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GUEST EDITORIAL

Internet Censorship In Authoritarian Belarus

By Viachaslau Bortnik

Something that every Internet user in Belarus feared has finally happened. On February 1, 2010, Alexander Lukashenka signed a decree imposing censorship on the Internet, approximately year before the next presidential election. Lukashenka had previously been criticizing “anarchy on the Internet”. After placing most of the traditional media under its control, the regime is pursuing an offensive against new media. The presidential election is scheduled to take place in early 2011 and Lukashenka plans to “win” again (the last two presidential elections wherein Lukashenka retained power were widely viewed as fraudulent). Thus far the Internet has been one of the last places to express independent opinion in Belarus. The political opposition is fearful of being without any media access during the upcoming elections.

Under the new decree, Internet providers, websites and Internet users will be strictly controlled by the government and a special unit of the Presidential Administration – the Operating and Analytical Center. According to the decree “On Measures for Revising Use of the National Segment of the World Wide Web”, through an agreement with the President, the Center will define the list of “telecommunication operators, which have the right of direct access (interconnection) to international telecommunication systems, and authorized Internet service providers”. Any activity of a provider can be stopped by a decision of the Council of Ministers. The Center will be able to forbid access to information considered to be illegal according to Belarusian legislation and will control the registration of “.by” domain names. An Internet service provider will be able to stop rendering Internet service to anybody in cases that they find to constitute a “gross violation of law, further violation of the decree, and other acts of legislation”.

Although it is not yet clear how the decree’s provisions will be utilized in the new legislation which takes effect on July 1, 2010, there is no doubt that behind the extensive control over Internet access and online content President Lukashenka has the obvious intention of reducing free expression in Belarus. Comments of Belarusian officials suggest that there is nothing positive on the horizon. The Belarusian Minister of Communication Mikalai Patsyalei pointed out that visitors of Internet cafes will have to show their passports for identification. Natallia Pyatkevich, the deputy head of Lukashenka’s Administration said that the ideologists should serve as the original source of information, not oppositional websites. Behind the extensive control over Internet access and online content President Lukashenka has the obvious intention to reduce free expression in Belarus.

Introduction of the scandalous decree resulted in criticism by the international community including the EU, OSCE, human rights organizations and the Belarusian Diaspora worldwide. The EU’s foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said that the decree “is going to further restrict freedom of speech and freedom of media in Belarus after it takes force”. The EU regards this issue as an important step in a wrong direction and hopes the Belarusian authorities will review it. The OSCE has

prepared an expert assessment of the decree, and provided the Belarusian government with a set of recommendations that include the following:

- Abolish mandatory identification of internet service users and their technical means used to connect to the Internet.
- Clarify the meaning and procedure of introducing limitations and bans on spreading illegal informations.
- Clarify the scope of responsibility of Internet service providers in the event of failure to comply with an order by a relevant body to eliminate violations or to suspend Internet services,
- Envision requiring state bodies and other public organizations to publish information not only on their activities, but also information which results from these activities.
- Abolish the requirement to include hyperlinks to the original information source in media outlet materials disseminated via the Internet.

At the same time activists of the Belarusian-American Association staged numerous protests against Internet censorship in Washington and New York. The recent event in front of the Newseum in the U.S. capital was supported by the international press watchdog group Reporters Without Borders and covered by Voice of America. “Last year, the Belarusian government claimed that China was a model in terms of Internet control. This year, President Lukashenka signed a decree subjecting online access to an identity check or to prior online authorization dependent on the content and the applicant. Now, in Minsk, people will censor themselves, which is the worst violation you can impose on freedom of speech”, said Clothilde Le Coz, the Washington Director of the Reporters Without Borders in her address to the protesters. In its monitoring of online freedom, Reporters Without Borders has until now classified Belarus as a country “under surveillance” because it has only one Internet service provider (Beltelekam), because access to opposition websites is blocked during major political events and because Internet café owners are required under a February 2007 decree to alert the police about customers who visit “sensitive” sites and keep a record of all the sites visited during the previous 12 months on each computer, making the information available to the police if requested. If more far-reaching Internet censorship is imposed in Belarus, as contemplated by the new Decree, the country would be added to the list of countries such as North Korea, China and Iran, which are notorious for blocking Internet freedom.

The Decree “On Measures for Revising Use of the National Segment of the World Wide Web” is to take effect on July 1, which does not leave much time to work out a comprehensive strategy. For years the Internet has been viewed by international experts as a key vehicle for promoting democracy in Belarus. In a worst case scenario, the Internet will not be an area of free speech anymore. This would force the international community to find answers to tough questions. The U.S. and the EU should work together to facilitate international pressure on the Belarus government in order to compel a review of the onerous decree. The international community should promote public discussion on Internet censorship in Belarus by organizing information campaigns, protests, conferences, mobilizing media and other grassroots activities. In this difficult situation, sufficient support should be provided to satellite TV and FM radio broadcasting.

Viachaslau Bortnik is currently pursuing an MA in Public Administration at the American University in Washington, DC.

From the Publisher

Full and objective information is essential for democracy to develop and thrive. Incessant official propaganda does the opposite – it suppresses democracy, and that is the case in Belarus today.

The Internet as the last outpost of free dissemination and exchange of information is under threat there, a topic extensively covered in this issue of *Belarusian Review*. The existing outside radio broadcasts need to be enhanced by satellite TV that can cover the whole country.

Such a station is BelSat. It needs greater support in order to effectively carry a message of democracy to a greater number of average Belarusian citizens and voters.

FEATURES

EU Calls Belarusian Internet Decree 'A Step In Wrong Direction'

See no evil!

By Ron Synovitz

The European Union says a new Internet decree in Belarus is a "step in the wrong direction" at a time when Brussels is scrutinizing Minsk's record on issues like free speech and freedom of the press.

The EU says President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's decree of February 1 appears to contravene standards set out in the so-called Eastern Partnership -- an initiative aimed at improving ties between the EU and its eastern neighbors.

The official website of the Belarusian president says the decree he issued is "an attempt to protect the rights of Belarusian citizens, society and the state in the field of information." Government websites claim the decree will help the country's economy by developing the Internet.

But critics are crying foul. They say the decree, which is due to go into effect on July 1, is a poorly disguised attempt to shut down opposition media on the Internet during the campaign for the next presidential election in early 2011.

Indeed, the decree calls on all Internet providers in Belarus to store data on the Internet use of individuals for a full year and to hand that information over to law-enforcement agencies upon request.

It also requires Internet service providers to block access to any website within 24 hours of being asked to do so by government regulators -- a provision that goes beyond anti-terrorism security rules imposed under the most restrictive Internet laws in Western countries.

"Whatever the president is calling this decree, it is not done to improve the situation of Internet freedom in the country," said Lucie Morillon, head of the Internet Freedom Desk at the Paris-based press freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders.

"It is actually a way to tighten control online," Morillon told RFE/RL. "It is a way not only to be able to track down dissidents and people who criticize the government, but it is also a way to intimidate those people who believe the Internet is a way to find and disseminate information that they cannot find in the traditional media."

EU Weighs In

European Union foreign affairs officials have now weighed in on the issue, telling RFE/RL the decree is "a step in the wrong direction" at a time when Brussels is trying to gradually increase its engagement with Belarus.

"This new presidential decree on the Internet, if it comes into effect of course, would further curb the freedom of speech and information in Belarus," said Lutz Guellner, the spokesman for EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton. "We would consider it, therefore, as a significant step in the wrong direction. We hope that the Belarusian authorities would look into this again."

Guellner says one key issue for the EU in regard to the Eastern Partnership with Belarus is whether the decree is implemented in a way that silences political opposition or restricts the free flow of information or freedom of the press:

"The EU wants to gradually engage with Belarus but it depends on tangible progress in specific areas that have been identified," he says.

"The EU has regretted the lack of progress, in particular, in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms but also in how political action was dealt with -- crackdowns on peaceful political actions; the continued denial of registration of many political parties and independent media," he says. "That is exactly the context in which we are looking at this specific new decree."

Guellner explains that for the Belarusian economy, what is at stake with the Eastern Partnership initiative is help toward unifying trade regulatory systems -- a process that would open up possibilities for imports and exports, for business, and for investments on both sides.

"To give you a very tangible example, if Belarus is working toward what we call closer 'regulatory convergence' in the area of health standards for products that it is exporting -- for dairy products, for example -- when it gets there, then it can also export dairy products [to the EU]. It can export cheese. It can export yogurt and things like that. But it can only happen when this regulatory approximation has been done. And that applies for a whole range of goods and areas that are of potential interest to Belarus."

What Do Belarusians Think?

Syarhei Balykin, a lawyer and business owner in Minsk, told RFE/RL he doesn't think the new decree is going to cause any immediate problems for Belarusian firms trying to do business.

"I think there won't be big difficulties in business because foreign investors are not specified in this law," Balykin said. "The only problem I see is the requirement to have all Belarusian firms registered with the [Belarusian] domain name 'by.' It is much more expensive than registering with the dot-com domain name used internationally."

But Kyril Paznyak -- an Internet journalist and publisher of the Belarusian online publication "My" -- sees the decree in the context of earlier government moves to close down traditional printed newspapers with opposition view and the ongoing state control over broadcast media in Belarus.

"I believe that the main purpose of this decree is to scare the Internet community into self-censorship," Paznyak told RFE/RL. "It is understandable why authorities have ideological concerns about the Internet. It is the place where all independent press has been pushed."

"The Internet is where civic journalism in Belarus is still developing with political blogs and publication of textual information and multimedia from ordinary citizens," he said. "Most importantly, it is a virtual environment where the major part of alternative communications exist -- where different communities are being created, including political groups and civic activism."

Uladzimir, a young Internet user in Minsk, told RFE/RL he doesn't believe the government's claims that the decree will help clean up violent or sexually explicit content from the Internet in Belarus.

"All this legal language in the decree about fighting pornography and violence on the Internet is a folk tale," Uladzimir said. "None of this kind of content will disappear. What will disappear are viewpoints that are different from the official government-propagated information in Belarus."

OSCE Studying Decree

"Our office has been informed that this decree has been issued and as part of our normal monitoring procedures, we are looking into it," said Roland Bless, director of the office of Miklos Haraszti -- the Representative on Media Freedom at the Vienna-based Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. "It will take a while before we come to a conclusion."

One method the OSCE could use in its review would be to submit the decree to legal experts who would highlight any potential pitfalls of the document -- including how it is implemented in practice as well as issues that may only come to light if the decree is challenged in the Belarusian courts.

The OSCE legal experts could measure the decree against international standards on media freedom. They also could refer to how similar legislation has developed or been implemented in other countries.

If they determine the decree violates the OSCE commitments of Belarus, delegates from the organization could approach the Belarusian government directly to recommend changes.

RFE/RL's Belarus Service contributed to this report

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 04, 2010

Political Sphere in Belarus: From Marxism-Leninism To Political Science

By Volha Charnysh

Like its native country, the discipline of political science in Belarus will take decades to outgrow its Soviet past. After all, most of the country's contemporary social science luminaries were brought up on the volumes of scientific communism, memorizing the blessings of the socialist revolution and the proletarian dictatorship, and today force-feed their own students with courses like the "Ideology of the Belarusian State." As a result, the spectre of communist past still haunts the Belarusian academia.

Overcoming that "spectre" is what inspired five young researchers at the Belarusian State University to found *Palitychnaya Sfera* (*Political Sphere*), the only professional journal of political studies in Belarus. Since its inception in 2001, the journal has evolved into a dynamic and professional research institute geared toward acquiring new knowledge and presenting it at the academic and political levels, as well as to the public at large. Today, *Political Sphere* is, first and foremost, a community of political and social scientists.

"Our main focus is the gradual formation of a Belarusian school of political studies," explained Andrei Kazakevich, director of the Institute, in a Feb. 15 interview. *Political Sphere* aims to represent achievements of Belarusian political science without political and ideological limitations, overcome negative consequences of authoritarian rule for the Belarusian academic community and society, and maintain a dialogue between political scientists, the public, and the private institutions. *Political Sphere* also hopes to encourage the study of Belarusian politics, stimulate research and analytical activities in Belarus, and integrate Belarusian scientists in the international academic community, according to the "Concept note" on the Institute's web site.

This spring, *Political Sphere* is completing a research project on the evolution of Belarusian national identity in 1990-2008. Nation, national project, concept of nation, and ethnic conflicts are the focus for the upcoming issue of the journal. "The topic is very important for Belarus, which is undergoing the process of nation-building, and where the national identity is fragmented," said Kazakevich.

The journal *Political Sphere* receives submissions from the researchers in Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, and the United States, but most of its contents comes from Belarusian authors, according to Kazakevich. All articles pass an anonymous review. Sometimes the institute publishes the so-called "English issues," compiled from the most interesting articles translated into English, said the Institute's researcher and board member Siarhei Kuzniatsou in a Feb. 16 e-mail. The publication's primary audience is political scientists, students, analysts, and observers. While *Political Sphere* may also be of interest for politicians and government officials, "they feel themselves smart enough without such readings," noted Dzianis Melyantsou, a researcher and board member of the Institute, in a Feb. 15 e-mail.

Having experienced the “idiosyncrasies” of Belarusian academia firsthand, members of the Institute identify the absence of empirical research and the isolation from international academia as the main obstacles to the growth of political science in Belarus. These obstacles have been both the main reason for the journal’s existence and the primary concern of the founders of *Political Sphere*, who in 2005 moved the journal to the European Humanities University in exile in Vilnius, Lithuania, due to the increasing suppression at home. According to Kazakevich, the move is partial, and Minsk remains the center for the scientific community associated with the journal. In 2009, *Political Sphere* became independent from EHU, but remains registered in Lithuania.

The *Political Sphere* team consists of 12-15 permanent authors and researchers, all of whom are political scientists and sociologists between the ages of 25 and 35. Some of them are associated with Belarusian State University and National Academy of Sciences, while others received their MA and PhD degrees abroad, according to Melyantsou. Andrei Yahorau, a researcher and a board member at the Institute, said in a Feb. 16 e-mail the team’s age corresponds to the age of the Belarusian political science, which started developing only in the recent 15-20 years. According to Yahorau, the team’s interest in political science emerged as a result of the necessity to understand the political contradictions of the 90s. With contemporary Belarus being a “barely known state from the scientific view point,” we are excited about discovering and describing every piece of Belarus’ political reality,” he said.

The difficult conditions of Belarus’ social sciences have affected the career trajectories of all members of Institute. “It is very difficult (and often impossible) to defend a dissertation, get a job at the university that will correspond to one’s qualification and career plans, undertake independent research, or officially publish one’s work,” said Yahorau.

“For the authoritarian regime in Belarus, research on politics is a taboo,” Kazakevich said. “Political science is squeezed out by ideology, and ‘politics’ is considered as an undesirable and risky research subject. Belarus’ conservative and patronizing academic community is isolated from its western equivalents, and there is no dynamic or incentives for creative work.” Kazakevich said the discipline of political science has never become quite legitimate in Belarus. “Its main difference with the West is the orientation on translating current knowledge and speculative musings. Empirical research and attention to details is lacking,” he added.

Despite the difficulties the team faces, *Political Sphere* aspires to take the place it deserves in the Belarusian academic community as well as integrate into the international academic field. Yahorau also said, “To be accepted as researchers and professors, to prepare the next generations of Belarusian political scientists, to form a vibrant scholarly community, and to discover the political reality in Belarus for ourselves, our country and the world, is our greatest ambition.”

ENDNOTE: *Political Sphere* is currently inviting submissions for its spring 2010 Issue on the subject of nation, national project, concept of nation, or ethnic conflict. The papers may be submitted in Belarusian, Russian or English. The submission deadline is March 22, 2010.

To find out more, visit the Institute’s website at palityka.org or email info@palityka.org.

U.S. Department of State 2009 Human Rights Report: Belarus

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices
March 11, 2010

Summary:

Belarus is a republic with a population of 9.5 million. The country has a directly elected president, who is chief of state, and a bicameral parliament, the National Assembly, consisting of the Chamber of Representatives (lower house) and the Council of the Republic (upper house). A prime minister appointed by the president is the nominal head of government. In practice, however, power is concentrated in the presidency. Since his election in 1994 as president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka has consolidated his power over all institutions and undermined the rule of law through authoritarian means, manipulated elections, and arbitrary decrees. Subsequent presidential elections have not been free or fair, and the September 2008 parliamentary election failed to meet international standards. While civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, their members continued to commit numerous human rights abuses.

The government’s human rights record remained very poor as government authorities continued to commit frequent serious abuses. The right of citizens to change their government was severely restricted. The government failed to account for past politically motivated disappearances. Prison conditions remained extremely poor, and reports of abuse of prisoners and detainees continued. Arbitrary arrests, detentions, and imprisonment of citizens for political reasons, criticizing officials, or for participating in demonstrations also continued. The judiciary lacked independence, trial outcomes usually were predetermined, and many trials were conducted behind closed doors. The government further restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of press, speech, assembly, association, and religion and continued to enforce politically motivated military conscriptions of opposition youth leaders. The government seized published materials from civil society activists and limited the distribution of a number of independent media outlets. State security services used unreasonable force to disperse peaceful protesters. Corruption continued to be a problem. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and political parties were subjected to harassment, fines, and prosecution. Religious leaders were fined or deported for performing services, and churches continued to face per-

secution from authorities. Trafficking in persons remained a significant problem, although some progress was made to combat it. There was discrimination against Roma, ethnic, and sexual minorities, and against use of the Belarusian language. Authorities harassed independent unions and dismissed their members, severely limiting the ability of the workers to form and join independent trade unions and to organize and bargain collectively.

US Mission to the OSCE

*Statement on Freedom of Assembly in Belarus
As delivered by Political Counselor Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 25, 2010*

On numerous occasions, the United States has taken the floor to address serious and specific concerns regarding the fundamental freedom of assembly and association in various OSCE countries. As we all know, this fundamental freedom is outlined succinctly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and many specific OSCE commitments. The most notable of the latter come from Copenhagen 1990, which the Chairmanship and the Government of Denmark will celebrate with a special event this summer. Specifically, all participating States committed at Copenhagen that “everyone will have the right of peaceful assembly and demonstration,” and this “...right of association will be guaranteed ...including the right to form, join and participate effectively in non-governmental organizations....”

Likewise at Copenhagen, participating States committed that, “Persons belonging to national minorities have the right freely to express, preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, and to maintain and develop their culture in all its aspects.”

It is for these reasons that we must voice our concern over recent, very troubling developments in Belarus. This is not an attempt to politicize the situation, as some participating States might suggest. We must point out that participating States likewise expressed their commitment at Copenhagen to “respect the right of everyone, individually or in association with others, to seek, receive, and impart freely views and information on human rights and fundamental freedoms.” This is one step, in accordance with our OSCE commitments, we are taking today.

For a few months, we had observed incidences that we hoped showed positive Belarusian government reaction to peaceful assembly and association. Monthly solidarity demonstrations were allowed to occur without interference and without incident. Unfortunately, the recent treatment of demonstrators has reversed the more positive approach. On February 8, 14, and 16, peaceful demonstrations were forcefully disrupted by Belarusian security forces, many of whom refused to identify themselves, and demonstrators were harassed, man-handled, arrested and detained. Moreover, there were deliberate attempts to block media coverage of the actions, in violation of Belarusian law.

At the same time, there appears to have been increasing action by the Government of Belarus to systematically marginalize and repress selected portions of the Polish minority in Belarus, most recently in Ivieniets outside of Minsk. This has raised serious concern in the United States, as it has in Europe. We hope that the Belarusian government will take a constructive approach to reaching a fair and lasting solution to this issue.

We note that the Government of Belarus has failed to abolish criminal code provisions that penalize activities by unregistered organizations, contrary to its commitments to the OSCE. We continue to urge the Government of Belarus to review these laws and their implementation to ensure they are in compliance with OSCE commitments regarding the fundamental freedom of assembly and association and the rights of national minorities. In accordance with our OSCE commitments, we stand ready to work with the Government of Belarus, by whatever means necessary, in this endeavor.

HISTORICAL DATES

February 1, 1661

Inhabitants of the city of **Mahileu** rose against the Muscovite occupying army. Assisted by troops of the Grand Duchy of Litva, they liberated their city for the duration of the 1654 war.

February 2, 1838

Birthdate of **Kastuś Kalinouski**, leader of the anti-Russian national uprising of 1863-1864.

March 21, 1840

Birthdate of **Francishak Bahushevich**, poet, lawyer and pioneer of the Belarusian national revival.

March 22, 1864

Kastuś Kalinouski, the leader of the anti-Russian uprising was executed by Russian czarist authorities, in Vilnia.

March 25, 1918

Belarus' Independence Day (Day of Freedom) — Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) was declared an independent state by the Executive Council of the First All-Belarusian Congress, in Miensk.

April 4, 1557

450th anniversary of birth of **Leu Sapieha**, a renowned statesman, chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Litva, compiler and one of the authors of Litva's collection of laws - the Lithuanian Statute (first printed in 1588 - in Belarusian).

ECONOMY

Belarus' Oil Sector: A Target Of Opportunity for Moscow

By Vladimir Socor

Russia's threat to abolish its oil subsidies to Belarus aim not only to punish Minsk for its recent rapprochement with the European Union, but also to put the oil processing and oil transit in Belarus under the control of Russian companies (EDM, January 5).

The role of Belarus with regard to oil transit for Europe is somewhat similar to Ukraine's role for gas transit. Each country provides transit service for the bulk of Russian oil and gas, respectively, by pipelines to Europe. In both cases, the Kremlin seeks to control the transit routes so as to gain additional leverage on European consumer countries.

Russia has broken into Ukraine's internal gas transportation system and market, thanks to the presumably pro-Western president Viktor Yushchenko in 2006; and it has used that position to drive Naftohaz Ukrainy into insolvency, opening the way for a Gazprom move on Ukraine's transit pipelines. In Belarus, however, the presumably Russia-oriented president Alyaksandr Lukashenka has all along resisted Russian control of the oil processing plants and transit pipelines. The Kremlin is arm-twisting Belarus by shifting oil transit volumes into the Baltic Pipelines System (BPS), which circumvents Belarus to reach Russian Baltic ports for tanker transportation to Europe. Similarly, Russia threatens to bypass Ukraine's gas transit system by laying pipelines on the seabed of the Baltic and Black seas. Moscow uses the threat of circumvention to pressure Belarus and Ukraine into sharing control of their oil and gas sectors, respectively, with Russian companies. In that eventuality, Russia would presumably maintain the supply and transit flows by overland pipelines through Belarus and Ukraine.

While the threat of bypassing Ukraine through the Baltic and Black Sea is hardly credible, the circumvention of Belarus is credible and indeed in progress through BPS Phase One, which is already operational, and the incipient construction of BPS Phase Two. The pressure is now growing through the threat of abolishing oil subsidies to Belarus, following Minsk's attempts to improve its relations with the EU.

Refineries and transit pipelines in Belarus are all under the jurisdiction of the state-owned holding BelNaftaKhim. This includes: the Belarus section of the Druzhba transit pipeline for Russian oil to Europe (operated by BelNaftaKhim's subsidiary HomelTransNafta), the Mozyr and Navapolatsk refineries, the Palimir petrochemical plant (associated with the Navapolatsk refinery), and some smaller assets (Interfax, January 1-7).

Belarus provides transit service for more than 70 million tons of Russian oil per year to Europe (not including the

oil supplies to Belarus itself) through the Belarus Druzhba pipeline. This staggering quantity takes two directions from Belarus territory: one westward into Poland and Germany, and the other one southward via Ukraine into Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary (with pipeline links to each country). All these countries critically depend on Russian oil supplies through Belarus and Ukraine.

Originating at Unecha on the Russia-Belarus border, the Belarus Druzhba pipeline bifurcates at Mozyr. The westward branch enters Poland at Adamowa/Adamowo and continues across that country to Germany. The southward branch enters Ukraine at Brody and continues—as the Ukrainian section of the Druzhba pipeline—toward Central Europe. The southward branch links up at Brody with the Odessa-Brody pipeline, which is being reverse-used for Russian oil to the Black Sea.

A third, northward branch is also a part of the Belarus Druzhba transit pipeline. It runs in two spurs to Latvia and Lithuania, respectively, and used to deliver 16 million tons per year in the aggregate to those two Baltic States. Russia, however, stopped oil deliveries by pipeline to Latvia and Lithuania in 2002 and 2006, respectively. Thus, the Belarus Druzhba's northern branch is no longer operating at all. Moscow, using its monopoly as oil supplier, hoped to strangle Latvia's Ventspils export terminal and Lithuania's Mazeikiiai refinery and acquire them on the cheap. The goal has not been accomplished but it remains on the agenda. It also serves as a reference paradigm for other countries where Russia is a monopoly supplier to local refineries, including Belarus.

BelNaftaKhim's Mozyr and Navapolatsk refineries operate exclusively on Russian oil. Each of them processes 10.5 million tons of crude oil per year, an unusually large volume that has remained constant in recent years. Russian oil companies, chronically deficient in refining capacities at home, use Belarus as a strategic base for their refining operations. Russia delivers some 21 million tons of crude oil to Belarus annually in recent years (21.5 million tons in 2009), including 5 to 6 million tons to meet Belarus' domestic requirements for petroleum products and another 16 million tons to be refined for exporting the products (RIA Novosti, January 4).

Belarus has included the Mozyr and Navapolatsk refineries in the program for privatization of state property since 2008. However, Minsk is bargaining hard over the terms of "privatization" by Russian state-controlled companies or oligarchic entities. As part of its resistance, Belarus supports the goal of using Ukraine's Odessa-Brody pipeline in the originally planned direction, south-north, for Caspian oil supplies (Valerya Kastyugava, "Prospects of Belarus' Participation in the Odessa-Brody Pipeline's Operation," BISS, 2008). By the same token, Belarus is interested in reactivating the northern pipeline connection to the Baltic States. Since Russia forced its closure, Minsk considers the option of using that line in reverse, so as to receive non-Russian oil via Lithuanian or Latvian maritime terminals.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 5
January 8, 2010

Precarious Russia Oil Deal May Hit Belarus Refiners

Belarus may need to cut refinery runs after bending to Russian demands on the amount of oil it can import duty-free, traders said on Thursday, a day after the countries signed a deal to end a month-long oil dispute.

But Russia's hard-won deal, which will secure the Kremlin a bigger share of oil revenues, may prove to be short-lived. The Belarusian government said in a statement it would pursue the removal of export tariffs in line with a planned customs union.

"Within a customs union, the agreements reached in Moscow cannot exist for long," the Belarusian government said. Russia and Belarus agreed an oil supply deal on Wednesday, easing fears in Germany and Poland that the escalating dispute could affect deliveries of crude along a route carrying about 10 percent of European supplies from West Siberian oilfields.

Russia agreed to supply 6.3 million tonnes of duty-free oil to Belarus, enough for its domestic consumption, with a proviso that this amount could be raised after September should the Belarussian economy exceed growth forecasts.

"We are prepared to deliver all the oil Belarus needs for its own market without duties," Russian Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko told reporters in Helsinki.

But analysts said Moscow had won the biggest concessions.

"On face value, Russia probably won this dispute, since Belarus wanted more oil exempt from export duties," said Chirvani Abdoullaev, senior oil and gas analyst at Alfa-Bank.

Belarus, which signed the deal as supplies to its two refineries slowed to a trickle, must pay full export duties on the excess Russian crude it receives after paying only 35.6 percent last year.

These volumes are likely to exceed 14 million tonnes, most of which is refined and re-exported.

Several Russian traders said refinery runs in Belarus were almost certain to fall as a result. One trader said this could even force one of the two plants, Naftan or Mazyr, to close.

"Refinery runs will definitely come down. The refineries were only surviving on the low duties," one trading source said.

Belarussian state oil concern Belnaftakhim declined comment.

CUSTOMS UNION

Belarusian First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka was quoted by agencies as saying Russian oil refined in Belarus and returned to Russia for export would be exempt from duties.

Syamashka, who attended the talks in Moscow, also said Belarus would forge ahead with plans to modernise its two refineries. "Under no circumstances will we slow the tempo of reconstruction," he said in a separate statement.

The dispute had the potential to flare up again, analysts said, as the planned customs union between Russia, Belarus and another ex-Soviet state, Kazakhstan, begins to take shape.

Russian traders, who met with customs brokers on Thursday, said they had received few clues on what action to take next.

"There is uncertainty about how the duty-free volumes will be spread throughout the course of the year, as January deliveries were imposed at 100 percent," one source said, adding that Belarus had not received any oil duty-free this month.

Russia had agreed to an 11 percent hike in transit fees on crude that crosses the territory of Belarus en route to Europe, Syamashka was quoted as saying by Belarussian news agencies.

"It's a material shift in pricing terms. Essentially, it will help the Russian budget," said Lev Snykov, oil and gas analyst at VTB Capital in Moscow. "Russia is running the pipeline business, which helps in resolving these issues."

The deal might also give impetus to oil pipeline monopoly Transneft's project to build phase two of the Baltic Pipeline System, a 1,000-km (625-mile) route to the Baltic Sea that will bypass Belarus.

"Diversifying, hedging your bets, protecting yourself makes sense," Abdoullaev said. (Additional reporting by Andrei Makhovsky in Minsk, Terhi Kinnunen in Helsinki and Vladimir Soldatkin in Moscow; editing by Sue Thomas)

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus, Reuters, Jan. 29, 2010

Kremlin Energy Strategy Encompasses More Than Oil and Gas

By Ben Aris in Moscow

The world's energy map is being redrawn and Russia intends to plant its flag in the centre of the new world order. Already amongst the biggest producers of oil and gas, Russia is using its store of petrodollars to make sure it stays in the game when the world's hydrocarbons start to run out – or at least become so expensive that everyone switches to alternative sources.

In the last year, the oil and gas geo-political map has been redrawn after China managed to break Russia's half nelson on Central Asia by building two new big oil and gas pipelines that run east out of the region. The Kremlin has been playing the same game as it develops a trident of gas pipelines running westwards.

Less visibly, the Kremlin (or its oligarch friends) have been busy shopping for energy assets in what the Russians call "the near abroad" as well as further afield. Russian companies already own the main power station that supplies its erstwhile enemy Georgia as well as the main export power line out of the country. The Kremlin has launched

a sustained campaign to build nuclear power stations in places like Iran, **Belarus**, Turkey, Bulgaria and beyond, and even the state-owned hi-tech agency Rusnanotec is investing heavily in photovoltaic cells.

Pipeline plays

The new pipelines will dramatically alter the rules of the energy game, but in addition to building new pipes the Kremlin has deployed its massive wealth to buy up as many of the existing pipelines and energy companies it can. Some countries have welcomed the Russian approaches, like Turkey and Serbia, while others, like Ukraine, are resisting for all they are worth.

... Other countries are succumbing to Russian pressure a bit more reluctantly. While Kyiv is resisting fiercely any suggestion that it may sell its gas pipeline to Russia, **Belarus already caved in three years ago**. Gazprom already owns 37.5% of the national pipeline operator Beltransgaz, but will raise its stake to 50% this February after transferring the last \$625m payment of a \$2.5bn deal. The Kremlin is now manoeuvring to buy out the other really attractive energy assets in Belarus - two modern oil refineries.

Russia threatened to cut Belarus' oil supplies off in January and at the time of writing a deal had reportedly been struck in which Russia got most of what it wanted (and the Belarusians didn't). Call it Ukraine-lite: turning off the oil spigots would also leave five European countries dry - Hungary, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland and Slovakia. Moscow wants to reduce the oil transit tariff, but Minsk is playing hardball. The issue of privatising the refineries has been mentioned, but currently there is no resolution for the row in sight.

Going nuclear

But Moscow doesn't come empty handed. Minsk may be unhappy about giving up first its pipelines and later its refineries, but in exchange Russia has promised to build (and, more importantly, finance) a \$9bn nuclear power station in Minsk. This project has especial appeal after Lithuania shut down its Soviet-vintage Ignalina nuclear power plant at the start of this year.

Source: Excerpts from an article on Website business-neweurope.eu, February 9, 2010

Quotes of Quarter

The Lithuanian Defense Minister **RASA JUKHNAVICENIE** told the assembled Belarusian journalists in Vilnius on December 18, 2009, according to the Internet portal tut.by:

"Our top priority is to preserve Belarus as an independent state on the map of Europe, and not as a province of some other country"

JACEK PROTASIEWICZ, the Chairman of European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Belarus, declared in a February interview with RFE/RL:

"The European Parliament will not shut its eyes on the repressions in Belarus."

Belarus' Forum

In The Land Of Yanukovych's Forefathers

Branislava Stankevich in Yanuki and Naira Bulghadaryan in Spitak

The residents of one Belarusian village were particularly interested in the results of the Ukrainian election.

The tiny village of Yanuki, in northern Belarus, has no post office, no stores, no school, and only four remaining residents, but it's the ancestral home of **likely Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych**.

It was from Yanuki that Yanukovych's grandfather emigrated prior to the October Revolution, hoping to find better fortunes in neighboring Ukraine's Donbas region.

But the residents here have not forgotten about Yanukovych's ties to their village.

When he last visited here in 2006, he made some vague promises about helping to build a dairy factory and houses in order to revive the area.

Antanina Babaryka, a secretary in the Vaukalatsk agricultural executive committee of which Yanuki is a part, says "he's one of our kinsmen. It's nice when someone like that succeeds in life. I met with him twice during his visits here and liked him a lot."

Babaryka recalled that Yanukovych was welcomed as an honored guest during his visits here in 2003 and 2006. He was treated with Belarusian dishes and taken for strolls around the old neighborhood.

As for his promises to assist in the area's renaissance by building 300 houses in the village, Babaryka says she doubts they will ever materialize, as the village has almost completely disappeared. Food deliveries are made to the residents twice a week and a doctor visits once a month.

"Goodness, what can one say of Yanuki! There are only three houses left there, where once there were as many as 36 -- and only four official residents," Babaryka said.

Of the four remaining residents, pensioner Maria Yanukovich (sic!) is the only one who owns a telephone. She says she is not a relative of the new Ukrainian president, but that everybody in Yanuki bears that last name.

While she keeps up with news of Yanukovych, she too is pessimistic about whether his election might improve the village's future prospects.

"Perhaps he did once make a few promises, but Yanukovych has Ukraine to worry about. We will manage on our own here. After all, we're not poor. We have a cow, we have bread -- we have everything we need. He has his own problems."

Maria Yanukovich says that areas around Yanuki are very picturesque: there are forest, lakes, marshes, and perhaps it might make a good tourist attraction for Ukrainians wishing to see the ancestral homeland of their new president.

But, she says, there's nobody that could organize such a venture. Only pensioners remain and their children and grandchildren won't be returning to Yanuki anytime soon.

Meanwhile, the residents of Spitak, a small town in northern Armenia, are going to send a letter of congratulations to Yanukovich to express their joy at his apparent success.

Yanukovich led a Ukrainian rescue and rehabilitation team to the town in the days following a devastating 1988 earthquake.

On the 20th anniversary of the earthquake, Yanukovich visited Spitak and was honored by the Armenian authorities who named a square after him and made him an honorary citizen.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, February 09, 2010

Kosciuszko Honored At His Birthplace

The estate, where Tadeusz Kosciuszko was born, is situated in the village of Merachoushchyna (the Ivatsevichy district, the Brest region). Opposition leaders, foreign diplomats, cultural figures, historians, public representatives, journalists, local inhabitants and Belarusians from all over Belarus came to pay tribute to the memory of the great son of Belarus.

The local authorities were scared by the visit of the opposition leaders. The traffic police detained a bus with democratic activists near Merachoushchyna. People had to go to Kosciuszko's estate on foot. The fear was so great that only people from special lists were permitted to enter the estate as officials of the Brest region executive committee and the Ivatsevichy district executive committee were present at the event. Officers of militia and secret services in mufti were guarding the entrance to the museum.



US Charge d'Affairs in Belarus Michael Scanlan

While the officials were marking the event in the museum, an impromptu meeting was held at the memorial sign in honour of Tadeusz Kosciuszko. Leader of the civil campaign European Belarus **Andrei Sannikau**, historian and writer **Uladimir Arlou**, head of the BPF party **Alyaksei**

Yanukevich made speeches. Singer-songwriter **Zmitser Bartosik** performed his best songs.

Historian **Uladimir Arlou** said it was a disgraceful situation when monuments to Tadeusz Kosciuszko are not being erected in Belarus, streets are not called in his honour, but instead, Russian general Alexander Suvorov, who drowned the uprising in blood, is being glorified in the country. Belarusian Tadeusz Kosciuszko is an honorary citizen of France, national hero of the United States and Poland, but he hasn't officially been recognized national hero of Belarus so far.

Charter97 Biographical note: Tadeusz Kosciuszko was born in Belarus in 1747, graduated from the Corps of Cadets in Warsaw, Paris Military Academy, spent seven years struggling for independence of the United States. He and **Thomas Jefferson**, the author of the US Declaration of Independence, were friends. He got American highest awards, the rank of general, could have stayed in the US and made a career there. He returned home in 1784 and in 1794, led the uprising against the Russian Empire, which had annexed the territory of Belarus after a partition of the Commonwealth of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Litva. From 40,000 to 50,000 Belarusians took part in the uprising. They were nobles, students, peasants. A month after the beginning of the uprising, the insurgents managed to take Vilnia, Hrodna, Brest, Ashmyany, Braslau, Vaukavysk, Lida, Slonim, Pinsk, Navahradak. However, the uprising was eventually defeated by the overwhelming force of the Russian regular army. Later, Napoleon offered him the rank of general in his army, but Kosciuszko declined to accept it.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, February 6, 2010

Quotes of Quarter

The exile **Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR)** stated in an interview with RFE/RL on January 10, 2010, that it

"is delighted with brave action of Belarusian patriots who hoisted the (banned) white-red-white flag on the Christmas tree (the tallest in the country) in Vitsebsk."

The former Belarusian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs **ANDREI SANNIKAU**, as reported by the European Radio for Belarus on March 10, 2010, has announced that he is going to run for President:

"I have always been proud of being an opposition activist, and I will advertise myself that way."

He added that he "will try to reach an agreement with the whole opposition."

The EU's foreign policy chief **CATHERINE ASHTON** stated, as reported by RFE/RL on February 17, 2010 that she was

"disappointed by the recent arrests of 40 members of the Union of Poles and other civil society representatives in Belarus."

NEWS BRIEFS

December 28, 2009

Belarus receives \$200 million loan from World Bank

The loan from the World Bank was for the purposes of development, a spokesman for the Belarusian National Bank said on Tuesday.

The loan will be disbursed for 16 years with a grace period of six years.

"The loan is granted to support the government's economic program aimed at eliminating the social consequences of the [financial] crisis and deepening structural reforms that provide a basis for the resumption of sustainable economic growth," the spokesman said.

The World Bank's strategy of cooperation with Belarus envisages an increase in financial aid to the ex-Soviet republic from \$100 million to \$250 million annually in 2010-2011.

The IMF allocated Belarus its first tranche of \$800 million in January, the second tranche of \$680 million to the ex-Soviet state was received in July. Minsk received \$699.5 million in October.

Source: RIA Novosti, Office for Democratic Belarus,

January 10, 2010

BNR Rada urges support for a brave activist

The exiled government has demanded the release of Syarhei Kavalenka detained in Vitsebsk for having hoisted the banned white-red-white flag atop the tallest Christmas tree in the country.

It considers it to be its duty to draw the attention of democratic states and international organizations to the problem of Syarhei Kavalenka and his helpers.

The BNR Rada noted that solidarity with the Vitsebsk patriots should be a top priority for human rights organizations and for all Belarusian nationally-minded political parties and movements.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

January 16, 2010

Lukashenka has created secret service for Internet

The Operating and Analytical Centre under the president is given the right to control online correspondence of Belarusians and monitor which websites they browse.

On January 4 Alyaksandr Lukashenka signed the decree "On amending some laws of Belarus to clamp down on criminal activity".

Thus since yesterday the Operating and Analytical centre under the president is invested with authority to carry out operational-investigative activities at the territory of Belarus. In other words, the Centre has the right to control online correspondence of Belarusians and to monitor browsing of websites by Belarusian internet users.

Recently the OAC attracted attention due to the draft law on regulating ByNet which was received by the press. According to experts, the draft decree had been prepared in the OAC and planned to authorize the structure to allocate the international channel of access to the Internet and exercise control over the entire Belarusian segment of the Web.

The scandalous document includes blocking of websites on the decision of governmental agencies, identification of Internet

users, state registration of online media, as well as bringing to responsibility those who distribute information on the web.

"Reporters without Borders" issued a statement of protest expressing concern over the plans of the Belarusian government to tighten control over the Internet.

The decree should be annulled so that Belarus is not added to the list of countries such as North Korea, China and Iran that Reporters Without Borders has identified as Enemies of the Internet, the statement says.

Source: Blog Belarus News Therapy

January 16, 2010

Lech Walesa and Bill Clinton congratulate the first Head of State

The celebration dedicated to the 75th birthday of Stanislau Shushkevich was held on January 14 in Minsk.

Many prominent persons gathered to offer him their congratulations. Telegrams of greetings to the former Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus were received from the former US President Bill Clinton, and the former President of Poland, legendary Solidarity leader Lech Walesa and other world politicians.

During the ceremony the first screening of the film "Stanislau Shushkevich" directed by Leanid Mindlin and Syarhei Isakau took place.

"Everyone will have one's own answer to the question who is Stanislau Shushkevich. One would say he is the person who has destroyed the Soviet Union in the Belavezha forest.. A second would call him the first and the last legitimate leader of independent Belarus. A third one would call him an outstanding scientist. A fourth one – a wonderful educator who has helped 33 young scientists defend their Ph.Ds. And someone would recall that Shushkevich is a person with the smallest pension in Belarus. and all that would be true," said the People's Artist Zinaida Bandarenka.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

January 19, 2010

Belarusian Newspaper Editor Questioned For Spreading 'False Information'

BYALYNICHY, Belarus -- The chief editor of an independent newspaper in the eastern Belarusian town of Bialynichy has been accused of spreading false information, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

In November, Barys Vyrvich printed an article in "Pakhodnya" about the inability of local companies to pay their employees' salaries. He was questioned by the police as to the sources he used for the article.

Vyrvich said he had spoken to many local people and gave names to the police to verify his claims. Ru

The editor told RFE/RL that he expects more pressure as he believes local authorities are trying to shut his newspaper down.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

January 21, 2010

US concerned by Lukashenka's ties with countries supporting terrorism

US congressmen are concerned with growing amount of Belarus weapon sales and deliveries to strengthening ties with states sponsors of terrorism.

Bill “Belarus Arms Transfers Accountability Act of 2009” has been introduced in the US Senate and the House of Representatives.

“Belarus has been a significant supplier of rockets, mortars, antitank weapons, and mines to Palestinian extremist groups and to state sponsors of terrorism, such as Iran and Syria, as well as Mi-24 helicopters, artillery systems and Russian-origin armored combat vehicles to the Government of Sudan, tanks to the communist regime in North Korea, and military aircraft and aircraft engines to Iran,” – states the document.

Just according to the available official information, Belarus has exported arms valued at \$1,000,000,000 between 1999 and 2006, making it the eleventh largest exporter of arms in the world. The actual amount of the sales is expected to be much larger.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center
<http://www.facebook.com/l/39fbb;www>.

January 27, 2010

Ales Mikhalevich begins presidential campaign

Ales Mikhalevich has launched his presidential campaign bid on January 27 in Minsk.

The politician said he would rely only on Belarusian resources in his campaign. According to Mikhalevich, his team will comprise representatives of a new generation of the Belarusian society. He regards urban youth as his main support base.

Mikhalevich promised to present his full platform in early autumn.



Ales Mikhalevich

Source: European Radio for Belarus

January 27, 2010

Intellectuals call to reject the Customs Union in favor of Eastern Partnership

The community of art and scientific intellectuals on January 27 issued a statement titled “Belarus’ Participation in Integration Projects with Russia is Illegal!” Ihar Lednik, one of the statement’s authors, told the European Radio for Belarus that the aim of the statement is to prevent Russia from swallowing up Belarus. Our only way out is to take part in the Eastern Partnership program and to return people’s power through local elections.

The statement was endorsed by Uladzimir Kolas, chairman of the Council of Belarusian Intellectuals; writers Uladzimir Khalip, Ales Mikalaichanka, Uladzimir Sodal, Vasil Yakavenka; artists Ales Shaternik, Aliaksei Marachkin, Ales Tsyrukunou; Zinaida Bandarenka, scientists Yury Khadyka, Lidzia Savik, Yauhen Anishchanka, journalists Mikola Lavitski, Anatol Bukas,

engineers Aleh Hayeuski, Aleh Shahulin and others.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

February 2, 2010

Lukashenka Signs Edict on Internet Regulations

On February 1, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka signed decree No 60, entitled “Measures to improve the usage of the national part of the Internet”.

To ensure “the safety of citizens and the state, as from 1 July 2010 Internet service providers will have to identify devices used by Internet users and keep a record of them and the services rendered”.

Following a user’s request an ISP can restrict access of the user’s Internet access device to information of pornographic nature, information designed to incite violence, and other illegal actions..

The document encourages making information about government agencies and other state-run organisations more accessible. Government agencies, other state-run organizations and business companies with a prevailing share of the state in their authorized funds are obliged to use their official websites to inform visitors about their working hours, postal address, handling of applications, the administrative procedures they perform and other things.

The decree addresses copyright protection in the Web. Fiction, scientific, musical products, photos, pictures and other objects subject to copyright and allied rights that enjoy legal protection in Belarus can be made available in the Internet provided the rights are observed. News posts and/or materials posted by mass media must refer to the original source.

In line with the decree as from 1 July 2010 businesses that provide their products and services in Belarus via the World Wide Web will have to perform these services using Internet data networks, systems and resources which are located in Belarus.

These systems, networks and resources can be registered with the Information Technologies and Communications Ministry or an authorized agency. The government will work out the necessary procedures and regulations by 1 May 2010.

Source: BelTA, Office for Democratic Belarus

February 5, 2010

Belarusian Journalist Jailed for Hooliganism

Independent Belarusian journalist Ivan Shulha was convicted today of petty hooliganism and sentenced to 10 days in jail.

Shulha was detained on February 3 when police went to the apartment of Mikhail Yanchuk, a correspondent of the Warsaw-based Belsat television channel.

Several journalists were in Yanchuk’s apartment at the time, including Shulha, who was detained and taken away by police to a district court after they said he hit a police officer.

Belsat director Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy said the police action was “an attempt to discredit independent journalists in Belarus.”

She said Belsat would do everything possible to get Shulha out of detention. Shulha is an active member of the Belarusian Journalists Association, an NGO, and is a contributor to Belsat programs.

Belsat TV is a satellite television channel established by the Polish Foreign Ministry and the Polish public television company Telewizja Polska in 2007. It broadcasts to Belarus and has a

network of journalists in Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

February 5, 2010

***Narodnaya Volya* fined for advertising Belsat**

Narodnaya Volya was fined for advertising a new season on Belsat TV-channel. The decision has been taken by Leninski District Court of Minsk.

According to RFE/RL the court has proclaimed the newspaper guilty of violating the law "On advertising". Officials from the Ministry of Trade drew up an administrative protocol against *Narodnaya Volya* as they considered the announcement to be an advertisement.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

February 06, 2010

Belarusians Will Need Passports To Enter

Internet Cafes

Belarusian Communication and Information Minister Mikalay Pantsyaley said at press conference in Minsk that according to a February 1 decree by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, all Belarusians wanting to enter Internet cafes must have a passport as of July 1.

Pantsyaley said the decree -- which has been criticized by human rights organizations and many Western countries -- obliges Internet cafe owners to identify those who enter cafes.

The decree requires all Internet providers in Belarus to store data on the Internet use of individuals for a full year and to hand that information over to law-enforcement agencies upon request.

It also requires Internet service providers to block access to any website within 24 hours of being asked to do so by government regulators -- a provision that goes beyond antiterrorism security rules imposed under the most restrictive Internet laws in Western countries.

The president's official website says the decree is "an attempt to protect the rights of Belarusian citizens, society, and the state in the field of information."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

February 5, 2010

Proposed for Delegation to EURONEST PA

The Belarusian Independence Bloc, one of Belarus' three major opposition coalitions, has come out with its proposals for the composition of the country's delegation to the EU-Neighborhood East Parliamentary Assembly (EURONEST PA).

The issue was discussed at a meeting of the bloc's council on Wednesday.

The council decided that the delegation should include representatives of the United Civic Party, the Belarusian Popular Front, the Just World Belarusian Party of the Left, the Movement for Freedom, the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the Assembly of Pro-democratic Non-governmental Organizations, Malady Front, Belarusian Christian Democracy and the Party of Freedom and Progress.

The European Parliament reportedly suggests two possibilities for the composition of Belarus' delegation to the EURONEST PA.

As Jacek Protasiewicz, chairman of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Belarus, said in a recent interview with the Polish newspaper Rzeczpospolita, the delegation could consist of five members of the National Assembly and five representatives of opposition forces or all 10 members of the

delegation would be representatives of opposition forces.

Reportedly, the Belarusian authorities would not mind the five-plus-five format if they had influence on the selection of opposition representatives, but the European Parliament has not yet agreed to this.

The EURONEST PA was expected to consist of 60 members of the European Parliament and a 10-member delegation from each of the six post-Soviet states participating in the European Union's Eastern Partnership program, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Five of the six delegations would consist of members of Parliament, but no decision so far has been made as to who will be on the Belarusian delegation, as the Belarusian legislature is widely believed to have been formed in a way that was far from democratic standards.

The inaugural conference for the EURONEST PA has been scheduled for March 24.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus, naviny.by

February 14, 2010

Opposition action on St Valentine's Day dispersed

"Dozens of activists of youth organizations were arrested. Riot militiamen made journalists delete photos of paddy wagons from their cameras.

Young Front activists planned to hold a traditional action in Minsk on St Valentine's Day February 14. At 6 p.m., when oppositionists began to gather at Freedom square, they found there dozens of riot militiamen in uniform and in mufti and prisoner transport vehicles in yards. A Radio Liberty journalist took photo of one of them.

As soon as 30 Young Front unfurled banners "Demonstration of Love" and "Young Front", riot militiamen attacked them, snatched their flags, arrested the demonstrators. Beating the detainees, they pushed them into buses.

Young Front deputy head Mikola Dzemizdenka, Ivan Shyla, Anastasia Palazhanka, leader of the Young Democrats Mikhail Pashkevich were arrested.



All arrested people were taken to the Tsentralny district militia department of Minsk. They were released three hours later. Detained Uladzimir Yarmyanok said the detainees were made to stand facing the wall. Minor Stanislau Stesik was beaten. Leader of the Young Democrats Mikhail Pashkevich was beaten in the militia department for his attempt to defend Anastasia Palazhanka. His glasses were broken; the statuette he had received as winner of the Young Front's Prize "Love Belarus" were taken from him.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

February 17, 2010

EU's Ashton Condemns Crackdown On Polish Activists In Belarus

The European Union's foreign-policy chief has criticized the arrest in Belarus of members of an ethnic Polish organization, condemning police action against the group.

Catherine Ashton said in a statement she was "disappointed by the recent arrests of 40 members of the Union of Poles (UPB) and other civil-society representatives in Belarus."



Ashton said the moves against the UPB in Belarus "undermine our efforts to strengthen relations between the European Union and Belarus."

UPB campaigns for the rights of the ethnic Polish minority in Belarus.

On February 15, police arrested a large number of members of the banned group, including its leader, Angelika Borys

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

February 27, 2010

Apartment of editor-in-chief of *Narodnaya Volya* has been searched

The apartment of the editor-in-chief of *Narodnaya Volya* Svyatlana Kalinkina has been searched. *Belarusian Partisan* has reported that a PC has been confiscated alongside with the SIM card from Kalinkina's phone.

The search was conducted because of the criminal case connected with slander aimed against the head of Homel department of KGB Ivan Korzh. The search order was signed on February 16 but it was conducted only on February 26. According to Svyatlana Kalinkina, they looked for the computer that was used to send an e-mail to relatives of the convicted Homel policemen.

A similar search was conducted in the editorial office of *Narodnaya Volya*. The system unit of the deputy editor-in-chief of the newspaper Maryna Koktysh was confiscated then.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

March 1, 2010

Tatsyana Shaputska sues the State University administration

The member of Malady Front is trying to appeal her expulsion as she considers it to be illegal.

The girl has informed ERB that she sent her complaint to Moscow District Court of Minsk on February 28. The respondent is the administration of Belarusian State University.

Tatsyana Shaputska was expelled from BSU after she had taken part in the Civil Forum of the Eastern Partnership. The faculty administration only asked to reprimand the girl but the university administration took a more severe decision.

Policemen knocked Tatsyana off her feet at the last street action organized by "Malady Front" on February 14 - Valentine's Day. The girl got a closed craniocerebral injury. She commented on it in the interview with ERB and said she was still taking pills but felt much better – she practically had no headaches.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

March 10, 2010

Top Investigator Arrested In Belarus

MINSK -- A top Belarusian investigator who worked on high-profile corruption cases has been arrested, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

Svyatlana Baikova, an investigator in the Prosecutor-General's Office, was arrested today by the Belarusian Committee for State Security, or KGB.

The Belarusian Prosecutor-General's Office confirmed the arrest, but did not give any details.

At the time of her arrest, Baikova was engaged in probing corruption among high-rankling KGB personnel, including former KGB officer and customs official Anatol Hramovich.

She is also known for her active role in investigating a number of cases of corruption among police officers.

In 2000, Baikova began investigating the disappearance of former Interior Minister Yury Zaharanka. She was taken off that case in 2002. Zaharanka's whereabouts are still unknown.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

March 10, 2010

Andrei Sannikau runs for President

A well known opposition activist, the former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Sannikau has announced that he is going to run for President.

Sannikau: "I count on people's support as an opposition candidate. A tendency to obey the authorities and helping them a bit has become apparent. I have always been proud of being an opposition activist and I will advertise myself in this way".



Andrei Sannikau

Sannikau has commented in an interview with ERB that he counts on opposition forces accepting the European direction of development in Belarus. However, he says that he will negotiate and try to reach an agreement with the whole opposition. Sannikau has not specified what political mottos he will use and what political forces he will engage in the elections.

Source: Vital Ruhain, European Radio for Belarus

March 11, 2010

Only opposition to represent Belarus in Euronest

Only the opposition will represent Belarus in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Eastern Partnership – EURONEST. The

European Parliament has taken this decision at a meeting in Strasbourg.

A Polish European deputy Jacek Sariusz-Wolski informed ERB journalists earlier, Belarus will be represented in the Euronest only by opposition parties and important civil organizations like the Belarusian Association of Journalists, independent trade unions, etc.

It is already known that the Belarusian delegation in the Euronest will consist of Syarhei Kalyakin, Anatol Lyabedzka, Alyaksei Yanukevich, Alyaksandr Kazulin and Alyaksandr Milinkevich.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

March 16, 2010

Lukashenka Offers Venezuela Military Help

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has offered Belarusian help to strengthen the military of Venezuela.

Speaking March 16 during his visit to the South American country, Lukashenka said Belarus was ready to share with Venezuela its experience of creating an integrated defense system.

The president did not give further details on what type of support Belarus could provide to Venezuela's military, but said Venezuela should be able to live peacefully without worrying about potential foreign threats. He did not say what those threats could be.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has reportedly expressed interest in acquiring radar and anti-aircraft missiles from Belarus.

On March 15, as Lukashenka opened his visit to Caracas, Chavez said Venezuela was ready to begin selling 80,000 barrels of oil per day to Belarus beginning May 2010.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

March 16, 2010

Charter'97 office seized by police in Minsk

Some 10 police agents have today seized the apartment rented by Natalia Radzina, the spokeswoman of Charter'97 opposition group. They are confiscating all the office equipment.

Natalia Radzina told the European Radio for Belarus that she was punched in the face when the agents were entering the premises:

Radzina: Police agents entered the apartment. They have a search warrant issued by the Homel Prosecutor's Office. They are confiscating all computers. Since the press center of Charter'97 is located here, they are blocking the operation of our press center. They are taking all... I am not signing any protocols... They entered forcefully and punched me in the face.

Radzina said the search was in the framework of the criminal case over the slander against the former head of the KGB department in Homel Ivan Korzh. The journalist said she never wrote or published stories associated with this man.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

Quotes of Quarter

The director of the Poland-based satellite TV station **AGNIESZKA ROMASZEWSKA-GUZY** stated, as reported by RFE/RL on February 5, 2010 that the arrest and conviction on charges of 'petty hooliganism' of its correspondent Ivan Shulha was

"an attempt to discredit independent journalists in Belarus."

BELARUS ABROAD

Belarusian Opposition Protests in Prague

Prague, Feb. 14 - About 20 young people with historical Belarusian flags and banners featuring opposition representatives Tatiana Shaputska and Auhien Afnahel staged a rally protesting the persecution of democratic youth organizations in Belarus yesterday.

The protest action was staged by the movement "Young Revival" from the Belarusian People's Front that disagrees with policies of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenka.

According to Raman Kavalchuk, chairman of the "Young Revival," young representatives of opposition in Belarus were targets of various types of reprisals and intimidation.

The protesters waved an English-language banner with words **Stop Political Terror and Political Expulsions of Students in Belarus.**



The event expressed solidarity with the rally "I Love Belarus" in Minsk, held by the Young Revival on St Valentine's Day since the 1990s.

The EU has imposed sanctions on Lukashenka's regime in Belarus over its authoritarian practices.

The Czech Republic has been among vocal critics of Lukashenka's regime for years. It has been granting scholarships for Belarusian students, including those disagreeing with the existing regime that has expelled them from universities in Belarus.

Source: ČTK, *Prague Daily Monitor*, 15 February 2010

Excerpts from the distributed leaflet:

We gathered here today to express our strong support of young democratic leaders who are being persecuted by the regime of Alaksandar Lukašenka, Belarus' illegitimate head of state. We defend our nations right for a sovereign country in a free Europe, we defend our language, national identity, traditions and culture, now decimated by Belarus' current authorities.

The **Young Front** organization stages every year on St. Valentine's Day a rally "I love Belarus!" on central avenues of Minsk, Belarus' capital city. Today we are expressing our solidarity with this rally.

In December, 2009 **Tatsyana Shaputska**, deputy chairperson and press secretary of the **Young Front**, was **expelled from the Belarusian State University** due to her participation in the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership in Brussels. This fact is outrageous even considering the usual practice of expelling politically active students from Belarusian universities. The Eastern Partnership is an initiative of the European Union, officially accepted by Belarusian government. Alongside with government institutions, civil society representatives were invited to participate in this initiative.

Auhien Afnahel, one of the leaders of "European Belarus" civil campaign, was **kidnapped by an unknown masked commando on December 6, 2009**. According to him, he was seized by four masked men on Bialinski Street in Minsk in the evening of December 6. He was forced into a white car with tinted windows and taken out of the city; the kidnappers didn't say a word. Auhien Afnahel was forced to sit with his head between his knees and was discharged on a country road few kilometers from Barysau highway.

Recently **KGB men kidnapped youth leaders Zmitser Dashkevich**, chairman of Young Front, **Nasta Palazhanka**, deputy chairperson of Young Front, **Artur Finkevich**, chairman of the movement "Young Belarus" and **Uladzimer Lemiesh**, an activist of "European Belarus" civic campaign.

In all these cases young democratic opposition leaders were kidnapped by unknown masked commandos, using police walkie-talkies.

The young people were taken to the forest, threatened with a simulated execution and ordered to stop their political activities. Then the activists were taken to a place around fifty miles from Minsk and abandoned there.

Kosciuszko Honored in Philadelphia

The American Revolutionary War hero was born in 1747 in the Brest region of Belarus. The first name Tadeusz by which he is known today was actually his second given name. He was originally baptized as Andrej in the Greek Catholic (Uniate) ceremony which was then the prevalent local religion.

The members of the Belarusian community in Philadelphia marked this anniversary at the historic Independence Hall and at the Kosciuszko museum by distributing leaflets about him and the current political situation in Belarus. The event was concluded by a lecture at the local library about the man who is recognized as a notable fighter for freedom in Belarus, Poland and the United States.

Source: Charter97 Press Center, February 9, 2010

Mort Wins 2009 Lannan Literary Award

Valzhyna Mort was born in Minsk, Belarus in 1981. Her first collection, *I'm as Thin as Your Eyelashes*, was published prior to her moving to the U.S. in 2005. Her first US poetry collection is *Factory of Tears* (Copper Canyon Press, 2008), co-translated by the husband-and-wife team of Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Franz Wright. The book has been translated into Swedish and Russian. It is the first Belarusian-English poetry book ever published in the U.S.



There is an urgency and vitality to her poems; the narrative moves within universal themes—lust, loneliness, the strangeness of god, and familial love—while many poems question what language is and challenge the authority that delegates who has the right to speak and how. The *New Yorker* writes, "Mort strives to be an envoy for her native country, writing with almost alarming vociferousness about the struggle to establish a clear identity for Belarus and its language." *Library Journal* described Mort's vision as "visceral, wistful, bittersweet, and dark," and *Midwest Book Review* calls *Factory of Tears* "a one-of-a-kind work of passion and insight." Valzhyna writes in Belarusian at a time when efforts are being made to reestablish the traditional language, after governmental attempts to absorb it into the Russian language have been relinquished. She reads her poems aloud in both Belarusian and English.

The **Lannan Literary Awards and Fellowships** were established in 1989 to honor both established and emerging writers whose work is of exceptional quality. Over the last 20 years, Lannan Foundation, through its Awards and Fellowships program, has awarded 173 writers and poets more than \$13 million. The awards recognize writers who have made significant contributions to English-language literature.

Source: Lannan Foundation Web site
www.lannan.org

Quotes of Quarter

According to the **BELARUS ARMS TRANSFERS ACCOUNTABILITY ACT of 2009**, now under consideration in U.S. Congress:

"Belarus has been a significant supplier of rockets, mortars, anti-tank weapons and mines to Palestinian extremist groups and to state sponsors of terrorism such as Iran and Syria, as well helicopters, artillery systems and armored combat vehicles to Sudan, tanks to North Korea, and military aircraft to Iran."

Belarus Wins Medals In Vancouver

According to News.Az, the biathlon individual races were quite interesting. Norwegian Ole Einar Bjoerndalen and Belarus Syarhey Novikau showed equal time in male contests. Both received silver medals in the result.

The Belarus team won another award, the bronze was taken by biathlon player Darya Domrachava.

Biathlon - Women's 15 km Individual

1. BERGER Tora (Norway)
2. KHRUSTALEVA Elena (Kazakhstan)
3. DOMRACHEVA Darya (Belarus)

Biathlon - Men's 20 km Individual

1. SVENDSEN Emil Hegle (Norway)
2. BJOERNDALLEN Ole Einar (Norway)
2. NOVIKAU Syarhey (Belarus)

Source: www. News Az., February 19, 2010

Aliaksey Hryshyn Wins Olympic Gold

Aliaksey Hryshyn of Belarus held off a powerful Chinese contingent to seal the men's Olympic aerials gold ahead of a charging Jeret Peterson of the United States Thursday.

Hryshyn scored a combined total of 248.41 points in his two jumps on Vancouver's Cypress Mountain to finish just ahead of Peterson, on 247.21. Liu Zhongqing of the strong Chinese team took the bronze with 242.53.

Source: European Radio for Belarus, February 26, 2010



Aliaksey Hryshyn

Russian Tourists Ignorant About Belarus

By Paul Goble

Vienna, January 29 – Minsk tour guides say that nearly 20 years after Belarus acquired its independence, Russian visitors to their country still cannot deal with the reality that Belarus is an independent country and that Belarusians are a separate nation with a separate language, culture, and tradition.

Sergey Plutkevich, a commentator for the Tut.by portal, asked tour guides in his country "what facts from the history of Belarus shock Russian tourists?" Their answers, as summarized on that site this week, suggests just how little Russians understand about their Western neighbors

Anatoly Varavva, who Plutkevich says is "one of the most experienced tour guides of Belarus, said that "almost any fact which you could name when talking about the events which have occurred in our land generates shock among Russian tourists," few of whom are prepared to acknowledge that "our history can be distinguished from the all-Russian" version.

Tatyana Khvagina, the president of the Pinsk section of the Belarusian Association of Tour Guides, says that Russian ignorance about and attitudes toward Belarus and Belarusians had caused her much grief until she realized that the Russians had seldom been told the truth about her country.

She noted that if one looks at the standard Russian reference works, there is nothing about the Grand Principality of Lithuania and consequently, "it turns out that in the consciousness of our neighbors is missing six entire centuries of the Belarusian land!" Without a knowledge of that period, she continued, nothing afterwards makes sense.

Varavva acknowledged that Belarusians do not have a perfect knowledge of Russian history, but he said that unlike the Russians, "our people are much more tolerant," and they never militantly insist on their own point of view," even on such critical issues as the Grand Principality of Lithuania and the war of 1812 in which Belarusians fought on both sides.

But Khvagina said that Russians really get things wrong regarding the history of Belarus: "Many Russian tourists sincerely think that precisely Russian liberated us unhappy Slave from under the centuries-long Polish oppression, exactly the same way that they think about Ukrainians. In fact," she points out, "we are different!"

"We have our own history which has deep roots," she continued. "This isn't something good or bad; it is simply a fact with which others must take into consideration if we want to have good relations." And it is certainly the case that Belarusians have disagreements with the way in which they are treated in Poland and Lithuania."

Excerpts from an article in: Window on Eurasia, January 29, 2010

Thoughts and Observations

Will Belarus Build Its Nuclear Plant?

By David Marples

Over the past three years, there have been numerous discussions about the future Belarusian nuclear power station. Various sites have been studied and canvassed and in December 2008, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka announced that the station would be located in the Astravets district of Hrodna region, some ten miles from the Lithuanian border (EDM, April 20, 2009). However, there are increasing signs, not only that the station will be well behind the planned schedule of completion for the first two reactors (in 2016 and 2018 respectively), but also that it may not be built at all. The confusing reports stem from contradictory signals by the main partners, Belarus and Russia, and particularly from comments made by the Belarusian president.

Last May, Belarus and Russia signed a document on co-operation between the two countries on the peaceful uses of atomic energy. At this time, they agreed to work together to complete the construction of the Belarusian nuclear power plant. Belarusian Deputy Energy Minister, Mikalay Mikhalyuk, reported that an official agreement would be signed by the end of the first quarter of 2010 (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, February 9). Last December, a government commission resolved the question of location, stipulating that the plant would be built near the village of Mikhlishki, 12 miles from Astravets, and that when completed, the station would provide up to 30 percent of Belarus' electricity output (Belapan, March 5).

In some respects, matters appear to be proceeding normally. For example, at a workshop for government officials held in Minsk on February 9, Director of the Department of Nuclear Energy at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Jong Kyun Park, declared that he and his colleagues were ready to assist the Belarusians to build a plant that would reach 2.4 megawatts in capacity (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, February 9). Belarus must now hold discussions about the environmental feasibility of the plant with neighboring countries and Austria, with key talks taking place with the governments of Lithuania and Ukraine, according to Belarusian First Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection, Vital Kulik, in early March (Belapan, March 5).

However, in other respects, total confusion reigns. Noisy demonstrators interrupted talks on the potential environmental impact of the station in Vilnius (www.naviny.by, March 5). Critics note that the Neris River will provide the water supply for the station, which will likely lead to contamination of its waters, thereby threatening the extinction of the river's salmon. They also highlighted that there is no immediate provision for a recycling plant for the reac-

tors' nuclear waste, meaning that the burial of radioactive products will take place very close to the Lithuanian border. Opponents of the plant's construction in Belarus are thus placing their hopes on Lithuania to highlight these potential problems at future meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (The Baltic Course, March 7).

However, it is the partnership with Russia that elicits the most intriguing questions. In late February, Russian government officials attended the ceremonial laying of the first public stone of the Baltic nuclear power plant in Kaliningrad. Moscow is to provide financing for 49 percent of this station, with the rest open to foreign capital. Germany has reportedly expressed interest in becoming an investor. The timetable for the completion of this structure is identical to that proposed for the Astravets station, (completion of the first reactor by 2016 and the second by 2018) (Bellona, March 1). The difference is that construction work is already under way in Kaliningrad, which raises the question as to whether Moscow would be prepared to invest in a second, foreign station, when a domestic one will be completed just as quickly.

On February 25, Mikhalyuk stated that preparatory work on Astravets would entail the expenditure of 350 billion Belarusian rubles (\$119 million). The first houses for workers have been built and a road and railway are under construction. The Belarusians are dependent on support from Russia for this infrastructure, but nothing has been forthcoming from Moscow. No contract has been signed with Atomstroiekспорт, the anticipated Russian builder. Moreover, Aleksandr Surikov, the Russian Ambassador to Belarus, stated that his country was prepared to pay only for buildings at the plant site itself. Everything else must be covered by Minsk (*Belarusy i Rynok*, March 1).

His apparent reticence becomes more readily understandable if one recalls comments made by Lukashenka in late December 2009. The Belarusian president noted that construction of the Astravets plant was hardly in the financial interests of Europe and perhaps not for the Russians either. Instead, "[our] competitors are ready to pay us not to construct it and purchase their energy instead" (*Belarusy i Rynok*, March 1). Could the station then be simply a ruse to gain more loans from Russia, and possibly from Lithuania, which is another likely recipient of nuclear-generated electricity from Kaliningrad? Lukashenka has often demonstrated such wiles in the past, but given the time and expense already invested in Astravets, this would be a major ruse indeed.

Whatever his possible machinations, the fact is that the project is behind schedule, of secondary interest to the main partner, builder, and financier Russia, and raises significant questions and concerns in Lithuania, as well as among the anti-nuclear community in Belarus. Evidently, the community in Astravets would welcome the plethora of new jobs at the plant site, but, who is going to pay them? As yet there are no clear answers.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 49
March 12, 2010

Russia's Partnership with Belarus Hits Turbulence

By Sergei Blagov

Russian relations with its closest ally, Belarus, have reached a new low following a renewed dispute over energy prices and supply terms. The escalating disagreements over Russian oil supplies to Belarus now threaten to reduce shipments to Belarus refineries. Until recently, Russian crude exports to Belarus were delivered duty-free and then Minsk re-exported oil and refined products to Europe at a healthy profit. Now Moscow has concluded that Belarus is gaining far more than it deserves. On January 15, the Russian Federal Customs Service ordered levying full tariffs on crude oil and oil products supplies to Belarus from January 1, 2010. As Russia moved to levy full export tariffs, the price of crude oil increased from \$550 to \$560 per ton in January, or up from \$380 per ton in December 2009. This year, the price of Russian oil products imported by Belarus is also expected to increase by almost 50 percent (Interfax, ITAR-TASS, RIA Novosti, January 15).

Belarus has long been wary of Moscow's insistence on higher prices for Russian energy supplies. There have already been several bitter disagreements between Moscow and Minsk over energy issues. In February 2004, Belarus reluctantly accepted Russian terms of gas supplies following a price dispute with Russian gas monopoly Gazprom.

In January 2007, Lukashenka imposed a new transit duty of \$45 per ton on Russian crude oil exported to Europe, after Moscow imposed a full oil export duty of \$180 per ton on exports of Russian crude to Belarus. Despite their feud, both Russia and Belarus continued supplying oil to Europe. In the same period, Moscow and Minsk signed a three-year oil supply agreement. Moscow pledged to continue supplying oil and related products to Belarus on preferential terms in exchange for promises to levy Russian export tariffs on re-exported oil and oil products. However, Minsk failed to deliver on these pledges and continued lucrative re-export operations. In late 2009, Moscow suggested supplying duty-free 5-6 million tons of crude oil per year to Belarusian refineries, or down from some 20 million tons per year. The remaining 14-15 million tons per year is due to become liable to Russia's full export duty. However, Minsk has been reluctant to accept this offer. Subsequently, the Russian authorities reportedly told the country's oil companies to re-route some oil flows scheduled for Belarus.

Furthermore, Minsk has apparently tried to launch an economic counter-offensive. In early January, the Belarus Power Company Belenergo threatened to cut Russia's electricity transit to Kaliningrad region. Both sides started talks on January 12 and the next round of negotiations are scheduled for January 19.

The Belarusian authorities claimed that the Kremlin back-pedaled on its earlier promises. On January 13, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka sent a letter to President Dmitry Medvedev arguing that the Union State council had

decided on December 10 to sustain duty-free oil supplies to Belarus in the first quarter of 2010. But later, Russia backed out of this deal on oil shipments, according to Lukashenka (Interfax, RIA Novosti, January 13).

Minsk also cited the recent Customs Union agreement to request the continued duty-free supplies of oil and oil products to Belarus. During the summit meeting in Minsk on November 27, Medvedev, Lukashenka and the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed an agreement to launch the Customs Union in 2010. By lifting trade barriers, the Customs Union planned to achieve 15-17 percent growth in GDP for the three states by 2015.

Earlier this month, both countries locked horns over Moscow's restrictions on Belarusian food exports to Russia. Last May, Lukashenka told his government they should no longer try to rely on Russia. On May 29, Lukashenka ordered his government

to end "weeping, bowing and begging" to Russia and urged officials "to seek happiness in another part of the planet."

Lukashenka's strong

rhetoric was apparently sparked by remarks made by the Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, who warned that the Belarusian government could become insolvent by the end of 2009 or in 2010. In response, Lukashenka accused Kudrin of seeking to spread panic in Belarus.

Late last year, Lukashenka voiced fresh doubts about the viability of economic integration with Russia. On November 24, he announced that the Customs Union was largely aimed at strengthening Russia's economic position. He claimed that Moscow had recently started "trade wars" against Belarus because Russian goods were less competitive. He also voiced doubts over whether Belarusian interests were fully respected within the Customs Union. Lukashenka complained that Moscow had declined to annul the export duty levied on crude oil supplied to Belarus.

For several years, cheap Russian energy supplies to Belarus have been instrumental in sustaining Lukashenka's regime, although most of the Union State pledges failed to materialize. The latest energy dispute indicates that Moscow is struggling to sustain its close ties with Minsk.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 18
January 27, 2010

Quotes of Quarter

President **LUKASHENKA** of Belarus (viewed as an international pariah) in order not to create an embarrassing situation for the other presidents attending the inauguration ceremony of Ukrainian President Yanukovich, arriving late and seating himself next to Yanukovich's wife in the audience:

"Sorry...Excuse me... It turns out that there are traffic jams in Kyiv."

The Charter 97 Press Service reported that Lukashenka's 5-year old son who often accompanies his father on foreign visits, sat next to Yanukovich's wife and the Ukrainian president's grandson.

Conscription Used as a Deterrent By Belarusian Government

By David Marples

On December 29, Franak Vyachorka, the son of the former leader of the Belarusian Popular Front Vintsuk Vyachorka, was transferred from his military unit in Mazyr to a hospital after having discovered scabies. He also suffers from high blood pressure. However, although the hospital doctor informed him that he would remain there for several days in order to recover, he was discharged on January 5 and returned to his unit (www.charter97.org, January 6).



Franak Vyachorka

The case of Franak Vyachorka is the most notorious of several enforced conscriptions into the army of former university students, expelled for their political activities. In February 2008, he was expelled from the Belarusian State University, allegedly because he had been absent from some examinations, and had not performed satisfactorily on his re-examination papers. However, as his father pointed out (Correspondence with Jamestown, December 8), he was one of the best students at the university and almost certainly singled out for his political activities. On July 16, 2008, a medical board linked to the military enlistment office of the Savetsky district in Minsk found Franak to be unfit for service on a number of counts. A further examination in September 2008 revealed that he had high blood pressure and he was thus declared unfit for duty (*Vyasna*, July 13, 2009).

However, a regional medical board demanded a further examination, after which a final decision was postponed until March 2009. The military enlistment office in the Savetsky district, nonetheless, held a closed-door session in January 2009 and reversed that verdict, refusing Franak and his lawyer permission to attend the hearing (*Vyasna*, July 13, 2009). On January 16, 2009 plainclothes officials entered the hospital ward where Franak was recuperating, handcuffed and beat him, and took him to the recruitment office. Although his case was appealed, he was again physically assaulted on the street twelve days later, handcuffed, beaten, and taken to his army regiment, air defense unit 48694 in Mazyr (Correspondence with Jamestown, December 8).

Since his enforced conscription, Franak Vyachorka has returned to the hospital three times, most recently suffering from scabies. He has noted on an internet site (Facebook, January 11) that from January 1, 2010, the minimum

food intake for soldiers serving at Mazyr has been sharply reduced, as the region is no longer considered to be a zone suffering from the 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl. According to the Vyasna human rights agency (July 13), Senior Lieutenant Dzianis Kozak has put Franak under pressure because he refused to use the Russian language, and was threatened with criminal punishment as a result. On July 10, 2009, an ensign demanded that he sing in Russian, noting that other soldiers disliked the Belarusian language.

The case is increasingly typical in Belarus, where monitoring of human rights violations is often confined to head counts of political prisoners or the distribution of opposition newspapers (*Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Volya* specifically) at official outlets. Officially, members of opposition youth movements cannot be officially targeted for attending rallies and peaceful demonstrations. The reality is that it occurs all the more frequently. Once a male student is expelled from a higher educational institution, then the next step is conscription into the army, where conditions can quickly be made close to intolerable. That situation is exacerbated when the recruits are physically unfit for service.

In a letter to Jamestown on December 8, Vintsuk Vyachorka highlighted several other cases, including another member of the Belarusian Popular Front, Zmitser Zalezhnichenka, and Ivan Shyla and Zmitser Khvedaruk of the Young Front. Zalezhnichenka, he noted, was the most outstanding student in mathematics at Homel University, but was expelled and became the first to be forcibly conscripted in early 2008. Having finished his service, he now studies in Holland. Shyla, from Salihorsk, the deputy leader of the Young Front's "youth initiative" was forcibly drafted on January 28, 2009 following his own expulsion.

An even more disturbing example provided by the senior Vyachorka is that of Zmitser Fedaruk, another young man with a medical condition, but moreover, a student at a Theological College in Minsk, and thereby exempt from military service according to Belarusian law. On January 28, 2009, however, he was detained and accused of taking part in a rally in May 2008. In itself, this was a further violation of the law stating that administrative sentences no longer apply after a three-month period. He was forced to serve a ten-day prison sentence, then promptly taken to the medical center, declared fit for service, and sent to a unit in Zhodzina.

That expulsions continue to be used as a means of silencing student opposition is demonstrated by the recent case of Tatsiana Shaputska. Also linked are the kidnappings and harassment of youth activists by members of the Special Forces and KGB (EDM, December 16). Recently, the authorities have tried to control access and use of the internet, reportedly instigated by President Alyaskandr Lukashenka, because of a complaint by both the Russian and Belarusian Patriarchs (Kirill and Filaret respectively) regarding the content (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, December 30). Users will not be banned, but made "answerable" for whatever they may write.

Of all the human rights infringements, enforced conscription of medically unfit young men is perhaps the most glaring. Once recruited, they are essentially isolated, and

placed under conditions that threaten both their physical and mental health.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 12, January 19, 2010

Belarusian Crackdown On Polish Minority Puts EU Relations At Risk

Analysts are at a loss as to why Belarusian strongman Alyaksandr Lukashenka would want to jeopardize his quietly budding relationship with the European Union.

By Ahto Lobjakas

BRUSSELS -- The continued Belarusian crackdown against activists from its Polish minority is now likely to be discussed by EU foreign ministers meeting in Brussels next week, officials in Brussels say.

The current standoff between the authoritarian regime in Belarus and the independent leaders of its Polish minority has angered EU member state Poland and is threatening to develop into a serious test of the EU's belief in the redemptive powers of dialogue.

Should it continue, the crackdown could also reverse the rapprochement the EU has carefully nursed with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, dubbed "Europe's last dictator," over the past two years.

The latest controversy began with Minsk sanctioning the arrest of ethnic Polish activists and evicting prominent Polish groups from their headquarters. The incidents prompted Warsaw to intervene last week, provoking a cascade of further protests and the arrests of more than 30 activists from the Union of Poles in Belarus (ZPB), including its chairwoman, Anzhelika Borys. Warsaw has threatened to close its borders to some as-yet-unspecified Belarusian leaders.

The EU finally weighed in on February 16, with Catherine Ashton, the new EU high representative for foreign policy, saying she was "deeply concerned." In a statement, Ashton warned Minsk that the EU's future assistance to Belarus is "conditional on steps towards democratization and upholding human rights, including minority rights, taken by the government of Belarus."

Ashton's spokesman, Lutz Guellner, told reporters in Brussels today that Ashton is now seeking direct contact with Belarusian leaders. Phone conversations could take place as early as "today or over the next couple of days," Guellner said.

Alienation In Hrodna

Well-meaning as it may be, the EU remains literally a thousand miles from the western Belarusian city of Hrodna, which is at the epicenter of the current controversy. There, Belarusian and ethnic Polish residents indicated in interviews with RFE/RL they were concerned by the prospect of new EU sanctions and what many saw as an artifi-

cial dispute stirred for purely political reasons.

One man said Poland's threat to impose travel sanctions was the "correct response." "Our officials' main problem is their lack of responsibility and accountability. If they're stripped of [their travel rights], maybe they'll think twice about what they're doing," he said.

One woman dismissed the depiction popular in Minsk of a country unsettled by an upstart Polish minority, saying relations between Belarusians and ethnic Poles are fine: "I work with many Poles and their attitude toward us, as Belarusians, is very good," she said. "I think the conflict is artificial and specially created by bad people."

Many residents expressed the fear that the controversy would ultimately hurt long-awaited openings to Europe, and by extension, ordinary citizens of Belarus. "It's not beneficial for anyone -- not Poland, not the EU, and mostly not for Belarus," another Hrodna resident said. "But decisions in this republic, in Belarus, are made by one person. Whatever he decides, that's how it'll be."

Alienation runs deep in Belarus, one of Europe's poorest countries, which borders three of the EU's member states -- Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia

Efforts In Warsaw, Brussels

Top EU diplomat Ashton is understood to support Poland's drive to raise the issue at the next EU foreign ministers meeting, which will take place in Brussels on February 22. Speaking on February 16, Ashton likewise tacitly endorsed the credentials of ZPB leader Borys as "democratically elected." In her statement Ashton condemned what she said "appear to be attempts by the authorities to impose a new leadership on the Polish community."

Official Minsk's relations with its 400,000-strong Polish minority have always been tense. In 2005, President Lukashenka accused the Poles of being a "fifth column" bent on destabilizing his regime. Belarus does not officially recognize Borys's ZPB, which promotes the Polish language and cultural traditions, and which Warsaw sees as the sole legal representative of the Polish minority in Belarus. Instead, Minsk has promoted a rival, pro-government Polish body.

Poland has long spearheaded the EU's tentative embrace of Belarus, which saw the country join the bloc's Eastern Partnership last May. An EU travel ban on key government figures had been lifted earlier, in October 2008, and the suspension extended by a year last November despite misgivings in a number of EU countries.

The current crackdown seems to have taken Warsaw by surprise. After inconclusive crisis talks between Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski and his Belarusian opposite number Syarhey Martynau in Warsaw on February 12, Poland threatened to impose its own visa ban on officials held responsible for the anti-Polish measures. A definitive blacklist is yet to emerge, with Warsaw possibly keen to await the results of the EU foreign ministers meeting.

The regime persecutes one Union of Poles, promotes its pro-regime counterpart.

Piotr Kaczynski, an analyst with the Center for European Policy Studies in Brussels, says that Warsaw is continuing to work behind the scenes in a bid to get Belarus to reverse its policy of persecution of independent Polish activists. "What I'm seeing in the news is a clear two-way street -- not a one-way street, a two-way street," he says. "[On the one hand], they [Warsaw] are saying what will happen should this process continue, but they are keeping the back door open, calling on President Lukashenka to change this policy, to undo the mistakes and, [thereby], to return to the course of action which was pretty positive in bringing the EU and Belarus closer together."

Minsk's Motives

Minsk's motives, meanwhile, remain inscrutable. Matzej Plazynski, a Polish senator and the director of Wspolnoty Polskiej, an organization that works with Polish minorities throughout the world, says that "Belarus has tricked Polish diplomacy."

EU Parliament President Jerzy Buzek (left) warned that without democracy, Belarus will not be able to make use of the EU's support.

Analyst Kaczynski says Lukashenka's calculations may conceivably have something to do with the recent electoral victory of the pro-Russian President-elect Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine, or possibly with direct meddling from Moscow. But "it's impossible to see into Lukashenka's head," Kaczynski concludes.

Belarusian political analyst Uladzimir Matskevich says the sudden shift for the worse in Polish-Belarusian relations -- which he describes as "completely not in the interests of the regime" -- may be a reflection of factional infighting within the Belarusian regime. "If one views the regime as some united, monolithic entity that should behave rationally, then no explanation for this conflict with Poland can be found," he says. "However, if one is to postulate that there is some conflict, some competition between forces within the regime, then an explanation does emerge."

Matskevich believes countervailing pro-Polish and pro-Russian interests are vying for dominance in Minsk. If the current escalation of tensions with the EU is followed by personnel changes in the top flights of the Belarusian government, the pro-Polish faction is likely to have gained the upper hand; if not, Matskevich says, it may be that "Lukashenka thinks he's already done enough to normalize relations with Europe."

EU diplomats say the bloc's representatives in Minsk believe Lukashenka personally has authorized the crack-down against the Polish minority.

No Wish To Rock The Boat

Warsaw this week wheeled out its biggest guns in Europe to impress on Minsk the seriousness of the choice it is facing. The president of the European Parliament, Poland's Jerzy Buzek, was in Warsaw on February 16 for a meeting with Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich. After the meeting, Buzek warned that without democracy, Belarus will not be able to make use of the supporting instruments offered to it in the framework of the EU's Neighborhood Policy.

Owing to its democratic deficit, Belarus is currently not eligible for EU neighborhood funds, although the bloc indicated last autumn it may be amenable to allowing Minsk access to some funding on a tentative and conditional basis.

More relevantly, the EU could make it very difficult for the crisis-stricken country to secure further loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Last year, the IMF gave Belarus \$2.2 billion in bridging loans.

While it is assured of general EU backing in the standoff with Lukashenka, Poland itself faces a delicate balancing act. Having expended significant political capital to breathe life into the Eastern Partnership as a counterweight to Russian influence in the region -- and coaxed Belarus into it, as an integral part of the edifice -- Warsaw cannot afford to rock the boat too much.

The credibility of the EU's new member states is also at stake, given their attempts over the past few years to direct EU policy in their neighborhood.

The EU as a whole remains crucially interested in stability on its borders. Denying Belarus emergency financial aid -- or taking other measures that could push Minsk into the arms of Moscow -- would be counterproductive for the entire bloc.

Given all this, as well as the EU's well-established preference for dialogue over conflict, Belarus is unlikely to risk more than a token suspension of its participation in the Eastern Partnership. With the next Eastern Partnership summit scheduled to take place some time in 2011, there is ample time for Lukashenka to undo the damage -- should he feel so inclined.

Source: RFE/RL, February 17, 2010

RFE/RL's Belarus Service contributed to this report

Quotes of Quarter

After the upper house of the obedient Belarusian Parliament unanimously approved some minor changes in the Electoral law on December 18, 2009, the Central Electoral Commission Chairperson **LIDZIYA YARMOSHYNIA** was quoted by Interfax:

"I don't think that any additional changes in the law will take place before the upcoming local elections or the presidential elections in 2011,"

adding, that the changes were not submitted to OSCE, a step she viewed as

'insulting to a sovereign state.'

The freshly inaugurated Ukrainian President **VIKTOR YANUKOVYCH** in a gesture of neighborly political goodwill, at an impromptu meeting with his Belarusian counterpart, stated:

"Our relations have entered a new stage. I haven't forgotten, and won't forget the native land of my forefathers, the Vitsebsk region."

Reported by the Charter 97 Press Center on February 28, 2010.

At Yanukovych's Inauguration: Lukashenka Agreed To be Sidelined

Ukrainian diplomacy with direct participation of the Belarusian side managed to avoid countless unpleasant moments which could have occurred during the ceremony of inauguration of Ukraine's President-elect **Viktor Yanukovych** because of simultaneous participation of **Alyaksandr Lukashenka** and European presidents in the event, AFN reports.

According to Ukrainian mass media, president of Latvia **Valdis Zatlers**, Lithuanian president **Dalia Grybauskaitė**, Polish President **Lech Kaczyński**, Macedonian President **Gjorge Ivanov**, Hungarian President **Laszlo Solym**, Montenegrin President **Filip Vujanovic** arrived for the ceremony.



Presidents Yanukovych and Lukashenka

Lukashenka's presence in this narrow circle is even hard to imagine. A photo of Lukashenka and Kaczyński's handshake would become number one hit worldwide immediately. But thanks to persuasion or personal initiative of the guest, European presidents were delivered from the threat of immediate contact with the Belarusian dictator. Lukashenka has been acting his part in this political play excellently. He was allegedly late for the ceremony, though he arrived to Kyiv the evening before. In his turn, Verkhovna Rada Chairman **Volodymyr Lytvyn** treated the fact as a natural occurrence. Reading the name of Lukashenka in the list of persons invited for the inauguration, he made it clear to everybody that Lukashenka was absent in the audience at that moment.

The Belarusian guest entered the hall a bit later, and in order not to spoil the pleasure of the visitors from viewing the political blockbuster called "Yanukovych as Ukrainian President", he didn't go to his place in the sector for presidents ("Sorry... Excuse me... It turns out that there are traffic jams in Kyiv"). Lukashenka, who had been allowed to take his son Kolya with him, observed the inauguration sitting beside Yanukovych's wife (who was accompanied by her grandson), who is an important political figure of Ukraine as well. What a children's corner...

As a gratitude for the gesture of neighbourly political will, Yanukovych promised to find time in his busy schedule of such a significant day for him, and hold bilateral talks with Lukashenka.

"Our relations have entered a new stage. I am ready to consider jointly all strategic cooperation areas, for neighbourly economic relations between us to develop dynamically. I haven't forgotten, and won't forget the native land of my forefathers, Vitsebsk region," Yanukovych acted his part at the meeting with Lukashenka.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, February 28, 2010

Belarus' Alyaksandr Lukashenka, European Chessmaster

By **Pavol Demeš**

The policy of engagement that replaced the strict isolation of Lukashenka's regime needs to be rethought and recalibrated.

When Aleksander Lukashenka, the authoritarian president of Belarus, began a recent campaign to intimidate and punish members of the country's disobedient Polish community, he opened a new front not only with neighboring Poland, but also with the EU as a whole that must now meet that challenge head on.

Lukashenka knows how to play and is an effective self-made practitioner in international relations. Having ruled with an iron fist over his country of 10 million since 1994, he is one of the longest-serving presidents in Europe and knows very well how to use internal and external conflicts to maintain his rule. As Lukashenka sees it, Belarusians love and need him as the guarantor of nationhood and stability. Despite opposition movements, Russian punishments, EU and U.S. sanctions, and color revolutions around him, he remains comfortably ensconced at his palace while European commissioners, patriarchs, popes, and other presidents have come and gone.

But early 2011 will see a presidential election in Belarus and, in some ways, the campaign has already begun. Of course, it will be a campaign that is specific to Belarus and a select group of other countries of the former Soviet Union, where leaders are hesitant to retire anytime before they die. This type of election campaign is hardly recognizable to voters or politicians in democratic countries where ballots are actually counted.

The chessmaster Lukashenka understands that he is living in an interdependent and multi-polar world hit by an economic crisis, and he will use the time before next year's election to test new means of maintaining power that would allow his five-year-old son Kolya (who accompanies him regularly on his domestic and foreign trips) to continue learning from his powerful father until the time that he will be old enough to lead.

Indeed, the 55-year-old Belarusian president, while shaping his peculiar autocratic regime, has learned a great deal about different mechanisms for controlling his own people and limiting the capacity of the outside world to

influence his power games. The recent attacks by the police on the Union of Poles, a group representing the Polish minority (there are about 400,000 Poles living in Belarus, some loyal to the regime, others not) and their ramifications seem to be part of Lukashenko's skilful pre-election political engineering.

The timing of his Polish crackdown coincides with the pre-presidential elections in Poland and allows him to simultaneously demonstrate his overwhelming power both at home and abroad. Paradoxically, neighboring Poland earlier played a key role in the EU's recent welcoming overtures toward a Belarus that it argued was undertaking political reforms seriously. But the recent persecution of Belarus' Polish minority outraged Polish public opinion; now Poland is engaged in a bitter bilateral diplomatic war and is talking about new sanctions, conditionality, and visa bans. Polish President Lech Kaczynski and two potential presidential candidates - Bronislaw Komorowski, marshal of the Polish Sejm, and Radosław Sikorski, the foreign minister, are all scrambling to find solutions.

They have rightly called upon the institutions of the European Union for help. The EU, which is still working to define individual roles in the post-Lisbon period, reacted quickly. Jerzy Buzek, the new president of the European Parliament, who coincidentally happens to be from Poland, did his European best to answer Lukashenko's challenge by calling for a wider approach that doesn't look only at the issue of the Polish minority. Catherine Ashton, the EU's new high representative for foreign and security policy, said that Belarusian actions "undermined our efforts to strengthen relations between the European Union and Belarus."

Lukashenka is at his chess game again - and winning. Top Western officials are writing him letters, negotiating, and asking him politely to do the things they would like him to do. Fact-finding missions are coming to Belarus to discover what they knew before. While Poland and the EU take the time to consider their next step, Lukashenka is already way ahead of them. Indeed, his plans likely include making a grand display of stopping the attacks and beginning a reconciliation process between Belarusians and Poles. But before he does that, he'll ask for further international financial assistance and other benefits from the very people and institutions who are now asking him to stop persecuting his country's minorities. And when that assistance arrives, he will use it to extend his control over domestic resistance and opposition before the new round of elections early next year.

Lukashenka is a tough chess player who frequently uses forbidden moves (including removing pieces from the board) that throw his domestic and international opponents off-balance. The new EU leaders should recognize that their peculiar neighbor will not respond to standard diplomatic warnings and pressure, does not care about EU membership, and is capable of creating the illusion of success for those who enter into negotiations with him. They must appreciate that he is fully aware of the West's political and economic weaknesses and the increasingly process-driven mentality when it comes to democracy assistance

and the protection of human rights. In short, the policy of engagement that replaced the strict isolation of Lukashenka's regime needs to be rethought and recalibrated.

Instead of watching Lukashenka choose the strategy and create illusions, the attacks on the Polish minority in Belarus and Poland's consequent seeking of European solidarity should help us to rethink our values, commitments, and actions in respect to human rights and democracy, and to come up with real and effective cooperation strategies in this field. If we succeed in European Belarus, we will do much better in other parts of world.

Pavol Demeš is the director of the Central and Eastern Europe program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States

Source: Charter '97 Press Center, March 5, 2010

KGB Gets Unlimited Access To Telephone Companies' Data Bases

The KGB (State Security Committee) and the Operating Analytical Centre (OAC) under Lukashenka's administration are penetrating the cell phone companies by installing special equipment.

Provisions for co-operation between mobile operators with the KGB and the OAC have been rubberstamped by Decree #129 of March 3, 2010.

The KGB of Belarus and the OAC affiliated by **Alyaksandr Lukashenka** (OAC) have received access in on-line mode to databases of Belarusian mobile operators. Notably, penetrating lives of mobile communication subscribers will be carried out at the expense of cell phone companies.

The matter does not concern legalization of the practice when law-enforcing agencies de facto addressed mobile operators for help, but about the KGB and OAC penetration in the work of mobile operators through installation of special equipment.

According to the document, a mobile operator, using his own funds, is supposed to carry out purchase, installation, maintenance support and repair works for supporting electronic surveillance (System for Operational-Investigative Activities, SORM).

If mobile operators acquire new equipment, they must adapt it to SORM facilities.

They will know everything

According to the document, a mobile operator must offer the KGB and the OAC free uninterrupted remote access to databases of clients. This pill can be only sugared by the demand to record such addresses automatically and store this information for 5 years.

If round-the-clock remote access to databases of abonents is technically not feasible, mobile operators are to provide free full and accurate version of these databases in electronic form to the KGB, the Interior Affairs Ministry or the OAC using applications supplied by heads of abovementioned agencies.

Under the document, databases of subscribers must include the following information about them:

Physical persons: a number, name, surname, patronymic, subscriber's address or address of terminal, subscriber's numbers, information enabling to identify the subscriber or his terminal; and for cell phone subscribers – details of the identity document (its name, series, number, date of issue and the name of the state agency that issued the document);

Legal entities: firm's name, its legal address, the address where the terminal is installed, subscriber's numbers, information enabling to identify the subscriber or his terminal.

Source: Charter97 Press Center, March 5, 2010

MEDIA WATCH

From Minsk With Love

Belarus Olympic fans make up for their country's small size with intense passion

By John Mackie

They were easy to spot, because they were all sporting scarlet red Belarus hockey jerseys.

"This is my first [Olympics]," said Kunitski, 27, who hails from Minsk but now lives in New York. "I was dreaming about visiting one, and finally my dream came true. It's [a great] atmosphere. Just being here without being to any events, it's worth coming. And Vancouver is a beautiful city. It's our first day in Vancouver but already I can say it's one of the most beautiful cities I've ever seen."



Pavel Surkau (from left), Pavel Novy, Zmicer Kazak and Ilya Kunitski were enjoying the Vancouver sunshine on Friday. The four are visiting from the U.S. to cheer on Team Belarus during the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Photograph by: Ward Perrin, PNG, Vancouver Sun

"It's nice weather, and people are very friendly," he said. "When they see the sweater they say, 'Go Belarus.' Especially Canadians, they're very nice. It's [the] atmosphere of the Olympic Games, that's what attracts us."

His friend Pavel Novy concurred.

"We just got here this morning, but so far so good," said the 27-year-old, who is also from Minsk and now lives in New Jersey. "We see a lot of people, everybody's friendly. [We] have a lot of expectations about the city and Canada as well. It's actually my first time on [the] West Coast, my first time in Canada and the first time at the Olympics."

The Belarus hockey team was one of the Cinderella stories of the 2002 Olympics, overcoming the odds to advance to the semifinals.

This year's Belarusian team has four players from the NHL: Ruslan Salei, Mikhail Hrabouski, and Andrei and Siarhei Kastitsyn. It was beaten 5-1 by Finland in its first game, but the quartet of fans was undeterred. When the puck drops against Sweden and Germany, they'll be ready to scream their heads off.

Source: Excerpts from Vancouver Sun, February 20, 2010

125 Cities Across the Globe For a Free Belarus

On the night of 18th March 2010 the Young European Federalists (JEF) and numerous global partners protested against Europe's last standing dictatorship on the fourth anniversary of the disputed presidential elections in Belarus. The fifth consecutive "Free Belarus Action" took place in 125 cities on four continents, including cities in almost all European countries, even Belarus!



The Young European Federalists' signature street action saw young people gagging statues and each other and posing with signs reading "Give the people of Belarus a voice" in protest against Lukaschenko's dictatorship, which has left the 10 million Belarusian citizens deprived of fundamental human rights, including the right to free speech.

"Free Belarus means: when Belarus is free from the death penalty, celebrates good human rights, there is freedom of speech for all its citizens, freedom of press and NGOs and a process where the freedom of electing one's leadership in the elections is truly democratic – only then can we speak of a united, strong, and fair Europe," said JEF-Europe President Philippe Adriaenssens.

"Actions speak louder than words," continued Free Belarus Action coordinator Elisabeth Velle, "yet every year we hope it will be the last time we have to organise this action."

"Condemning a regime is not enough. The European Union should do everything in its power to support civil society within the Belarusian borders, make sure that the next general elections are under full observation of election monitors and guarantee the freedom of the press and political opinion. Moreover, it is time that the suspension of sanctions on Lukaschenko and his officials were lifted. Europe must send out the message that its core values do not allow it to silently tolerate human rights violations and that it in no way supports Belarusian dictatorship."

We urge European Commission Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton to foster greater co-operation between Member States and European Institutions, and to assist Europe in releasing the people of Belarus from the dictatorial grip. This way, Belarus can be on its way to join the democracies of Europe," concluded Adriaenssens.

Received from: belarus@jef, Young European Federalists (JEF)

Polish Papers on Belarusian Poles

The Belarusian dictator has no accusations to bring against Poland and Belarusian Poles. He is engaged in war against the entire Belarusian nation.

Today the two leading Polish newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, covered the decision of the court in Valozhyn to hand over the Polish House in Ivyanets to the pro-regime Union of Poles, as well as detentions of **Andzelika Borys** and her supporters, who had been trying to get into the court in Valozhyn.

Gazeta Wyborcza notes that on the day of trial the newspaper of Lukashenka's administration *Sovetskaya Belorussia* published an article with attacks against activists of the independent Union of Poles.

"If they are writing such things, it means that they admit I am a personality dangerous to their regime. Actually, I should be proud of that. But they cannot throw me away. I am a citizen of Belarus, and I haven't even applied for Karta Polaka (Pole's Card). I have a full right to live in this country," Andzelika Borys said commenting on the article.

The author of the item in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, **Waclaw Radziwinowicz**, in his comment to the conflict around the Union of Poles, writes:

"Lukashenka's behaviour might be understandable if he were trying to revive ethnic self-awareness, the language, if he developed the Belarusian culture. In such a case he could fear that the Polish identity is a threat. But it was he who had removed the Belarusian language from schools, he is guiding the nation right back to the Communist past under the flag of Stalin. (...) The picture reminds the early years of the Bolsheviks' rule. Let us recall the history of that time. Bolsheviks started with confiscation and forcible expulsion of dissenters from the country. And let us recall that it got worse and worse as it went on."

Yesterday's issue of *Rzeczpospolita* published an article by **Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy**, a director of Belsat, in which she analyzes the policy of Poland towards Belarus. Speaking about what measures Poland should use in response to the latest events related to the Union of Poles, Romaszewska-Guzy writes:

"It seems to me that a ban for crossing the border of Poland for persons that are enmeshed in repression, and not only repressions against the Polish minority but in human rights violations, is a good direction of action. It is possible that Poland should offer imposing a ban for entering the entire Schengen zone for such persons"

Source: Excerpts from Charter97 Press Center, 18 February, 2010.

Russia and Belarus Settle Oil Supply Spat

By Isabel Gorst in Moscow

Russia has settled a spat with Belarus about oil supplies and transit that had threatened to increase the price of oil it delivers to Europe.

The two countries have been locked in a dispute since last month over the export duties Belarus pays Russia for oil supplies and the transit fees it charges for transporting Russian oil exports through its pipelines to Europe.

Belarus had threatened to raise oil transit fees if Russia went ahead with a plan to increase export duties.

Igor Sechin, Russia's deputy prime minister and Vladimir Semashko, Belarus' first deputy prime minister, signed a package of agreements on Wednesday settling the dispute.

Talks between the two sides have repeatedly broken down during the past month leading to a brief interruption in Russian oil deliveries to Belarusian refineries early this year that contributed to a rise in oil prices.

Russia has repeatedly clashed with its neighbours over oil prices and transit as it moves to end preferential energy trading terms that date back to the Soviet era.

Europe, mindful of disputes that have disrupted Russian oil and gas supplies in the past three years, is eager for former Soviet countries to resolve their differences.

Source: Excerpts from *Financial Times*, January 28, 2010

No Pro-Russian Party In Belarus, Russian Analyst Says

By Paul Goble

Not a single political party in Belarus regardless of whether it supports President Alexander Lukashenko can be described as pro-Russian, an indication of what the political elite in that country feels and what it assumes will attract the support of the Belarusian people, according to a Moscow analyst Alexander Avrukevich.

Instead, "the most active political parties and their leaders [in Belarus] have quite clearly shown that the chief goal of their foreign policy if they come to power is joining the European Union, escaping Russia's sphere of influence, and the reduction of the role of the Russian language."

In fact, he continues, "the only [in his view] positive thing that certain of the opposition political parties would seek would be cooperation with Russia in the sphere of international trade," hardly support for Slavic unity Russians would like to see

Because Lukashenko dominates the political system, neither the government nor the opposition parties play a great role at least at present. But that does not mean that their programs should be ignored because those provide important clues on what the leaders of these groups believe and think other Belarusians want.

At present, Avrukevich says, there are six opposition parties: the Party of the Belarusian National Front, the Conservative Christian Party –BNF, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hromada), the Belarusian Social Democratic Hromada, the Belarusian Party of the Left, and the Unified Civil Party.

Avrukevich examines the program of each and then offers this summation: "The majority of the opposition parties either calls for weakening political ties with Russia by

joining the European Union and the formation of a political and economic union with the Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine on the basis of the commonality of their interests and cultural closeness."

"Or," he continues, these parties, "stress the utility of cooperation with Russia as along as independence is preserved." Some of them call for stripping Russian of its status as a state language in Belarus, and "they give priority to the Belarusian language as the symbol of Belarusian nationality."

The pro-government parties include the Belarusian Agrarian Party, the Republic Party of Labor and Justice, the Belarusian Patriotic Party, the Communist Party, the Belarusian Social-Sports Party and the Republican Party. Not surprisingly, they say less than the others about foreign policy, Avrukevich says, but what they do say is important.

In general, they support integration of the former Soviet space "not so much via reunification with Russia" as by means of "projects for the restoration of the USSR," something so unlikely and "utopian" that it is clearly not intended to be taken entirely seriously by anyone in Belarus and their silence on the status of Russian is deafening, Avrukevich implies.

Obviously, as a Russian nationalist himself, the Moscow analyst is not pleased by any of this. Neither are some of his readers. Among those commenting already was someone who identified himself as "Patriot" and said that Avrukevich's findings show that Moscow is already "losing Belarus just as it has practically lost Ukraine."

And another reader, "Vlad," said that these party programs show that "if the local [Belarusian] democrats come to power after Lukashenka, then Belarus will go down the Ukrainian path: the people will divide on the basis of language and relations with Russia, and the economy will be radically privatized and so on."

Excerpts from an article in: Window on Eurasia, 4 March, 2010

LETTERS

This time, it is a Letter from the Editor - to the readers

Neighbors with a Common Past

Recently I came across the October 2009 issue of *ARCHE*, a well-known Belarusian socio-political magazine. This particular issue was devoted to Lithuania, Belarus' neighbor to northwest and was entitled **1000 Years Together**. It contained a number of articles by Lithuanian historians, most of them describing various aspects of the common past of Belarus and Lithuania.

I was born and grew up in Vilnia that now as Vilnius is a part of present-day Lithuania. I maintained lifelong interest in the region, thus I am well acquainted with the ethnic issues peculiar to this part of Europe..

Yes, our peoples, the Belarusians and the present-day Lithuanians (a Baltic ethnic group) have lived almost 1000

years together, inhabiting the medieval state of *Grand Duchy of Lithuania* (the Latin name, or *Litva*, as Belarusians call it, or *Lietuva* as do the Lithuanians.).

Yet, the heritage of the historical *Grand Duchy of Litva* (abbreviated as **GDL**) is now interpreted by each nation differently.

The **modern Lithuanian state** presents itself as the *sole legal successor to the GDL*. According to the current Lithuanian constitution, the Lithuanian nation created the *State of Lithuania many centuries ago*, and has based its legal foundation on the (medieval) Lithuanian Statutes. This implies that *both the medieval GDL and modern Lithuanian Republic are to be regarded as Lithuanian nation-states*.

This view is now generally accepted by the international community -- by scholars as well as by politicians. For the present-day average Lithuanians this interpretation of GDL's heritage has served to provide them with a historical past they may be proud of.

According to this simplified and romanticized version of history, the brave Baltic warriors managed to conquer the much more numerous neighboring Slavic tribes, and establish an empire, extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

The **Belarusian interpretation** of the GDL's heritage is based on a different aspect, primarily on the pre-dominance of the Belarusian culture (known at that time as Ruthenian) and language in the historical Lithuania (*Litva*). First of all, the medieval Lithuanian Statutes, referred-to in the current Lithuanian constitution, were written in Old Belarusian, as were practically all of the GDL's official documents.

This Belarus-oriented view of the GDL history had much less opportunity to become known and disseminated, primarily because for a long time it contradicted the official Russian and later Soviet position that promoted the Baltic conquest theory, mainly for political reasons.

This position dates back to the late Middle ages, when Russia (then known as Muscovy) embarked on "liberating" their Orthodox brothers, Belarusians and Ukrainians from the influence of Rome and from the at first pagan and later Roman Catholic "Lithuanian yoke". Since that time Moscow has found it politically convenient to promote the Baltic version of describing the GDL heritage and Moscow's role in the region.

Belarusian historians have long disputed this theory, and more recently, at the end of the 20th century, did a solid group of Belarusian nationally-oriented researchers emerge that has undertaken the neglected task of questioning the theory of Baltic conquest. Their research has provided valuable insight into some less frequently analyzed aspects of the GDL heritage issue.

For instance, historian Paul Urban in his work "**Ancient Litvians (Licviny) - their language, origin and ethnicity**" points out that Baltic-sounding names of some of GDL founders, do not necessarily confirm their Baltic origin. He, as well as other researchers trace the origin of all ancient Belarusian tribes to the southern shores of the Baltic Sea, from which they migrated to the territory of present-day Belarus and assimilated or mixed with the original Baltic substrate. According to Urban, Baltic-sounding or similar names were commonly used by Slavic tribes that

inhabited the present northern Germany. Besides, many of the GDL founders were also known by their Slavic, Orthodox names.

Another well-known and very prolific researcher, Mikola Yermalovich, traced the original geographic location of *Litva* to the upper reaches of the river Nioman in western Belarus. He pointed out that there are six villages named *Litva* in this region, and yet none in the ethnic Baltic regions of the former GDL.

I may add another observation concerning the use of Old Belarusian in the official documents of the GDL. According to the proponents of the Baltic conquest theory, the usage of Old Belarusian was confined to the Grand Duke's office, since at that time there existed only two traditional written languages; Latin and Old Belarusian, referred-to as Slavonic in their works. This would imply that Old Belarusian/Ruthenian was not being used by the common folk of the GDL.

This claim was contradicted by the early 20th century discovery of a Muslim holy book *Al-Kitab* written in the 16th century by the linguistically assimilated Tatars living in the GDL. It was written in the Belarusian vernacular of that time, in Arabic script. By using Arabic script, altered slightly to reflect Belarusian phonetic features, the language of *Al-Kitab* expressed these linguistic features better than official Cyrillic texts of that time, and revealed a surprising similarity of the Old Belarusian vernacular to today's Belarusian.

Belarusian Review, in its Winter 2002 issue, re-printed an article from the *Encyclopedia of the Belarusian Language* entitled **Kitabs, the Unique Phenomenon of the Belarusian language**.

The October 2009 issue of *ARCHE* provided a valuable forum for translated contributions by contemporary Lithuanian historians. It essentially represented a gesture of goodwill on part of this Belarusian publication. Most of the articles contained in the issue present the GDL heritage from the modern Lithuanian point of view -- not flatly denying the Belarusian arguments -- but rather treating them as minor, less important facts, often "produced by academically unqualified researchers." As a result, they do not question the role of the Baltic ethnoses in forming and later governing the GDL, treating it as "universally accepted."

In concluding, I feel that it would benefit the furthering of knowledge about the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for a Lithuanian publication to publish Lithuanian translations of articles by Belarusian historians. Reciprocating the initial goodwill gesture by *ARCHE*, such a step would acquaint the Lithuanian readers with the views of their Belarusian neighbors.

Eventually, once translated into English, this scientific historical exchange may attract even some Western scholars to explore this interesting subject. Expressing myself this way, I hope to bring our international readers on board in learning more about the convoluted history of Eastern Europe.

George Stankevich

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