authorities, had for a short time given rise to a mild mutiny even within the Communist structures of the new republic. The small but strong democratic opposition led by the Popular Front's leader Zianon Pazniak succeeded well beyond its numbers, for a time. Had it received some significant sign of support from the West, it might have ended the general population's well developed survival instincts to remain compliant and thus relatively safe. However, the West saw no interest in this small state, which they had erroneously considered at the time as a Soviet creation. "We have to draw the line somewhere" said the then Canadian Deputy Prime Minister, Sheila Copps, when our community tried to plead for help for Belarus. Among the ordinary Belarusians, hope gave way to nostalgia for the familiar and comfortable, while Russia was already exerting strong pressure on the Legislature of Belarus - which had been elected before independence, and still dominated by the resurgent former Communists.

Aware of the situation, the exile Rada decided to wait and see. Before relinquishing our mandate, we wanted to be sure that the independence was irreversible and Belarus would not need us any longer. We considered that the BNR Rada—a legitimate Parliament in Exile, was a tremendous asset in our hands, and we were not going to part with it without serious assurances. The decision was unanimous. And soon after, we were proven right. The new President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, elected in 1994, showed less than one year after his election his pro-Russian Soviet upbringing and loyalties. In May 1995, he held his first rigged referendum by which he reintroduced the Soviet style symbols and Russian as an official language of Belarus. In 1996, Russia's top leadership in persons of its Prime Minister, the heads of both houses of its legislature, together with key generals descended on the capital, and rewarded Lukashenko by preventing his impending impeachment.

Ever since, our goal has been to protect the statehood of Belarus -- constantly threatened by our increasingly aggressive Eastern neighbor -- while helping the democratic opposition to fight the growingly authoritarian illegitimate government of Alexander Lukashenko and to create a modern European Republic of Belarus.

Rada's present role

In December 2001, Edward Lucas, in the *Economist*, quoted an Estonian exiled politician who stressed that by its very existence, a government in Exile does its job.

The Rada or the Belarusian Government in Exile could have chosen to be simply the symbol of a free Belarus. Such a symbol was still badly needed in Belarus. We held this role in the early nineties, when we felt we had done all we could to put Belarus on the map of the world, and that it was the Belarusian people's turn to fight for a better Belarus. That was until the election of Mr. Lukashenko and the 1995 referendum, the first of all next fraudulent elections and referenda.

The Diaspora supporting the Rada has done a lot to bring the outside world's attention to Belarus after the Chernobyl disaster. In Canada we created the Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus and brought thousands of children for a respite to Canada. The Diaspora in other countries helped by sending medicines to Belarus. We understood how badly Belarus needed friends in the free world. I have been personally convinced that our defeat in Versailles in 1918 was due to a lack of politically placed friends while many of our neighbours who proclaimed and preserved their independence between the wars had had friends in strategic capitals... We made it a goal to find friends for Belarus. We realized what a powerful political instrument culture can be. In order to make Belarus a member of the community of European peoples, and not just a disaster zone and "the last dictatorship in Europe," we made it a goal to call attention to Belarusian culture wherever and however we can.

But our most important political contribution to the renaissance of Belarusian democracy, to the preservation of Belarusian culture and the protection of Belarusian statehood has been made through direct communication with friendly governments. Those who have lived through similar situations, such as the Czechs, those who have made it their goal to defend democracy in the world, such as the United States of America, those who declare that they are not ready to see human rights violated anywhere in the world -- such as Canada. Each of our successes has needed conviction and convincing, perseverance and presence, and communication and information dissemination on our part. To achieve them, we have worked through our established communities in the countries whose help we were seeking, often in concert with the democratic Opposition in Belarus. A good example of this activity was the recent Appeal to the European Union, which I signed before the EU's Prague Summit together with the first Head of State of the Re-

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(in the early 90's), the exile Rada
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public of Belarus, Stanislau Shushkevich, and two previous democratic candidates for President, Zianon Pazniak, and Alexander Kazulin. Together with another Presidential candidate of 2006, Alexander Milinkievich, we met with the key leaders of the Czech Republic. We thanked the European Union for accepting Belarus into the Eastern Partnership Program while expressing our fears that Europe's outstretched hand may be misused to legitimize the regime instead of serving the people of Belarus. We have asked EU to include Belarusian civil society into the agreement. And, since the Eastern Partnership's economic assistance may prolong Lukashenka's stay in power, we have asked EU to take steps to help protect the endangered Belarusian culture and values. This joint appeal was heard by the Czech hosts of the Summit, who will pass it on to Sweden, the next presiding State of the European Union.

The example I have provided was an event held in the Czech Republic, a long time friend of the BNR Rada. I have been received there several times at the highest levels. The countries who have been in a similar situation to ours understand well the significance of a Government in Exile. But in most cases, dealing with a Government in Exile presents diplomatic difficulties, especially where commerce or a given political interest is involved. Such as the issue of the Arctic population in the case of Canada and Russia relations. We do understand that. And, at the same time, we are concerned that a rapprochement between the United States and Russia, for example, could theoretically happen at the expense of Russia's neighbors. I only hope at this specific moment in time that President Obama's administration is well aware of Russia's imperialistic instincts.

Last but not least, I would like to address the issue of the relations of the BNR Rada with Belarus. According to many, we have been the ray of hope, which has led our freedom fighters in Belarus to our common goal – the real and continued independence of our land. Outside of Belarus, we have preserved our language, our historical memory, our sense of national identity while they were being damaged in Belarus. During the period of renewal at the beginning of the nineties, the then President of the BNR Rada, Dr. Sazhych was welcomed in Belarus as an honored guest. However, as soon as Lukashenka became President, we became "the enemies of the people" -- together with the Belarusian democratic Opposition. The national white-red-white flag, the historical coat of Arms, the very mention of the Rada are no-nos in Belarus, except when the intent is their denigration by the propaganda machine. No lie is too enormous to fight us. The brain washing is successful among the ordinary Belarusians who have no access to unbiased information.

Our relationship with most parties of the Opposition is good. When we attend together international events, whatever our difference of thinking, we all know our common goal is to preserve the Statehood of Belarus and to make it a free, European democracy. As for the future of the Rada, we can't wait to be able to give back our mandate to a democratically elected BELARUSIAN government. It will be up to the people of Belarus to decide what kind of democracy they will have. As informal Ambassadors, we

will continue to look for friends for our people, whom they so tragically lacked in the past centuries.

There is no doubt that a government in Exile is an exotic idea for many. Such a government exists out of necessity and operates under many challenges, dilemmas and varying acknowledgments of its empowerment. My experience in this organism has been at times frustrating, at times satisfying. I have been privy to the variety of perceptions of Belarus and the correlations between global buy-in and the willingness to understand the conditions of existence of such a government. But whether the Rada is universally accepted is less important than our **constancy of presence**. We function on the idea that we are part of a process toward democracy, and that by our existence we can mediate the political nuances that must be understood in order to change the conditions in Belarus.

This article was originally presented by I.J. Survilla, President of the Rada of the Belarussian Democratic Republic in Exile, under the title GOVERNMENT IN EXILE: EXPLORATIONS OF THE BELARUS ENIGMA, at the Canadian Association of Slavists' CONFERENCE 2009, on May 24, 2009. Panel Title: Technology, Nation, Government and Material Culture: four Perspectives on Belarusian Cultural and Political Experiences

Opposition Delivers Its Roadmap

Belarusian opposition leaders handed a Belarus democratization roadmap to a US Congress delegation during a meeting in Vilnius on Thursday, April 16, BelaPAN reported.

The US delegation led by Shelley Berkley included four Democrats and three Republicans.

Taking part in the meeting were Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich's ally Viktor Karnyayenka, Belarusian Association of Journalists chair Zhanna Litvina, a leader of the Belarusian Christian Democracy party and Vintsuk Vyachorka, deputy chair of the Belarusian Popular Front.

Belarus' opposition politicians had problems when crossing the border into Lithuania in the morning. Kazulin had his belongings searched, while opposition youth leader Artur Finkevich was not allowed to cross the border. Belarusian border guards told the 24-year-old leader of an opposition youth group called Maladaya (Young) Belarus that he was temporarily banned from leaving the country and put an appropriate stamp into his passport.

Lyabedzka expressed the opinion that the Belarusian authorities wanted to prevent them from arriving on time for the meeting. "There was a two-hour line of cars on the Lithuanian side," Lyabedzka said. "But Lithuanian border guards allowed us to jump the line when we explained the situation to them. Only thanks to that, we managed to arrive on time."

Sources: BelaPAN, EuroRadio for Belarus, April 16, 2009

Belarusian Teen Wins a Prestigious Tennis Tournament

The 19-year-old Belarusian won the Sony Ericsson Open in Florida. **Victoria Azaranka** claimed the biggest victory of her career as she defeated five-time champion and world number one Serena Williams in the Miami final.



Here is how *Washington Post* covered this victory:

Williams led 3-2 before Azaranka won five consecutive games to take control. The teenager also won the final five games and closed out the biggest win of her career when Williams sailed a backhand long. Azaranka tossed away her racket, covered her face and hopped to the net.

Her voice shook during the trophy ceremony.

"I'm sorry. I think I forgot my English right now," she told the crowd. "It was such an honor for me to play Serena. She's the greatest player for me. I was so happy to be able to play her and win."

Azaranka, who won her first tour title three months ago at Brisbane, improved to 23-2 this year. She grew up in Minsk and befriended NHL goaltender Nikolai Khabibulin, who invited her to the United States to train. She moved to Scottsdale and has lived there with Khabibulin and his wife since 2005.

Source: <http://bielar.us>, April 2009

2009 Ice Hockey World Championship

Belarus' team placed 8th, defeating Hungary 3:1, Norway 3:2 in overtime, Slovakia 2:1 and Finland 2:1 on penalty shots.

Russia edged Belarus 4-3 in a back-and-forth quarterfinal match. The defending champion Russia trailed twice in the second period but forward Ilya Kovalchuk scored the winner in the third period.

Russians won gold, Canadians silver and Swedes bronze.

Forward **Mikhail Hrabouski** became Belarusian teams' most productive player, with 9 points (3 goals, 6 assists), followed by Aleh Antonienka - 6 (3+3), and Alaksiej Kaluzhny - 6 (1+5).

Andrei Mezin has become world's best hockey goalkeeper according to the results of the world championship that was held in Switzerland.

The Belarusian goalkeeper was rated the best by the tournament's board of directors and by journalists who included him in a symbolic championship's team.

Mezin's activity percentage in Switzerland was 94.77. He managed to catch 163 out of 172 pucks.



Mezin at work...

Source: European Radio for Belarus, May 11, 2009

Belarus Will Organize 2014 Ice Hockey World Championship

The International Ice Hockey Federation decided that Belarus will organize the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championship, IHTA was informed by the president of the Latvian Ice Hockey Federation Kirovs Lipmans.

Latvia's candidacy received three votes out of a possible 108, whilst Belarus received 75 votes. As reported, Latvia vied for the right to organize the 2014 championships with Belarus, Hungary and Ukraine.

Latvia has already organized the championships once, in 2006, whereas Hungary, Ukraine and Belarus have not yet hosted the championships. In 2010 the championships will be held in Germany, in 2011 in Slovakia, in 2012 in Finland and in 2013 in Sweden.

Source: Web site The Baltic Course

Quotes of Quarter

On May 28 Russian Finance Minister **ALEKSEI KUDRIN** stated at a press conference in Moscow:

"We may face insolvency of the Belarusian government and its economy as a whole due to their insufficient reserves by the end of the year, or maybe in a year". He later added "I offered to Lukashenka, and our president supported issuing the \$500 million loan in Russian rubles, if Russian rubles are needed in mutual payments, but Belarus refused."

NEWS BRIEFS

April 01, 2009

Opposition Defense Spells Trouble For Minsk Teacher

MINSK -- An English teacher in Minsk who was fired for politically charged remarks she made in class last week was rehired by her employer, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

The private "SOL Minsk" education center dismissed Mariana Hruzdilovich on March 25 after she defended demonstrators from a student's characterization of them as "dumb monsters of the opposition [who] gather in the streets and shout out some stupid things."

The exchange came after a class discussion began about Freedom Day, which was marked by opposition activists in Belarus on March 25.

Hruzdilovich reportedly responded that she had attended such gatherings for many years and saw many good and intelligent people among the demonstrators.

She was fired the following day.

Hruzdilovich told RFE/RL that the female student told her parents of the conversation, and that the girl's father was a police colonel who then pressured the education center into firing Hruzdilovich.

SOL Minsk rehired her on March 31.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

April 19, 2009

Riot militiamen beat opposition and tear EU flags on Solidarity Day in Belarus

An action of solidarity with political prisoners was brutally dispersed in Minsk on April 16. People who came to the October square were brutally beaten by riot militiamen.

About a hundred opposition activists gathered on October square to demand the authorities to release prisoners of conscience.

The demonstrators were holding portraits of political prisoners and disappeared Belarusian politicians and banners "Freedom for Political Prisoners", national and EU flags. Ten minutes later, dozens of riot militiamen came to the square and began to force people to Internatsyanalnaya Street. Riot militiamen were beating people, snatching national and EU flags.

The demonstrators were forced out of October square to Internatsyanalnaya Street and then to Yanka Kupala Street and Bahdanovich Street. The protesters were escorted some kilometres to Atlant refrigerator plant. When the demonstrators made attempts to return to the square, riot militia forced them out again.

The protesters were shouting "Shame!", "Fascists!", "Freedom to political prisoners!", "Long Live Belarus!"

"Riot militia uses an extremely mean and cynical policy during these dispersals. One can think that participants of the action were just being pushed out of the city center, but in real fact, riot militiamen were beating us cruelly. They were hitting us with their fists and feet in kidneys, legs, and backbones.

Source: Charter97 Press Center

April 26, 2009

Opposition Stages Chernobyl Anniversary Demonstration in Minsk

A crowd estimated by reporters at up to 1000 people participated in an opposition-organized demonstration in Minsk on Sunday afternoon to mark the 23rd anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Three leaders of the Belarusian Popular Front, Lyavon Barshcheuski, Vintsuk Vyachorka and Viktor Ivashkevich, as well as Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists, were the official organizers of the traditional demonstration, called Charnobylski Shlyakh (The Path of Chernobyl).

The demonstration began with a rally in the square in front of the National Academy of Sciences, the government-authorized assembly place for the event.

The Belarusian authorities hide the truth about the severity of the Chernobyl accident's impact on the population of the country, Ivan Nikitchanka, a corresponding member of the National Academy of Science, said in his opening address. According to him, a survey recently conducted by him and other experts found that there was not a single area in Belarus where there were no people without radionuclides in their bodies.

Dr. Nikitchanka said that it should be the task of the entire nation, not only opposition groups or the government, to minimize the consequences of the accident.

Heorhiy Lepin, a member of the founding committee for an organization called Scientists for a Nuclear Free Belarus, said that no proper exploration has been done at the site in the Astravets district near the Lithuanian border that the government has selected for the construction of Belarus' first-ever nuclear power plant. There is a tectonic fault line in the area and the hazardous seismological environment there may lead to the collapse of the plant, Dr. Lepin warned.

The demonstration ended with a commemorative ceremony in front of the Chernobyl chapel at about 3 p.m., with some 400 people in attendance.

Pavel Sevyarynets, a leader of the unregistered Belarusian Christian Democracy party, said in his speech that the Chernobyl disaster was a portent of the collapse of the Soviet regime. "But before that, the regime did one of its last black deeds by ordering that the radioactive clouds moving towards Moscow be seeded in the Homyel and Mahilyow regions in Belarus," Mr. Sevyarynets said. "The names of the people who made that decision have been erased from memory. They have been forgotten by people but not by God. And their deed will be properly assessed by the justice of Heaven."

.... While visiting the Chernobyl-affected Homyel region on April 25, Mr. Lukashenko called the forthcoming demonstration a "fascist march." "Tomorrow they want to walk around streets in a fascist march to demonstrate something," the Belarusian leader said. He suggested that oppositionists should better demonstrate in radioactively contaminated areas.

Source: www.naviny.by, Office for Democratic Belarus

May 5, 2009

Political refugees from Belarus deprived of media accreditation for the Prague summit

Czech authorities have canceled the accreditation of Belarusian political refugee and journalist Aliaksei Shydloouski and two other Belarusian journalists at EU's Eastern Partnership summit.

Last week, Shydloouski was accredited as a reporter with the Belarusian immigrants' newspaper *Minsk-Prague-Info* together with Yauhen Sidoryk, the editor-in-chief of this newspaper. According to Charter'97, the accreditation was confirmed by the press office of the Czech foreign ministry.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

May 8, 2009

Protest against Lukashenka's dictatorship at summit opening in Prague

About 100 Belarusians stayed near the Congress Center holding posters "No to Dictator Lukashenka in Europe!", "No to Dictatorship!", "Freedom to Political Prisoners in Belarus!", national white-red-white flags and flags of the civil campaign "European Belarus".

"We were standing on the steps near the entrance. Ours was the only protest picket near the building where the Eastern Partnership summit is being held, so it drew everyone's attention. Numerous journalists who came to cover the summit, showed great interest in the Belarusians' protest rally," Alyaksei Shydloouski told the Charter'97 press center.

Delegations of countries-participants of the Eastern Partnership program welcomed the protesters. They read slogans with great interest, said Alyaksei Shydloouski. The Belarusian delegation arrived at the Congress Center in an armoured car. Escorted by securities, they passed by the protesting refugees and disappeared in the building.

The protesters welcomed the representatives of the Belarusian regime with hissing and shouts "Long Live Belarus!" and "Shame on you!"



PM Topolánek assuring demonstrators

Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek appeared before the demonstrators to express his solidarity with the protesters and assure that European politicians know there are political prisoners in Belarus and Europe is not going to give up principles of democracy.

Source: Charter97 Press Center

May 8, 2009

Belarus, EU to Develop Energy Cooperation

Belarus and the European Union intend to develop cooperation in the energy area. This intention is confirmed in the power engineering declaration between the Government of Belarus and the Commission of the European Communities. Foreign Minister of Belarus Syarhei Martynau and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, exchanged the alternates of the document in Prague on May 7.

"This is a small but confident step," Benita Ferrero-Waldner said. This is a very important move for the two sides, according to Syarhei Martynau.

By signing the declaration, the sides state the intent to continue discussing the issues of oil and gas transportation, safety delivery problems of mutual interest. Belarus-EU will exchange information on energy strategies and programmes, approximate the approaches to regulation and reformation of the energy sector especially gas and electricity markets. The sides intend to develop regional cooperation in the area of energy markets.

The sides acknowledge that Belarus and the EU are bound by common interests in the energy sector and that the integration of their energy markets may bring benefits to the two sides and strengthen the energy security on the European continent.

The declaration will be finally formalized once it is signed by Energy Minister of Belarus Alyaksandr Azyarets and European Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs.

Source: BelTA, Office for Democratic Belarus

May 11, 2009

29 people on solidarity hunger strike to support political prisoners in Belarus

Political prisoner Mikalai Autukhovich has been on hunger strike for 26 days in the pre-trial detention center protesting against unlawful arrest. New opposition activists join the hunger strike every day to express their solidarity with him.

State of health of Vaukavysk entrepreneur Mikalai Autukhovich, who is on hunger strike, has deteriorated, lawyer Pavel Sapelka told.

On May 4, a number of political and public figures of Belarus declared themselves on indefinite hunger strike to support the detained entrepreneurs from Vaukavysk, who are kept in the Minsk pre-trial detention center #1. Among the participants of the strike are former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the BPF party Lyavon Barshchouski, former political prisoners Andrei Kim, Mikalai Statkevich, Syarhei Skrabets, Artsyom Dubski, leader of the coordinative council of entrepreneurs Alyaksandr Makaev, "Young Front" activists Anastasiya Palazhanka, Mikola Dzyamidzenka, and others.

The participants of the hunger strike demand to free arrested entrepreneurs' leaders Mikalai Autukhovich, Yury Lavonau, and Uladzimir Asipenka from charges, release them immediately, rehabilitate all political prisoners in the country, and stop persecuting people on political motives.

Street rallies of solidarity are organized in Minsk and other Belarusian towns every day.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

May 12, 2009

Justice Ministry Denies Registration to Belarusian Christian Democracy

The Belarusian Ministry of Justice has lifted the suspension of its registration denial to Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD), taking the final decision not to give the legal status to the opposition party.

The justice ministry denied state registration to the BCD party on April 15, citing flaws in its application papers and other minor irregularities.

Two days later, the ministry issued a statement saying that it had suspended the registration denial because of "the need to study additional information."

The BCD has a month to appeal against the registration denial to the Supreme Court.

"I have no doubt that BCD will be denied registration," Pavel Sevyarynets, a member of the BCD founding committee, told BelaPAN earlier this month. "A government TV channel is now making a report about our party. Local authorities force our activists say on record that they did not participate in the BCD founding conference. This is being done to justify the registration denial."

The government is afraid of legalizing a party that cooperates with educational institutions and churches, Mr. Sevyarynets said. "We'll continue to work irrespective of the justice ministry's decision," he said.

Source: www.naviny.by

May 17, 2009

The Belarusian Viking won the Eurovision contest

Belarus-born Alexander Rybak from Norway became the winner of the 54th Eurovision Song Contest. Most European countries, among them Belarus, gave the musician the highest mark

Our countryman scored record 387 points beating previous record by Finnish band Lordi (292) in 2006.

According to the Eurovision rules the next contest will be organized in Norway.

Norway received the maximum number of points –12 – from Spain, Belarus, Sweden, Israel, Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Poland, the Netherlands, Estonia, Denmark, Slovenia, and Hungary.



The song "Fairytale," that gave victory to Rybak at the song contest held in Moscow, was composed for the occasion, as told by the singer: a musician began to play a melody recalling his beloved. That is how Fairytale was born.

Alexander Rybak was born in Minsk to a family of musicians on May 13, 1986. When he was five, his parents moved to an

Oslo suburb and he has never visited his native country since then. He played with the popular group A-Ha and the famous violin-player Pinchas Zukerman.

Source: Charter97 Press Center

May 20, 2009

CSTO Official Says Russia Will Supply Missiles To Belarus

MINSK -- The secretary-general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Nikolai Bordyuzha, said in Minsk that Russia will soon supply Belarus with S-400 and Iskander missiles.

Meanwhile, Minsk-based military analyst Alyaksandr Alesin told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that Russia needs to resolve shortages within its own air-defense troops before it begins helping other countries.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

May 20, 2009

Gas Price for Belarus to Reach \$200-205 per 1,000 Cubic Metres in July

Starting from July 1 2009, the gas price for Belarus will make up \$200-205 per one thousand cubic metre, First Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus Uladzimir Syamashka said in a plenary session within the Belarusian Industrial Forum on May 20.

"From July 1 Belarus will pay \$200-205 per 1,000 cubic metre of the Russian gas," he said. Uladzimir Semashka emphasized that gas tariffs in Belarus are lower than in Europe as a transport constituent of the prime cost in gas transportation from Russian to Europe is higher than from Russia to Belarus. Besides, Belarus, as a Union State member, purchases gas duty-free.

Source: BelTA, Office for Democratic Belarus

June 5, 2009

Silence of the European Union may kill Belarusian political prisoner

Austrian human rights activists are raising alarm: political prisoner Mikalai Autukhovich has been on hunger strike for more than 50 days.

A long hunger strike of the arrested Belarusian entrepreneur inspired human rights activists from Austria to make a clip that is being actively distributed on the internet. A short movie tells about the destiny of Belarusian political prisoners, one of whom, Mikalai Autukhovich, had to go on hunger strike protesting his unlawful arrest. The Belarusian authorities, however, don't react to the protest act of the Belarusian prisoner of conscience. The EU leadership doesn't display practically any reactions either.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

June 6, 2009

Economist says milk ban may cause financial bleeding

Economist Leanid Zaika says that Russia's ban on dairy imports from Belarus would hit Belarusian farmers hard.

Russia's consumer protection watchdog Rospotrebnadzor banned the import of some 500 titles of Belarusian dairy products last week and later announced plans to add 800 more titles to the ban list. The agency cited the producers' failure to obtain necessary permits in accordance with Russia's new food standards in effect since December 2008.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski ordered Belarusian officials to end what he called "the war of words" with Russia over the export of dairy products.

Zaika says that Russia moved to stop Belarus' expansion to its market.

"Belarus' dairy export to Russia rose by 37 percent last year. Wasn't Russia supposed to react to that? The internal demand is shrinking amid the crisis, while Belarusians keep flooding it with milk," Zaika told ERB.

He says that the ban may lead to a loss of \$200 million to \$300 million for Belarus' economy. In addition, he says, farms may face a shortage of money to pay wages to farm workers.

"This is a geopolitical weapon. All 118 districts in Belarus may face a shortage of cash," Zaika predicts.

He adds that Rospotrebnadzor may also impose a fine on Belarusian dairy farms for failure to comply with the standards. It may be as big as \$500 million. Belarus expects Russia to release the same amount of money as a loan.

Meanwhile, Belarusian officials have reportedly begun talks with Baltic states, Georgia and Azerbaijan and other possible destinations for milk export.

"No one waits for us in other markets. This is not a matter of days. It is impossible to capture new markets so fast," economist Mikhal Zaleski comments on the situation.

Source: Anton Valatkovich, Maksim Yarmak, European Radio for Belarus

June 14, 2009,

Belarus Leader Snubs Moscow Security Pact Summit

MINSK (Reuters) -- Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka will not attend a former Soviet security pact summit in Moscow on June 14 in protest at Russia's ban on imports of its dairy products, Belarus's Foreign Ministry said.

Ties between former Soviet allies Russia and Belarus have been strained, with Moscow angered by Belarus's refusal to recognize Georgia's pro-Russian breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

Earlier this month, Russia banned imports of 1,200 types of milk products from Belarus, which earns billions of dollars from its dairy exports and last year had about 4 percent of the Russian market.

"At this moment, we witness an open economic discrimination by one of the members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation [CSTO] against Belarus in a very important segment of products," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"Objectively, such actions undermine economic security, which is a fundamental basis for stability ... In the current situation, Belarus ... is forced to cancel its participation in the [CSTO] meeting in Moscow on June 14."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

June 18, 2009

Milk War Over?

Belarus has resumed deliveries of dairy products to Russia, but the ongoing dispute between the countries does not seem to be over.

Following talks in Moscow on Wednesday, head of Russia's consumer watchdog Rospotrebnadzor and Belarusian Agriculture Minister Syamyon Shapira signed a protocol changing technical requirements for the import of dairy products from Belarus, which were the reason for the ban.

However, the dispute between the countries may continue on a new level. The Belarus customs service has said that it plans to

implement certain elements of customs control on the Russian border.

Currently, customs control of goods from Belarus and customs clearance of goods from third countries only exists on the Russian side. *Vedomosti* daily reports that Minsk has already introduced stricter customs examination procedures.

Source: Russia Today, Office for Democratic Belarus

June 18, 2009

RIGHT ALLIANCE registered

The right-wing organization "Right Alliance" has been officially registered on June 17, 2009. Its leader, Yuras Karetnikau informed Radio Racyja about it.

The organization's objectives are defined as: realization of informative and consulting functions of a non-commercial character, supporting youth activities in the fields of education, business, culture, sports and tourism, as well as contributing to the economic and social-cultural development of Belarus' citizens.



Yuras Karetnikau

The "Right Alliance" was founded five years ago as a union of Belarusian patriotic youth initiatives after the voluntary dissolution of the Belarusian Party of Freedom.

After five years of underground activity the organization has been registered as an informative and consulting institution. Now the "Right Alliance" is entitled to publish books, magazines, produce CDs, conduct publicity campaigns and even scholarly research.

This type of registration is not performed by the Ministry of Justice, but rather by other governmental structures - district administrations, official name registers etc.

This allows us to use our official name and forms, to publicize our activities. We will now be able to open organization's branches in the regions.

The negative side of the coin is that we will be treated as a commercial structure, which makes it easier to liquidate us than a civic organization.

During its past five years in the underground the "Right Alliance" has conducted in the capital and regions dozens of actions of a national-patriotic and civic nature.

The organization is led by Mr. Yuras Karetnikau, who ran for a parliament seat in the last parliamentary elections.

Source: Siarhiej Budkin, Radio Racyja

BELARUS ABROAD

CBS International Summer School for Belarusian Studies in Poland

The Center for Belarusian Studies at Southwestern College (Winfield, KS) invites undergraduate and graduate students to participate in its first International Summer School for Belarusian Studies from July 6 to August 7, 2009.

The program, to be co-sponsored by the Poland-based Belarusian Historical Society, will be held at the Belarusian Lyceum in the town of Hajnówka in the Podlasie region of northeastern Poland, an area of great natural beauty and home to Poland's ethnic Belarusian minority — an ideal setting for the study of Belarusian language, history and culture, as well as for the study of a broad range of issues relating to cultural diversity and minorities policies in the expanded EU. Coursework will include intensive Belarusian language instruction (beginning and intermediate levels and individual advanced-level tutorials) and lectures in English and Belarusian on Belarusian history, literature, contemporary politics and society.

The program will also include a regional studies component, with lectures and events focusing on the history, culture and current status of the Belarusian minority in Poland, as well as of the Podlasie region's other ethnic groups, including Poles, Jews, Tatars, Lithuanians, and Russian Old Believers. Faculty will include instructors from Białystok University and the Belarusian Lyceum in Hajnówka, as well as Hrodna University in Belarus. Additional guest lectures on Belarusian history, politics and culture will be given by visiting researchers from Europe and North America. Students will have a choice of dormitory accommodations at the Belarusian Lyceum, or homestays with Belarusian-speaking families in Hajnówka.

Coursework will be supplemented by a rich and diverse cultural program, including visits to Belarusian minority cultural organizations and media outlets, meetings with Belarusian writers and artists, films, concerts, theatrical performances, and excursions to important sites related to Belarusian and Orthodox culture and other attractions of the Podlasie region: the city of Białystok, the recently restored Orthodox monastery in Supraśl, the Białowieża (Belaveža) National Park (the largest and ecologically most diverse remnant of the primeval forests of the Northern European plain), the historic town of Bielsk Podlaski, the Holy Mountain of Grabarka (the most important Eastern Orthodox pilgrimage site in Poland), and the Borderland Foundation in Sejny, a unique institution dedicated to preserving the rich multicultural heritage of the borderland region and promoting dialogue and new forms of cooperation between its many ethnic groups and cultures.

In mid-July students will also have the opportunity to attend Basovišča, the annual festival of Belarusian rock music organized by the Belarusian Students' Association in the town of Gródek (Haradok) east of Białystok. At the end of the program, from August 8-19th, students will have the option of traveling to Belarus on a tour including Hrodna, Navahrudak, Slonim, Niasviž, Mir, Minsk, Połack, Viciebsk, Mahiloŭ, Pinsk and Brest.

The program cost, including tuition, room, board, cultural program and excursions is \$2,900 (the cost of the optional Belarus tour at the end of the program will be announced as details become available). For further information and application materials, please contact the program director: Dr. Curt Woolhiser, Harvard University, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Barker Center 327, 12 Quincy St., Cambridge MA 02138-3804; e-mail: cwoolhis@fas.harvard.edu; tel. (617) 495-3528.

Source: <http://www.bielar.us>, April 6, 2009

Exhibition of Belarusian Posters Revisits Brussels

On April 24 sunny Brussels hosted the opening of the exhibition 'Visual code of the time: post-Soviet poster art in Belarus'. It was the second presentation of this exhibition in Brussels. After the Administration Communale d'Evere and Curieus Evere, the Centre culturel Forest expressed its great interest in presenting Belarusian posters to Brussels' public.

It is in fact the first exhibition presented in the newly opened Centre culturel Forest. The centre was inaugurated only in September 2008, however, the building, which hosts it, has a long history. During more than one century it hosted the Wielemans Ceuppens brewery, which closed in stages during 1982-1988. After that, the site has been abandoned for almost 20 years. Some years ago local authorities decided to blow a new live to the spot, creating the cultural centre and making it profitable for the inhabitants of the neighborhood.



The exhibition was opened by representatives from the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels), the Centre culturel Forest and Association Culturelle Joseph Jacquemotte, which organised the event. The exhibition focuses on the works of mid 1980s-1990s which, according to the authors of the project - the Office for a democratic Belarus and the Belarusian Union of Designers - most brightly illustrate the impact that important socio-political transformation taking place in the country in that time had on poster art.

The exhibition has already been on display in six European cities including Warsaw, Berlin, Dresden, Trieste, Granarolo and Toulouse. Thirty works of well-known Belarusian designers were displayed in the Centre culturel Forest until May 7, 2009.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus, April 25, 2009

Congress of New Belarusian Diaspora

The Second Congress of the New Belarusian Diaspora of Europe and the USA took place in Strasbourg, France, on April 24-28, 2009. The New Belarusian Leaders Forum: Renaissance Generation addressed the matters of cooperation between the EU and Belarus united the representatives of the younger cohort of Belarusian émigrés in the EU and the USA.

Thirty five leaders of the new generation from fourteen European countries and the USA and prominent representatives of the Belarusian civil society and Belarusian experts in political affairs, mass media, and civil society attended the Congress. Special attendees included: Leader of democratic movement "For Freedom" Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Deputy Director of Rada BNR Siarhiey Navumchyk, political analysts Piotr Martsau and Yury Drakakhrust, and human rights defenders Inna Kuley and Andrey Kim.

The attendees addressed the problems of current political, social, and economic environment in Belarus, the country's dialogue with the European entities, participated in plenary sessions on the matters of European integration and major unifying and disintegrating factors affecting the Belarusian civil society, assessed the results of the previous year's Congress, and developed a wide range of new projects and initiatives.

In closing, the Congress passed the Declaration with recommendations to the European and Belarusian authorities and organizations for most optimal development of the mutual cooperation, and issued two statements addressing (1) politically charged criminal persecution of Mikalai Autuchovitch and his colleagues; (2) disregard of the public opinion in the matter of nuclear power plant construction in Belarus. The English texts of the Congress' statements were sent to the European entities, representatives of Belarus to the Council of Europe, and mass media.

The participants of the Congress also met with the representatives of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations of the Council of Europe, PACE, and human rights experts. Andrey Kim and Ivan Shyla were awarded Freedom Medal as the most energetic political activists of 2008 at the official ceremony attended on April, 26 by MP Christos Pourgourides, Special Reporter of the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

Arts exhibitions of young Belarusian artists from the organization Young Media - Photos of Belarus featured works of Valeria Krasovskaya. The Congress was organized by the international community Third Way with the support of the Belarusian Ruch International, Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations of the Council of Europe, and German Marshall Fund, and Rada of Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR). The First Congress of the New Belarusian Diaspora of the EU and the USA took place in March 1-4, 2008 in Tallinn, Estonia.

Source: www.3rdWay.org, April 29, 2009

Declaration of the Belarusian Opposition On Eastern Partnership

We welcome the idea of the Eastern Partnership and express our appreciation to the EU for including Belarus in this programme.

We understand the importance of the general issues prompting the EU to propose a new approach in dealing with Lukashenka's anti-democratic regime, which is intentionally destroying Belarusian civil society.

Nevertheless, we believe that securing the rights of civil society and of the individual should be a condition for relations with the authoritarian regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka and should be stressed in the Partnership's protocols. Participation of civil society in the Eastern Partnership will guarantee positive changes; it will create the possibility of a positive choice for replacing the existing regime. Without this participation, the Partnership will not achieve positive results and will be used by the anti-democratic regime to justify its own destructive activities.

We would like to draw attention to the anti-culture character of Lukashenka's regime. Along with ruining civil society and violating human rights, this regime is also methodically destroying Belarusian culture, education and creativity, national historical knowledge. It has made universal Russification the mainstay of its anti-culture policies. In the contemporary world, culture is becoming one of the main attributes of sovereignty. Russification and the destruction of culture increase the negative influence of Russian pro-imperial political circles in Belarus.

In our opinion, one of the priorities of the Eastern Partnership's activities should be its assistance in saving Belarusian culture from systematic destruction by an anti-Belarusian regime. We propose adding an item to EU's demands to the Belarusian regime. It should deal with securing free development of Belarusian culture, education and creativity.

We believe that, in the realm of economic cooperation, priorities should be assigned to energy management and diversification of supplies of energy resources; namely, to investments in projects and technology dealing with the transportation of energy resources (oil, gas, and electricity).

We also consider it necessary to abolish all barriers by the regime to people's access to information and cultural-education projects. Simplification of the visa regime and reduction of visa fees for citizens of the Republic of Belarus would favour the mutual exchange of ideas and understanding of the democratic way of life.

We would like to point the attention of EU politicians to signals concerning the development of a mutual strategy by Lukashenka and his eastern allies regarding the Eastern Partnership. In our view, if this factor is underestimated and all forces in the Republic of Belarus (including those in emigré community) are not included in the Eastern

Partnership programme, prospects for the Partnership in Belarus might not develop or may just stop (in the worst case) at the level of factual recognition and legitimisation of the anti-democratic regime.

Feeling responsible for our people (Belarusians), we are interested in the viability of the partnership programme. We hope that our position will be heard and supported by the initiators and all participants of the Eastern Partnership.

6th of May 2009, Prague

Ivonka Survilla,
President of the BNR Rada,
and former presidential candidates: Zianon Pazniak,
Stanislau Shushkevich and Aliaksandr Kazulin.

Source: The web page of the Conservative-Christian Party of BPF, 09.05.2009

Editor's Note

In an interview with a Radio Liberty reporter, Aliaksandr Milinkevich explained why he has not signed the joint declaration by Ivonka Survilla, Stanislau Shushkevich, Zianon Pazniak, and Aliaksandr Kazulin:

I basically supported the text of the declaration. However, such declarations should be very articulate and properly verified; the text included some statements that, in my view, are not supported by facts.. For example, there is the statement implying that authorities of Belarus and Russia have a plan for destroying the Eastern Partnership.

Belarus Days in Prague

A series of events with the participation of the Belarusian opposition's representatives took place in the Czech capital on May 4-7 in the framework of the 'Belarusian Days in Prague'.

On Monday, May 4 a documentary film on Belarus entitled "The Kingdom of Dead Mice" was shown in Prague's city library. A discussion on the political situation in Belarus followed. It was attended by the Belarusian political analyst Ales Lahvinets and former Czech interior minister Jan Ruml.

On May 5 ex-presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, chairwoman of the Belarusian People's Republic Ivonka Survilla, leader of the Conservative Christian Part of the Belarusian Popular Front Zianon Pazniak, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada Stanislau Shushkevich and leader of the "For Freedom" movement Alyaksandr Milinkevich met with the Czech prime minister Mirek Topolánek.

On the same day Ivonka Survilla, Pazniak, Kazulin and Shushkevich met with Prague's Belarusian community - mainly with students - and answered their questions.

In the morning of May 6, the five politicians held meetings at the foreign affairs committee of the Czech parliament. In the evening, the Free Theater from Minsk performed the play "Generation Jeans" in the Montmartre gallery.

Besides, the five representatives of the Belarusian opposition took part in the conference entitled "Eastern Partnership: Forming A Forum of Civil Society" on May 5-6.

On May 7, the Belarusian oppositionists met the Czech foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg. Afterwards, they answered questions by journalists.



Marching to the Congressional Centrum

In the afternoon of May 7 a demonstration against political repressions in Belarus was held on a central square in Prague. Later about 200 demonstrators - representing Belarusian diasporas from the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland and Belgium - picketed Prague's Congressional Centrum, the initial site of the European Union's Eastern Partnership project. They demanded democratic reforms in Belarus and greeted the official Belarus delegation with shouts of "Shame!"

Source: European Radio for Belarus, May 8, 2009.

Quotes of Quarter

"Now is the time together with all EU countries and the Euro-commission to expand the Eastern Partnership initiative that had such a good start in Prague. We'll take real steps that will benefit Belarus, as well as the European Union."

Ambassador STEFAN ERICSSON of Sweden whose country is assuming the EU presidency, declared on June 1 at a press conference in Minsk.

Note: The Ambassador spoke in Belarusian, making the local journalists, even those of Russian language papers to do the same.

Thoughts and Observations

A Divided EU Reaches Out To Former Soviet States

By Heather Maher

PRAGUE -- European heads of state have gathered in Prague for landmark talks with six eastern countries it hopes to bring closer to the West, despite opposition from Moscow.

A draft summit statement of the new Eastern Partnership says its main goal is to "accelerate political association and further economic integration" between the 27-member European Union and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said the summit marked a "new start" in the bloc's relations with its eastern neighbors.

"This Eastern Partnership is a substantial offer for stepping up our bilateral ties with our eastern partners. It is also an instrument to boost regional cooperation and cohesion. This is a frame work for a long-term relationship and engagement by the European Union based on common interest and shared values," Barroso said.

Russian Anger

Moscow opposes the partnership, which it sees an attempt to reduce its influence in what it considers its backyard. On May 6, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned against the creation of "new dividing lines" in Europe.

But Brussels insists the new alliance is not against Russia. European Commission spokesman Amadeu Altafaj Tardio said, "this is not about building spheres of influence."

EU foreign-policy chief Javier Solana echoed that at a postsummit press conference with reporters in Prague.

"This is not against Russia. In fact, as you know very well, probably Russia and maybe Turkey will be cooperating in some of the programs, that eventually will be [put] in place. This is the philosophy in which we are beginning this process," Solana said.

EU Divisions

The idea for the partnership came from the Czech Republic, which currently holds the rotating EU Presidency.

More than half of the 27 EU governments sent a head of state, but Prague was unable to convince several key leaders to attend. Missing from the talks were Britain's Gordon Brown, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, Spain's Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, and France's Nicolas Sarkozy.

The draft statement that was produced reflects some of the tensions within the EU over the future of relations with its eastern neighbors. There is no mention of EU membership for any of the six states, and the section on visa liberalization contains the phrase "long-term goal."

The Czech Republic had favored dropping the "Eastern" name in front of "European Partnership," but in the final language, it stayed.

Barroso said the partnership will benefit both the EU bloc as a whole, and individual members on a bilateral basis.

"This is also a political initiative to serve the European Union strategic interests, promoting political and economic stability with the six partner countries to our east," he said.

"This partnership provides our partner countries with clear options for deepening their bilateral relations with the European Union in all areas leading up to association agreements including free trade as well as to more mobility for the citizens," he added.

Belarus Protested

The new initiative comes after a year of unrest in many eastern European countries. There was last August's Russian-Georgian war, this spring's riots in Moldova, and continuing political and economic upheaval in Ukraine. In January, energy supplies from Russia that transit Ukraine on their way to Europe were disrupted by disputes that have become all too familiar.

Although a delegation from Belarus attended the summit, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- the man known as "Europe's last dictator" -- did not.

Nevertheless, about 200 protesters -- many of them Belarusian political emigrants -- gathered in central Prague as the summit opened to voice their opposition to Belarus' inclusion in the partnership, according to the human rights group Charter 97.

They carried posters that said, "Freedom to Political Prisoners!" "No to Lukashenka in Europe!" and "Freedom to Belarus!"

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 7, 2009

European Parliament Backs New 'Pragmatism' On Belarus

By Ulrich Speck

BRUSSELS -- The European Parliament has adopted a resolution that outlines its support for a broader EU policy of engagement with Belarus.

While it has no binding force, the resolution acts as a useful barometer of where the EU, as an institution, stands on Belarus.

And where it stands -- as opposed to the isolationism of years past -- is in a place of pragmatic engagement.

As a clear sign of the new policy, EU officials have extended the suspension of a travel ban and started high-level talks with Minsk on issues like transport and energy.

Despite lingering concerns over the policies and comport of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Brussels has also included Belarus in its Eastern Partnership initiative, which offers closer ties between the EU and six ex-Soviet neighbors.

Speaking this week at a conference at the European Parliament, Hugues Mingarelli, the European Commission's deputy director-general for external relations, said the EU's new pragmatic policy consists of a two-track approach -- working with the democratic opposition and civil society on the one hand, but also engaging the authorities on the other.

"To be clear, I'm not saying that we should be complacent. We have to provide maximum support to civil society and the political opposition. We have to constantly remind the Belarusian authorities that on the European continent, there is no room for several practices that are in place, and that are unacceptable," he said.

Dismal Rights Record

The resolution expresses support for the EU's new policy of engagement, but it also voices concern about Belarus's dismal human rights situation.

Dialogue between Minsk and Brussels, the resolution says, "must be conditional on the lifting of restrictions on freedom and cessation of violence against participants in opposition protests and human rights activists."

It is now up to the government of Belarus to demonstrate to the European Union and the European Parliament its commitment in implementing change, and its willingness to respect basic human rights and democratic freedoms.

The parliament also sets benchmarks for the next nine months. The resolution calls on Minsk to "demonstrate substantial progress" by reforming electoral legislation, lifting restrictions on the distribution of independent print media and freedom of association and assembly, and by ending "the practice of politically motivated dismissals from jobs and universities."

Hans-Gert Pottering, the president of the European Parliament, welcomed the warming ties with Belarus but pointed to continued repression of political activists and politically motivated imprisonment, which he said "remains a practice" in the country.

Pottering said the EU will closely monitor developments in Belarus over the next nine months to see whether there is real change.

"It is now up to the government of Belarus to demonstrate to the European Union and the European Parliament its commitment in implementing change, and its willingness to respect basic human rights and democratic freedoms," Pottering said.

Unique Opportunity

If Minsk fulfills these criteria during the upcoming nine months, the resolution says, it may be considered whether to lift the travel ban permanently. If and when that stage is reached, it adds, the EU should take measures to "speed up the process of Belarus's reintegration into the European family of democratic nations."

Minsk has a unique opportunity, Pottering says.

"This chance, which would be linked with increased economic support by the European Union, cannot be missed," he said. "On behalf of the European Parliament, I express my strong hopes that the government of Belarus will take this chance at face value."

The ultimate hope is that the EU's engagement tactic will lead to the democratization of Belarus.

Jacek Protasiewicz, a Polish member of the European Parliament and one of the authors of the resolution, says engaging civil society is one way to open up the country. Another is to convince the current political leadership that they, too, can be part of the process.

"What we want to achieve is to convince those people in power in Belarus that democracy is not against them," Protasiewicz said. "In a democratic country, there is also room for them. And in a democratic country, like in democratic Poland, the former regime people are also accommodated; they are also part of the political and social life."

To make progress on all both fronts, Protasiewicz said, is possible "only when the policy of isolation will change into one of engagement."

Others, however, are skeptical of the new approach.

Jan-Marinus Wiersma, a Socialist MEP from the Netherlands, said there is no magic formula to dealing with Belarus, and that the previous policy of isolation was not without merit, because it forced Lukashenko to "create an opening" himself, by making overtures and offers of reform to the EU.

Little Has Changed

For Markus Meckel, a longtime observer of EU-Belarus relations and deputy foreign policy spokesman for the Social Democrats in the German Parliament, spring has not yet reached Minsk.

Little has changed for the people in Belarus, he says. So even as the EU engages the leadership in Minsk -- and continues to contemplate whether to extend a controversial invitation to Lukashenko to attend the May 7 launch of the Eastern Partnership program -- it must do much more to engage the rest of Belarusian society.

"If it's right to invite Lukashenko to Prague, then that also means that we need to do something for the civil society and for the democratic opposition quickly, in the short term," Meckel said. "Not only once, but on a permanent level."

Vladimir Senko, Belarus's EU ambassador, this week praised the bloc for its new pragmatic policy of engagement. The EU and Belarus are now on "a positive track," he said. But he insisted that Minsk would only be interested in cooperation as long as it takes place "on equal footing." Belarus was not begging for cooperation, Senko said, adding that the EU has "no direct leverage" to change the political or economic situation in his country.

Source: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, April 02, 2009

Quotes of Quarter

"The ban on import of 500 different types of dairy products into Russia should be viewed as Moscow's sanctions against Belarus, and rather serious ones,"

as quoted on June 5 by VIACHASLAU NIKANAU, the president of the fund Palityka, in an interview with Interfax.

HISTORICAL DATES

June 14, 1900

Birthdate of **Michas Zabejda-Sumicki**, a famous Belarusian opera singer. Lived and performed in Kharbin (China), Milan, Warsaw, Prague.

July 7, 1887

Mark Chagall, one of the most significant painters and graphic artists of the 20th century, was born in Viciebsk. Between 1915 and 1917 he lived in St. Petersburg, Russia; after the Russian Revolution he was the director of the Art Academy in Viciebsk from 1918 to 1919, and the art director of the Moscow Jewish State Theater from 1919 to 1922. In 1923 he moved to France, where he spent the rest of his life.

July 15, 1410

Anniversary of the **Battle of Grunwald**, one of the biggest in the Middle Ages. The German Teutonic Knights, with West European mercenaries, were then decisively defeated by an army commanded by the Polish king Jagiello (Jagiello) and Litva's Grand Duke Vitaut, supported by Czech Hussite and vassal Tartar contingents.

From Political Front Line To Army Drudgery

Young Belarusian activists say they are being forced to do military service because of their political views.

By Volha Lisichonak

MINSK | As the European Union continues to weigh the advisability of inviting Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to a summit in Prague early next month, activists in Belarus say Brussels should take a closer look at a recent government tactic: using military conscription to get rid of troublesome young oppositionists.

The charge comes amid a warming of relations between Belarus and the EU as both sides pointedly offer compliments to each other amid a new EU strategy of engagement. European officials have praised Minsk's efforts to meet EU recommendations on some human rights issues, while the Belarusian authorities commend their counterparts' intentions to increase dialogue and promote cooperation. Earlier this year, a senior Foreign Ministry official in the Czech Republic, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, cited progress in the democratization of Belarus, including a slackening in state repression of the media and a drop-off in criminal cases launched against the political opposition. On 16 March the EU decided to extend the lifting of a travel ban on high Belarusian officials.

Young Front activists gave moral support to young men who say they were forcibly conscripted into the army as a punishment for political activism. Photo: mfront.net/

Activists, however, complain that a practice begun last year, of quietly shipping off some of the most active young democracy activists to the army, has only intensified. According to the Viasna Human Rights Center, military conscription has been used as a repressive measure

against many youth activists from the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), the Young Front, and other youth initiatives, including several cases where health-related draft deferments reportedly disappeared overnight.

A SPEEDY RECOVERY

One of the most prominent examples concerns Franak Viachorka, a BPF activist and son of Vincuk Viachorka, the first vice-chairman of the BPF, the oldest opposition political party.

Back in June 2008, the military registration and enlistment office of the Saviecki district in Minsk permanently disqualified Viachorka from military service due to health reasons. When a regional medical examination called into doubt Viachorka's unfitness for active service, he was referred to a military hospital. The hospital then confirmed his original medical tests, and he was issued a temporary draft deferment until March 2009, citing the need for a retina operation.

Despite that deferment until March, on 8 January the young activist was detained, taken to the military registration and enlistment office in Minsk, and after that sent to a military hospital. Surprisingly, the diagnoses made at the hospital contradicted those he had earlier received. "It looks like the atmosphere of the place cured me," Viachorka joked to the press.

As Viachorka said later, he was escorted from the hospital in handcuffs on the morning of 16 January. At first, the authorities tried to serve him with a draft notice, but Viachorka persistently demanded the right to review his medical tests and refused to go back to the military registration office without seeing the results. After a conversation among several officers, including the military commissar of the Saviecki district, four unknown people burst into the ward, pinned Viachorka down and handcuffed him.

Viachorka says he was then taken to the registration office in a minibus with black blinds. Once there, things moved rapidly. According to Viachorka, the unidentified men acted as his escorts even inside the registration office, issuing orders to those working there. An induction commission met quickly and found Viachorka to be able-bodied and fit for service. "They were going to send me to the military unit immediately. But I said I was going to sue them in court," Viachorka said. The commission conferred and granted him a 10-day deferment until 26 January.

Calling his conscription politically motivated, Viachorka filed complaints to the courts regarding the violation of his rights by military registration officers and staff of the military hospital, as well as a formal complaint to the prosecutor's office over his violent removal from the hospital. In interviews with the press, he cited his work in the BPF as the reason for everything that has befallen him over the past year – besides his forced conscription, he was kicked out of Belarusian State University despite his high marks. "The authorities use military conscription to neutralize the most active members of the democratic opposition," Viachorka told the *Nasha Niva* weekly newspaper.

All those moves proved in vain. On 28 January, several individuals, again unidentified, brought Viachorka in handcuffs to the Baranavichy Military Radio Technological Division, where he has been carrying out military duties, according to news reports.

A TROUBLESOME YOUNG RECRUIT

A similar fate met one of the leaders of the Young Front, the largest pro-democracy youth organization. The group is legally registered in the Czech Republic after repeated refusals by the authorities in Belarus to provide legal status in the country. Eighteen-year-old Ivan Shyla, the group's vice chairman, received a draft deferment last summer due to health reasons. His situation then developed under the same scenario that Franak Viachorka experienced, except that at first Shyla didn't publicize his dealings with the military registration office because he did not suspect any political motivation.



Ivan Shyla

"I was detained and escorted to the military registration office while I was on my way there," he wrote on his blog. "Then a Belarusian State TV team and KGB officers came and consulted with the induction commission. I then witnessed as doctors resolved contentious issues within a mere few minutes." According to Shyla, the induction commission met to make a decision on his case before they even received the results of his medical examination. His military service began at the end of January.

"During liberalization, public repression is being replaced by other, quite out-of-the-norm forms of oppression. It doesn't change their repressive nature, but it does hide them and make them appear more legally reasonable. I think it is 'politically-motivated' conscription," Shyla wrote.

Again similar to Viachorka, Shyla had problems in school that he ascribed to his political activity. He was expelled from high school just before his last exam in June 2008. Half a year later, Education Minister Alexandr Radkov told the press, "He had to pass an exam the next day, but he was distributing leaflets around the city." Shyla's case drew a wide response in his native city of Salihorsk and his head teacher resigned in protest against Shyla's expulsion. Eventually, Shyla received invitations from Estonia, Poland, and other countries to complete his studies abroad.

Shyla, however, decided to stay in Belarus, but military service might now derail his hopes of finishing high school in the near future. "It is very important for me to complete my education, to finish school," he said at a press conference. "Definitely, army service will disturb my plans ... To pass

exams without attending classes is possible only in May and I am supposed to return from the army in June. It'll be purely the will and mood of the commander of the military unit I am sent to whether to let me to go and pass my exams or not."

COUNTERING THE STATE MEDIA

Both Viachorka and Shyla say they would like to be examined by an independent medical commission and will serve in the army if found fit for service. They want this commission to be formed by independent doctors, experts who will not be influenced by the Ministry of Defense and special services. The young activists insist that they are protesting not against conscription itself, but against flagrant violations during its process, knowing they must tread lightly on this delicate issue. Belarusian state television has broadcast several spots on the pair recently. The general impression made by these reports is that these young activists are weaklings trying to evade conscription by using supposed human rights violations as a cover.

But the activists argue that to agree with their conscription is to agree with the unlawful actions of the authorities.

"In a country without rules it is impossible to follow them," Shyla said on his blog. "Being a member of the Young Front for years I have realized that the law can be interpreted differently in accordance with political expedience. Rules can be violated by those who demand that others follow them. This is true for all spheres of public life. There is no place for equality and justice guaranteed by the constitution."

Some in Europe are watching. Members of the European Parliament noted the issue of forced conscription during a 2 April discussion of a resolution on engaging with the Belarusian regime. Vytautas Landsbergis, a parliamentary deputy and former head of state of Lithuania, made one of the strongest statements, citing the Viachorka case and saying conscription in this instance was "tantamount to state-practiced hostage-taking." Landsbergis said the authorities could use the son's situation to threaten his father: "'Look, be calm in your position because your son is in our army and something may happen to him.'"

Vincuk Viachorka recently pledged to appeal a military court decision that ruled his son's conscription was legal, the website Charter 97 reported. "The head of the cardiology department of the military hospital publicly admitted that Franak doesn't qualify for military service in accordance with the conclusion of the 10th municipal hospital," he said.

In the meantime, neither Shyla nor Franak Viachorka have been able to meet their families. Shyla has been taken into his division's medical unit because of tonsillitis, but he hasn't received proper medical treatment, Nasa Niva reported. He also was not allowed to meet his parents, because his unit is officially quarantined. Viachorka's parents received the same reason for their inability to meet their son. In addition, the only phone in his unit is broken and hasn't been repaired.

Volha Lisichonak is a freelance journalist based in Minsk.

Source: TransitionsOnLine, 17 April 2009

Protests Planned Against Belarus Nuclear Plant

By David Marples

Plans are underway for the annual Chernobyl Path March in Minsk on April 26, but this year they will be accompanied by similar demonstrations in the contaminated zone and in Astravets, the location chosen earlier this year for the construction of a new nuclear power plant in Belarus.

Earlier, two sites in Mahilou region appeared to be the favored locations for the station, but evidently they were rejected because one suffered from unstable soil conditions and the other might have "tectonic faults." An equally viable reason -that the Mahilou region is within the zone contaminated by the 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, was not discussed. In turn, a widespread criticism of the Astravets site, that it suffered a 7.0 magnitude earthquake in 1907, was dismissed by an expert from the prospecting company Belhealohiya (Belarus Geology), Volha Boyeva, who said that the proposed location is some 15 miles to the north of the rupture (*Belapan*, March 12).

In December 2008, the decision to use the Astravets site was announced by First Deputy Premier Uladzimie Syamashka, who said that work on the construction of houses for the builders would commence on January 19, 2009 and on the plant itself two days later. The station is to be a third generation water-pressurized plant, which is usually referred to by its Russian acronym VVER (www.charter97.org, Dec 19).

The current site is close to the villages of Mikhalishki and Hoza in Hrodna region, near the Lithuanian border and only 20 miles from the capital Vilnius. As news about the new location circulated last November, a steering committee was formed to create a public initiative entitled "The Astravets Nuclear Power Plant is a Crime" (ANPPC), headed by two locals, Ivan Kruk and Mikalai Ulasevich. They were reportedly refused permission to hold a public meeting in Astravets cinema and concert hall. Instead, on March 3, local officials held a partially closed meeting with experts, doctors, state officials, and media called "Construction of the Nuclear Power Plant in the Republic of Belarus -Security and Reliability," and opponents were not permitted to voice their opinions (*Vyasna*, April 9).

In mid-April, Ulasevich held a press conference in Minsk, at which he declared that the building of the station was not a civic decision, but rather a military-political one. He stated also that local authorities recently searched his apartment, as well as those of other activists opposing the construction, (*Vyasna*, April 14). According to one source, the district authorities sent out bogus leaflets on behalf of the "United Gay Party" purporting to come from ANPCC, ostensibly in the belief that such an agency would be universally condemned by the public (Bellona, March 16). A protest was also held in the city of Salihorsk by several young men, who posed as mutants and handed out literature, alongside a poster with the slogan "No to new Chernobyls" (www.charter97.org, April 15).

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has the final decision on both the location and acceptance of the project. Despite

the current financial difficulties facing Belarus, and the daunting costs of completing the station estimated at 4.5 to 5 billion Euros (*Narodnaya Volya*, April 15), it is to go ahead as planned. It will comprise two 1,000-megawatt reactors in its first phase scheduled for completion by 2016 (reactor one) and 2018 (reactor two), Lukashenka remarked that Russia was prepared to issue its neighbor a loan for the project and referred to a recent opinion poll of the Institute of Sociology that revealed that 60 percent of Belarusians support the project (*Belarusian Telegraph Agency*, April 7). The actual figure was 54.8 percent (www.minenergo.gov.by, Dec 20).

According to the Belarusian Ministry of Energy, the country will sign an agreement with Russia for the joint construction of the Astravets station, but it is plausible that a foreign engineering company will be employed to draw up the details (*Belarusian Telegraph Agency*, April 13). Russian ambassador to Belarus, Aleksandr Surikov, in a recent interview with the news agency Belapan, stated that Russia supports the idea of the station, and he also remarked that there would be an opportunity to expand the plant beyond its initial size (*Narodnaya Volya*, April 15).

The plans are causing some anxiety in several quarters. Lithuania's Foreign Minister, Vigaudas Ushatskas, expressed concern that the plant was so close to the border with his country (Bellona, March 16). Lithuania's Ignalina nuclear plant, which is a graphite-moderated RBMK, is slowly being phased out, while the location is in an environmentally clean zone close to several nature reserves.

The third issue is the projected costs and Belarus' inability to pay them. In essence, the project will be almost entirely Russian in operation, including fuel and reactors, as well as potential ownership if the loans are ever recalled. It would add to the Russian economic interventions in Belarus, which include the project "Minsk City" at a cost of \$4.5 billion and the presence of subsidiaries of seven Russian banks (*Narodnaya Volya*, April 15).

Finally, there is a more general problem of resorting to nuclear power in the country most affected by the Chernobyl disaster. About one fifth of Belarus' residents inhabit areas contaminated by that accident, but the government has adamantly maintained that the land is safe to cultivate. The new project in Astravets has given new significance to the Chernobyl anniversary in Belarus.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume: 6 Issue: 75, April 20, 2009

Quotes of Quarter

"I am personally warning you, Siarhei Siarheevich (Premier Sidorski) and (Finance Minister) Prakaapovich ... that as of today a new time has come. If you don't get results in Moscow – you don't need to bow, whine and weep. We'll find better luck in other parts of the planet."

LUKASHENKA harangued his ministers at a cabinet meeting on May 29.

Caucasus Impacts Russia-Belarus Relations

By Paul Goble

Vienna, May 26 – Minsk's latest refusal to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia and even more the suggestion by some officials there that Moscow should "compensate" the Belarusian government to get it to take that step reflect underlying problems in the relationship of the two Slavic countries, according to a leading Moscow analyst.

In an essay posted online today, Sergey Markedonov argues that "the basic problem in Russian-Belarusian relations" is that the two sides entered into "the 'unification' process" for entirely different reasons, something that has become increasingly obvious and increasingly annoying to Moscow (www.polit.ru/author/2009/05/26/realizm.html).

For Moscow, the Moscow specialist on ethnic relations in and among the post-Soviet states insists, the Union of the Russian Federation and Belarus was never more than "an ideological project," something that represented either a move away from "the Belovezhskaya complex" or, especially under Vladimir Putin, yet another "sublimation of Soviet nostalgia."

But for Minsk, the entire process of a "brotherhood of Slavic states" was completely pragmatic, a policy predicated on the ability of Belarus to make use of Russian resources "for the development of [its own] national model of economics and politics" and thus reinforcing its national independence.

Such "a geopolitical dialectic," Markedonov continues, was based on the reality that "in Moscow, no one ever considered Minsk an equal partner and ally." Russian officials rarely consulted with their Belarusian counterparts, and consequently, Alyaksandr Lukashenka was able to realize his own version of the Sinatra doctrine – "I did it my way."

That approach worked very much to his own advantage. On the one hand, it allowed the Belarusian leader to get aid from Russia while not ignoring his country's location at the edge of Europe. And on the other, it helped him domestically where any concession to Moscow is likely to be seen as undermining Belarusian independence.

And those differences help to explain why in the words of Russian political scientist Andrey Suzdaltsev the union of the two countries is "such a strange formation," lacking "a shield, a flag, a president and government, territory, citizenship, force and fiscal agencies, borders and so on" and "not being a subject of international law or a member of the UN."

Despite that, Markedonov continues, Moscow expected Belarus to follow its lead in extending diplomatic recognition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, given that it is "not simply a strategic partner like Azerbaijan or a strategic ally like Armenia or Kazakhstan" but rather "part of a common Union state."

Since last August, however, Moscow's expectations

for Belarus have not been met, and Markedonov strongly suggests that both because of the underlying tensions in the relationship and because of Moscow's own evolution in thinking about Abkhazia and South Ossetia, they are not going to be anytime soon.

During Russia's war with Georgia, Belarus ostentatiously refused to say anything about "'a genocide' or about a 'humanitarian catastrophe.'" And after the guns fell silent, Minsk continually put off extending recognition to the two breakaway republics, offering one implausible excuse after another, at least from Moscow's point of view.

Over time, he continues, Russian officials have made fewer such predictions, not only because they have proven wrong in the past but also because Moscow's own view on Abkhazia and South Ossetia has changed. Initially, it hoped that perhaps as many as 15 countries would follow its lead, but now some in Moscow have revised their view of such a development.

On the one hand, Russian officials recognize that they can exert far more control of the situation in both places if they are the only foreign embassy and hence only foreign support of these two states. And on the other, no one in the Russian hierarchy is interested in attracting attention to Moscow's failure to achieve what it said were its goals.

But quite clearly, the failure of Belarus to follow Moscow on this rankles. And now that some Belarusian parliamentarians have suggested Moscow should "compensate" Minsk for taking such a step, at least some in the Russian capital may revisit the question of a "union state" that to date has brought Moscow few benefits.

Russia Struggles to Sustain Alliance with Belarus

By Sergei Blagov

Russia's relationship with its former closest ally Belarus, has reached a new low point following a bitter dispute. Moscow has apparently struggled to remain on good terms with Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenka -described by some as Europe's last dictator. Meanwhile, although both countries have attempted to form a "union state," Lukashenka bluntly told his government that they must no longer rely upon Russia. The session of the council of ministers of the Russia-Belarus union state held in Minsk on May 28, proved to be a major disappointment for both sides.

Russian officials were keen to appease the authoritarian Belarusian leader. "Russia is always ready to support Belarus," Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said after talks in Minsk with his Belarusian counterpart Sergei Sidorsky and President Lukashenka. Russia will continue to provide financial support to Belarus, he told a news conference. Putin said that the Russian gas giant Gazprom had issued advance payments for gas transit via Belarus until October this year (www.belta.by, Interfax, ITAR-TASS, RIA Novosti, May 28).

After the talks, Sidorsky urged Moscow to lift all restrictions on Belarusian exports into Russia. He argued that Belarus accounts for only 4 percent of Russia's imports -thus posing no threat to Russian manufacturers. Sidorsky also said that in the first quarter of 2009 Russia had a sizable trade surplus with Belarus (www.belta.by, Interfax, May 28).

On May 28, Russia and Belarus signed agreements on the peaceful use of nuclear energy and land lease issues. On February 3, the supreme state council of the union state adopted a joint action plan, designed to limit the adverse repercussions of the financial crisis. In March, Russia disbursed the second \$500 million installment of the \$2 billion Russian loan, following the \$1 billion granted in November 2008.

The Russian government press-service said in a statement before the meeting that Moscow "prioritized multi-faceted integration and cooperation with Belarus in its CIS policies." However, on May 22, Lukashenka accused Moscow of sabotaging the union state arrangements: "The presidents make decisions but the Russian government fails all of them," he argued. "They accuse us of cooperating with the West, but we have no other option," Lukashenka protested (Interfax, May 28).

Yet in the wake of the talks on May 28, Lukashenka intensified his verbal assault on Russian policies. On May 29, Lukashenka ordered the government to end "weeping, bowing and begging" to Russia (EDM, June 1). He also suggested that no country will be permitted to pressure Belarus. Moreover, he warned against what he described as attempts "to pocket" Belarus (www.belta.by, Interfax, ITAR-TASS, RIA Novosti, May 29). Lukashenka's rhetoric was apparently in response to remarks made by the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov and the Finance Minister Alexey Kudrin. On May 28, Kudrin warned that Belarus might become insolvent by the end of this year, as the country's currency reserves became further depleted. He said the disbursement of the last \$500 million installment of a \$2 billion Russian loan will depend on Belarusian economic policies, adding that Minsk had refused to accept the \$500 million loan in Russian rubles (Interfax, May 28).

Not surprisingly, Belarusian officials dismissed Kudrin's remarks. On May 29, Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov insisted the country will be able to repay its debt. Its debt remains below 14 percent of the country's GDP, he argued. Kobyakov also characterized Kudrin's statements as an "exaggeration" (Interfax, ITAR-TASS, May 29).

Russian officials also tried to repair the damage inflicted by Kudrin's remarks. Notably, Putin described Kudrin's "extreme assessment" as "inappropriate" (Interfax, ITAR-TASS, RIA Novosti, May 28). However, Putin's explanation was not received well amongst the Belarusian government. On May 29, Lukashenka accused Kudrin of seeking to spread panic in Belarus and claimed that Kudrin's "tirade" was pre-arranged with Putin (www.belta.by, Interfax, May 29). In response, Shuvalov suggested settling bilateral differences "calmly," while the speaker of the Russian Duma Boris Gryzlov said there were no substantial disputes

between the countries (ITAR-TASS, May 29). Both sides must not allow mutual trust to be undermined using the economic crisis as a pretext, he said (Interfax, May 29).

Russian lawmakers proved less diplomatic. Alexey Ostrovsky, the head of the Duma's CIS committee, argued that Lukashenka was unlikely to secure Western backing and had no other viable option but to continue in talks with Moscow (Interfax, May 29). Vadim Gustov, the head of the CIS committee of the federation council (the upper house of parliament) described Lukashenka's criticism as a "short-sighted" attempt to exert pressure on Russia. Another lawmaker, Oganeg Oganyan, dismissed Lukashenka's statements as "blackmail and provocation" (Interfax, May 29).

Despite these apparent bilateral disagreements, Russian officials still hailed the strength of military ties between Moscow and Minsk. On May 29, Konstantin Biryulin, the deputy head of the Russian service on military-technical cooperation, noted a "positive" experience in the preferential export of Russian arms to Belarus. He said that among the CSTO states, Belarus remains the main buyer of Russian weapons at domestic prices (Interfax, May 29). Russia has significant security interests in Belarus. According to one bilateral agreement, the Russian military enjoys the use of an early warning radar hub in Baranovichi free of charge until 2020.

The authoritarian Lukashenka first swept to victory in 1994 based on his promise to reunite Belarus with Russia. In 1997, then Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Lukashenko signed a treaty pledging the formation of a union with its neighbor. Russia and Belarus also agreed to introduce a single currency and a shared system of taxation by 1999, but these agreements were not implemented. For several years, cheap Russian energy supplies to Belarus have proven instrumental in sustaining Lukashenka's regime - while most of the union state pledges only remain on paper. The latest spat with Minsk indicates Russian difficulties in sustaining its close ties with Belarus. Following Lukashenka's calls not to rely on Russia, it remains to be seen whether Moscow and Minsk might continue pursuing their "union state" policy.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 6, Issue 105, June 2, 2009

MEDIA WATCH

'Milk War' Strains Russia-Belarus Ties

By Ellen Barry

MOSCOW — Furious over a Russian ban on imported Belarusian milk products, the president of Belarus on Sunday boycotted a planned summit meeting of post-Soviet states whose centerpiece was the start of a joint military force formed by Russia and four of its closest allies.

As the so-called milk war with Moscow moved into its second week, the president, Aleksandr Lukashenko, released a statement saying that the ban "effectively forces Belarusians to their knees"

and that unless it is dropped, going ahead with the planned military force would be a “mockery of common sense.”

Mr. Lukashenko's abrupt no-show is bound to irritate Moscow, which was hoping to consolidate ties with its neighbors and end their flirtation with Western allies. President Dmitri A. Medvedev hastily assumed the presidency of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which Belarus was scheduled to take over on Sunday, and inaugurated the military union in Moscow over Mr. Lukashenko's protests.

The collective security agreement — which some see as an eventual counterweight to NATO — was signed by the leaders of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. It was not signed by Uzbekistan, which has raised objections to some provisions, or Belarus. Andrei Popov, a spokesman for Belarus' Foreign Ministry, told the Interfax news agency that the agreement was not valid because there was no consensus among members....

While Russian officials said the ban had no political overtones, Belarusian politicians have said they are being punished for defying Russian orders.

One outstanding issue is Belarus' refusal, so far, to formally recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two breakaway enclaves of Georgia, whose independence so far has been recognized by only Russia and Nicaragua. In an interview with the BelTA news agency earlier this month, Mr. Lukashenko said Russian officials made a \$500 million loan contingent on recognition — something Russian officials deny.

Belarus has long been financially dependent on Russia, as Mr. Medvedev pointed out dryly in his remarks on Sunday, but that relationship, too, is under strain. In late May, Russia's finance minister, Alexei Kudrin, withheld the \$500 million, the last installment of a \$2 billion loan, warning that the country could face default by the end of this year unless it overhauls its economic policy. Mr. Lukashenko reacted angrily.

“If it's not working out with Russia, let's not bow down, let's not whine and weep,” he told a gathering of economic officials the next day, BelTA reported. “Let's look for our happiness in a different part of the planet.”

Source: Excerpts from an article in *The New York Times*, June 15, 2009

An (Un)wanted Guest

By David J. Kramer, Irina Krasouskaya

The EU's counterproductive attempt to reach out to Europe's last dictator.

Easing international pressure on Aleksandr Lukashenko could allow him to continue human rights abuses.

The European Union finds itself in an awkward position at the moment: hoping that an invited guest finds reason to stay away. Last week, Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, acting on behalf of the EU, invited Aleksandr Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, to a May 7 summit in Prague to formally launch the EU's Eastern Partnership with six eastern neighbors: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus. Even if Lukashenko, often described as Europe's last dictator, declines the invitation and sends someone in his stead, **the invitation represents Lukashenko's wholly undeserved return to the international stage, which is a serious setback for the promotion of political liberalization and human rights in Belarus.**

In a recently released report, the U.S. State Department notes that the Belarusian government's human rights record last year “remained very poor” with “frequent serious abuses” against NGOs, political parties, and opposition activists. The government has yet to account for politically motivated disappearances, including the late husband of one of the authors of this article. Lukashenko has “consolidated his power over all institutions and undermined the rule of law through authoritarian means, manipulated elections, and arbitrary decrees,” the report says.

What has the policy of easing pressure on Lukashenko produced? Mostly negative results. The Belarusian government has rejected other independent media requests for distribution and refused registration to several other NGOs and trade unions. New criminal cases have been brought against a number of opposition activists, including previously released political prisoners, and some have been rearrested. Another previously released political prisoner, Artur Finkevich, was abducted and beaten last December, while activist Artyom Dubski reportedly was beaten in jail after being detained two months ago. Security forces have violently responded to several peaceful demonstrations, and several youth activists have been forcibly drafted into the military. The Lukashenko regime, in other words, continues to engage in human rights abuses even as relations with the West warm up.

The U.S. Embassy in Minsk has not been allowed to return to its previous staffing levels and still is not permitted an ambassador. In addition, Belarusian authorities continue to deny proper medical treatment and access to an imprisoned U.S. citizen arrested and convicted last year in a secret trial on suspect charges. And the Belarusian parliament holds open the possibility of recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, separatist regions in Georgia that Russia recognized last year.

The EU's 2006 plan of action outlined 12 steps in the area of human rights Minsk needed to take for normalization of relations, yet most of these remain woefully incomplete and recent developments in Belarus run in the opposite direction. **Worse, the 2006 plan seems to have been abandoned by the EU itself. The strange half-measure of inviting Lukashenko to Prague with fingers crossed that he won't come is neither smart engagement nor principled policy.**

(Editor's note: Belarus was represented by two ministers)

David J. Kramer was most recently assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor and, before that, a deputy assistant secretary of state responsible for Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, in the George W. Bush administration. Irina Krasovskaya is president of the We Remember Foundation.

Source: Excerpts from <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>, April 2009

Europe Betrays Its Mission in Prague

By Borut Grgic

The much-anticipated Prague Summit between the European Union and our eastern partners was a flop. The eastern partnership declaration published last Thursday is not worth the paper it was printed on.

The EU has once again taken a bold proposal -- initially designed by Sweden and Poland -- and turned it into seven pages of ramble. It was a sad day for all. The EU is clearly

without good ideas and without the bold leadership necessary to do what is needed in the east. The countries invited to the summit -- Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan -- are all European. Yes, they are also Caucasian, Caspian, and Black Sea nations, but Europeans nonetheless. So why was a membership concept for these countries missing from the document?

Strategic thinking was never a European forte. American think-tankers poke fun at their European counterparts for superbly managing day-to-day affairs but never quite getting the big picture.

In Prague we definitely missed the big picture.

The EU is a project in the making, which is why we have an enlargement policy, which has been the single best tool for reuniting the Continent. It has turned Europe into the biggest market in the world, and it has injected dynamism into the European economy. Now, it seems, someone wants to reverse this progress and halt enlargement.

... Europe owes a new draft document to its eastern partners spelling out an integrated approach aimed at creating the Europe of the 21st century: whole, united and free.

We began this project in the 1940s, shortly after the end of World War II. A major breakthrough was achieved in the 1990s with the fall of the Iron Curtain, which then led to the big bang enlargement -- the first of its kind -- in 2003, when 10 central and east European states joined the EU. Our next job is to finish this story, which means welcoming into Europe Turkey and the Balkan and eastern countries.

Mr. Grgic is an independent investor in the Balkans and the Caucasus, and the founder of the Institute for Strategic Studies.

Source: «The Wall Street Journal» — excerpts from an article, May 12, 2009.

LETTERS

Dear Editor:

I have been a subscriber of *Belarusian Review* for several years now. I studied Russian at Georgetown University and became acquainted with Belarus when I taught English in Hrodna from 1995-1996 through a program called Project Harmony. I completed an MA in Russian and East European Studies at Stanford University in 2001. I am currently a stay-at-home mom and depend on *Belarusian Review* to keep me up-to-date with events in Belarus.

In the last winter edition, you mentioned that there was a need for fresh forces for the magazine. Since I am not currently affiliated with a university, I have limited access to academic resources for fact-checking and other research. However, I would be more than happy to help out in other ways if possible. I would be happy to edit articles in English, particularly articles that have already been translated from Russian or Belarusian into English, or other tasks that can be managed on-line and with my limited free time.

I thank you for your hard work on the magazine.

Maria Kiehn _____

Dear Maria,

We have already taken advantage in this issue of your offer to help out. Thank you for speedily editing two articles that were translated by a non-native English speaker.

The Editor

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Deputy Editor: Jan Maksymiuk

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P.O. Box 1347, Highland Park, NJ 08904

E-mail: belarusianreview@hotmail.com

Tel/fax: 732 222 1951

Europe : BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Malesicka ul. 553/65

108 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic

E-mail: georgestankevich@gmail.com

Tel/fax: (420) 274 771 338

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