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EDITORIAL

Lukashenka Facing A New Dilemma

By Joe Arciuch, Editor-at-Large

On the eve of upcoming presidential elections, set for December 19, the president of Belarus has a plate full of problems he needs to address. The most immediate decision is whether again to seek reelection. If he decides to run, then he would need to consider other elements, those relating to the outside world—primarily Russia, the European Union and the United States, to have them factored into, improving his odds.

In the past, Lukashenka didn't have to worry about such mundane things as fair elections and Western standards. All the previous elections and referenda, except for the 1994 presidential one, were rigged, leading the West to declare each of them illegitimate. But as long as Russia continued both to recognize those elections and to subsidize Belarus' economy with loans and cheap energy supplies, he could afford to ignore the West's concerns.

Lukashenka started to lose ground when Vladimir Putin came to power and in 2000 proposed that Belarus be integrated into the Russian Federation. Lukashenka saw in this the end to his long-coveted goal of occupying the Kremlin throne. Since then, to humble Lukashenka, the Kremlin applied ever more pressure on Belarus by increasing prices on Russian gas and oil supplies; demanding that Belarus sell gas pipelines to Russia; declaring a boycott on Belarusian farm products; and, finally, reportedly exposing him to a snub from President Medvedev at the August CSTO summit in Yerevan.

The last straw was the Kremlin's decision terminating its aid to Belarus to punish Lukashenka for his switch of attention to the European Union and joining the EU's Eastern Partnership program.

Lukashenka countered Russia's pressure tactics by telling the Kremlin he wouldn't recognize the so-called "independence" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And, last June, he sent an open letter to the Russian newspaper *Pravda of the Communist Party* in which he accused the Russian leadership of "assessing the fraternal ties in cubic meters of gas and barrels of oil." Also in June, in an interview with CNN, Lukashenka complained about relentless Russian pressure while praising Venezuela, Iran, and several North African and Middle East countries, including Israel, as friends of Belarus. In particular, he extolled China for helping Belarus by opening credit lines and promoting Belarus' economic development.

In July, Belarus' First TV Channel aired a 15-minute interview with Georgia's President Saakashvili. The Kremlin considered this an insult and Russia's NTV, owned by Gazprom, broadcast two consecutive film pieces of highly unfriendly documentaries portraying Lukashenka as a brutal, election-rigging, and opposition-repressing tyrant.

The Russian invasion of Georgia served as a wake-up call that Belarus might be Russia's next target. And the election in Ukraine of the Kremlin's best friend, Viktor Yanukovich, served as yet another proof of what Russia can do to manipulate presidential elections, including those in Belarus.

According to some reports, a search is underway by the Kremlin for pro-Russian presidential candidates from among the Belarusian opposition to run against Lukashenka. In fact, several Belarusian opposition leaders traveled to Moscow last June, where they met informally with Russian officials including the finance minister and members of Mr. Putin's United Russia party. This tactic also would apply in the event Lukashenka chooses not to run or something happens to him, in that way elbowing any possible Western-supported candidate out of the way. Russia used this approach successfully in the recent Ukrainian presidential elections mentioned above.

At this writing, there is no statement from Lukashenka as to whether he will run. Of course, he still may decide to do so — and win through his well-known mastery of organizing election fraud. Of course, this scenario would also serve to reveal yet again the long-standing impotence of the West to effect change in Belarus through existing policies.

However, given Russia's refusal to continue subsidizing the country, Lukashenka has been forced to turn to the West for political and economic support to help Belarus survive as an independent, sovereign country—and himself to continue as president. To gain the West's support, Lukashenka went along with some of the changes to the electoral code recommended by the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), as confirmed recently by the head of the Central Election Commission. She said she expects the West to "recognize" the upcoming presidential elections. . So it's quite possible Lukashenka will take advantage of the upgraded model to improve his chances for getting a passing grade, one that will help extend his 17-year tenure by another five years. (His current term expires on April 6, 2011.)

Another possibility: Lukashenka may decline or otherwise be unable to run. This, of course, would make the opposition and the West very happy but also create a messy situation characteristic to all democratic elections. And, as noted above, it would also open the door to even greater Russian machinations, *a la* Ukraine.

There is a lot of talk within the opposition about fielding a single candidate but it's doubtful an agreement will be reached. One thing is certain: a bitter competition between Russia and the West, each supporting the candidates of their choice. And equally certain is the fact that if Lukashenka chooses to run he holds all the rigging levers for achieving "success."

In his comments to reporters on August 3, Lukashenka said that while the U.S. position toward Belarus remains steady, Russia's has changed, with Moscow trying to pre-

vent Belarus from slipping out of the Bear's claws. Regarding Belarus-US relations, he said Belarus is ready for a dialog and eager to normalize those relations. He cautioned, though, that the U.S. (and Russia) will fail if they insist on democratization and reforms in Belarus as a precondition to the dialog.

The West is watching with interest this war. And despite the fact that Lukashenka is called Europe's "last dictator," EU's sympathies are still on his side. It appears that Lukashenka knows that. In the final analysis, if it comes making a choice between Moscow and Minsk, we think Europe will give preference to Minsk.

It will be quite interesting to watch the campaign and election process in this presidential election in Belarus. Regardless of whether Lukashenka runs or not, the competition between the West and Russia will be in full swing to have their preferred candidates elected. Our preference, of course, is for candidates leaning West so that Belarus will sooner rather than later become a member of the European community of democratic states.

From the Publisher

The Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) is comprised of 18 national membership organizations representing 20 million Americans with roots in that part of the world. The Belarusian-American community is represented in CEEC by the Belarusian-American Association (BAZA). Alice Kipel, a member of BAZA's National Headquarters who resides in Washington, DC is an active CEEC board member.

CEEC recently held its Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill informing Senators and Representatives about issues of concern to the region. The main among these were security and visa issues, Russia's undue influence and the need for U.S. continued assistance and interest in promoting democracy in the region. Our substantial delegation from a number of states stressed the need for greater media support, especially for BelSat telecasts and for increased inclusion of Belarusian participants in various student and cultural exchange programs. The latest issues of *Belarusian Review* were given out.

Our publication plays an important role in advocating Belarus' interests. In that regard it is immeasurably helped by our regular subscribers, and in particular by those who provide larger contributions or gift subscriptions.

So far this year our honor roll includes these contributors:

Anatol Lukjanczuk, Alice Kipel, Alla Orsa Romano, Nicholas Sniezko, Thomas Bird, Karnela Najdziuk, Eugene Kazan, John Shybut, Olga Wilson, Jan Zaprudnik.

DID YOU RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

FEATURES

Lukashenka Needs To Feel EU's power

By Pavol Demes

We should be prepared for the fact that Lukashenka will be defeated as well. Belarus and the Belarusians are changing.

Due to ongoing and serious violations of human rights committed by the Lukashenka regime, in April 2010 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe decided to suspend high-level contacts with the authorities in Belarus. This decision reinforced the conclusion that the European Union's previous policy of engagement with President Aleksandr Lukashenka had failed to lead to liberalization of his autocratic regime or real cooperation with the community of democracies. That policy of engagement was launched almost two years ago, in 2008, when European Union leaders, responding to the release of internationally recognized political prisoners, suspended sanctions imposed against key figures in Minsk. Member states, together with the new post-Lisbon EU representatives, will review their policy toward Belarus in the fall of 2010, but most observers doubt they will re-introduce strict conditionality toward the Belarusian regime.



Dr. Pavol Demes

As a result, Lukashenka will continue bluffing and benefiting in the absence of a coherent, effective EU policy. Meanwhile, the 10 million people of this post-Soviet nation will continue to suffer under Europe's last dictator and will lose faith in receiving solidarity and support from the family of Western democracies.

The Sustainability of the Power of Alyaksandr Lukashenka

The departure from office of the 55-year-old Belarusian leader has been predicted many times during his 16-year presidency. In spite of growing domestic opposition, sanctions by the West, and pressure from his former patron and sponsor, Russia, Lukashenka is still fit and in full control of his peculiar self-centered regime.

To rule, he doesn't need a political party; instead he employs a police network, a government, and a parliament

that are mere instruments in his hands. Ask the average Belarusian who is the country's prime minister or speaker of the parliament, and you're likely to get a blank stare. Flagrant legal changes allow Lukashenka to remain at the top of the power structure indefinitely while he governs via a huge ideological machine and a fear-based system of control over the country's social, economic, and political life. Any attempts to challenge his power are crushed; his opponents are removed from their positions, beaten, imprisoned, their reputations ruined – and a decade ago, some even “disappeared.”

This self-confident “orthodox atheist” is not afraid of violating even traditional moral rules by putting his two grown sons in important positions and allowing his six-year-old illegitimate son (the child's mother is carefully hidden from the public) to accompany him at state functions, including military parades where he wears the uniform like his proud father, and on foreign official visits (including the Vatican last year and a meeting with the Pope).

Among the most intriguing aspects of Lukashenka's regime are the country's elections, whether local, parliamentary, or presidential. Although elections are held, they are under the control and direction of the president who created the myth and state ideology that only he is capable of guaranteeing stability, order, independence, and the well-being of Belarusians.

He simply does not care about international electoral standards or criticism from foreign bodies. The bizarre, almost ritualized electoral system characterized by large-scale manipulation and cheating has reached a point that leads one to wonder why he even bothers with elections, particularly at the presidential level. They are a charade but serve to keep Lukashenka's state machinery in permanent alert, allow him to maintain control, and keep elected bodies clean of critics. And since the people hear about elections in other nearby countries, he probably feels a need to satisfy his nation by imitating free choice.

The April 2010 local elections were a farce, revealing yet again the lawlessness in Belarus. The upcoming presidential elections, which should take place at the end of this year or the beginning of 2011 (depending on Lukashenka's mood) are already exhibiting familiar features — intimidation and arrests of journalists and civil society leaders, violent disruption of peaceful demonstrations, manipulated court cases, etc. Every candidate who decides to challenge the “father of the nation” in his re-confirmation game must be ready to pay a serious price — harassment, physical attack, even imprisonment. So far there are about ten Belarusians who have announced their candidacy for this dangerous electoral roulette at a time when Lukashenka stands ready to “serve” a fifth term while grooming his little son Kolya to one day succeed him.

The Sophistication of Lukashenka's International Game

One can hardly deny that Lukashenka is a master of manipulation not only within his motherland but also in the international arena. Not surprisingly, the key objective of his foreign policy is to maintain and prolong his own domestic power.

The logic of Belarusian foreign policy is simple: Those who help Lukashenka maintain his power benefit from it; those who do not are ignored or pay a price, whether they are his own people or foreigners.

Lukashenka evolved from being a strong critic of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and propagator of the concept of unity with Russia to being a decisive fighter for Belarusian independence, particularly when he learned that the “big brother” might not guarantee his long-term future. Although Belarus was the only country excluded from the Council of Europe (in 1997) due to its autocratic political system, it has been better off economically and socially than other post-Soviet countries, enabling Lukashenka to remain popular among a fairly large segment of the population (though truly how large is virtually impossible to determine).

To his credit, Lukashenka has come to understand quite well how to adjust to today's multipolar world. Paradoxically he has managed to turn current geopolitical shifts, including the world economic crisis, to his benefit, stressing the stability and security of Belarus in comparison with other countries.

He sees that the formerly self-confident and powerful West is today preoccupied with multiple challenges, and he has rightly concluded that democratization in Europe's east is much less prominent on the EU's agenda than it was before. With some justification, he argues that democratic breakthroughs in some countries of the post-Soviet space did not bring more prosperity or clear prospects for joining European structures. He also sees that the newly assertive Russia has changed, is faced with its own challenges, and is not so “sincere and brotherly” as before.

As the biggest landlord able to single-handedly offer lucrative deals, Lukashenka is skillfully balancing between the two integration spaces — the EU and the Russian post-Soviet-space reunification project. At the same time, he has practically frozen diplomatic and many other ties with the United States, which, unlike the EU, has kept most of its sanction policy in place. (In fact, the Obama administration announced on June 8 its continuation of sanctions originally imposed in 2006.)

To show his independence and self-confidence, and to compensate for some losses in the European and Russian markets, during the last few years Lukashenka has started to reach out to distant fellow autocratic regimes, especially energy-rich ones, with Venezuela and Iran at the top of his list. He even is willing to explore possible economic cooperation with countries in the Middle East and China. Even if these countries are geographically and culturally distant, the Belarusian leader appreciates that they never link progress on human rights or shared history to business deals.

Belarus as a Challenge for the EU

There is no doubt that Belarus poses a special challenge for EU policymakers, both on the European and the national levels.

Even with the wealth of experience with democratization and integration of the post-communist nations to the EU, Lukashenka's Belarus is a unique case that reveals

long-term resistance to Western conditionality and the “sticks and carrots” game.

Hoped-for improvements in finding more effective democratization policies toward Belarus, particularly through listening more to the new member states, did not materialize. Lukashenka’s machinery was also able to neutralize any spillover effects from democratic development from three neighboring new EU members — Poland, Lithuania, Latvia — and from Ukraine, with which Belarus has a shared history and numerous people-to-people contacts.

This long stagnation led EU policymakers to their controversial decision in the last two years to open up dialogue with “Europe’s last dictator,” believing that if exposed to growing pressure from an assertive Russia and an economic crisis, Lukashenka might in return start a liberalization process and open Belarus to closer economic and political cooperation with the West. In the meantime, the EU has undergone profound changes as a result of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and its own financial turbulence. Its new foreign policy chief is looking to consolidate its external relations and open up opportunities for Europe to act in a globalized world and its immediate neighborhood in particular. In September–October 2010, EU leaders will review any progress made by Belarus and decide which steps to take toward this rather peculiar member of the Eastern Partnership program during its increasingly repressive pre-presidential-election period.

The main arguments of prevailing skeptics of possible changes of “the Lukashizm” are as follows:

1) The position of Belarus in the European architecture. In the minds of those favoring continuation of current policy, this young, mid-sized post-Soviet country, even if governed with an iron fist and suffering from significant international isolation, shows relative prosperity and stability and does not pose significant threats to the EU or the region. It is important to the EU as a transitional route for Russian energy products and for its potential for state-controlled companies that are bound to be privatized in one form or another due to Belarus’ unsustainable centralized economic model.

If one compares the state of integration of Belarus in Western versus Russian-dominated structures two decades after the collapse of Berlin Wall and subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, the picture is quite clear: Belarus has very few links to European and transatlantic institutions but is a member of the Russian-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States, Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Community — and its becoming part of a free trade zone is under consideration. Russia for sure has more ways and willingness to influence Belarus’ future than the West in both the very near and the longer-term future.

2) The transatlantic divide and the lack of coherence in policy. For many years, the EU and the United States had similar positions toward the Belarus regime — sanctions and isolation due to the violation of human rights and the lack of political freedoms. However, during the last two

years, this transatlantic commitment and unity was terminated. Although sanctions and low-level diplomatic contacts remain in force even after the change of leadership in the American White House, the United States’ reset policy toward Russia is carefully taking into consideration any steps in its neighborhood. Those advocating for democracy and human rights are having a harder time convincing the new U.S. leadership to pay more attention to this isolated East European country.

On the other hand, the EU lowered its standards when it suspended its sanctions policy and reopened a more intensified dialogue with Lukashenka on the political and economic level, claiming that isolation of the autocratic regime failed to produce democratic change and even risked costing Belarus its sovereignty. Accordingly, the EU has adjusted to the situation in Belarus and sees little prospect for change in its policy in the near future. Realists in Brussels’ corridors claim that a return to the policy of isolation and sanctions is less likely than continued engagement in spite of the current level of repression and abuse of human rights in Belarus. In light of the U.S. decision to continue sanctions, the EU’s position significantly reduces the odds of a joint transatlantic approach to democratic reforms in Belarus.

Risks and Hopes

It seems that pragmatism and realpolitik are winning at the moment over values-driven approaches in EU policy toward Belarus, while Lukashenka’s power game continues eroding the EU’s self-esteem. He is very well aware of the complicated procedural nature and internal problems of the EU and was not particularly shaken by the post-Lisbon proclamations that the EU would become a “more capable, more coherent and more

strategic global actor.” In spite of the shifts in policy in his favor and high-level handshakes from various European figures, Lukashenka openly criticizes the

EU, including its Eastern Partnership program, for not doing even more; meanwhile, he ignores diplomatic messages related to his behavior and the new wave of repression toward the media and civil society groups.

If the EU, the largest union in the world, is serious about its commitments and political and economic weight, it should become more serious and stop playing this asymmetric game controlled by one man. It should do this in closer cooperation with the United States. It should stop claiming that it has no alternative but to allow Lukashenka to ski in Europe’s resorts, legitimize him in front of his scared population, and give him financial and other assistance to prolong his autocratic regime.

It would be more than a moral hazard if EU leaders were to decide this fall to essentially accept Lukashenka’s increased brutality as the cost of doing business. If EU leaders could focus on using their power effectively, rather than pointing to their own weaknesses, there is a good chance that the largest union in the world would be able to adjust its policy and come out with more uplifting approaches toward its small Eastern neighbor.

It seems that pragmatism and realpolitik are winning at the moment over values-driven approaches in the EU’s policy towards Belarus.

The upcoming presidential election period in Belarus, connected with a re-evaluation of EU engagement policy, offers numerous incentives and instruments for reintroducing strict conditionality toward Lukashenka's regime. Will the EU rise to the occasion? "It seems that pragmatism and realpolitik are winning at the moment over values-driven approaches in the EU's policy towards Belarus."

We should remind ourselves of what worked in stopping similar autocrats during the last two decades, including the seemingly omnipotent Slobodan Milosevic, whose defeat ten years ago will be commemorated this fall. In all cases, brave local people, who were fed up with endless lies and manipulation, received foreign diplomatic, political, moral, material, and financial support to help rid them of their nefarious manipulators. In all democratic breakthroughs in Central and Eastern Europe over the last 20 years, it came as a surprise for the West that these autocrats were defeated.

We should be prepared for the fact that Lukashenka will be defeated as well. Belarus and the Belarusians are changing.

For two decades, Belarus has continued to emerge as an independent country. That independence is increasingly beyond doubt, and now Belarusians have started asking the question of what kind of Belarus they want to live in. This will make it increasingly more difficult for Lukashenka to keep his people calm and resigned to a fate that has him staying at the top.

We should be prepared for the fact that Lukashenka will be defeated as well. Belarus and the Belarusians are changing.

The opposition is far less weak than it seems on the surface. Lukashenka, supported until recently by Russia, has simply adjusted his environment much more brutally than have other autocrats in this part of the world. The courage and resistance of countless Belarusians should give us hope, and demand from us that we encourage and support those working to liberalize Belarus and end its self-imposed isolation. It is unlikely that Lukashenka's departure from power will take place via a standard electoral process. He is too scared to let that happen and lose. And for good reasons.

Domestic dissatisfaction is growing, and Russia is losing patience with his arrogant behavior. The names of current nationwide civic movements in Belarus contain words like "freedom," "Europe," and "truth" (among them are the Movement for Freedom, the opposition group European Belarus, and the Tell the Truth! campaign). One can only speculate, but the fate of Lukashenka's Kyrgyz comrade Kurmanbek Bakiyev, to whom he provided asylum recently, provides an interesting scenario for the future destiny of such abusers of power.

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

Source: gmfus.org. Website of the German Marshall Fund of the United States,

Ambassador Kelly on Human Rights in Belarus

U.S. urges Belarus to review its laws and comply with OSCE commitments

United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement regarding Human Rights in Belarus

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Ian Kelly to the Permanent Council, Vienna, July 13, 2010

The United States notes with serious concern continued acts of suppression and intimidation aimed at independent media and political opposition figures in Belarus. After some notable improvements in late 2008, we regret that in the period since there has been a litany of continuing violations of OSCE commitments.

Of most serious recent concern are the following events:

- A member of the group Maladaya Belarus (Young Belarus), Artur Finkevich, was attacked on July 8 shortly after leaving the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, while a companion accompanying him was left alone. He was sprayed in the face with an unknown liquid, punched and dragged to the ground. The attackers took his laptop, mobile phone, thumb drives, keys, passport, and wallet. Finkevich was scheduled to leave this past weekend on a U.S. State Department-sponsored exchange program to the U.S. He was unable to travel due to the theft of his passport.

- Belarusian authorities have warned at least two Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalists that they are "working illegally" in Belarus. They allegedly exceed the Government's quota on RFE/RL, a quota that violates Belarus's OSCE commitments to allow for a pluralistic and free media in Belarus.

- On July 9, 2010, opposition Party member Vital Kavalenka was jailed for five days along with his brother to prevent them from attending a festival which featured President Lukashenka at its opening ceremony.

- Print runs of two independent newspapers, *Volny Horad* and *Nasha Niva*, were blocked from distribution this past week, apparently because of the publication of articles on a Russian documentary implicating President Lukashenka in the disappearances of his political opponents.

- Police interfered with a July 9 meeting between two leaders of the "unofficial" Union of Poles in Belarus, Anzelika Orechva and Andrei Pachobut, by detaining them for more than an hour and searching their car for firearms while they were en route to a meeting with the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Stefan Fule.

- The editor of the Charter 97.org website, Nataliya Radzina, was interrogated for at least the fourth time since March, when her home and office were raided.

- Minsk police searched the car of activist Mikhas Bashura and again confiscated petitions intended to honor the writer Vasil Bykaw by naming streets in Minsk and Hrodna after him.

The GOB still has failed to remove Article 193 from its Criminal Code, which dictates jail time for any activity on behalf of unregistered public organization, including religious organizations, and thus legitimizes the state's prosecution of activities by unregistered groups. These incidents are but a few of many that indicate a systematic increase in the suppression and intimidation of independent media and political opposition in Belarus.

We continue to urge the Government of Belarus to review its laws regarding mass media, freedom of assembly and association, and political-party pluralism, as well as their implementation, to bring them into compliance with the OSCE commitments that Belarus freely adopted. In accordance with our OSCE commitments, we stand ready to work with the Government of Belarus in this endeavor.

Source: <http://osce.usmission.gov/july-2010>

ECONOMY

Belarus and Russia Escalate Latest 'Gas War'

By Breffni O'Rourke

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka of Belarus says he has ordered a halt to all transit deliveries of Russian gas to Europe, in the latest move in the worsening energy dispute between Minsk and Moscow.

The move comes just one day after Russian state-owned conglomerate Gazprom started to reduce the quantity of gas piped to Belarus for its own domestic use because of what it says are unpaid bills of \$192 million. It further reduced supplies today.

Lukashenka made his surprise announcement at a meeting in Minsk with visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

He said the row between the two countries over debt repayments is turning into a full "gas war," and he said the transit ban will stay until Gazprom pays what he says is a debt of \$260 million in gas transit fees.

After an initial reduction of 15 percent on June 21, Gazprom said earlier in the day that it was now delivering 30 percent less gas than usual to Belarus.

Belarusian officials had previously said that gas supplies westward to Europe would not be affected by the bilateral dispute with Russia.

"[Belarus] had no reason to make this decision," Gazprom spokesman in Moscow Sergei Kupriyanov said. "It's not just our gas. It is our pipe, it belongs to us, we own it."

Here We Go Again

In Brussels, a spokeswoman for the European Commission, Marlene Holzner, said the commission expects both Belarus and Moscow to respect their "contractual obligations," and not to impede gas supplies to Europe.

She said, however, that Russia had already prepared contingency plans to send extra gas to the EU via Ukraine

if necessary.

"If Belarus will really, indeed, take gas from the Yamal pipeline, which is a pipeline which has gas only for the European Union, [Russia] will deliver the gas via Ukraine to Poland and to Germany," Holzner said.

She said the European Commission is continuing to monitor the situation and is in close contact with Russia and Belarus.

Europe has fresh memories of an earlier gas dispute - last year's payment row between Ukraine and Russia, which disrupted gas supplies to EU consumers for two weeks in midwinter.

The gas disagreement has further soured Belarus-Russia relations at a time when they are already strained. Last month, Russia and Kazakhstan agreed to proceed alone on a customs-union project that was to have included Belarus. Minsk has also annoyed Moscow by giving sanctuary to deposed Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

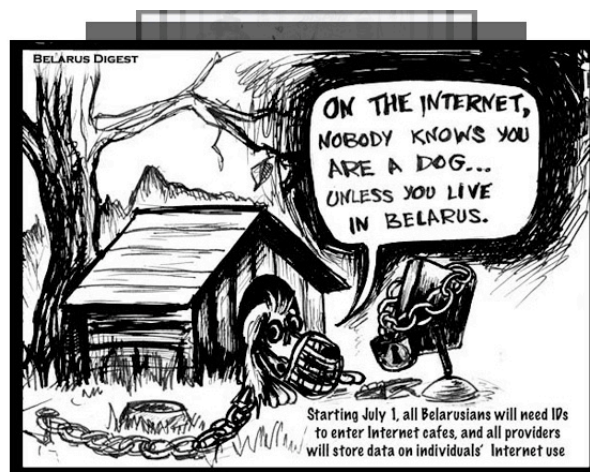
New Chapter?

In an interview with RFE/RL's Russian Service, the director of the Belarusian analytic center Strategia Leonid Zaika said that the Russian leadership's exasperation with Belarus Lukashenka lies behind the gas conflict between Russia and Belarus.

Zaika said that "finally" after so many years the Kremlin has begun to clearly speak out about Lukashenka and his political future.

"This is not a conflict. It is the beginning of a new Kremlin policy in the former Soviet area," Zaika said. "They were successful in overthrowing the government in Kyrgyzstan. There was a change of leaders in Ukraine. And the Kremlin has now decided to clearly state its attitude toward Aleksandr Lukashenka and his political future."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 22, 2010



Drawing by Volha Charnysh

Gazprom's Net Debt Disrupts Belarus-Europe Transit

By Vladimir Socor

Interrelated disputes over gas prices and transit fees have turned Gazprom into a net debtor to Belarus. As of mid-June, Gazprom's net debt to Belarus reached \$260 million in unpaid transit fees since November 2009. Gazprom itself acknowledged \$228 million from this amount. Also by mid-June, Minsk's debt to Gazprom reached \$192 million in arrears for deliveries of Russian gas in the same period. The Belarusian government acknowledged \$187 million from this amount.

With each side seeking to collect the debt from the other, net debtor Gazprom initiated hostilities. After a series of public warnings by its top management during the third week of June, Gazprom started reducing gas deliveries at the Russia-Belarus border. The cuts amounted to 15 percent of the contracted by June 21, another 15 percent by June 22, and an additional 30 percent by June 23, for a total reduction of 60 percent of the contracted volume (Interfax, Belapan, June 21- 24).

The cuts threatened consumers in Belarus as well as the EU countries Lithuania, Poland, and Germany, which import Russian gas via Belarus. Lithuania and Poland began feeling the pinch before it reached Germany farther downstream.

On June 23 Belarus borrowed (from sources yet to be disclosed) \$200 million, from which it transferred \$187 million to Gazprom. The Russian side restored the full flow of gas deliveries to Belarus, and to EU countries via Belarus and on June 24. Minsk, however, insisted on its due. First Deputy Prime Minister, Uladzimir Syamashka, demanded that Gazprom pay its debt the next day, failing which, Belarus would stop the transit of Russian gas to European countries.

On June 24, Gazprom nearly complied. It transferred \$228 million to the Belarusian energy ministry, sticking however to its own interpretation of the amount it owed (Interfax, Belapan, June 24).

Minsk's interpretation of the debt figure reflects its claims to Russian fees for gas transit service, based on the letter of agreements signed in November 2009 with Gazprom. Under those agreements, Gazprom should have paid transit fees of \$1.74 per thousand cubic meters (tcm) of Russian gas per one hundred kilometers of Beltranshaz pipelines in November-December 2009, and \$1.88 per tcm for each hundred kilometers from January 2010 onward.

For its part, Moscow claims that Belarus is only entitled to a transit fee of \$1.45 per tcm for every hundred kilometers of Beltranshaz pipelines. Such a low transit fee, however, was tied to the similarly "brotherly" price of \$150 per tcm of Russian gas supplied to Belarus for internal consumption, in accordance with the December 2006 contract.

That price, however, rose as scheduled to \$184 per tcm in the second quarter of 2010, and is scheduled to increase to \$193.5 per tcm in the third quarter of 2010. The price increases are tied to the agreed increases in the transit fees under the same agreement.

Moscow introduced a further condition with the 2008 agreement on a partial takeover of Beltranshaz by Gazprom. It demanded that Beltranshaz add a mark-up to the price of gas supplied to Belarus consumers, by the equivalent of \$10 per tcm in 2009 and the equivalent of \$11 in 2010. The Belarusian side has not added these markups and the matter remains in suspension as a commercial dispute.

The Russian government does not seem to feel confident about its case in this dispute. Following Gazprom's June 21-23 supply cuts, the government seemed more concerned about Gazprom's reputation in Europe than Gazprom itself. Energy Minister, Sergei Shmatko, went out of his way to signal that "it would be inappropriate to describe the situation as critical. Our traditional customers in Europe are not raising the alarm, and we can go to spot markets to buy the necessary volumes [for offsetting the shortfall in supplies to Europe via Belarus]." In a similar vein, Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, assured his counterpart German and Polish ministers, Guido Westerwelle and Radoslaw Sikorski, that Russia would promptly settle this dispute with Belarus (Interfax, RIA Novosti, June 23).

Gazprom CEO, Aleksei Miller, began issuing dire warnings that Belarus was siphoning off gas volumes destined to EU countries from the Beltranshaz pipelines (NTV, June 23). These warnings resembled Gazprom's political offensives against Ukraine in the January 2006 and January 2009 gas supply cutoffs by Russia. This time, however, the Russian government and its propaganda apparatus did not support Miller's allegations.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 123, June 25, 2010

Surge in Nuclear Power Projects Imperils Belarusian Program

By David Marples

According to Belarusian First Vice-Prime Minister, Uladzimir Syamashka, the end of July was scheduled to mark the finalization of an agreement between Belarus and Russia to build the nuclear power station at Astravets in the Hrodna region with construction of the station to start next July (*Svobodnye Novosti Plyus*, July 14-21). Unsurprisingly, given recent tensions between the two countries, that did not happen. Moreover, there is increasing pressure on Belarus from various sides to abandon the enterprise altogether.

The evolution of the Belarusian nuclear power station has been noted for its fluctuations, cost and financing issues, timing, and primarily, its role in the potential saturation of a small area of northeastern Europe with similar projects. One visitor to Astravets, Lithuanian Prime Minister, Andrius Kubilius, noted that while some construction work has been done on roads and basic infrastructure, the building of the station itself is not yet underway and could conceivably be abandoned. Lithuania has cited environmental concerns, including the potential impact of the Astravets plant on its river systems, and its location only

28 miles from the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius (*Narodnaya Volya*, August 2).

However, plans to build a new Lithuanian station at the same location as the Ignalina plant, which was decommissioned at the end of 2009, are more controversial (Interfax, July 8). Ignalina is located at the conjunction of three borders: those of Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus. It supplied 78 percent of Lithuania's electricity through two RBMK reactors, which initially had a capacity of 1500 megawatts, but which was reduced to 1300 megawatts at the insistence of the EU. The EU's concomitant demand to close the station as soon as possible has led to the situation whereby only Russia operates an RBMK station, and Lithuania is for the moment completely dependent upon imported Russian gas for its electricity needs. Lithuania is thus anxious to work with its European partners to construct a safer station, though full details will only be known in the fall (*NewEurope*, July 18). The Baltic region may also see two other reactors come into service very shortly: a new unit at the Leningrad nuclear power station at Sosnovyi Bor, near St. Petersburg (four are planned altogether to replace the obsolete RBMK-1000 reactors of the Chernobyl type) and a highly controversial third unit at the Olkiluoto station in Finland (*Bellona*, August 2). Both Poland and Estonia are reportedly considering nuclear plants of their own (<http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf102.html>). The potential build-up of nuclear power stations in the region resembles the situation in the European USSR in the mid-1980's and indicates a new confidence in the industry.

Moscow's decision to build another new nuclear plant — called the Baltic Nuclear Power Station — in Kaliningrad Oblast seemed designed as a counter to the new edifice to be erected at the Ignalina site (EDM, March 12). It also signifies that the Astravets station now has a low priority in Moscow. Yet, Belarus is almost entirely dependent on Russia for Astravets, both for its construction and operation. The goal of bringing the first unit on line in 2016 is entirely unrealistic. Moscow offered financing of up to \$6 million, which would have covered about two-thirds of the total costs. Belarus asked for \$9 million. Moscow then demanded that 50 percent of the ownership of the plant would accrue to the Russian energy company Inter RAO UES, which is 57 percent owned by Rosatom, through the operation of a joint venture. The Belarusians, in turn, suggested that a third unit should be constructed (only two were planned originally) directed exclusively to Russian needs. Moscow promptly rejected that proposal (www.navy.by, July 31).

One former native of the Hrodna region, Dr. Yuri Bandazhevsky, who was persecuted in Belarus after investigations into the effects of low-level radiation at his clinic in Homel, mounted a stinging attack on the proposed station from the perspective of both health and environmental concerns. Bandazhevsky, who currently heads the Ecology and Health Center in Kyiv, commented that all Belarusians have received an adverse impact from radiation over the past 50 years both before and after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. He criticized the International Atomic Energy Agency as a body that popularizes the industry despite its proven harmful effects (*Svobodnye Novosti Plyus*, July 14-21).

The task of the Belarusians now is to persuade their Russian partner that the enterprise should go ahead as planned. However, the Russians are hardly in a mood to make concessions, given the current deterioration of relations between Moscow and Minsk. A series of critical television programs and media articles about the Belarusian president have been released and several leaders of the Belarusian political opposition have recently received a warm welcome in Moscow (*BelGazeta*, July 26). Several analysts have suggested that Russia is even ready to replace its former ally Lukashenko with a more amenable figure (*The New York Times*, August 1), though it remains unclear whether there will be any serious effort to unseat him.

All the countries in the region appear prepared to push ahead with their own nuclear power programs. Belarus, having decided to rely on financing and construction of its reactors from Russia, has been put in a very embarrassing situation given the widespread domestic propaganda about the new station. There are two alternative options — to end the partnership with Russia and find a new sponsor; or to shelve the project, which would be a humiliating defeat for Lukashenko.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 150, August 4, 2010

Belarus' Forum

NOTE: In the following article Belarusian names (both personal and geographic) are transliterated from Cyrillic using the Roman LACINKA alphabet.

The first occurrence of a given name is presented as follows:

Name in LACINKA [name in LOC transliteration].

Example: *Marcinovič* [Martsinovich]

UN to be Engaged in Investigation Of Political Abductions in Belarus?

Leaders of the Belarusian opposition have addressed the UN Security Council with a request to conduct an international investigation into the abductions of well-known Belarusians.

On Wednesday the appeal was sent to Foreign Ministers of the permanent members of the UN Security Council — China, Russia, the Great Britain, France and the US. The full text of the address follows.

Your Excellency

We are writing to you about the disappearances of high-level public figures in Belarus which have remained uninvestigated for a long time.

To date, the human rights community in Belarus, lawyers for the families and the relatives of the disappeared have exhausted all available local remedies, and have also exhausted regional and international human rights remedies to no avail. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenko, who remains in power since the time of the disappearances, has not created conditions for a national credible and impartial national investigation into these cases and has blocked all international efforts to find the truth about their fates.

The cases of the disappeared men are:

1. Former Belarus Interior Minister *Jury Zacharanka* [Yury Zakharanka], May 1999
2. Former Vice-Premier, former Chairman of the Central Election Committee *Viktar Hančar* [Viktar Hanchar,] September 1999
3. Businessman and public figure *Anatol Krasoŭski* [Anatol Krasouski], September 1999
4. Russian TV (ORT) cameraman *Dzmitry Zavadzki* [Dzmitry Zavadski,] July 2000.

In Belarus, independent civil society investigations into these cases have found some evidence of complicity in the disappearances by high officials in the Lukashenka government. Two Belarusian prosecutors who found evidence of an official cover-up and published their allegations in the independent Belarusian and foreign media were forced to flee abroad in 2001 and have obtained political asylum and remain in hiding.

In 2000, the UN Committee Against Torture reviewed the periodic report of Belarus and noted ongoing concerns about disappearances, and called on the state party to “consider establishing an independent and impartial governmental and non-governmental national human rights commission with effective powers to, inter alia, promote human rights and investigate all complaints of human rights violations, in particular those pertaining to the implementation of the Convention” (A/56/44, paras.40-46).

This was never done, and no reply was provided to the UN CAT. The government of Belarus has never responded to repeated queries submitted about these cases from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Disappearances for many years.

In February 2004, a fact-finding report was published by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly which found that senior Belarusian officials may have been involved in the disappearances of the four men during 1999 and 2000. The report stated that steps were taken at the highest level of the Belarusian state to cover up the true background of the disappearances. The report, prepared by Cypriot parliamentarian **Christos Pourgourides**, was approved unanimously by the Assembly’s Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights meeting during the Assembly’s 2004 winter plenary session in Strasbourg (Doc.100624, February 2004).

In 2006 and again in 2007, **Adrian Severin**, the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus, reported to the UN Human Rights Council that the human rights situation in Belarus was intolerable, and noted continued inaction on investigation and prosecution of the disappearances (E/CN.4/2006/36).

In July 2010 Russian mass media revealed new information on the disappearances of the opposition leaders and public figures in Belarus and the complicity of high government officials in the disappearances. There was no official reaction to that information.

Due to mass violation of human rights Belarus is not a member of the Council of Europe, so it is not possible to bring a suit regarding the disappearances to the European Court of Human Rights.

Accordingly, mindful of more than 10 years of work attempting to bring justice in the cases of the disappearances of these four prominent Belarusian figures in political life

and media, we turn to you as Minister of Foreign Affairs of a permanent member of the UN Security Council to consider taking up this matter and approving a Commission of Inquiry by the UN Security Council into the disappearances of public figures in Belarus in 1999 and 2000.

We make this request mindful of the UN-appointed international commission which investigated the killing of former Lebanese prime minister **Rafiq Hariri** in 2005 and other politically motivated assassinations in Lebanon (S/RES/1595/2005) as well as the tribunal to try those responsible for the Hariri killing, established by the UN Security Council in June 2007.

We urge you to take up the issue of the disappeared public figures of Belarus at the level of the UN Security Council and to use your good offices to ensure that an international investigation into the fate of the disappeared is mandated.

Respectfully, (signed by)
Stanislaŭ Šuškievič [Stanislau Shushkevich]

Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th convocation,

Chairman of the Central Council of the party Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada

Andrej Sannikaŭ [Andrei Sannikau]

Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus (1995-1996),

Coordinator of the civil campaign “European Belarus”

Ales Bialiacki [Ales Byalatski]

Vice President of the International Federation for Human Rights,

Anatoł’ Liabiedźka [Anatol Lyabedzka]

Chairman of the United Civil Party,

Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th and 13th convocations

Miečyslaŭ Hryb [Mechyslau Hryb]

Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus (1994-1996),

Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th and 13th convocations,

Secretary General of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada)

Siarhiej Kaliakin [Sergei Kalyakin]

Chairman of the Party “Fair World”

Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th and 13th convocations

Aliaksandr Dabravolski [Alyaksandr Dabravolski]

Member of the Political Council of the United Civil Party,

People’s Deputy of the Soviet Union (1989-1991),

Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 13th convocation

Aliaksandr Sasnoŭ [Alyaksandr Sasnou]

Former Minister of Labour of Belarus,

Member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th convocation

Aleh Voŭcak [Oleg Volchek]

Chairman of the human rights centre “Legal Assistance to the Population”

Valery Fraloŭ [Valery Frolov]

Deputy of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus of the 2nd convocation,

Major General

Aliaksiej Janukievič [Alyaksei Yanukevich]

Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front Party

Ryhor Kostusieŭ [Ryhor Kostuseu]

Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front Party

Viktar Ivaškevič [Viktar Ivashkevich]

Chairman of Minsk branch of the Belarusian Popular Front Party

Michail Marynič [Mikhail Marynich]

Ex-Minister of Foreign Economic Relations of Belarus,

Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th convocation,

Ambassador

Piotra Sadoŭski [Pyotr Sadouski]

Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th convocation,

Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany (1992-1994)

Uladzimir Niakliajeŭ [Nyaklyaeu]

Coordinator of Tell the Truth civil campaign

Aliena Skryhan [Elena Skrigan]

Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the 13th convocation

Jaraslaŭ Ramančuk [Yaraslau Ramanchuk]

Deputy Chairman of the United Civil Party

The article was prepared by **European Belarus** website.

Source: Charter 9 Press Center, Aug.8, 2010

HISTORICAL DATES

September 8, 1514

Anniversary of the **Battle of Vorsha**, when a military force of about 30,000 men, led by hetman Konstantin Astroski of the Grand Duchy of Litva defeated a Muscovite army of cca. 80,000 men near the town of Vorsha.

Since 1991 this date has been celebrated as the **Day of Belarusian Military Glory**.

September 27, 1605

Anniversary of the **Battle of Kirchholm**, when the troops of the Republic of Two Nations (Grand Duchy of Litva and Poland), under the leadership of hetman Jan Karol Chadkievic defeated the numerically superior Swedish army.

November 2 - Remembrance Day (Dziady)

The day for commemorating ancestors with a special family meal, dating from pre-Christian times and later associated with Christianity's All Souls' Day.

Since the Belarusian Declaration of Sovereignty in July, 1990, **Dziady** became an occasion for patriotic demonstrations emphasizing the victims and heroes of the historical past. Such observances were led by the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and other groups and included marches to **Kurapaty**, a site near Minsk where mass executions took place during the Stalinist era.

COMPARISON

of Transliteration Methods:

**Library of Congress
(LOC)**

LACINKA

Consonants

CH	Č
KH	CH
SH	Š
ZH	Ž
TS	C

W - or U after vowels

Examples: kroŭ, rabiŭ

Y

at beginning of words, after vowels,
after consonants **D, R**, or after **Ŭ**

Examples: jama, toje, nadvorje, zdaroŭje

Y

after other consonants

Examples: nie, siabra, piaro

**Soft (palatalized) consonants -
marked by the 'soft sign' Ь in Cyrillic script:**

Roman	Cyrillic	LACINKA
S	СЬ	Ś
Z	ЗЬ	Ż
Dz	ДЗЬ	DŹ
Ts	ЦЬ	Ć
N	НЬ	Ń
L	ЛЬ	Ł

Quotes of Quarter

Said President **Alyaksandr Lukashenka** on September 16, 2010,

"They are not even an opposition. They are the enemies of the people,"

— adding that the opposition was always trying to undermine the country by siding with Belarus' enemies.

"Today, the survival of Lukashenka's regime depends [on] money. He has everything else -- the power structures, [early] voting, a docile populace which totally supports him, or so he thinks. His only problem is money. So in these conditions, I think the policies of both Europe and the United States [toward Belarus] should be tougher."

Belarusian opposition activist and poet **Uladzimer Nyaklyaeu** on June 8 urged the West to adopt a tougher approach to his country with regard to financial sanctions.

Colleagues Remember Byabenin as Talented Journalist Who Was 'High on Life'

Daisy Sindelar

Mourners gathered in the Belarusian capital to say farewell to one of the country's best-known opposition journalists.

Aleh Byabenin, co-founder and director of the outspoken Charter 97 website, was found hanged at his family's dacha in the village of Pyarhurava near Minsk on September 3. He was buried today in Minsk's Eastern Cemetery.



A mourner carries a portrait of Aleh Byabenin during his funeral in Minsk.

Prosecutors have declared Byabenin's death a probable suicide, saying there was no evidence of foul play and that two empty bottles of a strong Belarusian liqueur were found near his body.

Byabenin's friends and colleagues, however, strongly reject the suggestion, saying the energetic 36-year-old journalist left no suicide note and had no known problems at work or at home with his wife and two young sons.

Zmitser Bandarenka, coordinator of the Charter 97 website, has accused investigators of fumbling the timing of Byabenin's death, saying the journalist's death certificate puts the time of death a full 15 hours earlier than police and prosecutors' records.

Speaking to RFE/RL's Belarus Service, Bandarenka says it is impossible for him to believe his colleague committed suicide.

"Byabenin was my friend, a real journalist, and a real man. We were together in many difficult situations, and among our team, he was always a center of stability," Bandarenka says. "There was no reason for him to end his life, as the police have said. We absolutely don't believe it. He was one of the pillars of online journalism, and certainly he will be sorely missed by all of us."

Aggressive Reporting

Byabenin was reportedly last seen alive on the afternoon of September 2 and had sent a text message that day inviting friends to a movie in Minsk. His body was discovered in the early evening on September 3.

Prosecutors now say they are trying to determine whether Byabenin was somehow provoked into killing himself.

But workers at Charter 97, the website of the human rights organization that carries the same name, complain that interrogators seem to be more interested in how the site operates than in the circumstances of Byabenin's death.

Charter 97 has been highly critical of the government, and Byabenin was a particularly sharp critic of the country's authoritarian president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Charter 97 has frequently reported on the rising number of temporary abductions of activists and youth leaders and has alleged that such acts are training exercises for security forces looking to create "death squads" with the aim of eliminating prominent opposition figures.

The opposition has blamed several high-profile disappearances which took place in the 1990s on Lukashenka.

Byabenin's aggressive reporting had caused him troubles in the past.

Zmitser Padbiarezski, a journalist with the tut.by Internet radio station and a former correspondent for RFE/RL, called Byabenin "a fearless reporter" who "delted into the in the early evening on September 3.

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He recalled an incident in the late 1990s when Byabenin was briefly abducted.

"I remember one incident where he was snatched up by some people in civilian clothes, hustled into a car, and driven off to some forest," Byabenin says. "They were probably trying to scare him. This was a reaction to his work. I'd venture to guess that not all journalists are similarly 'honored' with such intimidation tactics."

Lots Of Limits

Crackdowns on journalists are common in Belarus, where Lukashenka has steadily stripped the country of nearly all nonstate press and taken pains to limit Internet media.

Svyatlana Kalinkina, the editor in chief of "Narodnaya volya," one of the country's few remaining independent newspapers, said she has received anonymous threats since publishing a column disputing the official version of Byabenin's death.

Kalinkina said she received a postcard reading, in part, "Live and fear. A hunt for traitors has begun." The message was written on a card bearing the logo of the "Tell the Truth!" opposition campaign, a move Kalinkina said was meant to discredit the movement's antigovernment activists.

The controversy comes as Belarus is gearing up for presidential elections in 2011. A number of opposition politicians are looking to challenge Lukashenka, who has indicated he is likely to seek a fourth presidential term. (Belarus has no presidential term limits.)

Among the likely presidential candidates is Andrey Sannikau, a close associate of Byabenin's. Byabenin was a member of Sannikov's headquarters and was expected to play a leading role in his election campaign.

Sannikov, like other Byabenin allies, disputes the theory the journalist committed suicide. "We had extensive plans. We met every day," Sannikov told Charter 97. "Aleh is my friend. He is the main member of my team, a brilliant journalist, and a very reliable person."

International Questions

Byabenin's death has prompted concern outside the country as well.

Jerzy Buzek, the president of the European Parliament, said on September 5 that he was "deeply moved" by the news of Byabenin's death and called for a transparent investigation into the incident.

Friends and colleagues reject the possibility that Byabenin could have killed himself.

Dunja Mijatovic, the media freedom representative for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe,

NEWS BRIEFS

July 5, 2010

Sensational film about Lukashenka on NTV

A Russian TV channel at last told the truth about political disappearances and killings of oppositionists in Belarus.

The programme Chrezvychainoye Proissheshtiye (Emergency Event) on NTV channel showed the film "Godbatka" telling about the mysterious death of vice speaker of the Supreme Council of Belarus Henadz Karpenka, abductions and killings of former interior minister Yury Zakharanka, vice speaker of the Supreme Council, former head of the Central Election Commission Viktor Hanchar, journalist Zmitser Zavadski, businessman and public figure Anatol Krasouski. The film shows archive interviews with the abducted oppositionists and their relatives and says directly about involvement of the Belarusian authorities in elimination of their political opponents.

The movie gives an interview with former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, tells how he was beaten ahead of

the elections and then thrown into prison. The film tells about the private life of the Belarusian ruler and his illegitimate son, Russia's pay to the regime of Belarus, and billions spent to support Lukashenka.

The movie also shows Lukashenka praising Hitler and telling that Germany of the 1930s was a model of the state structure for him.

Source: Charter97 Press Center

July 31, 2010

Russia refused to construct nuclear power plant in Belarus

Russia is not interested by that project unless certain conditions are met.

Moscow has refused to sign an agreement on construction of the first nuclear power plant in Belarus with Minsk until a joint venture for selling electric energy from the NPP created, Interfax reports. Earlier the Belarusian leadership stated that a package of agreements on the NPP construction would be signed before the end of July 2010.

Russia wants to get at least half in the distribution joint venture. Thus, Moscow lays claims on 50% of profit from energy sold from the Belarusian NPP in case it would be built on account of the Russian loan.

"The issue of shares in the distribution enterprise could be a matter of negotiation, but the terms of its creation, on which the Russian side insists, are unacceptable," states a source in the agency in the Belarusian government.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

August 4, 2010

Russian media attacks described as 'Dirty Propaganda'

MINSK — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has said he will not respond directly to recent criticism of him in the Russian media that he describes as "dirty, anti-Belarusian propaganda," RFE/RL's Russian Service reports.

Russian state television channel NTV aired the second part of a critical documentary about Lukashenka, "Godfather," on July 16. The first segment, which aired on the same channel, led to an outcry from Belarusian officials, aired on July 4.

Anti-Lukashenka articles have also appeared in the Russian newspapers *Izvestiya*, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, and on the English-language TV-channel Russia Today.

Lukashenka told reporters during a tour of southeastern Belarus on July 16 that "those who spurn me" are indeed hurting him and said he's not used to such criticism.

"It's hurtful that it's done by my colleagues," Lukashenka said. "But this isn't organized by the media, this comes from [the Kremlin]."

Lukashenka claimed to know who is giving the orders for critical reports about him and promised to speak soon to "the responsible Russian gentlemen."

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

August 5, 2010

Zelva authorities tore down a memorial tablet of Larysa Heniyush

The memorial tablet was established in honor of the 100th anniversary of a famous Belarusian poetess.

The memorial tablet was removed from the building where Larysa Heniyush lived, after it was viewed by an official of dis-

strict executive committee Yuri Kulikou, who is responsible for ideology. It was told by the present owner of the house to Radio Svaboda.

According to the words of Kulikou, authorities are going to “perform a legal evaluation” of unauthorized installation of the memorial tablet. It is unknown where the tablet is now.

Larysa Heniyush was born on 9th of August, 1910, in Vaukavysk district of Hrodna (Grodno) region. After finishing the Vaukavysk gymnasium she lived with her emigrant husband in Prague, where she worked as a secretary of Vasil Zaharka, president of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in exile.

Heniyush was occupied with preserving and administering the presidential archive, she supported Belarusian emigrants, political refugees and prisoners of war. In 1942, in Prague, she published her first book *Ad rodnych niu*.

In March of 1948, being a citizen of Czechoslovakia, Heniyush was arrested, and in 1949, in Minsk, she was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment as a person without citizenship. She was serving her sentence in prison camps of Komi and Mordovia. In 1956 she was released ahead of time, but she has not been rehabilitated until now. She moved to live in the home of her husband — in the town of Zelva, where she was under house arrest, not having been able even to see her only son who lived in Belastok (Poland). Throughout her life — she died on April, 7, 1983 — the poetess did not wish to acquire Soviet citizenship.

Source: Charter97 Press Center

August 28, 2010

Presidential hopefuls Milinkevich, Kastusyou warn about threat to Belarus' independence

Opposition presidential hopefuls Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Ryhor Kastusyou have warned that Belarus may lose its independence because of the government's policies, as quoted by Belapan.

"The irresponsible and anti-democratic policies of the government not only impede rapprochement between Belarus and united Europe but also create a danger of losing state independence," the politicians say in a joint statement issued on August 25 on the occasion of the 19th anniversary of the constitutional law status of Belarus' Declaration of State Sovereignty.

"Many of the provisions of the Declaration have never been implemented," the statement says. "Since 1994, Belarus has evolved into an authoritarian state where the rights and liberties of Belarusians are violated, the people's will is neglected and the development of democratic civil society is held back in every possible way."

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

September 5, 2010

Belarusian journalist Aleh Byabenin found dead in his summer cottage

Aleh Byabenin was one of the founders and leaders of charter97.org website.

The body of Aleh Byabenin was found today at 5.30 p.m. in his summer cottage not far from Minsk.

Aleh Byabenin was born in 1974. He graduated from the Belarusian State University, department of journalism. In 1990ies he occupied the position of the deputy chief editor of *Imya*, an in-

dependent Belarusian newspaper. Since 1998 he was the founder and head of charter97.org website. Aleh Byabenin had a wife and two sons.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

September 10, 2010

Ashton calls for credible probe into Belarus Death

The office of EU foreign relations chief Catherine Ashton has urged Belarus to hold a credible investigation into the recent death of opposition activist Aleh Byabenin.

"We are saddened to hear about his tragic death. He was a key contributor to pushing the reform agenda in Belarus. We join others in calling for a full, independent and transparent investigation into the cause of his death," Ms Ashton's spokeswoman Maja Kocjanic said on Thursday (9 September).

When asked by EUobserver if the incident could affect the EU's review of travel sanctions on Belarus' authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashanka, due in October, she added that: "We are very mindful of the human rights situation in the country."

The Belarus foreign ministry on Thursday said it would invite officials from the Vienna-based pro-democracy body, the OSCE, to help shed light on the incident.

"The invitation of foreign experts is an unprecedented step for not only Belarus but also European countries. It has been prompted by our concern about the insinuations that not only the media but also international institutions are making," foreign ministry spokesman Andrey Savinykh said, the independent Belarusian news agency, Belapan, reports.

The move was given a cautious welcome by fellow opposition activists, who noted that the composition of any OSCE delegation and the quality of the evidence submitted by Minsk should be scrutinised.

Source: EU Observer/Office for Democratic Belarus

September 11, 2010

Belarusian class for one pupil to be organized in Hrodna

A special educational programme will be created for the first-grader Sveta Astrouskaya in school #32 and her parents will have to stand trial for an “unauthorized” demand to create a Belarusian class.

Professor Ales Astrouski has not managed to find parents willing to see their children studying in a Belarusian-language class during a week of agitation at parents' meetings. The administration of school #32 has suggested a compromise: the majority of subjects will be taught to his daughter in Belarusian. She will attend classes of drawing, eurhythmics and physical education together with other children. Sveta will study like this for the next 4 years.

Ales Astrouski will stand trial for organization of an unauthorized action. His wife Aksana and a journalist Uladzimir Hilmanovich are accused of participation in “an illegal picket”.

Ales Astrouski says that he will organize agitation for parents for the next academic year. If nobody likes his ideas, his second child Yanka will also have to study according to an individual programme. He will go to school next autumn.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

September 14, 2010

Belarus sets presidential election for 19 December 2010

Belarus lawmakers on Tuesday voted to hold a presidential election on December 19.

The date was approved by 108 of 110 deputies in parliament, which is dominated by supporters of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

September 15, 2010

Sannikau to participate in elections

Leader of European Belarus civil campaign, Andrei Sannikau, confirmed his intention to participate in presidential elections.

He stated on September 14, "I confirm my intention to participate in presidential elections. I am sure that Belarusians have a real chance to get rid of dictatorship and make their country a normal European state," said the politician.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus



Andrei Sannikau

September 17, 2010

Milinkevich gives up presidential Bid

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the Movement for Freedom, announced on Friday that he would not run in Belarus' presidential race as no changes had been made to national electoral regulations to ensure fair, free and open elections, as quoted by BelaPAN.

The Movement for Freedom was pushing for amendments to the Electoral Code, but to no avail, the politician, who was a candidate in the 2006 presidential election, said at a news conference held in Minsk on Friday.

"We applied to the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament for assistance in ensuring that representatives of independent presidential candidates are allowed to count votes together with members of election commissions," Mr. Milinkevich said. "Besides, we maintained correspondence about the matter with the parliament. But after the date of the election was set, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, head of the central election commission, announced that no amendments would be introduced to regulations."

"We have no elections, we only have an election campaign," Mr. Milinkevich said.

The politician denied plans to call for the boycott of the election, noting that he would throw his support behind a "Belarusian Choice" campaign consolidating the Movement for Freedom, the Belarusian Popular Front, the Belarusian Party of the Greens and presidential aspirant Ales Mikhalevich's Union For Modernization.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus/ naviny.by



Alyaksandr Milinkevich

September 17, 2010

Belarusian opposition activist announces bid for president

Prominent Belarusian writer and opposition activist Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu has officially announced his intention to run for president, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

Nyaklyaeu said at a press briefing in Minsk on September 16 that if he won the presidential election, now scheduled for December 19, he would do everything possible to turn Belarus from a presidential republic into parliamentary-presidential republic.



Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu

Nyaklyaeu, a former chairman of the Union of Belarusian Writers, is the leader of the Moving Forward movement. The movement has gained prominence in the months since Nyaklyaeu organized a "Tell the Truth" campaign encouraging Belarusians to speak out about social problems and record instances when government officials give "false" information to the public.

Nyaklyaeu, 63, said the initiative group for his support in running for president would consist of some 1,000 people and would meet despite Minsk authorities' refusal to provide a site.

Nyaklyaeu warned that if government officials were to steal an electoral victory from him in December's poll, his supporters would hold mass protests on Minsk's central square.

In May, police raided "Tell the Truth" campaign offices as well as the homes of dozens of the initiative's activists.

Renowned poets Ryhor Baradulin and Henadz Buraukin, artist Zinaida Bandarenka, Chornobyl researcher Henadz Hrushavy, scientist Radzim Haretski, Belarusian Association of Journalists head Zhanna Litvina, human rights activist Tatsyana Pratsko, and chessmaster Viktor Kupreychyk have given their support to the "Tell the Truth" campaign.

Nyaklyaeu read his poem "I Came So That You Win!," suggesting it might serve as his campaign slogan

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

September 17, 2010

Lukashenka says Belarusian opposition is people's enemy

The Belarusian opposition is the enemy of the people, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on Thursday.

"They are not even an opposition. They are the enemies of the people," he said, adding that the opposition was always trying to undermine the country by siding with Belarus's enemies.

The Belarusian parliament has set presidential elections for December 19. Lukashenka earlier hinted that he would take part in the elections, but has so far made no official statement on the matter.

Source: RIA Novosti, <http://en.rian.ru>

September 24, 2010

Lukashenka Registers To Run In Belarus Presidential Elections

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has submitted his registration documents to seek a fourth term in office in the December 19 presidential elections.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty



Alyaksandr Lukashenka

September 27, 2010

Belarus is one of Europe's leaders in price growth

According to Eurostat's latest data, Belarus is still among European leaders at consumer price growth.

The biggest rise in consumer prices in comparison with July 2010 was recorded in Belgium (2%), Ukraine, Luxemburg and Malta (1–1.2%);

for a period since the beginning of the year – in Malta (6.5%), Romania (5.6%), and **Belarus (5.1%)**, writes Internet newspaper *My*.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Quotes of Quarter

As quoted in article in *Economist* on July 22, referring to current dealings between Russia and Belarus, **FYODOR LUKYANOV**, the editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*, argues:

"There is no such as a point of no return in this battle, because both sides are represented not by noble knights, but by cynical traders."

BELARUS ABROAD

Young Belarusian Writers Meet in Prague

Over forty mostly young Belarusian writers and poets visited Prague (Czech Republic) in the beginning of August 2010 — to attend translators' seminars linked with honoring the 100th anniversary of birth of the Belarusian poetess Larysa Hienijuš.

The guests included finalists of the contest held by the Belarusian PEN-Club on this occasion. Besides attending the seminars and visiting the castle in Vimperk, they participated in two joint Czech-Belarusian literary evenings. The first one took place on August 8th in Prague, during which the guests from Belarus were introduced to two prominent Czech writers: Petra Hůlková and Jáchym Topol, both of whom recently spent some time in Miensk. During her stay there, Petra was completing her novel *The Plastic Room*, excerpts from which, in Belarusian translation, were read by the bohemist Siarhiej Smatryčenka. Mr. Topol dedicated to Belarus his latest novel *In the Cold Country*. Belarusian visitors had the opportunity to ask their Czech colleagues about their works and their impressions of Belarus.

The next day, in the cafe *Krásné Ztráty*, Belarusian writers assumed the main role of the evening. The public heard the works of both young prose writers and poets: Aleš Jemieljanaŭ, Anton Rudak, Vital Ryžkoŭ, Andrej Adamovič, as well as those of older and better known literary figures: Barys Piatrovič, Paval Kaściukievič, Alhierd Bacharevič, Andrej Chadanovič. The evening included the presentation of the poetry book *Amalgama* by Max Ščur, a Belarusian poet, living in Prague. His book was recently published in Miensk, in the publishing house Lohvinaŭ.

A week later, on Monday August 16th, one of the most influential Czech newspapers *Lidové Noviny* printed an article by Jáchym Topol, entitled "The regime that wages war on its own language," in which the author writes about the complicated position of the Belarusian language and of Belarusian-language writers in their homeland, the recent "Belarusian literary landing in Prague," and Czech-Belarusian literary contacts, impersonated by Francišak Skaryna, Larysa Hienijuš, Uladzimier Žylka, Viktor Valtar, Vasil Bykaŭ.

Editor's Note: Names of Belarusian writers have been transliterated using the Belarusian **LACINKA**. You may use the table on p. 11: **COMPARISON** of transliteration methods — **LACINKA** vs. Library of Congress transliteration.

Francišak Bahuševič Honored in Vilnia

On September 17, 2010 a memorial plaque of Francišak Bahuševič, the father of the modern Belarusian literature, was unveiled in Vilnia. The opening was timed to the 170th anniversary of Bahuševič's birthday, who was a native of the Vilnia region.

The event was organized with the assistance of the Union of Belarusian Public Organizations in Lithuania, as well as the Belarus' embassy in Lithuania, and became part of the Belarusian Days of Culture in Lithuania, which were held from 17th till 19th of September 2010.



The plaque was created by composite authors – the sculptor Leŭ Humileŭski and the architect Aliaksandr Korbut, both of whom are well known in Belarus.

The unveiling of the plaque was marked by attendance of the Belarusian Minister of culture Pavel Latuška, Belarusian Ambassador in Lithuania Uladzimir Dražyn, deputy mayors of Minsk and Vilnia. The ceremony was attended by many representatives of the Belarusian community of Vilnia. It was concluded by performance of Belarusian songs by pupils of Vilnia's Belarusian secondary school named after Francišak Skaryna.

Tolerance: Reality or still Illusion?

Author: Belarusian participant of the International Forum

One week ago I came back from the International Forum *Vilnius between the wars: Jewish culture, Lithuanian society, Polish state and Belarusian minority* which was held from 14th to 19th September 2010 in Vilnia (current Vilnius), Lithuania. The conference was organized by the historians Matthias Middell and Stefan Troebst from Leipzig and their partners in Vilnius "The Lithuanian Institute of History", the "Centre for Studies of the Culture and History of East European Jews" and the "Vilnius Yiddish Institute" of the University of Vilnius.

Being a Belarusian who is very interested in knowing more about our history and our roots, which are nowadays quite disputable in historical perspectives of our neighbors, I was eager to hear and see the marks of Belarusian presence in the current Lithuanian capital. It is not news for Belarusians that

Vilnia was and still remains one of the centers of our culture and history.

However, in European history discourse (and here I refer to the discourse of the majority of EU countries) Belarusians are left behind in Vilnia's history, rarely mentioned if mentioned at all. Therefore, I looked forward to attending this conference, pleased that we were mentioned, were part of the discourse and took an equal place along with Poles, Jews, and Lithuanians.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Belarusians were present in the title of the conference, their presence in the lectures and presentations was almost invisible to foreigners who did not have at least some prior knowledge.

In the opening speech given by Martin Bock, Senior Program Manager at the programme "A critical examination of history" at the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future", the forum was aimed at the **understanding different perspectives of history and to tolerating assessments and interpretations by different [ethnic] components present in Vilnia**. The workshop was intended to develop strategies and tools for this purpose.

To my mind, as a participant and scholar dealing with the topic of Belarusian minority in Vilnia, the aim of the forum was not met. From my personal experience and conversation with other participants, many were confused and did not see the reason of bringing all four communities; the main focus was made on Jews and Lithuanians, while Poles and Belarusians were generally ignored. The only event that was devoted to Belarusian topic was an excursion held on the first day of the forum. However, the person who led the excursion, Elena Temper, Belarusian by origin from the University of Leipzig, failed to explain the role Belarusians played in the city's development as well as the role of the city in Belarusian history. Focusing mainly on Belarusian presence in Vilnia in the beginning of 20th century, she did not connect the city to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the role Belarusians played in this state. Thus, for the majority of participants it remained a mystery how Belarusians appeared in Vilnia, and why they had such strong feelings for this particular city. That was actually the first and the last case of mentioning Belarusians in Vilnia during the forum.

Though the organizers managed to bring to Forum such bright and famous scholars as David Fishman, Alfred E. Senn, and Tomas Venclova who gave us public lectures on Vilnia, none of them tried to link all mentioned communities, to show their cooperation and/or confrontation, focusing strictly and exclusively on the community they chose to speak about. All attempts and questions by the participants to connect those communities, to show their interconnection had failed, since the speakers diplomatically avoided answering — saying that they were not in position to do so.

Since the Forum was organized mainly by Germans and Lithuanians with the assistance of the German embassy in Vilnia, the Lithuanian Institute of History and the Lithuanian MFA one could expect the perfect organization till the very small details. However, somehow with this forum that was not the case. Somehow all the small deficiencies were associated with the Belarusian side of the forum. The first one was due to the fact that in the forum's actual title the Belarusian minority turned out to be "Belorussian," which could be ignored, if the organizers, namely Mr. Troebst, would publicly apologize and consider it to be a misprint. Instead, at the

first private mention of such a mistake he pretended that it was not so important at all; on the second, public, mention of this, Belarusian representatives received sincere apologies just from Mr. Senn, while Mr. Troebst publicly refused to see the problem in this, referring to the fact that the Forum was not the UN session, so everybody was free to ignore the fact that “Belorussia” has not been in existence for almost 20 years already. So this is the tolerance, mentioned as one of the aims of the forum, which Belarusians did not get at the end, since even their proper name was not tolerated.

Another, to my mind, even more serious case of disrespect to Belarusians presented on the forum was the attitude to the Belarusian historian Prof. Siarhiej Novikaŭ, who was supposed to be a participant of the Panel Discussion. Siarhiej Novikaŭ, a well known Belarusian historian, did not get a chance to say a word during the panel, since somehow there was no interpreter who would translate his speech from German (which was not the working language of the forum) into English. The question arises: how it was it possible that a person who did not speak English was invited to participate in the public discussion, and if he was invited, why proper translation was not provided. Speaking to Mr. Novikaŭ, I learned that Mr. Troebst was aware of the fact that Mr. Novikaŭ did not speak English. Moreover, that was the third time Mr. Novikaŭ was invited to this forum and Mr. Troebst was well aware of his language situation. In the morning of the day when the panel discussion was held, Mr. Novikaŭ was personally promised by Mr. Troebst that translation from German will be available. . Although, in the evening everything was presented as an unfortunate fact that Mr. Novikaŭ did not speak English, and Mr. Troebst himself briefly presented Novikaŭ’s main points (though making them much softer, that Novikaŭ would do). Troebst also ignored the fact that one of the translators was eager to translate from Russian into English. Thus, Novikaŭ was left silent during the forum panel.

So as the result of forum, participants got a very clear picture of Jewish presence in Vilnia (Vilne), as well as Lithuanian one. Poles were almost never mentioned, while Belarusians were generally discredited and left behind. The question arises: what happened to the **understanding different perspectives of history and to tolerating assessments and interpretations by different [ethnic] components present in Vilnia?**

This article should be considered the personal opinion of the author — supported not only by Belarusian participants, but also participants from Poland, Hungary and some from Germany.

SPORTS

4 Track-And-Field Medals

were won by Belarusian athletes in the European championship, held in Barcelona in August of 2010:

GOLD: by Andrej Michnievič in Men’s shot-put

and by Nadzieja Astapčuk in Women’s shot-put

SILVER: by Natallia Michnievič in Women’s shot-put

BRONZE: by Andrej Kraučanka in Men’s decathlon

Belarus placed 9th among European nations.

Belarusians Win 2 Gold Medals at European Rowing Championship

Two Belarusian rowing teams have become European champions on September 11, at the tournament which took place in Montemor-o-Velho in Portugal, informs BELTA. The female four without coxswain, consisting of **Hanna Haŭra, Natallia Helach, Natallia Haŭrylenka and Zinaida Kliučynskaja**, have defeated the Italians, their only rivals in the final.

The male two with coxswain — **Vadzim Lialin, Aliaksandr Kazuboŭski, Piotr Piatrynič** — have also shown best results and won a gold medal. The tournament closed on September 12. Four more Belarusian boats competed today in the main finals — male two without a helmperson, female two with a helmperson, female eight with a helmperson, and **Kaciaryna Karsten** in one-woman boat category.

Belarus - France 1:0

in a soccer match, held on Sept.4, 2010, in Paris, on the Stade De France stadium.

Belarus’ national soccer team defeated France in the introductory round match of the European soccer championship.

Siarhiej Kiśliak scored the only goal for Belarus in the 86th minute of the game, after receiving a pass from **Viačaslaŭ Hlieb**.

Next weekend, on Sept. 11, the national soccer team tied **Rumania 0:0**.



Siarhiej Kiśliak

Editor’s Note: Names of Belarusian athletes have been transliterated using the Belarusian LACINKA.

You may use the table on p. 11: **COMPARISON** of transliteration methods - LACINKA vs. Library of Congress transliteration.

HISTORICAL DATES

August 6, 1517

Francis Skaryna of Polatsk printed the first book in Belarusian, *THE BIBLE*, in Prague.



August 9, 1910

Birthdate of the Belarusian poetess Larysa Hienijush, in the town of Zelva.

August 14, 1385

The dynastic Union of **Kreva** was signed between the Grand Duchy of Litva and the Kingdom of Poland, its purpose being a common defense against the aggression of the German Teutonic Order. Under the terms of this treaty, Grand Duke Yahayla married the Polish princess Jadwiga, and became the King of Poland. The dynastic union thus created a federation of Two Nations.

BELARUSICA

Fate of Isolated Minorities: Lusatia - Podlachia

CONTINUED from the Summer 2010 issue of *Belarusian Review*

An essay by Kirył Kaścian

IV. Dispersed nests."

Today both united Germany and Poland are members of the European Union and of the Council of Europe. Therefore, the standards protecting national minorities in these two countries, at least formally may be considered all-European. The question remains as to the effectiveness of these standards concerning Lusatia and Podlachia. As a matter of fact, legislation in the sphere of national minority rights has less to do with individuals than with groups of persons who on the basis of their smaller number stand out in comparison with other groups with different languages, cultures and traditions. One of the most essential points in the protection of national minority rights is the prevention of their assimilation and possible measures leading to changing ethnic proportions in regions where they are concentrated. However, it is doubtful that the laws are able to foresee disparities in the regions' economic development. One should note that the regions of Belarusian concentration in Poland, and Lusatian Serb concentration in Germany belong to the most problematic regions in terms of economic development. The absence of prospects in "the small homeland" leads to an exit of population,

especially of youth, in search of a better life elsewhere. As a result, both Belarusians of Podlachia and Lusatian Serbs are facing the sad prospect of final assimilation over the course of several future generations.

Thus, the present situation of the Belarusians of Podlachia and the Lusatian Serbs should be analyzed taking into account the danger of final assimilation. Therefore all concepts of cultural and economic development of regions inhabited by concentrations of these minorities must consider this danger. As stressed above, the position of both ethnic groups in the final stage of the communist era in Poland and the German Democratic Republic could be defined as that of "dispersed nests" - their population declined due to assimilation and migration to other regions in search of a better future. However, instrumental foundations of the national life of Podlachian Belarusians and Lusatian Serbs, existing at the time, testified to a rather high degree of social mobilization of both groups.

V. We are a handful...

In the Lusatians' case, the unification of Germany resulted in more opportunities for their participation in the political arena. Noteworthy may be the fact that the unified German state actually adopted the best practices of GDR legislation concerning the protection of the Lusatian ethnic group. This was already illustrated in the text of the German Unification Treaty. The standards of the legal protection of Lusatians and their culture seemingly improved, yet many other factors strongly outweighed these good beginnings.

The first factor may be the general perception of Sorbness (i.e. Lusatian language) in the region of Lusatia. On one hand, one has to admit a high degree of acceptance of bilingualism by the German population of the region. On the other hand, the coexistence of the Lusatian and German languages in the region results in the fact that a clear majority of local Germans very infrequently come in contact with the Lusatian language. In addition, using Lusatian in their presence creates in the minds of local Germans the impression that they are being intentionally excluded from conversation. Thus, while they recognize the existence of the Lusatian language in the region, and its visual presence on signs and notifications, local Germans do not treat it in the context of inter-ethnic contacts. This position belongs to the German language exclusively and has resulted in the existence of two parallel societies — Lusatian and German. However, while the degree of accepting German in their social contacts by Lusatian Serbs is fairly high, among Germans the corresponding degree of accepting Lusatian is very low.

The second factor is the development of Lusatian culture. Yes, Lusatians have their own schools and cultural institutions — theaters and performing groups. On one hand, this may testify to the full-fledged cultural life of the tiny ethnic group. On the other hand, it results in the "folkloric" impression of Lusatians due to their rather distinct folk costumes and their tradition of painting Easter eggs. It reminds one of a very fitting phrase by "Domowina"'s director Jan Nuk in 2008, in which he said: "Lusatians are not just a folklore group, painting Easter eggs,

but a nation, whose culture will disappear without help.”¹ As a matter of fact, the Lusatian culture is fully dependent on financial assistance from state and federal institutions. Despite the fact that nobody denies its uniqueness, in reality its situation appears very contradictory. Attempts to extend knowledge of the Lusatian language in German-language schools through the program “Witaj”² pale in their effectiveness, when compared with the closure of several elementary Lusatian-language schools. Authorities justify their actions by the small number of students and the corresponding difficulty in maintaining the schools. Yet, using the ruling on the minimum number of students as applied to Lusatian-language schools seems completely inappropriate. Moreover, this situation creates doubts as to whether German institutions on various levels fully understand the problems facing the Lusatian culture. As a shining example of such a “misunderstanding” is the insufficient financing of Sorbian cultural institutions, which resulted from a dispute between the federal government and two union states (*Länder*) with Lusatian population. The inability of the federal government to quickly solve financial problems in 2008 brought about protests by the Lusatians. They produced a corresponding memorandum, addressed to the heads of all member-states of the European Union, which included a call to revise the division of competences in favor of the German federal government and to raise the legal status of “Domowina”. Thus, the very existence of such a conflict raises the issue of the overall effectiveness of Germany’s administrative division in the context of problems pertaining to Lusatian Sorbs.

The second factor leads to the third, probably the most essential one – that of politics. Within unified Germany Lusatians have found themselves inhabiting two federal states – Brandenburg and Saxony. Despite the existence of wide-ranging powers in matters of culture and legislative affirmation of Lusatian rights in both states, matters pertaining to the Lusatians usually require coordination between the two states. The absence of a consensus may cause problems with financing, as described above. Therefore, most effective would be an administrative division of Germany, in which territories with significant concentrations of Lusatians would be within the boundaries of one federal state. An ideal solution would be the creation of an officially bilingual federal state Łužica/Łużyca/Lausitz.³ However, this solution seems absolutely unrealistic. First of all, the process of altering existing borders or creating new federal states in Germany is very complex and requires political will and the desire of the population.

Moreover, both the percentage of Lusatians among the population of these two states, and the territory where they are concentrated, are relatively modest. Secondly, in this case, the issue of the economic viability of the newly created federal state will arise because that Lusatia is one of the problematic regions. Thirdly, at the moment the Lusatians themselves make no such demands.

Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to review the existing status of Lusatia within the current administrative borders in such a way that territories with significant numbers of

Lusatians obtain a certain legally fixed degree of political autonomy, beyond their bilingualism. This, possibly unpopular and economically not viable, solution should be primarily political. Arguments in its favor should be fully based on the necessity of the effective preservation of Lusatians and their language from final Germanization, and also on providing a sufficiently strong impulse for the development of this Slavic nation as an integral ingredient of the ethnic mosaic of a multicultural and multilingual Europe.

VI. The most tolerant nation

While the Lusatian situation is fairly well-defined, with the Belarusians of Podlachia not everything is that clear. One could immediately note that, while in number of inhabitants and economic potential Bielastok tends to resemble Chóśebuz, the town of Hajnaŭka may be compared with Budyšin. Indeed, the virtually polonized Bielastok with an official Belarusian population of 2.5%, reminds one of the almost totally Germanized Lower Lusatia’s Chóśebuz where Lusatians number about 1% of the population of 100,000. Nevertheless, Bielastok was and remains one of the most important Belarusian cultural and publishing centers beyond borders of the Belarusian state. Considering the percentage of Belarusians in Hajnaŭka and adjoining counties, it seems that in the near future this particular town may become the Podlachian version of Budyšin. It is probable that by raising the role of Hajnaŭka it will be possible to regain at least something from the virtually lost Belarusian part of Bielastok’s image. Therefore let us begin with a brief excursion to the 1990s and focus on Bielastok, which in Belarus itself is usually identified as Poland’s Belarusian capital.

One should note that Belarusians’ starting conditions were much worse than those of Lusatians. The difference lies not only in lower standards of national minority policies in the Polish People’s Republic as compared with that in the German Democratic Republic, but also in the general perception of Belarusians by Poles. The sarcasm of Jaŭhien Miranovič, used in the title of this section of our article, appeared in Bielastok’s newspaper *Niva* in 2004. According to Miranovič, speaking Belarusian in public areas of Bielastok, due to the reaction of local Polish “kresovian”⁴ patriots “may be considered by some as display of courage, by others — as insanity, and by still others — as provocation.” Also, in accordance with this attitude of Polish society were measures of Bielastok’s rightist-catholic authorities. Among others, one should recall the 1997 celebrations of the 250th anniversary of Bielastok acquiring municipal rights, during which the role of Belarusians and Orthodox in the city’s history was totally ignored. One should not be surprised that the anti-Belarusian measures by Bielastok’s regional authorities caused much criticism, especially by intellectuals like Jerzy Giedroyc, who in his last interview before his death said: “I believe that we are conducting the worst policies toward the Belarusian minority. This is only harming us.”⁵ One should add here the various assessments by Poles and Belarusians alike concerning the activities of the former “anti-communist underground.” (The affair of Romuald Rajs⁶ may be one example.)

Thus, despite the presence of Belarusian-language schools, cultural and publishing activities, at the time Poland joined the European Union it was rather difficult to discern any qualitative changes in attitude toward the Belarusian minority either by ordinary citizens, or by most local authorities.

Since May 1, 2004 Poland has been a member of the European Union. However, since then there has been no noticeable change in attitude toward Belarusians in Podlachia. Poland has finally adopted its National Law "On national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages," that allows using Belarusian names of settlements, streets or objects, and also enables the Belarusian language to acquire the status of a supporting language in those districts where Belarusians constitute at least 20% of the population. However, in reality, the Belarusian language is not being used to an adequate degree. Although, according to this law and the results of the 2002 census, 12 districts of the Podlachia voivodship were entitled to implement these rights, at this time only four of these districts are using Belarusian as a supporting language, and Belarusian-language signs of settlements and streets are still missing.

This is due to the law's wording, according to which "the minority language" *may be used*, but not *must*. This attitude in implementing the law shows that Polish authorities do not regard the introduction of minority languages where there are concentrations of minorities as imperative. Considering the results of the 2002 census (according to which Belarusians in Poland numbered almost 50,000), which were strongly criticized by representatives of minorities, one may question the effectiveness of the above law, and especially of its sections designed to prevent "assimilation of people belonging to a minority" and "measures aimed at change of national or ethnic proportions on the territories populated by minorities."

Another factor to consider is the attitude toward the Belarusian language, common in Poland. Despite the presence of its own Belarusian minority, the use of Russian and Polish dominate in Polish-Belarusian relations, both on the official level, as well as on the purely social level. Therefore the role of the Belarusian language in this process is narrowed down to provincialness, folklore or political opposition, which in no way contribute to raising its status. On the other hand it remains questionable as to whether Polish society, especially on the regional level, is ready to peacefully accept Belarusian Cyrillic signs in localities with concentrations of Belarusians. In light of the above-described difficulties with the Belarusian issue in Bielastok, it is hard to believe that the Polish society has sufficiently matured in this matter.

Last, but most important is the political factor with two sides: an internal and external one. Taking into account the present tense state of Belarusian-Polish relations on the official level, the Belarusian minority in Poland may be described as hostage of this situation. Under different political conditions one might expect a different degree of cooperation between Belarusians of Podlachia and the Belarusian state. However, neither history nor politics

tolerate the conditional mood. Therefore the main bilateral document favoring the protection of Belarusians in Poland, remains the Belarusian-Polish Agreement on "Cooperation and Good Neighborliness," concluded in 1992. This agreement is designed to provide merely moral support by the Belarusian state, since Podlachia is a part of Poland, and local Belarusians are citizens of Poland, which confirms the primacy of Polish laws in this territory.

However, in today's situation, when considerable attention is being devoted to rapid assimilation of Belarusians in Podlachia, the internal political factor is assuming important significance. The last Polish census revealed that the Belarusian minority has the largest territorial potential in Poland, being concentrated primarily in the district of Hajnaŭka and the eastern part of the Bielsk district. Therefore, under conditions allowed by the valid Polish law on national minorities and administrative division of territories, it would be possible to initiate an experiment in the form of creating a Belarusian national district with its center in Hajnaŭka with a wide degree of self-government, where bilingualism would be real and visible. Such, a possibly unpopular and economically not viable solution of the problem must be primarily based on understanding the necessity of effectively preserving the Belarusian minority and its language in Podlachia. Precisely this type of scenario agrees with ideas expressed by Jerzy Giedroyc — about Podlachia's role as a special Piedmont for the reconstruction of a national and democratic Belarus.

VII. Persist, stand your ground in waves of times, you little nation!

The development of Podlachia and of Lusatia in the post-war period have many similarities. However, the current position of Lusatian Serbs and Podlachian Belarusians, despite a fairly high degree of social mobilization of each of these groups, must be analyzed through the perspective of final assimilation. Therefore all concepts of economic and cultural development of both regions must take this danger into account. Both groups represent unique ingredients not only of the German and Polish, but also the European cultural space.

However, the current position of both societies requires a greater degree of support than what is being extended now. It seems appropriate not only to maintain cultural institutions of Podlachian Belarusians and Lusatian Serbs, but to create their own national and territorial units within the limits of existing German and Polish law, with full respect for the territorial integrity of these countries and maximum support for the Lusatian and Belarusian cultures and languages. Such "politicization" will make it possible to stop the assimilation process at a point when this measure is still possible, and thus preserve these two unique indigenous Slavic cultures not only in the context of a particular region, but of Europe as a whole.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Original German text: "Wir sind keine eiermalende Folkloregruppe, sondern ein Volk, dessen Kultur ohne Hilfe untergeht."
2. A project designed to promote bilingual education in Lusatian and German in schools and kindergartens in Lusatia.
3. When suggesting the bilingual term *Łužica/Łužyca/Lausitz*, the author takes into account both Lusatian languages as a single linguistic/cultural space: *Łužica* (Upper Lusatian), and *Łužyca* (Lower Lusatian.)
4. **Editor's Note:** *Kresy* is a Polish term for "Eastern Borderlands", commonly used to denote Western Belarus and Ukraine before World War II.
5. Original Polish text: "Uważam, że prowadzimy jak najgorszą politykę w stosunku do mniejszości białoruskiej. To przynosi nam szkody."
6. Former member of the Polish Armia Krajowa, known under nickname "Bury," responsible for burning down ten villages in the Bielsk region and killing their inhabitants due to their Belarusian nationality and Orthodox religion. His most notorious crime was the execution of 30 Belarusian carriage drivers in the Bielsk district on January 30, 1946.

Thoughts and Observations

Has Moscow Had Enough Of Belarus' Lukashenka?

By Brian Whitmore

Has the Kremlin finally had enough of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka? The past two months have featured a gas war between Moscow and Minsk and a televised mudslinging match between Lukashenka and the Kremlin.

Lukashenka had long been one of Moscow's most reliable partners in the former Soviet space. But in recent years he has increasingly become an irritant, cozying up to the West, refusing to recognize the independence of Georgia's pro-Moscow separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and demanding cut-rate prices for Russian natural gas.

And now there are increasing signs that the Kremlin has had enough.

'The Godfather'

On July 4, the Gazprom-owned television station NTV broadcast the first installment of an unflattering documentary about Lukashenka titled "The Belarusian Godfather."

"Until recently, the Western press referred to Lukashenka as 'Europe's last dictator,'" the narrator says as the documentary begins. "He has compared himself both with Hitler and Stalin, and considers himself the godfather of all Belarusians."

The program covered the suspicious deaths and disappearances of Belarusian opposition figures in the late 1990s, suggesting that they were victims of a government-run death squad. It delved into Lukashenka's private life. It re-

minded viewers of the billions of dollars in support Russia has given to Belarus.

On July 15, Lukashenka hit back, airing an interview on state-controlled television with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, a bitter foe of the Kremlin.

Saakashvili thanked Lukashenka for not recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia and accused the Russian authorities of waging a "propaganda war" against Belarus.

Citing the still-unsolved killings of journalist Anna Politkovskaya and human rights activist Natalya Estemirova, the Georgian leader said Russia was in no position to criticize any country's human rights record.

The tit-for-tat continued on July 16, when NTV aired the second installment of "The Belarusian Godfather," which linked Lukashenka to self-exiled Russian oligarch Boris Berезovsky and ousted former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

Backing the Opposition

The mudslinging follows a nasty dispute over gas prices in June. It also comes as Lukashenka prepares to seek a fourth term as president in elections slated for early next year.

Alyaksey Yanukevich, leader of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front, says the documentaries are a clear sign that Moscow is considering forcing Lukashenka from power.

Alyaksandr Kazulin may have Kremlin backing for 2011.

And he believes that "in any case it benefits Russia for Lukashenka to be weak. This policy the Kremlin is carrying out is to weaken and personally humiliate Lukashenka." Yanukevich says the "Godfather" is only the first "of what will be regular information attacks."

Some analysts note how opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin -- a former political prisoner who ran against Lukashenka for president in 2006 -- was quoted heavily in the documentary. Andrey Dynko, editor in chief of the Minsk-based Belarusian-language weekly *Nasha Niva*, says this may be a sign that Moscow may look kindly on a fresh bid by Kazulin to oust Lukashenka in the 2011 election.

"In general, I think these two films have strongly cheered the opposition political forces up, because they have seen a new field for activity," Dynko says. "They have been given new hope."

Or Just a Warning?

Leonid Zaika, director of the Minsk-based think tank Strategia, says it appears that the Kremlin has prepared a "fine-tuned operation" to oust Lukashenka by depriving him of the economic aid and cheap energy that keeps the Belarusian economy afloat and by stealthily backing an alternative candidate for president.

The *coup de grace*, Zaika predicts, will come if Lukashenka fixes the vote and Moscow joins the West in refusing to recognize Lukashenka's reelection as legitimate.

"If Washington, Brussels, and Moscow all don't recognize the election results, then the situation changes completely," Zaika says. "They don't need to do anything else. They don't need any conspiracies. The Kremlin can act legitimately and lawfully."

Analysts caution, however, that Moscow would not make a serious move to oust Lukashenka unless they were certain they could control the transition and install a pliant president in his place.

Pavel Sheremet, a political analyst for the Russian daily *Kommersant*, says a more plausible scenario is that Russia is attempting to frighten Lukashenka into being more obedient and deferential to the Kremlin.

"I would be wary to make the far-reaching conclusions that Moscow has a plan for a regime change in Belarus. It is quite possible, and we have already seen it many times, that it may be a pressure campaign not to oust Lukashenka but to make him take some actions in his presidential post," Sheremet says.

"He will keep his post, he will not be prevented from winning triumphant victories, but he will have to pay for this by making concessions in the customs union or the political union with Russia."

Source: RFE/RL, July 19, 2010

Pro-Moscow Candidate Replacement at Least As Unacceptable as Lukashenka

By Paul Goble

– The Party of the Belarusian Popular Front, the oldest opposition group in that country, says that it will not ally itself with Moscow against Alyaksandr Lukashenka because a "pro-Russian" replacement would be at least as harmful to Belarus as the incumbent president has been.

Instead, as Moscow's *Novyye izvestiya* reported yesterday, the opposition group has called on its supporters to step up their struggle against "the strengthening of Russian influence" in Belarus even if that makes them appear allies of Lukashenka whom the Kremlin has been attacking in recent weeks.

According to a declaration released by the Front, "Europe and the United States during the election campaign will conduct themselves quite passively while Russia "as the date of the holding of presidential elections gets closer, will strengthen the information campaign against Lukashenka."

Aleksei Yanukevich, the head of the Party of the Popular Front, told the Moscow paper, that the Russian authorities may even go so far as to publicize information about the bank accounts of Minsk officials abroad, something that the US did not have when it "introduced sanctions" against Belarus.

The Moscow paper reported that Yanukevich believes that "Moscow is preparing its own protégé for the post of Belarusian president." But, the Popular Front Party leader said, "a pro-Moscow candidate for us is just as unacceptable as Lukashenka," because such an individual would cost the country its independence whatever he did domestically.

According to Yanukevich, the Russians have worked out the following "scenario" for changing the powers that be in his country. First, after the vote, many will complain that the results have been falsified, especially given how angry people are about the economy. Then, people will protest, and Moscow "will use its ties inside the Belarusian nomenklatura."

In the elections, the Popular Front Party plans to run its deputy chairman Grigori Kostusev, although the party supports continued talks with other opposition groups to come up with a single opposition candidate. Those talks are not going well, but if they do succeed, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, head of the "For Freedom" movement, is expected to be the candidate.

Who the pro-Russian candidate might be is still unclear, *Novyye izvestiya* reported. But many in Minsk assume that this role will be played by Vladimir Neklyayev, a poet and opposition figure who lived for a few years in Norway, but has since "returned to the Motherland." He supposedly is backed by many in the force structures and nomenklatura.

The situation that the Belarusian opposition finds itself in is extraordinarily difficult, all the more so because most analysts in the West do not recognize its nature. While the opposition despises Lukashenka and all his works, they are not prepared to sacrifice their country to Moscow just because the Russian powers that be currently oppose him.

That impossible situation may be exactly the one that some in Moscow may hope to put the pro-Western Belarusian opposition parties in, all the more so because it may have the effect of making these parties look pro-Lukashenka to the Belarusian electorate when in fact they are nothing of the kind.

But unless Western governments recognize this situation and see that the Belarusian opposition is animated by long-term patriotism rather than short-term political calculations, those countries are likely to be unwitting players in a game that will either allow Lukashenka to continue his dictatorial ways or Moscow to rein in Belarusian independence.

Source: Window on Eurasia, Staunton, July 30, 2010

Belarus Sets December Date For Presidential Vote

By Daisy Sindelar

Lawmakers in the Belarusian National Assembly have overwhelmingly approved a mid-December date for the country's presidential election, nearly four months ahead of when strongman President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's third term is due to expire.

Many had initially expected the vote to be held in January or early February. By law, the vote must be held no later than February 6, two months before the end of Lukashenka's current term.

But parliament member Vasil Baikou, presenting the election bill during today's extraordinary session, said December 19 was the "most optimal" date for the vote and his fellow legislators agreed.

"The commission's goal was to ensure maximum citizen participation in the election and hold the election at a time convenient for the voters," Baikou said. "Holding the election before the end of this year, without losing time on an electoral process, will enable [the elected president] to begin solving social and economic tasks for the coming year and the next five-year period immediately starting from the beginning of 2011."

The earlier election date may be an attempt by Lukashenka, who is expected to run for a fourth term, to limit the potential momentum of rival candidates.

The authoritarian Lukashenka has held office since 1994, and has rarely faced a serious political challenge in his multiple reelection bids. But economic setbacks and mounting animus from Moscow have left the Belarusian leader in a position of greater-than-usual vulnerability.

In recent years, Lukashenka has sporadically courted nontraditional partners, including the West, in a bid to counterbalance Russia's historic dominance.

His actions have put him increasingly at odds with Moscow, which frequently uses its monopoly over energy supplies and its continued subsidies of the Belarusian economy to pressure Minsk in times of discord.

Outside Influence?

In June, Russia temporarily reduced natural-gas supplies to Belarus amid a season of disputes over a proposed customs union and Minsk's offer of refuge to the ousted president of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiev, a decision that Moscow opposed.

In late August, Russia expressed outrage when assailants threw two Molotov cocktails into the compound of the Russian Embassy in Minsk. And a dispute has long simmered over Belarus' unwillingness to follow Moscow in formally recognizing Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The rising enmity has prompted suggestions the Kremlin may once again seek to renegotiate the price of its energy sales to Belarus in January, at a time when bracing winter temperatures can amplify its powers of persuasion.

In moving the elections forward, Lukashenka may have been seeking to preempt the damage that a hike in energy prices, and the resulting spike in utility costs, could do to his reelection bid.

The move also allows the Belarusian leader to make good on a populist promise to raise average salaries to \$500 — from under \$430 — a promise he might not be able to honor following a Russian pricing spike.

Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu, the head of the Tell the Truth civic campaign and a likely presidential candidate, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that a wave of impending economic troubles made the December election date practically inevitable.

"So to hold an election and wage a political campaign under such inauspicious economic conditions would be suicidal for the government, for Lukashenka," Nyaklyaeu said. "That's why the election will take place prior to the start of the new year — while the situation is still more or

less acceptable, while there are still available funds to pay off factory workers, pensioners, and all other state employees."

Window of Opportunity?

Many observers **have suggested** the Kremlin is eager to see Lukashenka finally removed from his post and is openly orchestrating his ouster. Russia's NTV channel in July broadcast a highly critical documentary on Lukashenka. The program, titled "The Godfather," focused on several high-profile disappearances in Belarus during Lukashenka's presidency in the 1990s.

This week, a video, posted on YouTube purported to document an anonymous former employee of the Russian security forces claiming Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is actively planning Lukashenka's assassination.

The Kremlin has denounced the clip as nonsense; even so, by shortening the campaign season, Lukashenka may also be looking to limit the impact of Russian propaganda, real or imagined. Perhaps hedging his bets, Lukashenka today pledged his support and loyalty to Moscow in a meeting with Nikolai Bordyuzha, the head of the Collective Security Treaty Organization that binds Belarus and five other post-Soviet countries with Russia.

With the elections now scheduled, the attention will turn to the opposition, to see which candidates are ultimately put forward as Lukashenka's rivals for the race.

Belarusian opposition leaders have indicated they hope to coordinate efforts during the upcoming presidential campaign, but they have failed to come up with a single opposition candidate.

Former presidential contender Alyaksandr Milinkevich, arguably the best-known opposition politician, has suggested he might not run in the upcoming vote, despite earlier pledges that he would. Milinkevich today told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that he would make a final decision by the end of this week.

But as many as 10 others have expressed their initial intention to run against Lukashenka. In addition to Nyaklyaeu, these include Syarhey Haidukevich, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party; Yaroslav Romanchuk, deputy chair of the opposition United Civil Party; and Viktor Tsyareschanka, chairman of the country's small-business association.

Another likely candidate is Andrey Sannikau, who heads the European Belarus movement. Sannikau's standing may gain moral weight from his close association with Aleh Byabenin, the opposition journalist who was found hanged in his country home earlier this month.

Prosecutors initially called Byabenin's death a suicide but have since acknowledged the journalist might have been murdered. Byabenin's death has galvanized the country's opposition activists and prompted angry calls by the West for an open investigation.

Speaking to RFE/RL's Belarus Service, Sannikau criticized the government for keeping the public guessing for so long about the election date.

But he said that regardless of when the elections were held, they would be an opportunity for voters to put the country on a fresh path with its neighbors and the world.

"Everything surrounding this date — the secrets, the rumors — tells you something about the situation we're in," Sannikau said. "The government can't even candidly and conscientiously tell the people when the election will be held, how it will be held, etc."

He speculated that the vote was set before the new year because "it's evident that relations with everybody — Russia, Europe — are complicated, and will grow even more complicated for Lukashenka."

"That's why it's necessary to change this government," Sannikau said. "I'm ready for the election and the [announced] date doesn't change any of my plans."

Potential presidential hopefuls must now collect 100,000 signatures to formally establish their candidacy. That process begins on September 30, once the candidate groups tasked with collecting the signatures have themselves been registered.

Lidziya Yarmoshyna, the chair of Belarus' Central Election Commission, said today that international observers would be invited to monitor the elections.

Observers denounced the results of the country's last presidential elections in 2006, saying the vote had been rigged. Lukashenka officially won 83 percent of the vote in that contest.

Source: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 14.09.2010

Head of Charter-97 Website Dies In Mysterious Circumstances

By David Marples

On September 3 at 5.30 p.m., a relative found the body of Aleh Byabenin at his dacha in Pyarhurava, not far from Minsk. He had ostensibly committed suicide by hanging himself. Police from the Dzyarzhinsk district reportedly found two empty bottles of balsam in the house as well as an overturned stool.

The head of the Minsk regional police press office, Alyaksandr Danilchanka, declared that there were no "suspicious circumstances" and that Byabenin had committed suicide (Belapan, September 6). The preliminary verdict of the investigator was that at the time of his death, Byabenin was in a severe state of alcoholic intoxication (*Narodnaya Volya*, September 9).

The death coincided with the arrest of six alleged Russian anarchists said to be responsible for throwing two Molotov cocktails at the Russian embassy in Minsk on August 30. That event sparked a new round of mutual accusations between Minsk and Moscow (Belarusian President, Alyaksandr Lukashenka blamed "Russian thugs") over who was responsible for the attack (*RIA Novosti*, September 6).

Aleh Byabenin was born in Kostroma, Russia in 1974. He received a degree in journalism from Belarusian State University and in the 1990's was the editor of the inde-

pendent Belarusian newspaper, *Imya*. In 1998 he was the founder and leader of the website Charter-97, a critical and vigilant observer of the Lukashenka regime in Belarus for the past decade. He was married with two sons (*Palityka*, September 3).

Charter-97 has waged a lengthy campaign to ascertain the fate of several political leaders in Belarus who disappeared without trace in 1999-2000. Byabenin had downloaded and posted the three episodes of the Russian TV documentary *Godbat'ka*, which has incensed the Belarusian authorities. In the 1990s he was abducted briefly by men in plain clothes (Radio Free Europe, September 12).

Several close associates of Byabenin, as well as independent observers, cast doubt on the peremptory verdict that he had committed suicide. First, Zmitser Bandarenka, coordinator of Charter-97, noted the discrepancy between the time of death noted by the examiners and that recorded officially. Thus a forensic expert stated that the time was 2:00 p.m. on September 3, but the death certificate stated September 2, a difference of at least 14 hours. Furthermore, text messages received from Byabenin indicated his intention to go to the October cinema in Minsk at 8:00 p.m. for the premiere of a movie. He and his family had just returned from a holiday in Greece (www.charter97.org, September 4).

Moreover, Andrei Sannikau, a close associate of Byabenin who was backing the former's presidential election campaign, visited the dacha and stated that he did not believe the suicide story (www.charter97.org, September 4). There was no suicide note, the two had made detailed plans for the future, and the interior ministry was publicizing details of his suicide without awaiting the results of an official investigation. In his campaign Sannikau had called for cooperation with both Russia and the European Union, in contrast to Lukashenka's official slogan of "Belarus is not Russia!"

Several friends of Byabenin also voiced doubts about the official cause of death. Svyatlana Kalinkina, chief editor of *Narodnaya Volya*, stated that the idea of suicide was "absolutely unbelievable." Kalinkina found it incredible that someone contemplating suicide could have planned to go to the movies (*Belorusskiy Partizan*, September 4). Others, writing on the Facebook website, commented that Byabenin, as a connoisseur of Scotch, would not have consumed two bottles of balsam.

Head of the Belarusian Free Theater, Mikola Kalyazin, who was a friend of Byabenin for 16 years, noted that Aleh, a happy family man with two small children, had never suffered from depression. He had headed the news section of *Imya* at the age of 20, had no equals in his field of expertise, and was personally responsible for the popularity of the Charter-97 website (*Belorusskiy Partizan*, September 4).

Kalinkina noted elsewhere that after the explosion on Belarus' Independence Day two years ago (EDM, Jul 22, 2008), the security services were revamped and the hard-line Viktor Sheiman had resigned. Kalinkina speculated that there might be a campaign within the agency to re-install him by instigating various provocative acts (*Nasha Niva*, September 5). A day after this article appeared, Ka-

linkina found a postcard in her mailbox purporting to derive from the "Tell the Truth" campaign, casting aspersions on her character and stating that "a hunt for betrayers has started!" (www.naviny.by, September 6).

The political situation in Belarus today is exceedingly complex. A decade ago, the clampdown of the Belarusian authorities on a recalcitrant and troublesome website would have been straightforward. However, the high-level disputes between the Belarusian president and the Russian government have introduced a new dimension. Russia publicly accuses Lukashenka of murder and then a leading oppositionist is found dead.

Yet, if the answer to the puzzle of Byabenin's tragic death is to be found in Moscow, then why have the Belarusian police and forensic authorities resorted to such subterfuge? Why have they rushed to such immediate conclusions when, for example, the perpetrators of the 2008 bomb attack have yet to be found? Conversely, if the Belarusian authorities or secret services are involved, then what goals did they have in mind? Neither Sannikau nor anyone at the website was likely to discontinue their activities. A political murder serves only to further blacken the name of Lukashenka in the West. Are the security services out of control? It may be some time before the answers to these questions will be known.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 7 Issue: 168
September 20, 2010

MEDIA WATCH

The Tandem vs. the Godfather

By Ilya Milshteyn

The second film which staff of the Gazprom-owned NTV devoted to Aleksandr Lukashenka turned out to be even worse than the first. Worse in the — how shall we put it mildly — artistic sense. Even though, after *Godfather 1*, it seemed that all records in terms of trash-talking had already been broken. And also worse for Aleksandr Grigoryevich himself. While the main idea of the first documentary film consisted of a simple "attack" on the Belarusian president, in the second there was already serious discussion about his overthrow. The scenario writers of *Godfather 2*, boldly incorporating clips from Bishkek and Minsk, were drawing a direct parallel between the fate of Kurmanbek Bakiev and the unenviable fate of Lukashenka. The Kyrgyz people who had risen up, as the reader could guess, were setting a good example for their fraternal Belarusian people.

Everything else in the new work was almost a total repetition of the themes of the first film. Word for word, frame for frame. And everything — as before — was the truth. Batka [nickname for Lukashenka, meaning "Father" — translator's note] really did praise Hitler, hoping in his Soviet-style simplicity to be liked by a German journalist. Under Lukashenka, people really did disappear — oppositionist politicians and journalists. Aleksandr Grigoryevich really was a parasite in friendship with Russia. But there was also some truth in the fact that the fiery enmity of Rus-

sian television viewers for the "last European dictator" was dictated exclusively by political considerations: his constant squabbles with the president of the Russian Federation and his unending enmity for Prime Minister Putin. Then again, there was one other source from which the creators of the second film in the series gleaned their inspiration. This was Lukashenka's response to their first creation. A response that cut Moscow to the very quick.

The fact is that the greatly experienced Batka, notably disappointed after showing of the first film, did not respond right away. He dealt the counterpunch several weeks later — and it was most unexpected. More precisely, there were two coolly calculated counterpunches. First, Aleksandr Grigoryevich spoke warmly in Crimea with Russia's main enemy, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, with whom he celebrated together at the anniversary of the multi-vectoral [Ukrainian President Viktor] Yanukovich. And then, something entirely unheard of happened: The Georgian leader granted an interview to Belarusian state television.

At the same time, we cannot say that Saakashvili said anything overly abrupt about the policy of the Kremlin tandem. Or about Russians in general. On the contrary, he noted that the Russian people "do not deserve for the world to call them occupiers." And without spilling his emotions out onto Medvedev-Putin, he wondered instead, "It is hard to understand what they want." Then again, in developing this idea, he pointed out that "when you are prepared to talk to your neighbors only by means of pressure and blackmail, the discussion will not work out." But perhaps this was the most abrupt phrase of all those uttered during the rather brief interview. On his Imedi [Georgian television channel] he spoke out much more brutally.

In general, the interview did not turn out to be scandalous. The very fact of Saakashvili's appearance on Belarusian TV — where they will not do an interview with any serious politician without Batka's permission — was already scandalous. This unheard-of event was a scandal: An enemy whom Russian troops fought two years ago, had become a confederate of the Belarusian president. A country that was a member of the Customs Union had given air time to a man who pulled his country out of the CIS.

The reaction in Belarus itself was pluralistic. Public officials who had gotten used to everything praised Batka. The people, who had gotten used to everything, said nothing. The oppositionists, who had gotten used to everything, were unpleasantly surprised. In their opinion, Saakashvili, who had agreed to play these games, had trampled down the weak shoots of Belarusian democracy.

Russia's reaction was the uncompromising, although artless, [second] film on NTV. It was a film that sooner testifies to the confusion of the propagandists than to the fact that Moscow had worked out some kind of a strategy in the struggle with Lukashenka. After all, the similarity of the authoritarian regimes in Belarus and in Russia was all too obvious, as well as the risky nature of certain topics that touched on Batka the evil-doer. It would have been possible, for example, to describe how Putin dealt with his enemies with the same success and with the same in-

tonations. Or about how, during his tenure, state television praised Stalin. Or about the hexogen [reference to allegations that FSB agents planted hexogen explosives to simulate terrorist attacks — translator's note].

In general, this is a rich topic: the upcoming hastily made, trash-talking, righteous films about our current fathers, made as soon as their time has ended. On one hand, Russian television producers have become so adept at fulfilling orders from above in the past decade that, it seems, they are capable of artistically mastering any subject in a day. On the other hand, the rudiments of the profession are lost, and they cannot produce anything but trash. Whether it is about Batka, or about the "spy stone," or about Putin. Honestly speaking, we feel bad for the truth.

... Evidently, in sending a "black spot" to Lukashenka, the Kremlin was convinced that he would simply get frightened. He would understand that he is next in line after Bakiev. And once frightened he would moderate his ambitions and think long and hard about how to improve relations with the mighty eastern neighbor. And, judging by how long he kept quiet, Aleksandr Grigoryevich really did feel a bit uncomfortable.

But after the interview that Lukashenka instructed his television producers to get from the "American protégé" we may presume that he gradually came to grips with his feelings. Natural anger edged out the fears, and he raised his glove and let his partners in Slavic brotherhood have it — from his very soul. Now, stocking up on popcorn, we are patiently waiting for Berezovsky to speak out on Belarusian TV and for the third in the series of the engrossing thriller about Batka's bloody regime. Somewhat later, his interviewers will probably take a sincere interest in the viewpoint of Garry Kasparov about what is going on in Russia. And then [Russian television] will make a fourth episode in the series. And then Limonov will go to Minsk.

[TOL note: The Kremlin often accuses foreign-based oligarch Boris Berezovsky of fomenting unrest at home and other misdeeds. Ex-chess champion Garry Kasparov heads an opposition movement that is regularly harassed by the Russian authorities. One of his allies, although with radically different political views, is the writer-provocateur Eduard Limonov.]

Source: Grani.ru website, Moscow, in Russian, 19 July 2010

In Russia-Belarus Information War, Documentary Is the Latest Salvo

By Michael Schwartz

MOSCOW — A new documentary film about the Belarussian president, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, portrays him as a bumbling tyrant enamored of Hitler and Stalin. He has political opponents killed, journalists silenced and elections rigged in the film, all while keeping his faltering country locked in a Soviet time warp.

For years, human rights groups and Western governments have been leveling similar accusations. But the latest salvo against Mr. Lukashenko comes from an unlikely source: Russia's government-controlled television.

The documentary is part of an all-out propaganda war that has erupted between Russia and neighboring Belarus, two former Soviet republics that were once so close they had been on track to reunite. When the documentary, titled "Godfather," was aired last month on Russia's NTV television, it seemed to signal that the marriage was officially off.

The mudslinging, which has played out in both countries' government-controlled media in recent weeks, reflects the deepening tensions between them. The latest dispute broke out in June when they tussled over natural gas prices, and continued when Mr. Lukashenko nearly scuttled a planned customs union between his country, Russia and Kazakhstan that had been a pet project of Vladimir V. Putin, Russia's prime minister and pre-eminent leader.

For years the Kremlin has supported Mr. Lukashenko, praising elections that independent monitors called rigged, while also ignoring violent crackdowns on the opposition. Moscow bolstered Mr. Lukashenko's government with cheap natural gas and discounted duties on oil, which Belarus refined and resold. Russian subsidies, the moderator in the recent documentary says, "are the main secret of the Belarussian economic miracle."

In return, the Kremlin seems to believe that it has received little but headaches. Amid the natural gas pricing dispute in June, Belarus retaliated by briefly cutting off flows into Western Europe.

Mr. Lukashenko has also been out of step with Russia's policies in the former Soviet Union. He has given refuge to Kyrgyzstan's former president, Kurmanbek S. Bakiyev, who was ousted in April after bloody riots that Moscow seemed to encourage. He has also failed to follow the Kremlin's lead in recognizing the independence of two separatist Georgian enclaves, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

"He received a huge amount of money, with which he was in part able to support the economy of Belarus, its economic growth and the well-being of his people, without giving anything in return," Vladimir Ryzhkov, a Russian opposition politician, said on Russia's Ekho Moskvyy radio last month. "It seems the Russian leadership decided that that's it."

Speaking to reporters recently, Mr. Putin played down the significance of the media campaign.

"I do not see any media war. Perhaps this is because I barely read any periodicals and have not been following the electronic media lately," Mr. Putin said. He was less ambivalent about Mr. Lukashenko, however: "When it comes to money or energy supplies, everyone wants to get something from Russia for free, so when they don't they get annoyed."

The "Godfather" documentary voices criticisms typically found in Western human rights reports about Belarus (and Russia, for that matter). It covers the disappearances and killings of Mr. Lukashenko's political opponents over the years and shows video of armored police officers beating antigovernment protesters. Images of Mr. Lukashenko dressed in military uniforms intersperse with footage of him inspecting collective farms.

"Little has changed since the U.S.S.R.," the narrator says at one point.

Only those with satellite dishes were able to view the program inside Belarus, though it can easily be accessed on YouTube. And in the Soviet tradition of samizdat, people have been recording the film themselves and passing along bootleg copies, said Andrei Sannikov, a Belarussian opposition leader.

Mr. Lukashenko, needless to say, was not pleased. He said that he was "offended" by the documentary.

"I know who gives these commands, who is governing these processes," he said in a statement on his Web site.

Shortly after, Belarus fired back, publishing excerpts in one of Belarus's government newspapers from a highly critical report about Mr. Putin, written by Russian opposition figures. "Savagery has become the norm in Russian society," the newspaper wrote in an accompanying commentary.

Belarus's government-controlled First Channel also aired an interview with Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili, who has been vilified by Russia's leaders — and who has been the target of unflattering Russian documentaries himself.

In the interview, Mr. Saakashvili called the Lukashenko documentary hypocritical, noting the prevalence of political killings in Russia. "This has the smell of a propaganda war," Mr. Saakashvili said.

Responding to the interview, Boris Gryzlov, Russia's Parliament speaker, called Mr. Saakashvili an "outlaw" and suggested that there would be consequences for Belarus.

"Anyone who gives Saakashvili the opportunity to feel like a president, including in another country, is making a decision that could affect relations with Russia," he said.

Russia's retreating support could certainly bode ill for Mr. Lukashenko in next year's presidential election. Some Russian political analysts have begun to speculate that the media campaign could signal the start of an effort to unseat him.

In fact, several Belarussian opposition leaders traveled to Moscow last month, where they met informally with Russian officials, including Russia's finance minister and members of Mr. Putin's United Russia party.

Russian soft-power in the form of media campaigns and economic pressure is credited with helping to unseat the Kyrgyz president, Mr. Bakiyev, in April. However, Mr. Lukashenko, who has been in power for 16 years, appears to be on surer footing than his Kyrgyz colleague was.

Still, the possibility of gaining Kremlin support has already enchanted some opposition figures in Belarus.

"This is a unique situation when Europe and Russia can agree on the conduct of the Belarussian presidential campaign," said Yaroslav Romanchuk, an opposition leader, who said he planned to run for president. "This is the first time in history."

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